



(S) Fidel Castro: Alive, But Not Quite Kicking

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(S) The Fidel era in Cuba appears to be coming to an end.

(S) Rumors about the death of Fidel Castro are nothing new, but following his late July 2006 emergency surgery and "temporary" transfer of power to his brother Raúl, such rumors are likely to be taken more seriously. Fidel Castro's unexpected 28 October television appearance negated yet another one of those rumors. Images of Fidel reading the day's newspapers and later gently shuffling his feet with his arms swinging in an uncoordinated motion, may have unintentionally served as more than a simple proof-of-life. When compared to previous post-surgery video and photos, this latest footage does show a livelier Fidel, but it also depicts a frail 80-year-old man whose days as the charismatic ruler of Cuba are basically over.



(U) Fidel Castro and his brother Raul (Jane's)

(U//FOUO) In late July 2006, Cuban President Fidel Castro underwent emergency surgery to control gastro-intestinal bleeding following a trip to Argentina. Based on the analysis of photos and video released since the operation, U.S. officials believe that Fidel is suffering from cancer of the stomach, colon or pancreas and estimate that he has 3 to 8 months to live without chemotherapy and possibly up to 18 months with chemotherapy.

(S) Since the surgery, Fidel has postponed his 80th birthday celebration and was noticeably absent from the Non-Aligned Movement Summit held in Havana in mid-September and the Ibero-American Summit held in Montevideo in early November; two relatively high-profile events a healthier Fidel would have likely used to promote his ideology and criticize U.S. policy. Cuba's Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, recently retracted a prediction that Fidel would return to power in early December.

(S) Time and time again Fidel Castro has defied rumors about his death. While this latest video is indeed proof that Fidel is still alive, it is also strong evidence that he no longer has the physical strength or ability to return as the ruler of Cuba. Fidel Castro watchers are now focusing on December 2nd, the date of his belated 80th birthday celebration. Another postponement or failure by Fidel to attend this event will further support the argument that the Fidel era is over.

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