Little 'Cold War' Chills Caribbean

Cuba's Batista, Dominican Republic's Trujillo at odds over political asylum, weapons, spies.

By Jay Mallin

Havana (Worldwide Press Service) - A Caribbean cold war has blown up with the fury and unpredictability that are so typical of the two strongest men of the region: Cuba's President Batista and Generalissimo Trujillo.

Ordinarily, Latin dictators stay— or hang— together on the premise that intramural squabbles are not so important as the border between their countries.

But the new wrinkle is that Batista has always been an exception. While retaining basic power, he has nevertheless permitted a certain amount of fighting on his borders.

And more important, Batista has committed the cardinal sin of allowing political fugitives from his country to obtain asylum in Cuba.

The first sign that a storm was brewing came early this year when top Trujillo officials began to go to Cuba with supplying weapons to a Dominican underground movement.

In response, Batista accused the Trujillo government of using spies in this country. To prove his point, Batista showed pictures of Cuban agents in Santo Domingo.

Evidence of the charges would appear in Dominican newspapers stories on the return of agents on missions from Cuba.

Charges and counter-charges followed. Trujillo said the stretch of water separating the two islands was neutral. A prominent labor leader here warned that Trujillo's aid to the Dominican underground was being painted with Cuban insignia in preparation for a bombing of Havana and a top police official in Santo Domingo, Carlos Prio, was plotting with Trujillo to oust Batista.

In the Cuban Congress, Senator Rolando Masferrer headed a task force, which began probing the Dominican espionage on Cuba. At this point, Dominican Ambassador Federico Llerenas made a misstep by going to Masferrer and offered him "anything you want" if he would become a Trujillo agent.

But Masferrer is a strong Batista supporter, and, without Llerenas' knowledge, he made a tape recording of his words. When the recording was played for Batista, he immediately had Llerenas declared persona non grata and then turned him over to the Organization of American States.

The best-informed opinion here is that relations between the two countries is possible, but that actual shooting war is not.

The Organization of American States would almost certainly intervene and, with the aid of a few U.S. Navy ships now in the area, would prevent any further hostilities between Cuba and the Dominican Republic could be easily checked.