

No. 74

Handwritten initials
 American Embassy,
 Habana, Cuba, January 30, 1948

Rec'd
 Feb: 4

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ACTION
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Subject: Possible Cuban Participation in Arms Movements
 in Caribbean.

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 ARMY
 NAVY
 CIA

The Honorable
 The Secretary of State,
 Washington.

Sir:

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I have the honor to refer to a memorandum of conversation of January 8, 1948, entitled "Alleged Venezuelan and Haitian Involvement in Revolutionary Activities against Dominican Republic", received on January 22 from the Division of Caribbean Affairs with a transmittal slip dated January 14, 1948 requesting the Embassy's comments.

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The memorandum of conversation and the notes from the Dominican Embassy have been read with great interest in this Embassy. While at first blush the nature of the allegations is such as to make one discount them, nevertheless, it has been observed that the Dominican charges against Cuba have often been correct. Based on observation of events during the summer of 1947 and more recently, it appears to this Embassy that Dominican sources of intelligence are more often correct with respect to the main trend of events, and usually highly incorrect with respect to details. The observations of the American Embassy in Ciudad Trujillo, contained in its airgram No. A-10 of January 19, are given great credence. It is entirely possible that an elaborate smoke screen is being developed, but at the same time this Embassy, based on past experience alone and without any special knowledge of the present situation in the several countries, is inclined to pay some heed to the old adage "where there is so much smoke there must be some fire".

Inasmuch as Cuba has not been so directly concerned in recent months with the crop of rumors floating about the Caribbean, information is less readily available on general developments. At the same time this Embassy wishes to observe that an apparent change has taken place in the habits and tactics of the revolutionary plotters. Whereas previously information was easy to come by, even to the point of the plotters almost pointing with pride to past or impending developments, they have now become close-mouthed. Rumors still originate and circulate but they have become so diverse and so often contradictory as to make it appear that a stronger leadership has evolved or that the revolutionaries have sincerely taken to heart some of the lessons of the fiasco of Cayo Confites. They are perhaps more adept at smoke screens or of drawing red herrings across the path.

It is, of course, entirely possible that the absence of any concrete information means simply that no considerable plans are afoot.

With respect to the position of Cuba in the present name-calling contest, it is clear that, for the moment at least, she is important as a source of armaments but not as a base of operations. With respect

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RETURN TO DIRECTOR

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American Embassy, Habana

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to the supplies of arms and munitions available in Cuba for any revolutionary or invasion attempt, certain events have come to light in the past few days which may be significant. The details of facts and rumors are contained in a memorandum which is enclosed.

Until recently it was the consensus of this Embassy that General PEREZ, Chief of Staff of the Cuban Army, would probably not permit the release of the arms seized from the Cayo Confites expeditionaries. It was realized, however, that he might be willing to get rid of certain items (e.g. the Mauser rifles which could not easily be integrated into the Springfield-equipped Cuban Army) provided he could be assured that these arms would not fall into the hands of forces which might challenge his authority or threaten Cuba's domestic tranquillity. During the last few weeks our doubts regarding General Perez's attitude on this subject have increased. First, there is strong presumptive evidence that the clandestine air cargo shipped to Guatemala consisted of arms; second, at a recent meeting in Miami General Perez and Minister-without-Portfolio José Manuel ALEMÁN are reported to have displayed more cordiality than was to be expected, and there was even a report to the effect that a political deal had been made between these ex-siamies; third, the continued unbridled and provocative statements of the Dominican Government have done nothing to ease the Cuban Government's hostility toward Trujillo; fourth, and of great importance in the Cuban scene was the purchase of arms by the Dominican Government from Brazil. This purchase was taken with great seriousness by the Cuban authorities, who tried unsuccessfully to prevent its consummation (see Embassy's telegrams No. 713, December 5, and No. 775, December 24, 1947). The enclosed memorandum provides further detailed considerations.

The current unrest in this area, accompanied by recriminations and what amounts to an arms race, probably has ramifications of some kind in all countries bordering on the Caribbean. Under these circumstances the fullest reporting and the widest possible exchange of information among our respective missions would seem to be desirable--not only to enable the Department to obtain as many pieces of the mosaic as possible, but also to help our missions evaluate the information they receive. With this in mind, copies of this despatch are being sent not only to our missions in the Caribbean, but also to those in all countries bordering this area, viz. from Venezuela through Central America to Mexico.

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In view of the foregoing and of the evidence of tension mentioned in the Department's circular telegram of January 17, 1948, 1:00 a.m., this Embassy would not be greatly surprised at more definite indications of trouble in the Caribbean. It would be even less surprised to learn that Cuba is implicated in movements of arms and the giving of at least moral support to an uprising. In short, and whether or not we may again be approaching a crisis, the time has come for us to initiate and support some collective inter-American action looking toward a settlement of these difficulties in our own back yard. I can heartily endorse the opinion expressed by Ambassador Butler in his despatch No. 6 of January 2, 1948, in which he said:

"In spite of the many major critical problems with which the Department is faced, some remedial action in the Caribbean

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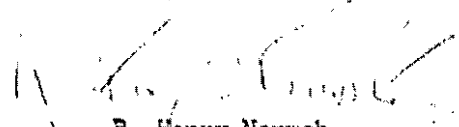
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area in the near future may well prevent the development of a serious situation which would represent a much heavier future demand on the Department's time and attention."

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The basic decision with respect to the attitude of the United States Government on the control of the movement of arms has been made, as announced to the field in the Department's circular telegram of January 17, 1948, 1:00 a.m. It has further been noted that in the prosecution of persons guilty of illegally exporting arms no favor has been shown: those concerned with exports to both the Dominican Republic and to Cuba have been brought to trial. It occurs to us that such sound action on our part could be made the subject of more widespread interest among the nations of Latin America. Perhaps a more positive policy of releasing information to wire services or using it in the Department's radio programs would be well worth while. We can continue to emphasize the fact that the United States has fulfilled, and intends to continue to fulfill, its treaty commitments.

Respectfully yours,


R. Henry Norweb

Enclosure:

Memorandum, January 29, 1948.

File No. 800

LD Mallory/DV Anderson:mk

Copies to: American Embassy, Ciudad Trujillo
American Embassy, Port-au-Prince
American Embassy, Caracas
American Embassy, Bogotá
American Embassy, Panamá
American Embassy, San José
American Embassy, Managua
American Embassy, Guatemala
American Embassy, México, D.F.

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Enclosure to despatch No. 74,
dated January 30, 1948, from
American Embassy, Habana, Cuba

MEMORANDUM

January 29, 1948

Subject: Comments on Dominican Notes of January 7 and 8,
1948 and Information Regarding Recent Develop-
ments in Cuba in Connection with Caribbean Arms
Movements.

The continued allegations and charges of the Dominicans follow previous patterns. In the material under reference the charges are a little more disturbing than former outcries. The Department requests comments in its transmittal slip. In this respect only a few specific points refer to Cuba, which points are commented upon below. On the general subject of whether or not the Dominican Republic may be threatened anew, Cuba is important as a possible source of arms. Previous tight control shows signs of relaxation. Proof is far from definite but a number of points discussed below may be of interest.

With reference to the memorandum enclosed with the Dominican Embassy's note of January 8, there are a few references to Cuba, concerning which the following comments are offered:

1. The reference on pages 4 and 5 to President Grau's speech on Soldiers' Day (December 15, 1947), which the Dominican memorandum states "undoubtedly contains phrases threatening our country, which the Cuban President could not completely conceal", is possibly indicative of Trujillo's guilty conscience. Nevertheless, President Grau did refer to his hostility and that of the Cuban people toward dictatorships and there was a reference to Cuban soldiers who, he said, "would know how to go forward at any moment to defend in any other country these ideals of liberty and justice". Given Grau's known hostility toward Trujillo, it is not surprising that the Dominican dictator should have interpreted these remarks as having been aimed at him.

2. The "arrival at the port of Aux Cayes (Haiti) of two Venezuelan landing barges", mentioned on page 6, apparently refers to the landing craft which an officer of this Embassy observed at Nuevitas on December 11, 1947 (see Embassy's telegram No. 741, December 15, noon) and which were the subject of two telegrams to the Department from our Embassy at Port-au-Prince (Nos. 473 and 480, December 22 and 23, 1947, respectively). No information has been received by this Embassy to indicate whether these craft reached their destination in Venezuela or whether investigation there has linked them to a revolutionary plot.

3. The decoration received by President Grau from the Haitian Government mentioned on page 6 was the subject of this Embassy's despatch No. 4548 of November 25, 1947, in which it was pointed out that this evidence of cordiality between Haiti and Cuba would probably be noted with displeasure by President Trujillo.

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With respect to the movement of arms, the following facts and rumors are offered:

1. Cuban Naval officials claim that the arms seized from the abortive invasion of 1947 were given only in very small part to the Navy, the Army receiving the lion's share. Inquiries of officers of the Army have elicited responses to the effect that the Army did not receive the bulk of arms but that the Navy has them. The fact that neither branch of the Cuban armed forces is willing to admit that the arms are in its possession is in itself suspicious.

2. It has recently been reported that a motor, which formed part of the equipment of the Cayo Confites expedition and had been seized by the Army, has been turned back to its supposed owner in compliance with a court order. According to the same source, officers of the Cuban Army Air Force have stated they are not sure whether they will be allowed to keep the planes seized last summer, particularly the P-38 types.

3. Three recent flights of Guatemalan air force planes, each consisting of two planes, were made to Habana. The planes were apparently loaded at night at the Cuban military airfield for the return trip to Guatemala. Our Military Attaché, Colonel GLENN, reports that when these three flights landed at Guatemala City, armed guards were placed around the planes which were taken to closed hangars and kept under heavy guard. Even U. S. Mission personnel who had been given freedom of movement at the airport were denied access to the hangars. The only items which our sources have noticed are missing at Campo Columbia are two large SCR-284 radio sets which were crated for shipment on January 9, viz. about the time one of these flights is believed to have taken place. There is therefore reason to question whether certain arms and munitions may not have been released by the Cuban Army.

4. Information bearing on the same subject is contained in a report obtained by a controlled American source that arms from the Cayo Confites expedition were on board the Cuban Naval vessel MARTI and that the commanding officer was verbally instructed to permit the removal of at least a part of these arms. The officer did not comply with the order, was temporarily transferred from his command, and during his brief absence the arms were removed.

5. In an attempt to check on the presence and movements of the vessel QUITERAS (see Embassy's telegram No. 104, January 26, 1948), the Naval Attaché to this Embassy on a number of occasions requested information from the Port Captain of Habana. He was repeatedly assured that the vessel had arrived in the port of Habana on November 23 and had not departed. Suspicion led to a minute check of the harbor and it was discovered that the vessel had left some time previously, a fact which was confirmed by the Harbor Police in response to an inquiry from an official of an American shipping company. While not proven, this Embassy now suspects that the Port Captain, an officer of the Cuban Navy, was deliberately trying to throw us off the track. (According to information furnished this Embassy by Juan AREVALO, a Cuban

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labor leader friendly to President TRUJILLO, the GUITERAS is owned by Eufemio FERNANDEZ. The Department will recall that Fernandez played a leading part in the Cayo Confites venture.)

6. The fact that the Chief of Staff of the Cuban Army, General PEREZ, has failed to furnish our Military Attaché with requested and promised details regarding the arms of American origin seized when the Cayo Confites expedition was broken up is also suspicious.

7. The following information attributed to Rolando MASFERRER, a leader of last summer's frustrated plot, was obtained on January 29 from a controlled American source:

(a) General Perez has given Eufemio Fernandez an unspecified amount of small arms and hand grenades for use in a renewed attempt against Trujillo and has promised him the P-38 aircraft which were seized last September (see numbered paragraph 2 above).

(b) Fernandez and Juan BOSCH are the joint owners of a small sailing vessel with an auxiliary motor (note: probably the GUITERAS; see numbered paragraph 5 above) which has been loaded with arms for shipment to Venezuela; Masferrer thinks these arms might be unloaded in a friendly country, "such as Guatemala".

(c) The Cuban Navy has recently examined the two landing craft used in the Cayo Confites expedition and Masferrer has hinted that this action is indicative of the interest of the Cuban Navy in another attempt. (Note: Masferrer might well be wrong since such an examination would logically be made in connection with the incorporation of these craft into the Cuban Navy. Both of these landing craft were recently brought to Habana, and the Inspector General of the Navy has informed our Naval Attaché that they are in very poor condition.)

(d) José M. ALEMAN, Minister-without-Portfolio who played a leading rôle in last summer's plot, is still interested but only in the possibility that an abnormal situation would be created in Cuba which would give President Grau a pretext to remain in power.

(e) Fernandez, who is to be the military leader of a new expedition, is recruiting men in Cuba. Masferrer has a low opinion of Fernandez's ability.

8. Early this month Granville HICKS, author of "Blood on the Streets", who worked actively with the Dominican revolutionaries prior to their late unsuccessful attempt, informed the Habana correspondent of the United Press (McCarthy) that an invasion of the Dominican Republic was being planned in Venezuela or Guatemala. The Embassy learned on January 29 that Hicks has written again to McCarthy warning him to expect important developments within the next two or three weeks.

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