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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM AMEMBASSY, HABANA

1726

DESP. NO.

May 7, 1953

DATE

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

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SUBJECT: REPORTS FROM MEXICO REGARDING ARRESTS OF CUBANS SAID TO BE REVOLUTIONARIES.

In a press release dated April 30, 1953, the Ministry of Information announced that "through official channels" the Cuban Government had learned of the detention by Mexican authorities of Eufemio FERNANDEZ Ortega, ex-Chief of the Secret Police, Segundo CURTI, ex-Minister of the Interior, ex-Colonel Oscar DIAZ, Juan RIOS Montenegro, an aviator, and Cándido DE LA TORRE, ex-Alderman of Habana. The release said that "compromising documents" were seized that revealed plans to attack the coasts of Cuba and the modus operandi of arms contraband.

The Minister of Information charged that the detentions in Mexico were a "link in the chain of international disturbances being caused by the so-called Caribbean Legion" in which the Mamaroneck affair had been another. He also accused ex-President PRIO of investing a "good part of his large fortune in an insurrectional plan, the prime objective of which included the indiscriminate bombing of the city of Habana."

At the same time, the local press began carrying a series of press despatches from Mexico City regarding the reported arrests and supposed concentrations of mercenaries for an invasion of Cuba. The despatches principally quoted Excelsior of Mexico City and gave a confused picture of denials of arrests by Mexican authorities, Excelsior insistence on the detentions, Prío denial and Curti ridicule of invasion plotting, Prío protesting arrests and the Mexicans setting the men free, Mexican investigations, and finally, the "arrests" explained on the basis of the men having gone to the police as informants regarding plotting.

Various Cuban Government spokesmen commented on the reports. The Minister of the Presidency minimized the reports but declared that the Government was prepared to maintain law and order. Army Chief of Staff General TABERNILLA disclaimed knowledge of reported dropping of war material in Cuba by planes from other countries and said that the countryside, the coasts and the air

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are closely watched. The Minister of Information called Prío's denial of plotting and his counter-accusation of Batista financing of the Mexican reports a "smoke screen" to cover his own activities. The Minister stated that "no one in Cuba is upset at his plotting since it lacks ideological and moral foundation."

The reports from Mexico City did not create much of a stir in Cuba. They are the latest of a series of rumors and reports of revolutionary activities and as such have little novelty or scare effect. The present general mood of the people is not in favor of violent solutions of political problems, and even the Communists abjure violence, although probably as a tactical move. There cannot be a very great number who are unaware that Batista is not likely to have neglected precautionary measures against which an invasion expedition such as that suggested by the reports from Mexico would have slight chance of success so long as the armed forces remain faithful to Batista.

Pertinent clippings are enclosed.

For the Ambassador:



Earl T. Crain
Acting Counselor of Embassy

cc: Amembassy, Mexico, D.F.

RESTRICTED

APR 30 1953

Enclosure to D-1726
Habana
5/7/53

Mercenaries Said Poised in Yucatán For Invasion of Cuba

MEXICO CITY, April 29. (AP).—
The afternoon newspaper "Ultimas Noticias" reported today that 300 "mercenaries" have concentrated on the Yucatan coast for an invasion of Cuba. There was no confirmation of the report from other quarters here.

"Ultimas Noticias" said the 300 were recruited by forces of the opposition to Pres. Fulgencio Batista. It said the majority were Mexicans but that Cubans, Guatemalans, Costa Ricans were included.

The paper said the plan was to move these soldiers of fortune in small sailing boats to Cuban coasts in the near future. Once disembarked, it added, they would seize some coastal towns to serve as centers for armed revolt against Batista.

"Ultimas Noticias" said the movement was financed by ex-President Carlos Prío Socarras who spends part of his time in exile here but who was reported to be in Miami now.

Cuban Exiles Arrested In Mexico

Eufemio Fernandez and other supporters of exiled former Cuban President Dr. Carlos Prío Socarras have been arrested by the Mexican authorities, the government of President Batista learned yesterday through official channels, according to the Ministry of Information.

Arrested together with Fernandez were Segundo Curti ex-Minister of the Interior, Oscar Diaz, ex-Colonel of the Cuban Army, the aviator Juan Río Montenegro and former alderman Candido de la Torre.

According to the information received by the Cuban government, compromising documents revealing not only plans to attack the coasts of Cuba, but also the manner in which they have been smuggling arms into Cuba, taking advantage of the hospitality of the countries which have given them refuge, were found on the arrested men, who will be brought before the Mexican courts.

The arrested men have tried to contact ex-President Prío, who is considered in Mexican circles as the head of the insurrection movement, in which he has invested around \$7,000,000.

In connection with this news from Mexico City, Minister of Information Ernesto de la Fe declared yesterday that the Mexican event is no more than a link in the chain of international disturbances which the so-called Caribbean Legion is causing, the previous link in which was the seizure of large quantities of war material in the New York State town of Mamaronck.

He said it was not surprising that ex-president Prío, who permitted bloodshed in the streets of Havana when he was President, should have invested a large part of his huge fortune in a plan of insurrection which included the indiscriminate bombing of the city of Havana.

He remarked reports of landings planned at various ports of Cuba and of the recruitment of mercenaries to form expeditionary forces and said the Batista government is keeping a close watch on the activities of all these people and that, if their mad plans were to prosper, they would be rapidly destroyed by the armed forces of Cuba.

MEXICO CITY, May 1. (AP)—There was no immediate comment here on a report in Havana that a group of Cuban ex-President Prío

(Continued from Page 1)

Socarras' friends had been arrested in Mexico.

All government offices were closed for the May Day celebration and officials could not be reached.

The newspaper Ultimas Noticias several days ago printed a story saying 300 mercenaries financed by Prío were in the Yucatan peninsula preparing for an attack on the Cuban mainland.

However, since then there has been no confirmation of such a troop concentration, and the Cuban Embassy itself in Mexico said it had not headed of it.

Newspapers in Yucatan, where the men supposedly were camping said they found no evidence of them.

Several weeks ago Prío, then in Mexico City, conferred with top Mexican officials and told them he was not using Mexico as a base for an attack on Cuba, or even as a headquarters for plotting such an attack.

It is against Mexican law for foreign political exiles to use Mexico as a base for plotting against home governments, and several exiles here were reportedly warned against abusing their Mexican asylum.

(Continued on Page 10)

MAY 3 - 1953

'Excelsior' Insists Police Hold Cubans, But Police Say No

MEXICO CITY, May 2 (AP) — The newspaper "Excelsior" says it has proof local police are holding five well-known Cubans suspected of plotting to overthrow the present Cuban Government by armed invasion. Police themselves deny holding any Cubans on such charges.

"Excelsior," in a front-page story in its Sunday morning edition, said a reporter saw the men in police headquarters. The reporter was promptly ordered out of the room with the warning that the men were being held *incomunicado*.

"Excelsior" identified the men, all former aides of exiled Cuban President Prio Socarras, as:

Eufemio Fernandez, former Chief of the Secret Police under Prio; Segundo Curti, former Interior Minister; Oscar Diaz, former Colonel in the Cuban Army; Juan Rios Montenegro, aviator; and Candido de la Torre, Havana City official.

"Excelsior" said further that the arrests had been made at the request of the Cuban Ambassador two days ago.

The Cuban Ambassador, Francisco de Miranda y Varona, said earlier today he had no official information about arrests made in Mexico which his own Government had announced yesterday.

Mexican officials, including those of the powerful Interior Department, also had denied any knowledge of such arrests.

However, "Excelsior" said the five Cubans had been arrested, are being held *incomunicado*, and that according to informed sources the men had obtained arms and men to launch an invasion of Cuba.

Unconfirmed reports from Yucatan earlier this week said 300 armed mercenaries were in the peninsula, ready for an invasion financed by Prio.

"Excelsior" said the men being retained here were being treated with full courtesy.

The newspaper said all had been living here at the same hotel (Reforma Continental) at which Prio Himself makes his headquarters when in Mexico City.

The newspaper said all efforts to

(Continued on Page 2)

'EXCELSIOR'...

(Continued from Page 1)

contact the men had failed, and that officials consistently said "we have no such men" when questioned.

MEXICO CITY, May 2. (AP)— Mexican officials said today they knew nothing about reports that a group of former Cuban officials had been arrested here in connection with an alleged plot to attack Cuba.

Cuban Ambassador Miranda, who was scheduled to see the Mexico City Police Chief about reports from government spokesmen in Havana, was forced to break the appointment because of illness. Meanwhile, the Mexican Ministry of the Interior said none of its agents had made any arrests or investigated

reports that 300 mercenaries were on Yucatan peninsula preparing to attack Cuba.

Reports appeared in the Mexican newspaper "Ultimas Noticias" which said the mercenaries were financed by ex-President Prio.

Cuban Minister of Information De la Fe said Friday five ex-Cuban officials, friends of Prio, were arrested by Mexican authorities and information disclosing intent to attack the Cuban coast had been seized.

The Mexican Security Bureau said it had made no arrests and received no orders for arrests. Mexico City Police Chief Miguel Mollnar said his men had not arrested any invaders and "it is not our responsibility, anyway."

Ambassador Miranda said earlier that he had no official information about the arrests.

MAY 3 - 1953

Prio Denies Invasion Plot, Curti Laughs At Arrest Reports

MIAMI, Florida, May 2. (AP).—Segundo Curti, former Cuban Interior Minister, laughed today at reports that he and other former Cuban officials had been arrested in Mexico City in connection with an alleged plot to attack Cuba.

Curti said Cuban President Batista's "Minister of Information is obviously very poorly informed." Curti, who has a home in Miami, added that he had not been in Mexico since February.

The Cuban Information Minister, Ernesto de la Fe, said Friday night that five former Cuban officials, all friends of the exiled ex-President, Carlos Prio Socarras, had been arrested in Mexico and that information was seized "disclosing an intent to attack the Cuban coast."

Curto, who accompanied Prio to Mexico after Batista overthrew the Prio regime in March, 1952, said:

"The announcement of the 'arrests' in Mexico simply reflects a state of nervousness on the part of Batista and his henchmen, who, having sinned, now fear to be sinned against."

MIAMI, Florida, May 2. (AP).—Former President Carlos Prio Socarras of Cuba today branded as "absolutely false" a report from Mexico that his friends are financing a projected invasion of Cuba.

Prio, in exile in Miami, told the Miami Herald that the report, published in the newspaper Ultimas Noticias at Mexico City is "absolutely lacking in veracity."

"There is nothing to it," he said. "That is propaganda paid for by Batista." (He referred to Cuban President Fulgencio Batista, who ousted Prio in a bloodless coup in March, 1952).

"The people of Cuba are fully capable of liberating themselves without the necessity of invasion from any direction."

Prio arrived at his Miami home Monday from Mexico City and said he plans to return there soon.

The Mexican report said 300 "mercenaries" was assembled on a remote coast of Mexico for an amphibious invasion of Cuba.

MEXICO CITY, May 2. (AP).—The Cuban Ambassador said today he had no official confirmation of the arrest here of any plotters against the government of General Fulgencio Batista of Cuba.

Ambassador Francisco de Miranda y Varona said, however, he would talk later in the day with the Mexico City Police Chief.

Newspapers here carried the story on a concentration in Mexico of soldiers of fortune planning to invade Cuba, and the Havana government said last night a group had been arrested.

The fact that the Ambassador will see Mexico City officials would indicate that any possible arrests were made here, although the alleged invasion forces were reported concentrated in Yucatan.

Police officials declined any comment until after they had seen the Cuban Ambassador.

Watch Kept Along Coasts, In Air, Says Army Chief

Minister of the Presidency Dr. Andrés Domingo Morales del Castillo yesterday minimized the importance of reports from Mexico of a planned invasion of Cuba, but said the government is prepared and peace and order is assured.

Army Chief Major General Francisco Tabernilla told reporters: "We have no news about war material dropped in Cuba by planes from abroad. And I wish it to be clearly understood that we have established a very efficient vigilance in the countryside, along the coasts and in the air."

"In accordance with the wishes of President Batista," Gen. Tabernilla continued, "the armed forces will attack nobody, but we shall know how to defend ourselves if we are attacked."

"What we want is peace and tranquillity for the nation."

When reporters questioned the Minister of the Presidency on reports of a projected invasion of Cuba allegedly organized by Cuban exiles in Mexico, he said: "The Government of Cuba has no official news on this conspiracy and the threat of invasion, although the arrests made in Mexico lend a certain aspect of veracity to the reports sent out by the different news agencies."

The Minister added: "It is quite impossible that 700 to a 1,000 men armed with rifles could take the island and much less that they could bombard Havana. The Army is perfectly prepared and the go-

vernment is keeping a careful watch over the situation."

In conclusion, he said: "In reality all this has little importance, but the entire Cuban people can rest assured that the Cuban Government has completely guaranteed public peace and the lives and property of citizens."

Alberto de la Campa, a high official of the Ministry of State, questioned yesterday about news that Mexican authorities had frustrated an expedition against the Cuban government, in which arms from Guatemala were reportedly involved, said, "We trust in the assurances of friendship repeatedly offered by President Arbenz and the Guatemala Ministry of State and in the good relations which are maintained by the Governments of Guatemala and Cuba. (The Cuban

that Sabre jet pilots had shot down Ambassador in Mexico declared yesterday that he had no official confirmation of the news which the press had circulated. He had an appointment with the Mexican Chief of Police to ask for information, but cancelled it due to illness. The Mexican police said they had no comments to make until after they had spoken with the Cuban Ambassador.)

Ex-President Prío denied in Miami yesterday that he or his friends financed any planned invasion of Cuba.

The Cuban government said Friday it had been informed that five Cuban exiles had been arrested in Mexico City. Yesterday it was reported extraofficially that Col. Rafael Izquierdo, aide to ex-President Dr. Carlos Prío Socarras, was among the men arrested.

It was reported from Pinar del Río yesterday that Army forces had arrested seven University students at Consolacion del Norte, accusing them of carrying forbidden arms and of using clothing reserved for the Army. It is not known whether this has any connection with the reported invasion.

The students were held for the Urgency Court but are expected to be released. Questioned by newsmen, they said they had arrived at Consolacion del Norte from Havana to climb the peak known as Pan de Guajabon and had brought a map, "machetes," knives and knapsacks for the purpose.

MAY 5 - 1953

FCF

Prio Denials Seen Screen For Plotting

Movement Has No Moral Basis, De la Fe Says

Ex-President Prio's denials of revolutionary plots against the present Cuban government are just a smokescreen he is trying to throw up to hide his subversive activities in the Caribbean, Minister of Information Ernesto de la Fe said in an official statement issued yesterday. He referred to recent declarations made by the former President in the United States in connection with events in Mexico, in which Prio said the Batista Government had paid for publication of the Mexican reports.

"Dr. Prio Socarras well knows," he added, "that the news of the different arrests of his followers in Mexican territory were transmitted by cable agencies of recognized integrity, with cannot be bought, as the millionaire ex-president is well aware.

"A man of short memory, Dr. Prio seems to have forgotten his recent declarations in which he asserted textually: 'In Cuba they are conspiring under the very nose of President Batista.'

"Although nobody in Cuba is worried about his plot because it lacks ideological and moral foundations, it is true that he has made considerable investments to create an atmosphere of unrest which provide means to damage the national economy. A good part of the money from the spurious destruction of deteriorated bills is being used in this make-believe war.

"As regards the histrionic ex-Minister of the Interior of the deposed regime, Segundo Curti, he knows better than anybody that only a few days ago he was in Mexico.

"Up to now that is all I have to say on the activities of the millionaire syndicate created under the protection of the government of Carlos Prio."

MAY 5 - 1953

Mexicans Probe Cuban Exile Plot

MEXICO CITY, May 4. (AP)—Government secret agents flew to coastal areas today to check reports of a filibuster plot against Cuba while government officials had fastly denied they had arrested anybody.

The agents were checking reports of a frustrated arms shipment from Tampico and of a concentration of soldiers of fortune on the Tabasco coast. Back of the whole cloud of mystery and controversy was a report that Cuban revolutionaries had enlisted and armed 300 men. They were supposed to be on the Yucatan peninsula waiting for small sailing vessels to take them to Cuba.

The report has never been confirmed but it spurred Mexican officials into a burst of activity covered with a thin veil of denial anything is going on. Over the week end four or five Cubans were arrested, to be released a few hours later after exiled President Carlos Prío Socarras returned from the U. S. to intercede for them.

Prío's total reported all day that neither he nor any of his friends were in. Police officials said they still knew nothing of any arrest. The Interior and Foreign Ministries said the same. So did the Cuban Embassy.

MEXICO CITY, May 4. (AP)—The newspaper "Excelsior" has accused government officials of withholding news of what the paper said was the detention of five Cuban exiles in Mexico City. In a strongly worded editorial, the newspaper charged the government with unjustified censorship.

It said officials withheld news that five exiles had been detained and later released following accusations that they had plotted an invasion of Cuba.

Meanwhile, it was reported last night that exiled President Carlos Prío Socarras of Cuba had returned to Mexico City from Miami, Florida, and that the five Cubans who reportedly were "detained" had been released and had joined him at his hotel headquarters.

Government officials had denied that any Cubans were held, despite the fact that reporters insisted they

had seen the exiles at police headquarters.

The "Excelsior" editorial, commenting on the reports, said the asserted withholding of news was making a mockery of Mexican press freedom.