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FROM

AmEmbassy, Habana

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TO

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

March 20, 1957

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Action Taken

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SUBJECT: Joint Weeks No. 12 for State, Army, Navy and Air Departments
from SANA

Name of Officer: 16 OCB-2 OSD-2

(UNCLASSIFIED) PRESIDENTIAL PALACE ATTACKED. Just after 3:20 PM on March 13, 1957, approximately 40 armed men attacked the Presidential Palace. The attackers blasted their way into the building and eventually reached the second floor. President BATISTA, his wife and their youngest son, and Secretary of the Presidency Andres DOMINGO y Morales del Castillo were among those in the Palace at the time. There was some fighting within the Palace but by about 4 P.M. the attackers had been driven out of the building. Some took refuge in nearby buildings but were not able to hold these positions long. Coincident with the attack against the Palace a group of armed men led by José Antonio ECHEVERRIA, President of the Federation of University Students (FEU) -- and long sought by Cuban police for his anti-Government activities -- took over a local radio station and forced the announcer to read a statement that BATISTA and Army Chief of Staff TABERNILLA had been killed and the Government overthrown. They made other revolutionary announcements before the station was cut off the air by an employee. As the armed group left the radio station one of their three cars became involved in a gunfight with a police radio car and ECHEVERRIA was killed; the rest presumably made their way to the University of Habana or to the University Hospital. At about 5 P.M. Government forces seized the University and Hospital, and it was reported that arms were found in the Hospital. By about 5:30 P.M. all of the attackers who had not managed to escape -- and it is not known how many did escape -- had apparently been killed and order restored. The dead included Menelao MORA Morales, former representative and long-time oppositionist, who led the attack against the Palace. Peter KORENDA, an American tourist from Clifton, New Jersey, was killed when his room at the Hotel Regis, near the Palace, was sprayed by gunfire during the attack; Edward BUTTS, American from Garfield, New Jersey, who was in the room with KORENDA, was injured slightly. Following the attack the Chief of the National Police recommended that persons remain indoors at night and all military personnel were alerted. Many of the city's private schools closed on Thursday and some

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remained closed through Friday. Commercial airports in Habana were closed to incoming and outgoing traffic from 3:45 P.M. on March 13 to 6 A.M. on the 14th. By Friday, March 15, the light tanks which had come from Camp Columbia to help defend the Palace were withdrawn and, except for increased guards around the Palace, the city appeared back to normal. It was announced that approximately 40 persons, including rebels and Government forces, died in the shootings on March 13. On March 16 BATISTA told newsmen that the Government had had advance notice that the attack was being planned and that this information had enabled loyal forces to perfect plans for the defense of the Palace which assured failure of the rebel attack. BATISTA said he himself had remained in the Palace, in spite of recommendations that he move to Camp Columbia, in order to personally direct the defense of the Palace. He indicated throughout the interview that there was never any doubt in his mind as to the outcome of the attack.

(CONFIDENTIAL) COMMENT. The attack appeared to have one objective -- to kill BATISTA -- and it nearly succeeded. There is no indication that the attackers had clear plans about what to do if they had succeeded. The Embassy has been informed that the attack plans involved some 200 men, about 40 of whom were to assault the Palace, and that many of the supporting groups failed to appear. There have been rumors for some time that followers of former President Carlos PRIO Socarras were planning an armed move against BATISTA and there is reason to believe that some of this group were involved in the March 13th attack. There are however no indications that Communists or "26th of July" Movement followers were involved, in spite of claims to that effect by the Government. There probably is more revolutionary activity to come. The Government's reaction was swift and violent. Many have been arrested -- sources say as many as 400 but with most released after interrogation -- and some people have died under mysterious circumstances (e.g. PELAYO CUERVO NAVARRO below). Two senators were arrested but released. The Embassy does not see any prospect of a popular uprising against BATISTA -- the majority of the Cubans are politically apathetic -- and although it is probable there will be further trouble, the Embassy feels that barring a successful military coup -- or a successful assassination attempt -- BATISTA still stands a good chance of finishing his term.

(UNCLASSIFIED) DEATH OF PELAYO CUERVO NAVARRO. Dr. Pelayo CUERVO Navarro, a well-known lawyer, President of the Board of Directors of the Ordox Party, former Congressman, and former Minister -- in the Government of General MENDIETA -- was found shot to death in a Habana suburb on Wednesday night, March 13, 1957. The Chief of the National Police told newsmen that it did not appear that CUERVO was connected with the Palace attack of the 13th and that his death was being investigated. The Chief of the Military Intelligence Service (SIM) and the Chief of the Cuban Police Bureau

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of Investigation, when questioned by newsmen, stated that it was not possible for members of the Armed Forces -- which include the police -- to have been involved in the death as they were charged with the protection of the Cuban people. It was also reported that BATISTA himself had given the police orders to treat CUERVO with special consideration.

(CONFIDENTIAL) COMMENT. It is generally agreed that CUERVO was killed by Government forces. He had gone into hiding during the afternoon of the 13th -- because of the Government's habit of arresting him whenever anything happened -- and he was taken from his hiding place and shot. His murder is likely to have a profound effect on Cuban politics since it will lead to increased support for those elements of the opposition advocating violence.

(UNCLASSIFIED) OPPOSITIONIST POLITICAL PARTIES. Leaders of oppositionist political parties, including José PARDO Llada of the National Revolutionary Party and Carlos MARQUEZ Sterling of one of the Ortodoxo groups, have announced they will meet this week to continue their efforts to reach a unified opposition front. On March 14, 1957, Vice President Rafael Guas Inclan announced that the Government had decided to abandon the Vente Plan which provided for partial elections in November, 1957 with general elections a year later and that there would be general elections on November 1, 1958. The Vice President said that failure of the opposition to agree on a unified position with regard to elections had led the Government to make this decision.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) COMMENT. Most opposition political activity in the last few months has centered about the demands of the various opposition groups for early elections. The Government's decision makes further oppositionist discussions at this time rather academic.

(UNCLASSIFIED) CUBAN CONGRESS CONVENES. The 25th regular session of the Cuban Congress convened on March 18, 1957. There was a good attendance and opposition groups were represented. The day's activities included the reading of President BATISTA's message to the Congress. The message -- reported to be 493 pages long -- outlined the progress of the Administration and the events which have taken place since Congress adjourned.

(CONFIDENTIAL) SITUATION IN ORIENTE PROVINCE. Fidel CASTRO is still in the Sierra Maestra mountains but things seem to have been quiet there during the past week. The Government has from 700 to 800 military personnel in the area but the exact strength of the Castro forces is unknown.

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The Office of the Military Governor of Santiago de Cuba, set up following the Castro landing, has been abolished. The Military Governor -- Colonel Ramon CRUZ Vidal -- has been relieved and the man under his command returned to their respective units. This leaves General Martin DIAZ Tamayo in charge of military operations in the Province, except for the troops engaged against Castro who remain under the command of Colonel Pedro BARRERA.

The three American minors from Guantanamo Bay Naval Base (WEEKA No. 11, March 13, 1957) are still believed to be with CASTRO, and the Embassy and the Consulate at Santiago de Cuba are continuing their attempts to contact them and have them leave the area.

(UNCLASSIFIED) CENSORSHIP AND CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES. The order suspending constitutional guarantees remains in force. No press censorship has been imposed but since the attack on the Presidential Palace on March 13, the Ministry of Communications has issued an order suspending for three days the news programs of Habana television station TELEMUNDO and another suspending for seven days the radio broadcasts of José PARDO Llada, oppositionist leader and news commentator. The two suspensions were ordered because of reports concerning the Palace attack.

(UNCLASSIFIED) BELGIAN AND CUBAN LEGATIONS TO BE EMBASSIES. The Ministry of State announced on March 15, 1957 that Belgium and Cuba had agreed to raise their respective Legations to the rank of Embassies.

(UNCLASSIFIED) TELEPHONE AGREEMENT SIGNED. On March 14, President BATISTA and members of his cabinet received I.T.&T. and Embassy officials and completed the signing of the final agreement revising and extending the company's concession to operate and expand telephone service in Cuba. Rates are adjusted upward, enabling the company to obtain necessary financing, and the company undertakes to invest promptly \$61 million in expanding its services. Other important points relate to taxes, numbers of telephones, and establishment in Cuba of an assembly plant.

(UNCLASSIFIED) COMMENT. The final agreement is a compromise between the original company and Government positions. Signature comes just in time to avert a serious crisis in local communications.

LABOR

(UNCLASSIFIED) TELEPHONE WORKERS' POSITION RE "PLAN OF IMPROVEMENT". The Executive Committee of the Labor Federation of Telephone Workers, following a special meeting called by its Secretary General Vicente Rubiera to discuss the recently signed agreement for the new telephone expansion project, issued a public

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statement in which it was asserted that (1) the collective agreement of the Telephone Federation and the company would "undergo no change or suspension in its text, content and scope in view of the PLAN OF IMPROVEMENT"; and (2) The Telephone Federation as the representative organ of workers guarantees to its members the effectiveness of that agreement.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) COMMENT. The above statement was undoubtedly issued to scotch rumors that the new telephone agreement (which will increase present employment from 2980 to 7840 in 1966) would abrogate the Federation's collective bargaining agreement with the Company.

(UNCLASSIFIED) TELLECHEA NAMED AS CUBAN WORKER DELEGATE TO ILO. Public announcement has been made that the CTC Executive Committee has approved Ignacio GONZALEZ TELLECHIA as the official Workers' delegate to the June 1957 session of the International Labor Conference. His advisers are to be: Francisco AGUIRRE, José PEREZ Gonzalez, and Jesus ARTIGAS.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) COMMENT. Tellechea replaces Angel COFIÑO, who has been Cuban Workers' delegate for nine years and is also a member of the ILO Governing Board. The change is a direct result of the bitter fight that has been in progress between Eusebio MUJAL, Secretary General of the CTC, and Cofinio who heads the Labor Federation of Electrical, Gas and Water Plants.

(UNCLASSIFIED) PSYCHOLOGICAL. The Middle East situation was the main subject discussed by the Habana press during the week. Información sized up recent events as a return to the cold war, and a virtual victory for Nasser. The current tense situation, the newspaper pointed out, is obviously the result of the decision from Moscow, and Nasser's threats have prestige and meaning only because of the backing of Zhukov. In spite of the new tensions, Información expressed the opinion that the threat of a new World War was nothing more than a threat placed in the voice of Nasser by the Soviet Union. The Soviet tactic, the newspaper felt, is an obvious one -- to discredit the Eisenhower Doctrine in the Middle East and to oblige the United States to use force in the area. Although the situation is critical, the newspaper concluded, it is far from desperate. Excelsior stated that Nasser's boasting of victories in the Middle East is "incredibly ridiculous" and typical of the ravings of demagogues. This newspaper viewed Nasser as an Arabian Hitler in his dreams of conquest and his methods, but drew an historical contrast by pointing out that the Nazi dictator had an advantage of leading a well-developed and industrialized nation which had the capability of waging war. Without the backing of the Soviet Union, Nasser cannot even be considered dangerous, the newspaper stated. Excelsior considered that Nasser was taking advantage

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of the present confusion in Washington and that Israel would not sit back with folded arms and let Egypt take over the disputed areas. Avance observed that Nasser was not interested in having the UN solve the crisis in the Middle East, but is taking the dangerous course as self-appointed saviour of the Arab world. Nasser appears, the newspaper concluded, to have learned many tactical lessons from Hitler and Mussolini. Pueblo also labeled the Egyptian Strong Man as a "Hitler in Miniature" who has now declared verbal war on the United Nations.

Army, Navy, Air

Negative.


Arthur Gardner

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