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FROM: AmEmbassy, Habana

651

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April 3, 1957
DATE

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SUBJECT: Joint Weekly News Release State, Army, Navy and Air Departments from SANA.

Name of Officer

(UNCLASSIFIED) JOINT CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE. The Joint Congressional Committee set up to study possible solutions of the Cuban political crisis continues to receive foremost press attention. The committee is debating its administrative procedures and expects to start its hearings later this week. It is understood that no regular sessions of Congress will be held during the next two weeks or so to lessen the possibility of interference with the committee's hearings. There are reports that various oppositionist groups, such as the National Revolutionary Party and factions of the Ortodoxo Party, will attempt to reach some joint agreement on the opinions to be expressed by their representatives when they appear before the committee. Government Congressional leaders continue to express optimism as to the outcome of the committee's deliberations. On March 24, 1957 representatives of some 25 important professional, civic, religious and cultural groups -- pointing out their lack of political motivations -- published a signed statement expressing horror at the turn to violence on the part of Cuban youth, concern about the deterioration of Cuba's political, social and cultural situation, and hope that a peaceful solution will be reached. The first reaction from the Government came in a statement from Minister of the Interior Santiago REY who inferred that the statement should have condemned acts of violence against the Government and indicated that such civic groups should leave the search for a political solution to the Joint Congressional Committee. On April 1, 1957 it was announced that a civic group from Santa Clara had issued a statement similar to the one published March 24th.

(CONFIDENTIAL) COMMENT. The political situation remains a matter of deep concern to most Cubans. The Joint Congressional Committee has the best wishes of all but it does not yet appear that the Government is prepared to modify its decision to hold elections in November, 1958 and not to grant an amnesty -- these have been the main points of disagreement between the Government and the oppositionists, who appear equally unyielding. Santiago REY's statement was unfortunate. The Government leaders in the Congress have stated again and again that

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they will go to any extreme to reach a solution to the political crisis and that they stand ready to hear opinions from all sectors of the population, even the revolutionary groups. REY's statement indicates that outside interest is not welcome and that the search for a solution should be left to the professional politicians, who by implication are better able to speak for the people than are the people themselves.

(UNCLASSIFIED) **TERRORISTIC ACTIVITIES.** Government security forces discovered several important arms caches during the past week, one of which reportedly contained arms and explosives worth \$300,000. When asked on March 30th whether he thought there were many more illegal arms in Cuba, BATISTA indicated he felt \$10 million worth might have been smuggled into Cuba -- basing this on an admission by former President Carlos PRIO Socarras about three years ago that he had purchased \$5 million worth then and his estimate that PRIO has purchased another \$5 million worth since. BATISTA added that the rebels had enough arms in Cuba to take over the country but that they lacked the support of the people. He stated that the Government policy of helping foster tourism by not delaying passengers for a complete baggage check had made it easy for rebels to smuggle arms into the country.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) **COMMENT.** An Embassy officer who met an incoming relative at Habana's International Airport since March 30th reports that the customs authorities seem to be searching baggage more thoroughly than before. Of course, most of the arms have been brought in by other means, either by false marking of crates and boxes and connivance of customs officials, or by clandestine landings on Cuba's long and open coast.

(UNCLASSIFIED) **FIDEL CASTRO.** Reports concerning Fidel CASTRO and the "26th of July" Movement are confusing. On March 13th Secretary to the Presidency Andres DOMINGO y Morales del Castillo gave the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba every assurance of the Government's cooperation in his attempts to reach the three American youths missing from their Guantanamo Bay Naval Station homes since early February and generally presumed to have joined CASTRO and his forces. There have been several recent reports of arrests of Cuban youths trying to make their way through the Cuban Army lines to join CASTRO in the Sierra Maestra mountains. On March 25th a Habana news magazine editor rated brief headline attention when he reported he had travelled throughout the Sierra Maestra area and that CASTRO was not there. Then on March 30th BATISTA told newsmen that CASTRO and the "26th of July" group were not in the Sierra Maestra mountains.

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(CONFIDENTIAL) COMMENT. It might have been more accurate for BATISTA to have said that the Cuban Army had been unable to see or to capture CASTRO. The reasoned conclusion of our intelligence services is that CASTRO and his men -- exact number unknown -- are in the Sierra Maestra mountains though possibly not in the area the Army claims to have cordoned off. The Cuban Army detachment pursuing CASTRO has not been disbanded and there appears to be every reason to believe that the Government is not as convinced CASTRO is not there as the President's press statement would seem to indicate.

(UNCLASSIFIED) DELEGATIONS CALL ON BATISTA. Delegations representing the hacendados (sugar producers), the colonos (sugar cane growers), the Veterans of the Cuban Army of Liberation, the bankers, and the CTC (Cuban Confederation of Labor) called on President BATISTA during the past week to express their repudiation of the March 13th attack against the Presidential Palace and their satisfaction that he and his family emerged unscathed.

(CONFIDENTIAL) COMMENT. The Embassy has heard that Ministers of the Government have contacted various civic groups and have discreetly suggested they send such delegations to the Palace. It is understood that a delegation of Cuban Industrialists and another from the American Chamber of Commerce in Cuba are scheduled to make calls soon.

(UNCLASSIFIED) NEW CUBAN TV NETWORK. A third Cuban television network went on the air April 1, an outgrowth of the failure of Televisión Nacional. The equipment of Televisión Nacional was purchased by a group of investors including Goar Mestre, owner of the important CMQ-TV network. The new network, CMEF-TV, began with outlets in Habana, Matanzas, Santa Clara, and Camaguey, and by July will have added Holguín and Santiago. CMEF-TV plans heavy usage of films, including those from USIS.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) SUGAR. On March 28, the Cuban Government decreed that all wages and salaries for Cuban sugar labor should again be calculated at the basic 4.96 cents per English pound of sugar.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) COMMENT. With the current average price around 5.15 cents per pound, f.o.b., Cuba, the early decision of the Government to increase the wage level may have been due in part to the desire of C.T.C. and Government officials to offset the demands of radical labor leader and Congressman from Las Villas Conrado BECQUER for increased participation of labor in the income derived from the sale of the 1957 sugar crop.

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LABOR

(UNCLASSIFIED) ELECTRICAL WORKERS ATTEMPT CTC WITHDRAWAL. The National Council of the Labor Federation of Electric, Gas and Water Plants voted on March 28, to disaffiliate from the CTC, charging the top CTC leadership with repeated provocation and continuous disregard for the Federation's rights and autonomy. The Council's decision which was to have been subject to a referendum has been declared null and void by the Minister of Labor.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) COMMENT. Immediate cause of the Council's action was the recent endorsement by the CTC Executive Committee of a Ministry of Labor decree and resolution aimed at preventing Communist infiltration of public service companies (by prior screening of candidates for employment) and which the Electric Plant workers strenuously oppose (See Weeka 13).

PSYCHOLOGICAL

(UNCLASSIFIED) The Middle East situation, particularly as it was affected by the Bermuda Conference and the announcement that the United States would join the Bagdad Pact, was once again the predominant international topic in the Cuban press. INFORMACION felt that nothing concrete was agreed on at Bermuda in regard to the Near East problem except that Britain agreed to go along with the Eisenhower doctrine, which had already been firmly established before the meeting ever took place. The U.S. joining of the Bagdad Pact did not mean much, according to this paper, at least militarily, but politically it may help to fortify the Eisenhower doctrine. In contrast AVANCE considered the Bermuda conference of "extraordinary importance" and one which produced agreements of far-reaching significance. DAIRIO DE LA MARINA criticized the "Great Powers", particularly the U.S., for their allegedly wavering policy in the Near East. By stopping the military action, said this paper, the U.S. was obligated to seek a solution to the basic problems of the area, and the simple offering of guarantees to these countries will not suffice. ALERTA, on the other hand, believed that the U.S. decision to participate in the Military Committee of the Bagdad Pact will have important repercussions, particularly in strengthening the morale of the member nations, although no doubt it will antagonize India whose traditional enemy, Pakistan, is a member state. PUEBLO felt the Bermuda conference only made more evident the divergent policies of Britain and the U.S. in the Suez issue, while Excelsior felt the conference succeeded in reuniting these two countries who had separated over a situation in the Middle East created by the Kremlin.

ARMY

(UNCLASSIFIED) Major Andres PEREZ-CHAUMONT y Altuzarra, former Liaison Officer of the Cuban Army for Foreign Military Attaches in Cuba, has been designated to substitute Lt. Col. Juan a. ESTEVEZ y Maymir as Military Attache to Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, with residence in Mexico City, effective 20 March 1957

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per presidential decree No. 605. Major PEREZ-CHAUMONT departed for his new assignment 1 April 1957; new position for Lt. Col. ESTEVEZ y Maymir has not been published.

Major Jorge LE SANTE, formerly second in command of the Operations Section, G-3, Cuban Army General Headquarters, replaces Major PEREZ-CHAUMONT as Foreign Liaison Officer.

NAVY

(UNCLASSIFIED) CUBAN PBY LOST. On 1 April 1957 a Cuban Navy PBY crashed into the sea near Cabanas, Pinar del Rio Province. The aircraft took off from the Naval Air Station, Mariel, at 1515 on a routine patrol flight and reportedly fell at 1530. The reason for the accident is not known at this time. Of the crew of seven, only one enlisted man survived. He was picked up by a fishing vessel. The pilot of the ill-fated aircraft was Alferez de Navio (LTJG) Remberto PEREZ FONTICIELLA; the co-pilot was Alferez de Fragata (ENS) Felipe A. DIP Laquis. The Cuban Navy has dispatched vessels and aircraft to search for the wreckage and other survivors but as of this date the search has not been successful.

(CONFIDENTIAL) COMMENT. The aircraft which was lost was a PBY-5A No. 70. This aircraft was the best of the four PBY's belonging to the Cuban Naval Air Arm. Under MAP this aircraft was provided in August 1956 from U.S. Navy "mothball" storage to replace a Cuban PBY that was beyond economic repair. ENS DIP recently graduated from U.S. Navy Air Training at Pensacola and Corpus Christi. He had some difficulty in qualifying as a Naval Aviator because of physical reasons but finally was graduated after a delay of several months.

(UNCLASSIFIED) CUBAN CANDIDATES FOR US NAVAL ACADEMY EXAMINED. Examinations have been administered by the Office of the Naval Attaché to determine eligibility and to select one Cuban boy for entrance into the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis in 1957. Seven candidates were civilians and nine cadets of the Cuban Merchant Marine School. Only eight of the boys completed the examination.. Cuba already has two midshipmen now studying at Annapolis.


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