Habana, February 3, 1941.

Strictly Confidential

Dear Sumner:

I am sending you herewith my despatch No. 1505 of February 3 instead of sending it through ordinary channels to the Department. I believe it would be desirable that this despatch have only very restricted circulation. It is my hope that the serious situation here may be composed without public knowledge thereof. The Military and Naval Attachés are sending very brief telegrams to their respective Departments today, but I have told them to confine themselves to very brief telegrams as I am sending full information to the Department, where Army and Navy can undoubtedly inform themselves. The question is a purely political one now, and I do not believe it advisable that Army and Navy should become too much interested in the details now, as I still hope that the situation can be composed.

I will telephone you this afternoon as soon as I have my despatch and this letter off on the air mail. I am not cabling, as the story is too complicated to give any kind of an adequate picture by cable. I will give you as much as I safely can over the telephone this afternoon.

The situation is serious. The Army and the Police are with Pedraza. I think there is no doubt of that in either Pedraza's mind or in Batista's. Batista precipitated the situation unwise by removing García without consulting Pedraza. Batista is not nearly as calm and considered about these things as Pedraza is. The removal of García and the circumstances attendant to it were, of course, only the straw that broke the camel's back. The situation has been developing for some time, but neither Pedraza nor Batista thought it would come to anything like this. The responsibility rests principally, in my opinion, on Batista for having precipitated the situation. Pedraza I think was prepared to play ball with

The Honorable
Sumner Welles
Under Secretary of State,
Washington, D. C.
with him, even in making major changes in the Army and Navy and in the way of administrative reforms. Now Pedraza feels that Batista is really preparing to get rid of him, and when Pedraza makes up his mind he is a very more difficult character to deal with than Batista.

As it stands today there are, of course, some rumors creeping out in certain quarters, but only a few people realize the serious nature of the break. Even in the Cabinet they only realize that there is difficulty over the removal of García. I am unable to comment on the possible courses, as the time before the air mail leaves does not permit. It seems to me that we are principally interested in the maintenance of order, and that individuals do not count so much for us. It would, I believe, be a great misfortune if there should be a shift from constitutional government after it having been brought about again so painfully. At the worst, I do not think there will be bloodshed of a serious character if Pedraza, who can do it as things stand today, obliges Batista to resign and leave. Just what Pedraza would do, I do not know, but he might make the Vice President President and govern behind the throne, as did Batista with Laredo Bru. Of course, Pedraza might take over the whole Government. This latter course I think would be bad in many ways. With Pedraza in control and the Vice President made President the situation might in some ways be better, so far as we and Cuba are concerned, but this, too, has many disadvantages.

I am hoping that they will be able to compose their differences as the best solution all around. Even if they do compose their differences Batista will have to be more reasonable so far as we are concerned, for his position will be so much weaker, and Pedraza can be depended upon, I believe, to give cooperation to us.

I am wondering what you think of my having told Ramos that I would be willing to sit down with Batista and Pedraza, not as Ambassador, but as a friend of both of them and of Cuba. I do not want to get into the position of a mediator and I hope the situation will
will be settled between them without my being brought into even such a conversation. I feel, however, that this would be the least I could do if they want it, as I think I could bring some thoughts to their attention which both of them may not be taking sufficiently into account.

I shall keep you advised.

Faithfully yours,

George S. Messersmith

GSM/mw