

Communist Threat to the United States Through the Caribbean

U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, of the Committee on the Judiciary.

Tuesday, May 6, 1960

**Testimony of Gen. Francisco J. Tabernilla
(through an interpreter)**

(Hearing resumed at 2:25 p.m. pursuant to adjournment.)

Senator KEATING. Will you call the first witness?

Mr. SOURWINE. Gen. Francisco J. Tabernilla.

Senator KEATING. Will you raise your right hand, please?

Do you solemnly swear that the evidence you will give in this proceeding will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

General TABERNILLA. I do.

Mr. SOURWINE. Your full name, Sir.

General TABERNILLA. Francisco Tabernilla.

Mr. SOURWINE. You are a former Chief of Staff of the Cuban Army?

General TABERNILLA. Yes, sir.

Mr. SOURWINE. Do you speak English, General?

General TABERNILLA. Well, I speak some English.

Mr. SOURWINE. We can conduct this in English if the Chair pleases and use the interpreter if his services seem to be needed.

General TABERNILLA. Thank you.

Mr. SOURWINE. Would you sit there, Mr. Interpreter?

If the general feels the need of having a question interpreted, he can indicate and you can interpret it.

General, you are a graduate of the Cuban Military Academy?

General TABERNILLA. Yes, sir.

Mr. SOURWINE. In what year?

General TABERNILLA. 1917.

Mr. SOURWINE. You are then a career soldier?

General TABERNILLA. Yes.

Mr. SOURWINE. You have spent your life in the army of Cuba?

General TABERNILLA. More than 40 years.

Mr. SOURWINE. How many governments of Cuba did you serve under, General?

General TABERNILLA. About five.

Mr. SOURWINE. Five. You were Chief of Staff of the Cuban Army at the time the Batista government was overthrown?

General TABERNILLA. I was Joint Chief of the General Staff.

Mr. SOURWINE. Do you remember telling us in executive session about what you referred to as Batista's betrayal of the Cuban people?

General TABERNILLA. I explained about the way he left Cuba.

Mr. SOURWINE. Will you tell us about that now, please?

General TABERNILLA. Yes.

On the 31st of December 1958, I was at home, and one of his aides called by telephone to my house inviting me to be at General Batista's house in Camp Columbia at half past 11 with my wife to have coffee for the New Year.

So I went there at half past 11. He got in about 10 minutes to 12. And after 1 o'clock, 10 minutes past 1, I think, he called us into his office down there, and he read a paper, and he was resigning as President of the Republic on account of he didn't want any more bloodshed among the Cuban people. And he asked us to resign also our posts.

Mr. SOURWINE. He asked you to resign?

General TABERNILLA. Yes.

Mr. SOURWINE. That is you, his officers?

General TABERNILLA. Myself and all the generals, too, that were present at that meeting at his office. And he told us that we had to take a plane, I think it was around 3 in the morning. And he had previously given the name to his aide what plane I should take with my family, and all the generals, too.

We came here to the United States, we arrived at Jacksonville the 1st day of January. And he went to Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic.

Mr. SOURWINE. Could the Cuban Army have resisted successfully the march on Havana if it had been ordered to do so?

Could Castro's march on Havana have been successfully resisted if the army had been ordered to resist it?

General TABERNILLA. You mean the 1st day of January?

Mr. SOURWINE. Yes, Sir.

General TABERNILLA. No; General [Eulogio] Cantillo--General Batista named General Cantillo in charge of the Government. He said a junta--a junta is three or four--and he named Cantillo.

Senator KEATING. You had better use the interpreter. I don't think he understands the question.

Mr. SOURWINE. Interpret my question, please. The question is, General, could the march on Havana have been successfully resisted if the army had been ordered to resist it?

General TABERNILLA. It could, but not for a long time, because by that time the people of Cuba were already against the regime of Batista, and there is no army, once the people get up in arms, that can suppress it.

Mr. SOURWINE. The people themselves supported this revolution, did they not?

General TABERNILLA. Completely.

Mr. SOURWINE. And that is why the revolution succeeded?

General TABERNILLA. Exactly.

Senator KEATING. Could the Castro forces, the so-called rebels, have been eliminated if the order had been given earlier to wipe them out?

General TABERNILLA. Yes, certainly, it could have been done if, at the time Castro landed, the proper orders were given to suppress him; there is no doubt that it could have been done.

Mr. SOURWINE. General, are you acquainted with the present chief police of Havana?

General TABERNILLA. No, sir.

Mr. SOURWINE. Do you know who he is?

General TABERNILLA. No, Sir.

I know by the papers, his name is [Efigenio] Almejeiras, but I don't know him personally and never heard of him.

Mr. SOURWINE. Was your brother Minister to Colombia during the Bogota riots?

General TABERNILLA. Yes, Sir; he was Minister of the Legation in Cuba; he was Minister there in the Legation in Cuba.

Mr. SOURWINE. In the Colombian Legation?

General TABERNILLA. No, the Cuban Legation in Colombia.

Mr. SOURWINE. And he was in Bogota?

General TABERNILLA. Bogota, the capital; yes.

Mr. SOURWINE. Was Raul Castro there?

General TABERNILLA. I don't know.

Mr. SOURWINE. Was Fidel Castro?

General TABERNILLA. Fidel was there.

Mr. SOURWINE. What do you know about that?

General TABERNILLA. The only thing I know is that he took part in the big riot they had there, and he bragged of killing himself several persons.

Mr. SOURWINE. You have this from your brother?

General TABERNILLA. I got that from my brother, and he is dead.

Mr. SOURWINE. Would you tell us, General, about the indoctrination of the Cuban Army with Communist propaganda?

General TABERNILLA. Now you mean, the indoctrination now?

Mr. SOURWINE. No; what do you know about indoctrination of the army with communism at any time.

General TABERNILLA. Not during the time of the regime of General Batista, not then. There is now. But I don't know about it other than what I read in the papers.

Senator KEATING. There was no Communist infiltration in the army during the regime of Batista?

General TABERNILLA. None.

Mr. SOURWINE. What effect, if any, did Communist propaganda have on the army under Batista and before Castro took over?

General TABERNILLA. The Communist propaganda was sent by Fidel Castro himself to the chiefs of the armed services to the line troops, the fighting troops that were in the field. He would write them in their own handwriting making propositions that the war was not against the army but it was against the Batista regime, that we were all but brothers.

Mr. SOURWINE. Was this propaganda successful in causing defections of Batista officers and troops?

General TABERNILLA. There were two cases.

Mr. SOURWINE. Only two?

General TABERNILLA. Two, Sir, that went over to the enemy, and a battalion that fought for 11 days and then surrendered.

Mr. SOURWINE. During the fighting against the Castro forces, were there requests by field commanders to General Batista for more troops and supplies?

General TABERNILLA. Yes, Sir. There were requests for personnel and munitions.

Mr. SOURWINE. Were these requests granted?

General TABERNILLA. Some of them, the majority were not.

Mr. SOURWINE. Did the failure to grant these requests have anything to do with the success of the Castro forces?

General TABERNILLA. One of the reasons.

Mr. SOURWINE. Do you have any knowledge, General, respecting the intentions of Fidel Castro as regards the United States?

Senator KEATING. Wait a minute.

I would like to ask a question before that question is answered.

Do you favor the return of Batista in power to Cuba?

General TABERNILLA. I don't think he has any chance at all.

Senator KEATING. Do you personally favor it?

General TABERNILLA. No. He was my friend and commander until the 31st of December 1958. Since, no more; I have nothing to do with General Batista.

Senator KEATING. Do you think it would be a mistake for him to return to Cuba?

General TABERNILLA. Why, sure.

Senator KEATING. You think that his return to Cuba would not be in the interest of the Cuban people?

General TABERNILLA. The Cuban people would not take Batista any more; I am sure of that.

Senator KEATING. I am quite sure of that, too, but my question is, do you think his return would be in the interest of the Cuban people?

General TABERNILLA. No, sir.

Mr. SOURWINE. Do you have any knowledge respecting the intentions of Fidel Castro as regards the United States?

General TABERNILLA. I know nothing personally about him other than what I read in the newspapers. From what I read that is happening, it is clear that he is an enemy of the United States.

Mr. SOURWINE. I have no more questions, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KEATING. No further questions.