

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY SUMMARY

DOMINICAN GOVERNMENT MOVES AGAINST REBELLIOUS CULT

Dominican police and military personnel on 28 December took action to disperse a fanatical religious group in the village of Palma Sola, near the Haitian border. In the resulting violence, an army general and at least 44 members of the cult were killed, seven civilians were wounded, and about 675 were taken prisoner. Several hundred cultists and their leader, Plinio Ventura, were said to have escaped to hills nearby. Latest reports, however, state Ventura was among the dead. There reportedly are other branches of the cult in the area. The armed forces appear to be in control, and are preparing to disband remaining cultists with as little violence as possible.

Plinio Ventura and several of his brothers reportedly set themselves up in Palma Sola about a year ago as "prophets" of one Liborio--a local leader killed during the US occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924. Liborio had a large and fanatical following among the illiterate Negro peasants in the locality.

Last November the Dominican press reported a growing concentration in Palma Sola of "pilgrims" from all parts of the country. Reports that the cult had been defying government authority were accompanied by rumors that some of its members were receiving military training and expecting shipments of arms from Haiti. Some of the most notorious henchmen of the former dictatorship were alleged to have taken refuge among the cultists.

The government apparently decided to take action when it learned that the cultists had boycotted the general election of 20 December.

There is no proof that remnants of the Trujillo regime supported by Haitian dictator Duvalier, local pro-Castro elements, or opportunistic members of the interim Dominican Government attempted to use the cultists to disrupt the country's transition to democratic rule.

There are no indications, however, that the Haitian regime has accommodated itself to the emergence of democratic rule in the neighboring republic. Moreover, a Radio Havana broadcast by a Dominican exile group on 29 December lauded the memory of Liborio, stated that he was "murdered by US Marines," and called on the Dominican people to unite in "defending, helping, and protecting the peasants persecuted in the mountains by antiguerrilla forces trained by Yankee officers."

The US ambassador in Santo Domingo reported on 29 December that Antonio Imbert--an ambitious member of the seven-man ruling Council of State--apparently opposed visits to the scene of the violence by the US military attachés because he feared they would report that the police killed many cultists needlessly. Imbert told the ambassador that Trujillists or Communists or both, based in Haiti, were training these "poor starving peasants" for rebellion.

Imbert, who has been trying to build the police into a force personally loyal to him, could be expected to fear reports critical of police conduct since the police action was ordered by one of his strongest backers, the attorney general. Speculations that Imbert brought about the incident to further his own ambitions cannot be substantiated, although some of his followers reportedly visited the area in recent weeks.

[REDACTED]