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INTELLIGENCE NOTE
BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

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MEXICO: TERRORISM STILL ON THE RISE

The dimensions and seriousness of the terrorist guerrilla problem in Mexico are only now becoming evident. While the security forces have improved their counterinsurgency capabilities and achieved some spectacular successes, terrorist activity has probably not yet peaked (as it did earlier elsewhere in the hemisphere), and it may not begin to decline in intensity for some time. Meanwhile, as has already been amply demonstrated, individual incidents will continue to be extremely embarrassing to the government, but will not seriously threaten its survival.

The guerrilla groups. Violence is hardly uncommon in Mexico, but terrorist groups have not been prevalent there since the late 1920s. In March 1971, however, the government discovered a group which had received training in North Korea. There have since been a series of incidents including bombings, kidnappings, bank robberies, and two ambushes of army convoys, all attributed to guerrillas.

① A. Approximately 15 guerrilla groups exist in Mexico, located in many different areas. The most important single leader is Lucio Cabanas

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Barrientos, who heads a small group active in the state of Guerrero (see map). Cabanas is also loosely associated with as many as ten other groups located in Mexico City, Aguascalientes, Chihuahua, Monterrey, and Oaxaca. The Cabanas group has engaged in some of the most audacious recent activity: in two separate attacks on army convoys near Atoyac it killed at least 26 soldiers and captured over 50 weapons.

B. A group known as Los Agachados (which can be translated to mean the oppressed) is unusual in that it appears to be made up largely of peasants. Reportedly this group has representatives in almost all the states of Mexico, but its total membership is not believed to exceed 100. This group has not yet surfaced in any operations, although it may be responsible for some of the bombings in Mexico City and Oaxaca during the national holidays last September.

C. The National Civic Revolutionary Association (ACNR), a group which operates in Guerrero along with that of Lucio Cabanas, achieved prominence under the leadership of Genaro Vazquez Rojas--Mexico's number-one guerrilla. Vazquez, who was killed in February 1972, had considerable charisma and something of a Robin Hood reputation. His death and the subsequent capture of other top members of the ACNR greatly reduced the effectiveness of the group. Three of four other groups operating in Mexico City have apparent connections with the ACNR.

D. The Revolutionary Action Movement (MAR-Action) gained notoriety in March 1971 when the Mexican Government announced its existence, claiming that its members had been trained in North Korea. About 50 members apparently went to North Korea, but not all MAR members have received this

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guerrilla training. The government expelled five Soviet diplomats in retaliation for the implied complicity of the USSR because of its failure to prevent Mexicans studying in Moscow from forming this group and traveling to North Korea with false travel documents. The MAR is linked to at least one other group, and it probably still has over 50 active members at large. Some 30 others have been apprehended.

Despite the confusing welter of organizations, the total number of guerrillas probably does not exceed 500, including about 130 presently in jail and 21 who escaped to Cuba. Most terrorists are either students or drop-outs (occasionally joined by teachers and professors), although two groups operating in Guerrero and the Agachados are largely peasant organizations. All groups are Marxist-oriented, but ideology appears to be more of an excuse than a reason for their actions.

The government's response. President Echeverria is aware of the political/economic and social inequities imposed by Mexico's closed economic system and its one-party political power monopoly. He has instituted changes in tax, labor, and social security laws and has taken pains to create the impression that vigorous steps are underway to improve the lot of the lower income sectors. However, few tangible benefits have filtered down to the masses, and even these are largely cancelled out by the country's rapid population growth.

In dealing with the terrorist problem, the government has depended heavily on the security forces, which are reasonably competent and have

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been increasingly effective. A major new technique is the approach used in interrogating captured terrorists. Whereas previously the police attempted to laboriously obtain complete statements from every person arrested, they now concentrate on simply getting more names and addresses quickly enough so that the information can be used to make more arrests.

Prospects. Mexico has been through a rather eventful 20 months (see the appended listing of terrorist incidents). The guerrillas are still a serious problem, particularly in the mountainous areas of Guerrero where economic and social conditions are bad and where the guerrilla groups enjoy fairly broad support, or at least the tolerance, of the general population. The terrain there inhibits the maneuvers of the security forces, and on the most recent occasions the guerrillas have been able to engage army units at times and places of their choosing, inflicting heavy casualties. The army has responded with sweeping roundups on a fairly indiscriminate basis, and recently there have been reports in the Mexican press that prisoners were interrogated under torture. This suggests that the situation in Guerrero has worsened and that the problem is likely to plague the government for many months.

The guerrillas in the urban areas will probably not prove to be as difficult a problem for the government. Violence in the cities is more apt to involve innocent bystanders than that in rural areas, thus serving to isolate the terrorists from the society they claim to be helping. Moreover, the security forces have at times been able to round up large numbers of terrorists because the groups failed to maintain good internal security by adequately compartmentalizing members in independent cells.

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Experience elsewhere in the hemisphere suggests that the guerrilla/terrorist problem has probably peaked in most other countries, and that the various groups will become increasingly isolated as the security forces become more proficient in counterinsurgency operations. Mexico may fit into this general pattern, but appears to be in an earlier phase of the cycle. Since some groups have engaged in very little activity and others have not yet initiated operations, terrorist activity in Mexico has probably not reached its zenith. The downward phase, therefore, may not become evident for some time.

INR/Africa and the American Republics

Director : GHSumm *UJG*
 Analyst : PRKeller *PK*
 Extension : 22557
 Drafting date: 11/22/72
 Released by : David E. Mark *per Eub*

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PARTIAL CHRONICLE OF EVENTS

- November 18, 1972 Defense Minister Cuenca Diaz reportedly declared that the Mexican Government was willing to negotiate with Lucio Cabanas.
- November 8, 1972 An aircraft was hijacked in Monterrey by four members of a group calling itself the Combat Group of the Armed Communist League. The hijackers demanded 4 million pesos ransom, several weapons, and the release of seven terrorist prisoners. The hijackers thereupon directed the plane to Cuba.
- September 23, 1972 16 soldiers were killed in a guerrilla ambush of an army convoy in Guerrero.
- September 14, 1972 Bombs exploded in Mexico City, Oaxaca City, and Morelia. Several US companies were included in the targets.
- August 1, 1972 20 persons rounded up after the June 25 ambush were handed over to the judicial authorities.
- July 18, 1972 Six men of the Lucio Cabanas group were arrested in Guerrero.
- June 25, 1972 Ten soldiers were killed and two wounded in an attack on an army truck in Guerrero.
- June 11, 1972 Explosions occurred at four sites in Mexico City.
- April 18, 1972 Three members of the MAR guerrilla group were arrested.
- March 14, 1972 The son of a wealthy coffee grower was kidnapped in Guerrero. The action was attributed to Cabanas' group. The victim was released in June after payment of one million pesos ransom.
- February 2 Guerrilla leader Genaro Vazquez Rojas was killed in an automobile accident.
- January 29, 1972 Police announced the arrest of seven persons involved in the kidnapping of Airports Director Julio Hirschfeld and recovery of about two-thirds of the ransom money. The persons captured were reported to be members of the Zapatista Urban Front.

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January 25-February 4	Mexican security officials arrested a large number of guerrilla group members, including ten members of Vazquez Rojas' group (ACNR) and 69 persons linked to Lucio Cabanas.
January 14, 1972	Guerrillas staged a double bank robbery in Monterrey. Four guerrillas were captured and some of the money recovered.
January 7, 1972	The Director of the Acapulco preparatory school, Jaime Faril, was kidnapped and three million pesos demanded. Security forces freed Faril on January 13 and arrested six or more persons; the ransom was not paid.
December 24, 1971	Mazatlan millionaire Carlos J. Felton was kidnapped. He was released on January 4 after payment of five million pesos ransom.
November 19, 1971	The Rector of the University of Guerrero, Dr. Jaime Castrejon Diez, was kidnapped by the Vazquez Rojas' ACNR group. Ransom demands included release of nine political prisoners to be flown to Cuba, which was met by the Mexican Government on November 27. In addition, the family paid 2.5 million pesos; Castrejon was released on December 1.
November 18, 1971	Four persons were arrested in Acapulco who admitted being members of Cabanas' group.
October 22, 1971	Attorney General's office announced the arrest of ten guerrillas.
September 27, 1971	Airports Director Julio Hirschfeld was kidnapped. He was released on September 29 after three million pesos ransom paid.
September 22, 1971	Five members of a guerrilla group known as the Armed Commandos of the People (CAP) were arrested.
September 17, 1971	Police announced the arrest of nine persons, some linked to the CAP group.
September 10, 1971	Two members of the Revolutionary Action Movement (MAR) were arrested.
July 21, 1971	Police reported the capture of a house with documents, equipment, and arms of a group known as the Forces of National Liberation in Monterrey.

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July 20, 1971	Seven guerrillas were arrested in Mexico City.
June 5, 1971	Police arrested three additional members of the MAR.
April 16, 1971	The Army clashed with guerrillas near Guaymas, Sonora, following their robbery of a bank. Three were arrested.
March 16, 1971	A group known as the Revolutionary Action Movement (MAR), many of whom received guerrilla training in North Korea, surfaced with government announcement of the arrest of 19 of its members. Five Soviet diplomats were subsequently expelled for complicity in the MAR plot.

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