

DEPT OF STATE APPEALS REVIEW PANEL (ARP)

HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED

DATE 03-19-2008 BY 60324 uc baw/rs/lsg

UNCLASSIFIED

A-02

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

F8

Exemptions

ARP Action Cert 1/1Date 12-1-07

Department of State

INFO: ALL CONSULATES IN MEXICO

4 January 1974

E.O. 11652: XGDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, MX

Ambassy MEXICO

The Current Security Situation
In Mexico: An Appraisal.

(A) MEXICO A-511

(B) MEXICO A-563

SUMMARY: Since mid-September, Mexico has experienced an unusually pronounced wave of kidnappings, murders, large-scale robberies, terrorist bombings, and other acts of violence. Some of these crimes have had clear political motivation, some definitely have not, and others remain uncertain in origin. The net effect, however, has been to create a climate of apprehension in the business community (both domestic and foreign, and particularly in Mexico's three largest urban centers) and to cause evident concern on the part of the Mexican Government. Armed opposition to the COM remains slight in terms of numbers but may be increasing in terms of capability, coordination and geographic scope. Such opposition does not represent real threat to the stability of the GOM, but its very existence and its apparent determination promise to constitute at least a serious nuisance for months and probably years to come. END SUMMARY.

INTRODUCTION. The Embassy, SRP, the offices of the Legal and Defense Attaches, and the Consulates General at Guadalajara and Monterrey have filed numerous spot-reports on terrorist and criminal activities over the last

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

100-75820-800

POL: BWTeare: 12-27-73POL: HLEstep 12-27-73L: RTWischwitz/RL (draft) 12-27-73
SY: EFSchultz (draft) 12-27-73DAO: Gen. Cavazos (draft) 12-27-73
P/S: RSSampson (draft) 12-27-73

ENCLOSURE

100-75820-800

UNCLASSIFIED

Dept. of State, ISS/PS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.
(*) Release (X) Excise () Deny () Declassify
Exemption (b)() , E.O. 12958, 25x() () ()
() Declassify after
With concurrence
IPS by 12/1/07 Date 10-3-08 (not obtained)

28/JEW

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A- 2

Page 2

three months in various parts of Mexico -- most notably in the Federal District, the cities of Guadalajara and Monterrey, and the state of Guerrero.

This assessment assumes general acquaintanceship with that reporting and makes no attempt to recapitulate it in detail, although it will cite some of the more noteworthy events of the period. Nor will it attempt to cite numerous clandestine-source reports in SRF channels on the thinking, planning or predictions of GOM security agencies.

BACKGROUND. Much of the recent extralegal and political opposition to the Government of Mexico can apparently be traced to the student demonstrations -- and Government counteraction those demonstrations stimulated -- just before the Olympic Games in Mexico in 1968. Numerous interpreters of the Mexican extreme left have seen "the events of 1968" as a watershed or turning-point in modern Mexican history; it was those events which caused students and others already critical of the GOM to conclude that the possibilities for meaningful change "within the system" were foreclosed and that the only means of achieving the radical social change they believed necessary therefore lay in violent opposition to the government.

With the advent of the Echeverría administration in December, 1970, the political rhetoric of Mexico underwent a marked transformation: "dialogue" with students and other malcontents became the watchword; a "democratic opening" was proclaimed; some of the student-demonstration leaders of 1968 were co-opted into the party-government system; and in official theory, at least, whatever justification there might have been for extralegal opposition instantly vanished.

Violent opponents of the Mexican system clearly have not been pacified by administration rhetoric, however, and the first three years of President Luis Echeverría's term have been marked by a long series of politically-motivated acts of violence (some of them

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A-2
Page 3

perpetrated by groups that had set their course before Echeverría took office, but with no sign of diminution as the result of the current administration's liberalized posture). Among many such events, the following stand out:

-- The GOM's announcement of the arrest of numerous members of the Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria (MAR-Action) and its consequent expulsion of five Soviet Embassy personnel in March, 1971;

-- Student demonstrations on June 10, 1971, whose repression led to a still-debated number of deaths and woundings, was attributed -- with apparent justification -- to government-sponsored goon-squads, and resulted in the removal of the Federal District's Regente (Mayor), Chief of Police, and eventually the Attorney General;

-- The kidnapping of Julio HIRSCHFELD Almada, then GOM Director of Airports and Auxiliary Services, in September 1971, and his release after payment of a large cash ransom;

-- The kidnapping of Jaime CASTREJON Díez, then Rector of the University of Guerrero, in November 1971, and his release in return for ransom and for the release of numerous political prisoners;

-- Two ambushes of Mexican Army units in the state of Guerrero by guerrillas under the leadership of Lucio CABANAS Barrientos, in June and August 1972;

-- The hijacking of a Mexicana domestic flight out of Monterrey to Cuba, including the release of half a dozen just-arrested terrorists as part of the ransom, in November 1972;

-- The kidnapping of U.S. Consul General Terranca G. Leonhardy in Guadalajara in May 1973, with the release of an additional 30 "political" prisoners.

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET//NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A-2

Page 4

The balance, from early 1971 through mid-1973, was not always in favor of the terrorists. The GOM, apart from arresting numerous members of the MAR, succeeded in capturing over time some participants in (for example) the Hirschfeld and Leonhardy kidnappings, and it benefited from the death in an automobile crash (February 1972) of Genaro VAZQUEZ Rojas, until then the most prominent single guerrilla leader, and the consequent capture of one of his lieutenants.

This whole series of crimes and the often-futile searches for their perpetrators, however, demonstrated serious deficiencies in the performance of the Mexican Army, the Federal and State Judicial police, and the municipal police forces in most of the localities concerned. Only the small Dirección Federal de Seguridad -- whose responsibilities also include protection of the president, intelligence collection and coordination, surveillance of some foreign embassies, etc. -- emerged from this period with reason for pride in its accomplishments. And the release of imprisoned terrorists and guerrillas (notably in the Castrejón and Leonhardy cases) must have been particularly disheartening for the DFS. Some GOM officials believe that some of the guerrillas so ransomed have returned from Cuba, but there is no evidence that they have resumed an active role in Mexico.

THE GOM ATTITUDE. The Echeverría administration has from the outset refused, at least in its public pronouncements, to concede any political motivation to MAR-action, Vázquez Rojas, Cabañas, or any of the numerous other groupings (so far there are no other guerrilla leaders of national reputation) that have come to light. The usual GOM terminology for the perpetrators even of clearly political crimes is "common criminals," "delinquents," or "wrong-doers," who are often characterized as suffering from "social disorientation" or laboring under the weight of "confused pseudo-ideologies." At their most ridiculous, some GOM spokesmen (notably the Secretary of National Defense, Lt. Gen. Hermenegildo CUENCA Díaz) have tried to claim that guerrillas such as Vázquez

~~SECRET//NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A-2
Page 5

Rojas and Cabañas are nothing more than "bandits" or "cattle thieves," or have denied that confirmed (and widely-publicized) incidents ever occurred.

In fact, relatively little in the way of programmatic or ideological pronouncements has issued from the contemporary guerrillas, but what has emerged clearly indicates opposition to the present Mexican social and governmental system on political grounds and includes attempts, often rather crude, to enlist workers, students, peasants, and Army enlisted men and NCO's in the guerrilla cause. The GOM's attempt to denigrate or conceal such pretensions on the part of its adversaries seems to reflect both a desire to assuage public concern and the tenet that, by definition, there can be no point on the political spectrum more "revolutionary" than the Mexican Revolution itself or than the government and party that claim to have "institutionalized" that Revolution. (It may be this sort of government-by-slogan that recently prompted New York Times correspondent C.L. Sulzberger to liken the Mexican experiment in "institutionalized revolution" to frozen custard.)

GARZA SADA AND AFTERWARDS. Political (and other) crimes in Mexico naturally have not followed any kind of regular schedule, and the months immediately following the Leonhardy kidnapping in early May were relatively quiet. In the last three months, however, there has been a series of incidents that have combined to create a climate of general concern. The first of these was the killing, in an abortive kidnap attempt, of Monterrey industrialist and philanthropist Eugenio GARZA Sada on September 17. (For a discussion of this incident, in the context of GOM reaction to the overthrow of Salvador Allende, see ref A). In quick succession there followed:

-- The revelation in early October of two murder-extortion cases which had begun with kidnappings the previous month (and which were not politically-motivated);

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A-2

Page 6

-- The double kidnapping in Guadalajara on October 10 of honorary British consul Dr. Anthony Duncan WILLIAMS and industrialist Luis Fernando ARANGUEN Castiello by the 23rd of September Communist League, with the former ultimately released but the latter killed "for being a bourgeois";

-- A series of lesser kidnappings, typically of ranchers, in the state of Sinaloa in October, November and December;

-- The ambush of an Army patrol in the hills of Guerrero on November 18, with five soldiers killed, seven wounded, and two attackers killed and two others captured;

-- The detonation of five bombs (all official and press accounts have referred only to three of the five) in Guadalajara on November 26, which brought the total number of such explosions in that city to fifteen or more in the last few months (see Guadalajara A-81);

-- The apprehension, after a lengthy shoot-out, of several members of the Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario from Jalisco and Sinaloa in the suburbs of Mexico City in the early morning hours of November 30, and a spectacular 1.5-million-peso robbery at a real-estate development office later the same day;

-- An explosion causing considerable damage to the Cuban Chancery in Mexico City before dawn on December 3 and the alleged firing of shots at the office/residence of the Prensa Latina correspondent on the night of December 4. (These two incidents, of course, are not consistent with the political motivation of any of the guerrilla groupings, a point which raises questions about their authorship.)

The events listed above, it should be stressed, are only the more spectacular of a long list of crimes that also included a robbery from the Gestetner duplicating-machine offices in Guadalajara, hold-ups at two prominent hotels in Acapulco, and the

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A-2

Page 7

week-long occupation of the rectory of the University of Guerrero in Chilpancingo by masked right-wing opponents (armed with rifles, shotguns and supposedly with submachine guns) of the University's allegedly leftist Rector.

THE EFFECTS. The cumulative weight of these events since mid-September has produced a climate of some anxiety, particularly among businessmen and other wealthy persons who consider themselves likely targets of kidnap attempts, most notably in Guadalajara but also in Monterrey and the Federal District. (The Embassy Security Office, for example, has received numerous requests from American businessmen resident here for information on defensive driving and other precautionary techniques and even about the possible armor-plating of their automobiles.)

The GOM's reversal of past policy in the Williams/Aranguren case when it refused to negotiate with the kidnappers (see MEXICO A-531) has, according to an SRF report, prompted concern within the GOM itself that one or another guerrilla grouping is likely to test the new policy in the near future by kidnapping a ranking GOM official, perhaps the lightly-protected governor of some relatively tranquil state. The GOM would then face the disagreeable choice of perhaps seeing one of its own sacrificed or of capitulating once again, thereby outraging the private sector.

The local press, never noted for its depth of insight or its responsibility, has made reference to a "psychosis of fear" in Mexico City and Guadalajara, and the Mexico City daily El Universal went so far as to interview a psychiatrist involved in rehabilitation work with criminals, who pronounced that: "When criminality manifests itself in waves that affect many human beings and when sociopathic diseases are created in the breast of society, as is happening now in our country, it can be taken for granted that anti-social or criminal conduct will spread by contamination, just as it happens when the atmosphere, the water or any other natural medium is poisoned." If the psychiatrist's pronouncement is overdrawn, it is nonetheless true

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A-2
Page 8

that metropolitan Mexico City has fallen victim to several waves of rumors this autumn; a recent one, with little or no foundation, concerns a strangler who has allegedly assaulted or killed 20 or more women in the ladies' rooms of commercial establishments. Another series, which no information available to the Embassy substantiates, concerns supposed attempts on President Echeverría's life (the latest version has it that he was wounded in the leg). Others, on more traditional topics, concern the possible devaluation of the peso or (sometimes with a bit of foundation) shortages of commodities such as milk, sugar and gasoline.

More tangibly, there are indications that tourism in Guadalajara has been affected by the crime wave in that city. Lic. Salvador CARDENAS Navarro, Jalisco state director for the Department of Tourism, told Excelsior that the city lost an average of 17,000 first-class tourists (evidently both Mexican and foreign) per month in September, October and November. Unfortunately, he provided no figures for prior years that would permit calculations in percentage terms. Generally speaking, however, there are no indications that foreign or even domestic tourism has declined anywhere except in Guadalajara as the result of political and other crime; on the contrary, hotel and airline reservations in and to popular tourist destinations for the imminent holiday period and the longer winter season remain difficult if not impossible to obtain.

THE CURRENT GOM RESPONSE. Apart from announcing that it would not deal with the Williams/Aranguren kidnappers, the GOM has, as reported by SRF, taken certain -- and of course unpublicized -- steps to improve its capabilities for dealing with terrorist groups. One such step is an increase in manpower for the Dirección Federal de Seguridad, and another is the creation of small intelligence units which are to be attached to the office of most state governors. Other actions include the replacement of the Guadalajara municipal police chief; the search for a new chief for the Jalisco State Judicial Police; and the transfer of

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A-2

Page 9

one of the Army's more highly regarded generals to a military zone command in Guerrero, where he will presumably take over the longstanding hunt for Lucio Cabafias and the guerrilla organization he heads.

These measures, while concrete, have yet to produce results. Otherwise, the GOM has continued to rely on its handiest, most traditional and least expensive tool: rhetoric. The rhetoric now, however, seems to be slightly more candid in recognizing that problems exist, even if it is no more likely to contribute to their solution. Thus on November 26 Echèverría, at one of his relatively infrequent appearances before the foreign press corps, replied to a Japanese correspondent who had specifically mentioned the Guadalajara kidnappings and reaction by industrialists in Monterrey (to the Garza Sada killing; see ref A) by suggesting that Mexico was no more than another victim of an international wave of violence:

"I believe that violence and kidnappings are a sterile international fad. These international trends go from country to country; not a day passes in which they don't occur in various countries; and the rapid dissemination of news leads disoriented young people to want to exert pressures or provoke changes by means of isolated acts of violence or terrorism. Every week there are airplane hijackings or kidnappings for economic goals or to generate political pressures, but in truth it can be said that the results are counter-productive because they prop up the interests that groups of disoriented youths want to attack. They lack the intellectual preparation to carry out political activities; they don't give any backbone to their ideas. I think this is the consequence of a trend of physical violence that the world is experiencing, something sterile that we are struggling to prevent, as all countries should do."

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A- 2
Page 10

On December 7, in his remarks to a special session of the National Tripartite Commission on energy problems (MEXICO 9238), the President said:

"When...we exercise our liberty in a responsible fashion, we are proving the kidnappings, assassinations and acts of terrorism are clearly of foreign origin and that we should be united in condemning them...We reply that it is with a policy of dialogue, of interchange of ideas, of common solutions, that we shall have to find the solution to our problems. Let there be no hidden or negative interests to destroy this exercise of Mexican liberties!"

Both quotations are characteristic of Echeverría, and it is doubtful that either one had a significantly reassuring effect on its immediate audience or on the public. The most interesting feature is the claim in the second quotation that recent political crimes are "un-Mexican" and of foreign origin. To the best of the Embassy's knowledge, the GOM has found very little evidence of foreign (and none of foreign government) involvement in any of the contemporary guerrilla groupings since the discovery in early 1971 that some members of MAR-Action had received guerrilla warfare training in North Korea. If such evidence existed, it seems likely that the GOM in any case would want to make it public -- as it did with the initial MAR-Action arrests -- if only to prove the President's point. (The timing of Echeverría's obscure statement -- only days after the two earlier-mentioned incidents directed at Cubans -- is suggestive, however.)

One other episode in the rhetorical campaign deserves mention. Lt. Gen. Cuenca Díaz, who denied soon after the event that Army troops had been ambushed again in Guerrero on November 18, called on November 30 for the creation of a "Secretariat of Security" that would bring all GOM police and security agencies under a single roof. He claimed this was an old

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A- 2
Page 11

proposal that he was reviving, and he cited certain objective problems in law-enforcement agencies, such as the tendency toward major or complete turnover of municipal police forces every three years when new municipal governments are elected. Numerous commentators quickly jumped in to cite constitutional and practical obstacles to the plan, and the Embassy's conclusion is that Cuenca was seeking mainly to divest the Army of at least some internal security responsibilities, which he has always appeared to find distasteful and unrewarding. (Two soldiers had been murdered and their weapons stolen in Guadalajara on November 6 as they came off bank-guard duty, and Cuenca had announced that soldiers would no longer be assigned to such inappropriate duty.)

HOW SERIOUS ARE THE GUERRILLA AND CRIME PROBLEMS? There is obviously no simple answer to this question. It can be said accurately that the problems are more serious than the GOM would wish the public to believe, but not sufficiently serious to justify the present climate of anxiety in the major metropolitan centers. Mexico's problems are clearly less serious than those suffered currently or in the recent past in such countries as Argentina and Uruguay.

We have no current estimates of active guerrilla strength and we are not aware that the GOM does either, but we suspect that the strength figure is no more than several hundred. This, of course, does not count the passive sympathizers and supporters of Lucio Cabañas in remote areas of Guerrero, but Guerrero remains the only state where significant popular support is thought to exist.

On the other hand, Cabañas' own group has demonstrated considerable skill and sophistication in its ambushes of Army patrols and in avoiding for so long any significant degradation of its strength. The Williams and Aranguren kidnappings in Guadalajara were professionally done and only on December 26, according to press reports, was the leader caught and killed in a gunfight. Numerous other politically-motivated crimes in

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A-2
Page 12

Guadalajara and elsewhere in the Republic remain unsolved. Moreover, [available intelligence] information on the 23rd of September Communist League, which took responsibility for the Williams/Aranguren kidnappings and may have more ambitious plans for the future, indicates that that organization may represent a merger of the Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario of Guadalajara and surviving members of MAR-Action, the Lacandones (a group centered in Mexico City that was responsible for armed robberies in late 1972 and early 1973), with possible links also to revolutionary elements in Monterrey. Such a degree of coordination, if confirmed, would be unprecedented among modern-day Mexican revolutionary groupings. (Even the Vázquez Rojas and Cabañas groups operating in the same state were reportedly unable to agree on coordinated activity, although discussions of the subject are believed to have been under way or about to begin at the time of Vázquez' death.)

Clearly, several terrorist or guerrilla groupings retain the capability to carry out bombings, kidnappings and robberies at times and places of their choosing virtually anywhere in Mexico. It is within their capability, for example, to cause an explosion at a tourist hotel in Acapulco or some other resort which would make front-page news around the world and significantly harm the economically-important tourist industry. At the same time, occasionally-effective work by GOM security agencies and blunders by the guerrillas themselves have proved that the guerrillas are not invincible, and increased public awareness and preventive measures (e.g., the practice of hiring bodyguards by wealthy residents, reportedly widespread and growing rapidly) and any improvement in coordination and vigilance on the part of GOM security agencies may eventually curb their effectiveness.

Common crime, on the other hand, may be on an upsurge in Mexico in any case because of rapid population growth, insufficient job opportunities and inflationary pressures. It is mentioned here both because it forms part of the climate (witness the "strangler" rumors cited earlier) and because several

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

MEXICO A-2
Page 13

instances have been reported in which common criminals, usually clumsy amateurs, have invoked the name of Cabañas or of guerrilla organizations in extortion attempts. This question probably does not lend itself to any kind of statistical analysis; to the best of the Embassy's knowledge, the GOM publishes few statistics on common crime, and our experience in gathering statistics even in the relatively limited narcotics field suggests that any researcher would be entering a morass.

OUTLOOK. Politically-motivated crime in Mexico represents a serious annoyance to the GOM. The Garza Sada and Williams/Aranguren cases this fall, above all, caused the most serious crisis of confidence for the Echeverría administration since the student "massacre" of June 10, 1971. However, existing guerrilla groupings at present constitute no threat to the stability of the GOM, nor have their existence and activities, to our knowledge, prompted anything more than serious criticism of the government. Despite suggestions to this effect from one American correspondent (since departed) and from a member of the Chilean junta, we see absolutely no prospect of a pre-emptive move by the Army, or by civilian right-wing civilian elements, or the two in combination. (For the Chilean report, see SANTIAGO 6146 and MEXICO 9492)

What may be in prospect (as GOM officials themselves expect, according to SRF reporting) is a continuation of the sporadic terrorism and other acts of violence of the type Mexico has experienced over the last three years, at least until such time as GOM security agencies have improved their capabilities to the point where they can quickly apprehend the perpetrators in a high percentage of cases and infiltrate terrorist groups in order to dismantle them completely. We discount the prospect that many guerrillas will be induced to abandon armed struggle by Echeverría's promises of dialogue or by any other means, and we discount equally the prospect of any widespread popular rising in support of any guerrilla organization.

MCBRIDE

RMS

~~SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

UNCLASSIFIED