

AMERICAN EMBASSY

MEXICO, D. F.

Memorandum of Conversation

S-POL 23-8
Students
XPOL-6-Torres Arriaga

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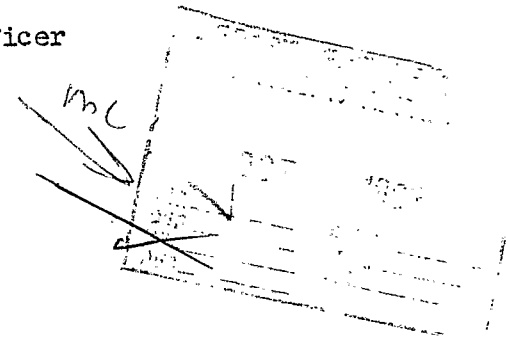
DATE: October 22, 1968

SUBJECT: Student Disorders

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PARTICIPANTS: Victor Torres Arriaga, Instructor in Political Science at UNAM
Robert E. Service, Political Officer

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1. At my invitation Victor Torres Arriaga joined me for lunch at Sanborns. Currently an instructor in political science at UNAM Torres Arriaga was until September 15 the representative in the Federal District of the Governor of Durango. He has recently had feelers from PRI President Alfonso Martinez Dominguez to devote time to the work of the Institute of Political, Economic and Social Studies (IEPES) headed by Jorge de la Vega Dominguez. In his capacity as instructor and part-time graduate student (he is completing his thesis) he has frequent contact with students.

2. Torres Arriaga believes that the student movement which dominated capital life in the months before the Olympics is going to break out with renewed vigor as soon as the games are past. He says he has never seen the students so determined or unified. He cited a recent vote at a student meeting where 80% agreed that they would continue the struggle even if it meant losing not just one but five years of study. The bloodshed of October 2 has not frightened them into quiescence.

3. Torres Arriaga, with most others, believes that the Government has handled the student crisis poorly. But whereas many others focus their criticism on the amount of force used (too much, too little) and the timing with which it was used, Torres Arriaga prefers to ascribe Government mishandling to a pervading, but unnecessary, fear of letting the students have a truly independent political existence. He sees freedom of organization and expression as the overriding issue (the six demands are tactical devices to gather support) and, accordingly, believes that Government willingness to accept independent student politics offers the only sure way out of the present crisis. He argues that members of the National Strike Council (CNH) should be given assurances against arrest or

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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harassment and that they should be encouraged to operate openly. He sees no future whatsoever for AMD's announced intention of strengthening PRI influence in student ranks. But he sees no immediate danger to PRI political control resulting from the abandonment of the student sector to its own devices. He professed to know of no case in which student activists, even those who had led strikes and declared their total dedication to a martyr's cause, had not made their peace with the "system" within two years after leaving student ranks. As an example of excessive Government fear with regard to the students, Torres Arriaga cited the fact that no student newspaper is permitted to publish openly and without controls.

4. Torres Arriaga, while arguing for a less fearful approach to student problems, admits that more is involved than the simple determination to act independently of Government control. He accepts the idea that many, if not a large percentage, of the students seek radical change in Mexican society. He attributes this in part to very real concern on the part of students about their job prospects once they are out of ^{the} university. Despite Mexico's rapid rate of growth job opportunities are not keeping pace with the demand. He touched briefly on the standard criticism that there are too many lawyers, but had little comment on the prospects for educational reform.

5. Torres Arriaga discounted the influence of student unrest in other countries on the Mexican scene. Likewise, he does not think that the events of recent months represent or indicate a significant break with previous patterns of student protest in Mexico.

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