

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION REPORT

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(Classification and Control Markings)

(b)(2)

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15. SUMMARY: (Leave Blank)

~~(C)~~ Report furnishes information concerning use of Mexican Army troops to bring under control student riots which occurred in Mexico City the week of 29 July 1968. Information concerning riot control equipment and training of Mexican Army also is furnished.

1. (U) Mexican Army units stationed in Mexico City were utilized to assist police and riot police (Granaderos) in breaking up student riots which got out of control in Mexico City during the week commencing 29 July 1968. Troops were first used at about 0030 hours, 30 July, when the Paratroop Battalion and elements of The Infantry Brigade, stationed at Military Camp Number 1 in Mexico City, dispersed rioting students in Mexico City's central square (Zocalo) in a sharp action that lasted only about 30 minutes. Groups of students, including many in their early teens, gathered during the day of 29 July and violence began in the city's central area about 2100. Students threw stones and Molotov cocktails and set fire to buses which they had confiscated earlier and used to barricade streets. Federal and district police, federal security police, secret service and the Corps of Granaderos, using tear gas and night sticks, gave battle to the students, but were unable to control the

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situation. Students barricaded themselves in several buildings, mostly schools, in the area and there was talk of them raiding nearby civilian armories to obtain arms. Assistance of Army troops was requested by Mexico City Mayor Alfonso Corona del Rosal.

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2. (U) After the skirmish in the Zocalo, in which Army troops used fixed bayonets and armored recon vehicles, students were routed from schools in the area, and the buildings and grounds were occupied by soldiers. A bazooka was used to blast the door of a school where some students had barricaded themselves.

3. (U) During 30 July, student disorders continued, but in scattered locations and involving small groups of students who commandeered buses and used them to block streets and to attempt to reach downtown Mexico City. Troops and police were transported around the city to locations where trouble appeared to be brewing. Late in the day, most of the troops were returned to their barracks where they remained on the alert. The Secretary of Defense, Lt Gen Marcelino Garcia Barragan issued a public statement, declaring that the military was ready "to repel any aggression" and would act "with all energy and force necessary". Troops found 300 Molotov cocktails, 250 liters of gas and many empty bottles, plus knives, stones and chains in the buildings from which students were dislodged. One rifle also reportedly was confiscated.

4. (U) Student representatives met with Mayor Corona del Rosal on 30 July and presented seven demands, as follows:

a. Removal from jobs of Federal District Police Chief (Army Lt Gen Luis Cueto Ramirez) and his assistant.

b. Firing of those responsible for injuries to students and damage to facilities at Vocational School #5.

c. Payment of indemnity to students injured.

d. Changes in law pertaining to intervention of authorities during disorders.

e. Destruction of police dossiers opened on students arrested.

f. Release of detained students.

g. Immediate withdrawal of police and federal troops from all school properties.

5. (U) On 31 July 1968, about 20,000 National University (UNAM) students, led by the rector, Javier Barros Sierra, held an orderly meeting on the university grounds to protest the violation by police and troops of the university's autonomy. (No police or troops actually occupied the university's buildings or grounds in the southern part of Mexico City, but did occupy several schools affiliated with the university in the center of the city.) During the demonstration, a number of Army reconnaissance vehicles appeared at the Zocalo in the center of town, but left after a few minutes when word was received that the students were to remain at the university. During the day, Army troops were withdrawn from all but two schools. Military patrols were continued in troubled areas and helicopters were used to spot potential trouble spots. Also on 31 July, the mayor responded to the demands submitted by student representatives the preceding day. Through a spokesman, the mayor granted five of the seven demands and promised to take under study the remaining two. It was promised that detained students would be released, unless they had broken the law; that troops and police would be withdrawn from all schools; that police dossiers would not be opened on students detained unless they had committed a crime; and that indemnity payments would be made to injured students where investigation indicated such payment was justified. It also was promised that student ideas regarding changes in regulations and laws pertaining to intervention in disorders would be considered. Taken under study by the mayor was the discharge of the police chief and his assistant, and the firing of those responsible for injuries to students and damage to facilities at Vocational School #5.

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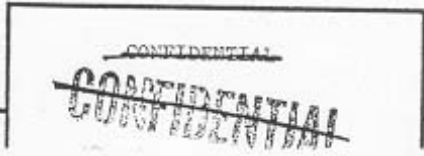
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6. (U) On 1 August 1968, an estimated 40,000 students (some estimates of participants went as high as 85,000) held a demonstration and march, again led by the rector, from the UNAM grounds up Insurgentes Avenue several kilometers, and then circling back to the campus. Most of the students were from UNAM, but they were joined by students and faculty members from the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN) and several other schools. Purpose of the march again was to protest violation of autonomy of Mexican educational institutions, and to demand release of students detained during the riots. There had been reports that the students might extend their march to the city's center, and Army troops were stationed at the Zocalo and at a "prudent" distance (about 1 kilometer) from the line of march. When the march and demonstration ended peacefully, the Secretary of Defense issued a statement congratulating the students. Heavy rains soaked the march participants. During the day of 1 August, all Army personnel and police were withdrawn from the last two schools they had been occupying. During the night, there was scattered disorder in the downtown area. Several thousand students gathered at the Monument to the Revolution after the UNAM march, but riot police and Army troops on the scene deterred any violence.

7. (U) From 1-13 August, the situation was relatively quiet but volatile, with newspaper exchange of charges and countercharges. This often involved the placing of large newspaper advertisements (up to full-page in size). The official government line seemed to be to blame the disorders on "foreign" influences, particularly on leftists, communists and Trotskyites. President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz, visiting the States of Colima and Jalisco, was out of Mexico City during the violence. On 1 August, he made a plea for national unity in a speech at the Mexican Air Force's Air College near Guadalajara, where he was attending graduation exercises. This prompted a rash of newspaper ads, many full-page, paid for by governmental entities and organizations, supporting the president. (Secretary of Defense Lt Gen Garcia Barragan had been scheduled to accompany the presidential party during the visit, but cancelled out at the last minute, undoubtedly due to the student situation.) On 8 August, Mayor Corona del Rosal proposed that a joint commission, composed of governmental, student and faculty representatives, be established to investigate the various charges and versions of what had happened and who was to blame, to include rumors of student deaths during the violence. Student reaction to this was mixed, with some adhering to their demands for the firing of the police chief and his assistant. They called for a student strike until their demands were met, and classes at UNAM and IPN continued suspended. The CIA and FBI even drew the blame of the Federation of Technical Students, who charged that some faculty members and students were agitating under orders from these two U.S. agencies, and that "persons allied to the agencies were trying to institute a "military dictatorship to serve U.S. ends".

8. (U) The situation reached a new climax during the late afternoon and early evening of 13 August when thousands of students (estimates ranged up to 180,000 with the best average appearing to be between 80,000 and 100,000) staged a protest demonstration through Mexico City's downtown streets, ending at the Zocalo where speeches were heard. Although noisy, the demonstration was without incident and ended with a display of the Mexican flag and singing of the national anthem. Obviously under orders, police were absent from the streets (but were alerted and ready for action). Students participating were from the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), National University (UNAM), the Normal School, and the Chapingo School of Agriculture. Members of the faculties led the contingents from each school. Placards carried by the students praised Cuba and Che Guevara and denounced the police, Granaderos, Mexico City officials and even President Diaz Ordaz.

9. (U) On 14 August 1968, [REDACTED] said that the Mexican Army had no function in connection with the 13 August demonstration (but units in Mexico City had been alerted). He said that no official permission had been granted for the student march of the day before. When asked what the students might do next, he replied that no one knew, but "maybe they will just stay on strike". Also on 14 August, at least one Mexico City Spanish-language daily newspaper carried a front-page interview with Secretary of Defense Lt Gen Garcia Barragan, in which he was quoted as saying that



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Mexico's small force was an "army of peace", and had nothing against any group of individual in the country, especially the students. He said that most members of the Army had children who were students, many of whom attended IPN and UNAM.

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10. (S) While the Mexican Army did not become involved in countering the riots until the week of 29 July, the student difficulties were traced back into the preceding week. On 22 and 23 July, clashes between students of two IPN preparatory schools and a private school brought intervention by regular police and riot police and student charges of police brutality. The National Federation of Technical Students (FNET) received permission to hold a demonstration on 26 July to protest police methods. Leftist elements attempted to deflect the march away from its planned course to the city's central square (Zocalo). The march started to get out of hand when the FNET group was met by a smaller group of communists and leftists celebrating the anniversary of Castro's "26th of July Movement". The radicals succeeded in redirecting the march towards the Zocalo and enroute buses were commandeered, windows broken and stores looted. Police and riot police arrested many, including Mexican Communist Party (PCM) members. Police also raided PCM headquarters and the party's newspaper, La Voz de Mexico, confiscating files and propaganda. July 27 and 28 were relatively quiet, but 29 July brought more violence and, ultimately, the intervention by Army troops at the mayor's request.

11. (S) It is impossible to obtain an accurate estimate of the numbers of students involved in the actual violence. Best estimate for the 26 July disorder is about 3,000, with possibly an equal number in the 29-30 July disorder. (The subsequent peaceful demonstrations at UNAM included estimated 20,000 and 40,000 participants and the 13 August downtown demonstration 80,000). During the period of disorders, estimates of number of persons detained went as high as 1,600, many of whom were subsequently released; many of those detained were non-students and, reportedly, a number of foreigners. [REDACTED] received reports [REDACTED] that there were four students killed and about 200 wounded. Students claim that up to 48 were killed. There has been no public confirmation of any fatalities, and all government officials continue to deny emphatically that there were any deaths.

COMMENTS:

1. (S) By all accounts, the Mexican military performed creditably in helping to quell the disorders. The main engagement involving troops was during the night of 29-30 July when they dispersed students in the Zocalo in a clash lasting only about 30 minutes. Some eye-witness accounts indicate they may have acted a little too firmly, and it is apparent that, once deployed, they acted with little hesitation. There has been little press criticism of the military's role in the riots and the students have selected the Granaderos (riot police) and regular police for most of their anger. Private comment of "over-reaction" by the Army has been heard, however.

2. (S) [REDACTED]

The troops were formed into a Task Force put under the command of Brig Gen Crisóforo Mazon Pineda, whose regular assignment is Commanding General of the Infantry Brigade. Second in command of the Task Force was Brig Gen Mario Ballesteros Prieto, regularly assigned as Chief of Staff of the Secretariat of National Defense. Military personnel assigned to Defense Headquarters and units in the Mexico City area were put on full alert (restricted to offices and installations) on 29 July. This was dropped to a partial alert on 7 August and this condition remains in effect as of the date of this report.

3. (S) [REDACTED] received a report from [REDACTED] who visited Acapulco during the week of 5 August 1968 in connection with Olympic matters

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indicating that casual conversation with Mexican Navy officers there indicated considerable support for the students in Mexico City and some criticism of their harsh treatment. However, [REDACTED] instructor at the Mexican Superior War College in Mexico City, reports that his conversations with Army and Air Force officers at the college indicates full support for the government action and use of troops. One Mexican officer at the War College who has a relative assigned as a platoon leader in one of the units used to control the student situation, related that this relative told him the following story: The young officer's platoon was assigned to duty at one of the schools where students were demonstrating. The soldiers were standing on guard duty surrounding the school and were subjected to considerable name-calling and taunting by the students, some of whom spat on the soldiers. Finally, a superior officer came around to the school and issued instructions to the platoon leader to straighten the matter out. Immediately, the soldiers went into action and dispersed the students, many of whom they apprehended. These were taken inside the school building (out of sight from the public) where they were then subjected by the soldiers to the hazing that students at the Military Academy (Heroico Academia Militar) receive.

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4. (S) Participation of the Mexican Army units in the actions to quell the student riots was discussed [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] the Task Force headed by Brig Gen Mazon Pineda reported directly to the Secretariat of Defense, and did not come under the command or direction of the Mexico City Chief of Police (as had been largely assumed to be the case). He said that the Army had responded to the mayor's request for assistance and he stressed (the official government line) that there had been no deaths. He said that all persons taken into custody by the military were turned over as soon as possible to civil authorities. All troops used were from the Mexico City area. [REDACTED] as he saw it, the police and Army troops did not violate the "autonomy" of the educational institutions, but had really protected it, since the schools were being "victimized" by outside agitators. He said that the intent of autonomy was to guarantee freedom of instruction and exposure of students to all current theories and teachings, but not to give a free hand to leftists agitators who had ulterior motives. Asked about riot control equipment and training, [REDACTED] that the Military Police Battalion (assigned to the 1st Military Zone) had such equipment similar to that of the Granaderos (tear gas grenades, grenade launchers, gas masks and long "billy clubs"). Also, the MP Battalion received special training on riot control. No other Mexican Army units have any special riot control equipment, but all units do receive "some" riot control training. (This is believed to consist of little more than normal basic training of the soldier in extended order drill and use of the bayonet.)

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5. (S) A Mexican Army officer [REDACTED] stated at a social function on [REDACTED] that the Mexican Government has "fairly well established" that the student riots were planned by "leftists and communists" who wanted to bring "discredit" on Mexico City shortly before the Olympic Games scheduled to start in October 1968. Reflecting growing concern of Mexican authorities concerning possible further disorders during or before the Olympics, [REDACTED] visited [REDACTED] requesting training material on the subject of riot control. (An expedited requisition has been dispatched.)

6. (S) If the joint commission proposed by the mayor (or any other authoritative body) establishes that there were in fact a number of student deaths and/or that the Granaderos and/or Army units were overly brutal, there may be further repercussions. Following the large 13 August demonstration and march, further student action can only be guesswork. It is believed that continued demonstrations, and particularly any further violence, will endanger the success of the Olympics.

7. (S) Attached to this report is a selection of photographs appearing in Mexico City newspapers showing Army troops and Granaderos "in action" during the riots. A study of the photos shows the soldiers with only their normal helmets, rifles and bayonets, while the Granaderos have gas masks, tear gas grenade launchers and billy clubs.

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