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FROM Amembassy MEXICO

DATE: December 30, 1971

SUBJECT: The First Year of the Echeverria Administration

REF Mexico A-115, March 22, 1971

INTRODUCTION The purpose of this report is to summarize and assess the Echeverria administration during its first year in office--the period ending December 1, 1971. Insofar as the airgram draws conclusions and makes comments, the entire year is covered. For a detailed discussion of the early portion of the year, however, the reader is referred to Mexico A-115, "The First Hundred Days of the Echeverria Administration." END INTRODUCTION

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I. The Echeverria Style. Speaking to the Foreign Correspondents' Association of Mexico on December 11, soon after the anniversary of his inauguration, President Luis ECHEVERRIA asked rhetorically, "What is it, essentially, that the new government has done?" His response, he said, would be that his government "has tried to preserve liberties--economic liberty, religious liberty, liberty of expression." He continued: "We have chosen the road of liberty because this is the point of departure for development..."

In the remainder of this rather philosophical address, Echeverria went on to cite the various initiatives

FORM 10-64 DS-323

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Drafting Date: 12/23/71

Phone No.: 844

Contents and Classification Approved by: POL: HMatthews

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Another significant development along the same lines, although not yet officially announced, is that the percentage increase in legal minimum wages for the 1972-73 biennium will be substantially greater than in recent years. In the Federal District, for example, the minimum wage will probably be increased by 20 percent, as against an increase of 13 percent granted two years ago.

10. The Military Shortly after taking office, Echeverría publicly announced that the time had come for venerated "revolutionaries" to retire from positions of military leadership and make way for younger men. Despite this stated objective, he appointed General Cuenca Díaz and Admiral Bravo Carrera, both aged 69, as the oldest members of his otherwise generally youthful Cabinet. While retirements of elderly general officers have increased moderately in number during the intervening year, attrition in the upper ranks of the Army/Air Force occurred mostly in the normal manner: through death. (The tradition in the Navy has been to observe more strictly the legal retirement age of 60.)

The long-standing phenomenon of superannuation is probably only a secondary factor contributing to discontent within the Mexican military, evidence of which has appeared recently. However, the administration may believe that wholesale retirements would only exacerbate the leadership difficulties within a somewhat-demoralized military establishment.

In mid-1971 several reports and rumors of indiscipline and dissatisfaction came to the Embassy's attention. These ranged from a suspected mutiny in Chiapas which was quickly quelled, through a reported instance in which troops turned their backs on Cuenca Díaz, to a group offer of resignation by a substantial number of Air Force pilots. While details have been hard to substantiate, it is evident that there was a rise in expressed discontent.

A further factor in Echeverría's evaluation and treatment of the military may well be the Army's performance in

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maintaining internal security. The unsuccessful effort to track down guerrillas operating in the State of Guerrero predates this administration, but during the past year the Army's efforts (Operation Teleraña) have been greater than they were previously, so the failure must be even more galling. On the other hand, the armed forces have continued to act effectively in the anti-drug campaign and have enlarged their already-extensive civic action program.

The Army recently announced that five new battalions would be formed to increase the effectiveness of these efforts. A substantial pay raise for both officers and enlisted personnel was enacted in mid-year, and the GOM has at least tentatively decided to purchase a squadron of F-5 fighters (20 aircraft). We see this last-mentioned prospective expenditure (which has only limited application to the maintenance of internal security), together with the pay raise and an unusually large 1971 promotion list, as parts of an attempt to overcome discontent and restore pride within the military establishment -- which has suffered considerable opprobrium ever since Army troops were employed against student demonstrators in the 1968 riots. By the end of Echeverría's first year, this attempt seemed to have achieved some success.

This attention bestowed upon the military and the reports of discontent have combined to create some misgivings that the military may be seeking some more direct role in Mexican politics. Generally such misgivings are expressed in private conversations or, if aired publicly, appear in far-left publications such as POR QUE? An exception, however, was an article in the November 3 issue of NOVEDADES. Citing Cuenca Díaz' statement the previous day that, "Our government is stronger than ever, and for that reason a coup d'état that would overthrow it is infeasible" (Embtel 6119 of November 3), the author characterized the statement as "a tacit admission of the truth of information from intellectual circles that 'a group of counter-revolutionaries will undertake a coup to oust President Echeverría'..."

Despite these indications of unease, most observers agree that discontent within the military so far has stemmed

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largely from bread-and-butter issues. As already noted, the efforts made to solve these problems appear to have lessened the pressure.

11. "Democratic Openings" The executive in November introduced several constitutional amendments, all supposedly designed to "perfect" Mexican democracy. One lowers the minimum ages for members of Congress; another increases the population base for a seat in the Federal Chamber of Deputies, thus limiting somewhat the expansion that will follow from the 1970 census returns; and a third lowers the minimum requirement for a minority party's obtaining proportional-representation seats in the Chamber while simultaneously increasing the maximum number of such seats a party may obtain (Embtel 6295, November 11). All these amendments were approved by the Congress during December, and the GOM has announced it will submit amendments to existing legislation which will ease registration requirements for new political parties and provide all minority parties with additional facilities during campaign periods.

The GOM and the PRI naturally hailed these proposals as a major "democratic opening"; other quarters were not so sure, with the opposition Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) complaining that the changes did not go far enough and with elements on the left complaining that they constituted no real "opening" at all.

The PRI itself, in contrast, experienced only minor changes in its internal rules as the result of its Sixth Ordinary Assembly in March (A-197, May 14) and significant changes of personnel only in the Federal District, where a follower of Martínez Domínguez was displaced by an Echeverría man (see A-551, October 22).

The Baja California municipal elections of 1968 remain in Mexican political history as a major scandal; apparent PAN victories in Tijuana and perhaps in Mexicali were nullified by Echeverría as Secretary of Gobernación. Thus Baja's elections in 1971 -- including the only governorship at stake during the year -- were a major test for the PRI and for Moya Palencia; we received reports indicating, in fact,

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Martínez Domínguez and the Federal District Police Chief resigned, officially in order to facilitate the investigation which Echeverría had ordered the Attorney General to make.

By July, however, Attorney General Sánchez Vargas announced that he had been unable to find any evidence of official complicity in the suppression of the demonstration. Echeverría removed him in August and in the Informe on September 1 promised that the investigation would be re-intensified under the new Attorney General, Pedro OJEDA Paullada. Through the end of Echeverría's first year and down to the present, however, no report on the events of June 10 has been issued. There is reason to believe that any candid report would be highly embarrassing to GOM officials, present as well as past, and possibly including the President himself; yet the absence of any report has damaged Echeverría's credibility. This remains true despite the GOM's apparent attempt to divert attention from June 10 to a universally-popular campaign against the porras, the [redacted] gangs which in recent years have terrorized a number of campuses (A-453, August 20).

13. Internal Security Echeverría's first year was marked by a number of spectacular developments under this broad heading. He began by releasing piece-meal some of the less doctrinaire participants in the 1968 student demonstrations (A-52, February 15). In March, the GOM announced the arrest of 20 members of the Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria (MAR-Action) and charged that, apart from robberies already carried out, this group was plotting the overthrow of the government. Several of the MAR-Action members arrested had gone from studies at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow to guerrilla training in North Korea, and Echeverría retaliated by expelling the Soviet chargé and four other embassy officers, all known or suspected KGB agents (Embtel 1964 of April 8). As the arrests of a few other MAR-Action members followed (about 25 still remain at large), other guerrilla/terrorist groups began to surface or to increase the level of their activities.

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Perhaps the most prominent of these has been the Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria headed by former school-teacher Genaro VAZQUEZ Rojas and operating principally in the State of Guerrero; it was probably responsible for two kidnappings in Guerrero in mid-March, may have shot down the helicopter in which the State Governor was riding in April (resulting in his death), and on November 19 scored its biggest coup of the year by kidnapping Guerrero University Rector Jaime CASTREJON Díez. In return for his release (delayed until December 1, the anniversary of Echeverría's inauguration), the ACNR obtained a ransom of 2.5 million pesos (US\$200,000) and the release of eight of its members, who were flown to Cuba on November 28. Also included was Mario MENENDEZ Rodríguez, editor of the bitterly anti-government publication POR QUE? (As already noted, intensified Army operations against the ACNR during 1971 have been largely unsuccessful.)

Aside from MAR-Action, ACNR, and the previously-known Emilio Zapata Group in Guerrero, led by Lucio CABAÑAS Barrientos, we have become aware during the year of at least six other confirmed "revolutionary" groupings and two or three others which may exist in name only or whose ideological direction is doubtful. Some of these groupings have so far confined themselves largely to training; others, such as the Comandos Armados del Pueblo (CAP), have embarked upon criminal activities^{and} have suffered some attrition. The combined membership of these organizations probably does not exceed a few hundred persons, but the rate at which they have come to light during the year, their geographic dispersion, the extent of their activities, and the evidence of coordination among some of them all suggest that they constitute more than a mere nuisance to the GOM.

Further complicating the internal security situation was a spate of robberies that peaked around the September 16 anniversary of the independence movement and caused the GOM to declare an unprecedented nation-wide military alert for the occasion. Soon afterwards, on September 27, Julio HIRSCHFELD Almada, Director of Airports and Auxiliary Services, was kidnapped and released 60 hours later after the payment of a three million peso (US\$240,000) ransom.

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Some of the robberies during this period were probably perpetrated by common criminals, and the political motivation of the Hirschfeld kidnapping remains doubtful (see A-568 of November 1), but these incidents led the GOM to try to improve coordination among its security agencies.

Just after the release of Castrejón on December 1, the political prisoner issue was revived when Pablo ALVARADO Barrera, a follower of Vazquez Rojas, was killed in an alleged escape attempt -- and under highly suspicious circumstances -- at Lecumberri Prison in the capital (A-658, December 20). Apparently acting to defuse the issue, Echeverría soon afterwards ordered the release of the remaining 20 prisoners held for participation in the 1968 riots (A-665, December 27).

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