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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
MEXICAN AFFAIRS
1973

SUBJECT: The Second Year of the Echeverria Administration

Hold for CPT

JAN 22 1973

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The Civic Contribution. The new Organic Law for the Army and Air Force, enacted in late 1971, made assistance to the national populace a specific Defense mission. This foreshadowed an increase in 1972 in an already-substantial Defense effort devoted to civic action and the anti-narcotics campaign. Customary civic action activities -- inoculations, instruction in sanitation, school construction, veterinary assistance etc. -- were continued, but on an enlarged scale. Distribution of potable water to remote villages was undertaken as a substantial activity in arid regions, using 110 newly-acquired tank trucks (probably the Army's largest single equipment purchase in 1972). The National Military Service (conscript) brigades were increasingly employed in such activities as the national forestation/reforestation campaign and pick-and-shovel repair work on local roads, and their basic military training was reduced correspondingly. The Defense effort in the anti-narcotics program was intensified and efficiency was improved through better planning and coordination. While military performance in drug crop destruction remained somewhat uneven from one military zone to another, DAO field visits verified that in principal drug crop areas the military effort was extensive and generally effective within the resource limitations. In this latter regard, the principal deficiencies were availability of helicopter reconnaissance and the restricted ground mobility of Army units, which often had to move long distances to reach important crop areas and then search them on foot.

Military Role in Internal Security. The death of Genaro VAZQUEZ Rojas in a vehicle accident in February 1972 (see Section H, below) created momentary hope that a marked reduction in bank robberies, kidnappings, etc., would follow, particularly in the state of Guerrero. This proved not to be the case. Instead, a new aspect appeared which particularly troubled the Armed Forces, the ambush of military units. Two such cases occurred during the year in Guerrero, ten soldiers being killed on June 25 and another 18 on August 23. These ambushes triggered an intense Army hunt for the band headed by Lucio CABAÑAS Barrientos, who quickly replaced Vázquez as Mexico's best-known guerrilla. The Army reinforced its units in Guerrero, shuffled senior commanders there, and utilized as many as 2,500 personnel in the search, including

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elements of at least six different infantry battalions. So-called "social action" brigades, specially structured with medical, veterinarian, engineer and other special personnel, were repeatedly dispatched to the state. The Army apprehended numerous suspects, several of whom, after interrogation, were turned over to civil authorities for prosecution. However, Cabañas remained at large. The Defense Secretary and other public officials continued to refer to him publicly as "an ordinary bandit," refusing to concede him "guerrilla" stature. But Cuenca Díaz also from time to time referred to the possibility of giving Cabañas amnesty if he would lay down his arms, which suggested the extent to which he remained an irritant to the Army and the government.

Foreign Military Relations. The Defense Secretariat, and particularly the Secretary himself, generally accorded U.S. military representatives (and those of other countries as well) rather cool, formal and cautious treatment. General Cuenca Díaz seemed to have little concern for foreign friendships and generally avoided actions suggestive of a special military relationship with any country. Thus, when the U.S. enacted legislation requiring recipient countries to make a ten percent deposit for grant military assistance received, the Secretary of Defense recommended that, while the deposit itself was not objectionable, the GOM should not participate in the exchange of notes required to formalize the obligation. He reasoned that Mexican national policy precluded acceptance of grant assistance from any other government and that the exchange of notes would constitute official GOM acknowledgment that Mexico was receiving grant U.S. military training. (Such training had previously been disguised locally as "becas," or scholarships.) While the Mexican Government nevertheless concluded the exchange of notes, the Defense Secretariat as of this writing has not answered repeated DAO inquiries as to whether it plans to resume grant training, a posture of inaction which suggests that it may not in fact participate.

Throughout the latter half of 1971 the Defense Secretariat regularly denied requests by foreign military attachés to visit Mexican Army units. Repeated requests for such visits by USDAO and personal complaint by the Defense Attaché to

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H. Internal Security

A year ago urban and rural guerrilla activity in Mexico was clearly on the rise. In 1971 the country witnessed several spectacular kidnappings and bank robberies that went unsolved for several months.

At the outset of 1972 conditions seemed to improve with the wrap-up of several different but sometimes inter-related urban guerrilla groupings (Mexico 456, January 29) in a demonstration of heightened determination on the part of GOM security agencies. The death of Genaro VAZQUEZ Rojas in an automobile crash at the beginning of February deprived Mexico of its most celebrated guerrilla leader. There were further arrests during the year, notably of a group that had previously dedicated itself to training exercises in rural areas but inexplicably turned to high-visibility, low-damage bombings of government buildings and private firms -- several of them U.S.-owned -- between June and early October.

As already noted, however, the guerrilla organization headed by Lucio CABAÑAS Barrientos in the State of Guerrero twice ambushed Mexican Army units and remains largely intact and certainly at large. Aside from the intensive military operations mounted against Cabañas, there was further evidence of the GOM's concern with the situation when it refused a request by opposition legislators that General Cuenca Díaz testify before the Congress this fall, when almost all other Cabinet officers were doing so. And from about June onward there was a recrudescence of urban guerrilla activity in the State of Nuevo León (see Monterrey A-62 of November 26), culminating in the hijacking of a Mexicana Airlines flight to Cuba in early November which involved the release of several just-arrested guerrillas.

It is therefore difficult to draw a balance at this point in time. Several of the groups organized in the period from 1968 or 1969 through 1971 have been put out of action, and nation-wide guerrilla strength has been significantly

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but not irreparably degraded over the past year. At the same time, the Cabañas organization -- even though its major operations have so far been confined to part of a single state -- demonstrated in the two ambushes greater capabilities than any of the other modern-day guerrilla groupings.

The GOM, meanwhile, persists in its refusal to admit publicly that any problem exists or to concede political motivation to anyone who has taken up arms against it. Privately, there is considerably more sophistication; a young theoretician for the PRI, for example, concedes that there is a problem with socio-economic roots, and not only in Guerrero, but believes there is no point in "alarming the public" by airing it publicly. Instead, he believes the GOM should quietly continue the approach it has already adopted: a combination of police and military action with developmental programs involving heavy federal spending in the poorest parts of the country. He professes confidence that this approach will, over time, defuse the "temporary" guerrilla situation. Considering events in 1972, we have yet to be convinced.

I. Internal Politics

The major development here was Echeverría's attempt to put not only his own stamp but a whole new face on the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). In February he chose Jesús REYES Heróles, an intellectual and experienced government administrator with little direct experience in practical politics, to take over the party presidency from the lackluster and rather inept Manuel SANCHEZ Vite, who returned to the governorship of Hidalgo. Echeverría's choice for secretary-general, the number two position, was Senator Enrique GONZALEZ Pedrero, another intellectual (and with a pronounced leftist background).

Numerous personnel changes followed, and the PRI under this leadership geared up for its 7th Ordinary National Assembly in October. This event failed to live up to expectations.

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