



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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October 2, 1969

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Richard Kleindienst
Deputy Attorney General
Department of Justice

FROM: Chris G. Petrow, ^{USA}Country Director
Office of Mexican Affairs

SUBJECT: Operation Intercept

1. Purpose - The purpose of this memorandum is to summarize the diplomatic aspects of Operation Intercept as well as the Mexican reaction to it.

2. Diplomatic Initiatives - The urgent U.S. concern about the drug abuse problem was transmitted to the Mexican President in July by Ambassador McBride and again on September 8 by President Nixon at the Amistad Dam meeting. In addition, briefings on the scope of Operation Intercept were given to the selected GOM officials, including the Secretary of Government, 10 days before the Operation began. Notification of the start of "Intercept" was given one day in advance to the Acting Foreign Secretary by Ambassador McBride, and to the Mexican Ambassador here by officers of the Department of State.

We had hoped that advance notification of the purpose and scope of "Intercept" would not only impart to the Mexicans a sense of the seriousness of our

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E.O. 13526, Sect. 5.6

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determination to stop the drug traffic, but would also give them proof of our willingness to take them into our confidence. Our efforts in this respect were marred by press leaks - the first on August 28 in regard to placing Tijuana off-limits to military personnel, the second on September 8 to the New York Times, which gave some details on the proposed Operation Intercept. These leaks somewhat negated the benefits of advance private briefings and cast doubt on our willingness to take the Mexican authorities into our confidence.

Finally, when "Intercept" began, the Department provided guidance to all Consuls in Mexico for handling inquiries and instructed Consuls to brief key Mexican local and state officials.

3. Mexican Reaction - As expected, "Intercept" has provoked strong hostility from commercial and civic organizations in the larger Mexican border cities where traffic delays have been severe. Revenue from tourism and retail sales has no doubt dropped.

Beyond the border areas, there is also strong discontent, although it is somewhat less intense. In reacting to "Intercept" the Mexicans are inclined to relate it to old and often unconnected grievances. Hence "Intercept" is not only judged on its own merits but is also considered as another harassment from the powerful northern neighbor. The problem not only stems from traffic delays and business losses, but perhaps even more fundamentally from a feeling of wounded dignity on the part of the Mexicans inspired by the intense personal search they are subjected to. Mexican sensitivity about their dignity, their suspicion that at heart Americans regard them as inferior beings, causes them to react at a high emotional pitch.

There has been a tendency for the Mexicans to consider retaliation by promoting a boycott of U.S. border cities. Some U.S. merchants and commercial groups have expressed concern over this possibility.

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On the Governmental level, the Mexican response was initially noncommittal as they did not apparently fully comprehend what was involved. In recent days, however, under heavy press, commercial and other pressures, the Mexicans have taken several initiatives: 1) Foreign Secretary Carrillo Flores and Ambassador Margain have both informed us of Mexico's serious concern about repercussions of "Intercept" in the border area; 2) President Diaz Ordaz referred to "Intercept" in derogatory terms during a toast to the U.S. astronauts visiting Mexico City; 3) only one Mexican Cabinet Minister attended Ambassador McBride's reception for the astronauts although the entire Cabinet was invited; and 4) Carrillo Flores has sent a personal message to President Nixon on the subject of "Intercept." In addition, the Government-dominated press has shifted from an initially tolerant attitude on "Intercept" to an increasingly strident tone of hostility to it. It is clear that Operation Intercept as it is currently being carried out has damaged and is continuing to damage our relations with Mexico.

4. Proposed Bilateral Meeting on Intercept - In response to Carrillo Flores' appeal for some action to placate Mexican public opinion, Secretary Rogers, on September 27, advised Carrillo Flores of our readiness to meet with appropriate Mexican officials to discuss "Intercept." Action is under way to arrange such a meeting.

5. Comment - As noted above, the hostile reaction from Mexican border interests was anticipated. Although reports from our border posts in the past few days indicate that passions may be cooling somewhat, we believe Mexican anger will continue as long as the Mexicans do not receive what they consider courteous treatment as equals, the traffic tie-ups are not relieved and business losses are not alleviated. Mexican-organized "boycotts" may have some temporary success in certain cities but are very unlikely to prosper on a border-wide scale.

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The negative reactions from the Mexican President and press are stronger than expected. We believe this is in part due to ire over discourteous treatment, dramatized by an unfortunate incident at El Paso in which the Mexican Consul General was subjected to a rigorous customs inspection, and in part to a persistent stream of U.S. press speculation that the "true" purpose of "Intercept" is to coerce Mexico into greater action on narcotics by willfully damaging border revenues.

We feel it is particularly important to act in a manner not offensive to the Mexican sense of dignity and to especially avoid recurrence of incidents like that in El Paso. We understand the Bureau of Customs has taken measures to this end.

The Mexican Government will probably attach much importance to the meeting of enforcement officials, and will give it much publicity, since participation in the meeting would constitute the "action" the Mexican border interests, and the country at large, are demanding of the GOM. We expect that the Mexicans will press for measures which will ease the main problems described above. Any measures which we can take without impairing the objectives of "Intercept" should be given careful consideration.

The Mexicans may also repeat their request for additional materiel for their own eradication programs.

In short, the official Mexican reaction to "Intercept" has been more hostile than anticipated and, if it continues, may well affect U.S.-Mexican relations in areas unrelated to narcotics control. However, we believe that our acceptance of their proposal to hold bilateral talks will lead, at least temporarily, to abatement of the hostile reaction.

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