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To : The Secretary  
Through: S/S  
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *TLH*

Subject: Mexican Government's Use of Force Probably Forecloses the Possibility of a Compromise Solution to the Student Conflict

The student/government conflict, which has grown in intensity and ferocity, appears to have reached the point where compromise solutions acceptable to both sides are no longer possible. The use of force to put down the disturbances will probably succeed in the long run, but it will generate a degree of bitterness in the student sector and the administration which will affect relations for the remainder of Diaz Ordaz' presidency.

Options rapidly diminishing. The government's determination to use all the force necessary, including street fighting, to put an end to student unrest, seems to indicate that the authorities have abandoned hope of resolving the matter through any form of negotiations. Student extremists numbering perhaps several thousand are therefore faced with the difficult decision of either fighting on against overwhelming fire power or giving up and disappearing. Presumably reason will ultimately prevail, but it is at least conceivable that an undetermined number may be galvanized into resisting until they are killed or immobilized by injuries and tear gas grenades. The government may still seek to offer some concessions to students not involved in the violence, but the estimated 15 student deaths has probably foreclosed any possibility of an early truce which could be acceptable to both sides.

Government's assessment of utility of force. The use of force as the primary tactic is logical in the Mexican context and probably stems from a government assessment or hope that the violence will be short-lived and the capital returned to near normalcy.

② This report was produced by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Aside from normal substantive exchange with other agencies at the working level, it has not been coordinated elsewhere.

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before the October 12 opening of the Olympic Games. Force is a time-honored method of dealing with student disturbances in the country, particularly outside Mexico City, and it has been used successfully numerous times. Students have traditionally given up and returned to their classes once the government made it unmistakably clear that it would not tolerate further agitation and violence. Hence the authorities probably assume that there is no reason why the tactic should not work in this instance. There is, however, a growing body of evidence that the government badly miscalculated the extent and depth of student sentiment, almost from the beginning.

Growing evidence of government's miscalculation. Perhaps the tragedy of the affair is that the Diaz Ordaz administration, which is a good government by Latin American standards, might have pacified the student community six or seven weeks ago, i.e., shortly after the bloody riots of 26 and 30 July, by partially agreeing to some student demands. A decision by the president in mid-August to allow a dialogue between student leaders and government officials could have cut the ground from the militant agitators and permitted the moderates to argue that Diaz Ordaz was not unmindful of student problems, particularly the matter of police interference in student intramural squabbles. The Minister of Government did offer to set up an investigating committee to examine charges, but the proposal was never fully accepted by the student leaders, possibly because the offer was merely to investigate and contained no indication that the government was prepared to recognize that police brutality was a problem. Several days after the investigating committee proposal was made public the students staged a giant demonstration in which sharp criticism was focused for the first time on the President's person. This criticism reached unprecedented heights of scathing vulgarity on August 27 when student poster attacks openly called for an end to the Diaz Ordaz government.

Outlook. The students almost certainly cannot win. The government has ample force to contain the control violence and the security forces can gradually isolate and wear down the extremists who choose to fight on. The military and police will almost surely attempt to keep student deaths at a minimum, but at the same time they will also continue to apply whatever fire power is necessary to stamp out violence. The next 48 to 72 hours will probably see a gradual slackening off of the pitched battles and student sniper attacks with the extremists withdrawing and going into hiding when possible. There probably are limits, however, beyond which the government will not wish to go at a time when the upcoming Olympics are focusing much attention on Mexico. A continuation of the bloody fighting for the next several days with additional student casualties could generate a wave of revulsion, and its conceivable that some student athletes from various foreign countries might refuse to participate in the Olympics.

So far no sector of the Mexican society has shown strong interest in supporting the students. The large labor federations are creatures of the government and are unlikely to respond to student approaches; but were they to do so, the government would be faced with a much more formidable problem. A work stoppage in Mexico City, which seems highly unlikely, could force a postponement of the Olympics.

Government/student relations have probably been damaged beyond repair, at least for the remainder of the Diaz Ordaz government. The PRI, the official party which has ruled Mexico for almost 40 years, is unaccustomed to having any sector of society challenge its authority. Students, however, have shown that the government and thus the party, while powerful, is not invincible. Perhaps the lesson will not be entirely lost on other groups not completely satisfied with the status quo.