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HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State

Info : Ciudad Juarez, Guadalajara, Matamoros, Mazatlan, Merida, Mexicali, Monterrey, Nogales, Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras, Tampico, Tijuana, Veracruz

FROM : AmEmbassy, Mexico, D.F.

DATE: September 13, 1962

SUBJECT : Implications of President Kennedy's Visit to Mexico

REF

SUMMARY

Two months having past since President and Mrs. John F. Kennedy ended their highly successful visit to Mexico, the Embassy submits an evaluation of some of the more striking effects of the visit, particularly with respect to a) the Mexican Government's reaction to the warmth of the welcome accorded the President and Mrs. Kennedy; b) factors to be considered with respect to their attending mass at the Basilica of Guadalupe; and c) the implications of the visit for certain aspects of U.S. and Mexican policy.

In summary, the Embassy believes that the following conclusions about the Presidential visit can now be made:

1. The Mexican Government appeared surprised but pleased at the size and warmth of the reception accorded to President and Mrs. Kennedy by the Mexican people.
2. As a result of the visit, the atmosphere in which relations between the two countries are conducted appears to have become somewhat more cordial.
3. The Communist failure to mar the Kennedy's visit has underlined the splits and weaknesses within the Mexican Communist movement, and has caused the Communists perceptible discomfort.

4. Although

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Drafted by: POL/RWAdams/HEBergold:mwa

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4. Although there is some reason to believe that the Mexican Government may tolerate an increase in anti-Communist domestic activity as a result of the visit, it appears equally possible that the Government may consider it necessary to show an increased friendliness toward individual Communists and pro-Communists who were displeased by the visit.
5. The extent to which basic United States-Mexican relations will be improved as a result of the visit will depend to a considerable degree on the extent to which satisfactory solution can be found to the problems discussed by the two Presidents, especially to the problem of salt water in the Mexicali valley and to the Chamizal dispute.
6. Developments since the visit indicate that Mexico is no more disposed than it was during the visit to change its basic position regarding Cuba.

THE WARMTH OF THE WELCOME

The Mexican Government spared no expense or effort to assure that the President and Mrs. Kennedy would have an unusually cordial reception. Government, labor, student, and civic groups were effectively organized to line the route of march from the airport to downtown Mexico City on June 29. The Ministry of Gobernacion demonstrated that it was able to spot and control Communist and pro-Communist persons and groups to an extent never before observed in Mexico and undoubtedly surprising to local Communists. Perhaps the most significant part of the Government's effort to prevent leftists from spoiling the welcome was its use of the strongly anti-Communist Frente Civico Mexicano de Afirmacion Revolucionaria (FCMAR), led by ex-Presidents Miguel ALEMAN and Abelardo RODRIGUEZ. At the request of the Government, the Frente Civico supplied thousands

of its members

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of its members and sympathizers to be duputized as special security agents along the march route. The use of the Frente Civico must have been unpalatable to the Communist Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional, of which Lazaro CARDENAS is the principal figurehead and to the pro-Cardenas members of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) who place themselves on the left of the broad political spectrum which characterizes Mexico's dominant political party. The Government, however, was apparently quite willing to take the political risk involved rather than chance unpleasant incidents during the President's visit.

In fact, no such incident took place. The million or more Mexicans who were on hand to greet the Kennedys - although in large part recruited and placed along the June 29 march route under careful Government organization - produced the largest, warmest, and most sincerely friendly reception ever accorded a foreigner in Mexico. Perhaps of even greater significance is the fact that hundreds of thousands of cheering Mexicans voluntarily assembled along streets President Kennedy was expected to pass, often waiting many hours, to give him and Mrs. Kennedy a warm welcome. Unlike the initial welcome to Mexico City on June 29, none of these subsequent demonstrations of friendship during the visit were organized by the Government. The spontaneity and warmth - qualities not susceptible of being "organized" - of the crowds suggest that friendliness and respect for the United States among the mass of the Mexican people are greater than some persons have previously felt. It should be noted that the vast majority of Mexicans, both middle class and humbler people, are themselves not "anti-American", although many of them, particularly the less educated, are susceptible to agitation or propaganda against the United States directed by extreme leftist or supra-Nationalist leaders. Distrust and envy of the United States is found largely in so-called intellectual circles, and among many university students and others of higher status in this country.

During the past weeks, there has been considerable speculation about how the Mexican Government (Lopez Mateos, his advisors, and his Ministers)

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and his Ministers) interpreted the reception given the Kennedys. Not infrequently one has heard that President Lopez Mateos was shocked by the crowds and that he somehow saw in their approbation of the Kennedys a repudiation of himself, his administration, and its policies. In the Embassy's view, those who espouse this line of reasoning are mistaken.

It is certain that Mexican Government officials were impressed by the initial reception and by unplanned popular demonstrations as the visit progressed, but, after all, this is what they had wanted. If the cooperation of the Mexican people was greater and more spontaneous than expected, so much the better. Inasmuch as Lopez Mateos and members of his administration were included in many of the events where crowds came to cheer, they shared in the crowds' approval and quite naturally saw in the welcome a Mexican vote of confidence for Lopez Mateos and his "national unity" program, as well as for the PRI. Mexican leaders, then, were surprised but pleased by the reception which they believe aided in achieving what was, from Mexico's point of view, one of the most important aims of the visit, namely a keener appreciation on President Kennedy's part of Mexico and its people. Even the President's act of good will in agreeing that the two governments seek a solution to the Chamizal question has been viewed in the Mexico City press as concrete evidence that the U.S. now has a leader who understands Mexico.

This image of an American President who is sympathetic toward Mexico and its problems would probably have been less sharply defined were it not for the strong personal impact that the Kennedys made on Lopez Mateos and his advisers. It is reliably reported that Lopez Mateos has remarked on several occasions since the Presidential visit that it took less than five minutes in the first series of conversations between himself and President Kennedy for him - Lopez Mateos - to become aware that President Kennedy was very much the same kind of person as he, with the same basic approach to the problems confronting them both as chiefs of state. Similarly, no Mexican face was brighter on the occasion of Mrs. Kennedy's tremendously well received

speech in Spanish

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speech in Spanish on June 30, than was Lopez Mateos'. So evident was Lopez Mateos' personal delight with his guests that he must have been more than satisfied with the reaction of the Mexican crowds, especially as there was a real political dividend for him in their cheers.

MASS AT THE BASILICA:

The attendance of President and Mrs. Kennedy at mass in the Basilica de Guadalupe was the emotional apex of the visit as far as the Mexican public was concerned. News of the President of the United States worshipping at the shrine of the "Virgen Morena", venerated as Mexico's "national miracle" even by nominal or "anti-clerical" Catholics in this country, has reached every corner of the Mexican countryside. The event has made so deep an impression that it is certain to be long remembered. Every aspect of the Presidential visit created good will for the United States, but the attendance at mass at the Basilica was such a huge success that it deserves to be discussed separately.

President Kennedy's attendance at mass at the Basilica, the one church in Mexico where religion and nationalism are intermixed, served to blunt anti-clerical criticism. Had President Kennedy gone to a parish church or to the Cathedral, this would, in the eyes of many Mexicans, have had only a religious aspect without any reference to Mexican history or culture. As it was, all Mexicans, whether or not they are anti-clerical, appreciated the significance of the Kennedys' presence at the Basilica. Because most Mexicans believe that the Lopez Mateos administration approved, and arranged for, the mass at the Basilica, despite announcements this was not part of the official program, Lopez Mateos garnered wide praise from unfamiliar, and often openly critical, quarters for this apparent evidence of endorsement of religious freedom.

Whether or not the Roman Catholic clergy, a minority of whom are frankly considered by political observers as seventeenth-century

activists

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activists still fighting the hundred-year-old Constitutional Reforms of Benito JUAREZ, may feel that the demonstration of popular support on July 1 at the Basilica will strengthen the Church in pushing the Government harder on religious and anti-Communist issues remains to be seen. The recent appearance of a strong pastoral letter against Communism and the widely publicized attacks from the pulpit of a priest against Lazaro Cardenas in the latter's home state of Michoacan have led some speculation in this regard, but this simply illustrates the current tendency on the part of many Mexican political observers to scrutinize each local development for a possible relationship to the visit of President Kennedy.

THE IMMEDIATE RESULTS OF THE VISIT:

Officers at the Embassy and in the Consulates have reported that their dealings with Mexican counterparts have been eased in many instances in the wake of the good feeling left by the Presidential visit. It also appears possible that the Mexican Government now may be willing to permit a limited amount of anti-Communist domestic activity. The use of the Frente Civico during the visit and the designation of Ezequiel PADILLA, one of the leaders of the Frente, to be Lopez Mateos' representative at the inauguration of the President of Colombia are indications that anti-Communist groups may expect some freedom of action as long as they maintain a circumspective attitude and do nothing to threaten "national unity", that basic singleness of action on the part of all political groups which Lopez Mateos and the PRI consider essential to Mexican stability and progress.

On the other hand, late August and early September have brought certain indications that Lopez Mateos may believe that the need for unity in the face of the 1964 Presidential elections demands that the administration show an increased cordiality toward elements of the Left that were displeased with the visit. Cases in point are increased contacts between Lopez Mateos and Cardenas, including the participation of Cardenas in the official Presidential party at the inauguration of electric power facilities at Cupatitzio, Michoacan. This has allowed the pro-Communist press to contrive an "alliance" between the two

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for public consumption. Other indications of Lopez Mateos' appeasement of the Left is the appointment of Javier ROJO GOMEZ, a Cardenista, as head of the Campesino sector of the PRI, and the clear implication in Lopez Mateos' State of the Union address on September 1 that Mexico will continue relations with Cuba and oppose collective action against Cuba by the OAS.

The Communists lost face, however, both among themselves and with the public, when they failed to mount a single incident or demonstration against President Kennedy during the visit. The impression of disunity and political impotence in the Mexican Communist movement was brought home by the provision to it by the Soviet Embassy of large sums of money to disrupt the Presidential visit, with nothing of any substance being accomplished in this connection. The Cuban 26th of July anniversary celebration and the planned demonstrations for artist David Alfaro SIQUEIROS, imprisoned Mexican Communist, on July 31 both passed without the Communists taking to the streets in the apparent fear of an inclination on the part of the Mexican Government, and the ability of Gobernacion, to thwart them.

Many Mexicans believe that President Kennedy's visit, and particularly what they regard as his endorsement of the goals of the Mexican Revolution, has contributed toward restoring international confidence in Mexico and, in so doing, reinforced the political position of Lopez Mateos. They also feel that the Presidential visit demonstrated a clearly defined interest on the part of the United States in Mexico's continued prosperity, and hopes have been aroused, not only in the public, but also in official circles, of increased financial assistance, both public and private, from the United States and of our intention to settle favorably for Mexico the Chamizal dispute and the current Colorado River Salinity issue. These two problems are regarded by Mexican officials as the outstanding political matters at issue between the two governments, and an acceptable solution regarding them will, in their eyes, be the acid test of the greater cordiality in bilateral relations arising from President Kennedy's visit.

For the Ambassador:

Robert W. Adams
Robert W. Adams
Counselor of Embassy