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Intelligence Note

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

August 29, 1968

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To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : Thomas L. Hughes *by h.c.d.l*

Subject: Mexican President's Decision to use Force Against Students may Exacerbate Differences

President Diaz Ordaz has had enough of student demonstrations and insults and has decided to use force to put down future disorders. The President was apparently stung by the scathing attack on his person and administration in the mammoth demonstration held on August 27. Student banners and placards called for the death of Diaz Ordaz and his cabinet and one sign showed the President entering the bathroom with a copy of the Mexican Constitution in hand. Poster attacks on the President's person, which are unprecedented, had appeared in one of the three other large protest demonstrations held since the bloody riots of 26 and 29 July but they were fewer in number and far less insulting.

The government believes that its use of force will create a difficult situation for the next few days and a number of clashes between students and security forces have already taken place. Some students have been severely wounded and possibly several killed. Tanks and armored vehicles have been employed to rout student groups and keep them dispersed in the narrow streets feeding into the main square in Mexico City.

Diaz Ordaz probably felt rebuffed. President Diaz Ordaz's decision to use force against the students was probably caused by his exasperation and a feeling that his tolerance and good will had been ignored. Since the 26 and 29 July riots the security forces have allowed the students to

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demonstrate and march without interference, probably in the belief that unrest and discontent would gradually diminish. Such restraint is unprecedented. The President may well feel that it was also unreciprocated and that students have taken advantage of his restraint to deliberately embarrass Mexico abroad.

Students also piqued. Students, for their part, seem convinced that the government has been unresponsive. They tend to view the peaceful and orderly nature of the demonstrations as evidence of responsible behavior and they publicly proclaim a readiness to negotiate. Most student leaders are probably sincerely interested in resolving their grievances against the government through negotiations.

At least some of the student demands do not appear to be excessive. Generally, the students are asking for a statement recognizing university autonomy, an investigation of police brutality in quelling student fights, freedom for persons arrested since the riots, and the dismissal of the Mexico City police chief. But the administration has been unwilling to accede to any demands probably because it is completely out of character for the government to allow any sector of Mexican society to challenge its authority. However, the government has offered to enter into a dialogue with student representatives and educators to investigate student charges but efforts to reach agreement on a site and personnel to be included have faltered.

Application of force will exacerbate differences. President Diaz Ordaz' decision to apply force against students and the renewed violence in Mexico City will dampen prospects for an amicable settlement within the immediate future. The government has the power and resources to deal

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effectively with almost any level of disorder the students choose to mount. But an overwhelming display of military might will undoubtedly frighten many students, and at the same time it will almost certainly generate a good deal of bitterness and anger within the student community. The President's decision also incurs the risk of broadening the conflict to include segments of several other sectors in the population. Press reports indicate that some slum dwellers have already joined students in new protests against the government. Thus, on the eve of the opening of Congress on September 1 and the President's state of the union address he faces a serious student rebellion and the spectre of continuing violence and bloodshed.

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