

CAS

AIRGRAM

RS/P
POL 23-9 MEX

FOR RM USE ONLY

A-394

CONFIDENTIAL

HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 BUREAU OF AIRS
 INTER-AMERICAN COORDINATION
 DIR DEP POL
 IRWC AID

file
 DEB
 ARA MEX
 10/13/65

FROM : AmEmbassy MEXICO D.F.

DATE: October 9, 1965

SUBJECT : Armed Attack on the Garrison at Ciudad Madera, and Related Matters

REF : Embtel 696 to Department, Info Ciudad Juarez UNN.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

On September 23, a group of armed men numbering 20 to 30 launched a surprise attack on the Army garrison (approximately 100 men) at Ciudad Madera in Western Chihuahua. The attack, which failed, resulted in eight of the attacking band, including the principal leaders, killed and six deaths among the garrison. Military authorities have announced that with the death of the leaders and dispersal of the attacking band tranquility will return to the area. Identified leaders of the band have also been listed as leaders of the so-called Ejercito Popular Revolucionario Mexicano (EPRM). During the past year or so this small insurgent group comprising an estimated hard core of 50 men and a peasant following of several hundred has engaged in acts of brigandage, cattle rustling and support of peasant land claims in the Madera area. While its identified leaders almost without exception have been or are members of the Union General de Obreros y Campesinos Mexicanos (UGOCM), the labor and agrarian arm of the Partido Popular Socialista (PPS), the Embassy has no evidence that the outbreak in Chihuahua was part of a broader or concerted activity. Nonetheless, it is symptomatic of a general malaise among the peasant sector, which can be expected to worsen unless the Government undertakes a broad program of peasant habilitation. Of this there is no evidence to date.

CONFIDENTIAL
GROUP 3

Downgraded at 12-year intervals;
not automatically declassified.

FOR DEPT. USE ONLY

In Out

FORM 4-52 DS-323

COPYFLO-PBR

Drafted by: WWStuart:mls 10/8/65

Contents and Classification Approved by:

Clearances: (in draft) Charge d'Affaires C.A. Boonstra
Defense Attache - General Crawford

P/R - Mr. Scott
LegAtt - Mr. Johnson

I. The September 23 Incident

Early reports of the September 23 incident varied widely regarding the number of guerillas and Government forces engaged in the action. However, on the basis of information developed subsequently by CAS, the Legal Attache, the Defense Attaches and the Consulate General at Ciudad Juarez, the following is believed to be a generally accurate description of the incident.

During the night of September 22 or early morning of September 23, a group of armed men apparently drifted into Ciudad Madera, a lumber town in mountainous western Chihuahua and took positions overlooking the Mexican Army camp in that town. At about 6:30 a. m., while the Mexican troops were standing roll call, the group opened fire with small arms and grenades. Notwithstanding initial losses, the Mexican troops succeeded in reaching their arms and counter-attacking the attackers. During the ensuing engagement and pursuit of the attackers, eight of the attacking group were killed and two more died subsequently from wounds. Five soldiers were killed and one officer died subsequently. Two civilian bystanders were killed and several were wounded. The attacking force was estimated to have 20-25 men and the defending Mexican Army detachment to number approximately 100 men. Among those killed during the engagement were Arturo GAMIZ Garcia, Pablo GOMEZ Ramirez, Juan Antonio GAITAN, Rafael MARTINEZ Valdivia and Salomon Gaitan. These were reported as leaders of the attack and of the armed band which has roamed the hills of Western Chihuahua for more than a year. As will be noted below, they have also been prominently mentioned as leaders of the Ejercito Popular Revolucionario de Mexico (ERPM - Popular Revolutionary Army of Mexico).

Following the attack, a detachment of paratroopers numbering about 100 men was sent from Mexico City to Chihuahua City and a detachment of Army troops of about the same size was sent south from Ciudad Juarez. These reinforcements were sent to the area for the purpose of sealing off possible escape routes of remnants of the attacking group, according to the explanation given the Defense Attache by the Secretary of Defense. However, according to the Secretary, the group abandoned its weapons and dispersed after the mauling by Federal troops and, consequently, the reinforcements were not used. Four Mexican Army planes swept the area in an apparently unsuccessful effort to locate remnants of the band.

The Government has announced that with the dispersal of the band, the death of its principal leader and the loss of its weapons, tranquility is expected to return to the area.*

*General Garza Zamora, Military Zone Commander in Chihuahua, made a similar statement some months ago.

II. Background of Chihuahua Violence

The southern and western areas of Chihuahua, characterized by rugged terrain and sparse population, have a long record of cattle rustling, outlaw activities and crimes of violence. This has been compounded by a struggle for land between small farmers and ejiditarios on one hand and large ranchers and timber companies on the other. In the Ciudad Madera region the situation has been further exacerbated for several years by a family feud between the powerful IBARRA family and Gaitan (Gaytan) family. The Gaitans (Salomon and Antonio) turned to outlawry and formed a small band. This band subsequently was joined by or coalesced with another group with more marked ideological orientation with the resulting formation of the EPRM under the leadership of Aturo Gamiz Garcia.*

The EPRM has been estimated to consist of a hard core of 50 men with several hundred campesino sympathizers. Its activities, apparently limited entirely to the mountainous areas of Chihuahua, seem to consist of a blend of armed robbery, cattle rustling and support of campesinos in their desire for land. Support of the campesinos in their struggle for land with the large ranchers and timber companies has apparently assured the band a measure of sympathy in the environment in which it moves and has probably attracted some active following from that sector.

Representatives of the press have suggested that termination of the bracero and PL-480 program by the U.S. has contributed to the following of the insurgent group in Chihuahua. This suggestion seems to rest more on logical deduction than on factual information. It is true that bracero recruitment from the most impoverished agrarian areas of Chihuahua reduced the pressure of unemployed campesinos and it is logical that termination of the program has aggravated this chronic problem. It is likewise logical that termination of community feeding programs in those areas where these programs were formerly carried out with PL-480 foods will have increased the pressure of poverty and discontent. However, activities of the EPRM antedate the termination of these programs** and the Embassy has no evidence to show that sympathy for or following of the EPRM was significantly affected by it.

*The evolution of the EPRM is unclear. For detailed information regarding it, see the report of the Legal Attache entitled "Ejercito Popular Revolucionario de Mexico (Peoples Revolutionary Army of Mexico)" dated November 5, 1964, and DAO IR No. 2864017265 of July 22, 1965. See also ConGen Juarez' A-4 of 8/18/64.

**The Consulate General at Ciudad Juarez reported in A-4 of 8/18/64 the attack by Gamiz Garcia and his group on a rural police patrol in July of that year.

The report of the Legal Attache cited previously shows that during the latter part of 1964 and 1965 the EPRM was under active investigation by the Mexican Attorney General's office and by Mexican military authorities. In his comments to the Defense Attache on September 24, 1965 (Defense Attache Report CX-93-65), General GARCIA Barragan, Secretary of Defense, stated that upon his assumption of office (December 1, 1964), he had determined to put an end to violence in the Madera area of Chihuahua. Government pressure on the EPRM was stepped up during 1965. Owing to the Mexican Government policy of suppressing or playing down information regarding civil disturbances and armed action, it is impossible to estimate the number of contacts or skirmishes between the EPRM and Government forces during that period. There are, however, reliable reports of the ambushing of a Mexican Army patrol and an armed police patrol by the EPRM during the May-June period with some loss of arms and equipment. Furthermore, the arrest of seven members of the band was reported by the press on June 30, 1965, and the arrest of at least five was confirmed by the Consulate at Ciudad Juarez (A-1 of July 8, 1965).

The attack of September 23, 1965, on the garrison at Madera seems on the face of it a foolhardy action. The EPRM band left the comparative safety of its mountain hideout to attack a garrison which outnumbered it 5 to 1. This may have been an act of desperation resulting from increasing Government pressure and undertaken in the hope that victory over the garrison would provide arms and ammunition as well as augmented prestige and following in the countryside. In calculating the risks, leaders of the band may have counted heavily on surprise and possibly on half-hearted resistance by the Mexican troops.* If such was the case, their plans miscarried. The garrison recovered from its surprise, fought bravely and inflicted shattering losses on the attackers.

III. Significance of the EPRM and the Madera Incident

Available reports on the EPRM generally agree in naming Arturo Gamiz Garcia as leader of the band. Also prominently mentioned as holding positions of leadership are Salomon Gaitan, Antonio Gaitan and Antonio Escobel. As noted in Section I, above, among those reportedly killed at Madera were Arturo Gamiz Garcia, Antonio Gaitan and Salomon Gaitan. Additionally, Dr. Pablo Gomez Ramirez, who was listed as killed at Madera is mentioned in earlier reports of the EPRM.

It seems clear, then that the attack on the garrison at Madera was carried out by the EPRM or a part of this group under the immediate leadership of the principal leaders of the EPRM.

*The Legal Attache's report of August 9, 1965, cites reports of some sympathy among common soldiers in the Mexican Army for the guerrillas and talk that they would possibly refuse to fight the EPRM.

While it appears likely that, as the Government predicts, the heavy losses sustained by the attacking band, including principal leaders, effective strength and weapons, will discourage organized violence in the area for some time to come, it is worth noting that the group engaged in the Madera attack accounted for less than half of the previously reported hard core strength of the EPRM, and at least one leader, Antonio Escobel*, has not been mentioned as participating in it. Finally, the underlying ambiente of an impoverished peasantry and a bitter land struggle remains.

An examination of the list of leaders of the EPRM shows a remarkable number to be or to have been members of the Union General de Obreros y Campesinos de Mexico (UGOCM), the labor and agrarian affiliate of the Partido Popular Socialista (PPS), led by Jacinto Lopez. Thus, Arturo Gamiz Garcia, Pablo Ramirez Gomez, Salomon Gaitan, Rafael Martinez Valdivia and Antonio Escobel (or Scobell) have all been described as members of the UGOCM. Of the five prisoners taken to Ciudad Juarez on or about June 30, 1965, three were uneducated Indians and two, Eduardo Rodriguez Ford and Francisco Marquez, are described as UGOCM members. Furthermore, reports of the Legal Attache indicate that the UGOCM and PPS in Chihuahua planned to take an active part in defending Rodriguez Ford and Marquez.

The leftist daily, El Dia, on September 24, 1965, carried statements by the PPS and the UGOCM regarding the attack on the Madera garrison. The national directorate of the PPS found a double responsibility for the incident -- that of the Government and local officials and that of "those who followed a mistaken path" to insure the peasants' enjoyment of their rights. The statement continues that if the state government had dealt with the land problem in a timely manner instead of systematically denying to the peasants their rights, the incident would never have occurred. Federal deputy Jesus Orta (UGOCM), speaking for the National Committee of the UGOCM, denied that that organization had had any part in incidents in Chihuahua. He added that it is the policy of the UGOCM to deal with problems in a legal manner and asserted that several of the persons who took part in the incidents had ceased to be members of the organization since February 1964.

It is not possible on the basis of the present information to determine with certainty the relationship, if any, between the EPRM and the UGOCM and the

*The Communist magazine Politica of October 1, 1965, lists Antonio Escobel Gaitan. This suggests that Antonio Escobel and Antonio Gaitan, mentioned earlier, are one and the same person.

PPS. Certainly it cannot be disregarded that the known leadership of the EPRM, almost without exception, were present or past members of the UGOCM. In contrast the Mexican Communist Party (PCM) and its peasant affiliate, the Central Campesino Independiente (CCI), is seldom mentioned in reports of the EPRM. On the other hand, present PPS policy tends more toward cooperation with the Government and it is most unlikely that Lombardo Toledano would have directed or knowingly tolerated armed action against the Army by PPS units. It is not clear how effective Lombardo's control over Jacinto Lopez and the UGOCM is. The latter is far more "activist" than its parent PPS and has encouraged peasant land squatters to seize land and, despite Orta's statement mentioned above, to resist the authorities in doing so. The UGOCM may well have acquiesced in the activities of EPRM, but it seems unlikely that it would have ordered the attack on the garrison at Madera. In any case, it can be safely assumed that top authorities of the Mexican Government are fully aware of the UGOCM connections of the leaders of the Madera attack and that the organization will be kept under careful scrutiny.

An Assistant Army Attache examined a photograph of material abandoned by the attackers at Madero and found it to be a hodge podge of ten old, obsolete military rifles, some of which had been converted to sporting rifles; four civilian sporting rifles, two with telescopic sights; two shotguns; 30/06, .22 calibre and .32 calibre cartridges; several shotgun shells; a pistol holster; primer or fuse cord; and a can which may have been one of the home-made bombs reportedly used by the attackers. This suggests that the EPRM has not been systematically supplied arms from outside its area of operation. No evidence has been produced to suggest that any of the EPRM leadership has been to Cuba or had advice or training from others who had been there. The EPRM -- leadership and following -- seems to have been drawn from the affected areas of Chihuahua.

Apart from the possible relationship with the UGOCM, the Embassy has no information to suggest that EPRM operations in Chihuahua were part of or related to a wider or national movement.

The Embassy is therefore inclined to view the EPRM as an essentially local phenomenon, arising out of peasant poverty, land struggle and the conditions peculiar to the area which were mentioned earlier.

One other aspect of the Madera incident deserves passing mention. As the Consulate at Ciudad Juarez has indicated, the position of Governor Giner Duran has been viewed as precarious, particularly since the violence which occurred in Chihuahua City during the visit of Diaz Ordaz there as a candidate.

CONFIDENTIAL

A-394
Mexico D.F.

-7-

The situation which developed in the Madera area is widely believed to be due in part to corrupt state politics, and the flare-up of violence close to the U.S. with attendant publicity probably has further weakened his position with President Diaz Ordaz.

IV. The Underlying Agrarian Problem

While the Embassy is without evidence that the activities of the EPRM were other than a local eruption, they are symptomatic of a general malaise among Mexico's impoverished peasantry. Small armed bands are reportedly active in Michoacan, Guerrero and Oaxaca but these are believed to be brigands without political motivation. Armed brigands and clashes between landless peasants and the authorities are, of course, endemic in Mexico. While, as reported in the Embassy's A-1283 of June 30, 1965, there are some indications that incidents between peasants and the authorities are increasing, there is no indication that peasant unrest poses any real threat to the Government at present or that it will become such in the immediate future. No opposition leadership has emerged capable of capturing peasant discontent and channeling it into a coordinated movement -- and none is in sight. The extreme left, notwithstanding active efforts, has been unable to provide this leadership and the Government security machinery would make the emergence of it difficult. The PRI's machinery of peasant control through caciques, ejido comisariados and the Confederacion Campesino Nacional (CNC) machinery remains by and large effective throughout the countryside. As a result, peasant unrest has until now resulted in only sporadic and isolated violence along well known traditional lines.

Nonetheless, thoughtful Mexicans are becoming increasingly disturbed by the peasant problem, not because it constitutes an immediate threat to stability but because unless vigorous steps are taken to deal with the problem it is bound to grow worse and eventually to produce an explosive situation. Cessation of the bracero program and failure of the Mexican Government to institute a substitute program to provide employment and income replacing that formerly provided by employment in the U.S. has doubtless further depressed the already depressed economies of the poorer rural areas. And the high rate of population increase in the peasant sector has a steady and growing depressing effect. If a revolutionary leader capable of capitalizing on widespread unrest and discontent should appear, there exists a considerable potential for a quickly expanding violence.

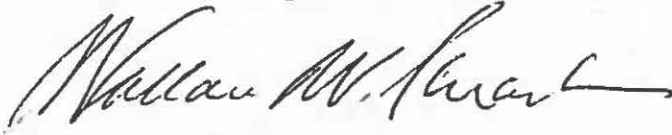
CONFIDENTIAL

Most disturbing against this background is the failure to date of the Diaz Ordaz Administration to propose any comprehensive plan for dealing with the problem.

During his electoral campaign, Diaz Ordaz spoke eloquently of the need for integral agrarian reform. He argued that the peasant problem could not be solved by simply distributing land -- that not land but increased productivity and income is the answer. To that end, the integral agrarian reform should include technical assistance, marketing facilities and credit availability.

However, during their almost one year in office, the President and his Director of the Department of Agrarian Affairs have given almost exclusive attention to continuing the traditional program of land distribution, which though laudable within the Revolutionary mystique, is viewed by most observers (including the President as candidate) as an inadequate approach to the problem. As the Embassy has previously observed, what seems to be required is a basic political decision to shift on a large scale resources now going into urban and industrial development to a comprehensive program of rural habilitation. Of this there has been no indication to date.

For the Charge d'Affaires a. i. :



Wallace W. Stuart
Counselor of Embassy
for Political Affairs