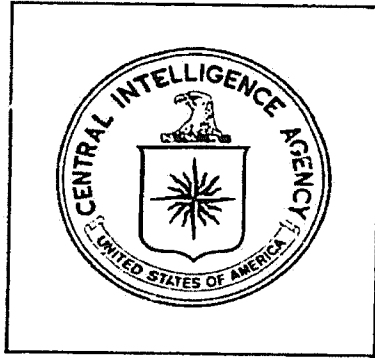


~~Secret~~

(b)(3)



STAFF NOTES:

Latin American Trends

~~Secret~~

132

August 13, 1975
No. 0522/75

~~SECRET~~(b)(3)
(b)(6)El Salvador: A Warning to the Opposition

President Molina's decision to take the political offensive in the wake of the bloody clash between students and security forces on July 30 has at least temporarily cowed the opposition. In the week following the clash, students temporarily occupied the capital's cathedral, an extremist group took over a radio station to broadcast a revolutionary message, and a bank guard was killed near the university. None of the incidents sparked further unrest; significantly, no political organization called for protests against the government.

Molina has publicly blamed the initial clash on a conspiracy directed by communist and opposition groups. Although he implicated organizations of almost every stripe, he singled out the major opposition Christian Democratic party for special attention and issued a not-so-veiled threat that the parties could be outlawed. He also warned students that even greater force might be used in the future to maintain order.

The opposition surely recognizes--with legislative and presidential elections scheduled for 1976 and 1977 respectively--that the President's words are not to be taken lightly. Fraud is generally credited with providing the government's edge in recent elections and Molina is probably uneasy about next year's prospects. Additionally, a hard line against students and leftist opposition is sure to win favor with the military.

In recent years, the military-backed governments have resorted to electoral fraud to prevent any possibility that a Christian Democrat might win. This has helped to move the Christian Democrats into coalitions with the leftist and communist parties. As evidenced by his most recent performance, President Molina intends to continue the hard line and perhaps press it further than his predecessors if the opposition mounts an effective challenge.

(b)(3)

August 13, 1975

-10-

~~SECRET~~