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TO : Department of State

INFO : Amembassy RIO DE JANEIRO
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTER-AMERICAN AFFAIRS
JAN 21 1969

FROM : Amconsul RECIFE

DATE: Jan. 10, 1969

SUBJECT : Fourth Army Considers Further Action Against American Priests

REF : Recife 14

SUGGESTED DISTRIBUTION

As the attached memorandum of a recent conversation with Fourth Army Chief of Staff General Samuel Correa indicates, further action by local military authorities against the American Oblate priests in Recife may be in the offing. As General Correa's remarks demonstrate, the Fourth Army considers that it has been overly generous in the face of what to it seems to be continuing provocation by the American priests. The formal complaint received last week by Dom Hélder from Fourth Army Commander General Alfredo Souto Malan, concerning the activities of one of the Oblate fathers, is a further indication of Army irritation with the American priests.

The Consulate General is continuing to follow this situation closely and will report further significant developments.

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FORM 10-64 DS-323

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Drafted by: *RHM*
POL: RHMelton: jbs
Clearances:

Drafting Date: 1/10/69

Phone No.:

Contents and Classification Approved by:

Action: *WAPR - NAW - file*

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RECIFE REPORT 4

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

January 8, 1969

SUBJECT: Church-Military Relations

PARTICIPANTS: General Samuel Correa, Chief of Staff of Fourth Army
Richard H. Melton, Political Officer

PLACE: Fourth Army Headquarters

The reporting officer called on General Correa to make an informal inquiry concerning a report received by the Consulate General (see Recife 27) that the USIS office in Fortaleza was having difficulty with local military authorities as a result of USIS press releases dealing with U.S. news comment on recent events in Brazil. During the ensuing conversation, the General made the following comments:

USIS-Military Relations

General Correa, after consulting several of his subordinates, stated that the Fourth Army had received no word of difficulties with USIS in Fortaleza. He stated that the Fourth Army would certainly have been informed if the situation there were anything but normal. The General added that he would ask for a routine report on the situation from the Commander of the Tenth Military Region, with whom he had direct radio communications.

American Priests Still a Problem

General Correa then turned, without prompting, to the subject of Church-Military relations. He stated that the American Oblate priests in Recife were continuing to create problems. The Military was interested in avoiding any direct confrontation with the Church but, he added, "One could not continue indefinitely to prod the tiger (read Armed Forces) without the tiger reacting." Until now, the Army, he added, had been very patient with the Oblates despite considerable provocation. This situation could not continue indefinitely.

Subversion Not To Be Tolerated

The Army, said General Correa, was willing to accept criticism but it could not allow subversion. The "revolutionary wing" of the Catholic Church in Brazil was, he alleged, engaged in subversion. Individual priests or students who attacked the Costa e Silva Administration in a subversive manner would not bring down the government, but subversion grew "like drops of water" which could result in a "flood" if unchecked. While the activity of these individuals might not be considered subversive in the United States, authorities in Brazil must make this determination for themselves.

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Dissidents Reject Dialogue

The Armed Forces, the General continued, had assiduously sought dialogue with dissident elements in the Church and other sectors, but they were simply not interested in dialogue. (General Correa noted that the Fourth Army was in continuous touch with Dom Hélder concerning the activities of his clergy in Recife.) One could not, however, carry on a one-way conversation. Dialogue could not exist when one side (the Church) talked but never listened.

Military Seeks Social Justice

The Armed Forces is in the vanguard of those seeking social justice in Brazil. The Military has a common interest with many of its critics in seeking social justice, but it differed with them in that the Armed Forces was convinced that nothing could be achieved by violence and the destruction of existing institutions. General Correa compared the problem of seeking social justice in Brazil with solving the racial problem in the United States. Much admittedly remained to be done in Brazil but, pending solutions, violence and indiscriminate violation of the law could not be tolerated. Changes must take place within a legal framework.

Critics of the Government and the Armed Forces would have one believe that Brazil had made no progress in the field of social justice and that the Armed Forces was attempting to enslave the people. This was obviously untrue, but such unfounded charges made it difficult for the Armed Forces to adopt a moderate position with regard to its critics.

COMMENT: General Correa left the distinct impression that a further confrontation with the American Oblate priests may be in the offing. General Correa considers that the Army has been overly generous and restrained in the face of what to him seems to be continued provocation by the American priests.

DMC
POL: RHMelton: jbs

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