

THE CIVIL DISTURBANCE THREAT 1971-1975

UPDATE

3/71

1. The civil disturbance threat study was originally written in September and October of 1970. By mid-winter 1971, a number of shifts in public mood had occurred bearing on the civil disturbance problem. The major shifts are noted below. With these modifications, the civil disturbance threat study remains generally valid at this time as a basis for the Study Group's deliberations.

2. The most notable change in the civil disturbance picture was what one university president referred to as the "erie tranquillity" which had come to prevail over the nation's campuses. In marked contrast to the student disorders in May 1970, the Fall of 1970 and the Winter of 1971 saw a new calm present on many campuses. This calm was not substantially disturbed by the movement of South Vietnamese troops into Laos in February 1971. The difference in this student reaction compared to the reaction to the Cambodian incursion may be in part only a reflection of seasonal distinctions, winter versus spring. However, the extended quiescence tends to support the view that May 1970 marked the high water mark for the six year long period of increasing student unrest. Campuses might again become highly inflamed in conjunction with some new military action or political policy deemed particularly provocative.

Nevertheless, it now appears that the decline in large scale campus disorders may be occurring at a significantly faster pace than foreseen in the October threat estimate. This may result in a sharper decline in the likelihood of police and National Guard employment on campuses than was predicted in October 1970.

3. The alteration of mood on the nation's campuses was only one part of what seemed to be a more general relaxation of tensions. Increasing polarization in the society was a hallmark of the 1960s. While mid-winter 1971 saw no healing of the racial, political or cultural cleavages in society, the widespread sense of a continuing degeneration of public order seemed to clearly abate. Of course there remains the possibility that this new sense is merely the calm before the storm, that it is indeed an "erie tranquillity" subject to abrupt alteration. It is currently not, however, that something more than a mere pause in the momentum of past disorders is involved. It is quite possible that there has been a distinct reversal of the trends towards increasing large scale civil disorders. Only time will bear out the validity of this assessment. If it is valid, then an accelerated return to more normal conditions will be particularly evident in the areas of racial disturbances, student disturbances, and mass demonstrations with associated violence. There will no doubt be significant civil disturbances over the 1971-1975 period. Calls have been made recently, for instance, for anti-war protests involving civil disobedience in Washington, D.C. this Spring. At the present time, however, it is judged that the levels of these disorders will diminish at a faster pace than noted in the October estimate.