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UPHOLDING THE MONROE DOCTRINE: AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1954
GUATEMALAN *COUP D'ETAT*

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UPHOLDING THE MONROE DOCTRINE: AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1954 GUATEMALAN *COUP D'ETAT*

In June 1954, the American CIA collaborated with a small army of Latin America exiles to depose the democratic administration of President Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala. In a few short weeks, the United States covertly, almost casually, took advantage of its military influence in order to dramatically change the future of an entire nation of people. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the then-president of the United States, was commander-in-chief of an administration that felt that it had the right, even the duty, to drastically alter the lives of millions of Guatemalans, just as in past foreign interventions conducted by the US.

As William Appleman Williams bemusedly proclaimed in his article “The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy”, “One of the central themes of American historiography is that there is no American Empire.”¹ However, strong themes of American imperialism permeate all of American history: Western expansion of the frontier, claiming land from Mexico in the early nineteenth century, attempting to win Canadian land in the War of 1812, intervening in Iran through covert operations in 1953, the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Whether for purposes of

¹William Appleman Williams, “The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 24:4 (November 1955), 380.

expansion, control of resources, or ideological manipulation, the United States had established a strong foreign policy of intervention and imperialism by the mid-twentieth century.

The United States played such a heavy role in the Guatemalan *coup* that effectively, Jacobo Arbenz was “overthrown by the United States in June 1954,” as Piero Gleijeses, professor of US Foreign Policy and Latin American Studies at Johns Hopkins University, wrote simply and emphatically.² In ousting another country’s fair and democratic government through the use of military force in order to install a new military government more sympathetic to American interests, Eisenhower merely extended the United States’ long pattern of imperialistic action. Economic imperialism motivated the Guatemalan *coup* to some extent because American corporations heavily depended on Latin American resources, but largely, the *coup* in Guatemala was a product of ideological imperialism: part of the United States’ ongoing quest for control over the entirety of the Western Hemisphere, a quest that had defined American foreign policy since James Monroe delivered the nationally groundbreaking Monroe Doctrine in his seventh annual message to Congress.

The Monroe Doctrine stated that “the occasion has been judged proper for asserting, as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European Power.”³ The message was clear: according to the wishes of the United States, North and South America

² Piero Gleijeses, “The Death of Francisco Arana: A Turning Point in the Guatemalan Revolution,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 22:3 (October 1990), 527.

³Library of Congress, “A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nations: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 – 1875” [document on-line] (Annals of Congress, Senate, 18th Congress, 1st Session, accessed 5 June 2013); available from <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llac&fileName=041/llac041.db&recNum=4>; Internet.

were to remain under their own jurisdiction, without threat of European imperialism. However, as the issuer of the Monroe Doctrine, the United States also set itself up to be the gatekeeper of the Western hemisphere, a duty to which it religiously adhered, even when it came to Cold War-era Guatemala.

At the time of the US-orchestrated Guatemalan *coup d'etat*, the international community was at its height of Cold War tension and hysteria, and the United States was one of its most powerful and determined members. Desperate to stifle Soviet and Communist influence in its neighbors, the Eisenhower administration was constantly prepared to resort to drastic measure to curb Communist expansion and, by perceived corollary, thereby defend democracy and freedom. Communism was heavily demonized by Americans as an arm of evil and oppression; mentions of “the Communist menace” ran rampant through public discourse. Though the USSR was not European, the United States upheld the same foreign policy principle that it had maintained since the Monroe Doctrine: the Americas were not to be interfered with by anyone other than the United States. As a result, the Eisenhower administration justified its “defending” Guatemala and the entirety of the Western Hemisphere against Soviet-propagated ideological imperialism with its own show of ideological imperialism. E. Howard Hunt, a CIA professional involved in Guatemalan intelligence leading up to the *coup*, shared his view of the situation in Guatemala and the relevance of the Monroe Doctrine in a 1999 interview:

My attention was soon directed to the apparent violations of the Monroe Doctrine, or the coming violations of the Monroe Doctrine, by Guatemala, by the government of Arbenz... Eventually, an officer of lower rank than myself came down to say, "Well, you know, why don't you cool it - there's no particular interest in what's going on in Guatemala." And I said, "Well, I don't think that's the thing to do," I said, "because we're faced here with the obvious intervention of a foreign power, because

these home-grown parties are not really home-grown, they're being funded or advised by a foreign power - i.e. the Soviet Union.⁴

The United States believed that Guatemala was turning into a Soviet outpost in the United States and therefore an ideological and national security threat to the United States. In 1954, two days after the *coup*, an article in the New York Times proclaimed that “Washington fears the Communists might succeed in taking over Guatemala and using it as a beachhead to infiltrate other Latin-American nations and the vital Panama Canal Zone.”⁵ Another newspaper from earlier in the year also cited the national security dangers of Communist influence in Guatemala, claiming:

The real problem of communism in Guatemala is not a Communist revolt or seizure of executive power. It is the progressive nourishment of a thriving Communist community already healthy enough to heckle, goad, sting, and constantly harass the United States in accord with the wishes of the Soviet Union.⁶

The same newspaper also described the ideological dangers that the United States perceived in Guatemala:

The Communist menace here is... a bustling outpost of Soviet propaganda right in the hear of the Americas....Guatemala is being transformed by an international Communist effort into a thorn in the

⁴E. Howard Hunt, interview by The National Security Archive, transcript of tape recording [interview on-line] (21 February 1999, accessed 7 June 2013); available from <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-18/clarridge1.html>; Internet.

⁵"Guatemala Erupts," *New York Times*, 103:35,211 (June 20, 1954), sec. IV, 1.

⁶"Guatemalan Reds Exploit Reforms: Utilize Agrarian Law in Effort to Build up Peasant Force to Serve Communist Ends – Double Threat is Posed: A Disruptive Internal Conflict and Provoking of Unilateral Act by U.S. are Held Goals," *New York Times*, 103:35,102 (March 3, 1954), sec. I, 11.

flank of the Western Hemisphere. How to get it out before infection starts is a tough problem.⁷

The United States, in the midst of the heavily ideological Cold War, feared that majority Communism would begin in Guatemala but spread to its neighbors throughout the rest of the Western hemisphere. Rather than allow other countries influence in the Western hemisphere, the United States took it upon itself to undo ten years of progressive political, economic, and social development in Guatemala by orchestrating a hare-brained *coup*.

In 1944, the country of Guatemala went through a series of dramatic shifts in government, all motivated by the people's desire to move toward a more democratic government.⁸ The so-called "October Revolution" eventually saw self-proclaimed "spiritual socialist" Juan José Arévalo installed as the first democratically elected President of Guatemala.⁹ Arévalo's radically different ideology incited a period of national reform in Guatemala that included securing basic rights for workers through the creation of a Labor Code that mandated minimum pay policy as well as some unionization protection.¹⁰ This reformation also, and eventually most significantly, spawned the revision of the nation's land distribution policy. In general these reforms did not significantly affect the daily lives of the Guatemalan people, but they gradually prompted the government of the United States to sit up and take notice of this small Latin American country and its radical president.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸ Charles D. Brockett, "An Illusion of Omnipotence: U.S. Policy Toward Guatemala, 1954-1960," *Latin American Politics & Society*, 44:1 (Spring 2002), 117.

⁹ Stephen Kinzer and Stephen Schlesinger, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

Despite the relative success of Arévalo's presidency, political turmoil continued to rip the nation's government into a conservative right-wing faction, headed by Army Colonel Francisco Arana, and another more liberal political group eventually represented by Defense Minister Jacobo Arbenz.¹¹ Both men were nationally recognized military and political figures who had aided in the removal of Arévalo's predecessor in the October Revolution of 1944; now, they vied for the leadership of the socially stratified, politically swaying country.

Just over a year before the next presidential election in Guatemala, Jacobo Arbenz and President Arévalo together coordinated the attempted interception of Francisco Arana. On June 18, 1949, a group of armed soldiers detained Arana during his travel to the city of El Morlón. A gunfight ensued, and Arana was killed; President Arevalo later attributed the assassination to the "conservative opposition" to his own government, and public speculation blamed political supporters of Arbenz.¹² Whether or not the assassination was purposeful or accidental remains unknown, but either way, it was to Arbenz's political benefit.¹³

Shortly thereafter, Arbenz held the support of President Arévalo, who recognized Arbenz's commitment to Guatemalan economic and political reform.¹⁴ He also gained the backing of a significant portion of the Guatemalan military as well as tentative support from

¹¹Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 58.

¹²Piero Gleijeses, "The Death of Francisco Arana: A Turning Point in the Guatemalan Revolution," 544-545.

¹³Kinzer and Schlesinger, 45.

¹⁴Immerman, 62.

Guatemala's workers and lower classes, who hoped for social reform to result from his presidency.¹⁵

Jacobo Arbenz succeeded Arévalo as President of Guatemala in March 1951. Arévalo's presidency had been "marked by the unprecedented existence of a multi-party system, by the development of urban trade systems, and by nearly unfettered freedom of the press;" even so, during his term, "illiterate women could not vote," "the Communist Party was proscribed," and "trade unionism in the country was severely restricted."¹⁶ Though the country had made great strides in democratic reform under Arévalo, Arbenz faced the continuing task of enacting land distribution reform to the benefit of Guatemalan industry.¹⁷ At the time of his ascension, Guatemalan industry was suffering. Guatemala was a "banana republic", its unstable economy dependent on a few main export crops largely mediated by American corporations. As a result, American corporations controlled much of the country's economy and farmland, and most of Guatemala's cultivatable land rested in the hands of a tiny percentage of the population, little of it ever actually being put to use.¹⁸

Firmly nationalist, one of Arbenz's goals was to increase Guatemala's self-sufficiency and economic prosperity; in his inaugural address, Arbenz stated that the goals of his administration would be, "to convert Guatemala from a country bound by a predominantly feudal economy into a modern, capitalist one."¹⁹ One year into his term, he made several strides toward

¹⁵Richard H. Immerman, "Guatemala as Cold War History," *Political Science Quarterly*, 95:4 (Winter 1880-1981), 633.

¹⁶Gleijeses, "The Death of Francisco Arana: A Turning Point in the Guatemalan Revolution," 533.

¹⁷Brockett, 117.

¹⁸Kinzer and Schlesinger, 50.

achieving this in the form of Decree 900, a radical agrarian reform bill.²⁰ Decree 900 confiscated unused farmland from large plantations and redistributed the land to the Guatemalan people.

President Arbenz's reform bill made perfect sense from a nationalist perspective in that it gave Guatemalans the resources that they needed in order to prosper while reducing foreign corporate control. However, the land bill also aggravated American-based corporations that were suddenly faced with the seizure and redistribution of thousands of acres of their unused land. First Arévalo had empowered the workers that the companies exploited on their plantations; then Arbenz was calmly expropriating their land in Guatemala. Unsurprisingly, these reform movements eventually raised a few eyebrows in the Eisenhower administration.

Though Arbenz was clearly not communist and, in fact, often criticized the communist ideology, Guatemala contained a small yet growing communist party.²¹ American and Soviet tension at the time had fostered an intense anti-communist agenda within the United States. In the midst of Guatemalan reforms that threatened American economic giants and bolstered the leftist ideology, the Eisenhower administration trained a wary eye on Arbenz and his government, all the while biased by Cold War-era prejudices.²²

The United Fruit Company, or UFCO, was a corporation that was particularly instrumental in attacking the actions of the Guatemalan government. UFCO held a considerable

¹⁹Jacobo Arbenz, *Discourses* (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1951), 14, as quoted in Immerman.

²⁰ Frederick W. Marks III and Stephen G. Rabe, "The CIA and Castillo Armas in Guatemala, 1954: New Clues to an Old Puzzle," *Diplomatic History*, 14:1 (January 1990), 69.

²¹John W. Young, "Great Britain's Latin American Dilemma: The Foreign Office and the Overthrow of "Communist" Guatemala, June 1954," *International History Review*, 8:4 (December 1986), 576.

²²Mark T. Hove, "The Arbenz Factor: Salvador Allende, U.S.-Chilean Relations, and the 1954 U.S. Intervention in Guatemala," *Diplomatic History*, 31:4 (September 2007), 624.

amount of Guatemalan land – almost 1.5 million acres – overlorded a significant portion of the Guatemalan workforce, and held a dangerous amount of sway in Guatemala’s economy.²³ In 1950, renowned Argentinean poet Pablo Neruda denounced the role of “parallel government” that American corporations filled in Guatemala and other so-called banana republics. In his 1950 poem “La United Fruit Co.,” Neruda described the United Fruit Company’s reign in Central America:

It rebaptized these countries
Banana Republics,
and over the sleeping dead,
over the unquiet heroes
who won greatness,
liberty, and banners,
it established an opera buffa:
it abolished free will,
gave out imperial crowns,
encouraged envy, attracted
the dictatorships of flies...
Carias flies, Martinez flies,
Ubico flies...wise flies
expert at tyranny.²⁴

The United Fruit Company had previously supported the kind of dictatorial, highly socially stratified society that would allow the company free reign in the Guatemalan economy and an inexpensive labor supply. However, UFCO was one of the companies most dramatically affected by Arbenz’s agrarian land reform bill, thousands of acres of their land being expropriated and redistributed Guatemalans.²⁵ Despite being awarded over \$600,000 in return

²³Stephen M. Streeter, “Interpreting the 1954 U.S. Intervention in Guatemala: Realist, Revisionist, and Postrevisionist Perspectives,” *History Teacher*, 34:1 (November 2000), 70.

²⁴Ben Belitt, ed., *Selected Poems: Pablo Neruda* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), 148.

²⁵Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 54.

for unused land expropriated under Arbenz's agrarian reform bill, UFCO lobbied the US State Department in an attempt to gain further compensation.²⁶ Whether or not as a result of many State Department officials' close financial ties with the United Fruit Company, the United States government submitted a formal legal claim against the Arbenz administration in April 1954 demanding an extra \$15 million in recompense to be paid to the economic giant.²⁷

The Arbenz administration understandably refused the State Department's demands. Some historians claim that the pleas of the United Fruit Company were what ultimately drew the Eisenhower administration into condemnation of Arbenz; others attribute tension to suspected involvement with the Soviet Union and the communist ideology, as consistent with the latest official statement by the United States.²⁸ Regardless, as of 1954, strained relations existed between the American and Guatemalan governments.

These strained relations were reflected in United States public perception of the Guatemalan government and people at the time, a perception fueled by the media but created by the United States Central Intelligence Agency. In the years leading up to the CIA intervention in Guatemala, the CIA and US Department of State collaborated with representatives of the United Fruit Company to distort public image of the Guatemalan people and inflate perception of communist influence in Guatemala. Certain investigative reporters were mysteriously deflected from the issue, and dubious information was supplied as if it were fact, among other propagandist strategies described by professor of Political Science and International Relations Gordon L. Bowen:

²⁶Kinzer and Schlesinger, 76.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 77.

²⁸ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954*, 34.

the CIA and United Fruit [UFCO] helped plant unsubstantiated stories in the American press about Soviet arms turning up in Guatemala. Indeed, Fruit Company-sponsored information constituted a near monopoly of the sources used in American press reports about Guatemala in this era. U.S. Information Service documents show that even within Guatemala much of the Latin American comment on the 'red menace' in Guatemala which was reprinted from Chilean and other 'credible' Latin American sources was, in fact, originally written by CIA officers.²⁹

US newspapers from the early 1950s were rife with gruesome portrayals of a communist-outrun Guatemala. Newspaper articles from before the Guatemalan *coup* fed the public stories of the Communist Party being "the most important party" in Guatemala. These articles insisted that communists had "succeeded in capturing the [Arbenz] administration" because President Arbenz was "permit[ting] their dominance."³⁰ In reality, the Communist Party of Guatemala (*El Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo*) seems to have held very little influence in Arbenz's administration. Having no source of correct information, however, the people of the United States – if they thought about the subject at all – continued to believe that Arbenz and his fellow radicals "were hampered by inexperience, lack of democratic tradition or organization and the opposition of the great, rich landowners," and so gave communists "ever more power and influence."³¹

The people of Guatemala were also portrayed by the United States media to be feeble and incompetent, puppets in the hands of sardonic, cunning communists. While reporters described

²⁹Gordon L. Bowen, "U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Radical Change: Covert Operations in Guatemala, 1950-1954," *Latin American Perspectives*, 10:1 (Winter 1983), 95.

³⁰"Central America Feels Communist Pressure: But Party Seems to Have Little Success Except in Guatemala," *New York Times*, 103:35,043 (January 3, 1954), sec. IV, 4.

³¹"Guatemala Erupts," 1.

foreign dissent with gusto – the bitterness of the authoritarian governments of neighboring Latin American countries such as Nicaragua and Honduras that feared similar democratic reforms in their countries as well as the righteous American concern about the prospect of a communist outpost in the Western Hemisphere – Guatemalan citizens were viewed as apathetic, helpless, and apolitical in the face of an unstable government aggressively veering toward leftist politics. In a New York Times article from early 1954, before the *coup*, reporter Sydney Gruson wrote as if it were indisputable fact that “The great masses of people of the region [Latin America] are not concerned over communism or, in fact, any other ideology, including democracy, as it is understood by the Western world. They are so poor that the problems of feeding and housing occupy all their time.”³² Here, Gruson employed an imperialistic perspective consistent with Maslow’s infamous hierarchy of needs, degrading the intelligence and competence of every Guatemalan citizen. He insinuated that Guatemalans could not even comprehend “democracy, as it is understood by the Western world,” as if Latin America was so inferior that it could not even be regarded as part of the Western hemisphere despite its geography.

This attitude of intellectual and innovative superiority has been seen time and time again in instances of imperialism, from Christopher Columbus’s wretched enslavement of the inhabitants of Hispaniola in the late fifteenth century to Belgian occupation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo hundreds of years later. The American public and government were set up to believe that the Guatemalan people could not take care of themselves in their own country against a threat identified only by American political hysteria, and therefore, in June 1954, the CIA under the Eisenhower administration felt that they were justified in bringing Guatemala’s autonomous, democratic government to its knees. After all, Guatemalan Communists were “in

³²“Central America Feels Communist Pressure: But Party Seems to Have Little Success Except in Guatemala”.

control of the labor unions, the Government's radio and newspaper propaganda organs and other key jobs," as far as the public knew.³³

Anti-Guatemalan sentiment permeated the United States with the help of UFCO lobbyists as well as suspicious politicians.³⁴ It is difficult to discern the Eisenhower administration's true motivations for moving into its next stage of Guatemalan manipulation because of the sheer rapidity of the operation.³⁵ Following the coattails of a purportedly successful CIA intervention in Iran as well as constant whining on the part of the United Fruit Company, members of President Dwight Eisenhower's cabinet made the official decision to act against Arbenz in August of 1953.³⁶ Recorded in a memorandum to U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, it was stated that "During the past year the Government of Guatemala and Communist elements within that country have strengthened their position," and that despite some ragtag revolutionary movements in Guatemala, it was "improbable that the Arbenz Government can be successfully countered without direct military action in which revolutionary forces must have outside aid."³⁷ The CIA was directed to "Through covert channels, supply RUFUS [Colonel Castillo Armas] with all the arms, planes and money required for a successful operation, providing the review of his assets is positive."

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Bowen, 67.

³⁵ Nicholas Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999), 102.

³⁶Kinzer and Schlesinger, 107.

³⁷U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum From the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency (King) to Director of Central Intelligence Dulles" [document on-line] (Washington, August 17, 1953, accessed 9 June 2013); available from <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d41>; Internet.

Operation PBFORTUNE was the first official stage of the Guatemalan *coup d'etat* attributed to the United States. Beginning as early as in February 1952, the CIA created a classified list of “Guatemalan Communist Personnel to be disposed of during Military Operations” through assassination, imprisonment, or exile.³⁸ Under President Truman, the CIA planned to supply right-wing Guatemalan rebels with necessary equipment and supplies to take down the Arbenz administration. In a memorandum to the Deputy Director for Plans of the CIA, an undisclosed official reported that:

Armed action against the [Guatemalan] government has been planned and pending since early this year and is now imminent. Details of the plan for such action, which follows through to the establishment of a democratic government, are known to us. [name not declassified] considers that if proper support can be provided the plan is feasible and practical and has a good chance of succeeding if it is put in effect by 1 September 1952.³⁹

The rest of the memorandum recommended that “support with arms and equipment” and “financial support in the amount of \$225,000 be provided” to Col. Castillo Armas in order to secure the overthrowing of President Arbenz’s government. However, the operation was not allowed to begin because the CIA could not obtain sufficient evidence of communist exploits or national security threats in Guatemala.⁴⁰

³⁸Reproduced by The National Security Archive, "Guatemalan Communist Personnel to be disposed of during Military Operations of Calligeris" [document on-line] (accessed 8 June 2013); available from <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB4/docs/doc04.pdf>; Internet.

³⁹U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum From [name not declassified] of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency to the Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner)” [document on-line] (Washington, July 9, 1952, accessed 9 June 2013); available from <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d12>; Internet.

⁴⁰Cullather, 123.

At the time, the American public was led to believe that Guatemala posed a national security threat to the United States through its support of Soviet-bolstered principles and promotion of vaguely leftist programs such as Arbenz's agrarian reform bill.⁴¹ The idea of Guatemala being a communist enemy was not difficult to foist onto the American people during this period of constant hysteria and suspicion.⁴²

In fact, the next stage of foreign intervention by the United States was born of the aforesaid hysteria and unfounded suspicion, and it was just as readily accepted as the media-propagated idea of Guatemala being a threat to the Western hemisphere. In an unfounded and unspeakably cruel maneuver, the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States collaborated with right-wing military rebels in Guatemala to destroy Arbenz and his reform movements.⁴³ The intervention, dubbed Operation PBSUCCESS, strove to force President Arbenz to resign and turn leadership of the country over to the Guatemalan military.⁴⁴

Though the United States claimed to be protecting democracy in the Western Hemisphere through bringing down Arbenz, the CIA's plan clearly entailed measures to ensure the deposition of the democratically elected leader of Guatemala who brought economic change and social reform to the country.⁴⁵ They planned to place Guatemala under military control that would instead stifle the lower classes, and this was somehow America's idea of necessary and beneficial foreign intervention in the 1950s.

⁴¹ Marks and Rabe, 84.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 68.

⁴³Sharon I. Meers, "The British Connection: How the United States Covered its Tracks in the 1954 Coup in Guatemala," *Diplomatic History*, 16:3 (June 1992), 410.

⁴⁴Kinzer and Schlesinger, 144.

⁴⁵Meers, 420.

The American government justified the intervention in Guatemala in several ways. The most public and compelling of these arguments was the ideological: the CIA truly interpreted the perceived (though barely existent) Communist influence in Jacobo Arbenz's government as a legitimate threat to the national security of the United States. Duane Clarridge, chief of the Latin America division of the CIA, described the nature of the alleged threat to the United States in the following manner:

Now to me what happened with the Cold War was, it wasn't so much you were gonna have somebody come over and invade a country, the Soviets weren't gonna come over and invade a Latin American country, what you were gonna have is their covert action apparatus create a situation where you have a government come to power in x, y and z country which is favorable to them to one degree or another, and then they will begin to either exert influence in that country and you get a domino effect where we have other countries begin to follow that, or they set up bases.⁴⁶

Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas led the Guatemalan side of the *coup d'etat*, the two hundred-odd band of undertrained mercenaries that comprised the so-called Liberation Forces.⁴⁷ Armas was a well-known figure and recently-exiled opponent of Arbenz and his politics. Given the full political and military support of the CIA, Armas became able to take control of the government of Guatemala with the help of a small army of CIA-trained and armed mercenaries. In January 1954, news of Operation PBSUCCESS was leaked to the public, but the information

⁴⁶Duane Clarridge, interview by The National Security Archive, transcript of tape recording [interview on-line] (21 February 1999, accessed 7 June 2013); available from <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-18/clarridge1.html>; Internet.

⁴⁷Immerman, 637.

hardly caused a stir.⁴⁸ The US State Department denied involvement in Colonel Castillo Armas' military plan, saying:

The Department of State has today received a summary of the statement issued yesterday by the Presidential Information Office of Guatemala charging that the U.S. Government had acquiesced in a plot by other nations against Guatemala. The charge is ridiculous and untrue. It is the policy of the United States not to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations. That policy has repeatedly been reaffirmed under the present administration.⁴⁹

Planning of Operation PBSUCCESS continued to proceed normally.

In May 1954, the United States Navy hastened the start of Operation PBSUCCESS by blockading Guatemalan ports, intercepting and searching Guatemalan ships, and purportedly searching for evidence of communism-motivated aggression on the part of the small Latin American country.⁵⁰ Colonel Armas disseminated rightist propaganda among Guatemalan citizens, leading Arbenz to crack down on government protests and opposition.⁵¹

Finally, on June 18, 1954, Colonel Castillo Armas and his army of mercenaries invaded Guatemala and almost immediately fell to defeat at the hands of the Guatemalan Army.⁵² 480 mercenaries were certainly not adequately strong to overthrow the government of a sovereign nation through military force; however, Arbenz faced the tactical threat of United States support

⁴⁸Kinzer and Schlesinger, 145.

⁴⁹“Department of State Bulletin [document on-line] (accessed 9 June 2013); available from http://archive.org/stream/departmentofstat301954unit/departmentofstat301954unit_djvu.txt; Internet.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 101.

⁵²Meers, 416.

for the Liberation Army.⁵³ In fact, Piero Gleijeses claimed that Arbenz eventually stepped down not because of internal dissent and protest, but because of fear of United States invasion and occupation.⁵⁴

Ultimately, the Guatemalan *coup d'etat* represented a steep political divide in the nation, but it was the threat of United States occupation that drove President Arbenz to resign.⁵⁵ After a brief counter-revolution, on Sunday, June 27, Arbenz resigned from the presidency of Guatemala.⁵⁶

Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas took control of the nation, much to the consternation of much of the Guatemalan population.⁵⁷ Upper-class landowners certainly did not bemoan the demise of Decree 900 and the land redistribution that it implied.⁵⁸ However, in a society in which prosperity depended on agriculture, and therefore the availability of land, Arbenz's land reform bill had made beginnings in striving for equality in Guatemala.⁵⁹ Armed protests and demonstrations fought against Castillo Armas' government, but the government was led by a succession of military juntas that fostered a society of corruption, oppression, and civil warfare.⁶⁰

⁵³Immerman, 117.

⁵⁴Piero Gleijeses, "The Death of Francisco Arana: A Turning Point in the Guatemalan Revolution," 546.

⁵⁵Streeter, 210.

⁵⁶Kinzer and Schlesinger, 179.

⁵⁷Streeter, 68.

⁵⁸Brockett, 92.

⁵⁹Kinzer and Schlesinger, 208.

⁶⁰Meers, 416.

Everything that Arevalo and Arbenz had worked for since the October Revolution a decade previously was essentially destroyed in the space of a few days due to Operation PBSUCCESS.⁶¹

Despite the gross injustice and unwarranted interference of the CIA intervention in Guatemala, the event sparked extremely little notice outside of Guatemala. While violent protests raged through the streets in Guatemala as the country fell once more to elite-sympathetic dictatorship, the rest of the world only remained politely concerned as they watched from a distance. The role of the CIA in fueling the *coup* was long-concealed from the American people and from most of the American government.

The Eisenhower administration was able to orchestrate the *coup* very quickly through the decisions and input of a very small number of people by hiding the operation from both Congress and the American public, but lack of informed response on the part of the international community and the United Nations left the Eisenhower administration unchecked in their abuse of power and international supremacy – supremacy that resulted in another case of American imperialism.⁶²

⁶¹Immerman, 212.

⁶²Bowen, 97.

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