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“FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND RELIGION?”:
PSYCHOLOGICAL INTELLIGENCE THAT OVERTHREW A GUATEMALAN
GOVERNMENT, 1952-1954

A Master’s Thesis

Submitted to the McNulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Masters of Arts

By

Sean F. Thearle

May 2012

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2012

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PSYCHOLOGICAL INTELLIGENCE THAT OVERTHREW A GUATEMALAN
GOVERNMENT, 1952-1954

By

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ABSTRACT

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Sean F. Thearle

March 2012

Thesis Supervised by Professor John J. Dwyer

In 1954, the United States rescinded its Good Neighbor Policy toward Latin America when it conducted a covert operation, known as PBSUCCESS, in Guatemala that forced the resignation of democratically-elected President Jacobo Arbenz. Since then, scholars have written a wide array of books and articles pertaining to the subject. While most authors have focused attention on who was to blame for the coup, this research project takes a new approach by examining the roles of religion and entertainment in facilitating Arbenz’s overthrow. Instead of investigating causes or motives of U.S. intervention, this project seeks to answer questions about the operation itself. It focuses on the role of culture in covert operations and combines political, economic, technological, religious, and cultural history to set scholarship on this event in a new direction.

From April-June 1954, the CIA employed psychological intelligence and propaganda to quickly destabilize Guatemalan politics. The CIA intelligence gathered before the psychological warfare campaign was used two ways: first by Catholic priests in Sunday homilies and second by a clandestine radio station (codenamed SHERWOOD). Together these forms of propaganda helped sway an ambivalent public (sixty percent of the Guatemalan population was indifferent toward its leader less than a month before the launch of the radio station) to support an “invasion” by a band of approximately 1,500 Guatemalan exiles led by Castillo Armas against the sitting government.

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Introduction

On June 27, 1954, a peaceful social revolution in Guatemala came to a screeching halt when democratically-elected nationalist President Jacobo Arbenz resigned from office under mounting internal and external pressures. For many of the approximately three million people living in this small Central American nation in the mid-1950s, Arbenz's resignation arrested an effort begun in 1944 by Guatemalan president Juan Arévalo to empower the nation's landless peasantry and working classes. During this time, the United States was fully engaged in both a domestic and international ideological conflict against communism. The Red Scare, as it is popularly called, produced a hysteria that was exploited by reactionary politicians like Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin who brought charges of subversive activity to many government employees, the film industry, and progressive politicians. This frenzy crossed into American foreign policy by 1953 as the U.S. helped to orchestrate the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq in Iran and began preparations to carry out a similar operation in Guatemala against Arbenz. The progressive reforms brought about by Arbenz were seen by President Dwight Eisenhower's administration as the first steps toward the establishment of a communist beachhead in the Western Hemisphere capable of spreading to other nations in the circum-Caribbean and threatening U.S. security in the Panama Canal region.¹

¹ Preliminary meetings between American ambassador John Peurifoy and Jacobo Arbenz in December 1953 indicated that Arbenz was not a communist but accommodated the communists within Guatemala. After a six hour dinner meeting with Arbenz and his wife, Peurifoy concluded that Arbenz was "not a Communist [but] will certainly do until one comes along". See William Z. Slany, N. Stephen Kane, and William F. Sanford, Jr., eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, Volume IV: *The American Republics* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1983) 1091-1093.

U.S. policy during the Cold War focused on containing communism within its present borders. The ideological conflict between capitalism and communism was fought in many places around the world in the ten years after the end of World War II through direct military action, most notably in Eastern Europe, China, and the Korean Peninsula. For places like Guatemala, though, President Eisenhower preferred the use of covert operations instead of conventional military action.² The Central Intelligence Agency, began in 1947 under President Harry Truman, launched its campaign against Arbenz late in 1953 after receiving approval from CIA Director Allen Dulles and the president.

Over the last 58 years, scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to the events in Guatemala in 1953 and 1954. Many have sought to clarify who was to blame for the coup.³ Put another way, the “blame” game has been “beaten to death” after more than fifty years of writing on the subject. Clearly, there is no single answer regarding who or what caused the United States to end its Good Neighbor Policy and execute a heavy-handed clandestine operation in a small Central American country. Simply put, perhaps, all actors involved are partially to blame for this intervention. Nonetheless, there is substance to the fact that there is still much to learn from the event if one were to cast aside the tendency of past researchers that placed blame on Jacobo Arbenz, the CIA, Eisenhower’s administration, or the United Fruit Company. It is with that premise that the scope of this research was undertaken.

Examination of hundreds of pages of CIA documents released in 2003 under the Agency’s Historical Review Program reveal that the covert operation known as PBSUCCESS could not have achieved its goals of removing Jacobo Arbenz from power

² John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006) 148.

³ An assessment of the literature on Operation PBSUCCESS will be covered in the first chapter.

if not for psychological intelligence. This intelligence, gathered through multiple sources, was aimed at developing a propaganda campaign to cause unrest in the days and weeks leading up to the “invasion” by a small group of Guatemalan exiles led by Castillo Armas. This thesis combines political, economic, cultural, religious, and technological history of the United States and Latin America to explain how the CIA’s background research on the people of Guatemala proved to be an integral part of the overall success of the operation. Although the psychological warfare campaign launched by the CIA (fed mainly by a clandestine radio program known as SHERWOOD) has received nominal attention by scholars, little is known about the intelligence gathered to cause the Guatemalan people to tune in and listen to the propaganda radio broadcasts and the politically-charged homilies given by Guatemalan priests in the weeks leading up to Arbenz’s overthrow.

The organization of this research project is divided into four chapters. The first chapter scrutinizes earlier research on Operation PBSUCCESS and reviews the scholarship that developed over the last 58 years. Chapter 2 analyzes the CIA’s efforts to gather psychological intelligence and pick out a site to broadcast its clandestine radio broadcasts. This chapter will also highlight many of the political arguments that were broadcast by the CIA and the Guatemalan government’s challenges through its own propaganda. Chapters 3 and 4 go into greater detail on how this intelligence was utilized to destabilize the country through efforts of the Roman Catholic Church and entertainment programs broadcast on *Radio Liberación*, the CIA’s covert radio station launched on May 1, 1954. Primary sources used for this study include diplomatic correspondence contained in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series (published

by the Government Printing Office in Washington DC), hundreds of pages of documents released by the CIA in 2003, as well as previous research conducted by CIA historians, experts on Guatemalan history, and historians specializing in Latin American religious history.

Background

As the United States increased its economic and political power in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the nations of Latin America experienced greater economic and military pressures from the “hovering giant” to its north. As a result of political instability in many parts of the region, the United States often sent its marines and naval ships to Latin American countries in an effort to maintain its economic security. In Guatemala, the United States did not intervene militarily. Prior to the election of Juan Arévalo in 1944, the United States was able to penetrate the country through private investment due to the many corrupt dictators who controlled Guatemala during the late 1800s and early 1900s. United Fruit Company amassed a great deal of economic control over the country. This Boston-based company controlled the only Atlantic port in Puerto Barrios, owned nearly all of the railroads within the country through its subsidiary International Railways of Central America (IRCA), and was the largest landowner and employer in Guatemala.⁴

At the onset of the Great Depression, Guatemala’s economic instability caused a great deal of political and social upheaval. To restore order and encourage economic

⁴ The United Fruit Company held approximately 550,000 acres on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts by the time of Jacobo Arbenz’s agrarian reform act in the summer of 1952. See Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) 75.

growth, the nation's elite united to form a more stable government under Jorge Ubico.⁵ Under Ubico, Guatemala's economy stabilized and the nation's relationship with the United States remained amicable.⁶ However, during the Great Depression, many Guatemalan middle and working class people read about American President Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms and began to demand social reforms and democracy in their country as well. By 1944, the Guatemalan people grew tired of their dictator and, spawned by the impending victory over European dictators Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, they demanded change.⁷

On July 1, 1944, due to growing pressures from within the country, developments in Mexico, and the loss of American support for President Ubico, due to his "erratic and unreliable" behavior, the domineering leader of Guatemala resigned.⁸ Later, after months of unrest and anti-government propaganda following Ubico's resignation, free elections took place and Juan José Arévalo was chosen as president. Between 1945 and 1950, Arévalo's administration had four priorities: agrarian reform, better rights for workers, a

⁵ United States Department of State, Susan K. Holly and David S. Patterson, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954: Guatemala* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2003) xxiii (Hereafter noted as *FRUS: Guatemala*). The majority of Guatemalan elites in the early twentieth century were coffee growers and controlled 72 percent of the Guatemalan land despite comprising only two percent of the country's total population.

⁶ After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, Ubico declared war on all of the Axis Powers and subsequently moved to assist the FBI in deporting German citizens and Guatemalans of German origin to the United States. In 1944, Ubico's government expropriated all of the coffee estates belonging to Germans. See Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) 19-21.

⁷ Even elites that benefitted from Ubico's rule turned against him. Similar cases were found throughout the circum-Caribbean as Anastasio Somoza (Nicaragua), Rafael Trujillo (Dominican Republic), Fulgencio Batista (Cuba), and Isaias Medina Angarita (Venezuela) all either had their control seriously threatened or were removed from power. See *FRUS, Guatemala*, xxiv; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 22.

⁸ See John J. Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute: The Expropriation of American-Owned Rural Land in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) for information on Lazaro Cardenas' diplomatic tactics which challenged U.S. hegemony in the 1930s. Franklin Roosevelt subsequently accommodated Cardenas in his reform efforts.

stronger educational system, and a consolidation of Guatemala's political democracy.⁹ During his term, Arévalo was an outspoken advocate for the peasantry. He began a series of reforms aimed at curbing the economic stranglehold that United Fruit had on the country. His successor, Jacobo Arbenz, elected in 1950, expanded Arévalo's reforms and completely upended the oligarchical system that had existed since the colonial era.

After Jacobo Arbenz took power in 1951, the United States government became very concerned about the activities of communists in Guatemala and the levels to which Arbenz's government supported them. The economic and agricultural reforms that he instituted negatively affected the United Fruit Company. Beginning in 1953, the Arbenz government expropriated nearly 400,000 of the 550,000 acres of land that UFCO owned in Guatemala in an act of legislation known as Decree 900.¹⁰ Of the approximately 550,000 acres of land that the company controlled, 85 percent of it was unused; "only as many bananas were grown as could be sold abroad." UFCO contended that the reason for leaving the majority of its land uncultivated was due to the periodic infestations of plant diseases that could wipe out its crops.¹¹ The United Fruit Company owned more land in Guatemala than any other organization and controlled a majority share of the country's only railroad. As compensation for the expropriation of the lands taken from UFCO, the Guatemalan government offered the company "twenty-five-year term bonds

⁹Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) 26-37. This is the revised and expanded edition of this seminal work. The original work, entitled *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, was published in 1982 and distributed by Doubleday. Reprints appeared in 1983 and 1990. All subsequent citations in this essay will utilize the most recent edition of Schlesinger and Kinzer's work.

¹⁰ Zachary Karabell, *Architects of Intervention: the United States, the Third World, and the Cold War, 1946-1962* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999) 103, 105. Decree 900 was a landmark reform project passed in June 1952; it enabled Arbenz's government to advance the agrarian reform first proposed by Arévalo. This law stated "uncultivated lands on estates greater than 224 acres [were] subject to expropriation."

¹¹ Schlesinger and Kinzer 75-76.

at 3-percent guaranteed interest for the exact book value of the assets claimed by United Fruit”, but UFCO immediately rejected this proposal due to what it believed to be a gross under-compensation. For much of the early 1900s, UFCO undervalued its properties in Latin America to decrease the amount of tax liabilities it had on its lands. Adding to the impression that UFCO was being targeted by Arbenz’s government, Guatemala offered a total of \$627,572 as compensation for the expropriated lands when UFCO (and later the State Department in April 1954) demanded a much more significant amount, \$15,854,849.¹² The agrarian reform did not affect the large Guatemalan landowners as greatly as it did the Boston-based company. After Arbenz expropriated nearly eighty percent of UFCO lands, Guatemalans who owned large tracts of land were treated with moderation by the Arbenz government. Provided that the lands owned were under production, these tracts were left out of expropriation.¹³ Decree 900 proved to be the major tipping point in the American decision to overthrow Arbenz.

American foreign policy in developing nations during the Cold War combined the economic, political, and national security goals of the country. When foreign governments nationalized assets controlled by foreign investors, the United States justified intervention by stating that this action by foreign governments was a trend toward communism.¹⁴ President Dwight Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles both believed that communist incursions into areas of the developing world hinged upon economic nationalists rebelling against the established political and economic order.

¹² John Prados, *Presidents’ Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations from World War II through the Persian Gulf* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1996), 98. See also Schlesinger and Kinzer 76.

¹³ Robert Wasserstrom, “Revolution in Guatemala: Peasants and Politics under the Arbenz Government,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 4 (October 1975) 445-455.

¹⁴ The United States intervened in Iran shortly before the hostilities occurred in Guatemala and intervened in Cuba seven years afterward due to the nationalization of foreign assets.

In a speech delivered to the Congress of Industrial Organizations in Cleveland, Ohio in November 1953, Dulles stated the goals of American foreign policy in the face of communist threats. He mistakenly believed that the Soviet Union's policy on world revolution focused on nationalist aspirations of "colonial peoples" and instigated them to rebel. Before the newly won independence could "become consolidated and vigorous in its own right," the communists would, according to Dulles, move in and absorb the people into their "orbit".¹⁵ Because of this speech, many American diplomats believed that nationalist movements such as those that occurred in Guatemala were the first steps toward the establishment of a communist country in the Western Hemisphere. The speech itself was misleading, however, because it did not accurately depict events in Guatemala. Arévalo and Arbenz came to power through peaceful democratic elections and the economic and social reforms were carried out peacefully. The violence that Dulles spoke of in his speech did not occur until after Arbenz resigned and the country plunged into a bloody forty-year civil war.

As Arbenz enacted economic reforms that aided the Guatemalan working class, the United States increased its efforts to depose him. The more even-handed Good Neighbor Policy instituted in the 1930s by Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt was no longer advanced by American foreign policymakers in the post-WWII era.¹⁶ For the United States, safeguarding political and economic interests in the Western Hemisphere

¹⁵ John Foster Dulles, "The Moral Initiative," John Foster Dulles Papers, Box 75, Mudd Library, Princeton University cited in Zachary Karabell, *Architects of Intervention*, 111-112. Eisenhower wrote a memorandum to Dulles stating that he agreed with these principles. See Louis Galambos et al, eds., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The Presidency, The Middle Way*, Vol. XIV (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 676-677.

¹⁶ In the early 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt pledged not to interfere with Latin American affairs in an effort to develop cooperation between the United States and Latin America. This policy instituted a new era in inter-American relations. It ended the heavy-handed policy of the United States toward Latin America from 1898-1934 that was characterized by many military interventions.

was paramount to hemispheric policy; even if it meant renouncing the claims that Washington would no longer meddle with the internal affairs of the nations south of the Rio Grande. By 1952, Harry Truman tasked the CIA to develop plans to remove Arbenz from power in Guatemala. When the United States State Department hosted Nicaraguan president Anastasio Somoza in April 1952, discussions ensued on how to “take care of” Arbenz. With proper support from the United States, Somoza insisted that he, along with exiled Guatemalan Colonel Castillo Armas, could successfully lead an uprising to overthrow the Guatemalan government.¹⁷ Known as Operation PBFORTUNE, the goal of the United States was to support the operation covertly by providing a limited amount of material and logistical support to an armed insurrection by Castillo Armas so as not to reveal the relinquishment of the Good Neighbor Policy. The U.S. successfully utilized the Good Neighbor Policy in the late 1940s to create the Organization of American States (OAS) and establish Pan-Americanism for the defense of the hemisphere against external threats like communism. When Somoza exposed the CIA’s role in this operation, the strategic efforts of twenty years of American foreign policy were threatened. As a result, the U.S. arms shipments authorized to send to Castillo Armas were stopped and the operation was put on hold.¹⁸ Covert efforts in Guatemala by the CIA increased when Dwight Eisenhower became President in 1953, however. Soon after Eisenhower became president, the CIA began moving forward with its efforts to remove Arbenz from power,

¹⁷ Castillo Armas lived in exile after being captured during a failed attempt in 1951 to instigate the Guatemalan army to rebel against the newly-elected Arbenz. Armas had been a strong supporter of Francisco Arana, the chief political opponent of Arbenz. Arana was assassinated in 1949. See Gleijeses 81-83.

¹⁸ Nicholas Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) 28-31. Somoza stated “[j]ust give me the arms, and I’ll clean up Guatemala for you in no time” to President Truman, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and other U.S. officials. See Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) 229.

an operation later known as PBSUCCESS. To accomplish this, it took an expansive psychological warfare campaign to convince the majority of Guatemalans (sixty percent of the population) to support a movement to overthrow their president.

Chapter 1

“Leaving No Stone Unturned” The Development of Historiography on PBSUCCESS

For forty-five years following the conclusion of World War II, the United States exerted its influence in many of the developing regions of the world in order to curb the spread of communist and nationalist ideologies. Latin America was a crucial theater in which the United States asserted its political and economic policy in order to circumvent leftist governments that threatened American political and business interests. With the elections of Juan Arévalo and Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala (in 1944 and 1950 respectively), American hegemony in Central America, which went nearly unchecked for the first half of the twentieth century, was jeopardized. The United States moved toward intervention and implemented a covert operation known as PBSUCCESS that forced the democratically elected Arbenz to resign from the Guatemalan presidency. This ultimately resulted in the installation of a U.S. hand-picked dictator, Castillo Armas, by the end of the summer of 1954.

Scholarly interpretations of American intervention in Guatemala have varied over time. Current events and availability of primary source material played pivotal roles in the development of historians' understanding of the coup. Stephen Streeter outlined the schools of thought on Cold War U.S. foreign policy in Latin America in an article he wrote for *The History Teacher* in 2000. According to Streeter, realist (i.e. traditionalist) scholars of the 1950s and 1960s generally blamed the Soviet Union's expansionist ideologies for the rise of left-of-center governments in Latin America. Realists believed that American intervention was necessary to rollback communism and remove leaders

like Jacobo Arbenz for being “Soviet puppets.” Even while events were still unfolding in Guatemala in 1954, writers were offering conjectures on the necessity for the United States to halt the progression of what many believed to be the prelude to communist takeover in Central America. Due to the negative impact of the Vietnam War, starting in the late 1960s, revisionist scholars began to blame the United States for their intervention because it wished to expand its overseas markets through its foreign assets. This paradigm was revised over the course of the next two decades with the revelation of new source material and the advancement of economic theories such as dependency theory. As revisionism ran its course by the early 1980s, newly released primary source material from State Department archives and documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) that provided scholars with the ability to challenge the theories put forth by revisionist historians. These post-revisionists, although tricky to accurately characterize, incorporated both strategic and economic factors into their analysis.¹⁹ Scholars since the mid 1950s have taken into account new revelations on the affairs in Guatemala and have offered new interpretations over time, educating the field of history on U.S. Cold War policy toward its southern neighbors.

Realist Scholars of the 1950s

Realists looked at the Cold War and warned of a bleak future if the United States did not play an active role in containing communist threats from the two major communist powers, the USSR and China. Daniel James summed up the feelings of these scholars in the mid-1950s in his book, *Red Design for the Americas: Guatemalan*

¹⁹ Stephen M. Streeter, “Interpreting the 1954 U.S. Intervention in Guatemala: Realist, Revisionist, and Postrevisionist Perspectives,” *History Teacher* 34 (November 2000) 62.

Prelude. “We enter upon a new era in our history. We face...the prospect of continuous struggle against Communism on a hemispheric scale. We face the possibility even of war—war on our own shores of the kind hitherto characteristic of Asia. Such is the meaning of Moscow’s first attempt to conquer an American country, Guatemala.”²⁰ The scholars of the 1950s, much like the majority of Americans of the time, were greatly influenced by the Red Scare earlier in the decade, when suspected communist activities in the United States prompted multiple Congressional investigations of high-profile officials. Around the same time, the threat of communist takeover was experienced in various developing countries such as Iran, China, Vietnam, parts of Latin America, and Korea. The propaganda produced by the orchestrators of Operation PBSUCCESS also played a crucial role in influencing the interpretations of the traditional scholars writing about the intervention.²¹ Without other source material to rely on aside from the propaganda put forth by the architects of the intervention and various journalists’ observations, realist scholars came to the conclusion that Soviet influence in Guatemala was the primary reason for U.S. action in 1954.

Daniel James in 1954 outlined what he believed were communist activities in Guatemala that threatened the entire region. He noted the presence of Guatemalan consuls on the Honduran border in 1954 shortly before a general strike occurred with Honduras. James quoted Secretary of State Dulles who had a presumption that a labor work stoppage in Honduras occurred in the region where the Guatemalan government

²⁰ Daniel James, *Red Design for the Americas: Guatemalan Prelude* (New York: The John Day Company, 1954) 11.

²¹ See Stephen Streeter’s remarks on the roots of the realist interpretation in “Interpreting the 1954 Intervention in Guatemala,” 62-63. For information on the Red Scare in America and the spread of communism around the globe, see Martin Walker, *The Cold War: A History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1993) 59-82.

placed its consuls and noted that two of these consuls “were found to be deeply involved in the strike.”²² Another scholar, Frederick B. Pike, wrote in 1955 that the Guatemalan Communist Party, organized in 1947, changed its name to the *Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo* or Guatemalan Workers’ Party in 1952. By doing this, the party received full political rights within the country and quickly succeeded in infiltrating Guatemala’s labor organizations. Using the land reform law instituted in 1952 by Jacobo Arbenz, this party seized control of the labor movement in the countryside.²³ Realist scholars like James and Pike viewed the actions by labor parties in Central America as being controlled by or, at the very least, highly influenced by communists. What these scholars failed to take into account was the mistreatment of workers in this region by American-owned businesses during the first half of the twentieth century. When working classes in Guatemala stood against this exploitation and promoted their own economic interests, it was seen as hostile by American economic and diplomatic groups. This era in which these scholars wrote was witness to confrontations between capitalism and Marxism around the globe and, as a result, the only explanation for this change in Guatemala for realists was an aggressive communist influence. According to realist scholars, American intervention in Guatemala in 1954 occurred in response to Soviet intervention, which was a direct violation of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine.

Other realist scholars of the 1950s attributed U.S. policy to preventing communist takeover as well, but they also added different explanations to the roots of communist activity in Guatemala. In an article published in 1954 for the *International Journal*, William Krehm outlined the Guatemalan support for democratic movements throughout

²² Daniel James, *Red Design for the Americas*, 195-196

²³ Frederick B. Pike, “Guatemala, the United States, and Communism in the Americas,” *The Review of Politics* 17, no. 2 (April 1955) 242-243

the circum-Caribbean against military dictatorships supported by the United States. He argued that in retaliation for the support Guatemala gave to the Caribbean Legion, the United States placed an arms embargo on the country.²⁴ Krehm attributed the nationalist tendencies of Guatemala under Arévalo, and the actions taken by the Caribbean Legion to communism, rather than revolutionaries attempting to thwart U.S.-backed dictatorships in the region. This was a similar tendency for realist scholars when writing on nationalism in Latin America.

Many of the realist scholars of the 1950s argued that America acted upon a potential communist threat to the Western Hemisphere in order to prevent communism from spreading to other Latin American nations. Influenced by the Truman Doctrine of 1947 which worked to actively contain the spread of communism by not openly engaging in armed conflict with the Soviet Union, realists interpreted the economic nationalism of Guatemala similar to the American policymakers. According to Daniel James, the agrarian reforms signed into law by Arbenz in 1952 facilitated an offensive by communists to take their “war of attrition” out of the Guatemalan capital and attack Guatemalan and American investments in the countryside.²⁵ Other realists in the mid-1950s made a case that communist influence in Guatemala began to grow in the 1940s under Arévalo. In 1956, John D. Martz argued that Arévalo was not opposed to communism and did little to curb the communists’ growing power during his presidency. He advanced his argument further by stating that Arbenz, although not a communist, aided them by not uprooting the party when he had a chance in 1951.²⁶

²⁴ William Krehm, “A Victory for the West in Guatemala?,” *International Journal* 9, no. 4 (Autumn, 1954) 298. For a precise definition of the Caribbean Legion see Gleijeses, 107-116.

²⁵ Daniel James, *Red Design for the Americas*, 123.

²⁶ John D. Martz, *Communist Infiltration in Guatemala* (New York: Vintage Press, 1956) 47.

The anti-communist feeling in America inspired the realist scholars' arguments of the 1950s and influenced their choice of sources. The sources made available to realist scholars by the late 1950s helped to build a case for the necessity of American intervention abroad to prevent the spread of communism. Ronald M. Schneider utilized a General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers' public document to show the remorse felt by Guatemalan labor unions when Soviet leader Joseph Stalin died in 1953.²⁷ By showing the sadness felt by the Guatemalan working class, Schneider attempted to reveal the connections between communism and Guatemalan workers, thus justifying American intervention there. Schneider was a bit more objective in his analysis of Operation PBSUCCESS though; accurately noting in his epilogue that the laboring classes of Guatemala for the first time in the country's history had the ability to "freely organize, bargain collectively, and strike."²⁸ This opened the door for later revisionist scholars to take a much closer look at the social and economic factors involved and critique the United States not just for its intervention but also for its contribution to a decades-long exploitation of the Guatemalan peasantry and working class.

The Development of Revisionist Interpretations, 1960s and early-1970s

While realists of the 1950s focused on the power politics of the Cold War, by the late 1960s scholars began to strongly question their interpretations. Escalation of tensions in Vietnam brought criticisms against the government by much of America's youth and from left-of-center scholars working in its universities. Historians in this era began to critique the United States' foreign policy in the developing world. For many of

²⁷ Ronald M. Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala, 1944-1954*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958) 265.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 302

these revisionists, the United States intervened to protect its economic interests and maintain its “informal empire.” Some wrote that the intervention in Guatemala in 1954 served as a precedent for U.S. Cold War foreign policy that justified intervention wherever its interests were threatened.²⁹ D.F. Fleming argued in 1966 that because the United States helped so many of the world’s trouble spots, it dangerously weakened its economy, neglected its poor, and in attempting to curb communism, it helped to promote right-wing dictatorships around the world.³⁰ These beliefs caused many revisionists to rethink American foreign policy during the Cold War. These revisionists were far more critical of U.S. actions than the realists and began to critique U.S. domestic policies and private interests in their analysis of Washington’s Latin American policy.

Helped by new sources, such as Congressional testimony given in the 1960s by many of the key American actors in the 1954 intervention, revisionist scholars proposed novel interpretations on how much of a role the United States played in the overthrow of Arbenz. In 1971, Max Gordon argued that prior to the 1944 revolution that brought Arévalo to power, American-owned corporations monopolized Guatemala’s key economic regions, relegated the nation’s workforce to dependency status, stagnated the growth of Guatemala’s economy, and provided political backing to oppressive regimes that perpetuated an impoverished society.³¹ After the elections of Arévalo and Arbenz, when hundreds of thousands of acres of land owned by UFCO were expropriated, the United States began to move toward a counterrevolution. Gordon revealed that months

²⁹ See William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1972) 21; Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) 700-701.

³⁰ D.F. Fleming, “The Costs and Consequences of the Cold War,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 366 (July 1966) 127

³¹ Max Gordon, “A Case History of U.S. Subversion: Guatemala, 1954,” *Science and Society* 35, no. 2 (Summer 1971) 134

after the inauguration of Eisenhower as president, Spruille Braden, an ex-assistant secretary of state for Latin America, promoted American intervention in Guatemala to the administration. Ironically, Braden worked as a public relations director for UFCO in 1953 and issued a follow-up statement to a speech he gave at Dartmouth College attacking Guatemala's agrarian reform law.³² The connections drawn by historians between politicians and consultants for the UFCO proved to be a major turning point in the scholarship on the 1954 intervention. It provided later revisionist historians with a crucial argument by which to base their critiques of American involvement in Operation PBSUCCESS.

Studies conducted in the 1970s by social scientists began to delve deeply into the economic causes of the 1954 counterrevolution. In a study published in 1975, Robert Wasserstrom examined the influence that UFCO played in everyday Guatemalan life. In an attempt to debunk theories that posited that remote communities of indigenous people carried on a sense of economic backwardness in Guatemala (and elsewhere in Latin America), Wasserstrom studied the efforts made by Presidents Arévalo and Arbenz to assimilate indigenous communities into the Guatemalan political economy.³³ The arguments made by Wasserstrom revealed that Arbenz favored economic nationalism. That Arbenz treated Guatemalan *fincas* modestly under his agrarian reform compared to the foreign agribusinesses such as UFCO is reflected in much of the revisionist

³² Ibid. 142

³³ Wasserstrom, "Revolution in Guatemala", 445-455. A number of years before Wasserstrom published his article, Frank Tannenbaum influenced many scholars studying Indian policy in Latin America as a leading scholar in the *indigenista* school of thought. He associated primitive Indian communities with backwardness which in turn stalled economic development in Mexico, Guatemala, and elsewhere in Latin America. Utilizing studies conducted by scholars Pablo González Casanova and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (who studied Mexican indigenous groups) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Wasserstrom argued that indigenous communities in Guatemala and Mexico could be found very close to urban centers where they played a major part in the national economy by selling agricultural products and some manufactured goods at very low prices to *mestizo* middlemen.

scholarship that downplayed the role of communism as the primary reason for American intervention in 1954.

The “Peak” of the Revisionist School of Thought, late-1970s and early-1980s

By the 1970s, economic theories were influencing much of the scholarship on U.S. foreign affairs, Guatemala being no exception. The Dependency Theory (and later World Systems Theory) became the foundation for much of the analysis conducted on Operation PBSUCCESS in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Author José Aybar de Soto examined many of the elements of U.S. involvement in Guatemala and placed the intervention into the context of the Dependency Theory. Aybar de Soto examined UFCO’s role in the overthrow of Arbenz and argued that there was an “interlocking nature between public and private sectors” which allowed the company to influence American policymakers.³⁴ He argued that the United States was a “core” nation in relation to a “periphery” state of Guatemala in the world economy. The arguments made by revisionists in the 1970s of the interdependence of private companies to public policy in the United States reflected the greater emphasis placed upon economics as the primary influence on American Cold War foreign policy.

In 1982, Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer wrote *Bitter Fruit* that advanced Aybar de Soto’s interpretation of the 1954 American-led coup in Guatemala. These authors offered the clearest exposition of the revisionist position to date and synthesized the works of earlier revisionist historians. Utilizing State Department communications, these authors revealed that Secretary of State Dulles authorized the American ambassador

³⁴José Aybar de Soto, *Dependency and Intervention: The Case of Guatemala in 1954*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979) 237

to Guatemala, John Peurifoy, to ensure that Castillo Armas, the Guatemalan president who took control of Guatemala soon after the coup, offered the United Fruit Company a generous contract.³⁵ The Dependency Theory and attention to economic forces shaping U.S. policy led writers to look at the connections between private business interests and public policy. It also led to many interpretations placing the blame for U.S. intervention on its economic objectives.

The groundbreaking work of Schlesinger and Kinzer utilized previously unreleased documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). It proved to be a startling revelation of the connection that existed between U.S. economic interests and foreign policy. These authors debunked realist theories of the 1950s. Schlesinger and Kinzer revealed that the arguments that the Soviet Union was attempting to establish a base in Guatemala did not have merit. Guatemala had no diplomatic connections to the USSR or any other nation in the Soviet bloc with the exception of Czechoslovakia. The authors provided a long list of ties that Eisenhower Administration officials had with UFCO, including Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother, CIA Director Allen, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs John Moors Cabot, UN Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, and Undersecretary of State Bedell Smith whom Schlesinger and Kinzer revealed to be “seeking an executive job with United Fruit while helping to plan the coup against Guatemala”.³⁶ For many scholars of the previous generation studying Operation PBSUCCESS, this information was not available when

³⁵ Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 218

³⁶ Ibid. 106-107. See also Jonathon L. Fried, Marvin E. Gettleman, Deborah T. Levenson, and Nancy Peckenham, eds., *Guatemala in Rebellion: Unfinished History* (New York: Grove Press, 1983) 69. The authors, in a post script to Max Gordon’s 1971 article entitled “A Case History of U.S. Subversion”, remarked that the inspiration for the 1944 revolution in Guatemala came from Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, not the Soviet Union, as many realist scholars of the 1950s argued.

their works were published. The publication of *Bitter Fruit* in 1982 was the apex of revisionist scholarship because it utilized previously unexplored primary source material to provide a lucid clarification on the connection between the economic interests of policymakers and the covert operation that deposed a democratically-elected president in a sovereign nation.

Post-Revisionism, 1980s-Present

The post-revisionist school of thought on American foreign policy in Latin America began to take shape around the same time revisionist interpretations were reaching their height in popularity in the early 1980s. Post-revisionists incorporated many of the economic paradigms that revisionists propagated, but these scholars placed a much greater emphasis on ideological and cultural aspects for U.S. intervention in Latin America.³⁷ This school of thought is much more difficult to accurately define when applying it to the 1954 coup in Guatemala due to the many topics that were (and still are) explored by these scholars. In 1982, Richard Immerman challenged Schlesinger and Kinzer's theory that the coup was ordered to promote the economic interests of the United States. Immerman argued that although United Fruit Company's interests were harmed by the efforts of the Arbenz government to expropriate land to peasants, the company still retained 150,000 acres of land in Guatemala. He also argued that the Eisenhower administration confused the terms nationalist and communist when referring to Arbenz.³⁸ This interpretation reexamined some of the elements of realist interpretations of earlier historians. It focused on the economic motivation for the coup

³⁷ Stephen Streeter, "Interpreting the 1954 Intervention in Guatemala," 62, 65.

³⁸ Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982) 183.

but also provided a domestic political argument of Eisenhower's anticommunist foreign policy. Immerman showed that both political and economic forces shaped the intervention in 1954 and this helped to usher in the post-revisionist school of thought to the field of study on Operation PBSUCCESS.

The early 1980s were a period of transition for scholarship on the 1954 U.S. intervention in Guatemala. As new source material became uncovered, new studies began to explore previously unexamined elements of the coup. In 1983, Gordon Bowen argued that both American and Guatemalan actors played pivotal roles in bringing about the 1954 coup; at times, working symbiotically. Bowen noted that even though UFCO lost the most land under Arbenz's agrarian reform, Guatemalan military officers with ties to banana and coffee plantations lost many acres of land prior to Decree 900 being enacted in 1952. Anti-government violence increased significantly between 1951 and 1953 during a time where the United States pledged much less support to the efforts to overthrow Arbenz. Looking at Guatemalan politics, Bowen cited U.S. Ambassador John Peurifoy's reaction to the seizure of UFCO lands. Peurifoy, handpicked by the Eisenhower Administration to oversee the covert operations in Guatemala, quickly changed the subject to communists in the Arbenz government at his first meeting with the Guatemalan president. Bowen argued that although communists were small in number in the Arbenz government, they did exist and Arbenz knew that they were there. Combining secondary literature with declassified State Department and CIA documents, Bowen came to the conclusion that "the communists were too successful at democratic politics to allow democracy to survive."³⁹ In other words, the small number of communists in the

³⁹ Gordon L. Bowen, "U.S. Foreign Policy toward Radical Change: Covert Operations in Guatemala, 1950-1954," *Latin American Perspectives* 10 (Winter 1983): 89-92.

Guatemalan government used the social democratic government to their advantage, playing upon the social revolution that began in 1944.

Some scholars by the late 1980s began to examine new areas of study to prove their arguments that the primary reason for U.S. intervention in Latin America was economics. Gabriel Kolko in 1988 examined U.S. hegemony in Latin America in the late 1940s and 1950s. Kolko argued in his book, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1980*, that the United States is “preeminently an economic civilization” and that this premise was deeply rooted in the policy of the United States. In this work Kolko established the idea that America promoted capitalism in such a way that its business interests were implemented.⁴⁰ As a revisionist historian critical of U.S. foreign policy, Kolko augmented many of the ideas put forth by scholars like Aybar de Soto, Schlesinger, and Kinzer. Although the revisionist paradigm was still relevant by the time this book was published, scholars by this point were beginning to focus more attention on untapped sources which facilitated variant interpretative works by the end of the decade.

In 1988, Jim Handy sought to show the effects of Decree 900 on Guatemalans. He shifted away from the arguments of earlier scholars who considered the agrarian reform to be a foreign policy issue concerning the expropriation of UFCO lands. Handy, instead, consulted Guatemalan source material to reveal the various forces that led to Decree 900, the domestic support and opposition to the program, and the manner by which the law was applied in the country. By drawing upon the archival records from Guatemala as they pertained to Decree 900, Handy illustrated that the movement assisted

⁴⁰ Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1980*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988) 117.

the development of large working class organizations that were crucial to the law's implementation. According to Handy, when Arbenz was elected president in 1950, two-thirds of the population relied on agriculture as their source of income. For many decades, "land dispossession had helped bind the majority of the population into depths of poverty." Handy summarized the history of land allocation in the country from the time of Spanish colonial rule to the days leading up to the revolution of 1944. He mentioned that land expropriation from the indigenous population did not reach a wholesale level until commercial cultivation of coffee became widespread in the late 1800s and by 1944, more than half of the farming units, some 165,850 families, owned less than what was required for subsistence. Handy argued that Guatemalan politicians during the revolutionary period placed agrarian reform above all other legislation. Reform under Arévalo was done with care due to resistance by leaders of the armed forces. The Arévalo government withstood more than thirty coup attempts during his presidency. Arbenz, however, promised agrarian reform in his campaign speeches and delivered on his promise in May 1952. Handy outlined the revisions that the original bill underwent as it went through the Guatemalan legislature and also listed the "hierarchical series of organizations" that Decree 900 established within the country.⁴¹ Handy contributed a very important addition to the historiography on Guatemala by studying land reform in Guatemala and the effects that it had on both large Guatemalan landowners and peasants.

Jim Handy provided a follow-up study to his research on agrarian reform in 1989 with a study of the complex differences among the Guatemalan population. Handy noted

⁴¹ Jim Handy, "'The Most Precious Fruit of the Revolution': The Guatemalan Agrarian Reform, 1952-1954," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 68, no. 4 (November 1988) 675-696.

that much of the agricultural production was provided by the labor of indigenous people. When coffee production began to increase substantially by the late 1800s, Guatemalan Indians were, at times, forced into laboring on the coffee plantations. In the years leading up to the 1944 revolution, many belittling myths developed among the non-indigenous population of Guatemala about culture in the countryside. Handy stated that some within the country advocated wiping out Indian culture altogether in order to “solve” this problem.⁴² Handy noted that during the revolutionary period, the Ladino population in rural Guatemala became increasingly alarmed when indigenous groups congregated in large numbers outside of the small towns. This hysteria often resulted in army interventions to prevent mass uprisings. Adding to the fear of a mass Indian revolt was a book published in Guatemala in 1946 detailing the events of *la matanza* in El Salvador in the 1930s. The book contained ghastly photographs of the destruction to both lives and property. Handy noted that the link between communism and Indian revolt, as seen in El Salvador with *la matanza* played a major role in the hysteria of the people living in the Guatemalan countryside.⁴³ This article provided a background for why the agrarian reforms instituted by Arbenz led to unrest in the rural regions of Guatemala. This fear of unrest prompted Ladino elites in the countryside to call upon the army to quell the relatively minor disturbances that occurred between Ladinos and indigenous groups

⁴² Jim Handy, “‘A Sea of Indians’: Ethnic Conflict and the Guatemalan Revolution, 1944-1952,” *The Americas* 46, no. 2 (October 1989) 189-191

⁴³ *Ibid.* 196-198. *La matanza* (translated to the massacre in English) in El Salvador was a popular uprising against the government of El Salvador led by communist forces and supported by indigenous people in the western part of the country. The result was a serious crackdown on peasant and indigenous groups and resulted in the death of thousands of people at the hands of the Salvadoran military.

between 1944 and 1952. To this end, Handy concluded that this fear was as much a part of the overthrow of Arbenz in 1954 as any other element posited by previous scholars.⁴⁴

In the early 1990s, historians continued to expand upon the earlier works of revisionist and post-revisionist scholars by examining many other new elements to explain American intervention in Latin America. Like Jim Handy in the late 1980s, Piero Gleijeses studied the 1954 America-led coup in Guatemala by utilizing Guatemalan sources. He wrote an article for *The Journal of Latin American Studies* in 1990 that provided an alternative view on the Guatemalan revolution that began in 1944. Gleijeses argued that a turning point in the revolution occurred in 1949 with the assassination of the Chief of the Armed Forces, Francisco Arana. The conservative colonel aspired to become the next president of Guatemala in 1950. With his death, it helped to allow Jacobo Arbenz to ascend to this role the following year. According to Gleijeses, the actors responsible for the death of Arana are enveloped in controversy. Some scholars speculated that members of the Guatemalan upper class were responsible for his death due to his hesitancy to launch a coup against Arévalo. Gleijeses riposted this assertion by stating that it defied logic because Arana was the only man capable of gaining the presidency who supported the elites in the country. Arana opposed Arévalo but did not wish to take the presidency through extralegal means. Gleijeses conducted convincing research that the death of Arana came as a result of his personal ambitions as a plotter. He did not wish to take over the presidency but invited his own murder by physically threatening Arévalo days before his assassination. As a result, Jacobo Arbenz ascended

⁴⁴ Ibid. 203-204. The two articles published in 1988 and 1989 by Jim Handy ultimately led to publication of a monograph in 1994 that went into greater detail on how ethnic conflict and the agrarian reform law led to the counterrevolution in 1954. See Jim Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

to the presidency the following year and set in motion the events that lead to the counterrevolution in 1954.⁴⁵ The article written by Piero Gleijeses, along with the articles written by Jim Handy are indirectly related to the 1954 counterrevolution. However, they make up an integral part of the historiography on the event because each helps explain the internal forces that shaped the events in 1954.

In 1991 Piero Gleijeses provided a great addition to the literature on the 1954 counterrevolution in Guatemala when he published *Shattered Hope*. By interviewing numerous people living in Guatemala and ex-CIA officials over a twelve year period, Gleijeses provided a detailed analysis of the relationship between the U.S. and Guatemala from 1944-1954. He supplied a succinct political and economic analysis of the event. Gleijeses quoted Jacobo Arbenz's closest friend as stating that the coup in 1954 would have occurred even if Guatemala did not grow bananas.⁴⁶ This assertion suggested that the United States did have an anti-communist motive for deposing Arbenz. He acknowledged that there was some basis to the argument that Arbenz was a communist, but the government was still headed by a presidential system.⁴⁷

By embarking on this enriching study, Gleijeses offered the most explicit narrative of the combined economic and political factors involved in the Guatemalan counterrevolution to the literature. He noted that despite the restrictions placed on American companies dominating the Guatemalan economy, the leaders of Guatemala during this decade were nationalists and sought to become an ally of the U.S. and not just

⁴⁵ Piero Gleijeses, "The Death of Francisco Arana: A Turning Point in the Guatemalan Revolution," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 22, no. 3 (October 1990) 527-550

⁴⁶ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 3-4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 182

a satellite.⁴⁸ Gleijeses showed through an exploration of American media articles that when Decree 900 was enacted, it was received in the United States with much concern that the communist party agenda was being played out by a weak executive in Arbenz.⁴⁹ His work helped to set the field of study on Guatemala in a new direction as the Cold War ended. The convincing arguments conceived in *Shattered Hope* revealed that there were political and economic motives for the intervention and that the two were interconnected.

The early 1990s were a pivotal period for scholarship on Guatemala and many other events related to the Cold War. As global tensions eased with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, so too did new archives open which allowed scholars to develop new research on Operation PBSUCCESS. Earlier scholars wrote with limited empirical evidence which often resulted in implications of blame placed on communists working inside Guatemala or the United States' continuation of asserting hegemonic influence on its neighbors to the south. As more archival sources became available, the field of study expanded and a great deal of new interpretations came about. The post-revisionist school, limited at first and often containing many of the same elements from revisionist scholars, really took off in the 1990s beginning with Gleijeses' *Shattered Hope*. As the decade wore on, new research provided the field with detailed analyses of the Central Intelligence Agency's role in the coup along with updates to earlier economic analyses of the coup.

In 1991, Susanne Jonas published a clear account of the 1954 counterrevolution and subsequent civil war that engulfed the country. Conducting research in Guatemala

⁴⁸ Ibid. 117

⁴⁹ Ibid. 232-233

for Jonas began in the 1960s when the country was in the midst of a civil war that lasted until 1996. As she explained in her introduction to her 1991 publication, she became entranced by the country. In the light of new developments in the country in the 1970s and 1980s, she wrote a historical narrative on the country.⁵⁰ Jonas acknowledged the earlier interpretations by revisionist historians that there was a link between the Eisenhower Administration and the United Fruit Company. However, she also questioned how strong the link was and whether it was the primary factor in prompting the execution of Operation PBSUCCESS in 1954. According to Jonas, “[t]he U.S. government and private U.S. investors became concerned over the increasing radicalization of the Revolution under Arbenz” who increasingly allied itself with members of the Guatemalan peasantry and working classes.⁵¹ To that end, she helped to advance the post-revisionist perspective that political and economic elements played crucial roles in the toppling of the Arbenz government.

In 1994, Martha Cottam critiqued the U.S. government for oversimplifying Jacobo Arbenz’s government in Guatemala. Cottam argued that the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations both saw the nationalist tendencies of Arbenz as hostile to American economic interests and were likely influenced by communist activity in the country.⁵² Other historians in the late 1990s made very good use of the declassified State Department documents after the Cold War and came to similar conclusions about the Eisenhower Administration. James F. Siekmeier examined the nationalism of Latin American nations like Guatemala and Bolivia and argued that for American foreign

⁵⁰ Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and U.S. Power* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991) 1-3

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 32

⁵² Martha Cottam, *Images and Intervention: U.S. Policies in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994), 38.

policy makers, the economic nationalism of these nations posed a far-greater challenge than communism.⁵³ Michael Krenn explored the interdependence between the United States and Latin American countries. He argued that the United States realized during the Cold War that it needed the developing nations of Latin America in order to expand its markets, acquire raw materials, and gain strategic positions in global diplomacy with a united Western Hemisphere. In turn, the Latin American nations received protection, capital, and technology from the United States.⁵⁴ These two authors utilized State Department records to provide new interpretations about the U.S. Latin American policy. By utilizing these records, Siekmeier and Krenn advanced the post-revisionist approach by exploring the economic interdependence between the United States and Latin America as a reason for American involvement.

In the 1990s, a major breakthrough for scholars studying the 1954 coup in Guatemala occurred. In response to the former Soviet Union opening its archives to help answer many questions about the mysteries of the Cold War behind the Iron Curtain, the Central Intelligence Agency's Director in 1992, Robert Gates, "announced that all documents over thirty years old would be reviewed for declassification."⁵⁵ This allowed many historians to research the role of the CIA in the execution of Operation PBSUCCESS. Shortly after the Agency's announcement that it planned to "open up" its archives and shed light on the secrets of its covert operations during the Cold War,

⁵³ James F. Siekmeier *Aid, Nationalism, and Inter-American Relations: Guatemala, Bolivia, and the United States, 1945-1961*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 3-4.

⁵⁴ Michael L. Krenn, *The Chains of Interdependence: U.S. Policy toward Latin America, 1945-1954*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 7.

⁵⁵ Nicholas Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) vii. Although many documents were declassified as a result of this announcement, the civil war that had been taking place in Guatemala since the late 1950s did not end until 1996 and there were still intelligence operatives working in the country. Many documents on the coup were not released until 2003.

Nicholas Cullather was hired to conduct research on Operation PBSUCCESS. Initially, his findings were kept secret by the Agency to be distributed only among members of the CIA. However, after President Bill Clinton issued an executive order in 1996 to declassify and release hundreds of thousands of pages of material, and the Agency requested that two-thirds of it remain secret, many complaints arose. As a result, the Agency eventually released Cullather's study as part of an ongoing campaign to be less secretive about Guatemala and other covert operations it conducted during the Cold War.⁵⁶

Cullather's study, although still containing classified materials blacked out in printed copies available to the public, was a very clear narrative of the CIA's role in Operation PBSUCCESS. At the very least, it created opportunities for other scholars to answer questions related to the operation that had previously not been explored. Cullather addressed many of the critiques that the Agency miscalculated the communist influence in the country and offered a rebuttal to these appraisals. Cullather's research on the CIA documents revealed that officials in the United States viewed Guatemala as it did other parts of the world that fell to communism. To those officials, if communism gained a foothold in Guatemala, the chances of it spreading to other countries in the Western Hemisphere increased significantly.

Cullather synthesized how the Agency viewed Arbenz's government in 1952. He stated that many within the United States' foreign policy staff recognized that communists only held a minor influence in the country at the time. However, communists were slowly gaining influence. Plans to enforce diplomatic and economic sanctions on Guatemala or UFCO abandoning its operations in the country would only

⁵⁶ Ibid. xiii-xv

work to strengthen the resolve of the communists in the country. The CIA recommended that covert action be taken to remove Arbenz from power, a motion that the Pentagon agreed with.⁵⁷ Cullather detailed the Agency's progress in planning and carrying out the operation but intentionally omitted documents related to the finances for the operation as well as the SHERWOOD radio propaganda campaign that worked to undermine the Arbenz government. Cullather's study was a crucial addition to the literature on Operation PBSUCCESS as it helped other scholars in the following years to continue researching CIA operations in the country and answer many of the questions still remaining about its role in the 1954 coup.

Scholars in the 2000s went into greater detail on the CIA operations during the Cold War era. John Prados used declassified State Department and CIA documents to write a lengthy book on the CIA's covert operations. Although his work was not specific to the operations in Guatemala, he did reveal evidence that the CIA carried out a convincing propaganda campaign against Arbenz's government. In April 1954, reports surfaced that the president of Nicaragua, Anastacio Somoza, averted an assassination attempt by the Caribbean Legion, a leftist group operating in the Caribbean which was fighting against totalitarianism. According to Prados, the CIA worked strenuously to pin a connection to Arbenz in an effort to undermine his government.⁵⁸ Another scholar, Tim Weiner, revealed that the CIA planted fake news stories in the Guatemalan media after Colonel Al Haney's liaison to Castillo Armas, the CIA's choice to carry out the coup, leaked that a plot was underway to depose Arbenz.⁵⁹ Weiner highlighted the imaginary

⁵⁷ Ibid. 8-9, 24-25

⁵⁸ John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006) 116

⁵⁹ Al Haney was Director of the CIA Allen Dulles' hand-picked special deputy in charge of overseeing Operation PBSUCCESS from its headquarters in Opa Locka, Florida.

uprisings broadcast by the CIA on its radio program in Guatemala and showed that the effect of these broadcasts turned Jacobo Arbenz into the dictator that the CIA described in earlier propaganda.⁶⁰

Authors since the 1950s have revealed an immense amount of information about the 1954 coup in Guatemala that overturned a decade-long reform effort attempting to change the desolate fortunes of an overwhelming majority of Guatemala's population. However, some questions remain unanswered. When Jacobo Arbenz resigned on June 27, 1954, he did so reluctantly and with the intention of not plunging his country into a violent civil war that would upend all of the reforms he and his predecessor enacted. What caused such a swift destabilization of his government? Surely, the undersized armed forces under the command of Castillo Armas did not wield enough power to successfully overthrow the government. As evidenced by Cullather's study, the CIA embarked on a massive radio propaganda campaign that some scholars have attributed to being the single-most crucial cause for the demise of the Arbenz regime in Guatemala. U.S. scholars have written pieces (a paragraph to a few pages) on the CIA's propaganda, its radio broadcasts known as SHERWOOD, and their effects, but little attention has been given to precisely how the operation was carried out. More importantly, the question of which methods were used to provoke the Guatemalan people to read the propaganda and tune their shortwave radio dials to the CIA station and listen to the broadcasts remains unanswered. This research project intends to broaden the understanding of this historical problem. Evidence obtained through declassified State Department and CIA documents

⁶⁰ Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008) 108, 113. Haney's response to the leaked information about the CIA's plot were fabricated headlines such as UFOs flying over Guatemala, the birth of sextuplets in rural Guatemala, and a decree by Arbenz that he was "forcing all Catholic troops to join a new church that worshipped [Joseph] Stalin!"

reveals that the Agency's biggest success in the entire operation was its ability to gain psychological intelligence through various sources and formulate it into a very powerful radio and religious propaganda campaign. People did not listen to the radio broadcasts to hear political propaganda they could easily obtain from newspapers or various other sources. Rather, they tuned into the station for its entertainment programs that contained music and comedy selections. The intelligence gathered on the Guatemalan religious background also proved crucial to the psychological warfare campaign as people heard from priests and from the radio broadcasts that communism was an atheist ideology. Less than two months after the station launched, these people, who first became hooked by its music and entertainment programs, became convinced that a massive invasion led by Castillo Armas was underway when in reality the invasion force was barely 1,500 and the troops stopped after only traveling six miles into the country.⁶¹ Hence, a conclusion can be drawn that the psychological intelligence gathered by the CIA in the months leading up to PBSUCCESS was the determining factor in the operation's triumph. The following chapters will incorporate research undertaken on the SHERWOOD campaign and the religious background of Guatemala to broaden our understanding of the 1954 coup in Guatemala.

⁶¹ Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006): 141-142.

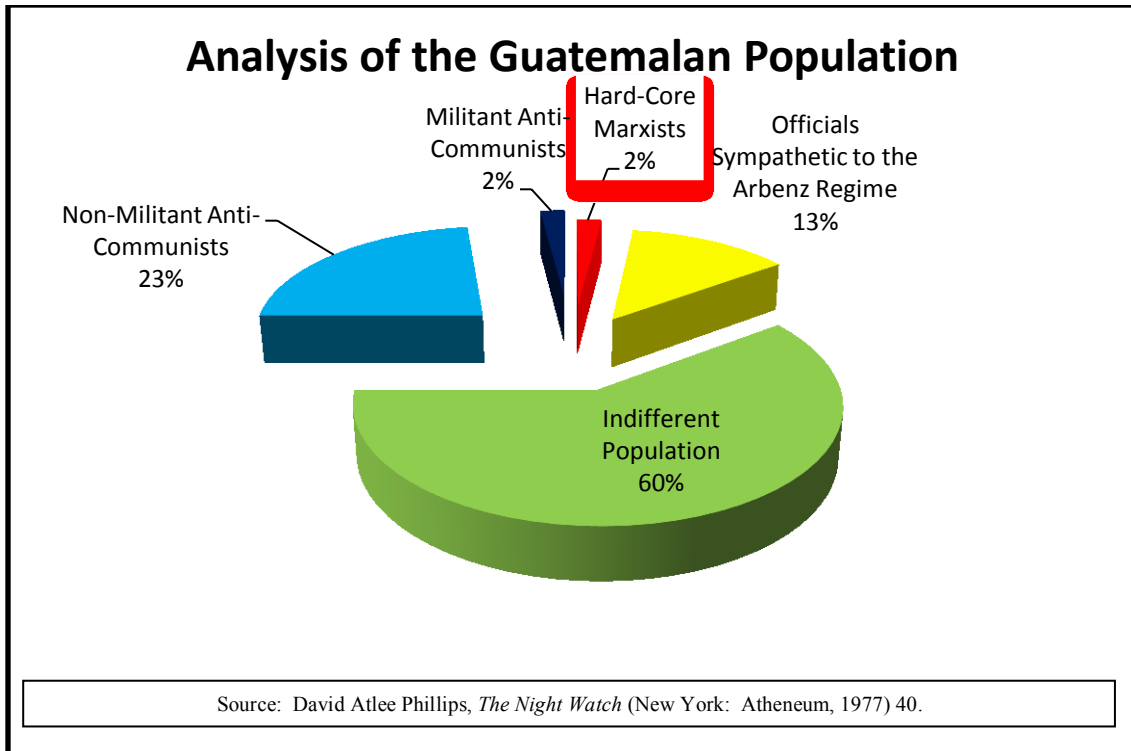
Chapter 2

“Overt Espionage”: Preparing Guatemala for Regime Change

In 1953, the CIA was tasked by President Eisenhower’s administration to remove Jacobo Arbenz’s government, thought at the time to be dominated by communists, and replacing it with a regime friendly to United States’ interests. “This mission was to be accomplished in such a manner as to retain all plausible denial of United States participation.”⁶² Twenty years earlier, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt formally expressed that it was not the intention of the United States to intervene in the affairs of its neighbors in the Western Hemisphere, a course of action collectively known as the Good Neighbor Policy. Actions against the Arbenz regime in Guatemala, whether overt or clandestine, would indicate that the United States government abandoned its non-interventionist principles toward its neighbors south of the Rio Grande and reaffirmed the imperialist tendencies of its foreign policy toward Latin America from 1898-1934.

By 1953, the United States perceived that there was a major security threat to the Western Hemisphere if Arbenz remained in power. The most direct way to remove this threat was an expansive propaganda campaign aimed at convincing a large segment of the Guatemalan population that its government was overrun by communists. The following graph indicates an assessment of the Guatemalan population made in April 1954 by two Guatemalan exiles hired by the CIA to carry out its radio propaganda campaign.

⁶² Central Intelligence Agency, “Report on Project PBSUCCESS,” CIA Historical Review Program, November 16, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000928348/DOC_0000928348.pdf (Accessed November 12, 2011) 3. The document itself does not contain page numbers. The page number designated on this and subsequent footnotes will reflect the page number on the .pdf documents taken from all online sources from the Historical Review files of the CIA (ie www.foia.cia.gov).



Two Guatemalan exiles, Mario López Otero and José Toron Barrios, accompanied David Atlee Phillips, the man chosen by the CIA to oversee the SHERWOOD campaign, to Guatemala in late April 1954 to prepare for the launch of *Radio Liberación*. The assessment provided by Otero and Barrios was meant to determine the size of the target audience for the radio broadcasts. The goal was to convince the overwhelming majority of the population that allowing Arbenz to remain president would bring about a communist takeover of the country.⁶³

The CIA's Preliminary Plans to Execute its Propaganda Program in Guatemala

For any operation to succeed, whether unconcealed or surreptitious, preparatory work is crucial. For the Central Intelligence Agency in the months leading up to the

⁶³ See David Atlee Phillips, *The Night Watch*, 40 and "Report on Project PBSUCCESS," 30.

execution of Operation PBSUCCESS, preparatory work meant the acquisition of psychological intelligence or PI. In a report dated February 8, 1954 and circulated to the operatives working toward implementing the psychological warfare program, the Agency defined psychological intelligence as follows:

PI is a matter of “feel” solidly supported by facts. PI constitutes deliberate, orderly examination of the attitudes in and toward a given situation of both friendly and hostile individuals and social groups. PI systematically analyzes the mind and mood of specific individuals and specific social groups in specific sub-areas of the target. Out of these specific observations, PI at regular intervals makes a general appraisal of the entire target area’s attitudes.⁶⁴

Prior to the circulation of this document within the Agency, psychological intelligence gathering began as early as 1951 to determine which segments of the Guatemalan population to target.

The CIA’s role in inciting the counterrevolution was centered upon increasing the chances that a recruited Guatemalan exile, Castillo Armas, would succeed in leading a coup that would force Arbenz’s resignation. However, for many of the planners working inside CIA headquarters in Washington, knowledge of Guatemala, and more specifically the revolution of 1944, was obscure. In order to carry out destabilization efforts, an enhanced understanding of the country was imperative. A document produced on September 4, 1953 helped to educate CIA operatives. The author of the document gave a brief historical analysis of the nation’s politics, provided population statistics, and supplied an economic assessment. According to the document’s author, the increasing toleration of communist activity within the country by Juan Arévalo and Jacobo Arbenz

⁶⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, “Psychological Intelligence,” February 8, 1954, CIA Historical Review Program, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000913632/DOC_0000913632.pdf (Accessed November 29, 2011) 2. The document does not provide the author’s name, but it can be concluded that he likely was well-educated on Guatemala because of the detailed synthesis he provided on Guatemalan history and, more importantly, on the revolution that began in 1944.

lead to increasing radical and nationalistic policies incongruent to American interests in the country. When Arbenz began to institute his agrarian reforms, it was erroneously believed that communists held 51 of the 56 seats in the Guatemalan legislature and dominated more than fifty percent of the government bureaucracies. The report briefed Agency planners that efforts to secure a successful counterrevolution could only be achieved by “preparing a more favorable climate inside of Guatemala.” A preliminary estimate of how long it would take to prepare for a psychological warfare campaign was four to six months and the CIA placed a greater emphasis on this in the fall of 1953.⁶⁵

For CIA planners of the propaganda campaign, the ability to convince the Guatemalan public that its government was not serving its best interests was a complicated task. To convince the population that its government was falling under communist control, the CIA needed careful planning. An assessment in August 1953 provided guidelines for which measures to employ prior to launching any massive anti-government propaganda campaign. To the CIA planners, it was imperative that evidence be obtained to support the notion that Arbenz’s government had mismanaged the country and that Guatemala was in worse shape in 1953 than when Arbenz took office in 1950. The CIA also needed to secure military and radio facilities inside Guatemala and garner support from other Central American nations to launch their program.⁶⁶

In late 1953, the CIA analyzed the Guatemalan government’s sympathies toward communism in the country. A secret report distributed only to members of the Agency in

⁶⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, No Title, CIA Historical Review Program, September 4, 1953, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914815/DOC_0000914815.pdf (Accessed November 12, 2011) 1-5

⁶⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, “WSBURNT Campaign,” CIA Historical Review, August 20, 1953, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914828/DOC_0000914828.pdf (Accessed November 12, 2011) 1. WSBURNT was a cryptonym used by the CIA which stood for Guatemala.

October 1953 revealed that the Arbenz government provided significant aid to communist media sources by censoring anti-communist propaganda from student groups and other media sources for its attacks on the Arbenz government for supporting communism. The report also revealed that producers of communist publications, such as the daily *Tribuna Popular*, handed out their newspapers free of charge to government officials who took them home for fear of losing their job. For the CIA, this implied that propaganda sympathetic to communism infiltrated the government. The information gathered from this CIA document also suggested that communists were using the social reform policies instituted by the Arbenz government and utilizing them as a means to connect communist interest to the overall Guatemalan welfare.⁶⁷ As suggested by the Agency's report, from the time of Arbenz's election, to the time in which Operation PBSUCCESS was in its preliminary planning stages, communist activity in the country progressed to the point that it presented the Agency with a difficult task to ensure that its message was heard by the Guatemalan people. However, it also gave the CIA fuel to attack the government's censorship of the free press by indicating that the Guatemalan government was possibly moving toward a communist dictatorship.

The plans undertaken by the CIA to institute its propaganda campaign in Guatemala centered first upon the education of the Latin American populace as to the dangers of international communism. It was broken down into three phases which were to commence on December 1, 1953. The objective of this operation was to inform the people and the governments of the circum-Caribbean of the theoretical tenets of communism. The Agency also wished to show how communism negatively affected

⁶⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "Communism in Guatemala," Memorandum for All WH Field Stations, CIA Historical Review, October 13, 1953, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914763/DOC_0000914763.pdf (Accessed November 16, 2011) 6.

other countries that fell to it by explaining the political, economic, and social ramifications of international Marxism. To achieve this, the CIA championed the capitalist economic system in a positive light and focused on reforms that could alleviate the economic and social ills plaguing much of the region. These reforms included plans to lower the cost of living, technical education of farmers, and agrarian reform directed at creating a new class of small property owners. It proposed scheduling international meetings with leaders from these countries in order to incorporate these proposals. Guatemala was the primary target of these efforts.⁶⁸ This report took into consideration the socioeconomic problems afflicting people in this region and suggested instituting a constructive propaganda campaign to promote the capitalist system. Its suggestions sought to invoke an understanding that, if given a choice, embracing communism would not relieve the quandaries that Latin American people endured. Rather, only by embracing a capitalist system would sufficient economic and social reforms be enacted to assuage these hardships.

Convincing a large number of Guatemalan people to comprehend ideas that a capitalist system served their best interests amid government censorship in Guatemala was a daunting assignment. In an effort to show that Arbenz was suppressing the free press, the CIA engineered to place a newspaper flier into circulation that it intended to have hindered or even confiscated by operatives working within the Arbenz government.⁶⁹ The Agency clearly had two goals in mind. First, the confiscation of the newspaper provided the CIA with the evidence it needed to show that the Guatemalan

⁶⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, "Ideas on the Execution of a Propaganda Program," CIA Historical Review, October 30, 1953, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914739/DOC_0000914739.pdf (Accessed November 12, 2011) 2-3

⁶⁹ Ibid. 7

government smothered a free press. Second, it also allowed the Agency to test the government's ability to censor anti-communist propaganda in the country. The intelligence obtained through this effort helped the CIA execute SHERWOOD and the psychological warfare campaign through religious services in 1954 by providing the Agency with better knowledge of where to establish the radio site and where to have Guatemalan priests broadcast their anti-communist message.⁷⁰

To advance its propaganda campaign, the CIA sent many of its intelligence officials to Guatemala during the planning stages of Operation PBSUCCESS in an effort to provide the planners in Washington with a background of the country. On December 1, 1953 a report was released to CIA Headquarters that provided an enhanced political understanding of the Guatemalan government. The report showed a connection between top communist officials in Guatemala and those in the Soviet Union. For example, the author stated that José Miguel Fortuny, leader of the Guatemalan Workers' Party and a suspected communist, visited the Soviet Union for several weeks in October 1952. Guatemalan delegations were also sent to nearly every peace and labor congress held in the communist nations of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.⁷¹ The information contained in this report did not directly link Guatemala to the Soviet Union or other communist nations. However, it did provide evidence that top Guatemalan government officials were sympathetic to communism and the Soviet bloc. As the CIA planned its propaganda campaign, this background work helped to show which standards needed to

⁷⁰ In the following chapter, details on priests' homilies given in churches in April 1954 will be examined. Although used, anti-communist messages in printed religious materials were not seen a potentially effective source due to the chances of government censorship.

⁷¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Background Information on Guatemala," CIA Historical Review, December 1, 1953, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914681/DOC_0000914681.pdf (Accessed November 12, 2011) 1-2

be a primary focus when the campaign was launched. The report emphasized that communists in Guatemala “talked a Marxist line”. In other words, the government officials advocated programs that helped the working class and the peasantry. However, government officials were disconnected from these segments of the Guatemalan population as they lived and grew up in the cities and never experienced the economic struggles that many of the workers and peasants had. To the CIA planners, the rhetoric used by communists in the countryside sounded like it derived from the Soviet Union and not from Guatemala. The document advised specifically for the Agency to “keep in mind the clear distinction between the communizing government of Guatemala and the Guatemalan people themselves.”⁷² By obtaining the evidence of the obvious differences between the Guatemalan people and their government, it allowed the CIA to build solid case against Arbenz and the officials working under him.

The CIA’s intentions to subvert communists in Guatemala centered first on recruiting anti-communist groups operating within the country and in neighboring El Salvador and Honduras. Of the groups most opposed to communism were middle and upper class university students. In Guatemala the organization, *Comite de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas* (CEUA), staunchly opposed communism and held anti-Arbenz demonstrations as early as 1951 in Guatemala City. The publication of the CEUA, entitled *Boletin del CEUAGE*, overtly produced its propaganda from Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Assessments of this propaganda by the CIA revealed the publications to be of a “higher caliber” than most documents of each type due to the writers having an intellectual background. The Agency believed that the newsletter produced by the CEUA was intended for an audience of middle and upper class readers.

⁷² Ibid. 3

The writer of an assessment report recommended to the Agency that it was necessary to continue to utilize the *Boletin del CEUAGE* and continue to make sure that it reached its target audience in large numbers.⁷³ Inspired by the victories of the CEUA propaganda efforts, the Agency began to encourage the CEUA to use other methods aside from printed material to get its message to a wider audience.

The CEUA used numerous tactics which included spreading over 100,000 stickers on buses and trains, defacing walls with anti-communist graffiti, sending funeral notices to Arbenz and José Miguel Fortuny, and a very effective campaign in March and April 1954 where they painted the number 32 on city wall. The number 32 represented Decree 32 of the Guatemalan constitution which forbade international politics in the country and was obviously a message cast to criticize the Arbenz government for allowing Soviet interference. The CEUA also sponsored a radio program entitled “Anti-Communist Hour” on *Radio Internacional*. On April 21, 1954, armed thugs entered the radio station as the program was broadcasts, beat up the broadcasters, and broke all of the station’s equipment.⁷⁴ The utilization of the student group by the CIA proved very valuable for three reasons. One, it allowed for the CIA to gather sufficient intelligence about the people of Guatemala and how receptive they were to various propaganda efforts. Two, it also helped the CIA attack the Guatemalan government while its own propaganda efforts were still in the planning stages. Third, and possibly most important, it showed the CIA that supporters of the Arbenz government and the government itself were capable of destroying the CIA’s own radio propaganda program. Realizing this potential, it allowed

⁷³ Central Intelligence Agency, “Comite de Estudiantes Universitados Anticomunistas Guatemaltecos en Exileo and the CEUAGE Propaganda Organ: Boletin del CEUAGE,” CIA Historical Review, December 1, 1953, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000923964/DOC_0000923964.pdf (Accessed November 12, 2011).

⁷⁴ Cullather, *Secret History*, 64-65

the Agency to make revisions to its security for the SHERWOOD program before it was launched on May 1. By May 1954, when the CEUA grew tired of what it felt was the CIA “using” it, plans for the CIA’s own psychological warfare campaign were already complete and being put into action.⁷⁵

The Guatemalan Challenge

Communist propaganda emanating from inside and outside of Guatemala became a concern for the CIA in the fall of 1953. The Guatemalan government’s supporters and communist backers in Guatemala called for “revolutionary solidarity” within the country amidst rumors of a potential U.S. invasion force to overthrow Arbenz.⁷⁶ Militant anti-communists in Guatemala lacked cohesion and the ability to promote a successful counter effort to the growing communist influence in the country. Theodore Geiger, the chief researcher of the National Planning Association, produced a report entitled “Communism versus Progress in Guatemala” in November 1953 that implied there was a need for U.S. action if communism was to be defeated in the country. He noted that the communists gained and sustained power within the country by taking control of press and radio outlets. According to Geiger, this was not “the result of a widespread popular revolutionary movement.” Rather, the ineptitude of non-communists within the Guatemalan government and the lack of a cohesive opposition generated by anti-communists within the country enabled communists to gain more control after Arbenz

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, “Psychological Barometer Report (Period Ending 12 December 1953),” CIA Historical Review, December 16, 1953, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914636/DOC_0000914636.pdf (Accessed November 19, 2011)

ascended to the presidency.⁷⁷ As the CIA formulated its plans to introduce anti-communist propaganda into Guatemala, independent research such as this provided useful insight to the Agency. It also highlighted the obstacles the CIA would have to overcome in order to effectively carry out its campaign.

Intelligence gathered by the CIA in the fall of 1953 highlighted the key regions from which communist propaganda emanated. A secret CIA document released to members of the Agency on December 4, 1953 revealed that communist activity was highly concentrated along the border of Guatemala and El Salvador. From here, communist propaganda was created and distributed to couriers for release into both Guatemala and El Salvador.⁷⁸ Of interest is the fact that both anti-communist and pro-communist propaganda developed in border regions of Guatemala, providing further proof to the CIA that the situation was extremely delicate especially since most U.S. officials subscribed to the “domino theory.” If communism succeeded in Guatemala, the potential for its spread to neighboring countries was very high.

On November 30, 1953, the Guatemalan ambassador to the United States, Guillermo Toriello, charged the United States State Department with distributing propaganda aimed at undermining the Guatemalan government. In his accusations, he referred to these efforts as an “intervention” on the part of the U.S. government. He also noted the connections between State Department officials and UFCO.⁷⁹ The charges

⁷⁷ Theodore Geiger, “Communism versus Progress in Guatemala,” *National Planning Association, Planning Pamphlets* 85 (December 1953) 30.

⁷⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, “New Concentration of Communist Activities,” *CIA Historical Review*, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914676/DOC_0000914676.pdf (Accessed November 23, 2011) 1. This document contains a lot of material that remains classified. However, the declassified portions of the document do reveal the origin of much of the communist propaganda being circulated in Guatemala.

⁷⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, Case 16333 Report 16333, *CIA National Historical Review Program*, December 1, 1953, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914689/DOC_0000914689.pdf (Accessed November 12, 2011) 1

brought by Toriello were dangerous for CIA officials planning the propaganda operations since it planted the idea of U.S. intervention in the country. The revelation of U.S. intervention gave the Arbenz government more ability to discredit any half truths that the CIA planted about his connections to international communism. It also made it more difficult to convince the Guatemalan people of the association that Arbenz's government had with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it complicated diplomatic discussions taking place in Washington and Guatemala City. If the United States chose to expel Toriello for his charges, the CIA felt that it was highly likely that the Guatemalans would do the same to the new U.S. ambassador to Guatemala, John Peurifoy. Peurifoy was handpicked by Dwight Eisenhower's administration to resolve the situation. A staunch anti-communist and troubleshooter, Peurifoy was tasked with gathering intelligence in his discussions with Jacobo Arbenz and other top government officials. The fear of his expulsion from Guatemala due to deteriorating relations between the two countries caused great concern for the CIA. Realizing that the Guatemalan government could discredit U.S. propaganda helped the CIA develop its messages for its radio broadcasts by sending the communication that the broadcasters were Guatemalans fighting for freedom rather than American broadcasters. This gave credence to the charges brought by *Radio Liberación* when it launched in May 1954.

In response to the accusations set forth by Ambassador Guillermo Toriello, the CIA formulated methods to discredit the indictments brought by Toriello. It suggested that the United States draft a statement to the Guatemalan people that the accusative remarks by certain officials within its government in no way indicated that a disconnection was occurring or would occur between the Guatemalan and American

people, and that friendly accords between them would continue unabated despite the confrontational tone of the Guatemalan government.⁸⁰ The Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, John M. Cabot, publicly claimed that it was not the intention of the United States to intervene in any internal affairs of its neighbors to the south. At the Annual Conference on the Caribbean at the University of Florida on December 3, 1953, Cabot remarked that it pledged in 1933 in Montevideo, Uruguay that it would not intervene in the other republics in the hemisphere. For twenty years the United States did not rescind that promise.⁸¹ Surely, with more than three decades of U.S. interference in Latin America after the War of 1898 with Spain, Cabot's remarks were not all that assuring. "It is far easier for Latin Americans to become disturbed over 'Yankee interference' than over the charges of communism in the Western hemisphere," wrote Sydney Gruson, a writer for the *New York Times*, in an article published on December 23, 1953.⁸² For the planners of Operation PBSUCCESS, this was the greatest challenge confronting them. The Good Neighbor Policy stood for two decades but the security threats in a key economic region close to the Panama Canal made it very difficult for the United States to continue this policy. The CIA specifically needed to ensure that its preparatory work and the launch of the invasion remained concealed so further charges of U.S. intervention were not brought before the United Nations or Organization of American States. The psychological intelligence that aided the radio broadcasts and helped influence religious leaders in Guatemala enabled the CIA to do this. PI allowed

⁸⁰ Ibid. 2

⁸¹ Jay Walz, "U.S. is Clarifying Bid on Guatemala: Assures Latin Lands Warning on Reds is not Effort to Interfere in Regimes," *New York Times*, December 24, 1953, 5

⁸² Sydney Gruson, "Latin Americans are Vexed at U.S. for Scoring Reds but not Dictators," *New York Times*, December 23, 1953, 8

the Agency to overtly destabilize the political situation in Guatemala and retain plausible deniability.

Political Themes for the Propaganda Program

The Central Intelligence Agency had one goal in mind when it launched its propaganda campaign against Jacobo Arbenz and his government: preparing the Guatemalan people for a military operation whereby they would interpret any sign of force against their government as the commencement of a mass uprising. This formula was borrowed from the successful CIA operation in 1953 called Operation AJAX in Iran.⁸³ The CIA attacked international communism and the Guatemalan government's ties to it. The Agency planned to use the radio broadcasts as a means to carry out this portion of its operation. Tracing the history of Guatemala's governments, the CIA insinuated that all economic and political ideologies were borrowed: from liberal democracy to capitalism to fascism. When the 1944 Revolution installed a social democratic regime, it was, again, a borrowed principle. Drawing upon this theme of foreign ideology, the CIA called communism the worst of all. The Agency explained to the Guatemalan people that communism only influenced the country because Guatemalans were too lazy to think for themselves and borrowed an ideology emanating from a "Slavic power 6000 miles away."⁸⁴

As with its entire intelligence gathering for Operation PBSUCCESS, the CIA employed a plethora of means to acquire the psychological fuel to conduct its propaganda

⁸³ Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 164.

⁸⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "Proposed PP Program: Stage Two, PBSUCCESS," CIA Historical Review Program, January 25, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914052/DOC_0000914052.pdf (Accessed January 17, 2012) 9.

efforts. To obtain a greater insight of what caused the political developments in Guatemala from 1944-1953, the Agency drew upon the conclusions reached by an “outstanding” American student in Latin American history who presented a paper to a collection of US historians in November 1953.⁸⁵ The student concluded that the communists in Guatemala could join with zealous Guatemalan nationalists to attack U.S. imperialism in the country. Because of this common cause, the student asserted that the communists were able to maintain influence on the Guatemalan government without worry of political attack. The result of the patriotism of the Revolution of 1944 helped to consolidate a wide base of popular support and a large expansion of the politically active people in the country. The student advised the U.S. government to distinguish between the nationalism of the revolutionary movement and the communists that benefitted from aligning themselves with the fervent nationalism associated with many of the avant-garde policies instituted in the country since 1944.⁸⁶ The CIA incorporated this intelligence into its radio broadcasts. In particular, the Agency distinguished Jacobo Arbenz from international communism. On May 12, 1954, for the 7:30 AM broadcast, *Radio Liberación* alluded to a “conspiracy” cooked up in Moscow to utilize a well-known Panamanian named Jorge Isaac Delgado to falsify documents that proved Arbenz correct in his assertions that a foreign invasion was pending. The CIA’s transmission avowed that Arbenz would quickly remove all military and civilian officials who did not support the government and replace them with communists. Once the communists gained control

⁸⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, “An Evaluation of the Significance of the Shift in Political Poser Since 1944,” CIA Historical Review Program, December 28, 1953, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914608/DOC_0000914608.pdf (Accessed February 3, 2012) 1, 5-6. The report does not indicate the name of the student nor where he presented his paper. However, it does go into detail about his knowledge of the political situation in the country. The student visited Guatemala biennially and kept close contacts with his professional counterparts in the country.

of these critical posts in the government, the broadcast warned, a full-fledged communist dictatorship would become established in Guatemala.⁸⁷ The CIA attacked Arbenz for allowing international communism to gain such an influence in Guatemala. Taking into account the intelligence it received from the paper presented in November 1953, the broadcast did not attack the nationalism displayed by his government which planted a seed of fear that Arbenz was a liability to Guatemala because he intended to replace all unsupportive military and government officials with communists.

Radio Liberación intended to broadcast political propaganda to a varied audience. The military was the primary target of the propaganda, but many of its political programs were also tailored toward intellectuals, women, workers, and peasants. The programs contained dramatic background music that helped to build the suspense for the information about to be announced. Of the twelve recurring programs played on the station, most contained at least some measure of political commentary. “Rompiendo las Cadenas” (“Breaking the Chains”) focused on the economics of Guatemala in relation to communism. By the end of May, as tensions began to escalate, *Radio Liberación* began broadcasting news segments on its programs. The news segments that the CIA chose to broadcast also had a motive. They focused on specific events that helped it further show that communists were acquiring greater influence over the country and also worked to belittle government officials and their relatives.⁸⁸ The political propaganda contained in the SHERWOOD broadcasts was extremely effective in destabilizing the country and

⁸⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, “PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes,” CIA Historical Review Program, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000135031/DOC_0000135031.pdf (Accessed October 7, 2011) 97. The SHERWOOD tapes were recordings of the broadcasts on *Radio Liberación*. A CIA historian reviewed the tapes and produced this document that was released along with the other documents in 2003.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 6-9; 170

was vital to the success of the operation. For it to have the effect that it did, though, the psychological intelligence gathered by the CIA in the months leading up to its launch was even more important than the political commentary.

Picking Out a Location for the Radio Broadcasts

In order to implement the SHERWOOD radio program, the Agency needed to prepare for and overcome a number of obstacles. “[T]echnical feasibility, political tenability, and problems of security” were a few of the factors taken into consideration as the CIA looked at sites from which to broadcast their radio programs. In order to maintain the clandestine nature of the broadcasts, and the site from which it emanated, the CIA was forced to select a position located within 250 miles of the target area of the broadcast in order to use medium power transmitting equipment. The use of high-powered equipment enabled the CIA to broadcast from nearly anywhere in the hemisphere and Guatemalans would still receive the transmission. However, using higher technology risked the chance of exposing the CIA as the broadcasters of the channel. Low-powered transmitting equipment prevented the signal from reaching all of the women, military personnel, intellectuals, and workers that the CIA intended to reach. Therefore, the medium-powered equipment was utilized by the Agency.⁸⁹

Prior to launching the operation, the Agency needed to insure that broadcasts could continue should a power failure occur (or the government cut the power) during the militant phases of Operation PBSUCCESS when Castillo Armas’ men were to carry out the coup. In response to this potential roadblock, a document issued within the CIA on

⁸⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, “Selection of Site for Sherwood Program,” March 5, 1954, CIA Historical Review Program, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000913132/DOC_0000913132.pdf (Accessed October 8, 2011) 1-2

March 20, 1954 recommended that fifty battery-powered short and long wave radio transmitters be purchased in New York and shipped to Guatemala under a fictitious brand name. The report recommended that a CIA agent arrive simultaneously with the transmitters and locate specific sites in Guatemala City for the radio transmitters to be placed and hire six Guatemalans to install them.⁹⁰ This plan reaffirmed the instructions given to the CIA by the Eisenhower Administration. Maintaining plausible deniability was paramount so that the United States could answer any charges of intervention by promoting the coup as a Guatemalan affair that did not receive any aid from the United States. Although subtle in its scope, the installation of battery-powered radios (from New York no less) foreshadowed an upswing of domestic and international pressure on Arbenz and his government to resign from the presidency or face attack. By hiring Guatemalans living within the capitol city, the Agency enabled itself to avoid charges of intervention by the United States when the campaign was launched. When the Arbenz government in June ordered a blackout throughout the country in an effort to stop the broadcasts from being heard in June, the only effect it had was on Castillo Armas' air operations.⁹¹

The site chosen for the radio broadcasts also was carefully selected by the CIA which was a remote beach in Honduras known as Santa Fe. Because the site was too distant from Guatemala's capital, the radio station broadcasted on a short-wave setting which was similar to most of the radio broadcasts heard in the country. Guatemalans

⁹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, "SHERWOOD," March 20, 1954, CIA National Historical Review Program, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000917031/DOC_0000917031.pdf (Accessed January 10, 2012) 1-2

⁹¹ David Atlee Phillips, *The Night Watch*, 44. Most Guatemalans in the countryside did not have electric power and the radios were powered by battery and due to the CIA's planning, many radios in the urban areas continued to receive the Voice of Liberation transmissions.

received many of their radio programs on short-wave transmissions from neighboring Mexico. Throughout the country, the majority of radio sets were short-wave receivers. Therefore, the choice of Santa Fe was not a problem for the Agency. The primary problem of the site location was convincing the radio station's listeners of what David Atlee Phillips called the "big lie". This "big lie" was that the station was located within Guatemalan territory.⁹² In order to circumvent this, the Guatemalan operatives hired by the CIA, Mario López Otero and José Toron Barrios and a third unnamed operative, purchased advertisement space in Guatemalan newspapers. The advertisement noted that the original broadcasts would emanate from Mexico on Labor Day, May 1, because all Guatemalan radio was shut off for the day. Just a week after the first broadcasts of the Voice of Liberation radio station, unrest within Guatemala was widespread and it soon turned to anxiety. Within a month, Jacobo Arbenz suspended civil liberties throughout the country, effectively turning him into the non-democratic leader that the domestic anti-communists and CIA agents previously made him out to be.⁹³ Remarkably, the goals of the SHERWOOD campaign to destabilize the country worked. The people were fearful of an invasion and the paranoia that his regime was in jeopardy caused Arbenz to crack down on civil liberties within the country. An intelligence report arrived in Washington shortly after the launch of the radio program describing the departure of a ship from behind the Iron Curtain loaded with armaments destined for Guatemala. The Voice of Liberation quickly made this information public, further enhancing its charges that the Guatemalan government was overrun by communists. The radio soon broadcasted that the armaments were distributed in the Guatemalan countryside to a militia controlled by a

⁹² Ibid. 40-41

⁹³ Ibid. 41-42

labor federation loyal to Arbenz. Subsequently, the Voice of Liberation broadcast that Arbenz intended to replace the Guatemalan military with “a civilian proletariat constabulary”.⁹⁴

The political propaganda broadcast over the airwaves clearly unsettled the stability of Jacobo Arbenz’s government. Yet, broadcasting charges of communist takeover and the destruction of the military within the country only were successful due to the fact that a large number of Guatemalan people tuned in to listen to the programs. The day before *Radio Liberación* began, the Arbenz government instituted Congressional Decree 37 which required all privately-owned radio stations in the country to submit political discussions to the government for acceptance prior to being allowed to be broadcast on the airwaves.⁹⁵ The suspension of independent political discussions broadcast over the airwaves magnified the impact of *Radio Liberación*’s launch on May 1. For the most part, Latin Americans were turned off to politics broadcast over the airwaves. A number of letters written to the U.S. radio station by Latin American radio listeners contained in a CIA report dated January 26, 1954 reflect just that. Most of these listeners stated that they enjoyed good entertainment programs, but despised shows that consistently pushed a political agenda.⁹⁶ However, broadcasting anti-government propaganda was obviously the goal of the clandestine radio station. For the CIA to reach its intended audience with its political propaganda it needed subliminal methods to carry this out. Because of its psychological intelligence gathering on developments within the Roman Catholic Church, and a fair amount of astuteness on the people it attempted to

⁹⁴ Ibid. 43

⁹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, “Cable to Director from Guatemala City Re Guatemala 1954 Coup,” CIA Historical Review Program, April 30, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000915798/DOC_0000915798.pdf (Accessed February 18, 2012) 1

⁹⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, “Materials for Psychological Warfare Support–Guatemala,” 8-10

reach, the CIA was able to create a psychological warfare machine capable of undermining the Arbenz government.

Chapter 3

“Dios, Patria y Libertad” The Catholic Church Becomes the CIA’s Political Ally

The political attacks on Jacobo Arbenz’s government from the Central Intelligence Agency and anti-communist leaders within Guatemala proved to be vital to the overall triumph of Operation PBSUCCESS in 1953-1954. The effort to coerce Arbenz to embody the character that this propaganda campaign portrayed was very complex. One of the most important efforts made by the CIA that made its radio broadcasts more believable was the inclusion of the Roman Catholic Church in its propaganda efforts. After World War II, as international communism spread in many parts of the world, the Roman Catholic Church became increasingly outspoken against communism, which led it to support U.S. foreign policy in Latin America. The right-wing dictatorships of Rafael Trujillo (Dominican Republic) and Anastasio Somoza (Nicaragua), although very authoritative, were supported by the Latin American bishoprics in the 1950s.⁹⁷ With support from the most powerful cultural institution in the region, the Central Intelligence Agency used the Catholic hierarchy in Guatemala to attack and destabilize Arbenz’s government. The main issue facing the Agency was the fact that the Church in Guatemala, though vigilantly opposed to the growing communist influence in the country, was “handicapped by the small number of priests and by a lack of a constructive social program.” The Church’s priests during the late 1800s and into the 1900s were also subject to deportation as many were immigrants to the country.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Enrique Dussel, “The Church in Populist Regimes (1930-1959),” in *The Church in Latin America, 1492-1992*, Enrique Dussel, ed., (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992) 141.

⁹⁸ *FRUS*, Vol. IV, 1034; *FRUS: Guatemala*, 104

However, with the psychological intelligence acquired by the CIA in the weeks and months leading up to the initiation of Operation PBSUCCESS, the Catholic Church's militancy toward communism became an important tool in the psychological warfare effort.

Knowing that the Catholic hierarchy in Latin American countries tied themselves to the ruling class, CIA agent Howard Hunt met with Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York. In the conversation that ensued between the two, Hunt asked Spellman if it were possible to coerce the Guatemalan clergy to move against the Arbenz government. Spellman replied that convincing the Guatemalan clergy to actively attack Arbenz's administration would not be a problem. By April 1954, all attendees at Catholic masses in Guatemala were called upon by Catholic priests and bishops to “rise as a single man against this enemy of God and country” which was communism.⁹⁹ The efforts of Hunt to incorporate the Catholic Church into the psychological warfare effort kicked off a campaign that linked international communism to atheism which the CIA used in its clandestine radio broadcasts.

When Arbenz became president of Guatemala in 1951, the Roman Catholic Church in the country had only seven dioceses and one apostolic administration. Plagued by anti-clerical policies of the Guatemalan dictators starting in 1871, many of the Church's leaders were expelled from the country, its lands were expropriated, its schools held back, and the separation of Church and state became entrenched.¹⁰⁰ As a result, efforts to remain a powerful institution within Guatemala became extremely difficult,

⁹⁹ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 138

¹⁰⁰ Jeffrey L. Klaber, *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998) 222-223. Some of Guatemala's dictators during the “Liberal” period of its history (1871-1944) invited Presbyterian missionaries to the country in an effort to sway some of the population away from its Roman Catholic roots.

particularly in the countryside. In many parts of Latin America, the Church was confronted by populist governments that disregarded it. By the 1930s, the Church throughout Latin America attempted to utilize a program called Catholic Action to influence the secular world in which they lived. Unlike most other Latin American countries where it was popular among the urban middle class, Catholic Action was popular in the rural regions of Guatemala where a long tradition of “indigenous Catholicism” survived.

Under Jorge Ubico (1931-1944), the Roman Catholic Church in Guatemala regained some of the losses it suffered under the successive dictatorships of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The number of priests increased as well as the amount of lands the Church owned. After the revolution removed Ubico from power in 1944, a new constitution was written in 1945 that strengthened the Church within the country. However, to many of those within the Church’s hierarchy, the 1945 constitution did not go far enough to ease the restrictions placed upon it. After local elites lent their support to the Church and attacked Arévalo’s government for what it perceived as attacks against “Christian Guatemala”, the Roman Catholic Church became an opponent of the revolution which began in 1944.¹⁰¹ Guatemalan Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano succeeded Archbishop Duroy y Suré in 1938 and took control of Catholic Action in the country. Rossell y Arellano was an outspoken opponent of communism, one of which the CIA used to its advantage when the propaganda campaign kicked off in May 1954.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 49.

¹⁰² Enrique Dussel, *The Church in Latin America*, 148; Jeffrey L. Klaber, *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America*, 223. Catholic Action was started in 1935 by Archbishop Duroy y Suré in the Guatemalan countryside and was expanded upon by his successor Rossell y Arellano.

The CIA benefitted from the Church's revival in Guatemala. With the threat of a communist takeover in the country, the chances of a setback to the Church's resurgence in the country increased significantly. Traditionally, Catholic clergy in Guatemala (and most of Latin America) aligned themselves with the ruling class.¹⁰³ Because Guatemalan elites were virulently anti-communist, the Church followed suit and became a useful ally in the CIA's effort to overthrow Arbenz and remove communists from the country.

As early as 1952, the CIA looked toward Guatemalan religious leaders to carry out an operation among the Guatemalan people. By 1954, the CIA was in very close contact with the Guatemalan clergy influencing them to spread anti-Arbenz messages in their church services. Arrangements were made with the Mariano Rossell y Arellano to conduct a series of special daily Masses during an eight day period that coincided with the launch of Operation SHERWOOD. The Archbishop was unaware of the connection between his Masses and what the CIA called "D-Day." He was also naïve to the overall military plans of the Agency.¹⁰⁴ Most interesting about the Agency's research to utilize Rossell y Arellano in this crusade is the fact that the Archbishop spoke out against communism during Arévalo's presidency, long before Arbenz enacted agrarian reform and defied U.S. policy in the country. The CIA knew that Rossell y Arellano despised communism and he was the most powerful religious leader in the country, capable of reaching far greater audiences than printed pamphlets or circulars could.

Throughout Latin America in the early 1900s, Protestant missionaries made inroads in a predominantly Roman Catholic culture. Many of these missionaries defended the self-determination of Latin American people and, amidst the increasing

¹⁰³ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 138

¹⁰⁴ *FRUS: Guatemala*, 55.

nationalism in the region by the end of World War II, nationalist leaders, such as Arévalo and Arbenz, received a great deal of support from Protestants living in Guatemala.¹⁰⁵ As Guatemala's leaders instituted a number of progressive reforms opposed by elites in the country but supported by Protestants, the Church allied itself with the elites to preserve its own restitution that began under Ubico. Put another way, the Catholic Church's reaction in the country became increasingly opposed to the Arévalo and Arbenz regimes, a position that the CIA was able to exaggerate when it launched its campaign in 1953.

In 1947, the Church issued a statement aimed at working class Catholics attempting to unionize. The workers "were told to adhere to the Church's social justice teachings and not be exploited by Communists."¹⁰⁶ The CIA was instructed by the Eisenhower Administration to covertly remove Arbenz and install a government supportive of U.S. policies.¹⁰⁷ In other words, the CIA's goals were to install a government open to capitalism and foreign investment. With the Roman Catholic Church's revelations of its opposition to many of the nationalist policies promoted by the Arévalo and Arbenz governments, the CIA had a powerful ally inside the country that it utilized through its psychological warfare campaign. After reorganizing itself to confront challenges to its hierarchy and adapting to the anti-communist vehemence of the postwar period, the Roman Catholic Church supported U.S. anti-communist policy in Latin America, one which the CIA managed to coalesce into its psychological warfare campaign against Arbenz.

¹⁰⁵ Enrique Dussel, *The Church in Latin America*, 335-336.

¹⁰⁶ Hubert J. Miller, "The Taracena Flores Collection in the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas, Relating to Church and State Materials in Guatemala, 1945-1954," *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos* 12 (1986) 141

¹⁰⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "Program for PBSUCCESS," CIA Historical Review, November 12, 1953, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000135875/DOC_0000135875.pdf (Accessed October 28, 2011) 1

Educating the Population on the Dangers of Communism to Religious Ideals

In its efforts to stimulate the public against communism, the CIA utilized psychological intelligence to educate the people of Guatemala of what could happen to the nation if they did not rise up against the Arbenz government. The Agency did not believe that revealing religious subversion that occurred in nations behind the Iron Curtain was enough to convince the Guatemalan people that it the same would occur there. Rather, the CIA presented specific consequences for the religious institutions in Guatemala if communists were allowed to succeed. For example, the Agency revealed to through various media sources that Catholic iconography was likely to be replaced by images of Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin, and Georgy Malenkov. The CIA also broadcasted messages that Guatemalan Catholic churches were to become meeting houses for communists to plan attacks against the faithful in the country.¹⁰⁸ The CIA realized that providing examples of religious subversion in countries thousands of miles away would not have the same effect as illustrations specific to Guatemalan churches. The methods used by the Agency centered on the people's religious mores and helped to instill fear among the Guatemalan people that a communist takeover would result in the destruction of their religious institutions. Furthermore, this made the CIA's goal of acquiring supporters of a counterrevolution more possible. Showing how communism subverted religion within a country where faith existed regardless of location allowed the CIA to expand its psychological warfare program to the Guatemalan countryside. The

¹⁰⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, "Catholic Church Activities," CIA Historical Review, April 28, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000923783/DOC_0000923783.pdf (Accessed November 16, 2011) 2

CIA in late April 1954 sought to expand the Catholic anti-communist mobilization efforts into the working class operating in Guatemala's rural regions.¹⁰⁹

As the CIA began its preparations for the "invasion" of Guatemala by Castillo Armas' forces, propositions for a resolution condemning Guatemala as a communist beachhead were drawn up. The major issues that the Agency had to confront involved convincing other Latin American countries that halting communism in Guatemala (and elsewhere) required outside intervention (implying American intervention through economic aid and armaments). Once again, the Catholic Church became a major tool for the CIA. On May 27, 1954 a conference entitled "First Continental Congress against Soviet Intervention in Latin America" was held at the Cervantes Theater in Mexico City.¹¹⁰ Instead of focusing religious propaganda on the Guatemalan people, the CIA recruited a Guatemalan delegate by the name of Luis Coronado Lira to warn the rest of Latin America of the communist menace that was plaguing his country. At a meeting in May 1954 to invoke the agreement reached at Caracas, Venezuela in March of that year, he delivered this message.¹¹¹ Lira falsely exaggerated his government's intentions to intervene in the nation's schools, preventing religious education from being taught to the young in the country. He also warned the other Latin American delegates that communism was only expanding gradually and if unopposed, a rule of atheism would

¹⁰⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Cable from Director to Lincoln Re Guatemala Coup," CIA Historical Review, April 30, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000916076/DOC_0000916076.pdf (Accessed January 28, 2012) 1

¹¹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, "PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes," 296

¹¹¹ For information regarding the agreement in Caracas on communism in the Western Hemisphere, see Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 146-151, 154, 156-160, 169; José Aybar de Sota, *Dependency and Intervention*, 239-244, 248-249, 255, 278, 282, 285. It should be noted that invoking the Caracas Resolution was in response to the arrival of armaments to Guatemala from Czechoslovakia aboard the *Alfhem*. The inclusion of the religion to state the case for its necessity can not be understated though.

take control of Guatemala and spread to the rest of the Western Hemisphere.¹¹² As the CIA posited these same claims through various media outlets in Guatemala, so too did it work to prepare to influence other Latin American delegations that communism threatened organized religion worldwide. This allowed the United States to connect civil liberties, like freedom of religion, to its global campaign against international communism. Religious revival in other parts of the globe in the 1930s and 1940s also aided the United States in its efforts to contain communism after World War II.

Before, during, and just after World War II, throughout Latin America, “the renewal of parishes as ‘missionary communities’” became standard as Jesuit priests, many influenced by the Church’s revival in postwar France, instituted a new system of pastoral practice. This helped to spawn national conferences of bishops, ushering in a sense of religious nationalism.¹¹³ In Guatemala, the CIA used this to its advantage when attempting to portray its anti-communist message to the peasantry in Guatemala. Because the Guatemalan Church’s leaders were also unified in their efforts to fight communism in their country, the CIA managed to arrange meetings with many of the Church’s priests in April 1954 to instruct them on how best to carry out a propaganda program in their churches. As a result, each Sunday thereafter, attendees of Catholic Church services, many of whom were from the peasantry and working classes, listened to anti-communist rhetoric from the Catholic priests. This propaganda came from people that the peasants were far more likely to pay attention to than those in the secular

¹¹² Central Intelligence Agency, “KUGOWN/SUMMIT: Guatemalan Delegation,” CIA Historical Review, May 19, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000923527/DOC_0000923527.pdf (Accessed December 15, 2011) 2

¹¹³ Enrique Dussel, “The Church in Populist Regimes,” in *The Church in Latin America, 1492-1992*, 142-143

world.¹¹⁴ This effort helped to reach a segment of the Guatemalan population that was unreachable by other methods the CIA incorporated to broadcast its message and further helped the Agency to destabilize the country in the weeks leading up to Castillo Armas' invasion.

Despite the many uses of the Roman Catholic Church by the CIA during its propaganda/education campaign and the success it had with many of the people it attempted to reach, there were problems with convincing the entire population that communism threatened religious freedom. As agents in the field observed the situation in the Guatemalan countryside and in the industrial sector, they realized that the Church had a strong reluctance to interfere in labor disputes. It did not attempt to impose religious convictions on the nation's labor unions. The CIA also realized by early June 1954 that Guatemalans listened to the political propaganda through the radio and printing press but this did not have much effect in inspiring the labor unions to oppose the government. These unions were very dangerous to the overall success of the operation. The CIA estimated that labor unions controlled by communists or communist sympathizers had the capability to arm and confront Castillo Armas' forces when they arrived or, if unable to safeguard Arbenz's government, send the Guatemalan economy into a tailspin by calling for nationwide strikes.¹¹⁵ Throughout the campaign, the CIA had agents working in the field that continued to provide the necessary psychological intelligence in order to carry out Operation PBSUCCESS. In this particular case, the psychological intelligence

¹¹⁴ Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 164.

¹¹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "PP-Labor Operations," CIA Historical Review, June 4, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000922742/DOC_0000922742.pdf (Accessed December 15, 2011) 1-2

provided key information on a segment of the population where the Church was not going to be a key collaborator.

The Roman Catholic priests and bishops played a critical role in the CIA's religious propaganda campaign. Using its psychological intelligence research and employing the internal developments within the Catholic Church in Latin America, the CIA managed to reach a much larger audience than the printing press and radio could accomplish alone. However, the intended audience for this propaganda effort remained the urban population (i.e. the middle and upper classes as well as the educated students and teachers). The best means to incorporate the religious psychological intelligence to sway their opinion was through the clandestine radio program, *Radio Liberación*.

Radio Liberación and the Catholic Church

The SHERWOOD campaign kicked off on May 1, 1954 and had a large urban audience. As a program primarily designed to destabilize the country and provoke the Guatemalan people to rebel against their government, *Radio Liberación* carried messages often repeated on air so that the communications stuck with its listeners. *Trabajo, Pan, y Patria* (translated to Work, Bread, and Country), the station's slogan, invoked a message in its own right with its implication that the clandestine broadcasts were in support of the welfare of the Guatemalan people. This leftist slogan appealed to the Guatemalan people and undercut the communists' program because it implied that the station's broadcasters wanted to help the people while at the same time opposing the Arbenz government. It also sent the message that the broadcasts were not influenced by foreigners (mainly

agents working for the United States).¹¹⁶ The daily broadcasts also carried messages that were utilized to summon discontent within the Guatemalan people for their government. These communications carried with them cultural and religious overtones aimed at striking down communism. Warning the Guatemalan people that if it embraced communism, as its government had, Guatemala would be subjected to an imperialism greater than any other known to mankind; an atheist ideology that had its roots thousands of miles away. The memorandums also attempted to strike fear into the minds of Guatemalan Catholics with allusions to Pope Pius XII's decree in 1950 that all who accepted communism would be excommunicated from the Church.¹¹⁷

Like its agents in the field and through the printing press, the CIA's broadcasts on *Radio Liberación* sought to educate the Guatemalan population of the dangers of communism. By conducting research on the target audience, it was estimated that sixty percent of the population was indifferent to the Arbenz regime.¹¹⁸ The moral traditions of the majority of the population were based in religious doctrine (overwhelmingly Roman Catholic). The CIA used this to its advantage when it began its radio broadcasts. "The Ideological Decalogue", which was a series of specific statements addressing why Guatemalans should not allow communism, attacked communist ideology on moral grounds. It stated that Guatemalans should not allow communist activity to expand because it denied "the existence of God as beginning and end of the purest ideals of the human being," it destroyed "faith, ideals, and the spirit of self-improvement", and

¹¹⁶ David Atlee Phillips, *The Night Watch*, 41. Translated the slogan reads Work, Bread, and Country.

¹¹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes," 22-23. It should be noted that the reviewer does provide some editorial remarks throughout this document but it contains portions of the original texts of the cassettes and documents associated with the psychological warfare campaign.

¹¹⁸ See page 32.

ignored “the existence of moral values.”¹¹⁹ Under Jorge Ubico, Guatemala experienced a revival in the Catholic Church within the country. Groups such as Catholic Action and Opus Dei managed to bring about this revival among student groups, professional people, and married couples; precisely the main target audience of the CIA for *Radio Liberación*.¹²⁰ By positing the potential assailment of communist ideology on the religious morals that many of the nation’s people harbored, the CIA led its audience into believing in the dangers associated with its government.

Many of the communications relayed by the CIA’s clandestine radio station carried a very ominous message to its listeners regarding the prospects for the Catholic Church’s survival in a communist country. These strongly-worded points made by *Radio Liberación* were often repeated in several of its broadcasts throughout the two months that the station remained on Guatemalan airwaves. The messages were primarily intended for Guatemalan listeners but also served as a warning to other Latin American countries of the implications of communism. Calling Earth the “Heaven toward which communism advances,” the messages implied that communism had no use for an organized religion so long as its economic system was in place. When every human becomes equal, as communism aspires to, Heaven would be created on Earth, a false hope for those who believed in God and believed that someday they would ascend to paradise.¹²¹ Other messages revealed to the Guatemalan listeners that in a Soviet world, the people were handicapped; unable to demand wage increases or change jobs, pray, or

¹¹⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, “PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes,” 16

¹²⁰ Rodolfo Cardinal, “The Church in Central America,” in *The Church in Latin America, 1492-1992*, 261.

¹²¹ Central Intelligence Agency, “PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes,” 27.

believe in God.¹²² The CIA played upon the fears of the Christian population; revealing that if allowed to succeed, communism would strip away their spiritual rite.¹²³

The religious overtones contained in the refrains of *Radio Liberación*'s broadcasts also contained some encouraging statements for the people who fought against communism. Utilizing Christian virtues, listeners of the radio station were encouraged to use charity and social justice, two elements of the Church advocated by its priests, to defeat communism. The CIA utilized its knowledge of the Church's teachings, not condoning violence but passively resisting the spread of communism, to support this message. Advocating an aggressive reaction may have brought the authenticity of the radio station into question or, at the very least, caused some listeners to tune out. Calling communism an "apocalyptic beast", the refrain reassured its Christian followers that when communist domination was defeated, God would allow the world to live in the peace of Jesus Christ.¹²⁴ To reach the masses of people that seemed to be in a perpetual system of social injustice, *Radio Liberación* emphasized to its listeners that the Church, throughout history, called on those with riches and power to give to those who did not, even hypocritically using Marxist terminology such as "proletariat" to relay its message.¹²⁵ By attacking from the left, the CIA's propaganda managed to take away the one strong argument (social justice) that supporters of the Arbenz regime had. After Guatemalan government officials brought charges against the United States for being involved in a plot to overthrow the Arbenz government in January 1954 in a military

¹²² Ibid. 28.

¹²³ As communism never did become established in Guatemala, it is impossible to gauge the effect that the ideology would have truly had on the population. The nation was, in 1954, mostly rural and secret societies of Christians still could have existed even if a communist dictatorship outlawed organized religion in the country. Nevertheless, at the time, the CIA's usage of this genuine fear amongst the people played to its advantage in these radio broadcasts.

¹²⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes," 23

¹²⁵ Ibid. 24

coup, the invocations set forth by the clandestine radio broadcasts discouraging violence as a means to defeat communism gave *Radio Liberación* legitimacy as a radio station operated by Guatemalans and not the United States.¹²⁶

Further aiding the CIA's attempt to ensure that the station was regarded by the Guatemalan people as an operation carried out by exiled Guatemalans were references to Vatican statements. Rebutting statements made by Guerra Borges that the Catholic Church tailored its policy toward the best interests of capitalists, *Radio Liberación* broadcasted messages citing three famous papal encyclicals which showed that the Church engendered its policies toward achieving a social justice for all of its followers. The messages stated that the Church supported the plights of the world's peasantry and pressured world leaders to enact agrarian reforms and increases in workers' wages.¹²⁷ Again, this leftist message offered by the radio station's religious broadcasts signified that the Church supported the reforms that would help alleviate the quandaries plaguing the peasantry but, at the same time, showed that supporting communism and leaders like Arbenz would work to eliminate any chance of Church aid. All of this helped lend credence to the CIA's attempts to maintain its plausible deniability. After many charges of cohesion between the United Fruit Company, the Agency, and the Eisenhower Administration (who were all accused of supporting repression of the peasants) to bring about the overthrow of Arbenz in response to his agrarian reform laws in 1952, citing the papal encyclicals provided further "proof" to the Guatemalan people that the radio station was operated by Guatemalans living in exile which increased its legitimacy.

¹²⁶ For information regarding the charges brought against the U.S. for its involvement in Castillo Armas' plot to overthrow Jacobo Arbenz in January 1954, see Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 128-129.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 25. For information on Guerra Borges, see Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 184. Borges was a founding member of the Guatemalan Workers' Party in the 1940s.

The attacks against the Roman Catholic Church in communist countries around the world aided the CIA immensely as it broadcast its anti-communist propaganda on *Radio Liberación*. Citing many of the more provocative events that appeared in the Roman Catholic press, such as the murder of a priest in Lithuania, the expulsion of missionaries in China, and the fact that only one bishop remained in all of Bulgaria, the station made a strong connection between the speeches given by Archbishop Rossell y Arellano and the statements emanating from the Vatican.¹²⁸

The psychological intelligence conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency on religion throughout Latin America and its subsequent implementation into action played a key role in its propaganda campaign through Operation SHERWOOD, and homilies given by priests in Guatemala, allowed the Agency's message to be heard by a wide audience. For the purposes of its radio broadcasts, though, other methods needed to be employed, not just the work of religious statements condemning communism for its attacks on organized religion. The psychological intelligence conducted on what Latin American radio listeners preferred to hear on programs proved to play a vital role in the overall success of the propaganda campaign carried out by *Radio Liberación*.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 143

Chapter 4

“Dance to the Rhythm They Play for You” How Entertainment Destabilized Guatemala

*“Atención Guatemala! Atención Guatemaltecos! Radio Liberación les habla. Esta es la emisora clandestina Radio Liberación, operando en su frecuencia de onda corta y desde algun lugar secreto del territorio nacional. Escuchenos Usted y sabra la realidad del momento politico por que atraviesa Guatemala, y los progresos irrefutables del gran movimiento libertador. Durante el transcurso de nuestras transmisiones diarias, damos a Ustedes musica, comentarios y noticias en general, y demostramos palpablemente el crimen de la dominación comunista y la fuerza incontenible del movimiento libertador guatemalteco. En el aire los transmisores clandestinos de Radio Liberación!”*¹²⁹

The preceding was a sign-on used by the CIA clandestine radio station when it began its daily transmissions. Beginning on May 1, 1954, all Guatemalans who had access to a short-wave radio set and tuned in to the station’s frequency heard this or the second of two messages the CIA prepared to begin each broadcast. Of particular note in this sign-on is the incitation that the station would provide music programs and news along with a demonstration of the crime of communist domination and the Guatemalan liberation movement. The radio station did not broadcast an hour long political commentary denouncing communism and Jacobo Arbenz. Rather, the station provided entertainment throughout its broadcasts set between the political commentary in order to keep listeners from switching their radio dials or turning their sets off completely.

In the days preceding the launch of *Radio Liberación*, the CIA purchased ad space in Guatemalan newspapers to publicize the initiation of a new radio station that featured

¹²⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, “PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes,” 12.

“a galaxy of Latin stars”. The advertisement proclaimed that the radio programs would contain Maria Felix, a well-known and beautiful Mexican actress, numerous singers, and Mexican film star Cantinflas, who in the 1950s was one of the best-known men in Latin American popular culture. As payment for these advertisements, an associate of the Guatemalans hired to conduct the radio broadcasts traveled to Guatemala shortly after the station’s launch and paid the newspaper companies in cash for the half-page printed advertisements. On May 1st, Labor Day in Guatemala (and around the world with the exception of the United States), all radio transmissions operating within the country shut down. Hence, *Radio Liberación* was forced to tell its audience that it operated from inside of Mexico on its first day. By broadcasting on May 1, the CIA maximized its potential listening audience because no other radio stations were on the air in Guatemala. The newspaper ads promoting Latin American pop culture icons were not entirely deceptive as the station broadcast cassette recordings of these individuals. Guatemalans were told that the recordings were necessary due to the Guatemalan government’s censorship of the media which began two days before the station was launched.¹³⁰ From the outset, *Radio Liberación* captured its audience by providing entertainment in its broadcasts. Over the two months that the station remained on the airwaves, the CIA utilized the psychological intelligence it gathered in the months preceding the launch of the SHERWOOD program to provide its listeners with music programs that they enjoyed, oftentimes sneaking in satirical lines about the Arbenz government within the music itself. Each broadcast contained a purpose. Some of the broadcasts used a female announcer to gain the attention of women in the country to sway their husbands and sons

¹³⁰ David Atlee Phillips, *The Night Watch*, 41-42

to participate in the rebellion against the government, while others invoked the necessity of the army to join the rebel cause.¹³¹

Plans for Radio Propaganda in Guatemala

As the CIA continued its efforts to launch a psychological assault on the Guatemalan government, important new intelligence was gathered by January 1954. The reports that the CIA received regarding the capabilities for successful radio propaganda proved to be fundamental to the *Radio Liberación* program that was launched in May of that year. In 1954, the Agency estimated that approximately 71,000 shortwave radio sets were owned by people living in Guatemala. Of these 71,000 sets, 68 percent were owned by people living in the urban areas around Guatemala City and Quezaltenango, while the other 32 percent were scattered amongst the rest of the rural Guatemalan population. The CIA estimated that its radio broadcasts would be heard by the propertied classes of Guatemala which included business professionals, military men, and students in the nation's universities.¹³² What is important to note about this information is the fact that the CIA now had a target audience about which to concentrate its broadcasts. Even though the Agency had intentions to reach the entire population through its psychological warfare efforts, the knowledge obtained about the number of radio sets in Guatemala and the owners of those sets allowed the CIA to formulate its broadcasts directly at one specific group. To the vast majority of the population that lived in rural areas without

¹³¹ Ibid. 42

¹³² Central Intelligence Agency, "Materials for Psychological Warfare Support—Guatemala," CIA Historical Review Program, January 26, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914007/DOC_0000914007.pdf (Accessed November 10, 2011) 5-7. Guatemala had an estimated population of three million people in the early 1950s. The CIA's estimates for the number of radio sets owned in the country were based on a survey taken in 1951.

electricity or a radio, the CIA utilized other means to transmit its message, mainly in the form of circulars and pamphlets.¹³³ Most of the rural residents in Guatemala were illiterate, however, which made this a much less successful, and far less entertaining, program than the radio broadcasts.

As important as it was for the CIA to know who the target audience was for its radio propaganda campaign, it was even more important to understand what caused those lucky enough to own a shortwave radio in Guatemala to tune in and listen to the programs transmitted over the airwaves. Good communication between the Agency and U.S.-based shortwave radio stations provided this crucial information. The radio station found, through frequent letters written to it by Latin American listeners, that the most important feature of a good radio program was good music. Contained in a CIA report dated January 26, 1954 were some of the letters written by Latin American listeners to the American shortwave radio programs, which also included six written by Guatemalan listeners. A salient facet of the letters were that nearly every one contained a remark or two about the music broadcast on the radio program and a strong appreciation for the cultural aspects of the radio station's broadcasts. Many of the other writers stated that they did not wish to hear news or political commentary on the station because this could easily be obtained from other stations.¹³⁴ This intelligence obtained by the CIA proved invaluable to its efforts later in 1954 when its "Voice of Liberation" radio broadcasts were launched.

Through careful intelligence gathering and the communications between the CIA and private U.S. radio stations, by January 1954, the Agency developed a plan on which

¹³³ Ibid. 4.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 8-11

types of broadcasts would be most useful in presenting the Guatemalans with a different picture of their leader. Aside from the assertions of Arbenz's connections to international communism, the CIA saw it necessary to include entertaining broadcasts in its radio program. With the knowledge that Latin Americans had an affinity toward classical music, the Agency moved to acquire many of the recordings of Spanish and Latin American classical artists that were available at the time. At a cost of approximately fifty dollars for a five to six hour broadcast, the Agency believed the best method to obtain the music records was to imagine itself as an owner of a Guatemalan radio station provided with money and free passage through customs to purchase the music in New York. The writer of the intelligence report from January 26, 1954 suggested the following as the best broadcast materials for entertainment purposes for the clandestine radio channel: A selection of Russian composers, who were requested by Latin American listeners to American radio channels, poetry readings specifically intended to grab the attention of intellectuals and students living in urban areas within the country, music with a religious appeal, and other music from around the world.¹³⁵

Efforts to launch a successful radio propaganda campaign against the Arbenz government in Guatemala were done with great care by the CIA. Knowing that the Guatemalan government controlled three of the nation's most powerful radio transmitters, the Agency needed to devise a way by which to ensure that its broadcasts were heard without jamming by the Guatemalan government. Analysis of the same CIA report that showed the enjoyment of Latin Americans to good music programs also revealed the extent to which the Arbenz government subdued political opposition

¹³⁵ Ibid. 16-18. The Roman Catholic Church in 1954 declared it to be the "Marian Year" in celebration of the Virgin Mary. It was suggested in this report that it would be useful for the programs with religious zeal to contain dedication to religious patronesses.

broadcasted through radio. Although no mandatory laws were enacted under Arbenz to suppress political opposition in the media, the government prevented many of the political parties which opposed the government to fully state their political agenda over the airwaves. For example, in a 1951 mayoral election held in Guatemala City, opposition candidates for the position were allotted specific times to state their agenda on the government-controlled radio broadcasts. However, the opposition candidates were only allowed to do this two weeks prior to the election and their speeches were often cut short when compared to the pro-government candidate. Also, on an occasion where an opposition candidate was scheduled to appear, the radio anchor announced that the candidate failed to show up for his scheduled broadcast without giving reason for the candidate's lack of reliability.¹³⁶

The CIA estimated that about 2.4 percent of the Guatemalan population owned a radio set capable of receiving *Radio Liberación* with an additional 5000 sets available in public places. This estimation was compared to 13 percent in Cuba, 5 percent in Mexico, and 4 percent in Costa Rica who owned radios.¹³⁷ The knowledge of exactly who owned the radio sets and where these people were located proved to be very important intelligence for the CIA as it began to plan the programs for its target audience. Knowing that a large segment of radio audiences in Guatemala were female listeners, the CIA regularly used two men and one woman radio announcer on *Radio Liberación*. The

¹³⁶ Ibid. 13. It should be noted that most of the intelligence gathered for this report stems from research conducted in 1951. By 1954, the *Voz de Guatemala* radio station controlled by the Arbenz government had amassed a far greater control of the ability to produce anti-American propaganda and broadcasts sympathetic to international communism.

¹³⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "Notes on Radio Broadcasting—Guatemala," CIA Historical Review, January 25, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000917063/DOC_0000917063.pdf (Accessed November 12, 2011) 1

woman announcer was picked specifically as a means to target the female listeners.¹³⁸ The program that the female announcer hosted was called “*La Mujer y la Patria: Opiniones Femeninas Sobre el Problema Comunista*” or “The Woman and the Fatherland: Feminine Opinions about the Communist Problem.” The program contained many references to the roles of women in everyday life. Striking out against communism, the female announcer called upon women as voters to not allow communism to succeed. She proceeded to educate the female listeners on how communism comes to dominate a society.¹³⁹ Because communism failed in many parts of the world to attract women, the female broadcaster of *Radio Liberación* stated to the listeners that communists created an Infant Protection program to convince women to align themselves with the communist movement. The announcer stated on May 20, 1954 on the 8:00 PM broadcast of *Radio Liberación* that it was time for the women of Guatemala to stand up and resist communism by creating an Infant Protection program of its own.¹⁴⁰ The attempts by communists to curb infant mortality rates were designed to gain the support of mothers. The female announcer told Guatemalan women that they did not need to support communism to create social welfare programs. Rather, as a segment of the population that obtained the right to vote and with it the ability to influence Guatemalan politics nine years earlier, it was up to them to advance these programs through the ballot box.

The CIA’s main target audience with its clandestine radio programs was the urban middle and upper classes of Guatemalan society in areas such as Guatemala City and

¹³⁸ See Central Intelligence Agency, “Materials for Psychological Warfare Support–Guatemala,” 7; Central Intelligence Agency, “PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes,” 7.

¹³⁹ Expansion of voting rights to literate women occurred with the liberal constitution written on March 13, 1945. See Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 32-33.

¹⁴⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, “PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes,” 144

Quetzaltenango. As evidenced by the 5000 radio sets placed in Guatemala City before the launch of *Radio Liberación*, however, the CIA also knew that there was a strong chance that industrial workers, and those that were less educated, may have the opportunity to listen to the broadcasts as well. In order to ensure that the CIA did not fail at an opportunity to sway the opinion of this segment of the Guatemalan public, it incorporated humor into its radio programming. The program “*Miscelanea Musical del Aire*” was specifically aimed at the less educated. For example, on May 6 on the 7:00 PM program, a humorous joke at Jacobo Arbenz was inserted into the broadcast. One man said to another, “Oh, what a beautiful mule!” and the other man replied by declaring “That’s a picture of Jacobo.”¹⁴¹ Straightforward and satirical, the statement was directed at uneducated workers. Because much of the other propaganda on the radio station was too complex for the uneducated to fully understand, the use of humor played a major role in the CIA’s ability to relay its message to this group of people in Guatemala. At the time of the broadcasts, the literacy rate in the country was substandard.¹⁴² Most of the indigenous population (about 60 to 70 percent of Guatemalan people) could not read and write while the Ladino population (about 30 to 40 percent who were either pure European or mestizo ancestry) was mostly semiliterate. Estimates on literacy rates indicated that 75 percent of the population was illiterate and as many 95 percent of the Guatemalan indigenous population could not read or write.¹⁴³ Precisely accurate numbers were irrelevant but close numbers did help the CIA to determine how much effort needed to be focused on programs directed toward semiliterate and illiterate people.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 10

¹⁴² The CIA documents give the impression that the Agency believed that the lower classes would understand the meanings of the jokes. Classical music, although likely listened to by these groups, was felt to be more appealing to the middle and upper classes.

¹⁴³ Stephen Schesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 38

The humor on the radio programs used by the CIA did not just poke fun at Jacobo Arbenz. The satire was also directed at the president's wife and members of his cabinet. In one recording played on May 4 for the 7:00 PM broadcast, the president's wife, Maria, exclaimed that she never realized that an English woman could weigh so much after reading a newspaper article that said that she lost over 3000 pounds. On the same broadcast, the humor was directed at the Guatemalan Economic Minister, Roberto Fanjul. When Fanjul stated that he had difficulty training his horse and asked a horse trainer how he managed to train his horse so well, the trainer responded that the first rule to training the horse was that its trainer needed to be smarter than the horse.¹⁴⁴ Although these humorous outtakes helped to maintain the interest of the radio station's listeners, each also had an ulterior motive. As the satire was aimed at discrediting Jacobo Arbenz and others loyal to him, the CIA believed that the audience most likely to enjoy this portion of the programming was also the most likely to infer that its leader and his cohorts were inept at running the country. Much of the sixty percent of the population that was ambivalent to Arbenz was not well informed about their president.¹⁴⁵ The Agency used this to its advantage on the radio as it became the best source for information about Arbenz during a time when Guatemalan politics were unraveling. It was not difficult for the CIA to acquire the intelligence necessary to create these satirical jokes. A U.S. journalist who traveled to Guatemala interviewed government officials like Victor Emmanuel Gutierrez, Guatemala's Chief of the Confederation of Labor. When asked about how the confederation managed to acquire so much power on such little payments for union dues (\$3000 for approximately 35000 members), Gutierrez responded by

¹⁴⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes," 10

¹⁴⁵ David Atlee Phillips, *The Night Watch*, 40

stating that the confederation did not have many annual expenses. This information showed that this government agency was likely acquiring money from an undocumented source (communists). In its efforts to discredit the government, this intelligence was invaluable to the CIA because it allowed the Agency to broadcast truths in its political satire rather than speculating and fabricating information about the government officials. The CIA learned that peasants voted for whomever the ruling party told them to vote for.¹⁴⁶ By instilling a lack of credibility in the Arbenz government, the chances of swaying the peasants' political orientation became much greater.

Aside from the political satire used by the Agency in its clandestine radio programs, there were two songs played on the airwaves that contained subtle references to the dangers of communism. Both of the songs were performed by a group named "Los Trinqueteros" and each of the songs debuted on the radio station in May 1954. Referring to the assassination of Arbenz's political opponent, Francisco Arana, in 1949, the lyrics of the song "La Profesia" ("The Profession") stated that Arbenz would pay for coming to power through treason.¹⁴⁷ The refrain of the song, sang at the beginning and repeated in the last verse, read as follows: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; Jacobo Arbenz, you are going to pay..."¹⁴⁸ The second of the two songs, debuting on May 22, became the banner song of the Castillo Armas' Army of Liberation. In the song, many of the lyrics offered promises of hope of Arbenz's ouster noting that the Guatemalan people had

¹⁴⁶ Central Intelligence, "Political Views of: Newspapermen, Wealthy Businessmen, Government Officials, Oppositionists/Resistance to Regime/US News Inaccuracies," CIA Historical Review, November 24, 1953, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914703/DOC_0000914703.pdf (Accessed February 18, 2012) 3-4

¹⁴⁷ When Arana was assassinated in 1949, it remained a mystery as to who was responsible for his death. Because he was nominated for the presidency to run against Arbenz, some of the conservatives in the country speculated that Arbenz secretly ordered his murder. See Piero Gleijeses' "The Death of Francisco Arana" for a detailed analysis of the events surrounding the assassination.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 34-35

suffered under his rule, but would soon be liberated by the *trinqueteros*. The language used in the song was a rural Guatemalan dialect which the CIA managed to use to its advantage. Knowing that many peasants living in Guatemala spoke indigenous variants of Spanish, the CIA incorporated this into these songs sung by Los Trinqueteros.¹⁴⁹ The CIA took into consideration the fact that the Arbenz administration sought to improve the plight of the peasantry within Guatemala and counteracted it with a promise that reform would still come through the impending coup.

By obtaining the interest of the peasantry in the country through its entertainment segments, and knowing the low literacy rates of many of these people, the CIA emphasized patience to its listeners on its “Miscelanea Musical del Aire” program. After more than a week of broadcasted attacks against the Guatemalan government, and with discontent already beginning to grow within the country, the CIA could not risk a popular uprising more than a month before the scheduled invasion by Castillo Armas’ forces. It urged its listeners on May 11 to remain tranquil as the Arbenz government was attempting to entrap many of the clandestine radio station’s listeners. The announcer stated to the audience “you will have your fun, but not yet.”¹⁵⁰ This proved to be critical for the CIA. For the operation to succeed, it needed the support of a large segment of the population. If many of the supporters of the counterrevolution were imprisoned due to their support for the conspirators working against the Arbenz government, the operation could fail or, at the very least, the CIA’s role in the operation could be exposed.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 37. The word *trinqueteros* does not translate from Spanish to English. The CIA’s reviewer of the SHERWOOD tapes mentioned on page 34 that the lyrics to the songs used contained a rural Guatemalan dialect that is not easily translated. For information about the CIA and its efforts to reach the indigenous population, see Central Intelligence Agency, “Proposed PP Program: Stage Two, PBSUCCESS,” CIA Historical Review, January 25, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914052/DOC_0000914052.pdf (Accessed January 17, 2012) 7.

¹⁵⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, “PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes,” 92.

Breakdown of the Broadcasts

When *Radio Liberación* commenced its operating schedule on May 1, 1954, Guatemalans could listen to the station twice a day in two one-hour segments: between 7:00-8:00 AM and 9:00-10:00 PM. On May 13, the evening broadcasts began at 8:00 PM and lasted for two hours until May 27 when it, again, began at 9:00 PM. When the fighting broke out in the countryside on June 18, *Radio Liberación* began to broadcast developments every 45 minutes to an hour.¹⁵¹ The times selected were pivotal to its audience. Most workers in Guatemala were unable to listen to the broadcasts during the day. Because all of the broadcasts were created and played using cassette tapes, the Agency was not able to supply a “live” broadcast. Prior to the launch of *Radio Liberación*, the Agency obtained six and a half hours of cassette recordings of Guatemalan radio programs in order to better coordinate its own broadcasts. These recordings included the “top ten” songs that were played on Guatemalan radio in the spring of 1954.¹⁵² When the CIA sought to obtain recordings of marimba music, the popular and traditional genre of music within Guatemala, it found that these records were difficult to locate. As a result, the Agency hired, at the cost of \$800, professional musicians to record marimba music at a studio in New York City.¹⁵³ With the marimba recordings and the commercial cassette tapes of other musical genres assembled for *Radio Liberación* broadcasts, the CIA gathered enough musical entertainment to launch

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 7

¹⁵² Central Intelligence Agency, “Tape Recordings of Guatemalan Radio Programs,” CIA Historical Review Program, April 14, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000916369/DOC_0000916369.pdf (Accessed February 18, 2012) 1

¹⁵³ Central Intelligence Agency, “RQM/OIS Support of PBSUCCESS,” CIA Historical Review, July 21, 1954, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000920237/DOC_0000920237.pdf (Accessed February 16, 2012) 7

the radio psychological warfare campaign. These programs gave the Agency the ability to gain the attention of the Guatemalan population and also to maintain it.

On May 1, when the station began its broadcasts, the announcers explained radio broadcasts' format. Morning broadcasts were to begin with popular music and "jokes about the personalities of our sad political situation." The announcers also stated that the broadcasts would contain more serious segments about Jacobo Arbenz followed by exquisite music. Evening broadcasts were to contain modern music followed by serious segments, again attacking the government and closed with marimba music. The first week's broadcasts followed this format, containing political commentary interspersed with popular music such as Dean Martin's "When the Moon Hits Your Eye like a Big Pizza Pie".¹⁵⁴ Four separate music programs incorporated many of the suggestions taken from the letters of Latin American listeners to radio programs emanating from the United States. "Descanso en Ritmo" played the top hits from North America, mostly from the U.S., "En Alas de la Musica Que no Reconoce Fronteras" featured music from around the world, "Miscelanea Musical del Aire" presented music with a local flavor such as the very popular marimba music, and "Baile al Compas que le Toquen" played music that poked fun at the politicians in the Arbenz regime.¹⁵⁵ Knowing that Latin American listeners had a choice of where to obtain their news and political commentary from, it was important to supplement its broadcasts with familiar music in order to keep the people tuned in so they could hear the political messages as well.

By establishing from the outset a program lineup that contained entertainment along with political commentary attacking the Arbenz government, the CIA managed to

¹⁵⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes," 53, 59

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 8

accumulate a fairly significant listening audience. Had the CIA simply broadcast political commentary, the station likely may have continued to operate but the audience would have dwindled, essentially making *Radio Liberación* useless in the overall operation. Because of the entertainment, the CIA managed to maintain a listening audience throughout the two months that its clandestine radio station broadcasted the propaganda into Guatemala, transmitting the critical commentary that struck fear into the Guatemalan people and destroyed the Arbenz government. *Radio Liberación* ceased operating on July 2, 1954; five days after Jacobo Arbenz resigned the presidency. The transmitter was packed away and shipped back to the United States and nearly all of the CIA's American operatives left the country in time to celebrate the Fourth of July back in the United States. After the operation in Guatemala, the CIA was changed forever. "The triumph showed what could be accomplished through covert action, and its lessons, learned and unlearned, would have ramifications for years to come."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Nicholas Cullather, *Secret History*, 105.

Conclusion

This research project has tried to show how the CIA, by obtaining psychological intelligence prior to the launch of Operation PBSUCCESS, managed to carry out a very effective propaganda campaign against Jacobo Arbenz's government. All told, the psychological warfare effort was devastating for the reformist president of Guatemala. Within weeks after this campaign commenced, Arbenz tried desperately to open diplomatic discussions with Dwight Eisenhower to save himself from being overthrown, even if he had to travel to Washington to meet with Eisenhower himself. This last ditch effort was rejected by the U.S. president and the rest of his diplomatic corp. U.S. ambassador John Peurifoy relayed to the Guatemalan Foreign Minister that as long as communism remained influential in Guatemala talks between the two presidents would not accomplish anything.¹⁵⁷ By May 1954, plans to depose Arbenz were nearing completion. *Time Magazine* quoted Ambassador Peurifoy as stating that American officials in Guatemala were "sending out Fourth of July invitations" and not including any of the present Guatemalan government officials on the guest list.¹⁵⁸ Because of this, the psychological warfare campaign was extremely important to insuring that the operation succeeded.

When the foray into Guatemala began on June 18, 1954 by a small exile force led by Castillo Armas, *Radio Liberación* played a key role in exaggerating the upheaval caused by the invading exiles. In the six weeks prior to "D-Day", the clandestine radio station amassed a large audience that included Arbenz and many members of his

¹⁵⁷ Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 164-165

¹⁵⁸ "Guatemala: The New Junta," *Time Magazine*, July 12, 1954, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,860972-1,00.html> (accessed September 30, 2011) 2

government.¹⁵⁹ After jamming the Guatemalan government's radio communications, *Radio Liberación* became the outlet by which Guatemalans received updates on the battle between the forces of Arbenz and Castillo Armas. When aircraft piloted by Americans flew over Guatemala City dropping gasoline-filled soda bottles and sticks of dynamite meant to resemble conventional bombs, to create panic and an illusion that the city was under bombardment, the radio station reported that liberation forces bombed military targets and destroyed the Santa Barbara arms storage facility that held many of the weapons imported from Czechoslovakia aboard the *Alfhem*. After the Arbenz government reported that it fired anti-aircraft weaponry and struck one of the bombers and revealed that the bomber was flown by American pilots, *Radio Liberación* responded with a fictitious story that a Mexican investigation showed that the plane was actually a single-engine tourist plane on flight to Colombia and that anti-aircraft guns did not damage the plane as the Guatemalan government suggested.¹⁶⁰ As tensions reached a climax, Arbenz's last efforts to save his government were lost. *Radio Liberación* produced a story that discredited Arbenz's accusations that the United States intervened, for the time maintaining the deniability for the CIA in the coup and rendering the Arbenz government unable to charge the U.S. for its role.

When the dust settled, Arbenz had no choice but to resign from office, effective June 27, 1954. The 1944 revolution that held much hope and promise for tens-of-thousands of Guatemalan peasants was overturned, and eventually the nation entered into a forty-year civil war that took the lives of many people. Nearly sixty years have passed since this event took place in Guatemala and recently, many have come forward asking

¹⁵⁹ Immerman 164-165.

¹⁶⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, "PBSUCCESS: The SHERWOOD Tapes," 273, 281. See also Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 164.

that the United States issue a formal apology for its role in the coup. On October 22, 2011, Guatemalan president Alvaro Colom handed Arbenz's son a formal letter of apology for the events that occurred in June 1954. "As president of the republic, as commander in chief of the army, I want to apologize to the Arbenz family for that great crime committed on the 27th of June of 1954...Guatemala changed that day, and we haven't yet recovered" were the words spoken by Colom. Author Stephen Schlesinger asserted that "[t]he fake broadcasts and bombings 'put such fear in the small country' that it just collapsed..."¹⁶¹ If and when the United States does apologize for its role in the 1954 operation, the fact remains that the event has occupied an important place in the historiography of U.S.-Latin American relations since the 1950s. In the future, as more new evidence becomes available it is likely that historians will continue to research the event in attempts to find new clues about how the United States interventionist policies affected the approximately three million inhabitants of a small Central American country.

Although this research project on the CIA propaganda campaign against Jacobo Arbenz narrates American intervention in Guatemala in 1954 through a unique lens, State Department and CIA documents only explain the efforts made by the Agency to obtain the psychological intelligence so crucial to carrying out the operation. These documents reveal that the campaign was quite effective in destabilizing the Arbenz government but do not tell the entire story. The purpose of this project was to examine the efforts made by the CIA to accumulate and put into action psychological intelligence. The question remains as to the specific effectiveness on different segments of the Guatemalan population. The answer to that question likely can be revealed by researching journals,

¹⁶¹ Mariano Castillo, "Apology Reignites Conversation about Ousted Guatemalan Leader," *CNN.com*, October 24, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/22/world/americas/guatemala-arbenz/index.html> (Accessed October 25, 2011)

diaries, memoirs, and other documents left behind by the people who lived through this episode of Guatemalan history; many of which are likely long deceased. The future of study on Operation PBSUCCESS is not a matter of researching the rights and wrongs of U.S. participation in the event. Instead, it is more important to consider the impacts of specific subthemes related to the event (i.e. propaganda) on those most affected by it.

Operation PBSUCCESS was the first of many covert operations conducted by the CIA in Latin America during the Cold War. The triumph of the Agency in this affair set a precedent for future operations, most notably the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961. Similar to the Guatemalan intervention, the CIA recruited exiles to lead an invasion to overthrow Fidel Castro. The difference between the two, though, was that in Guatemala, the invaders succeeded while in Cuba, they failed miserably. The failure embarrassed the United States and specifically the CIA. Why did one operation succeed while the other failed? Arguments that Castro had far greater support in Cuba than Arbenz in Guatemala are viable. However, the assessments made by CIA operatives in 1954 showed that 75 percent of the Guatemalan population either supported Arbenz or, at the very least, did not oppose his policies. The largest difference between PBSUCCESS and the Bay of Pigs invasion is the fact that the CIA conducted a much more effective psychological warfare campaign in Guatemala. The Agency did not sufficiently “create the climate for regime change” in Cuba as it did in Guatemala. The psychological intelligence gathered on the Guatemalan population enabled the CIA to convince wealthy, urban Guatemalans and much of its military leaders to retract their support for Arbenz. Without this, the

operation was doomed to fail.¹⁶² In Cuba, Castro had the support of most of the population. Multiple U.S. interventions in the country from 1898-1958 produced a population that, at the very least, supported defiance of U.S. policy. The lessons from Guatemala that the Agency failed to take into account was that the U.S. developed very strong psychological intelligence and understood Guatemalan culture to the degree that it could influence most of the people of the country to turn their backs on Arbenz. The CIA failed despondently in Cuba to accomplish this. Future research to better connect the two covert operations is something that can and should be conducted to better understand the role of psychological intelligence (or lack thereof) in covert operations that succeeded or failed.

As this study has tried to show, without psychological intelligence, the CIA's intervention in Guatemala would not have achieved the results that it did. The Guatemalan Revolution of 1944 was a welcomed change for the vast majority of Guatemalan people. Political propaganda, although impossible to leave out as being the major cause of the destabilization of Guatemala, could not have been broadcast over the radio or in Guatemalan Catholic churches if not for the CIA's extensive research on the culture of the country. Thus, it can be concluded that, when considering all of the complex factors at play that allowed this operation to succeed, psychological intelligence played the most important role.

¹⁶² Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 164.

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