

Lobster 60

SUCCESS

The CIA in Guatemala, 1954

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On 18 June 1954, following the positive outcome in Iran a year previously, backed by the President, Congress and the State Department, the CIA launched their next interventionist operation. It entailed replacing the Guatemalan left-wing, reformist leader Jacobo Arbenz Guzman – seen by many in the US as a Communist sympathiser – with a leader who would be more suitable to US interests strategically, politically and economically, the dictatorial General Carlos Castillo Armas.

The effects of the US-sponsored coup d'état were deep and far reaching. For the CIA and the Eisenhower administration, 'its triumph confirmed the belief....that covert operations offered a safe, inexpensive substitute for armed force in resisting Communist inroads in the Third World.'¹ This ultimately led to complacency in tactics and methods, and the subsequent failure in Cuba in 1961. Guatemalan politics was also transformed, but not along the path of 'success' – as the CIA operation was codenamed – and democracy but one of bloodshed, dictatorship and tragedy. As the Guatemalan ambassador to the US at the time, Guillermo Toriello, stated in his introduction to the book *Guatemala in Rebellion*: 'The complicity and support given by a succession of United States governments to the executioners of our people have drenched

¹ Nick Cullather, *The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala 1952-1954*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) 2nd edition, p. 8.

our road to liberation in innocent blood.’²

This essay will explore the reasoning behind the CIA intervention in Guatemala, the preparation involved in the operation, how it was carried out, and the aftermath, highlighting the extent to which the CIA was specifically used to meet Eisenhower’s foreign policy objectives.

The arrival of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman

Following the 1944 revolution, which saw Dictator Jorge Ubico stand down, leading to democratic elections, Juan Jose Arevalo was elected. As Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer explain in their account of the coup, *Bitter Fruit*, Arevalo set out four main priorities when he took power: ‘agrarian reform, protection of labour, a better educational system and consolidation of political democracy,’³ ideas most notably expressed in his 1947 Work Code, which improved the conditions for labour. In the 1951 elections, following the assassination of his main opponent Francisco Arana, Jacobo Arbenz Guzman emerged victorious. In his inaugural speech he stated his primary objective was ‘to convert Guatemala from a country bound by a predominantly feudal economy into a modern, capitalist one.’⁴ The difference between Arevalo and Arbenz, essentially, was that Arbenz would go further in applying the role of government in Guatemala’s modernisation.

His most striking reform was announced on 17 June 1952: named Decree 900, it aimed to completely restructure and make more equal land ownership in rural Guatemala, converting the vast amounts of unused crops, usually left in the soil, into staple food crops. This would lessen the reliance

² Guillermo Toriello, ‘Introduction’ in Jonathan L. Fried (ed.) *Guatemala in Rebellion*, (New York: Grove Press, 1983) p. 17.

³ Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (New York: Doubleday, 1982) p. 37.

⁴ Jacobo Arbenz, *Discourses* [Speeches] (Guatemala City: Tipografia, Nacional, 1951) p. 14.

of the Guatemalan economy on expensive imports, and, through increased technological innovation, free up the huge number of agricultural workers needed during harvest time, to create an industrial workforce. The plan looked to distribute the land of those *latifundios* (landowners) with more than 223 acres to as many peasants as possible.⁵ By 1953, while Guatemala was still underdeveloped, progress was certainly being made, and most notably along lines similar to that of the New Deal and programs the US was supporting in Japan.⁶ Cold War paranoia, however, meant the situation was viewed somewhat differently in Washington.

The reasons for US intervention into Guatemala are often based around two beliefs: the first that Communist infiltration eventually led to direct action from the US,⁷ through the CIA but under the authorisation of the White House, to protect hemispheric security; and the other that the US acted to protect financial interests, most prominently those of the Boston-based United Fruit Company (UFCO),⁸ which had large economic interests in Guatemala and lobbying power in Washington. The first of these views, while not leading to firm presidential action until Eisenhower, did start to bloom under Truman. Although most in the State Department were on the whole unconcerned, at first, about Arevalo and the Guatemalan situation, some more persistent anti-Communists

5 Thomas Melville, and Marjorie Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership*, (New York: Free Press, 1971) pp. 44-45.

6 By 1953 the government had redistributed an estimated 740,000 acres, which amounted to an average 100,000 families or 500,000 individuals receiving some land, an estimated 10.4 acres per individual. See Karl M. Schmitt and David D. Burks, *Evolution or Chaos: Dynamics of Latin American Government and Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1963) p. 8.

7 See Richard H. Immerman *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998) and John Prados, *Presidents' Secret Wars* (Chicago: Elephant, 1996), Cullather (see note 1) and Stephen E. Ambrose, *Ike's Spies: Eisenhower and the Espionage Establishment* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1981).

8 See Schlesinger and Kinzer (see note 3).

such as Spruille Braden, were not satisfied; and alongside heightened reforms in Guatemala caused a 'general uneasiness within the Truman administration,'⁹ leading to increased 'thin' intelligence gathering.¹⁰

The duck test

No matter how thin the evidence was, reports of the possibility of Communism in Guatemala continued. Richard Patterson Jr., Truman's ambassador to Guatemala, coined the 'Duck Test' in which, using the metaphor of a duck, he explains that just because a duck is not wearing a label, if he 'swims like a duck' and 'quacks like a duck' then you can probably reach 'the conclusion that the bird is a duck, whether he's wearing a label or not.'¹¹ John Peurifoy, who would be Eisenhower's Guatemalan ambassador, would later apply this test. After talking to Arbenz he stated that 'he talked like a Communist, he thought like a Communist, he acted like a Communist and if he is not one, he will do until one comes along'¹² – a revealing statement about US Cold War policy thinking.

Following Arevalo's 1947 work code, United Fruit, seeing this action as 'an assault on free enterprise',¹³ found powerful voices who could bring their fears to the Oval Office, notably Edward L. Bernays, a master of public relations, and Thomas

9 Richard Immerman, 'Guatemala as Cold War History', *Political Science Quarterly*, 95:4 (Winter, 1980-1981) p. 635.

10 Intelligence gathering in Guatemala at this time was the responsibility of the FBI.

11 Richard Patterson, 'Draft of Speech to Rotary Club,' 24 March 1950, Patterson Papers, box five, *Truman Library* (Missouri) cited in Stephen E. Ambrose (see note 7) p. 222.

12 House of Representatives, 'Subcommittee on Latin America of the Select Committee on Communist Aggression', *Ninth Interim Report of Hearings: Communist Aggression in Latin America*, (1954) p. 12.

13 Nick Cullather (see note 1) p. 15.

G. Cocoran, a major lobbyist.¹⁴ When United Fruit land was expropriated under Arbenz's Decree 900, compensation of \$600,000 was offered in agrarian bonds. The sum was in fact UFCO's own valuation, but, regardless, this caused outrage in the company, which proceeded to launch a huge PR campaign and sponsor junkets to Guatemala in order to highlight their grievances and depict Arbenz as a Communist.¹⁵

While these reports and lobbying tactics, along with UFCO's close contacts in the White House and State Department, did gain recognition, with Schlesinger and Kinzer even arguing that UFCO held 'the fate of Arbenz and his ambitious social reforms,'¹⁶ neither Truman nor Eisenhower would warrant action purely on this basis. Eisenhower even stated that, 'expropriation in itself does not, of course, prove Communism.'¹⁷

However, in the context of the Cold War situation, and the need to protect America's 'backyard', United Fruit was seen as an example of the American way of life, which in turn was being threatened by those who wanted to undermine it – the Communists. So a threat to UFCO was a threat to US national interests and security.¹⁸ This link was made by John

14 Jim Handy, 'The Most Precious Fruit of the Revolution: The Guatemalan Agrarian Reform 1952-54', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 68:4, (November 1988) p. 699.

15 Correspondents from *Time*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Newsweek* and the *New York Times* were sent to report on Communist activities. The press took the bait, and floods of articles denouncing the Guatemalan government were published, such as Fitzhugh Turner's five part series on Guatemala in the *New York Herald Tribune* in February 1950, and Sydney Gruson's report (*The New York Times*, 4 June 1954 p. 1) which called UFCO 'the whipping boy for the Communists, the pawn in the Soviet's vast conspiratorial design.' Also see Richard Immerman (see note 7) p. 112.

16 Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer (see note 3) p. 77.

17 Dwight D Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 421-22.

18 Martin Needler, *The United States and the Latin American Revolution* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1972), p. 79.

F. Dulles, who stated that if UFCO did receive the desired payment, 'the problem would remain just as it is today as far as the presence of Communist infiltration in Guatemala is concerned. That is the problem, not United Fruit.'¹⁹

The CIA concluded by early 1952, as stated in NIE-62, that Arbenz was 'a potential threat to US security.....[engaging in] open communication with international Communism'; also acknowledging that while there were powerful opponents to the administration, they were fragmented, meaning 'powerful opposition to Communism will remain ineffective.'²⁰ With Decree 900 and land reform being announced, the Agency viewed this as meaning 'the Communists have an excellent opportunity to extend their influence over the rural population.'²¹ The Agency believed the only method to successfully remedy the threat in Guatemala was covert action, and began to look for ears within the still pessimistic State Department and assets within Central America. It was clear that no action could take place without the support of the State Department and authorisation from the President.

PBFORTUNE

Full covert action against Guatemala did nearly begin under Truman. Operation PBFORTUNE was put into motion following Nicaraguan president Anastasio Somoza's visit to Washington in April 1952. The dictator told State officials that if they supplied arms, he and Castillo Armas, who had escaped from

¹⁹ 'John Foster Dulles, news conference transcript' (8 June 1954), in US Department of State, *American Foreign policy, 1950-1955: Basic Documents*, volume 1 (1957), p. 1310.

²⁰ NIE-62, 'Present Political situation in Guatemala and possible developments during 1952', (11 March 1952), *FRUS 1952-1954, Volume IV, American Republics, (Guatemala Compilation)* (1983), document 3 (*FRUS 1952-54, Vol IV* hereafter).

²¹ Intelligence Report Prepared in the Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State, (5 March 1953), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala*, (2003) document 35 (*FRUS 1952-54, Guatemala* hereafter).

prison to Honduras in 1949 after a failed plot against Arevalo, would remedy the Arbenz situation. Truman authorised DCI Bedell Smith to make contact with Armas. Chief of the CIA Western Hemisphere Division, J.C. King, located arms and transport on 9 July 1952 and gave Deputy DCI Allen Dulles a proposal for arms and money. Finally DCI Smith received confirmation to go ahead from Under Secretary of State David Bruce on 9 September 1952. After being set in motion the plan was aborted on 8 October, following a leak.²² As a CIA memorandum from King said: 'This confirmed our general belief that no Latin American can be trusted to keep his mouth shut.'²³

Despite this, King did not want to abandon support for Armas and sought to ship arms as far as the Canal Zone, in case there was a change; he also gave Armas \$3,000 a week to keep his force.²⁴ Seeking the help of DCI Smith, the two kept the operation alive but with no mandate, hoping the new Eisenhower administration would be more decisive. Following a failed raid by anti-Communist rebels in March 1953, seriously damaging Agency assets,²⁵ the State Department grew more apprehensive. The new administration felt that Guatemala was 'in miniature all of the social cleavages, tensions and dilemmas of modern Western society under attack by the Communist virus.' They concluded that 'we should regard Guatemala as a prototype area for testing means and

²² The leak was from Somoza's son, Tacho, who asked Assistant Secretary Edward Miller in a meeting if the 'machinery' was on its way.

²³ J. C. King, Memorandum for the Record, 'Central American Situation', (8 October 1952), *FRUS 1952-54, Guatemala*, (2003) document 24.

²⁴ *Ibid.* document 25.

²⁵ NIE 84, 'Probable developments in Guatemala', (19 May 1953), *FRUS 1952-54, Vol IV*, (1983) document 15.

methods of combating Communism.²⁶ Eisenhower took this challenge, with covert action fitting smoothly into his 'New Look' framework. Cullather states that 'departments and agencies were headed by officials predisposed to seek active, covert remedies to the Guatemalan problem.' Eisenhower, unlike his predecessor, would be more decisive. Covert action in Guatemala had now found the administration it required.

Armas is chosen

Due to the nature of the operation, its organisation and structure was kept separate from other DDP/CIA activities. It had 'a separate chain of command, communications facilities, logistics and funds,'²⁷ with most of the CIA's top members involved.²⁸ Castillo Armas was chosen as the replacement to Arbenz, his 'military background, honest reputation, folk hero image, and Mayan appearance made him a good choice to lead the invasion.'²⁹ Armas received huge amounts of assistance from the US, militarily and economically. Arms were sent to bases in Honduras and Nicaragua, with whom the US

²⁶ Memorandum by the Officer in Charge of Central America and Panama Affairs (Leddy) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Cabot). 'Relations with Guatemala', (21 May, 1953), *ibid.* document 16.

²⁷ Nick Cullather (see note 1) p. 44

²⁸ Allen Dulles personally oversaw the operation, putting Frank Wisner at its head. Richard Bissell was Dulles' special assistant, co-ordinating with J. C. King, who remained head of the Western Hemisphere Division. Hans Tofte was the head of psychological and political areas and E. Howard Hunt was the Chief of Propaganda. The operations field headquarters, codenamed LINCOLN and headed by Al Haney, was established at Opa Locka, Florida. Dulles issued an initial budget of \$3 million on 9 December 1953. A diplomatic team was also in place, headed by Bedell Smith. It contained John Peurifoy, the Guatemalan ambassador, William Willauer ambassador to Honduras, Thomas Whelan minister to Nicaragua and Robert Hill ambassador to Costa Rica. See James Callanan, *Covert Action in the Cold War: US Policy, Intelligence and CIA Operations* (London: IB Tauris, 2010).

²⁹ Richard Immerman, 'Guatemala as Cold War History', *Political Science Quarterly*, 95:4 (Winter 1980-81) pp. 629-653.

signed military agreements in May 1954; and mercenaries were paid with 'wads of dollar bills'³⁰ to form Armas's rebel army. Several planes were also sent to Honduras, two of which Armas lost during the invasion, the only event documented in Eisenhower's memoirs that suggests US involvement. He describes debating with Dulles over whether to replace the planes; and after being told that, if he didn't, the operation would fail, he agreed.³¹ It must also be noted that although blame for the coup should be placed solely upon the White House, in his article featured in *Studies in Intelligence*, David M Barrett states that Congress also played a role, commenting that the belief Congress did not know roughly what was happening is 'thoroughly implausible'.³²

The primary weapon was psywar

PBSUCCESS was not, however, a military effort to overthrow Arbenz; these efforts were mainly for effect. The primary weapon in PBSUCCESS was covert psychological warfare (psywar) alongside an overt diplomatic effort from State and Defence, to isolate Guatemala and cover-up details. On 1 May 1954 (a national holiday), the CIA-financed radio station, the 'Voice of Liberation' (VOL), manned by a team of Guatemalan exiles across the borders, began broadcasting. Operation SHERWOOD as it was known, was ready as early as April 1954.³³ The radio station broadcast anti-Arbenz messages and claimed to be operated within the jungles of Guatemala. SHERWOOD was headed by David Atlee Phillips, a former actor, who, in his account in his memoir *The Night Watch*,

30 Eyewitness journalist Evelyn Irons, quoted in Edward Bernays, *Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of a Public Relations Counsel* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965) p. 771.

31 Dwight D. Eisenhower, (see note 17) pp. 425-26.

32 David M. Barrett, 'Congress, the CIA and Guatemala 1954', *Studies in Intelligence*, 10, (Winter/Spring 2001) p. 23.

33 Contact Report (28 April 1954), *FRUS 1952-54, Guatemala*, (2003) document 135.

asserts that SHERWOOD was the key to PBSUCCESS's triumph, stating that 'within a week there was unrest everywhere.'³⁴

The station was so well concealed that correspondents from *The New York Times* and *Time* used it as a source for reports, amplifying the psychological impact.³⁵ As well as radio propaganda, it was 'recommended a leaflet air drop' should be carried out 'on Guatemala City on May Day'.³⁶ In conjunction with this, the CIA had Cardinal Spellman of New York hold clandestine meetings with Guatemalan priests in order to 'suggest that the Church might warn the faithful against inevitable spiritual contamination through the commie-led fronts.'³⁷ Finally, any army officers not opposing Arbenz were persuaded with bribery.³⁸

Assassination?

Recent evidence documented by Kate Doyle and Peter Kornbluh has revealed, that assassination plans and proposals were put forward as part of these 'methods'.³⁹ A report released in June 1995 by CIA historian, Gerald K. Haines, claims that while assassination was never carried out,

34 David Philips, *The Night Watch: 25 Years of Peculiar Service* (New York: Atheneum, 1977) p. 53.

35 *Ibid.* pp. 40-46.

36 Memorandum for the Record. 'Synthesis of Ambassador Peurifoy's Remarks Relevant to PBSUCCESS Made at a Meeting 21 April 1954', (21 April 1954), *FRUS 1952-54, Guatemala*, (2003) document 131.

37 'Memorandum From the Senior Representative, Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida (Dunbar) to the CIA Station in Guatemala', (28 April 1954) *ibid.* document 136.

38 Stephen E. Ambrose (see note 7) p. 229.

39 Kate Doyle and Peter Kornbluh, 'CIA and Assassinations: The Guatemala 1954 Documents' in *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 4*. (George Washington University, National Security Archive).

proposals did exist in both PBFORTUNE and SUCCESS,⁴⁰ but the names of those targeted were deleted in the published version. Indeed a document contained in the PBSUCCESS training file, 'A Study of Assassination', details the steps and processes needed to effectively and properly execute 'the deed'.⁴¹ Right up until the beginning of the coup various memoranda ⁴² also detail the existence of assassination lists and the possibility of 'disposal action'.⁴³

Diplomacy

In conjunction with covert psywar, State Department officials along with the USIA (United States Information Agency), launched a campaign to tilt hemispheric and public opinion: which suggests that not only was the coup not fully justified but that opinion, both domestic and international had to be moulded to fit in with the instruments of US foreign policy. It could therefore be stated that the CIA, working alongside the State Department, held a significant position in defining this policy, not just implementing it. A report detailing the actions of the USIA certainly supports this, saying 'our principal information effort was directed toward creating greater awareness...of the real threat to peace and security posed by the verifiable Communist penetration.'⁴⁴ They did this through planted newspaper articles and tight control of the media, 'spinning' situations to form a pretext.

The most unified and effective pretext however, came

40 Gerald K. Haines, 'CIA History Staff Analysis: CIA and Guatemala Assassination Proposals, 1952-1954', in *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 4*, document one (June 1955).

41 'A Study of Assassination' see Nick Cullather (see note 1) pp. 137-140.

42 See index to 'Assassination plans' in *FRUS 1952-54, Guatemala*, (2003) for list of documents.

43 'Disposal List Prepared by C/EW' (1 June 1954) *FRUS 1952-54, Guatemala*, (2003) document 166.

44 'Report on Actions taken by the United States Information Agency', *ibid.* document 280.

from the tenth Inter-American Conference held in Caracas from 1– 28 March 1954.⁴⁵ The aim of the United States was to secure 'a strong anti-Communist resolution', while Latin Americans were concerned, as they had been for some time, with 'economic matters'.⁴⁶ John F. Dulles nevertheless introduced the 'Caracas treaty'.⁴⁷ This looked to secure support to halt Communism, stating that Communist infiltration of any country would call for 'appropriate action in accordance with existing treaties'.⁴⁸ After much protest, the resolution passed with a large majority, which pleased the United States and the corresponding dictatorships, but left most of the Latin American delegates feeling fearful, only voting for it out of worries the US would cut off aid to them.⁴⁹ Regardless, the US had got what it came for, and with hemispheric support in place the US felt everything was going to plan. Arbenz, however, fearful of impending invasion, made a mistake that would secure a US pretext beyond anything that occurred in Caracas.

Enter the Soviets

45 For a more detailed assessment of the politics behind the actual conference see Richard Immerman (see note 7) pp. 144-151

46 John F. Dulles, Minutes of Cabinet Meeting (26 February 1954) in *ibid.* p. 145.

47 Full name: 'Declaration of Solidarity for the Preservation of the Political Integrity of the American States against Communist Intervention'.

48 United States Department of State, *Tenth Inter-American Conference: Report of the Delegation of the United States of America with Related Documents* (Washington, D.C, Government Printing Office, 1954), pp. 8-9. 'Existing treaties' would refer to the 1947 Rio Pact which stated the requirement for an overall consensus between the OAS (Organisation of American States) before any action could take place.

49 As Uruguay's Chief Delegate explained to *Time* magazine: 'We voted for the resolution but without enthusiasm, without optimism, without joy, and without the feeling that we were contributing to the adoption of a constructive measure.' 'After the Vote,' *Time*, (29 March, 1954), p. 32.

Arbenz turned to the welcoming ears of the Soviets, who obliged by sending him arms through Czechoslovakia, on a Swedish registered ship, the *Alfhem*.⁵⁰ The Agency and State Department knew about the shipment, with Wisner agreeing in early April 1954 to let the shipment go ahead for a while until 'exposure would be most compromising to the Guatemalans.'⁵¹ It arrived in Puerto Barrios on 15 May 1954, with CIA agents waiting. As Nick Cullather states: 'the arms purchase handed PBSUCCESS a propaganda bonanza.'⁵² Dulles on 17 May exaggerated the size of the cargo and said it would triple the size of the army, while SHERWOOD, trying to cause a split between Arbenz and the army, reported the weapons were intended for workers' militias, which Piero Gleijeses, in his book *Shattered Hope*, has reported to be the case, highlighting the desperation of Arbenz.⁵³ The American press took the bait⁵⁴ and, as one Agency telegram stated, the 'shipment is shocking evidence that Soviets and Commies intend completely to take over.'⁵⁵

Following the incident, intimidation against the government was also stepped up, stretching the limits of international law and diplomatic harmony. Operation

⁵⁰ The CIA had tried to implicate Soviet/Communist involvement in the region by planting arms in Nicaragua in February 1954. Known as Operation WASHTUB, this is documented as on 7 May a telegram from the CIA station in Guatemala states: 'at this moment WASHTUB appears to be a complete success.' *FRUS 1952-54, Guatemala*, (2003) document 144. Also see Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: the Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) p. 294.

⁵¹ Memorandum from the Deputy Director for Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner) to the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division (King): 'Guatemalan acquisition of Iron Curtain arms', *FRUS 1952-54, Guatemala*, (2003) Document 121.

⁵² Nick Cullather, (see note 1) p. 79.

⁵³ Piero Gleijeses (see note 50) p. 304

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 299

⁵⁵ 'Telegram From the CIA Station in Guatemala to Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida' (20 May 1954) *FRUS 1952-54, Guatemala*, (2003) document 156.

HARDROCK, which saw a sea blockade of Guatemala with every ship searched for arms, was initiated on 24 May 1954. The message to Arbenz was that, if the US was prepared to violate international law, she wouldn't think twice about the 1947 Rio Pact.⁵⁶

The sinking of the Springfjord

This operation nearly led to a huge diplomatic crisis, when on 27 June, Somoza, fearing a ship named the *Springfjord* was carrying gasoline, not the cotton and coffee discovered afterwards, went against the orders of the CIA's Tracey Barnes and Al Haney, and had it bombed. Luckily it sank slowly and everybody escaped; but the real crisis was the fact this ship was British. Eisenhower was looking to gain British support for actions in Indochina at this point at the June 1954 summit, but after the CIA paid for the mistake in full to the sum of \$1.5 million, while the mood was soured, the British said little more, as do most histories in this area. The event did, however, make Eisenhower enforce stricter guidelines on covert activity, introducing a senior review group. It also had a psychological effect on the Guatemalan army, which turned against Arbenz.⁵⁷

The invasion 'force' led by Armas, consisting of only 150 poorly trained men, crossed the border into Guatemala on 18 June 1954, advanced six miles and halted at the Church of the Black Christ, where they stayed until Arbenz resigned. CIA personnel in the Florida field headquarters named LINCOLN, jammed radio communications, meaning citizens knew little of what was happening, causing panic and rumours to spread. Arbenz, who was also panicking, decided to initiate a complete blackout, in order to cease 'Voice of Liberation' transmissions, which served only to escalate the pandemonium.

⁵⁶ Piero Gleijeses (see note 50) pp. 312-313.

⁵⁷ John Prados (see note 7) pp. 105-106.

Armas's air force, consisting of only a few Cessnas and P-47 Thunderbolts, was the most successful psychological instrument. Manned by CIA-hired pilots, they circled Guatemala City dropping anything that caused a loud noise, from dynamite to coke bottles. (The planes were later referred to as *sufatos*, Guatemalan for laxatives, which best described their psychological impact upon the population.) Additionally, the 'Voice of Liberation' reported that Soviet pilots had defected to the West with their planes; and after a Guatemalan pilot did defect, he was given large amounts of alcohol, secretly recorded making an appeal and this was then broadcast. After this Arbenz 'did not permit the flight of a single military aircraft during the duration of the conflict.'⁵⁸ Now feeling all was lost, he looked to arm the peasants and the general population. But this was the final straw for the army, already fearing outright defeat, which now saw its own military status undermined. They called for Arbenz's resignation, which he tendered without a struggle on 27 June 1954, then fled into exile. A short-lived military junta attempted to continue to the fight but gave way to Armas a week later.

In the aftermath of PBSUCCESS, Frank Wisner initiated an operation entitled PBHISTORY to exploit the success of the coup and find documents implicating Soviet involvement. As Ronald M. Schneider's study on Guatemala, based upon PBHISTORY evidence showed, no 'smoking gun' proof was ever found.⁵⁹

The Agency, Whitehouse officials and the Eisenhower administration all failed to realise how close they had come to defeat, labelling the operation as a huge success, making covert action a decisive weapon of choice in diplomatically awkward situations. Through psychological methods Arbenz

⁵⁸ David Phillips (see note 34) pp. 43-44.

⁵⁹ Ronald M. Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala 1944-1954* (New York: Octagon Books, 1978).

became certain of a US invasion which the CIA was then able to exploit, avoiding the use of direct force, scaring him into resignation. If Arbenz had stood his ground and fought Armas's small rebel army, the CIA's main asset would have been removed, leaving Arbenz looking strong and in control, retaining his authority to rule. Aside from the elements of sheer luck that brought around Arbenz's resignation, various mishaps such as the failure of Operation PBFORTUNE, and the unauthorised raid that followed in March 1953, as well as countless leaks throughout the operation's history, could have exposed the CIA plans. Much like in Iran, the operation's success was mostly down to luck and the culmination of favourable local situations, which the Agency was able to exploit, creating the illusion of something much bigger, powerful and better organised.

In Guatemala, while removing a leader, the Agency had failed to install a suitable replacement; Guatemala fell into dictatorship and upheaval. PBSUCCESS achieved the short term goal of removing Arbenz, but 'thwarted' the long term goal of 'stable, non-Communist government'.⁶⁰ Armas further alienated leftist elements, which became more unified and resentful, leading to Armas' assassination in 1957, civil war, brutality, and large scale political unrest and uncertainty, still evident today.

For one man, however, lessons would be learned. Che Guevara, who arrived in Guatemala in February 1954, and later followed Arbenz to Mexico, stated in his article 'I saw the Fall of Jacobo Arbenz': 'the struggle begins now'.⁶¹ He had seen what the US did, the mistakes Arbenz made and was now preparing for his own fight in Cuba, which could come following the 1959 revolution. This time the US would not be so lucky.

⁶⁰ Nick Cullather (see note 1) p. 117.

⁶¹ John Gerassi, 'Introduction', *Venceremos: The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara* (1968) pp. 45-47.

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