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NSC BRIEFING NOTES  
WESTERN DIVISION

13 July 1954

Indications of an imminent attempt to overthrow the Costa Rican government

(see Appendix for background)

I. The Venezuelan government appears most determined of the several rightist <sup>REGIMES</sup> in the Caribbean area seeking to cause the overthrow of the Figueres administration in Costa Rica by supporting a movement ostensibly composed of Costa Ricans.

A. As early as mid-May plans were being discussed in Caracas for the overthrow of the Guatemalan and Costa Rican governments.

1. Venezuelan president Perez and security chief Estrada reportedly discussed the plans with emissaries from Nicaragua, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Honduras.

2. In early June Estrada visited Panama and Nicaragua reportedly reviewing the plans.

3. On 22 June a poorly-disguised Venezuelan plane dropped anti-government leaflets over the Costa Rican capital.

B. Venezuela first opposed an OAS meeting on Guatemala because of fear that such a meeting might jeopardize these plans.

1. When the OAS meeting on Guatemala was finally postponed on 2 July, however, the Venezuelans

*Chief of Security Police  
Venez.*

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were very angry because this denied them the opportunity to air the "Communist problem" in Costa Rica before the assembled foreign ministers.

- C. Venezuela apparently continues determined to oust Figueres
  - 1. The Venezuelan president, who dislikes the US, is extremely angry at what he feels is US support for Costa Rica.
  - 2. On 9 July security chief Estrada said he hoped an attack would take place. He said he would not inform the US if he learned any details.

II. Panama seems involved with Venezuela in the plot.

- A. President Remon thoroughly dislikes and distrusts Figueres.
- B. Very close military relations between Panama and Venezuela have developed this year
  - 1. Remon is obligated to Venezuela for a large shipment of arms and a military mission. No Panamanian compensation has been reported.
  - 2. Venezuelan arms have reportedly been taken to David near the Costa Rican border and Venezuelan military have been active in the area.

III. Nicaraguan threat to Costa Rica now seems less imminent but potentially still exists

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- A. The US embassy in Nicaragua on 10 July discounted reports that an armed group was preparing to invade Costa Rica from Nicaragua.
- B. Nevertheless, Nicaraguan president Somoza bitterly hates Figueres-- [REDACTED] he 25X1X6 would personally kill Figueres if he could.
- C. Relations between Costa Rica and Nicaragua have appeared close to the breaking point since April when an attempt was made to assassinate Somoza by persons coming from Costa Rica.
- IV. Guatemalan junta president Castillo Armas, according to persistent reports reaching Costa Rica is committed to assist in an anti-Figueres move in return for aid received from Venezuela and Nicaragua in his own rebellion. Arms and planes used then would be diverted against Costa Rica.
- A. An unknown number of Costa Rican exiles joined Castillo Armas' rebellion and are now reportedly organizing against Figueres.
- B. Though Castillo has denied any intention of aiding in an attack on Costa Rica, he strongly implied at a press conference on 1 July that such a move would be justified.
- V. Costa Rican people would strongly defend their government against any attack now likely, but the government lacks the means for defense.

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- A. The 1400-man Civil Guard, Costa Rica's only armed force, is organized only as police force and cannot even patrol the country's borders.
    - 1. It has only small arms and a few anti-aircraft guns.
    - 2. Has no planes.
  - B. In response to urgent Costa Rican appeals, the United States permitted the purchase of a few small arms in the US.
    - 1. The shipment is to arrive on 14 July.
- VI. Hemisphere reactions to overthrow of Figueres regime would be strongly adverse to US interests.
- A. Costa Rica widely regarded as a liberal democratic country.
  - B. Since even friendly Latin Americans are convinced Washington backed Guatemalan revolution US would be held responsible for <sup>Figueres</sup>~~Figueres~~' overthrow.

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Appendix: BACKGROUND IN CENTRAL AMERICAN POLITICS

- I. The Venezuelan, Nicaraguan and other Caribbean dictatorships have long considered the Figueres government in Costa Rica a threat because of the revolutionary activities of political refugees who receive asylum there.
- II. Costa Ricans available for a foreign-supported move to overthrow Figueres would be adherents of ex-dictator Rafael Angel Calderon Guardia.
  - A. Calderon (president 1940-44) controlled the Communist-supported Picado administration (1944-48) which was overthrown by Figueres in 1948.
  - B. Communists became very powerful under Calderon and Picado and their "shock troops" fought the Figueres forces in the 1948 civil war.
  - C. Calderon had the open backing of Somoza in an abortive attempt to regain control in Costa Rica <sup>LATER</sup> in 1948 and has since been on friendly terms with the Venezuelan government.
  - D. In 1948 and 1949 Figueres backed the "Caribbean Legion" which engaged in several plots against the Nicaraguan and Dominican dictatorships.
  - E. After relinquishing the presidency to Otilio Ulate, in 1949, Figueres was elected president in 1953 over Calderonista and Communist opposition by an overwhelming popular vote.
  - F. Figueres gave moral and probably material aid to the Nicaraguan exiles who tried to assassinate Somoza in April 1954 and is on friendly terms with

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Venezuelan ex-President Betancourt who hopes to oust  
the present Venezuelan dictatorship.

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