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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
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FILE

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Situation in Guatemala

1. Most of the officers in the Guatemalan forces are discontented with the country's economic and political situation and are impatient to take some definite action to prevent former president Arevalo's return to power. They dislike President Ydigoras' one-man government, and many of them fear that his determination to finish the last year of his term and to hold elections next December may favor Arevalo's re-election.

2. Thus far, the chief deterrents to a military coup have been the officers' inability to count on support, Ydigoras' discovery of several plots, and his success in sowing distrust of each other among the plotters. Many army officers were undoubtedly involved in the abortive coup attempt made in November by several air force officers. However, Ydigoras' at least partial foreknowledge of the plan and his immediate assumption of command of the ground forces made the other plotters so unsure of support that almost no one joined the rebels. Ydigoras' subsequent reorganization and downgrading of the air force caused resentment but greatly reduced the threat it could offer to his position.

3. The various groups of plotters will be strongly tempted to act before mid-March, when Arevalo reportedly plans to return to Guatemala to launch his active campaign for re-election. They are encouraged by the desire to act known to be widespread among their colleagues. In their urgency they may tend to overestimate the extent of support they would receive in any coup attempt.

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The officer groups which recently tried to enlist the help of Defense Minister Peralta for an early February coup probably did so in the belief that this would be the best means of securing wide cooperation among the military. Peralta opposes Arevalo and may be searching for some means to bring off a palace coup to put himself in the presidency with an appearance of constitutionality.

4. Ydigoras has stayed in office only by keeping his motives and moves secret from even his closest advisors. His tactical skill is still his greatest asset and those plotting against him are well aware of this. While the most impressive evidence available suggests that the coup scheduled for February could still take place, in fact the temper of the plotters is such that an attempt might be made at any time. However, the success of any such move or moves would be questionable. Finally, Ydigoras is quite capable of conniving with the military, if he felt he could not control their actions, to the end of a comfortable retirement in their favor.

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