

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: K - PROGRAM BRIEFING NOTES

On 16 April the Central Intelligence Agency dispatched me to Guatemala, where I was to operate as an undercover agent, posing as a wealthy American tourist and operating independently of the permanent CIA installation in that country. The background of my assignment was as follows:

1. By and large, executive power in Guatemala is centered in Guatemala City, the country's capital. Thus success or failure of the operation in the last analysis hinged upon our ability to wrest control of the city from the Arbenz Government. Conversely, as long as the Arbenz regime could exercise sway over the city, local successes in the provinces would not necessarily have assured us victory.
2. Arbenz and his advisers also recognized this strategic premise and were laying their plans accordingly. With the threat of an uprising growing daily, especially since the arrival of the arms shipment in Puerto Barrios, unprecedented measures were taken to ready the armed forces concentrated in Guatemala City and the law enforcement agencies for the anticipated showdown. Repressive measures were stepped up and during the week beginning 30 May, the Guatemalan police struck a devastating blow against the underground organization of Castillo Armas. For a variety of reasons we had

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not been able to stave off this event, whose success was mainly attributable to the insecure and thoroughly unprofessional practices in which the Guatemalan underground excelled.

3. While our undertaking was still in the planning phase, we had viewed this very development as a likely contingency. We had been reckoning with the possibility of a stalemate at some stage of the revolt, irrespective of insurgent successes in the provinces and irrespective of the scope of the internal resistance which we might be able to muster and actualize. Once that stalemate had been reached, we knew that the factor of Guatemala City as a focal point of governmental strength would loom large. Something had to be done about this.

4. We knew that Guatemala City was the Achilles heel of our undertaking. We had been unsuccessful in making serious inroads into the monolithic structure of government control over the armed forces concentrated there. The civilian resistance organization in Guatemala City was deplorably weak and exposed to the unceasing vigilance of the Government, the mounting fury of police terror, and communist deprivations. There existed, to the best of our knowledge, no serious fissures in the Army High Command's loyalty to President Arbenz personally although it is only fair to say that the officers' corps in its overwhelming majority had all along been strongly anti-communist. The police, we found, was to all intents

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and purposes communist controlled.

5. In the light of such unfavorable auspices for a speedy investment of the center of governmental strength and in realization of the overriding importance of the time element in all this, we determined that an attempt would have to be made to activate a resistance cell within the structure of the Arbenz regime.

6. As an optimum we would have liked to obtain concrete assurance of major defections among the troop units garrisoned in Guatemala City, once the internal uprising in the provinces hit its stride and military units in the provincial garrisons defied government control.

7. As a minimum, we were anxious to assure a transfer of power from Arbenz to elements sympathetic to our cause, ahead of a military showdown which - we knew - would be a prolonged and bloody affair and which might well have resulted in a Government victory.

8. The thesis was generally accepted that a palace revolution "old style" would militate against the effectiveness of a thorough purge of all communists and fellow travelling elements in Guatemala.

Although we favored a popular uprising on a vast scale as a prerequisite for such a thorough house-cleaning, we were naturally prepared to accept a palace coup in preference to failure and defeat, provided we could be satisfied that the transfer of power thus engineered was not merely a communist ruse designed to mask

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the preservation of communist influence and power behind a governmental front. As subsequent developments proved, such a dodge was in fact attempted and had it not been for the vigilance of our representatives in Guatemala City, might have succeeded.

9. The linchpin of President Arbenz's control was the Army High Command. As long as its fealty to the President remained unimpaired the chances of a successful overthrow of his regime were scant. Even peripheral defections in the provincial garrison towns could not make up for the continued allegiance of elite troops concentrated in the capital, and their defection could not be hoped for unless and until a significant element of the Army High Command decided to abandon the sinking ship.

10. To hasten this development by establishing lodgements of control within the Army High Command of Guatemala was the special assignment on which my Agency ordered me to proceed to Guatemala.

11. It stands to reason that the tasks with which I had been entrusted could not in propriety be discharged by CIA personnel assigned to our Embassy whose compromise would have disclosed beyond peradventure that the conspiracy enjoyed official American backing. For that very reason, it was clearly understood by all concerned, including our Ambassador, that should I be apprehended in the performance of my mission, the United States would merely accord me the customary protection to which all citizens abroad are entitled, but would disavow all knowledge of my mission.

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12. The only facilities to which I did have access, were the CIA cable link and the diplomatic pouch through which I could communicate with the regional headquarters in Miami and with the Director in Washington.

13. On 29 April I introduced myself to Colonel X, a member of the Arbenz cabinet, as the representative of an organization composed of Guatemalan exiles and a few prominent and independently wealthy United States citizens dedicated to the cause of overthrowing the Arbenz regime.

14. I explained to Colonel X that the Americans participating in this endeavor were not in any manner answerable to the United States Government. However, I left no doubt in his mind that we were acting within the framework of United States foreign policy which had resolved that communist ascendancy in Guatemala constituted a direct and major threat to the security of the United States in the Western Hemisphere and which for that reason was looking with favor upon any attempt undertaken by patriotic Guatemalan elements to break the communist stranglehold.

15. It should be noted as a fact of a significance transcending this particular operation that Colonel X, after a period of considerable doubt, decided to cooperate with us mainly on the strength of his conviction that this undertaking was backed by the United States. He may or may not have swallowed my story that the United States Government was not involved. He may have believed my pro-

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testations that this was essentially a Guatemalan undertaking. This matter was never raised between us again.

16. Colonel X's persistent demands for tangible manifestations of United States backing, culminating in an almost vehement insistence that military objectives in the capital of his own country be subjected to air bombardment suggested to my mind that he viewed this whole affair in the context of the worldwide struggle between the United States and Soviet imperialism. His decision to stake his life and career on what he must have realized was an exceedingly hazardous venture stemmed essentially from his conviction that in so doing he was aligning himself with the United States.

17. Over a period of almost two months, Colonel X furnished high-level intelligence, which - I have been told - contributed to the success of the operation. It should be stressed that he did so at a time when our fortunes were at their lowest ebb and that his trust in our good faith and in our professional competency was never seriously shaken - not even when the whole structure of the internal resistance organization caved in.

18. I cannot help but feel that Colonel X must have known that he was working for the US intelligence service. However, it should be stressed that at no time while this operation lasted was he provided with conclusive evidence of a direct involvement of the United States Government and the prime requirement of non-attributability remained

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inviolate all through this operation.

19. My attempts to recruit members of the Army High Command, principally the Minister of Defense, Colonel Sanchez, and his chief assistant, the Chief of Staff of the Guatemalan Army, Colonel PARELLELO, met with the difficulties of unexpected severity and finally had to be abandoned so as not to jeopardize the security of Colonel X.

20. Just prior to D-Day I made one last attempt through the Salvadoran Ambassador in Guatemala, Colonel Funes, who at my request invited SANCHEZ and PARELLELO to meet with me in the Salvadoran Embassy. At that stage it was my intention to serve them with a flat ultimatum rather than wasting on them any further missionary efforts.

21. I found myself hamstrung however, by Ambassador FUNES' stipulation that I was not to engage in any recruitment attempts under the protection of his roof, a restriction obviously imposed at the insistence of President Uscario of El Salvador.

22. I was furthermore laboring under the handicap of not being able to deal with the aforementioned officers from a position of strength. Rather than courting rebuff and possible compromise of Colonel X, I cancelled the engagement, being certain that the impact of government reverses would eventually convince them that they were backing the wrong horse. As it turned out, neither played a pivotal role in the regime's final undoing and both, in the reflection of their enforced exile, are likely to rue the day when they chose to ignore my overtures.

23. The role played by Colonel X in the overthrow of the Arbenz regime and in thwarting the communist scheme to install their puppet, the Chief of the Armed Forces, Colonel Diaz, is a matter of historical record and has been accurately covered in the daily press. Whether he could have moved sooner than he actually did is and will remain a matter of dispute.

24. Like Hitler, President Arbenz until the moment of his enforced abdication remained in effective control of the governmental apparatus and any premature sally might have met with swift retribution. My instructions to Colonel X had been all along to tread warily and not to stake the few important assets which we had been able to develop, in a precipitate move.

25. The internal uprising I had promised Colonel X never materialized. Furthermore, the manifestations of United States backing to which all along he had pointed as an indispensable prerequisite for the success of a palace coup supported by the Army High Command, were somewhat slow in coming. In the end all came out well.

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