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**CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM**  
**RELEASE AS SANITIZED**

19 November 1953

2003

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Status of U.S. Military Mission in Guatemala

1. With reference to the question which you mentioned to me after lunch today as having been raised with you by the Secretary of State, I have given further consideration to this matter and have discussed it with Colonel J. C. King and [redacted]. The following is a brief statement of our conclusions and recommendations.

2. It would be undesirable for the U.S. military mission presently in Guatemala to be withdrawn from there\*—and preferable that this mission in either its present or a slightly reconstituted form remain — provided that it should prove possible for this mission to carry out the following assignments:

a. By the maintenance of daily contact with top-ranking officers of the Guatemalan military forces, and without resorting to any covert activities of a compromising character, to observe and report at regular and frequent intervals on the general morale and attitude of the Guatemalan armed forces toward the present Guatemalan regime. [redacted] The channel for such reporting could be determined after further study, but it might be desirable for this information to be reported to the Ambassador, and by him made available for "his own information and guidance," but actually to be forwarded via our channels of communication.]

b. By taking advantage of normal contacts and associations with ranking representatives of the Guatemalan armed forces, to pass on to them selected statements and observations best calculated to weaken the morale and shake the faith of the Guatemalan armed forces in the present Guatemalan regime. [redacted] It should be relatively simple to devise the type and kind of statement and observation to be passed on in this manner and for this purpose in such a way as to avoid or at least minimize the risk of charges that the military mission was engaging in improper activities. For example, the U.S. military personnel might strike a sympathetic and regretful note in their conversations — pointing out that while programs of military assistance are being authorized for neighboring states, it has been impossible for them to obtain any Washington support for their requests and suggestions. They could speculate that the explanation for this difficult matter might result from high level Washington resentment over the policies and official declarations of the Guatemalan government which are seemingly hostile to the United States.]

\*at this time

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One of the most important types of information which we require is information concerning the morale and attitude of the Guatemalan armed forces and this would be the most natural and ready source of such information. If the contacts between the members of the U. S. military mission and their opposite numbers were as close as they could and should be, it should be possible to observe from time to time the results of other activities and efforts contemplated under the project upon the thinking and feeling of the Guatemalan military, including particularly the degree of firmness and loyalty of the armed forces. In no other way would it be as easy to observe and follow this vital aspect of the entire matter.

3. J. C. King has underscored the point that if the U. S. military mission is to be withdrawn, this is the wrong time to do so. Its withdrawal at the present time would be a substantially empty gesture and would create no particular reverberation. (It would be an almost insignificant tap on the wrist if done now.) The impact of the withdrawal would be much greater if this were done at a later time and after the other aspects of the psychological build-up had gained momentum and begun to have effect.

4. In order to gain the benefits above referred to, two or three steps would probably be required, viz:

a. The present personnel of the mission should be carefully assessed with a view to determining their competence and qualifications to engage in the two lines of activity recommended. Our Station Chief is expected here toward the end of the week and we can get a run-down from him on the characteristics and qualifications of the present members of the military mission. It might be desirable to substitute certain more qualified officers for present members of the mission in certain instances.

b. In any case, it would be necessary for the Chief of the mission to be recalled to Washington for a thorough briefing and cut-in to the extent necessary (which would not have to be too much) to enable him to give direction to the efforts of his staff. Presumably this briefing would be given by the appropriate military authorities, possibly by General Erskine or under his aegis.

(Signed) Frank G. Wisner  
Deputy Director (Plans)

cc: C/WH

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