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SECURITY INFORMATION

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3 March 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR: DEPUTY DIRECTOR (PLANS)

SUBJECT : Conversation regarding Guatemala with Policy Planning Staff Members of State Department

PARTICIPANTS : Department of State
Thomas C. Mann, Acting Assistant Secretary
for Inter-American Affairs
Paul H. Nitze, Chief, Policy Planning Staff
Ambassador Walter C. Thurston, Policy Planning Staff
John H. Ferguson, Policy Planning Staff
Lempton Berry, Policy Planning Staff

Central Intelligence Agency
[]

1. At the invitation of Mr. Horsey, Mr. [] met members of the Policy Planning Staff in Mr. Nitze's office this afternoon. In response to questions, he stated that CIA has personnel in Guatemala in the Embassy and also under unofficial cover. Its psychological and political warfare operations were slow in developing because two years ago the CIA Station Chief in the Embassy was blown and had to be removed from the country. It took some time to get personnel back into the country to begin operations. There have been other difficulties that have slowed up the organizing of such operations, but we now have means of distributing pamphlets and other propaganda from within the country. We have an organization in Mexico that sends material into the country and also one in Honduras which is responsible for radio broadcasts toward Guatemala. These mechanisms are now about ready to get going at an accelerated rate. The objectives will be to bring to the attention of the Guatemalan people the dangers of Communism, the extent to which the Communists have infiltrated into their Government, and to prepare their minds for supporting non-Communists should the latter organize a movement against the Communists.

2. Mr. Mann stated that a telegram just received from Ambassador Schoenfeld expresses the opinion that the Guatemalan Army is non-Communist but will follow the orders of the President. Mr. Mann stated that his information is that the opposition cannot count on the defection of any Army officers. He stated that one well-informed expert in the State Department proclaims the thesis that what the Communists want most in Latin America is chaos followed by American intervention to straighten affairs out.

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3. Mr. Ferguson raised the point that the psychological and political warfare activities described by Mr. [] would encourage armed opposition and might bring about that state of chaos that Mr. Mann referred to.

4. Mr. Mann drew a parallel between what is happening in Guatemala and what happened in Mexico in the thirties. He said that President Cardenas, advised by fellow traveler Lombardo Toledano, started a land reform program that aroused the opposition of conservative Mexican elements and American interests there. It went to some extreme, but there was later a swing back to conservatism and support of the United States in international affairs. Mr. Mann expressed the view that if the internal political situation in the United States would permit, it would be wise to let things take their course, and he was sure that the pendulum in Guatemala would swing back. He said that our policy should be to try to control these situations as best we could but not to get excited.

5. Mr. Nitze pointed out that during the last twenty years the Communists have developed their mechanisms, which makes the situation a little different in Guatemala from what it was in Mexico. Mr. [] pointed out that Mexico was more self-contained than Guatemala; that the revolutionary tendencies of the peoples in countries neighboring on Guatemala make Central America a powder keg that could be set off by Guatemala. Mr. Nitze asked Mr. Mann what he meant by controlling the situation in Guatemala, and the latter confessed that it would be difficult. Mr. Nitze seemed to recognize the need of social reform in Guatemala and the necessity for the United States working out a long term policy that would not seem to be combatting social advancement.

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