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Guatemala Approach - Meeting May 30, 1954

1. [ ] ad informed [ ] on May 28 that [ ] returned from Guatemala on the previous Wednesday, May 26, and at [ ] request arranged for both of them to come to [ ] home, which they did on the night of May 30, a few moments before 10 p.m. [ ] brushed aside incidental conversation and went to the heart of the matter at once, speaking with little interruption for almost two hours.

2. The arms shipment from Europe arrived while he was there and was a sensational development but does not in effect change the situation. It is undesirable that Guatemala now has Czech arms but the fault lies with the United States Government and not with the Guatemalan Army because the latter strenuously sought for three years to acquire arms from the United States but was prevented from doing so. When the Army got into a desperate situation of not having arms or ammunitions, it was justified in going wherever it could to fill its needs, even though it acquires equipment not in accord with inter-American standardization and counter to the Army's own desire to have only U.S. equipment. [ ] had himself come to Washington as Military Attaché with the special commission of acquiring U.S. arms from the United States Government, but he was rebuffed; the letter he received from the Pentagon, in October 1953, a copy of which [ ] had previously shown [ ], was clear-cut evidence that there was no hope of getting necessary arms in this country. The pro-Communists in Guatemala do not, he is hopeful, yet have a copy of that letter but if they did it would be a very strong weapon in their hands as it did show conclusively that the honest efforts of the

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Guatemalan Army to buy U.S. arms were defeated as late as about six months ago; and if the Army thereafter sought purchase in Europe, early in 1954, it was justified in doing so in its own self defense. [ ] said that [ ] fully understood the justification of the United States decision at that time, in view of the possibilities of elimination of anti-Communist officers from the Guatemalan Army but [ ] said that there is no point now in reviewing the matter further as it is history. He did want to emphasize that he felt attack on the Guatemalan Army for acquiring Czech arms is unjustified and offensive to the Army.

3. There is no danger from this acquisition because the arms are fully in the hands of the Army, which will guarantee their strict control. The shipment was known to be coming for some time before arriving; he himself knew of it for five days before the ship docked, and the fact that the Minister of Defense himself supervised the unloading and sent the arms to Guatemala City under military guard for deposit in the principal garrisons is proof that no misuse will be made. The quantity of arms is not out of line of Guatemala's needs and the kind of arms are only infantry weapons, of standard type, plus a few light field artillery pieces. There are definitely no tanks or planes in the shipment. He did not see any of the arms himself but knows that the Minister of Defense has a complete list of the shipment and was reliably assured that this list comprises only the above mentioned kind of arms. They are not a threat to any of Guatemala's neighbors.

4. Publication of the arrival by the United States was a mistake in so far as it made a scandal in Guatemala of a matter in which the armed forces are  
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deeply and rightfully interested. The net effect of the arms shipment is to make the Army much stronger and to raise its morale, both of which contribute to its preparedness to combat the Communists. For this reason, the arms shipment should not be made an international issue as the United States has already done.

5. Guatemala's neighbors have no reason to fear aggression. [ ]  
[ ] himself went to Salvador for a day's visit and contacted his friends in the Salvadoran military, who received him with the same cordiality as before. They were not worried over the arms shipment and indeed drank a toast to the Guatemalan Army's better situation. These officers know him personally and have full confidence in him and believe him when he tells them that the Guatemalan Army will not be used as an instrument of attack against Salvador. The Honduran situation is somewhat different because the Communists from Guatemala have been working in Honduras, but this does not mean that the Guatemalan Army would ever take any steps against Honduras, which is a country with no effective Army organization and no military defense system.

6. The problem of the Communists in Guatemala remains as before, but there is now a more determined opinion in the armed forces to take steps against them. The psychological atmosphere is now ripe for some action, and it must be taken very soon because the Communists are boasting that nothing is going to happen in spite of all of the fuss about the arms shipment -- so that if nothing happens, they will be stronger than before and will have profitted from the whole incident. [ ] spoke with numerous people in all levels of society: businessmen, Army officers, coffee planters, tradesmen, clergy, and

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and many personal friends and from all of these has a viewpoint which is not merely his own but is a substantial cross section of responsible opinion. The conclusion is that there is now adequate organization to take steps against the Communists and what is required is an incident to provoke action. The organization is both in the Army and in underground civil groups; he does not have details himself, even of the Army line-up, but accepts the strong assurances of his Army colleagues that they have a plan and are ready to act. The best means to set their action in motion is to create a sharp economic crisis, which can be done very easily by cutting off petroleum imports by Guatemala. This would paralyze transportation in about a week and would create such a furore that the Army would be perfectly secure in moving against the Communists. He does not believe that this act could be turned by the Communists against the United States, whose oil companies are the suppliers of the petroleum products, because the general public is waiting for the opportunity to do something against the Communists. The step should only be taken on an unofficial basis by the companies themselves by refusing to make more deliveries because their pending bills are long overdue; if the Government thereupon promptly pays back bills, the companies should be in a position to say that they cannot resume shipments at once as their schedules have been dislocated by the temporary suspension. The plan should involve that at least two and preferably three weeks minimum time elapse without any oil imports. All public transportation (trucks, buses, taxis) runs on gasoline and the railroad does not reach the most populated areas outside of Guatemala City.

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7. The reason for the present state of mind in Guatemala is that the Communists have over-stepped themselves, embarking on a reign of terror in the rural areas. No one feels his life is safe and land values are non-existent in face of the illegal application of the Agrarian Reform Law. The murder of the anti-Communist labor leader whose body was found in Lake Atitlan, ostensibly drowned, has stirred many people deeply; this should be strongly publicized.

8. On the other hand, the armed forces are well disposed toward the United States and are prepared to cooperate. This was shown during his own stay by the cordial reception given Colonel Glass, who was welcomed to the Military School and was everywhere received as an old friend; even newspaper notices on him were very favorable. The United States military missions are of real value in continuing the friendly association and should not in any case be removed, as they are well thought of by the Guatemalans. To remove them would be considered a major error, as it would not only lose the link with the armed forces but would open the door to bring in a European mission which might be either Czech or Polish. The fact that the Army will now use Czech arms is no reason why the missions should not stay because the Guatemalan Army already has a mixture of equipment, including Czech.

9. [ ] inquired as to what the result would be if petroleum supplies were really stopped -- would it mean that the gap could be filled by Mexico? The Colonel did not know. Would it mean a solidification of opinion and national sentiment behind the Government? He felt this is not likely, even though possible, because it is normal for everyone to blame the Government when something so essential as transportation is suspended or terminated. He emphasized that in any case the unofficial character of the action made it better than

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anything else that could be done as it would not compromise any foreign government nor the inter-American system. If this step should fail, it would be necessary to go on to other steps as once embarked on this road it is essential to carry through, regardless of ultimate cost.

10. [ ] pointed out that some inter-American action is now definitely decided upon and steps would probably be taken in the coming month to accomplish it. [ ] said that this might succeed but in itself is not a desirable move as it will cost so much in the way of bitterness, foreign criticism, domestic dissension and lasting wounds. It is far more desirable that the problem be settled internally by Guatemalans themselves. [ ] interjected that if step no. 1 (suspension of petroleum imports) should not succeed, any further steps would have to be under government auspices and preferably inter-American auspices as, for instance, none of the coffee buyers would act unless all of them were compelled to act under some kind of Government control. [ ] replied that this would of course have to be studied as the final step on coffee would absolutely break the national economy and he did hope that in the next four months, before the crop is harvested, private buying could be curtailed so as to create the same kind of immediate economic crisis as would result from suspension of oil imports.

11. [ ] standing up to leave, stated with considerable vigor that there is a danger of mistake in policy by the United States at this juncture. It must not lose sight of the Guatemalan Army, which is the official, responsible and honorable force to be employed for solution of the problem. A

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movement is afoot to attack the Army, which he and his fellow officers could not for a moment tolerate; they must defend and will defend the integrity and the honor of the armed forces. He knows of Castillo Armas but does not think that he can accomplish anything in Guatemala as he does not have the support of any considerable number of Army personnel and his strength from outside the country is doubtful; if he had any of the strength claimed for him, he should have accomplished a master stroke in descending on Puerto Barrios and seizing the whole shipment which was lightly protected by nothing more than a battalion of troops, a force which Castillo Armas should have been able to cope with. The fact that he did nothing when he could have accomplished, at one stroke, a step which would probably lead to overthrow of the Government is indication that he is not capable of achieving a revolution. Even the attempt would be undesirable because it would lead to bloodshed and the sacrifice of innocent lives, which is not necessary if the Guatemalan Army can act itself inside the country. The attempt to sabotage the railroad was a real attempt and was probably inspired by Castillo Armas; he himself saw the dynamite charges which did not go off and while they were homemade they were nevertheless real and were the kind of thing which would be put together in Honduras, a mining country. The Army had pursued the saboteurs, who were four in number and were armed with sub-machine guns. One of them was killed (also one major in the Guatemalan Army) and the other three escaped into Honduras.

12 Concluding, he said that any future contacts must be handled on a most confidential basis as this is a very serious business in which death is the penalty for a mistake as is witnessed by the body in Lake Atitlan. [ ] promised him that this would be the way of handling the relationship.

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