

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

14 MAY 1984

GUATEMALA: CENTRAL AMERICAN POLICY AND US RELATIONS

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Summary

Overall, Guatemala supports the broad objectives of US policy in Central America. Chief of State Mejia and Foreign Minister Andrade, however, are pursuing a number of specific policy goals that are at variance with US interests and which reflect Guatemalan nationalism, ethnocentric views of Guatemala's role in the region, and growing resentment of Washington in the armed forces. In our opinion, only a normalization of bilateral relations with the US--to include a restoration of military aid--could move Guatemala to a position substantially more supportive of the particulars of US policy. Guatemalan leaders are likely to continue to pursue closer ties to Mexico to effect the repatriation of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico. In this effort, we believe they will continue to adopt positions at Contadora and on regional issues that may be closer to those of Mexico than to those of Honduras, El Salvador, and the United States.

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Who Calls the Shots?

Chief of State Mejia and Foreign Minister Andrade, in our opinion, are the primary architects of Guatemalan foreign policy,

This memorandum was prepared by  of the Central America Branch, ALA. It was coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer for Latin America, Directorate of Operations, and the Office of Central Reference. It contains information available as of 14 May, 1984. Questions and comments are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, Middle America-Caribbean Division, ALA,

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[REDACTED]

particularly regarding Central American issues and relations with the United States. US Embassy reporting indicates that a number of other officials--military and civilian--have varying degrees of influence, but none are consistently consulted on a broad range of domestic, foreign, and national security issues. [REDACTED]

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The substance of Mejia's foreign policy is conditioned by his personal experiences and his perception of Guatemala's domestic needs. A strong nationalist and staunch anti-Communist, Mejia is a military man whose career has been largely devoted to defeating Guatemala's 20-year-old Marxist-led insurgency. Mejia is preoccupied with the guerrilla problem at home and apparently has two primary foreign policy objectives: obtaining foreign assistance to fight the insurgents, and simultaneously, undermining their credibility by restoring legitimacy to the Guatemalan government. [REDACTED]

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Mejia has delegated substantial authority to Foreign Minister Andrade to design and implement strategies consistent with his overall foreign policy goals. We believe, for example, that Andrade has major influence over Guatemala's role in Contadora--an area of little interest for Mejia--in bilateral relations with Mexico, and in the Belize dispute. The Foreign Minister also has substantial input into the conduct of Guatemalan relations with the United States, although we do not consider him the primary force. [REDACTED] 25X1

Andrade's power stems from Mejia's confidence in him, particularly for his ability to perceive longer term costs and benefits that Mejia, keenly aware of his temporary caretaker status, at times fails to consider. As a result, we believe that Andrade can persuade Mejia to modify foreign policy positions. Andrade was probably instrumental in convincing Mejia, for example, that their active participation at Contadora would be more helpful in ending Guatemala's regional isolation and in improving its international image than would Mejia's initial preference for reactivating the Central America Defense Council (CONDECA), a regional military alliance. According to Embassy reporting, Andrade covets power and delegates little or no authority to his subordinates, particularly on major foreign policy issues. [REDACTED]

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Andrade appears to be an elitist--even among Guatemala's elite--and prefers to associate with those he considers the prime movers on particular issues. At Contadora, for example, he apparently believes that Guatemala should have, at a minimum, influence commensurate to Mexico's and Andrade has developed close rapport with Mexican Foreign Minister Sepulveda. We doubt,

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however, that Guatemalan positions at Contadora reflect any influence of Sepulveda over Andrade. Rather, we judge that Andrade's desire to associate with the Mexicans is allowed by Mejia and the military in this case because they want Mexican cooperation on the voluntary repatriation of Guatemalan refugees from southern Mexico. [REDACTED]

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Andrade recognizes that political power in Guatemala rests with Mejia and the military, and that ultimately he serves at their behest. Knowing his influence is circumscribed by the military, he does not interfere with military issues or other domestic policies. He is not universally trusted by the senior military officers, and we believe that some of the Foreign Minister's statements, particularly those critical of the United States, may be designed to demonstrate his nationalist credentials and to ingratiate himself with the younger senior officers. His public reproofs of Washington, however, also express resentment of the United States Andrade knows is widespread in the military. [REDACTED]

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The senior field commanders who placed Mejia in power--loosely called the Council of Commanders--wield substantial power, but both the Council as a whole and its most influential member, General Lobos, are much more involved in domestic issues and internal security problems. No Council member stands out as an important foreign policy voice, and in general the commanders support Mejia's goals of garnering foreign military and economic aid to bolster their counterinsurgency capabilities and of restoring credibility to the government. We have no evidence that Mejia's foreign policy--including his conduct of relations with the United States--is a divisive issue among his senior commanders. [REDACTED]

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#### Guatemalan Views of Central America

The Mejia regime's goals of restoring domestic and international legitimacy to the government and gaining material assistance to aid Guatemala's war against the insurgents are behind its desire to play a more active role in Central America. Guatemalan policy in the region, however, is distinctly colored by three strong perspectives on the current situation in Central America, some of which are not shared by most of the other nations of the area. [REDACTED]

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First, Guatemala believes that its size and population, resource base, relative economic strength, geographic location, counterinsurgency success, and historical role in the region argue its adoption of a more assertive, leading regional role.

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Attempts by other countries to obtain Guatemalan backing in disputes with Nicaragua--particularly efforts by the United States and Honduras--have strengthened the national sense of strategic importance. Moreover, public and private statements by Mejia and Andrade over the past several months indicate that this courting of Guatemala has led them to believe that they have leverage with the United States and others. [REDACTED]

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Second, Guatemala does not see Nicaragua as a direct military threat nor as a critical supporter--much less the lifeline--of its domestic insurgents. Mejia has publicly accused the Sandinistas of supporting the Guatemalan guerrillas, but [REDACTED] he views the guerrillas' use of Mexican territory as a more important factor in their survival. Moreover, the Guatemalans consider the spread of communism in the region, represented by the Sandinistas, as a manifestation of the larger East-West struggle of the superpowers that should be primarily addressed by the United States. Thus, they believe that policies designed to diminish the Nicaraguan threat more directly benefit the United States and Guatemala's regional neighbors. [REDACTED]

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Third, Guatemala believes Washington is calling the shots in Central America. The Embassy says Mejia and Andrade frequently intimate that "Core Four" unity at Contadora, the attempt to revive the Central American Defense Council, the Regional Military Training Center in Honduras, and the Granadero I military exercises are all US-inspired and directed. Thus, they want to deal directly with the United States on such initiatives, not with their Central American neighbors--particularly Honduras--who they believe have little to offer in return for Guatemalan support. [REDACTED]

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#### Policy Approach to the Region

Guatemala's approach to Central America primarily reflects its desire for a resumption of US military assistance, increased economic aid, and a normalization of relations with Washington. Given Mejia's preoccupation with the counterinsurgency effort, we have little doubt that the Guatemalans view their relations with the United States on a strictly quid pro quo basis. [REDACTED]

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The Mejia government apparently believes that if the United States wants Guatemalan participation and support strongly enough, Washington will renew military aid. In our judgment, Mejia and Andrade consistently withhold full cooperation with the United States on Central American initiatives as part of a strategy to exact concessions. They do not want to be so

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uncooperative, however, that the United States loses interest in obtaining their support and, instead, moves to minimize Guatemala's role and further isolate it in the region. As a result, Guatemala's policy appears inconsistent as the government alternately assures US officials of its support for US objectives, while adopting actual policy positions that at best only half-heartedly support US goals. [REDACTED]

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We judge that the Guatemalans are likely to maintain their aloofness to elicit tangible benefits from Washington in return for their increased commitment. Meanwhile, they probably will pursue improved relations with other regional actors, particularly Mexico, where Guatemalan efforts may be inimicable to US interests. [REDACTED]

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#### Contadora

At Contadora, the Guatemalans are likely to continue their inconsistent and equivocal support of "Core Four" unity. They probably perceive few direct or immediate benefits from unconditional endorsement of hardline positions opposing Nicaragua in the talks. Conversely, Embassy reporting shows they fear that a settlement imposing restrictions on Nicaragua's military and political institutions could infringe on Guatemalan sovereignty by effecting similar constraints on its electoral process, armed forces, and paramilitary civilian defense force program. A more neutral posture in the Contadora proceedings holds some potential gain for Guatemala in terms of improving its standing with an international community keenly focused on the dynamics of the peace process. [REDACTED]

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#### The Mexican Angle

Mejia and Andrade also view moderation at Contadora as a means of extracting concessions from Mexico on border issues. The Guatemalans are especially interested in the voluntary repatriation of some 40,000 Guatemalan refugees from Mexico. The military hopes to house returnees in new "model villages" it is constructing in the frontier area. In our opinion, the Guatemalans believe that no other single development could match the favorable domestic and international impact on their image than the return of refugees who fled previous political violence. The presence of the refugee camps in Mexico, according to Mejia, are a continuous source of insurgent propaganda concerning human rights abuses. For other observers, they represent a vivid reminder of past brutal military repression in Guatemala. In statements to US Embassy officials, both Mejia and Andrade have explicitly tied a Guatemalan posture at Contadora

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consistent with Mexico's to the Mexicans' willingness to assist with a voluntary repatriation program, or at a minimum, their willingness to move the camps away from the border area. [redacted]

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Mexican officials announced in early May that they intend to relocate 2 refugee camps away from the border, possibly by late May. The Mexicans indicated they hope to improve the security of the refugees, an apparent reference to a recent attack on one camp by unknown, but armed and uniformed men. According to US Embassy officials in Mexico, however, President de la Madrid made the decision to move the camps before the latest incident. Guatemalan and Mexican officials reportedly have been negotiating a settlement of the refugee problem since at least February and, [redacted] Chief of State Mejia told his senior commanders in April that he expected a solution soon. [redacted]

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#### Regional Military Initiatives

The Guatemalans have not pursued multilateral military cooperation with their northern tier neighbors, El Salvador and Honduras, for similar benefit-cost considerations. In our opinion General Mejia's initial support for reviving the Central America Defense Council (CONDECA) reflected his belief that it could be an indirect conduit of US military equipment, provide a market for Guatemalan-produced ammunition, and propel him into a leadership role in Central America. Mejia's interest rapidly lapsed when he realized that none of these benefits would materialize. Conversely, the mutual defense pact posed the risk of embroiling Guatemalan troops in potential Honduran-Nicaraguan hostilities. [redacted]

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Mejia sees little direct benefit to Guatemalan participation in the Regional Military Training Center (RMTC) or in joint military exercises such as the current Granadero I maneuvers. The Guatemalans continue to waver on the nature and extent of their future involvement in such initiatives, probably as a ploy to exact a quid pro quo for their cooperation. Although they apparently would like to engage in these types of operations to reduce their regional isolation, they view unrecompensed participation as needlessly diverting precious resources from counterinsurgency efforts at home. The presence of two Guatemalan instructors at the RMTC and Mejia's reluctance to definitively rule out participation in future joint operations are designed to persuade the United States that greater cooperation in regional initiatives would follow if Guatemala had more resources. [redacted]

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The Importance of US Assistance

We judge that a renewal of US military aid and increased economic assistance is the only likely incentive--short of a Communist insurgent victory in El Salvador--capable of moving the Guatemalans to a substantially more supportive position behind US objectives in Central America. Even then, however, their strong nationalism, ethnocentrism, and domestic policy focus will ensure that they remain a less-than-pliant ally and wary of multilateral approaches to regional problems. Moreover, their military success against the guerrillas has come without US assistance. As a result, there is resentment in the armed forces toward the United States, particularly among younger officers who have not undergone US training and have had little contact with their military counterparts from the United States. Their growing "go it alone" attitude is likely to impose limits on the extent of future US-Guatemalan cooperation. [REDACTED]

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We believe the Guatemalans place as much symbolic importance on the restoration of aid as they do on its tangible impact on their counterinsurgency program. Mejia views his two foremost policy objectives--obtaining US material support and ending the international opprobrium of Guatemala--as closely linked. The removal of US restrictions on military aid to Guatemala, imposed because of human rights abuses, will continue to be viewed by any Guatemalan government as a critical step toward improving its image. [REDACTED]

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Coveting this symbolic support, Mejia and Andrade are likely to insist on a restoration of military aid as the sine qua non of improved bilateral relations and regional cooperation. As if to assist US decisionmaking, they stress economic needs over military and, according to US Embassy reporting, emphasize that Guatemala's military equipment needs are few. Mejia has told US officials that he wants helicopters for medevac purposes, spare parts for inoperative aircraft, heavy construction equipment for civic action projects, financial assistance for "model villages" to house displaced persons and refugees, small patrol boats to interdict arms, and technical and financial assistance with elections. [REDACTED]

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The Guatemalans see their needs--and requests--as small, and thus are frustrated by Washington's perceived myopia, particularly in light of the large sums of military and economic assistance provided to El Salvador and Honduras. Furthermore, many high-level Guatemalan officials--particularly in the military--believe that the country's record in improving human

rights, moving toward elections, and success against the Marxist guerrillas warrants the resumption of US aid. They believe they have earned the acknowledgement of these accomplishments--taken at some domestic political risk--that a flow of military assistance would imply. In our opinion, Mejia and his senior civilian and military advisers understand the role of Congress in the foreign aid appropriations process but, believing they have done their part, now consider Congressional opposition a problem for the Reagan Administration. Moreover, the Guatemalans appreciate that many in the US government sympathize with them, but they do not recognize that as equivalent--in symbolic terms--to having the support of the US Government. [REDACTED]

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Prospects for Changes in Guatemalan Policy

We do not expect any substantial change soon in either Guatemalan foreign policy in Central America or in relations with the United States. We believe the policies Mejia and Andrade are following are consistent with their goals of acquiring resources to fight domestic insurgents and to increase the government's legitimacy abroad. These objectives are widely accepted in the officer corps, and Mejia's strategy to attain them has generated little internal criticism. Guatemalan policy in Central America, in our opinion, is not dependent on the personal orientations of the current policy architects but rather reflects broader national values that have been conditioned over the last few years by their counterinsurgency success at home and the nation's sense of international isolation. [REDACTED]

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