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The Honorable Thomas Farmer  
Chairman, Intelligence Oversight Board  
The White House  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Chairman:

PBSUCCESS was the project cryptonym for the overthrow of the communist-dominated regime in Guatemala in 1954. An investigation was conducted by the Directorate of Operations Information Management Staff of an assassination plan which surfaced during a review of the PBSUCCESS file. Mr. Kujovich of your staff was informed orally of the initial finding last summer and that an investigation was underway. While this is a distant historical subject beyond the usual purview of the IOB, I reported it because it concerned assassination planning but had not surfaced during the Senate Church Committee investigations and thus could stimulate press interest in the future should it ever become public knowledge. On 14 September, my deputy informed Mr. Kujovich by telephone that the evidence indicated that the plan was not carried out. The following paragraphs describe the issue and findings:

While undertaking a systematic review for declassification of the records of project PBSUCCESS during June-July 1979, the Classification Review Division (CRD), Directorate of Administration, discovered a file entitled "Disposal List - Guatemala". A memorandum in that file seemed to indicate that in September 1952 consideration had been given to killing 58 Guatemalan communists during a military action (presumably an overthrow of the Guatemalan Government) to be carried out by a Guatemalan exile group. The memorandum also called for the exile or imprisonment of 74 other Guatemalan communists. A second memorandum in the file, dated 31 March 1954, representing an updating of older lists, named 34 Guatemalan communists to be disposed of. The discovery of the file was reported by CRD to Chief, Information Management Staff, and in turn by him to the DDO on 11 June 1979. The Inspector General and the DDCI were also informed.

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Following the discovery, further review of project PBSUCCESS records by CRD surfaced an additional folder entitled "[ ]" and seven other documents which referred to the subject of disposing of or eliminating Guatemalan communists. Two of the documents record conversations with Department of State officials in which the subject is mentioned. In one of these, a 20 March 1954 memorandum for the record, [ ] reports a meeting in Mr. [ ] office with Mr. [ ] and Mr. [ ] of the Department of State to discuss the results of a recent OAS conference and project PBSUCCESS. [ ] asked [ ] if he had changed his thinking since the conference on the possible methods to get rid of the ARBENZ government. According to [ ] Mr. [ ] repeated that in his opinion "the elimination of 30 of those in high positions of the government would bring about its collapse. He then qualified this statement by saying that perhaps even a smaller number, say 20, would be sufficient."

A second memorandum for the record dated 3 June 1954 by Mr. [ ] reporting discussions held with [ ] seems to refer to the subject. The two were discussing a memorandum prepared by Mr. [ ] in which Mr. [ ] had presented as a possible alternative to the "originally conceived, carefully-timed paramilitary action, should that prove difficult of fulfillment," a contingency (underlining added) alternative of leaflet drops, specific sabotage, and possibly political assassination as a means of persuading the Guatemalan army to move against the regime. Mr. [ ] reported:

Concerning one very sensitive type of treatment, which was raised directly for the first time by [ ] in his memo prepared here, [ ] considered this and ruled it out, at least for the immediate future, on the grounds that it would probably prove to be counter-productive. This decision was not conclusive and [ ] suggested that we come up with more specific plans both concerning the individual targets, the timing and the statement of the purpose sought to be achieved with respect to each. This would require a fairly solid showing of the advantage to be gained by this type of activity.

There is no indication in the records of project PBSUCCESS, as reviewed by CRD, that the subject of disposal was pursued further. It never received Agency or State Department approval even as a contingency plan. To the contrary, the project as formally approved

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by the DCI on 12 November 1953 called for the removal covertly, and without bloodshed if possible (underling added) the menace of the present communist controlled government of Guatemala. The removal was to be accomplished by bringing to bear a series of progressively heavier pressures including propoganda, economic sanctions, sabotage and finally, to the extent necessary, overt military action by a Guatemalan exile force aimed primarily at achieving the defection of the Guatemalan Army which in turn would bring about the President's resignation.

As matters proceeded, not only was there no disposal of communist leaders during the operation, there was none after. The operation was successful in bringing about the defection of the Army. President Arbenz, who resigned in favor of a Junta, took refuge in the Mexican Embassy. Many other government officials sought similar refuge. U.S. Ambassador John E. Purerifoy negotiated a peace between the Junta and Col. Castillo Armas, leader of the Guatemalan exile force. Castillo Armas was subsequently appointed provisional president and allowed all political refugees to leave the country. President Arbenz was granted political asylum in Mexico. One hundred and twenty Guatemalan communists also departed. The above events are matters of public record. As a check, the Information Management Staff traced the names of the 174 Guatemalan communists included in the various disposal lists. In no case did it appear that any of them died as the result of the upheaval in Guatemala.

All portions of the above are classified SECRET. Should you wish further information we can, of course, make the necessary arrangements.

John H. Waller  
Inspector General

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