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CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
RELEASE AS SANITIZED

SECURITY INFORMATION

7 March 1952

2003

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Stuart Hedden

SUBJECT: Guatemala

1. Attached are three copies of reports received from [ ]  
[ ] during 1950, describing Colonel  
Carlos Castillo Armas' plans prior to abortive revolt of 5 November  
1950.

[ ]  
J. C. KING/  
SA/DD/P-LA

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13 JAN 1950

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From: C 7 Report No.: C 7-860 Local File No.:

Number of Pages: 4 Number of Enclosures: 0

Report Made by: Merle G. Ruffner Approved by:

Distribution:  
By copy to: 2 - Washington Orally to: None  
2 - Files

Source Cryptonym: C 7 References:

Source, Operational Data, and Comments:

COMMENTS: The information in this report is not being divulged to the local Embassy or Military Attache's office at the present time. It is requested that Headquarters also not disseminate this information yet. It is felt that this is necessary in order to protect the highly confidential nature of the information. However, this station will keep in touch with this situation. When and if it appears that there is any chance that the revolt may be staged, the Embassy will be fully informed.

(Hdqs. Comment: Dissem'd extracts - guardedly. See SO-36757 on 8 March 1950. (In good time before the coup that failed.)

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Subject: Col. Carlos CASTILLO Armas in  
Initial Stage of Organizing Armed Coup  
Against Guatemalan Government

Report No: C 7 860

Date of Information: Current

Place Acquired: Guatemala City

Date Acquired: 13 January 1950

Evaluation: A-1

Date of Report: 19 January 1950

Source: Controlled American

1. Col. Carlos CASTILLO Armas was released from the penitentiary on 23 December 1949. Apparently his release was due to personal orders from Minister of Defense Col. Jacobo ARBENZ. He had been arrested in August, 1949, and charged with the crime of illegal possession of arms. He was to be tried with other officers charged with sedition in connection with the revolt following the assassination of Col. ARANA on 18 July 1949. When these officers were tried, however, in October, 1949, the case against CASTILLO Armas was not brought to prosecution. Instead, the charge against him was changed to that of theft of government arms. Col. CASTILLO Armas explained that the change in the charge against him was merely a device for keeping him in jail longer without bringing him to trial. He stated that the charges against him were completely false and that he had been arrested merely as a precautionary measure on the part of Col. ARBENZ. He said that ARBENZ knew that he, CASTILLO Armas, was in fundamental disagreement with him concerning the way the army and the country was being managed.

2. Col. CASTILLO Armas held important positions in the Guatemalan army up until the time of the assassination of Col. ARANA. He had been on the general staff, was Director of the Military School, and from this position was changed to Commander of the Military Zone of Mazatenango. He was holding this position when the assassination of ARANA occurred on 18 July 1949. Information concerning the assassination arrived tardily at Mazatenango, and Col. CASTILLO Armas took no part in the revolt that followed. However, on 22 July 1949 Col. ARBENZ ordered him removed from his post. This was due to no overt action on the part of CASTILLO Armas but, he says, was ordered by ARBENZ because he knew that he could not count upon CASTILLO Armas as being "one of his men".

3. On 23 July 1949 CASTILLO Armas came to Guatemala City and entered civilian life. He said he knew he could have received an appointment from ARBENZ to some post where he would not have had a command of men and would have been under the close observation of ARBENZ. However, he did not wish to compromise his reputation by being associated with the group then running the government and the army. He said he engaged in no plotting whatsoever during the time prior to his arrest, which followed several weeks after he entered civilian life.

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4. CASTILLO Armas stated that he was very much concerned about the present position of the Guatemalan army and government. He said the army has been thoroughly corrupted by Col. ARBENZ and the President. He said that it is a common practice for many of the officers in the army to receive extra monthly payments in addition to their regular salaries. This money comes from funds appropriated to the Ministry of National Defense and is handed out by ARBENZ for the purpose of keeping these men in line. In addition to this ARBENZ has an extensive intelligence system throughout the army which operates on both a formal and informal basis. Because of this many of the officers are afraid to make any statements or do anything that would indicate disapproval of present policies.

5. CASTILLO Armas said that he sincerely wished that reforms could be brought about in the country through regular constitutional elections. However, he has now become convinced that this will not be possible. He feels certain that if any one man should become strong enough to offer a reasonable amount of opposition to present government leaders, he would be either assassinated, as was Col. ARANA, or imprisoned or sent out of the country. He said that he had, therefore, become convinced that the only way to change the present government in Guatemala was by means of an armed coup. He said he regretted that this method was necessary but that he felt that it was justified.

6. He indicated that he is in the initial stages at the present time of planning such an armed revolt. This revolt would be directed at the army. He thought that perhaps the first objective would be the military base at La Aurora, just outside of Guatemala City. He said that he would not run the risk of trying to line up a segment of the army to effect the revolt because of the above described position in which so many of the officers find themselves. Instead, he said he had a sufficient number of men on the outside of the army, many of them ex-army officers, who would be his source of manpower.

7. The main problem troubling him was the matter of arms. He believed it too risky to try to obtain arms locally either from sources in the army or outside of it. He was, therefore, thinking of contacting SOMOZA or TRUJILLO for these arms. He realized that other Guatemalans had probably contacted SOMOZA and TRUJILLO for this purpose on previous occasions and had met with no success. However, he said that these men had no standing or power in Guatemala and that this must have been known to SOMOZA and TRUJILLO. He said that he wanted to make it clear, however, that the revolt which he plans will be strictly Guatemalan and that no foreigners will participate in it.

8. He said he also wanted to make it clear that he had no idea of establishing a military dictatorship in Guatemala. He planned to continue the present constitution in the country and to hold free elections. He said that he wanted true democracy in the country and that Guatemala did not have it at the present time because of the moral corruption of those in power. He said that he had no personal ambition for power and pointed out that he has an independent source of income. He said his only motive is his concern for the army and the country.

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9. He said he believed that his revolt could be successful largely because of the great number of personal friends he has in the top officer class in the army. He stated that all the military zone commanders in Guatemala are close personal friends of his. He said that these men know his reputation for sincerity and honesty and the moderate ideas which he holds. He said that he felt sure that immediately upon their learning that he was leading the revolt they would do everything possible to hold back any resistance from their units. For reasons of security, however, he did not plan to take any of these commanding officers into his confidence prior to the staging of the revolt.

10. Source asked him how he would meet the problem of armed civilians. He said he realized that several of the labor unions have a supply of arms and that other civilians supporting the government also have them. He stated that immediately upon beginning the revolt he would have it announced that this was a matter completely within the army and that the revolt was for the purpose of freeing the army from the state of corruption and disintegration to which it has been subjected by the present government. He would make a request that civilians abstain from participating in the revolt in any way. He said that he realized that this might have little or no effect upon those armed civilians who are so anxious to see the present government continue in power. However, as a military man he said he felt that he could cope with the problem of armed civilians. He said that if they see that the army is going with him in the initial stages, they will offer no resistance and will go to their homes.

11. Col. CASTILLO Armas made it plain to source that he does not plan to establish the old conservative element in Guatemala back in power. He said he detested the type of government that had been personified in Guatemala by UBICO. He realized that many of the so-called reactionaries in the country would try to "jump on his coat tails" and ride into power. He said, however, that he knows the army well and that there are a number of men in it, and several who have been forced to separate themselves from it, who are sincere and patriotic and accept the ideas of democratic government. It is upon these men that he will count most to help him in case the revolt is successful.

12. CASTILLO Armas said that he is in no hurry. His plans are in the initial stage. It may be months before he will take action.

COMMENTS: Col. CASTILLO Armas at the present undoubtedly has more prestige than any other man in the opposition. He is well regarded for his sincerity and honesty. It is believed that if any man in Guatemala can lead a successful revolt against the present regime, it will be he who will do it. His biggest problems are those of security and arms. He believes at the present time that he is not being surveilled by the government, but he realizes that he is probably considered by the government as its most dangerous opponent. He believes that he has a good chance of success in getting arms from SOMOZA or TRUJILLO, but he does not appear to have worked out as yet the all-important problem of how to get them into Guatemala.

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