

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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5 June 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD:

SUBJECT: Meeting with Representatives of Division of Research for American Republics, Department of State, as to the Effect upon Guatemala of Arms Procurement by El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

1. The meeting was held in the office of CWH at 1400 o'clock on 5 June 1953. Those present were:

Department of State: Mr. Burzin and Mr. Cunningham
CIA: Colonel King. [

2. Attached paper was reviewed, paragraph by paragraph, and serious objections taken by CIA representatives to the estimate that a substantial rise in anti-U.S. feeling in Latin America might be created by the supplying of arms to El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. It was pointed out to representatives of the Department of State that only the adverse effects of such an action were mentioned in the paper, and none of the beneficial effects. It was also indicated that an armed action by these three countries against Guatemala would result in a unification of the Guatemalan people behind Arbenz only if there were prolonged fighting, say for a period of months. This would be highly improbable because an attack by the three countries would be launched only if they were convinced that they had the means to bring about rapid military success. Numerous other minor points were objected to in the paper, and the conclusion was, at the end of the meeting, that a new draft would have to be made by the State Department.

JCK:PW

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G. C. KING
CWH

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Division of Research for Latin America
Special Paper No. 21
May 26, 1953

EFFECT UPON GUATEMALA OF ARMS PROCUREMENT BY
EL SALVADOR, HONDURAS, AND NICARAGUA

PROBLEM

To determine the effect of overt procurement of arms from the US by El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua upon the Guatemalan military, political leaders and public opinion.

1. Assuming an effectively initiated and sustained program of military assistance to El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, together with an equally effective isolation of Guatemala in the hemisphere, it is likely that the opposition to Arbenz will become more critical and militant and that important Army and political leaders now supporting Arbenz will calculate that the present regime is not in the best interests of either the nation or themselves. Under these conditions, Arbenz would probably eventually fall. However, a substantial rise of anti-US feeling in Latin America and some Latin American resistance to US leadership in the OAS and UN are likely consequences of US military assistance to Guatemala's neighbors. Unless successfully countered, such support would provide Arbenz with effective propaganda with which to sustain national patriotism and to prolong indefinitely the life and present course of his government.

2. The Army is the key to the stability of the Arbenz regime and could effect a rapid and decisive change in the Guatemalan political situation if it were to take concerted action. Although a quick change of attitude is always possible, there is no present reason to

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doubt the continued loyalty of the Army high command and of most of the Army officer corps to Arbens. The Army would be unlikely to take revolutionary action unless the high command or a substantial body of unit commanders became convinced that their personal security and well-being were threatened by Communist control of the Government, or unless there were widespread social disorder and protracted deterioration of the economy.

3. An agreement for overt procurement of arms from the United States by El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, especially if arrived at in confidence and if followed by rapid and sustained implementation, probably would seriously affect the Guatemalan Army. It would cause concern among the high command and would stimulate conspiratorial activity on the part of small, already disaffected army elements.

4. Although the concern of the Guatemalan Army leaders probably will involve initial resentment against the United States and a preference to go along with Arbens, the military are eventually likely to recognize that military aid to neighboring countries is an expression of US determination to eliminate Communist leadership and influence in

Guatemala. In this circumstance -- and barring effective external sympathy and support -- the Army high command is likely to calculate in terms of increased disaffection among lower echelon officer personnel, emboldened action by elements of the political opposition, an increase in the number of revolutionary attempts against the government, the loss of military position and political leadership in Central America, and new defensive requirements along Guatemala's borders.

5. It is probable that these calculations would ultimately cause at least a split among top Army leaders, some of whom would be willing to attempt deals with overt and covert oppositionist elements. Groups with which some present army leaders could negotiate successfully include elements of the urban opposition who, although anti-Communist, are also strongly nationalistic and who would favor continuance of many aspects of the revolutionary program. The present military leaders neither would nor could negotiate with opposition ^{centered} ~~centered~~ in the pre-revolutionary landholder-military elite. Without the united support of the Army, the Arbenz government could not be expected to survive.

6. Arbenz does not at present have a good position in which to maneuver. Under the pressure here envisaged he is not likely to alter

his present course but would appeal to the people in patriotic terms while taking strong measures to control the opposition.

7. Arbenz probably could rally considerable initial support at home, not only among Communist-led labor and the radical fringe of professional and intellectual groups, but also among many anti-Communist nationalists in urban areas, especially Guatemala City.

Under circumstances of continued internal tension and national isolation, however, blind emotion will tend to give way to a critical estimate of Arbenz' policies and their consequences. Particularly if the Army's loyalty to Arbenz falters, it is likely that substantial groups among the present opposition will be emboldened to take action and that the many political opportunists around Arbenz will seek deals with prospective new leadership.

8. The Communists will strongly support Arbenz as long as he controls the situation and will be able to make considerable local and international capital of the "imperialist attack" upon Guatemala. At the outset, their position in government and labor is likely to be strengthened and they will be able to use labor for effective mass demonstration purposes. The Communists have little power of their own,

however, and if the military and larger political support around Arbens weakens, the Communists will become progressively isolated and their leadership impotent. In time of crisis labor's capacity for effective unified support of Arbens, if deprived of its present leadership, would be very limited.

9. The course of developments estimated in ~~2~~³ through ~~7~~⁸ are contingent upon what degree of success the United States may have in countering or neutralizing unfavorable Latin American reaction to the supplying of arms to Guatemala's neighbors. Most governments, with the exception of Argentina, Bolivia, and Costa Rica (especially if Figueres wins the July presidential election) will probably seek initially to ignore the issue. Argentina will certainly take advantage of the situation propagandavise and probably will use it to further an ambition to create a Latin American bloc, seeking particularly the cooperation of Chile and Bolivia. In other Latin American nations -- Uruguay, Brazil, and especially Mexico, public opinion is very likely to be sharply critical of the United States and will deplore what will appear to them to be a blow against the inter-American system. The respective governments will be under increasing pressure to express officially

Guatemala's neighbors would provide no legal basis for international action against the United States. Latin American cooperation with the United States on other issues in the OAS and the UN would be under an increased strain.

10. Under present circumstances, the procurement of arms from the United States by El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua will increase the possibility of military attack by those countries on Guatemala. Such an attack will enable Guatemala to put a case before the OAS.

11. Such external possibilities may well provide sufficient psychological support and diplomatic assistance to prolong the life of the Arbenz government. ^{independence} The effectiveness of the Government-Communist propaganda will be greatly increased; for many elements of the opposition the anti-Communist issue and other opposition grievances are likely to be subordinated to a sustained, intense national feeling; these developments are likely to encourage the Army to continue its support of the government.