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Killing Democracy: US Imperialism, Civil War and Genocide in Guatemala 1954-1996

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"This ideology of [United States corporatism] embraces a belief that societies and cultures can be regenerated through violence.... This belief that [the US has] a divine right to resources, land and power, and a right to displace and kill to obtain personal and national wealth, has left in its wake a trail of ravaged landscaped and incalculable human suffering." — Chris Hedges, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*

The United States in 1954, under the thin veil of fighting communism and defending "American" interests, led a coup d'état in Guatemala to overthrow democratically elected President Jacobo Árbenz. Árbenz and his immediate predecessor Juan José Arévalo initiated substantial social programs that brought needed and popular changes to a rising urban working class and rural peasants that for 133 years were ruled by paternal autocrats that in Latin America were called *caudillos*. Beginning in the twentieth century Guatemalan rulers encouraged foreign corporations, enticed with generous governmental inducements to plunder the nation and keep labor costs at rock bottom. By 1944 the Guatemalan people began to pushback against the *caudillos* who ruled for benefit of the oligarchy and US corporations. The US onslaught against the Árbenz government set the stage for US imperialist interventions throughout Latin America for the next 65 years. Indeed, for the US Central Intelligency Agency (CIA), the operations in Guatemala and Iran (1953), served as a blueprint for CIA led interventions around the globe. Subsequent the overthrow of Árbenz, the elites in the CIA had jettisoned any notions that it follow the ethos that each had sworn to when he joined the intelligence agency. Richard M. Bissell, Jr., CIA officer in charge of the Cuban Bay of Pigs invasion, admitted that it was no longer necessary to speak the truth even to the nation's commander-in-chief.

> "Many of us who joined the CIA did not feel bound in the actions we took as staff members to observe all ethical rules," he said.

For him and his colleagues protecting the image of the CIA was the prime directive. The lies the CIA operatives told policymakers in the US would have disastrous in the decades to come.

Indeed, during the four decades subsequent the US-led destruction of the ambitious Guatemalan 1944 Revolution, Guatemala was once again beset with vicious and corrupt dictators. The revolution during 1944 that offered the working class and peasants social changes, that were featured in programs initiated during the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration in the US, were obliterated. The dreams of the poor and working class of a liberal government in Guatemala were violently swept away and replaced by four decades of Civil War and governmental policies of scorched earth cruelty and genocide under the

guidance, military training and acquiescence of the highest reaches of the US government. These horrors, that claimed more than 200,000 lives, 93 percent of the deaths at the hands of the Guatemalan military, culminated in the 1996 peace accord under the auspices of the United Nations. The peace accord ended a horrific and sustained wave of repression and slaughter and established a Commission on Historical Clarification to study the atrocities and their causes. This paper examines the US-backed overthrow of Guatemala's democratically elected government at the behest of corporate profits and the decades of savagery that supported tyrants who unleashed unspeakable horrors against their own populations during the 36-year Guatemalan Civil War.

Jacobo Árbenz, Francisco Arana, and Jorge Toriello, who oversaw the transition to a civilian government after the October Revolution (Public Domain)

Since 1821 when the Spanish empire ceded independence to Latin American nations, Guatemala remains the largest and the most populous nation in the Central American isthmus, a 200,000 square-mile region comprised of seven nations: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. By the late nineteenth century, Guatemala's economy was driven almost exclusively by coffee and banana exportation. Coffee barons, mostly Guatemalan nationals and Germans (who were expelled from the country and removed to US camps as their landholdings were forcibly liquidated during World War II), exploited a large peasant population, including indigenous Mayan Indians, that resided in rural villages and hamlets. US corporations dominated other economic sectors. The urban population resided in Guatemala City, the nation's capital. The urbans were mostly *ladino*, Spanish descendants with combined Mayan ancestry. The *ladino* population emerged at least partly from the exploitation of Indian women, who bore the children of white Spaniards or *criollos* who raped them. *Criollos* were of white Spanish ancestry, but born in the Western hemisphere However, by adopting their bourgeois values, *ladinos* could sometimes blend with the *criollos*. But mostly *ladinos* were neither property owners nor forced laborers. Instead, *ladinos* were landless free laborers who were in a constant struggle for survival. The *ladinos'* denial of their identity sharply differed with

the Indians' values of community and communal labor. The class structure in Guatemala consisted of a tiny but powerful oligarchy with a small upper-middle class layer that would be blocked from entering the higher levels of the society by colonial structures. The overwhelming percentage of the remaining population were impoverished, landless peasants. Hardly any social mobility existed among the classes, especially for the Indians who were mostly ignored or exploited. The Indians were considered in most quarters as non-citizens (Schlewitz 2004; Jonas 1991, 16, 22).

Guatemala's economy and class divisions were based on land ownership that remained in the hands of the oligarchy and the US corporations. Most of the population was landless. The oligarchs and United Fruit Company controlled a vast majority of arable land in the country as of 1950 with a large portion of these tracts uncultivated. The class differential also manifested itself in the ability of the elites to foist coercive methods on workers and the poor that included debt peonage and forced labor. Wages were at starvation levels even as periodic trends in the coffee and banana markets increased profits. The coffee and banana export economy that drove profits for the oligarchs and foreign corporations limited production of foodstuffs for workers as chronic shortages persisted of rice, beans, corn, wheat, tobacco and meat. The labor force in Guatemala was obviously connected to race with Indians at the bottom of the economic pyramid. These repressive policies stymied any consumer demand in the nation (Galeano 1997; Schlewitz 2004).

In the early years of the twentieth century, banana plantations made their debut. Beginning in the years subsequent to the US Civil War, US companies were becoming entrenched into the Guatemalan economy and a dominant presence in the lives of the nation. Especially dominant were the companies engaged in banana production, railway transportation and merchant shipping. Subsequent World War I, three US companies—United Fruit Company, International Railways of Central America (IRCA) and Electric Bond and Share— dominated economic scene. These companies built new railways for the exclusive use of products from US-corporate owned plantations. These foreign companies also monopolized the electric light, mail, telegraph and telephone services. United Fruit swarmed into Central America and became the biggest *latifundista,* the large landholders that controlled the rural populations. United Fruit Company dominated banana production and IRCA dominated transportation as their affiliates controlled the shipping ports and set up private customs and private police. By 1944 United Fruit Company was the largest landholder in the nation with 550,000 acres fronting both the Atlantic and Pacific coastlines (Galeano 1997; Schlewitz 2004; Gordon 1971; Jonas 1991, 19).

US businesses established favorable concessions from the Guatemalan government that included low taxes and capital transfer fees that kept the Guatemalan government in subservience, thus limited the government's ability to establish meaningful gains in its own economy. Furthermore, the wide profit margins the US corporations enjoyed allowed the US companies and their executives outsized leverage into the governmental policies of their host country. Bribery was commonplace and the corporate connections to powerful US policymakers in the US State Department and the Commerce Department ensured US corporations received substantial privileges (Schlewitz 2004).

During the nineteenth century in Latin America conservatives opposed the influx of foreign capital and advocated for an isolationist policy. They also preferred limited governmental oversight as the Catholic Church and *latifundista* maintained control of the peasants. Conservatives also rejected a Central American federation under Guatemalan leadership that liberals envisioned. On the other hand, liberals were the elites that mostly resided in

the urban areas. Liberals promoted a centralized government that included a planned economy, commercialization of agriculture, foreign investment along with integrating the nation with educational programs (Schlewitz 2004; Galeano 1997).

Prior to the liberal Revolution of 1871 huge land tracts, that were owned by the state, the Catholic Church or by no one, were claimed by privateers as Indian communities were voraciously sacked. Peasants who resisted offers to sell their land to the great enterprises that desired the parcels were forced into the army as brutal coffee plantations gobbled up land. Between independence in 1821 and the 1944 revolution when Dr. Juan José Arévalo (image on the right, public domain) was elected president, Guatemala see-sawed between the rule of conservative and liberal elites. Following Guatemalan independence from Spain in 1821, liberals maintained a tenuous hold on the government. Conservatives came to power in 1837 and ruled until the liberal revolution of 1871. That year General Justo Rufino Barrios seized the mantel of power that would remain in the liberals' hands for 50 years. Subsequent the 1871 revolution, liberals during the autocratic Rufino Barrios regime attempted to compel neighboring countries in Central America to unite into the Central American Federation, but these hopes expired when the *caudillo* was killed in the battle of Chalchuapa in El Salvador on April 2, 1885 (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 28-29; Schlewitz 2004).

Meanwhile, the liberals under the Justo Rufino Barrios regime ended the Church's dominance in education and established public education as they completed land reforms that seized land from the oligarchs and transferred ownership to peasants. As Guatemala flooded with foreign money primarily from Germany and the US, the liberal regime began infrastructure improvements in communication, seaports and roads to modernize the nation's ability to enter the world economy. The Rufino Barrios government could never be confused with a democracy, its progressive reforms for the poor notwithstanding. Its generous policies for the poor came to a halt upon the death of Rufino Barrios in 1885. When the megalomaniac protofascist General Jorge Ubico rose to power in 1931 with the support of the US and, specifically, the Rockefeller Foundation, after a string of brutal dictatorships, Guatemala had reverted back to its feudal conditions. The US State Department had since 1919 sought to assist the advancement of Ubico. Upon his rise to power, the oligarchs had successfully chased the peasants off the land. Ubico increased a centralized government that sought to privatize the nation's resources while it subsidized private industry and bolstered law and order to protect the ownership class (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 27-28; Jonas 1991, 20).

In 1934 the Ubico government instituted vagrancy legislation similar to the nineteenth-century Black Codes and Jim Crow laws in the post-Reconstruction US that forced those without proof of employment or ownership of enough land to labor for either for planters or on government work crews. Workers who fled were hunted down by gunmen. Industrial workers and artisans in Guatemala City made repeated efforts to establish unions, but they were unsuccessful until the 1944 Revolution. The workers were paid minimal wages and never enjoyed the increases that came with the rising prices of coffee or bananas worldwide (Galeano 1997; Schlewitz 2004).

The power differential between the "Colossus of the North," that was the US, and the Central American nation of Guatemala, ensured the subordination of the host nation's interests, ideals and culture. As US hegemony around the globe increased, so did the intensity of US prerogative over Guatemalan policy. During the post-World War II years as the Cold War escalated and especially following the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the US grip in Guatemala and Latin America tightened (Schlewitz 2004).

As the Great Depression held the globe in its icy grip, General Jorge Ubico (image on the left, public domain) with the concerted influence of the US in a corrupt election assumed the presidency in 1931. Using his secret police as a cudgel to menace any opposition, Ubico retained power as he restructured the Constitution at his whim for 13 years. But by 1941 during World War II, the US had misgivings about Ubico's pro-Nazi political stance. When German elite landholders were expelled from Guatemala that year and interred in US relocation camps, the US sent FBI agents to ensure the expropriation of their lands. Additionally, Assistant Secretary of State Nelson Rockefeller conceived a program of loans from the US government and private banks to spur business development and secure financial connections to the US. When the ultraconservative Ubico rejected Rockefeller's efforts, the US policymakers began to reconsider his usefulness to the empire (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 26-27; Schlewitz 2004; Jonas 1991, 22).

Meanwhile by 1944, a rising middle-class in Guatemala had assumed responsibility in coordinating work activities of the passive Indians who occupied 50 percent of the nation's total population. This petit bourgeoisie of schoolteachers, shopkeepers, skilled workers, underpaid public workers, junior military officers and university students formed a coalition for a revolution that included progressive and nationalistic property owners who had been snubbed by Ubico. Peasants and both rural and urban workers and artisans also joined the coalition on a limited basis. The Indian population was not active in the movement, but their general restiveness contributed support for change. Most important to the revolution was

the broad support the population had for a constitutional democracy. During the war years these cohorts listened intently via shortwave radios to US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "fire-side chats" about the New Deal and his "Four Freedoms" that declared that all humanity is entitled to freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want and freedom from fear. Roosevelt was a hero to this growing population's awareness of possibilities after it had been through 13 years of crushing repression from the Ubico regime. Roosevelt inspired workers and middle-class Guatemalans that they deserved a government that served the public's well-being not just the dominant class (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 26-29; Jonas 1991, 23).

Non-violent demonstrations led by schoolteachers began occurring in Guatemala with increasing frequency. Demonstrations against the government had never happened in Guatemala's history. This stunned Ubico who fancied himself as comparable to his idol Napoleon. He had not the slightest idea that his subjects hated him. The flatterers and lickspittles that Ubico surrounded himself with kept him in the dark about the citizenry's true feelings about his rule. On June 29, 1944 Guatemalans energized by middle-class activists gathered people from broad sections of the urban population. They staged a rally on the capital's central square in Guatemala City, that demanded an end to the Ubico government. Enraged, Ubico ordered cavalry to charge the protesters; 200 were killed or injured (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 27-28).

Until June 1944 Ubico had continued the thuggish and crushing legacy of repression of the *caudillos* that Guatemalan's endured since the nation's independence. But that year the oligarchy's government was in tatters. A few days after the June 29th demonstration, 311 schoolteachers, lawyers, doctors, shop owners and others delivered a petition that boldly stated the "Petition of the 311 declared the "full solidarity" of the petition's signers with the "legitimate aspirations" of the protesters. Feeling betrayed as many of the petitioners were those whom he considered his friends and broken in spirit, Ubico on July 1, 1944 resigned his office and ceded the government to General Federico Ponce (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 28).

Ponce (image on the right, public domain) vastly misunderstood the mood of Guatemala's electorate; he assumed incorrectly that the people desired a new *caudillo* that since independence from Spain was the hallmark of Latin American leaders. Ponce did institute

raises in teacher salaries and minimal reforms in the universities that he hoped would pacify the strident protesters who drove Ubico from office. But simultaneously, Ponce issued crackdowns on civil liberties: prohibited private meetings and demonstrations, expanded surveillance and retained control of the government in the hands of the military and *jefes politicos*, the local political bosses that Ubico relied upon to dominate and terrorize the country. Meanwhile, a prominent commentator wrote scathing articles denouncing the Ponce regime was assassinated on orders from Ponce The schoolteachers and other activists sought an opposition candidate to run against Ponce. Fellow schoolteacher and author of popular history and geography textbooks Dr. Juan José Arévalo was their choice (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 30).

On September 2, 1944 Arévalo, returning from a 10-year exile in Argentina, stepped off an airplane to adoring throngs of Guatemalans who accepted him as their chosen leader to take the people out of the dark days of dictatorship. However, Arévalo went into hiding almost immediately as Ponce ordered his arrest. But Ponce's days were numbered. Two military officers, Major Francisco Arana and Captain Jacobo Árbenz, who in 1950 would himself be elected president, returned from El Salvador where they plotted a revolt against the Ponce government. Arana and Árbenz rapidly organized a brigade of loyal soldiers who under Arana and Árbenz direction attacked police stations and military installations friendly to Ponce. Ponce acquiesced to the onslaught on October 22 and soon he left Guatemala. Arana and Árbenz were hailed as national heroes and formed a temporary junta along with Jorge Toriello, a well-known business leader. The junta immediately declared free elections would soon follow as it embraced Arévalo as the junta's candidate (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 30-31; Pike 1955).

Arévalo enjoyed broad-based support. On March 15, 1945 Juan José Arévalo took the oath of office as he was swept into the presidency with the support of 85 percent of voters. The franchise was only permitted to "literate males." Nonetheless, Arévalo spoke of the benefits of democracy as he expressed Christian Socialist notions that the government has a duty to improve the lives of its citizens. He called communism "contrary to human nature, for it is contrary to the psychology of man." Yet, he acknowledged communism existed in Guatemala as a legal political viewpoint. When Marxists established *Escuela Claridad*, an indoctrination school in 1945, Arévalo ordered the school closed on the grounds that the Guatemalan Constitution did not permit a political organization of a foreign or international character. But Marxism was gaining a toehold in the nation. In 1947 a group led by José Manuel Fortuny established *Vanguardia Democrática*, a communist organization (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 32-34, 56; Pike 1955).

Arévalo's governance promised major priorities: land and tax reform, labor protections, improvements to the nation's educational system and consolidation of political democracy. Arévalo encouraged formation of political parties. He restructured the National Assembly as an equal branch of government to the executive. Freedom of the press and free speech blossomed for the first time in the nation's 123-year history. In 1946 the Arévalo government passed Guatemala's first social security legislation that was fashioned after Roosevelt's New Deal. Additionally, Arévalo and the National Assembly in 1947 passed the Labor Code that was modeled after the National Labor Relations Act (the Wagner Act of 1935) that allowed labor unions and collective bargaining in the US. The labor legislation included an eight-hour workday, minimum wages, child and female labor regulations, severance pay and paid vacations. The land-owning oligarchs were enraged. This tiny group of privilege resented the very idea that any citizens not in their rarified socioeconomic

strata would be entitled to protections and benefits from the government. But the larger issue was that the Labor Code was instrumental, at least in part, for the US intervention in Guatemala in 1954. The Code required foreign corporations to maintain a workforce that was 90 percent Guatemalan. The oligarchy's obstinance drove Arévalo tentatively toward the welcoming arms of the communists. Ubico supporters alerted the FBI of Arévalo's labor reforms and cited "communist influence." The FBI opened a dossier on Arévalo. (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 37-38; Pike 1955; Gordon 1971).

Even as the oligarchy and the US corporations dug in their heels as the new welfare state delivered threats to their cheap labor supply and squabbles among the elites persisted, Arévalo's progress was significant. Government expenditures for education between 1944 and 1950 jumped 155 percent. Outlays for new schools and hospitals tripled in 1945 and doubled again by 1950. A group of US economists delivered a study that showed the new programs moderately redistributed income in favor of Indian peasants and low-income urban families and strengthened the entire economy by increasing productivity (Gordon 1971).

The benefits that Arévalo delivered mostly benefited the labor side of the economy but ignored the major issues of land and tax reform. The Indians remained landless. The overflowing wealth of oligarchy remained intact as the tax structure remained untouched. The privileged contracts that US corporations held also remained in place. A tax-reform measure that also would have provided adjustments to the corporations' contracts did not pass in the Guatemalan Congress. This legislative defeat prevented $4 million of income to the government that would have been available for economic expansion annually, according to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, i.e. the World Bank (IBRD) (Gordon 1971).

Notwithstanding Arévalo's energy and optimism, he faced daunting conditions that plagued the nation's living standards. City dwellers were faced with limited options for a sustainable income as most industry resided in the hands of foreign corporations, principally United Fruit Company and its affiliates. A small but steadily growing middle class remained on the fringes of the economy that had not adjusted to its existence. Rural populations were faced with subsistence wages of between five cents and 20 cents per day. Seventy-two percent of the land was owned by two percent of the population. *Latifundios* that comprised more than 1,100 acres constituted only 0.3 percent of Guatemalan farms, but they occupied more than half of the country's farmland. Seventy-five percent of all farmers were landless or owned only small plots. Indians, who were descendants of the Maya and never assimilated into Guatemalan society were landless. Only one-half of the arable land in 1952 was in production. The nation's economic system left peasants in abject poverty; the underutilized land and resources left Guatemala dependent on the US banana and coffee markets. The Indians represented 60 percent (1.8 million) of the nation's three million total population but they were chained to a debt-labor system that was little different from the slavery conditions that existed during Spain's rule. Life expectancy for *ladinos*, i.e. those with mixed Spanish and Indian blood, was 50 years. Indians could expect to live until age 40 (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 38-40; Pike 1955; Gordon 1971).

Inefficiencies in land utilization, resulting from the *latifundio* system, required that Guatemala import food, even as 75 percent of Guatemala's population engaged in agricultural production. Agricultural endeavors produced 57 percent of the country's gross national product. Beyond the narrow range of domestic agriculture in the country, banana and coffee production dominated the Guatemalan landscape. The vast land tracts in

bananas were wholly controlled by US corporations, principally United Fruit Company. The coffee production remained in the grip of the Guatemalan oligarchy (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 40; Pike 1955).

The monopolies enjoyed by US corporations contributed to stalling Guatemalan industrial development, according to a 300-page report issued by the IBRD. Contracts between the Guatemalan government and the US corporations allowed the corporations to reduce their tax liability to the Central American nation by one half. The three US corporations had enormous political clout that allowed them to skim profits off the top and return them to their US shareholders. Meanwhile, funds that might be used for economic development in Guatemala were siphoned off, tilting the economic table that left farmers in a dependent status and poverty ridden as it tightened the strangulating grip of the most reactionary elements (Gordon 1971; Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 53-53).

During the first couple of years of his presidential term Arévalo maintained a relatively stable environment in Guatemala. However, dark clouds began to gather during 1948 as workers became restive. The press, enjoying their newfound freedoms, began to vigorously attack the Arévalo administration as his base argued among themselves about definitive policies. Between June 1948 and March 1949 labor unions began strikes that continuously harassed United Fruit Company. A large cache of arms spurred Arévalo to declare a national emergency when the weaponry was uncovered in railroad cars at United Fruit's railway line at Puerto Barrios on the Atlantic coast. Plots to end the Arévalo government were tied to Colonel Francisco Arana who harbored ambitions to become president. Arana, backed by the military, had risen in power to the extent that he enjoyed a virtual veto over Arévalo's decisions (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 42-43).

Moreover, at least two dozen uprisings, either planned or in progress, threatened Arévalo's government during the president's six-year term. Additionally, fractures appeared among the coalition that backed Arévalo as the middle class feared the 1944 Revolution was moving too far toward the left. Radical elements continued to push for greater efforts to end poverty and the low status endured by workers and peasants. Labor unions flexing their newfound gains under Arévalo instigated punitive worker strikes against United Fruit Company and IRCA in 1946, 1948-1949 and 1950-1952. US financiers in Boston, the home of United Fruit's headquarters, along with their supporters in the US Congress denigrated these labor actions that impacted foreign shareholders' monetary gains. Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, whose family had deep financial ties to the giant banana vendor that Guatemalans called *El Pulpo* (the Octopus), took to the senate floor to denounce the Labor Code as specifically targeting United Fruit Company. The senator charged the legislation caused a "serious breakdown" because of communist intrusion. Senator John W. McCormack joined the chorus by blaming "a minority of reckless agitators" of attempting to punish United Fruit Company for "being American." Congressman Christian Herter threatened legislation that would cease funding to countries that discriminated against US companies. By 1950 the hysteria of the Red Scare was in full flower in the US as policymakers turned up the heat on Arévalo to denounce communism (Gordon 1971; (Stone and Kuznick 2012, 262).

In the runup to Guatemala's 1950 election, elements in the military felt their dominant role in Guatemalan society was threatened. Simultaneously, leftists, intimidated by Major Francisco Arana's control of the military, were apprehensive at the notion of the military securing the reins of the government. Also, sensing pushback from opposition the leftists were eager to implement the policies that the 1944 revolution promised. As the Arévalo

government faltered, the left sought a candidate for the upcoming election in 1950 election to counter Arana. They set their sights on Defense Minister Jacobo Árbenz, who had partnered with Arana during the 1944 military revolt against Ponce (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 43).

The more assertive Arana was popular with voters as the more reticent Árbenz cut a less dynamic profile. Árbenz's principle advisers worried that Arana might launch a coup d'état with the acquiescence of the military. A plot emerged to arrest Arana on charges that he was planning to take the government by force. But Árbenz supporters balked at that idea, fearing an uprising by the military. Another scheme considered was to kidnap Arana and force him into exile. What finally occurred was that Arana was ambushed at the Puente de la Gloria bridge. Arana was killed in the ensuing gun battle. Close friends of Árbenz were implicated but Arévalo refused to investigate. Rumors circulated that Árbenz witnessed the battle through binoculars while he was perched on a nearby hill. Following sporadic uprisings in the weeks after the assassination that Arévalo quelled, it was a forgone conclusion that Jacobo Árbenz would be Arévalo's successor as president (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 44-45).

On the Ides of March 1951 Jacobo Árbenz (image on the left, public domain) began his term as Guatemala's president. The Ides of March was significant in 44 BCE as the day of the assassination of Julius Caesar that marked a major change in the Roman Empire's destiny. Guatemala was no Roman Empire, but the election of the 38-year-old Árbenz would usher in major changes in the course of the Guatemalan history. The US would bring the wrath of empire to Guatemala as the Central American nation attempted to continue the nascent 1944 Revolution that ignited hope in the hearts of workers and the middle class during Arévalo's administration. The result of the US interventions that began in 1954 would lay the foundation for the slaughter or disappearance of 200,000 in Guatemala during the subsequent four decades (McSherry 2005; Weiner 2008; Stone and Kuznick 2012, 261).

President Jacobo Árbenz at his March 1951 inauguration voiced his commitment to meaningful reforms and social justice:

> "All the riches of Guatemala are not as important as the life, the freedom, the dignity, the health and the happiness of its people…we must distribute these

> riches so that those who have less—and they are the immense majority—benefit more, while those who have more—and they are so few—also benefit, but to a lesser extent. How could it be otherwise, given the poverty, the poor health and the lack of education of our people?"

Árbenz, early in his administration, was energetically transforming Guatemala into a modern capitalist nation. He enthusiastically worked to quash the iron grip of world coffee prices on the Guatemalan economy. He also sought to pull Guatemala away from the oppressive boot of US corporations on his countrymen. One of his first projects was the development of an Atlantic coastal port that would be owned by the Guatemalan public and compete against the Puerto Barrios port owned by United Fruit Company. Árbenz also began construction of a highway to the Atlantic that would compete with the IRCA railroad's monopoly. Finally, he erected a hydroelectric plant that produced electrical power cheaper than the US-investor owned Electric Bond and Share monopoly. Instead of simply nationalizing the US-corporate monopolies, Árbenz attempted to compete directly against the giants. However, Árbenz's main thrust was in land reform; in his message to Congress he stated that he advocated "agrarian reform which puts an end to the *latifundios* and the semi-feudal practices, giving the land to thousands of peasants, raising their purchasing power and creating a great internal market favorable to the development of domestic industry" (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 53; Stone and Kuznick 2012, 261).

The agrarian reform legislative vehicle to initiate the audacious plan to equalize wealth in Guatemala was called Decree 900. Decree 900 granted the Guatemalan government the power to expropriate land of large plantations that was uncultivated. Not included in this legislation were any farms with fewer than 223 acres, or farms between 223 acres and 670 acres that had a minimum of 2/3 of the farm's land under cultivation. Farms of any size that were totally cultivated were exempt from expropriation. The owners of the expropriated lands would be compensated with 25-year term government bonds that yielded three percent per annum. The valuation of the land expropriated was based on the owner's declaration of value for tax purposes as of May 1952. The property owners, especially the big US corporations and oligarchs, insisted that they valued their lands for tax purposes well below rates they could achieve on the open market to limit their tax liability (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 54-55).

These expropriated lands, together with huge "national farms" that were nationalized in 1941 when the Germans who owned these tracts were expelled from the country during World War II were to be parceled to landless peasants in tracts no larger than 42.5 acres each. To avoid speculation in the real estate market, most of the recipients of the land would not be granted a clear title and they could only occupy the land for the remainder of their life. Instead they would rent the land at five percent of the value of the food produced from the land. The "nationalized farms" once owned by Germans would be rented for three percent of the food's value from production. This bold initiative would only survive for 18 months until the Árbenz government was toppled. But during its existence, the program delivered 1.5 million acres (that the Guatemalan government paid $8,345,545 in bonds) to approximately 100,000 families—including 1,700 acres owned by President Árbenz and an additional 1,200 acres that was owned by Guillermo Toriello who would later become Árbenz's foreign minister (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 54-55).

Decree 900 would have grave consequences for the largest landowner in Guatemala, United Fruit Company that owned about 550,000 acres. Decree 900 was especially punishing to the corporation as the legislation targeted uncultivated land for expropriation. The banana

grower's landholdings were 85 percent uncultivated in 1953 due to market demand for the produce. In March 1953, 209,842 acres of United Fruit Company's uncultivated land were expropriated at the Pacific coast in a region named Tiquisate. The land was valued at $627,572. Between October 1953 and February 1954, the Guatemalan government expropriated an additional 177,059 acres at Bananera, near the Atlantic coast. The government valued this expropriation at about $500,000. The US Department of State on April 20, 1954 issued an angry protest and demanded a payment of $15,854,849 for the property at Tiquisate. This sum did not include the US value estimate for the Bananera tract. The total acreage expropriated tallied 386,901 (approximately 70 percent of United Fruit Company's landholdings in Guatemala). Foreign-policy experts in the Eisenhower were stepping up their rhetoric against the upstart Guatemalan government as they termed the previous Democratic administrations as "namby-pamby" (Pike 1955; Gordon 1971; Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 54, 75-76).

The larger scope, doubtless observed by Washington policymakers and their clandestine strong-arm men, was the contagion in other Central American nations of backlashes against the monolithic United Fruit Company. In Costa Rica José Figueres who was running for president demanded the United Fruit Company increase the percentage of profits from 15 percent to 50 percent that the company paid annually to the Costa Rica government. In Honduras and Panama, United Fruit Company's workers engaged in crippling labor strikes as the governments in those nations demanded more favorable contract terms. The US State Department and the CIA were alarmed by the Árbenz government in Guatemala actions against the fruit giant that were impending on the multinational corporation's 3,000,000 acres of land (nearly the size of the state of Connecticut), 2,000 miles of railroad, 15 hospitals, 237 schools and 100 steamships throughout Central America (Gordon 1971; Whitfield 1984).

Coinciding with the Arbenz agrarian reform was the election of Republican President Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower whose administration promptly abandoned President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy" in Latin America. To further complicate matters for Guatemala, key members of Eisenhower's foreign policy architects either had current or past business ties with United Fruit Company. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' law firm, Sullivan & Cromwell, a law firm that historians Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius reported "thrived on cartels and collusion with the new Nazi regime," represented United Fruit Company in legal matters during the years prior to the 1944 Revolution. John Foster Dulles, himself, spent 1934 "publicly supporting Hitler." John Foster Dulles' brother Allen Dulles was director of the CIA. Undersecretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, who was Dulles' predecessor as CIA director, joined United Fruit Company as a vice president in 1955. The assistant secretary of state for Latin America was John M. Cabot who held a large stockownership position in the company. His brother Thomas D. Cabot was a director for First National Bank of Boston. Robert D. Hill, the current ambassador to Costa Rica, was assistant vice-president of W.R. Grace and Company. Hill would later be active in the coup d'état to destroy the Árbenz regime. Hill later became a director of United Fruit Company (Gordon 1971; Stone and Kuznick 2012, 263; Kinzer 2006, 114).

Meanwhile, United Fruit Company, whose president was Samuel Zemurray, a business powerhouse that *Newsweek*magazine called "the dictator of the banana industry," was marshalling its considerable resources to combat the Árbenz assault on the fruit producer's landholdings in Guatemala. By 1947 the company had engaged the services of the celebrated public-relations genius Edward Bernays. In 1950 in a strategy session to counter

the Guatemalan government's pushback on United Fruit Company, Bernays, the noted author and nephew of the father of modern psychotherapy, Sigmund Freud, calmly soothed the worried brows of United Fruit's executives, "I [have] the feeling that Guatemala might respond to pitiless publicity in this country." Bernays would construct his marketing program on the theme that the dangerous communists that now infested Central America would soon be slithering into the very living rooms of Middle America (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 79-80; Whitfield 1984; (Stone and Kuznick 2012, 262).

By the time he appeared in front of the executives of United Fruit Company, Bernays had made his bones by directing advertising campaigns for several major US corporations. He ran the marketing strategies of the fledgling CBS television network. Perhaps his greatest feat was for the American Tobacco Company when he convinced prominent socialites to be photographed while they smoked cigarettes (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 80).

Bernays was a master of manipulating public opinion and manufacturing consent of public policy. In *Propaganda* (1928) he wrote:

> "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an **invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country**.... [I]t is the intelligent minorities which need to make use of propaganda continuously and systematically." (Emphasis added.)

With the benefit of nearly a century of hindsight, Bernays' prescient words are starkly frightening. Nonetheless, while this hired gun for big business provided a valuable service for his clientele, he also was a political liberal who supported many of Roosevelt's initiatives in the New Deal. Most important to United Fruit Company, Bernays supported Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy that eschewed the heavy-handed policies of the US that treated Latin America as the imperialist nation's colony. Bernays and United Fruit Company President Samuel Zemurray worked well together initially. But as Bernays learned about *El Pulpo* (the Octopus), the disparaging moniker that detractors called United Fruit Company because of its feudalistic policies against its workers, the public relations master began to have misgivings. After traveling to Central America to see firsthand his employer's operations, Bernays penned a memorandum that criticized the company's racist policies toward "colored" natives and the shoddy company-provided housing for its US managers in Central America. His star dropped rapidly in United Fruit Company's boardroom after he presented his findings (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 80-82; Whitfield 1984).

Nevertheless, Bernays enlisted journalists to write articles in liberal publications about the difficulties that United Fruit Company was experiencing in Guatemala. The *New York Herald Tribune* sent Fitzhugh Turner to Guatemala in February 1950. The reporter penned a series of articles, based on interviews with company bosses titled "Communism in the Caribbean." The article garnered frontpage headlines for five consecutive days. The *New York Times* sent reporter Will Lissner to Guatemala who concocted a bizarre story about communists from Chile infiltrating Guatemala. After it appeared in the *Times*, the story quietly disappeared from the discussion. Bernays' propaganda efforts began to post results as public opinion swung in United Fruit's favor. When college professor and author Samuel Guy Inman traveled to Guatemala, he obtained an interview with Guatemalan President Arévalo in 1950. Inman was impressed with the results of the 1944 Revolution that provided social

security, new schools and hospitals, labor unions, a free press and free elections. During the interview Arévalo insisted that he wanted the people of the US to know his disdain for communism. He declared Guatemala's "complete solidarity" with the US battles against communism in the Korean War then in progress. Arévalo emphatically stated that "Politically speaking Guatemala has no connections whatsoever with any extra-continental power, either European or Asiatic." The Guatemalan president added that the Guatemalan people sought to establish a nation based on the principles of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The US press including the Associated Press, the Hearst Corporations International News Service, *Newsweek* magazine, The *New York Herald Tribune* and The *New York Times* gave scant coverage of Arévalo's statements of loyalty to the US. (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 84-85).

By August 1953 Bernays was armed with a budget of $500,000 per year from the deep pockets of United Fruit Company and backed by a collection of corporate and political heavy hitters. Bernays and his allies convinced both liberals and conservatives in the US Congress that communism was running amok in Guatemala, despite the reality that the party had a paltry membership of 4,000. As the Senator Joseph McCarthy hysteria in the US reached feverish panic, the nation's public was looking for "commies" under every bed and behind every bush. Bernays and his coterie of propagandists successfully convinced America that radicals in Guatemala's government were the toadies of the Soviet Union. The American people succumbed to the Bernays story that United Fruit was the victim of sinister connivers of Soviet aggression. Thus, with the phony pretext established it was only a matter of time before the CIA would ignite the fuse of Operation Success the code name for the regime-change plot in Guatemala. Indeed, that very month, President Eisenhower authorized a $2.7 million budget for "psychological warfare and political action" and "subversion" along with other actions for a limited paramilitary war in Guatemala. While the initial program did not call for assassinating the Guatemalan president, the CIA in a its so-called "K program" stated that "the option of assassination was still being considered" up until Árbenz resigned his office on June 27, 1954, according to CIA documents that were declassified in 1995. The CIA had assembled a five-page roster of 58 targets for assassination. It included "high government officials and organizational leaders" who were alleged communists" (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 88-90; Stone and Kuznick 2012, 263; Kate Doyle and Kornbluh, Ed. 1995; Weiner 2008, 111).

The lynchpin in the CIA's schemes around the globe to topple governments that have the misfortune to raise the ire of the US empire is to identify a suitably pliable puppet to replace the besmirched "brutal dictator" of the targeted nation. United Fruit Company had considerable anxiety that the installed leader would be someone who would assist the corporation in its endeavors to maximize profits. Indeed, it pays to have friends in high places; this is especially true for US corporations that are operating in foreign nations where exploitation of the working class is paramount in the company's business plan. CIA Director Allen Dulles (and his brother Secretary of State John Foster Dulles) would be among the cadre of US officials that would pave the way for United Fruit's plans. Allen Dulles assured United Fruit Company's executives that the next leader of Guatemala would not expropriate any of the corporation's landholdings. As a bonus, CIA Director Dulles encouraged United Fruit Company to actively join the search for just the right man to replace the hapless Jacobo Árbenz (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 119-120).

After establishing three candidates who fit the prescribed CIA-United Fruit Company profile for Guatemala's new president, the US policymakers settled on General Carlos Castillo

Armas. The first candidate General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes who garnered reputations in the military as an opportunist and for cruelty. He hated Indians and was implicated in several massacres while he served under President Jorge Ubico prior to the 1944 Revolution. He was vetoed by E. Howard Hunt who would gain infamy during the Watergate scandal under President Richard Nixon. Curiously, Hunt objected to Ydígoras because he was a "right-wing reactionary" and too "authoritarian." Additionally, Hunt argued that Ydígoras looked too much like a Spanish nobleman; he was too white. The second candidate was offered by a United Fruit Company executive. The executive Walter Turnbull claimed that his choice, a lawyer and coffee plantation owner named Juan Córdova Cerna, was greatly superior to the unscrupulous Ydígoras. Unfortunately for him, Cerna developed throat cancer and was hospitalized, so he too was eliminated. Castillo Armas, although not ideal, looked like an Indian and his military background was favorable to the paramilitary forces that would be leading the offensive on the ground. Also, Castillo Armas fit the bill because as a smirking *Time* correspondent opined, "He was younger than Ydígoras, but also because he was a stupid man" (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 121-122).

On May 15, 1954 the nearly mile-long Swedish freighter *Alfhem* made its way into Puerto Barrios from the Atlantic Ocean. The big freighter's cargo was a guarded secret of the Guatemalan government. During the next few days more than 100 boxcars would be filled with the ship's contents that were comprised of large crates marked "Optical and Laboratory Equipment." As the boxcars were loaded, they traveled under a military escort to Guatemala City. But instead of optical and laboratory equipment, the crates contained war matériel from Czechoslovakia. The purchase included rifles, ammunition, antitank mines, and artillery pieces. Guatemala had paid more than a million dollars for the war equipment that the Árbenz government soon found to be mostly defective. Much of the weaponry was rusted and did not function. The artillery could not be transported through the jungle because of their size and design. The largest portion of the weaponry was antitank mines, but no tanks were used during the conflict because of the terrain and their maintenance costs. Some displayed a swastika emblem that showed their origin and age. The *New York Times* commented snidely that Árbenz was sold a cache of "white elephants." The US had placed a weapons embargo on Guatemala, so options for the Árbenz government to purchase weapons from other nations were extremely limited. When news of the 2,000-ton arms shipment reached Washington, Allen Dulles and other CIA policymakers were jubilant. Foster Dulles took the propaganda gift to claim that Guatemala was in league with the Soviet Union to expand communism into the Western Hemisphere. House Speaker John McCormack breathlessly called the weapons an atomic bomb planted in America's backyard. The high-strung US Ambassador to Guatemala John E. Peurifoy hysterically screamed that the United States was at war. The cache of nearly worthless weaponry served as the pretext that CIA and State Department were waiting for to launch their regime-change war against Árbenz. Castillo Armas who would lead the assault was waiting in Nicaragua for orders. Earlier the CIA hatched a scheme to plant boxes of weaponry with Soviet markings near the Nicaraguan border with the hope the weapons would be "discovered" by the Nicaraguan police (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 148-152; Weiner 2008, 112; Pike 1955, 250-251).

Meanwhile, the US State Department was plotting to initiate sanctions against Guatemala that included cutting off lines of credit for Guatemala from other nations, eliminating sources of petroleum and encouraging investors to remove their money from Guatemalan banks. Simultaneously, US Navy warships and submarines began a blockade against Guatemala in violation of international law as CIA-piloted C-47 transport airplanes dropped

leaflets over the presidential palace to terrorize Guatemalans. Reeling, Árbenz and his Foreign Minister Guillermo Toriello met with Ambassador John E. Peurifoy on May 24th seeking to arrange a settlement. When that meeting did not reach a meaningful conclusion, Torriello offered to accept a proposal that President Eisenhower had offered in January to arrange a neutral commission to arbitrate the issues between the two nations. Torriello even went as far as promising that Árbenz would negotiate concessions to United Fruit Company. But by then, the US plans for the Árbenz regime's demise in Operation Success were already cemented. During early June, Peurifoy cabled CIA Director Dulles urgently suggesting that the US negate existing trade agreements with Guatemala and order US citizens to evacuate the nation. Peurifoy hoped news of these actions would alarm the Guatemalan citizenry enough to instigate an uprising in the Guatemalan military (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 164; Weiner 2008, 112).

By June 15, just three days ahead of the CIA-led US invasion of Guatemala, Ambassador Peurifoy in a sweaty panic cabled Allen Dulles that "a reign of terror" was in progress after baseless rumors that reported that the Árbenz government was committing widespread torture and murder. Meanwhile, the US propaganda machine with E. Howard Hunt directing the orchestra was operating at full blast. Hunt described the goals of his psychological warfare operation this way:

"What we wanted to do is to have a terror campaign to terrify Árbenz particularly, to terrify his troops, much as the German Stuka bombers terrified the population in Holland, Belgium and Poland at the onset of World War Two."

Hunt clandestinely arranged a "Congress Against Soviet Intervention on Latin America" in Mexico City. Hunt stoked the conference with anti-communist thugs and reactionaries along with a token sprinkle of liberals to denounce the Árbenz government amid outlandish and bogus charges that would become his trademark in the decades to come. The conference ended in a public-relations disaster after delegates from Costa Rica and Ecuador stormed out of the conference in disgust (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 166; Weiner 2008, 112-113).

The United States Information Agency (USIA) had greater success with its more sophisticated system. USIA published propagandistic articles based on biased information provided by the CIA. Two hundred of these articles were widely distributed among various publications in Latin America. USIA printed 100,000 copies of "Chronology of Communism in Guatemala," a pamphlet distorting left-wing influence in the nation. Additionally, the propaganda agency printed 27,000 copies of cartoons and posters depicting the evils of communism. Free to the public movies were screened in theaters in Latin America that featured film footage that glorified the US. Finally, radio broadcasts were aired at prime listening hours to increase the favorable opinions of the US actions in Latin America. When the Guatemalan state radio station went off the air for a scheduled repair of its antenna, the CIA arranged for broadcasts at a frequency very close to the state-owned radio frequency.

On June 4 Guatemalan chief of the Guatemalan Air Force Colonel Rodolfo Mendoza Azúrdia flew an airplane to Anastasio Somoza's farm in Nicaragua. After the CIA plied him with whisky and misleadingly edited a taped interview to make it sound like the Mendoza Azúrdia was calling for a rebellion against the Árbenz government, the phony tape was broadcast. When Árbenz listened to the broadcast, he realized that the CIA had succeeded in its scam to paint him as a torturing dictator. Árbenz made things worse by arresting members of an anti-communist group that provided the CIA assistance. At least 75 of these members were

tortured, murdered and buried in mass graves (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 167; Weiner 2008, 113; Pike 1955, 250).

A secret radio propaganda campaign directed by David Atlee Phillips, a former actor who was hired by the CIA to conduct a "disinformation program," was especially successful in fomenting fear and panic among Guatemalans. The "Voice of Liberation" that the announcers falsely claimed originated "deep within the Guatemalan jungle" and that Árbenz was about to disband the army and replace it with a peasant militia. Broadcasts initially targeted directly to women, soldiers, workers and young people urged them to join the Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas Liberation Movement. Another broadcast tailored for military officers was crafted to encourage their defection from the Árbenz government.

The CIA issued broadcasts that become increasingly outrageous in their creativity. One broadcast hysterically reported falsely:

"A group of Soviet commissars, officers and political advisers, led by a member of the Moscow Politburo have landed.... In addition to military conscription, the communists will introduce labor conscription. A decree is already being printed. All boys and girls 16 years old will be called for one year of labor duty in special camps, mainly for political indoctrination and to break the influence of family and church on the young people.... Árbenz has already left the country. His announcements from the National Palace are actually made by a double, provided by Soviet intelligence".

The radio announcers schemed to falsely imply that rebels had infested the entire Guatemalan countryside by issuing fake calls for Guatemalans to aid "partisans" in locating air-drop sites. Meanwhile, the CIA radio team successfully jammed Árbenz's radio broadcasts that were issued to calm the fearful population (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 168; Weiner 2008, 114).

Meanwhile, the CIA transported 170 mercenaries to Tegucigalpa, Honduras for a planned meeting with their "commander," Castillo Armas. The mercenaries were picked from Guatemalan exiles, US soldiers of fortune and an assortment of Central Americans that the CIA had trained at secret bases in Nicaragua. After their training the rebels were moved to various villages in Honduras including a plantation town that was owned by United Fruit Company where the CIA trucked in armaments and rations. Included in the arms package were small arms weapons including bazookas, machine guns, grenade launchers. The invasion would begin in two days. The plan called for Castillo Armas to take and occupy the key town of Zacapa, where a strategic railroad junction supplied access to El Salvador, Guatemala City and the Atlantic coastal port of Puerto Barrios. The other major part of the Castillo Armas plan was to establish guerrilla forces throughout the countryside to harass government forces with sabotage and attacks. On June 18, 1954 after the CIA had flown in additional troops to villages in Honduras, Castillo Armas decked out in a leather jacket and travelling in a battered station wagon led a procession of trucks across the border into Guatemala. The invasion, that required four years to prepare, was begun. The planned capture of Zacapa and Puerto Barrios never came to fruition. Dockworkers and police loyal to Árbenz defeated 198 rebels at Puerto Barrios. Another troop contingency of 122 attacked the Guatemalan army garrison at Zacapa; 92 rebels were killed or captured. Another force of 60 rebels marched from El Salvador, but these troops were seized by local police. Castillo Armas personally led a company of 100 men to lightly defended villages, but within three days he radioed the CIA for additional weapons and food. More than half of his fighters were dead, captured or on the verge of defeat. Peurifoy and Haney were aghast. Peurifoy

pleaded for Allen Dulles “Bomb repeat bomb.” An irate Haney wrote to CIA headquarters a scathing, if more eloquent, missive:

“Are we going to stand by and see last hope of free people in Guatemala submerged to the depths of Communist oppression and atrocity until we send American armed force against enemy?… Is not our intervention now under these circumstances far more palatable than by Marines? This is the same enemy we fought in Korea and may fight tomorrow in Indo-China.”

(Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 170-171; Weiner 2008, 114-115).

As the invasion moved into its early days, Árbenz had time to recover from his initial surprise. As early as June 20, he began to see through the CIA’s charade that the invasion was widespread in Guatemala. The plan to intimidate the Árbenz into an early surrender began to dissolve. CIA Director Allen Dulles confessed to President Dwight D. Eisenhower that the odds of winning the incursion amounted to a coin toss. In his memoir *Reflections of a Cold Warrior: From Yalta to the Bay of Pigs*(1966), CIA officer Richard M. Bissell, Jr. wrote, “Grappling with continual operational snafus, we were only too aware how perilously close to failure we were.” To the administration’s chagrin, The *New York Times* published a stinging article by James Reston that disclosed Dulles was the architect of the invasion and thus spotlighted US involvement (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 172; Weiner 2008, 116).

Determined to keep the US in general and the CIA in particular off the front pages of US newspapers and to ensure deniability, the CIA had resorted to only three F-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers for use in their air assault. The single-engine propeller aircraft were World War II vintage. After three of these planes were downed, the mercenaries who contracted with the CIA to pilot the planes were forced to drop hand grenades out of cargo doors in lieu of flying bombers. Strafing runs were completed with hand-held machine guns. Meanwhile, Castillo Armas and his collection of troops that he referred to as the “Liberation Army” was faltering on the ground. The Guatemalan army pushed the Castillo Armas rebels back after the rebels attempted to capture Puerto Barrios and Zacapa. While the CIA had no illusions about potential successes from the Castillo Armas forces, the clandestine agency hoped they would succeed in spurring defections from the Guatemalan army (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 173-174).

The chief of operations for Operation Success Colonel Albert Haney contacted CIA Director Dulles with urgent pleas to send replacement fighter-bombers. Haney feared the assault would collapse without sufficient air support. Dulles continued to worry about international exposure of the US-led coup d’état. Meanwhile, Haney cooked up a plot that would create a false-flag operation for a bombing run in Honduras that could be blamed on Árbenz. But Honduran officials refused to comply with a plan that would have required bombs to be deployed against Honduran villages. In another colossal example of CIA incompetence, Haney assigned a former marine pilot to destroy the Guatemalan government’s radio station in Guatemala City. Haney specifically warned the pilot, “Just down the road is the transmitter of an evangelical station, and there are two American ladies there. You can tell the difference because the Árbenz station is all concrete and the mission has a red tile roof.” When the pilot returned from his mission it became obvious that he misunderstood Haney’s admonition not to bomb the structure with the red tile roof. The pilot, beaming, said, “You should have seen them red tiles flying!” (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 175-176).

Despite the CIA’s foundering assault against the Árbenz government in Guatemala, Allen

Dulles convinced President Eisenhower to increase his commitment in the overthrow of the democratically elected Árbenz government. Árbenz and his foreign minister Guillermo Torriello continued to seek a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Árbenz approached El Salvador's dictator President Oscar Osorio to mediate a solution, unaware of the vice-grip the US had on Guatemala's Central American neighbor. Osorio actively worked for the end of Árbenz's rule. Torriello frantically beseeched the United Nations to intervene. The US blocked Torriello's initiatives at the UN. The US ambassador to the UN and former US Senator, Henry Cabot Lodge, a staunch backer of United Fruit Company, and Dulles were worried that the UN forum would expose the US to criticism for its aggression against Guatemala (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 178-180).

Meanwhile, the CIA's propaganda machine cranked out fake news bulletins over the "Voice of Liberation" radio broadcasts that proclaimed Árbenz forces suffered major defeats in clashes with rebel troops. The hyped successes increased the fear and confusion among disheartened Árbenz loyalists. The broadcasts were well-timed to match the arrival of trains bringing in wounded Árbenz forces, lending credence to the CIA's propaganda efforts. In one broadcast the "Voice of Liberation" falsely reported, "At our command post here in the jungle we are unable to confirm or deny the report that Castillo Armas has an army of 5,000 men." In fact, the "Voice of Liberation" was nowhere near the Guatemalan jungle; Castillo Armas had only succeeded in gathering a force of barely 400 troops. But by June 25, even high-placed officials in the Árbenz began to express doubts of Árbenz ability to survive. The US corporate press did its share to spread disinformation about the actual events on the ground. The press depicted the swaggering, John Wayne caricature, Peurifoy, who toted a .45-caliber handgun and the inept Castillo Armas as heroes in an epoch struggle against what was ridiculously characterized as a gigantic Red Army. The reporters acted as stenographers to the river of lies coming out of the US embassies in Guatemala and Honduras, along with the public relations staff of United Fruit Company (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 185-188).

Despite the avalanche of US-fueled propaganda, anti-American sentiment exploded across Latin America as the month of June ended. Supporters of the Árbenz government waived the bloody shirt of US imperialism in Latin America. Students in Mexico marched against the US actions in marketplaces and at the university. In Honduras, students marched in support of the Guatemalan government, despite the Honduras government support of US interests. Panamanian students called for a 24-hour strike to protest the US aggression. Cubans in Havana threw stones at the offices of United Press International and the North American Electric Company as students attempted to enlist in the Guatemalan army at the Guatemalan embassy. Labor unions in Bolivia held mass events and decried the US "intervention." Argentina and Uruguay's congresses passed resolutions that denounced US "aggression in Guatemala." The US State Department privately polled Latin American nations and found that 11 non-communist and moderate pro-US nations voiced strenuous objections to the US policies in Guatemala. Nevertheless, the corporate media continued ignoring these objections as they beat the drums for war (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 188-189).

Meanwhile, the CIA was offering cash bribes to any officer from Árbenz's forces who would surrender his troops to the US-backed Castillo Armas forces. At least one officer reportedly accepted a $60,000 bribe to deliver the troops in his command to his government's enemies. But, despite the large sums offered, there is scant evidence that Guatemalans were joining the Castillo Armas cause. Castillo Armas was having difficulty in convincing

enough volunteers to drive trucks ferrying supplies. Nevertheless, while the rebels were not showing significant success in converting the masses in Guatemala, few were motivated to join in defending the country against the invaders. The "Voice of Liberty" propaganda stream was having its effect on the peasants who were accepting that defeat of the Árbenz government was imminent. Árbenz, himself, began to realize that even his army was becoming apathetic in its loyalty to him. The shaken Árbenz began to understand that the end was rapidly approaching. The CIA psychological warfare campaign succeeded in undermining the confidence of the Guatemala president (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 188-190).

As Árbenz began to understand that his support base was limited to the few communists that had a stake in his government's survival, Árbenz acted rationally. To continue fighting against the overwhelming odds of the US-backed rebels would only delay the inevitable and cause the deaths of more Guatemalans. Essentially, he was abandoned by almost all factions of Guatemalan society. The rich already despised him for his liberal social programs that he instigated. The tough actions his police had implemented had caused the middle class to turn its back on him. Also, in April the Catholic Church led by the Archbishop of Guatemala, Monsignor Rossell y Arellano had leveled attacks against Árbenz calling for Catholics to fight communism, demanding that "the people of Guatemala rise as a single man against this enemy of God and country." Rossell y Arellano asserted in a *New York Times* article that the relationship between Árbenz and the Church no longer existed. The middle class was further alienated when communist member of Congress Cesar Montenegro Paniagua warned on June 3 that anti-communists who launched an assault against the government would be decapitated, according to a frontpage article in the *New York Times*.

Many in the military harbored resentment toward the beleaguered president stemming from his implication in the murder of his opponent, the former head of the military Colonel Francisco J. Arana during the run up to the presidential election in 1949. The *Times* reported that on June 15, 80 army officers demanded that Árbenz address questions about communist influence in his administration. The lack of measurable success of his economic policies, cooled the segment of the population that had been neutral toward him to wish his ouster. Only the poor who benefited from his policies remained loyal, but their general passivity toward authority added no concrete support (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 198; Pike 1955, 248).

Image on the right: When President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán attempted a redistribution of land, he was overthrown in the 1954 Guatemalan coup d'état (Public Domain)

On June 27, 1954 at 9:15 pm on Sunday, Árbenz announced in a radio broadcast that he was stepping down as Guatemala's president. "For 15 days a cruel war against Guatemala has been underway," Árbenz reported. "The United Fruit Company in collaboration with the governing circles of the United States is responsible for what is happening to us." Árbenz blamed the US for instigating the overthrow of Guatemala's democratically elected government on "the financial interests of the fruit company and other US monopolies which have invested great amounts of money in Latin America and fear that the example of Guatemala would be followed by other Latin American countries…." Árbenz emphatically denied the US claim that the attack on Guatemala was about the US fighting communism. Árbenz told the nation that he was handing the reins of the government "to my friend Colonel Carlos Enrique Díaz, chief of the armed forces of the republic." Árbenz assured the nation that Díaz "will guarantee the democracy in Guatemala and that all the social conquests of our people will be maintained" (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 199-200; Weiner 2008, 117-118).

Historians and direct participants in the 1954 coup d'état have debated the causes of the failure of the Árbenz government and the wisdom of his resignation. Within a month subsequent his decision, Árbenz blamed pressure from "the military cliques that had been under terrific pressure from [Ambassador John E.] Peurifoy…. [T]he truth is that most of the officers had betrayed me and if it is true that the helpless masses were loyal to their government, they had lost their attributes." The communists, who had the most to lose from the resignation of Árbenz urged him not to step down. The communists argued, "It would have been better to bring the crisis out into the open, to denounce to the people the vile treason committed by the army chiefs, but President Árbenz underestimated the role that the masses could play." The communists were particularly angry that Árbenz chose Díaz as his successor. They claimed that Árbenz knew of Díaz's "treacherous commitments to Peurifoy." Thus, the communists insisted that Árbenz misled the nation that "the change in government, the democratic and revolutionary conquests could be salvaged." On the other hand, the communists in Guatemala, especially a young Argentine doctor named Ernesto "Che" Guevara, learned from the Árbenz failure. Che argued that Árbenz should have armed the peasants and taken a harder stand against the rebels. During the CIA-led Bay of Pigs debacle in 1961, Che and Fidel Castro made certain that the defenders of the Cuban Revolution would not succumb to the same defeat as Árbenz. The Cuban fighters

were both well-trained and well-armed. In more recent days, as the Donald Trump administration's attempt to topple the Nicolás Maduro government showed signs of faltering in the spring of 2019, one could attribute this failure in part to the well-prepared state militia in Venezuela (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 201-202; Stone and Kuznick 2012, 266).

Later, US journalists who covered the US-led coup d'état against Árbenz in 1954 conceded that the ousted Guatemalan president was correct in his accusations of the US intervention. Many in the media concluded that the military action against the Árbenz government was retribution for interfering with the potential profits of United Fruit Company. In a confidential interview with Stephen Schlesinger, an experienced correspondent for *Time* magazine admitted years later that, "there would have been no pressure or intervention. The US wouldn't have cared. With no threats to US property, there would have been no problems." This correspondent also acknowledged the horrendous consequences in Central America of the US misadventures in Guatemala. "If Árbenz had survived his term in office, it would have influenced and strengthened democrats in Honduras and El Salvador and isolated [Anastasio] Somoza in Nicaragua." The military action against Árbenz resulted in powerful reactionary forces in the region. It also ensured that future advocates of social change would be more militant and anti-US than the relatively mild Árbenz political stance. Moreover, as historian Frederick B. Pike asserts, the overthrow of the Árbenz government might have been accomplished by legal means through the existing structure of the US friendly Organization of American States (OAS). Instead, the US chose the violent diplomacy of might means right that played into the hands of the Soviets that bolstered its claims of US imperialist aggression.

Nevertheless, in the immediate aftermath of the coup d'état, US operatives were ecstatic that Árbenz was defeated. Peurifoy's insipid wife burnished her "ugly American" credentials when she penned this preen that appeared in *Time*magazine on July 26, 1954:

> "Sing a song of quetzals,* pockets full of peace!
>
> The junta's in the Palace, they've taken out a lease.
>
> The commies are in hiding, just across the street;
>
> To the embassy of Mexico, they beat a quick retreat.
>
> And pistol-packing Peurifoy looks might optimistic
>
> For the land of Guatemala is no longer communistic!"
>
> *Guatemala's national bird and symbol (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 203-204; Pike 1955, 257).

After his ouster, Árbenz and his family would lead an unsettled life. He first fled to Mexico and then to various European cities where he was viewed with suspicion and the tainted by a concentrated CIA smear campaign that continued until 1960. By 1957, the beleaguered former president returned to Latin America under a strict protocol that included his promise not to be involved in politics and report to the police weekly. He and his family lived in Montevideo, Uruguay for three years, but he remained depressed and was drinking heavily. Árbenz was heartened when in 1960 he was invited to live in Revolutionary Cuba. This would be a chance to live in a nation that could return to him his lost self-respect and his good health. But soon his personal problems with family members and his disillusionment

with the Castro government dimmed his outlook. In 1965, his 25-year-old daughter Arabella committed suicide, further sending Árbenz into dark and profound depression. Finally, in 1970 Mexico granted him permission to reside there permanently. On January 27, 1971, still plagued with feeling abandoned by his family and communist friends, 58-year-old Jacobo Árbenz drowned in his bathtub at his home. Authorities ruled his death was due to natural causes, but others doubted this conclusion as questions lingered (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 230-232).

Meanwhile, as President Carlos Enrique Díaz took center stage briefly as Guatemala's new leader, he advanced his plans to eradicate the tattered army of Castillo Armas. In a radio broadcast Díaz assured Guatemalans of his inspiration of the 1944 Revolution and his promise to Árbenz to continue the struggle to expel the foreign mercenaries from his nation's soil. US operatives who listened to the broadcast were enraged. At 4:00 am, Peurifoy along with CIA officers John Doherty and Enno Hobbing arrived at Díaz's suite for a meeting that lasted two hours. In a cable issued to Allen Dulles, Peurifoy, who could easily be described as domineering and mercurial, detailed a mild account of his conversation with Díaz. But Foreign Minister Guillermo Toriello reported a more likely version of the encounter as Díaz related it:

> "Peurifoy waved a long list of names of some leaders. He was going to require Díaz to shoot those who were on the list within 24 hours. 'That's all, but why?' Díaz asked. 'Because they're communists,' replied Peurifoy. Díaz refused absolutely to soil his hands and soul with this repugnant crime and rejected the pretensions of Peurifoy to come and give him orders. 'It would be better, in that case,' he went so far as to tell him, 'that you actually sit on the presidential chair and that the stars and stripes fly over the Palace.' Saying too bad for you, Peurifoy left.

Tensions escalated to a new level during a noon meeting. Díaz told Peurifoy that the new junta was thoroughly anti-communist, and if Castillo Armas was sincere that the rebellion stemmed from fighting communism, then he should lay down his arms. But as the meeting ended, Díaz casually informed Peurifoy that he would issue a proclamation that declared a general amnesty and a release of all political prisoners, including communists. Peurifoy was infuriated; he stormed from the room. Later, Peurifoy blasted off a cable to the Operation Success headquarters that reported, "We have been double-crossed. BOMB!" That afternoon CIA pilots bombed the government radio station that they a missed earlier (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 206-209).

A few hours later, Peurifoy returned to Díaz's office to find a meeting in progress with the three members of the junta: Díaz, Colonel Elfegio Monzón, who was the CIA's clandestine agent in Árbenz's cabinet, and Colonel José Angel Sánchez. Peurifoy succeeded in convincing Díaz to meet with Castillo Armas, despite the ill will that Díaz held for the US puppet, Castillo Armas. When the meeting finally occurred during the early-morning hours Peurifoy, Sánchez and Díaz were present, but Monzón had not arrived. Meanwhile, as tensions sharpened, Peurifoy thought that bullets were about to erupt, Monzón, flanked by two others and carrying a submachine gun abruptly entered the room. He stuck the barrel of his weapon into Díaz's ribs. Monzón directed Díaz out of the room. When Monzón returned alone, he announced wryly, "My colleague Díaz has decided to resign. I am replacing him." As dawn peeked over the horizon, Díaz reentered the room to pledge his support for Monzón. By 4:45 am, Monzón announced the new junta would be comprised of himself and two trusted partners, Lieutenant Colonel Mauricio Dubois and a US-trained 34-

year-old Lieutenant Colonel José Luis Cruz Salazar. The three new leaders agreed to meet Castillo Armas in El Salvador to arrange a cease fire and a peace treaty (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 210-211; Weiner 2008, 114).

Nevertheless, smooth sailing was not to be. From the start, members of Operation Success believed that Monzón was sympathetic to the ideals of the 1944 Revolution. Another complication was Castillo Armas, acting without consulting his CIA handlers, demanded that Monzón stepdown or face the consequences. Despite the cease-fire agreement Peurifoy endeavored to seal, Castillo Armas continued bombing in the region of Zacapa. Eventually, through back channels Peurifoy was able to get control of the capricious Castillo Armas. The bombing ended that evening. But during the meeting that Peurifoy arranged for the next day, June 30 in San Salvador, things became prickly. Both Monzón and Castillo, who already had previous clashes, claimed to be Guatemala's new leader. With no resolution in sight, it appeared that talks would breakdown and fighting would resume. But neither Monzón nor Castillo Armas would be able to assume the presidency without Peurifoy's blessing. Peurifoy structured a deal, that both Monzón and Castillo Armas agreed to, that provided a "total halt to hostilities" and the constitution that came out of the 1944 Revolution would be revoked. All members of the communist Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT) and Árbenz administration would be jailed and later tried. A five-man junta including Monzón and Castillo Armas with a provisional president selected within 15 days. On July 13, the US officials recognized Castillo Armas as the nation's legitimate leader as he dutifully denounced communism (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 212-216).

The Eisenhower White House was exultant that the US-backed Castillo Armas government was installed in Guatemala. Castillo Armas was celebrated at the White House with a 21-gun salute and a state dinner in his honor. Vice President Richard M. Nixon offered a toast to the US-selected Guatemalan "Liberator":

"We in the United States have watched the people of Guatemala record an episode in their history deeply significant to all peoples. Led by the courageous soldier, who is our guest this evening, the Guatemalan people revolted against communist rule, which in collapsing bore graphic witness to its own shallowness, falsity and corruption."

On September 1, 1954, thanks to his US benefactors, Carlos Castillo Armas assumed the full-fledged powers as the president of the Guatemalan nation. United Fruit Company was already salivating over the prospects of the new and friendly government. On July 1, seven labor organizers at United Fruit Company's plantations were murdered in Guatemala City. Weeks later, the new government cancelled the legal registration of 533 union locals. Revisions to the Labor Code placed enormous restrictions on the banana workers' federation, effectively making it illegal. Despite the promises to restore trade union rights lost when the so-called Liberation government under Castillo Armas seized power, union membership plummeted from 100,000 to 27,000. The conservative US union boss, Serafino Romualdi, from the American Federation of Labor was brought in to extirpate any communist influence in the labor movement in Guatemala. But upon his arrival, he was appalled at the extreme nature of the views of labor that were expressed by Castillo Armas. By the middle of September, the corporation had inked a deal with the Castillo Armas regime to reverse the expropriation of its lands and replace the taxes levied during the 1944 Revolution with much more generous tax rates to the company (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 219-221; Weiner 2008, 118).

The US-backed Liberation government's victory in securing rulership in Guatemala, officials

in Washington worried about unfavorable reporting from the world press. Commentators and politicos in Latin America began to voice skepticism that Árbenz was really a communist as evidence of Washington's clandestine involvement began to surface. The CIA launched a poorly organized program to counter allegations that the US misrepresented Árbenz's affiliations with communists by organizing a tour of the former president's residence. Reporters from the *New York Times* were shown stacks of textbooks that had imprints that implied that they were published in the Soviet Union. The reporters remained unconvinced and filed no story about the CIA's staged efforts. Another attempt to inhibit the revelations of CIA lies about Árbenz's political affiliation with communism included crews sent to Guatemala to film evidence of "communist atrocities" that Árbenz allegedly committed (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 219-220).

In an amazing and blatant show of hypocrisy, the Eisenhower administration attempted to minimize its ties to United Fruit Company, despite the Dulles brothers' long-term history with the company. In 1936, John Foster Dulles was involved in a shady scheme that benefitted United Fruit Company at the expense of his putative client IRCA, when the fruit company sought to gain total ownership of the railway. The transaction, negotiated by John Foster Dulles, also benefited the Schroder Banking Corporation, who owned most of the IRCA stock, with a hefty profit. Both Dulles brothers provided a substantial amount of work for Schroder Bank. Allen Dulles later served on the bank's board of directors. Yet, neither Dulles brother attempted to hinder the investigation that the Department of Justice was continuing into the company's operation that eventually concluded the fruit giant violated US antitrust laws. The US Justice Department filed an antitrust lawsuit within five days after Árbenz resigned the presidency. The Dulles brothers' silence might have been the result of a fear of allegations that they harbored bias in favor of United Fruit Company. Thomas Corcoran, United Fruit Company's legal counsel sardonically stated that "Dulles began the antitrust suit against [United Fruit Company] just to prove he wasn't involved with the company." The lawsuit dragged on until 1958, as the company's lobbyists initiated a vigorous effort to stymy the litigation. The lawsuit weakened United Fruit Company's stranglehold on Guatemala and caused the breakup of the firm's banana business in that country (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 220-221).

Meanwhile, the CIA and the US State Department began to roundup suspected communists and their fellow travelers in Guatemala. As the dominant class began to seek retribution against proponents of the 1944 Revolution, all constitutional guarantees were suspended. Conservative estimates reveal that 9,000 were imprisoned and many of these were tortured. Castillo Armas on orders from the CIA generated the National Committee of Defense Against Communism. The Committee that was announced on July 19 was endowed with the authority to meet secretly to declare anyone at its whim of being a communist. There was no due process or right of appeal for those accused. A few weeks later, Castillo Armas decreed a new law called the Preventive Penal Law Against Communism. This law declared that a series of "crimes" including many labor union activities would be labeled "sabotage" and considered capital offenses. Those who landed in the Committee's crosshairs could be arbitrarily arrested and jailed for up to six months. They were prohibited from holding public office or even owning a radio. Eight thousand Indians were slaughtered in the first two months of the regime. By November 21, 1954 a developed list emerged of 72,000 names with a goal of expanding the list to 200,000, about 6.7 percent of Guatemala's total population (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 219-221; Jonas 1991, 41).

One of the first actions that Castillo Armas initiated after he seized power was ending voting

rights of illiterates that comprised 75 percent of the nation's population. By the end of July, he abandoned the legislation for land reform that Árbenz established in Decree 900. All political parties, labor confederations and peasant organizations were outlawed by August 10. Seven days later, Castillo Armas, the "Liberator" reinstated the dreaded secret police that Ubico used to terrorize the country. The Castillo Armas regime began burning "subversive" books including *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo and novels written by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Writings of Juan José Arévalo, Guatemala's first democratically elected president were destroyed as were the works of other revolutionary writers. The Nobel Prize-winning novelist and vocal critic of United Fruit Company Miguel Angel Ásturias, who penned *El Señor Presidente* a novel about a brutally vicious fictional dictator in an unnamed Latin American nation, was included in the list of victims of The Liberator's censorship (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 221-224).

These actions did not appear to disturb Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to any extent. He only lamented that about 700 of Árbenz's supporters were safely ensconced in foreign embassies and beyond the reach of the CIA or Castillo Armas' secret police. Dulles became obsessed with the fear that any remaining Árbenz followers might cause blowback throughout the Western Hemisphere if they were not jailed. Foster Dulles frantically told Peurifoy to command Castillo Armas to arrest communist refugees before they fled the country. In July, Foster Dulles contrived a scheme to allege crimes whereby they would be charged and convicted of being "covert Moscow agents." As Peurifoy brought this plan to the Castillo Armas government, one of the government's ministers surprised that even the reactionary US ambassador would even make this suggestion. The minister informed Peurifoy that there was no legal basis in Guatemalan law for prosecuting someone because they might be a communist. Castillo Armas simply ignored Dulles' absurd suggestions. The only action that Castillo Armas took was to humiliate for former president by having Árbenz strip-searched in front of a jeering crowd as he was leaving Guatemala for exile in Mexico (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 222).

Meanwhile, Castillo Armas began an earnest rollback of the social changes inspired by the 1944 Revolution. In action that deviated from policies established in the nineteenth century, Castillo Armas reestablished a governmental connection with the Catholic Church. He returned to the Church the right to own property, to deliver religious teachings in the public schools and import foreign clergy. Castillo Armas abolished the Arévalo and Árbenz era prohibition against favorable concessions to foreign oil interests and encouraged them to purchase drilling rights in Guatemala. Guatemala at Castillo Armas' order rejoined the Organization of American States (OAS), the lapdog that the US held on a tight leash. Ironically, Castillo Armas received funds from his benefactor to complete Árbenz's pet public works project the highway to Puerto Barrios. Both the US and Castillo Armas had previously disparaged the project because it competed with United Fruit Company's railroad, IRCA. While these changes in Guatemala's landscape continued apace, the Eisenhower administration including the Dulles brothers continued to repeat the fiction that the coup d'état was instigated and completed by the Guatemalans with the slightest intervention from the US. Peurifoy swaggered into a congressional hearing and lied that that his role in the Árbenz ousting was limited to "strictly that of a diplomatic observer." During a September 12, 1979 interview, CIA officer Richard Bissell during Operation Success, admitted "Our job was simply to get rid of Árbenz. We did that successfully." Without the knowledge of the atrocities in Guatemala and elsewhere in Central America the US perpetrated in the 1980s during the Reagan administration, Bissell added, "[B]ut this does not assure a happy ultimate outcome" (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 224-225).

For US Ambassador John E. Peurifoy the glow of victory would not last long. After his successes in Guatemala, before the summer of 1954 ended Secretary of State John Foster Dulles assigned Peurifoy to a new ambassadorship in another hotspot, Thailand. On August 18, 1955, while his son sat in the passenger seat, Peurifoy was driving his powerful sky-blue Ford Thunderbird sportscar at highspeed along a narrow bridge when a slow-moving truck entered from the other end. As he attempted to maneuver around the truck, he lost control of the car and crashed. Peurifoy and his son were killed instantly. The CIA also achieved a short-lived boost in its reputation among policymakers as the clandestine organization was coming off impressive regime-change operations; the first being the 1953 overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in August 1953 and the second barely a year later in Guatemala. The bloom faded from the flower of conquest for the CIA however during the failed attempts to oust the governments of Sukarno in Indonesia and Fidel Castro in Cuba. These failures led to the downfall of CIA Director Allen Dulles and his aide and later Deputy Director Richard Bissell. United Fruit Company's star dimmed subsequent the Guatemalan coup d'état as the Justice Department continued to prosecute its lawsuit against the corporate titan. In 1972 the banana grower sold its Guatemalan operation to another exploiter in the fruit business Del Monte. But the fruit company continued to stagger under the weight of economic pressures. On February 3, 1975, Eli Black, the president of the latest iteration of the company, United Brands was in deep despair after losing his $2 billion empire. He rose from his massive executive desk in his corner office on the forty-fourth floor of New York City's Pan Am Building. Black smashed a hole in the window and jumped to his death (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 227-229).

Finally, Castillo Armas, who benefited during the initial phases of the successful coup d'état as the $80 million of US foreign aid commenced. Predictably, the largesse of Guatemala's titanic benefactor benefitted the oligarchy as it left the underclass in a state of poverty. Even with the full-throttle support of the US that hoped to make Guatemala the showpiece of US influence in Latin America, Castillo Armas would soon sour. The Liberator's economic plan focused on rolling back the advances to the working class and peasants that Arévalo and Árbenz installed. He returned the nation's economic base to bananas and coffee as he abandoned the ideas of industrialization. Within 18 months the land reforms were reversed as fewer than one percent of the peasants retained land that they gained during Árbenz's government. The gains that most Guatemalans enjoyed in the decade subsequent the 1944 Revolution vanished. Scandals began to plague the Castillo Armas government as he mutilated democratic processes that threatened his rule. By May 1956, plots against the regime sprouted like weeds. During a May Day celebration, workers booed government speakers off the platform to voice their rage against the anti-union laws. Responding to the government's crackdown, students began major demonstrations in cites around the country. The brutality evidenced in the counterrevolution galvanized the dominant class against workers to never again allow even the most modest social reforms. But the regime's cruelty and repression also prevented any broad-based support and legitimacy to the Castillo Armas government. Finally, Castillo Armas was gunned down on July 27, 1957 as he and his wife walked to a dinner down the hallway of the presidential residence behind the National Palace. When police arrived, they found the Castillo Armas' alleged assassin, army guard Romeo Vásquez Sánchez, dead from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot. The police explained the assassination as the work of a lone fanatical gunman, a theme that the US policymakers would repeat frequently for decades to explain assassinations in the US. Despite alleged leftist propaganda and a "diary" found in the pockets of Vásquez Sánchez, most Guatemalans remained skeptical of the government's official explanation (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 233-236; Jonas 1991, 64).

Meanwhile, the assassinated president's cabal that had organized under the banner of the National Liberation Movement (MLN) attempted to maintain power in its own clutches. However, exiled General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, then serving as ambassador to Columbia, had other plans. Ydígoras never relinquished the notion that he was the rightful leader of Guatemala. Ydígoras insisted that Árbenz rigged the 1950 election and later Castillo Armas reneged on a 1956 "gentlemen's agreement" that deprived him of the presidency. Ydígoras announced he would return to Guatemala to enter the presidential on the day that the MLN announced the election date. The election would be held on the anniversary of the 1944 Revolution, October 20, 1957. While he was aboard a flight to Guatemala, the stewardess handed him a message that said a mob was waiting for him at the airport intending to lynch him. The flight had been rerouted to San Salvador for his safety. This did not deter the "Old Fox" who suspected a plot to deprive him once again of the presidency. He walked into the cockpit where he placed his .45-caliber pistol to the American pilot's head and shouted in broken English, "You son of a bitch! We go to Guatemala or we all die!" When the plane landed in Guatemala, the crowd was populated by as many supporters as those who opposed him (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 236-237).

After his return to Guatemala an election was held with Ydígoras receiving a plurality of the vote. But five days later, influenced by the MLN, the official electoral tribunal issued a laconic statement that Ortiz Passarelli won the election. Ydígoras was furious as his followers took to the streets to protest the third time that he had been swindled out the presidential office. Intimidated by Ydígoras' popularity, the junta greed to a second election. This time things went in Ydígoras' favor, despite the CIA clandestinely handing the junta's choice to oppose Ydígoras, Colonel José Cruz Salazar $97,000 in "campaign funds." Ydígoras won on a plurality of the vote, but this time Congress confirmed him the winner by a 40 to 18 vote. Ydígoras assumed the office of the president on March 15, 1958 (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 238-239).

During the runup to the Bay of Pigs debacle that would occur in April 1961, the officer from the US military, fronting for the CIA, appeared at the National Palace in late 1957 to ensure his cooperation for a military base in Guatemala. Ydígoras agreed on the condition that the US government support him in continuing as the nation's president. It did not take long before the nationalistic officers in the Guatemalan military noted the CIA presence in their country as construction began airbases and infrastructure for receiving large shipments of war matériel. The officers resented being pushed aside as Ydígoras worked directly with foreign invaders. Many Guatemalan officers flatly balked at allowing the training in their country of a force to topple the Castro government. Many in the Guatemalan military respected Fidel Castro for his own nationalistic pride. In addition to the military, groups from the communist party, students, union members and peasants joined the incensed military officers' efforts to curtail the US infringement on Guatemalan soil. On November 13, 1960, Guatemalan troops totaling nearly one half of the entire army, led by 120 officers launched a successful assault on Fort Matamoros in the nation's capital, Guatemala City. Another brigade seized Puerto Barrios on the Atlantic coast along with the barracks at Zacapa (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 238-239; McSherry 2005, 209-210).

Alarmed that the uprising could interfere with plans to subvert the Marxist government of Fidel Castro in Cuba, Eisenhower dispatched B-26 bombers that were piloted by right-wing Cuban exiles. He also ordered five US Navy ships including the aircraft carrier *Shangri-La* to positions off the Guatemalan coastline. The revolt was put down in short order, but the *Christian Science Monitor* noted that forces in Guatemala resented the US imperialists to

such an extent that “rebels could take over two garrisons before the government learned of the revolt and that it took huge government forces to put down ill-equipped men is cause for much comment here.” Despite the ill-fated and short-lived rebellion, some of the officers who led the insurgency remained unrepentant as they refused the typically mild punishments for such actions, i.e. return to barracks and a reprimand from the president. Some of the officers, encouraged by the backing of the peasants, fled to neighboring Honduras and El Salvador. Two of the most zealous officers, 22-year-old Lieutenant Marco Aurelio Yon Sosa and 19-year-old Lieutenant Luis Turcios Lima, who were trained in special forces units by the US, soon returned to their native country They sought to wage guerrilla warfare against the hated Ydígoras, whom the two officers viewed as a US puppet and a corrupt lackey of the landowners (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 239-240).

During 1961 Yon Sosa and Turcios remained underground as they developed contacts with exiles and gathered support from peasants. Turcios established contacts with the outlawed communist party, the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT). Meanwhile, the two leaders recreated their growing army who fought in the initial uprising into a guerrilla force. Their strategies included toppling the US-backed Guatemalan government by attacks on government military installations using hit and run tactics. Their plans envisioned swiftly overthrowing the right-wing government, not for a long-term war of attrition. In February 1962, the two firebrands issued a call to arms under the banner of the “Alejandro de León November 13 Guerrilla Movement” that called for the “overthrow of the Ydígoras government and to set up a government that represents human rights, seeks ways … to save our country from hardships and pursues a serious self-respecting foreign policy.”

Meanwhile, Guatemalans were increasingly angry as protests erupted over election fraud in congressional elections that occurred in December 1961. On January 24, 1962, Ranulfo González, chief of the secret police was slain. Ydígoras blamed “Marxism directed from Cuba.” On February 6, guerrillas led by Yon Sosa and Turcios attacked army garrisons in Bananera and Morales, near Puerto Barrios, but their assault was repelled by government forces. However, in March another guerrilla force sprouted. Former Árbenz Minister of Defense Carlos Paz Tejeda led the brigade, called the “October 20 Front” in honor of the 1944 Revolution. The October 20 Front denounced the Congress “government stooges” and declared their rage “over foreign military bases in our country and the military treaties with foreign powers…. The statement added:

“The only road left is the road of uprisings. The only way to end the calamities torturing our country is to overthrow the despotic rule of Ydígoras and set up a government which proves by deeds that it is worthy of the peoples’ trust.”

By the middle of March, calls from the leftist political parties in Guatemala began earnestly calling for Ydígoras’ ouster as demonstrations clogged city streets. On orders from President John F. Kennedy, the US military once again entered Guatemala to stem the escalating uprisings. The US government equipped the Guatemalan air force with jet fighter aircraft and transport planes along with military advisers with counterinsurgency-trained special forces units. The advisers brought a company of 15 Guatemalan soldiers trained in guerrilla warfare at the US Panama Canal Zone facilities.

Ydígoras with the resources supplied by JFK, squashed the rebellion, but his troubles were not over yet. The Catholic Church rebuked him for subjecting peasants and workers to starvation wages and housing that “closely resembled concentration camps.” The CIA plagued Ydígoras for repayment of $1.8 million that the agency incurred during the 1954

invasion. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles questioned his commitment to anticommunism. Even JFK, who had supplied the Ydígoras government with troops and war matériel began voice disdain of the embattled general's corruption. As economic conditions continued to worsen in Guatemala and the cold-shoulder issued from the US, Ydígoras promised to stepdown as Guatemala's president at the expiration of his term in 1964 (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 240-242).

On March 29, 1963 on the news that Ydígoras was on the way out, Arévalo reentered Guatemala. The US reacted with predictable force. The following morning Ydígoras awakened to find a US tank on his lawn with the barrel of its cannon inches from the front door. Ydígoras took the hint and surrendered to the US choice to lead Guatemala, Defense Minister Enrique Peralta Azurdia. If Ydígoras was a tyrant, his zeal for dictatorship paled in comparison to extremes of General Peralta Azurdia. Any effort to bring even the slightest aid to the poor was abandoned under the new regime. Peralta Azurdia instead expanded the Guatemalan military. He rejected JFK's offers to supply the fledgling dictatorship with US Green Berets, the elite special forces who were trained in guerrilla warfare, preferring to use his own army squads to destroy rebel forces. Peralta Azurdia's death squads murdered anti-government activists by the score, but he was unable to eliminate insurgent fighters completely. In a police raid on March 2, 1966 on a meeting of the outlawed the communist parties the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT) and the Rebel Armed Forces Party (FAR) government forces arrested 28 people, including a former congressman who supported Árbenz. The congressman, Victor Manuel Gutiérrez, who was a forceful advocate for the left wing in Guatemala, was tortured to death with electrical shocks and disappeared; his body reportedly was thrown from an airplane at 20,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean. Others who were arrested with Gutiérrez suffered similar fates.

The Guatemalan death squads originated in November 1965 when US Ambassador to Guatemala Gordon Mein requested John Longan to train Guatemalan judiciary, national police and military officers in "techniques and methods for combatting terrorists, kidnapping and extortion tactics" under the banner of *Operación Limpieza* (Operation Cleanup). These techniques were at the core of a paradigm that evolved into counterinsurgent terror states that sank roots in Latin America—specifically, in Brazil (1968), Chile and Uruguay (1973), Argentina (1976) and El Salvador during the late 1970s. Operation Cleanup strengthened an intelligence system that spread its tentacles throughout Guatemalan society and morphed into the transnational Operation Condor, one of the most savage systems of state repression of the twentieth century. Operation Condor, part of an overarching US-led counterinsurgency program to inhibit social change, was based on a transnational intelligence apparatus that fostered the seizure, torture, murder and disappearance of political opponents in one another's nations to obscure the identities of the perpetrators of specific atrocities. During March 1966, relatives of disappeared persons filed more than 500 habeas corpus writs that elicited only silence from the Guatemalan regime.

Despite his tyranny, President Peralta Azurdia agreed to hold election in 1966. Liberals and activists who opposed the militarization of the country supported the candidacy of Mario Méndez Montenegro a moderate who had escaped the death squads' retribution by kowtowing to the regime. Nonetheless, four months before the election Méndez Montenegro according to official reports put a bullet into his skull and died in his home. Family members insisted his death was the result of political opponents. The dead candidate's supporters substituted his brother, Julio César Méndez Montenegro, who on March 6, 1966 won the election. The military attempted to oust the president-elect, but it

was thwarted by US diplomacy. However, the hopes of that social reforms might be initiated under President Méndez Montenegro were dashed when he allowed military commanders a free rein. With the Guatemalan military's acquiescence, the US placed Green Beret special forces in Guatemala.

Méndez Montenegro appointed Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio as commander of Zacapa province in the midst of the stronghold of guerrilla activity. With counterinsurgency training provided by Green Berets and bolstered by $17 million in military aid and equipment, the government increased its crackdown on rebel guerrilla forces. Under President Méndez Montenegro, backed by Arana Osorio, the "Butcher of Zacapa" and US Green Berets, the notions of liberalism in Guatemala were coming to a harsh ending. Arana Osorio instigated a strategy of unbridled bloodletting and cruelty. He established death squads that applied systematic terror that incorporated rape, torture and disappearances. In addition to its normal attacks on guerrillas, the government added widespread assassination of anyone who aligned with the liberals. His policy of destroying entire communities was de rigueur. Between October 1966 and March 1968, an estimated 3,000 to 8,000 people including guerrillas, but also middle-class professionals who supported policies of Arévalo and Árbenz, were gunned down in cold blood. The war hawks in the Lyndon B. Johnson administration were all smiles within four months of the Méndez Montenegro election as the US finally had a "willing partner" in Guatemala, as the *New York Times* described it.

The year 1966 marked the beginning of 30 years of carnage including the slaughter of 200,000 people in Guatemala and the torture of an incalculable number of victims. The US had its bloody hand in atrocities carried out in Guatemala. US pilots embarking from its airbases in Panama dumped napalm bombs on guerrilla targets in Guatemala. US special forces conducted intensive training of Guatemalan soldiers in anti-guerrilla warfare, prisoner interrogation and jungle survival. Under the US Office of Public Safety (OPS) Program, the US showered the Guatemalan government with $2.6 million from 1966 to 1970 for police training and equipment. During the same period, the US energized the Méndez Montenegro government to expand the police force from 3,000 to 11,000. The US boasted in reports that by 1970 30,000 police officers in Guatemala received training from the OPS (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 244-247; Bedan 2018, 337-338; McSherry 2005, 1; Grandin, The Last Colonial Massacre 2004, 73-74, 96-99).

As right-wing terrorist groups began swamping the Central American nation in 1967, one of these death squads murdered former Miss Guatemala beauty queen and anti-government activist Rogelia Cruz Martínez during December. Cruz Martínez's mutilated corpse was found naked and left for vultures. She had been beaten, stabbed, raped, poisoned and disgustingly tortured. She was among many women who suffered at the hands of torturers in government security forces, but the extremes of the depravities against her went beyond the norms of abject cruelty seen in prior cases. Left-wing guerrilla forces sought revenge by directly attacking the US military that they blamed for the barbarism unleashed in Guatemala. On January 16, 1968, guerrillas shot dead US Colonel John Webber and his aide Lieutenant Commander Ernest Munroe. Webber was the officer tasked with forming counterterror death squads that operated in the Zacapa-Izabal region. A declassified 1967 State Department memorandum disclosed:

"[A]t the center of the Army's clandestine urban counterterror apparatus is the Special Commando Unit formed in January 1967…. Composed of both military and civilian personnel, the Special Unit has carried out abductions, bombings, street assassinations of real and alleged communists."

After the assassinations, the guerrillas issued a statement that blamed the US military for creating the death squads that were "sowing terror and death" throughout the country. "The genocidal work of such bands of assassins has resulted in the deaths of nearly 4,000 Guatemalans," they alleged. "Disappearances" emerged as a counterinsurgency tactic in Guatemala during the 1960s.

Meanwhile, Colonel Arana Osorio, touted by his fellows in the military as a force for law and order and therefore, they asserted, Arana Osorio should be the next president. By this time the military and right-wing extremists were in control of the Guatemalan government. These members of the ruling elite had redrafted the constitution to ensure that whomever they selected would be elevated into president's chair. The use of terrorism kept the voting public cowed as it ensured the moderates and left wing played no part in the government. In 1980, the right-wing National Liberation Movement (MLN) issued a radio broadcast that summarized government policy, "The MLN is the party of organized violence…there is nothing wrong with violence; it is vigor and the MLN is a vigorous movement." After the "Butcher of Zacapa" Arana Osorio was installed in the National Palace on July 1, 1970, he instituted a vicious terror campaign to extirpate all traces of opposition, especially the left-wing guerrillas. Various sources estimated that during the first three years of the Arana Osorio regime there were between 10,000 and 15,000 disappearances and murders in the country. Arana Osorio with the contributions of the US financing and Green Berets laid the foundation for the unmitigated genocide in Guatemala against the Maya Indians during the 1980s.

In 1974, Guatemalan moderates supported an alleged centrist candidate named Efraín Rios Montt, a general in the military for the nation's next president. Rios Montt won the election, but powers in the military made certain Rios Montt would not assume the presidency. Rios Montt went into exile as Guatemala's attaché in Madrid, Spain. But he would return to occupy the National Palace during the 1980s when he would establish a legacy of genocide. However, in the interim Arana Osorio backed the colorless and affable General Kjell Eugencio Laugerud. He was installed as president. Still reeling from the "oil shock" of the 1970s and an inflationary economy, Schoolteachers went on strike for higher wages in 1973. The strike lasted for several months and ignited additional strikes throughout the public sector that extended into 1974. Diverse groups including semi-proletarian rural, urban masses, sections of the impoverished middle classes united under the common experiences of governmental caprice and violence. An already restive population was further angered when in February 1976 a massive earthquake that registered 7.5 on the Richter scale hit Guatemala, killing 25,000 and leaving 1.25 million (20 percent of Guatemala's population) homeless. The government did little to deliver assistance to survivors and even denounced foreign humanitarian groups for bringing desperately need aid to Guatemalans. Meanwhile, the rich scarcely were troubled by these inconveniences as their lives returned to normal within a week. They kept their dog-grooming appointments and in the evenings congregated at opulent restaurants and bars where they drank *terremoto* (earthquake) cocktails, the latest rage of the privileged set.

Meanwhile, a new spark of guerrilla activity started a blaze of renewed insurgency that formed under the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP). The EGP targeted Arana Osorio henchman Congressman Jorge Bernal Hernández Castellón, who was implicated in the disappearance of many leftists during the early 1970s. Additionally, other militant groups came together including the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), the communist Guatemalan Labor Party PGT and the Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA) (Schlesinger and

Kinzer 1982, 248-249; Grandin, Empire's Workshop 2006, 88; McSherry 2005, 47; Jonas 1991, 63, 123-124; Grandin, The Last Colonial Massacre 2004, 103).

The Guatemalan government's terror campaign reached levels not seen in that embattled nation by 1978. After a fraudulent election, Laugerud's defense minister and the darling of the military establishment, Fernando Romeo Lucas García occupied the National Palace. He promised to increase the already horrendous crackdown on guerrillas. The Lucas García regime is credited with levels of repression that were at the time unrivaled. He murdered 10,000 civilians, many of these in illegal executions. In October, massive protest erupted after increases in bus fares were established. During violence that ensued during the first 12 days of the month, at least 30 died, 350 sustained injuries and 600 were jailed. Labor leaders called for a general strike to begin on October 20, the anniversary of the 1944 Revolution to "protest against institutionalized repression." During a large rally in Guatemala City on that day, the head of the Association of University Students was machine-gunned as police calmly watched. After this slaughter, that occurred across the street from the National Palace, the perpetrators slowly drove away. His regime entered a crisis as the coalition of the bourgeoisie and military factions that supported his government unwound. Further compounding his troubles emerged as despite is utter willingness to slaughter unarmed civilians, the guerrilla movement continued to gather strength (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 250; Jonas 1991, 122-123).

By 1978 the Committee for Peasant Unity (CUC) emerged as a national organization that included peasants and agricultural workers comprised of Indians and impoverished *ladinos* but led by Indians. Subsequent their eviction in May from land they had been working 700 Kekchi Indians joined to protest. Their land was in a region known as the "Zone of the Generals," that was in demand by high-ranking military officers and developers. General Lucas owned 78,000 acres in the zone near Panzós. This land benefited from its location near industrial development near Guatemala City. The land also had plentiful resources of oil and minerals that were in demand by transnational corporations. During the peaceful protests, troops working at the behest of the landowners in a planned assault attacked the unarmed protesters, killing more than 100 and wounding 300 in broad daylight. The corpses were dumped into mass graves that had previously been excavated for that purpose. The massacre ignited a protest with 80,000 strong that was the largest demonstration in a quarter of a century. A year later 100,000 reprised the demonstration against the massacre. The massacre was significant as a tool of social terror to stymy the incipient unrest in Guatemala. In January 1980, poverty-ridden Indians from a rural province journeyed to Guatemala City marched into the Spanish embassy in desperation to have a hearing for their grievances. In direct violation of international law, Guatemalan police attacked the embassy as the ambassador pleaded for calm. During the chaos, a Molotov cocktail exploded into flames that engulfed the embassy killing all but one of the 35 Indians, several embassy workers and two Guatemalan government officials. Spain broke off diplomatic relations with Guatemala as its officials shrugged their shoulders in apparent nonchalance. Historians generally conclude that the massacre at Panzós and the burning of the Spanish embassy in 1980 collectively were a turning point in the consciousness the Indian population and the Christians who were advocating in the Indians' behalf (Jonas 1991, 127-128).

Meanwhile, as the 1980s arrived, the bloodshed, broad-daylight kidnappings and disappearances continued unabated. Death squads comprised of government military were in the mainstream of daily life in Guatemala. No member of the poor or petty bourgeoisie

was immune to violence. Drive-by killings claimed the lives of lawyers, schoolteachers, journalists, peasant leaders, priests and religious workers, politicians, trade union organizers, students, professors and others. Those who did not support the regime, including moderates, were called leftists or "subversives" and therefore, enemies of the state. Their corpses littered the blood-drenched streets. Between November 1981 and early 1983 the level of wholesale slaughter and genocide reached unimagined proportions as death squads and counterinsurgency forces combed the country for "subversives." The counterinsurgency campaign included a scorched-earth devastation that included burnings, massacres of entire villages and forced relocations. Entire groups, mostly Indians, were targeted for destruction, including the elderly and children. During this reign of terror in a region considered to be a hotbed of leftist activity 600 villages were destroyed, between 100,000 and 150,000 were murdered or disappeared. Reports described soldiers sweeping into villages and murdering children by bashing their brains out onto rocks while their parents were forced watch. The soldiers sliced open the abdominal cavities of live victims, mutilated genitalia, amputated arms and legs and committed mass rapes. In some cases, the soldiers tied victims to support poles inside their dwellings and set fire to the structure, burning the victims alive. A surviving witness reported that pregnant women were gutted; their fetus then yanked out of their body. During the same massacre, a soldier threw an infant into a river to drown saying, "Adiós niña," as her parents pleaded for their child's life. Often the soldiers simply machine-gunned their victims. More than one million were displaced as internal refugees including 200,000 who fled to Mexico. Additionally, the military ignited forest fires to eliminate hiding places for their quarry. The environmental destruction was irreversible, modifying weather patterns and rainfall amounts. Meanwhile, a media blackout in the US and many other Western hemisphere nations kept the public in the dark as to conditions in war torn Guatemala. Jonas attributes this "great silence" to inherent racism as the victims of these atrocities were overwhelmingly Indians (Jonas 1991, 147-149; Grandin, Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States and the Rise of the New Imperialism 2006, 90).

Meanwhile, as a February 6, 1980 edition of *Newsday* reported:

> "During recent months, the rebels have carried out some spectacular actions. They have assassinated the army chief of staff, who was reputed to be a leading organizer of "death squads." They have bombed two buildings in the capital, including the modern headquarters of the National Tourism Agency. And they have kidnapped the son of one of the nation's most prominent families, holding him for 103 days until a ransom estimated at $5 million was paid and laundered abroad. It was the first kidnapping on that scale to be seen yet in Guatemala, and the ransom money will presumable be used to buy weapons."

Guerrilla fighters in Guatemala against the right-wing dictatorship, claimed in 1981 the source of the nearly three-decade long revolution's genesis to the CIA's Operation Success action that toppled Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán's liberal government in 1954. In a formal statement the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) claimed:

> "that the defeat of guerrilla forces during the 1960s "by an army trained by the United States in counter-insurgency technique-s learned in Vietnam…. The temporary defeat of the armed movement by the end of the 1960s did not demonstrate the impossibility of armed struggle…. Today, the expansion of the guerrilla war and the qualitative growth of guerrilla units are occurring

faster than ever before."

Thanks to the 1954 US intervention and overthrow of a democratically elected Árbenz government by 1978 the World Bank concluded in its study titled *Guatemala: Economic and Social Positions and Prospects* (1978) that reforms the institution recommended in 1950 had not returned to the levels that existed during the Arévalo-Árbenz era. Instead, according to the World Bank, 10 percent of Guatemalan landowners continued to own more than 80 percent of the land. Most of this land was converted to the cultivation of exotic spices and other crops for exportation. This lopsided distribution of land ownership in the nation exacerbated shortages of basic food staples like corn and beans. Only 15 percent of the rural population had access to piped water. Just four percent had electricity. The absence of land reform forced many peasants to spend months out of every year working for hunger wages for owners of huge plantations, just as they did during the brutal days of the Ubico years. A third of the rural population was malnourished (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982, 250-254).

By 1980 when Ronald Reagan was swept into the White House on a neo-liberal agenda, the "showcase for democracy" that President Dwight D. Eisenhower promised in 1954 had become a "laboratory of counterinsurgency," as historian Susanne Jonas and others have described it. Even before he was elected, Reagan in 1979 sent a delegation to Guatemala with the message that Reagan was sympathetic to the savage, corrupt regime of General Fernando Romeo Lucas García. But by 1982 US officials were calling Lucas García a butcher. During the decades prior to Reagan's ascension to the White House, a torrent of US money and military training produced a Guatemalan army that was well skilled in obliterating in the most brutal fashion vast swaths of indigenous populations in the highlands.

The conscripts pressed into military service eagerly participated in these atrocities. Rigorous basic training in the Guatemalan army drained any sense of civilized proportion from conscripts. Recruits went through a training course that included enduring beatings and degradation. Their officers forced them to bathe in sewers and then prohibited from washing the excrement from their bodies. During training some recruits were ordered to raise puppies, then commanded to kill the helpless animal and drink its blood.

On March 23, 1982, the Lucas García government was toppled during a coup d'état led by evangelical Christian Efraín Ríos Montt. Playing to his right-wing religious base, Reagan never missed a chance to praise the Ríos Montt dictatorship. The US president had complete awareness through detailed CIA reports of reports of genocide in Guatemala, but still Reagan had an utter lack of concern of the blood-soaked Ríos Montt regime's unbridled slaughter of Indian men, women and children. In a memorandum dated November 15, 1982 Secretary of State George P. Schultz told President Reagan, "The coup which brought Ríos Montt to power on March 23 presents us with an opportunity to break the long freeze in our relations with Guatemala and help prevent an extremist takeover." Despite the administration's assertions in congressional hearings and in the press to the contrary, human rights organizations insisted that the Guatemalan army was slaughtering peasants in rural and Mayan regions of the country. Indeed, Reagan met with the Ríos Montt one day before the Guatemalan army on the dictator's orders began a three-day orgy of killing at a small village called Dos Erres. Soldiers murdered more than 160 including 65 children. Soldiers grasped children by their feet and swung their heads against rocks, splitting open their skulls. Meanwhile, Reagan complained to the press that the religious fanatic, who had

substantial ties to the fundamentalist movement in the US, was receiving a “bad deal.” Reagan confidently stated that Ríos Montt was “totally committed to democracy,” according to a December 5, 1982 article in the *New York Times* (Bedan 2018, 338; Grandin, Empire’s Workshop 2006, 90, 109-11; Doyle 2018).

The Guatemalan election of 1985 laid the foundation for the civilian government of Vinicio Cerezo and the first “political opening” in the nation’s modern history that lowered the intensity of civil war. The horrors of the scorched-earth policies were limited, but the counterinsurgency was still active, and the revolutionary movement was not decisively defeated. Yet, most Guatemalans welcomed the *respiro* (breathing space), however limited and contradictory. As the counterinsurgency apparatus remained, political tyranny was relaxed to a certain degree. The moderation of repression was codified into law, but even so, Guatemalans were leery that protest might result in government retribution. Only the most reactionary sections of the population felt any security in their freedom to openly express their opinions. But by 1987, the bloom was off the rose as political assassinations increased and accelerated during 1988 and 1989. At least three coups d’état attempts from military and civilian extremists in the right wing spurred an increase of death squad activity and crimes committed by the official security forces. Observers noted that a “return to the early 1980s” was in the offing as human rights groups named Guatemala as the nation with the worst human rights record in Latin America for 1989 and 1990. Assassination targets were the usual suspects: trade unionists, peasants, student leaders and church officials who advocated for even moderate reforms. June 1988, the progressive newspaper offices of *La Epoca* were destroyed by firebombs. Evidence pointed toward governmental security forces as the terrorism perpetrator. Vinicio Cerezo refused to initiate investigations as he had promised during his campaign not to prosecute atrocities committed before his regime. Cerezo’s unwillingness to prosecute those who committed crimes against humanity provided a shield of unaccountability that allowed these practices to continue (Jonas 1991, 163).

During the final two years of the Cerezo government the economy was in crisis, workers engaged in crippling strikes and protest marches and persistent allegations wide-spread corruption tarnished the government. The quality of life in Guatemala remained in tatters as the government ineptitude failed to address desperate conditions including infant mortality, wide-spread illiteracy, seriously deficient health care and social services and rampant violence. On November 11, 1990 during a general election Jorge Serrano was named Guatemala’s president in a runoff ballot. He was inaugurated on January 14, 1991. But internal strife in the government was the hallmark of life in the Central American nation. The regimes of governments continued to be racked by civil war, corruption and instability. In November 1995 in a field of 20 candidates battling for the presidency, the election finally came down to a runoff on January 7, 1996 when Álvaro Enrique Arzú defeated Alfonso Portillo. During the Arzú administration negotiations between Guatemalan military commanders and guerrilla leaders of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) under the auspices of the United Nations were initiated to bring the vicious 36-year civil war to a close (Global Security 2017).

On Sunday December 29, 1996 the historic peace accords we signed, officially ending the savage Guatemalan civil war, the longest and bloodiest in Latin American Cold War history. When viewed in its entire context the turmoil in Guatemala existed for 42 years, beginning with the US engineered coup d’état that ended the democratically elected government of Jacobo Árbenz in 1954. The process that laid the foundation for the signing of the accords began during the middle of the 1980s, subsequent the government’s scorched-earth

genocide that ravaged the country between 1981 and 1983. When a civilian government assumed power in 1986, the URNG began making efforts to resolve the conflict. The genocide that ravaged the country ended in 1983 left the URNG decimated and its mission to restore the 1944 Revolution and deliver the promise of a socially equal nation was finished. The fighting continued for another 14 years, but for the URNG, it became an issue of fighting for survival, attempting to restore the rule of law and respect for basic human rights. Serious negotiations began when a Catholic bishop offered his services as a "conciliator" and increased dramatically when the UN and other international figures entered the process in 1994.

The Accords that marked the end of the Guatemalan civil war are an enormous milestone in the nation's history that ended the wave of unremitting government repression. The Accords also poured the foundation for a Commission on Historical Clarification, that was tasked with studying the violence and identifying its causes. Yet, unfortunately the Accords did little to ameliorate the vast gulf of inequality that dominated the landscape in Guatemala. As of 2006, two percent of the population owned 50 percent of the arable land in the country. (Jonas, Guatemalan Peace Accords 2007; Kinzer 2006, 207; Grandin, The Last Colonial Massacre 2004, 166).

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