

CARLOS CASTILLO ARMAS, THE UNITED STATES AND THE 1954
COUNTERREVOLUTION IN GUATEMALA

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CARLOS CASTILLO ARMAS, THE UNITED STATES AND THE 1954
COUNTERREVOLUTION IN GUATEMALA

A Thesis

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Abstract

of

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Statement of Problem

The 1954 overthrow of President Jacobo Arbenz Gúzman orchestrated by the United States has been approached by various points of view by different historians. While many aspects of the overthrow such as the involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency, the influence of the United Fruit Company, and the Guatemalan government's relation to communism have all been covered, one crucial player in the overthrow, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, has not gained the same critical attention. Castillo Armas acted as the counterrevolutionary the CIA chose to lead the overthrow of Arbenz therefore understanding how he received the role and how he performed his task is important to understanding this historical moment.

Sources of Data

Documentation regarding the CIA's covert operations has become more readily available in two forms. The first is the *Foreign Relation of the United States* series, which has added an entire volume detailing the workings of the CIA and the State Department in Guatemala. Secondly, the CIA's Electronic Reading Room provides further documentation on the events prior to 1952 not featured in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* volume. In addition to American sources, a variety of Guatemalan sources

have been obtained including one of Guatemala's leading newspapers of the era, *El Imparcial*, and accounts from Guatemalan leaders on both sides of the conflict.

Conclusions Reached

The involvement of Carlos Castillo Armas in the CIA's operation to overthrow the Arbenz government was not arbitrary. He had been in contact with the CIA as early as 1950 and his work to overthrow the Guatemalan government impressed the CIA. He appeared more powerful and better organized than competing Guatemalan rebels and subdued the ones that threatened his position. His actions influenced the decisions of the CIA. While his ultimate role in the CIA's operation was only one part of a multifaceted plot, he played the part well and manipulated the CIA to his advantage.

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Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	vi
Chapter	
1.INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.THE GUATEMALAN REVOLUTION OF 1944.....	6
3.CASTILLO ARMAS THE ARANISTA.....	11
4.CASTILLO ARMAS AND REBUILDING SUPPORT FOR A COUNTERREVOLUTION.....	25
5.CASTILLO ARMAS AND OPERATION PBSUCCESS.....	39
6.CONCLUSION: PRESIDENT CASTILLO ARMAS.....	53
Bibliography.....	58

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

On November 5th, 1950, Carlos Castillo Armas, a former Guatemalan colonel, launched an attack on a Guatemalan military base. He hoped to overthrow the government just days before the Presidential election of Jacobo Arbenz Gúzman. The government forces quickly defeated the small and ineffective band of rebels. The battle left Castillo Armas wounded to the point that his captors dragged his body towards a cemetery until he suddenly showed signs of life. After recovering in a military hospital, he was thrown in jail for the second time in his life, the first occurring a year earlier for illegally gathering weapons for a presumed *coup d'état*. This would not be the last time Castillo Armas attempted to overthrow the Guatemalan government. He escaped prison soon after his recovery. Four years later in 1954, he led another assault, this time with the support of the United States and the Central Intelligence Agency. Mounting pressure from the United States forced the Arbenz government to collapse. As for Castillo Armas, he became President of Guatemala for a brief period, before an assassin ended his life in 1957.¹

Explaining how Castillo Armas rose to power so quickly and so successfully has changed significantly over time.² The earliest accounts of his success, when suspicion of American involvement was at its lowest, give Castillo Armas credit for overthrowing the

¹ Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, Expanded ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 123.

² Stephen M. Streeter provides the best overview of the historiography. He divided the literature into three periods: realist, revisionist, and postrevisionist. See Stephen M. Streeter, "Interpreting the 1954 U.S. Intervention in Guatemala: Realist, Revisionist, and Postrevisionist Perspective," *The History Teacher* 34 (2000), 61-74.

Arbenz government. These early histories, such as Daniel James' *Red Design for the Americas* and Ronald M. Schneider's *Communism in Guatemala: 1944-1954*, portray the Arbenz government as a communist beachhead poised to strike the United States.³ Their narratives conclude with a heroic Castillo Armas freeing his nation from the grip of communism.

However, in the 1980s historians began revising the history of the coup. The influence of the United States, both in the form of the CIA and the United Fruit Company, gained emphasis and broadened the understanding of the overthrow of Arbenz. Essential to these works are Richard H. Immerman's *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* and Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer's *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* among others. These histories also reassess the communist influence in Guatemala, which proved to be less influential than previously believed.⁴ These works are significant in understanding the interests of the United States, but may have also started a trend that devalued the role Castillo Armas played in the overthrow.

Building upon the work Immerman, Piero Gleijeses' *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* argues that Castillo Armas "hardly deserves a footnote were it not that in 1953 he was selected by the CIA to lead

³ Daniel James, *Red Design for the Americas: Guatemalan Prelude* (New York: John Day Company, 1954), 11, 54. Ronald M. Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala: 1944-1954* (New York: Praeger, 1958), 1-2, 314.

⁴ Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 6-7; Schlesinger, 72-75. A third work is also worthy of note. José M. Aybar de Soto published his work on Guatemala four years before Immerman, Schlesinger, and Kinzer, but did not have the same access to source material and had a slightly different focus on the subject. José M. Aybar de Soto, *Dependency and Intervention: The Case of Guatemala in 1954* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978).

the 'liberation' of Guatemala."⁵ This implies that the domestic factors in the overthrow of Arbenz were insignificant. A year prior to Gleijeses's work, a debate regarding Castillo Armas's role appeared in *Diplomatic History* between Frederick W. Marks III and Stephen G. Rabe. Marks argued that the histories written in the 1980s had a pro-Arbenz bias and he attempted to highlight the role of Castillo Armas and other anti-Arbenz elements in Guatemala. He also claimed to cite new evidence from Guatemalan sources.⁶ However, Rabe quickly pointed out the sources Marks discovered were many of the early works that were biased themselves, including propaganda designed to support the Castillo Armas government.⁷ While Marks may not have been able to effectively prove his point, he has raised the question of how significant Castillo Armas was in overthrowing Arbenz and whether scholars have acknowledged his contributions to the overthrow of the Guatemalan government.

As many historians have already concluded, Castillo Armas could not have overthrown the Arbenz government without the support of the United States. But that should not imply that he was a passive character receiving help from abroad. Instead, he played an active role in the operation. The CIA did not simply choose Castillo Armas to be their counterrevolutionary; he made himself into the best candidate available. His relationship with the United States goes back further than 1953 when the CIA began Operation PBSUCCESS, the operation designed to overthrow President Arbenz. This

⁵ Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 81-82.

⁶ Frederick W. Marks III, "The CIA and Carlos Castillo Armas in Guatemala, 1954: New Clues to an Old Puzzle," *Diplomatic History* 14 (1990): 67-68.

⁷ Stephen G. Rabe, "The Clues Didn't Check Out: Commentary on 'The CIA and Castillo Armas,'" *Diplomatic History* 14 (1990): 87-88.

allowed Castillo Armas to have some influence over the United States, such as affirming the communist presence in Guatemala and presenting himself as the best man to free Guatemala from the communists. Once the CIA started actively looking for a Guatemalan to overthrow the Arbenz government, Castillo Armas surpassed his rival candidates. He exhibited a variety of traits the CIA desired in an operative and had already begun working with anti-Arbenz groups, including the United Fruit Company and right-wing Central American dictators. By time Operation PBSUCCESS was approved in 1953, Castillo Armas had already positioned himself as the ideal candidate for the CIA. He had been in contact with the CIA as early as 1950 and promoted himself and the possibility of overthrowing the Guatemalan government. Even after a failed coup in 1950, he continued to find anti-government supporters and hold the attention of the CIA. While other Guatemalans like General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes and United Fruit Company lawyer Juan Córdova Cerna became government protestors, none received the same attention from the CIA as Castillo Armas.

The history of the 1954 *coup d'état* has been one of adding new pieces and new perspectives to gain a better understanding of U.S.-Latin American relations, the emergence of the CIA, and the Cold War in general. The new piece offered here is the role of Castillo Armas.⁸ Rather than a passive actor chosen by the CIA, Castillo Armas played an important role in moving the operation forward. He recognized the world had

⁸ A similar reexamination of the role of foreign leaders working with the United States to overthrow their national government can be found in the case of Mohammad Reza Shah and 1953 Iranian *coup d'état*. While specific circumstances differed, the Shah, like Castillo Armas, was not a passive actor. See Fakhreddin Azimi, "Unseating Mosaddeq: The Configuration and Role of Domestic Forces," in *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1952 Coup in Iran.*, Gasiorowski, Mark J. and Malcolm Byrne eds. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

entered the Cold War and by informing the United States of the Guatemalan government's "communist" tendencies, he could manipulate the situation. By forging relations with the U.S. early, negotiating with competitors, and sheer determination, Castillo Armas became the ideal agent of the CIA. Once the CIA's operation began, he could let the United States take up the work needed to be done in order to overthrow the Arbenz government. By 1953, Castillo Armas had already done the necessary work required to ensure his future in a new Guatemalan government.

In 2003, the State Department released nearly three hundred documents on the Guatemalan coup from its department and the CIA in its series *Foreign Relations of the United States*, giving scholars much greater access to source material and allowing a closer examination of various aspects of the CIA's operations.⁹ Additionally, the CIA's Electronic Reading Room contains some documents not found in *FRUS* collection, primarily documents written in Spanish and documents prior to 1952 and after 1954. An examination of these recently declassified documents in conjunction with accounts by historians, journalists, and scholars, including the Guatemalan newspaper *El Imparcial* and documents from the Guatemalan government, makes the role of Castillo Armas in the *coup d'état* will become much clearer.

⁹ One additional work significant to this historiography is *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala: 1952-1954* by Nick Cullather. The first edition came out in 1999 and provided a unique look at the operation from the CIA's perspective. The updated second edition includes a sample of the documents declassified in 2003.

Chapter 2

THE GUATEMALAN REVOLUTION OF 1944

Like others who have written about the 1954 coup, it is important to give an overview of the 1944 Revolution to understand the motives of the United States and the political viewpoint of Carlos Castillo Armas. The 1944 Revolution ended an era of dictatorship in favor of greater democratic freedoms. Key individuals like Captain Jacobo Arbenz Gúzman, the future President of Guatemala who the U.S. overthrew, and Major Francisco Arana, a more conservative revolutionary who Castillo Armas supported, both participated in 1944 Revolution.¹⁰ Their actions set the stage for American intervention and the ultimate triumph of Carlos Castillo Armas.

From 1931 to 1944, President Jorge Ubico Castañeda ruled Guatemala. In 1931, the Guatemalan upper-class supported Ubico's presidential run and served as the basis of his support throughout his rule. Even though he was democratically elected, he ruled as a dictator. The middle and working classes, as well as the Indian population, suffered under Ubico's rule as he limited their opportunities politically and economically. During the years of the global depression, Ubico downsized government. This left many middle class professionals with little opportunity for advancement, with the exception of joining the military and becoming an officer. However, this left the military bloated, with officers competing for few actual positions of prominence and Ubico only chose the most loyal followers for those positions. Ubico was also a tough anti-Communist, arresting and executing members Guatemala's miniscule Communist Party. Any organization of labor

¹⁰ Immerman, 44; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 28, 67.

was viewed as communist and Ubico would not tolerate any of it. As for the large Indian population, Ubico only further oppressed them by instituting Decree 2795, which allowed landowners to shoot any scavengers on their property, a group which consisted primarily of Indian peasants.¹¹ Ubico's antagonism of the middle and working classes proved to be his undoing in 1944.

The Guatemalan middle class became emboldened when citizens from other Latin American nations rose up, challenged, and deposed their respective dictators. In May 1944, President Maximiliano Hernández Martínez of El Salvador fell from power. His removal from power encouraged Guatemalan university students and professors began protesting Ubico's rule. In response, Ubico arrested protestors and suspended constitutional guarantees. His actions backfired, however; instead of suppressing the unrest, Guatemalans across the nation and of different social status began protesting. Even elements in the military, which Ubico believed would never turn against him, began to disobey his orders. Unable to quell dissenters, Ubico resigned on July 1, 1944.¹²

Even though Ubico stepped down from power, the revolution was incomplete. One of Ubico's generals, Federico Ponce, took control of the interim government junta. Ponce's rule only intensified oppression against dissidents. At the same time, he attempted to bribe the teachers who protested the oppression with a pay raise. However, when the government assassinated Alejandro Córdova, a prominent critic of the new government, the Guatemalan people reacted once more.¹³ Jacobo Arbenz Gúzman, a

¹¹ Immerman, 31-35, 37; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 9-13, 19-21.

¹² Immerman, 38-39; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 22-23.

¹³ "Alejandro Cordova Cae Asesinado En La Sombra," *El Imparcial*, 2 October 1944, 1; Immerman, 41.

young captain in the army who resigned in protest of Ponce's rule, and Major Francisco Arana, a tank commander from the Guardia de Honor, planned a *coup d'état* against Ponce. On October 19, 1944, the revolt began. Other young officers helped arm and train civilians. The revolutionaries targeted the capital and attacked. The next day, Ponce surrendered. Arbenz, Arana, and a civilian, Jorge Toriello, formed a junta with the goal of establishing a democratic government.¹⁴

Any role that Carlos Castillo Armas played between July and October is unclear and not well documented. He was not a major player, but he supported the revolution. He knew Arbenz from the Escuela Politécnica, the premier military academy of Guatemala, where they both studied. He referred to Arbenz as a "very close personal friend."¹⁵ Castillo Armas seems to have been also benefited from the Revolution. Before the overthrow of Ponce, Castillo Armas was an artillery instructor at Fort San Jose. After Ponce fell, he became a member of the General Staff.¹⁶ Whether this was because of his connection to Arbenz or to his connection to Arana is unclear. The replacement of the older generation of officers during the Revolution made room for the younger officers to receive a variety of promotions and fill higher positions. Castillo Armas went from a Major to a Lieutenant Colonel. Arbenz made an even larger leap from Captain to

¹⁴ "Finalidades de la Junta Revolucionaria del Gobierno," *El Imparcial*, 22 October 1944, 1, 7; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 26-29; Schlesinger and Kinzer, 28-32.

¹⁵ Schlesinger and Kinzer, 122; "Memorandum From the Acting Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency (*name not declassified*) to the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (Helms)," 17 March 1952, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003), 16. (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*: with appropriate year and volume numbers).

¹⁶ "Memorandum From the Acting Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency (*name not declassified*) to the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (Helms)," 17 March 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 15-16.

Lieutenant Colonel. Arana went from a Major to a Colonel.¹⁷ Castillo Armas continued to have success within the military for years after the Revolution.

As for the United States, the reaction to the Revolution was cautious, but positive. According to William C. Affeld, the chargé d'affaires of the U.S. embassy in Guatemala, the Revolutionary Government was “made up of sound and responsible persons.” In observing the Arbenz-Arana-Toriello junta, he confirmed the junta’s desire for the “establishment of democratic ideals.”¹⁸ In the context of the Second World War, one concern the United States had was whether or not the new government had been or could be influenced by the Axis powers. However, these fears were quickly dismissed.¹⁹ After consulting with other American republics and acknowledging that the Guatemalan people recognized the junta as the legitimate governmental power in the country the United States officially recognized the junta on November 7, 1944.²⁰

¹⁷ Kenneth J. Grieb, “The Guatemalan Military and the Revolution of 1944,” *The Americas* 32 (1976), 542; “Memorandum From the Acting Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency ([name not declassified]) to the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (Helms),” 17 March 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 15.

¹⁸ “The Chargé in Guatemala (Affeld) to the Secretary of State,” 24 October 1944, *FRUS: 1944, The American Republics* Volume VII (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), 1142-1143; “The Chargé in Guatemala (Affeld) to the Secretary of State,” 26 October 1944, *FRUS: 1944, The American Republics* Volume VII, 1145.

¹⁹ “The Chargé in Guatemala (Affeld) to the Secretary of State,” 26 October 1944, *FRUS: 1944, The American Republics* Volume VII, 1145; “The Chargé in Bolivia (McLaughlin) to the Secretary of State,” 27 October 1944, *FRUS: 1944, The American Republics* Volume VII, 1146; “The Acting Secretary of State to the Diplomatic Representatives in the American Republics Except Argentina, Guatemala, and El Salvador,” 31 October 1944, *FRUS: 1944, The American Republics* Volume VII, 1147. In the same vein, the United States had some concern over Axis property in Guatemala. Prior to the Revolution, the U.S. worked with Ubico to appropriate German property. The Revolutionary government later agreed to honor previous agreements. See “The Ambassador in Guatemala (Long) to the Secretary of State,” 18 April 1944 and “The Ambassador in Guatemala (Long) to the Secretary of State,” 14 November 1944, in *FRUS: 1944, The American Republics* Volume VII, 1154-1157, 1166.

²⁰ “The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Guatemala (Long),” 4 November 1944, *FRUS: 1944, The American Republics* Volume VII, 1151.

From the outside, the Arbenz-Arana-Toriello triumvirate looked stable and able to take on the task of forming a new government. They set a goal of holding free elections in December in order to elect a new president and a new Constituent Assembly. None of the three junta leaders would be eligible to run for president in December.²¹ Though the junta promoted democratic ideas, it also reinforced the power of the military. Arana had significant influence in the junta and advocated for a powerful military position for himself, especially since he was not allowed to run for President in the first election. Because Arana controlled much of the remaining armed forces in Guatemala, Arbenz and Toriello granted him his wish. Upon validating the election results, the new President would appoint Arana the Chief of the Armed Forces. The Chief of the Armed Forces would make all military appointments and could only be removed by the Congress if he had broken the law. His term would last six years. The position was purposely made more powerful than the Minister of Defense, the post that Arbenz filled.²² This struggle for power between Arana and the Revolutionary government he helped create continued to play out for years to come, ultimately paving the way for Castillo Armas.

²¹ Schneider, 15.

²² Grieb, 542-543; Piero Gleijeses, "The Death of Francisco Arana: A Turning Point in the Guatemalan Revolution," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 22 (October 1990), 528, 530-531.

Chapter 3

CASTILLO ARMAS THE ARANISTA

By the end of 1944, the Guatemalan people had deposed two dictators and established a junta consisting of two young military officers and one civilian. The triumvirate set out to establish a democratic government with free elections, but made some compromises to please Colonel Francisco Arana. A new democratic government under the leadership of President Juan José Arévalo came to power. Arévalo, a professor who left Guatemala in 1935 in protest of Ubico's rule, returned to Guatemala in 1944 to embrace the Revolution. He received over eighty-five percent of the votes cast in the first election of the new government on December 19, 1944.²³ All seemed well for the fledgling democracy. However, Arana continued to seek greater influence in the military and in politics. He embraced his fellow soldiers and began courting the upper-class elites in hopes of gaining their support. He expected to win the next presidential election to be held in 1950.²⁴ His undermining of democracy caught the attention of Arévalo and Arbenz. He did not live to see the presidential election and his supporters, including Castillo Armas, made attempts to avenge his death.

But even before Arana's death in 1949, Castillo Armas had made important connections with the United States. In addition to becoming part of the General Staff of the Guatemalan Army when the new government came to power, Castillo Armas also received additional training for his new position in the United States. From October 1945

²³ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 36; Immerman 44-45.

²⁴ Gleijeses, "The Death of Francisco Arana," 531-533.

to April 1946, he trained at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. There he met Jules Dubois, a news reporter who joined the military during World War II. Dubois led classes at Fort Leavenworth for Latin American officers. He remarked that “Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas was one of the best students at the General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth.”²⁵ Dubois would meet Castillo Armas again in the 1950s while serving as a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*. It is unclear what connection Dubois might have had with the CIA during this time, whether he participated in the operations, advised the CIA, or knew of the operations only through his friend Castillo Armas. What is certain is that he knew about the CIA’s operations in Guatemala and appears in a few documents.²⁶ After the overthrow of Arbenz, Dubois would write favorably of Castillo Armas in his works on communism in Latin America.²⁷

²⁵ Jules Dubois, *Freedom is My Beat* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1959), 157; “The Press: Freedom Fighter,” *Time*, April 15, 1957, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,862549-2,00.html> (accessed August 22, 2011).

²⁶ Two documents mentioning Dubois are found in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*. In these documents Dubois requests photographs of a submarine used in Operation WASHTUB, the CIA’s operations to plant Soviet arms. The two documents are: “Telegram From the CIA Station in [place not declassified] to Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida,” 11 May, 1954 in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 280 and “Telegram From the CIA Station in [place not declassified] to Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida,” 14 May, 1954 in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 281. These requests are unusually specific. Historians doubt how much Castillo Armas knew of additional CIA operations connected to PBSUCCESS, so how Dubois knew about this one is worthy of further pursuit. A third document found in the CIA’s Electronic Reading Room finds Dubois heading to Guatemala “in time for big story” and considers him “dangerous to PBSUCCESS.” The CIA experienced intelligence leaks throughout their operations in Guatemala, so their fear of Dubois reporting too early had some justification. Whether there were other reasons to deem Dubois dangerous to the security of the operation is unknown. “Cable to LINCOLN from (deleted) re Guatemala 1954 Coup,” 4 June 1954, [database online]; available from CIA Electronic Reading Room, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/> (accessed October 1, 2011). Since these documents appear as late as 1954, any early connections Dubois may have had with the CIA or the State Department are unknown. In a recent Freedom of Information Act request, the CIA denied the existence or nonexistence of any other records pertaining to Dubois relationship to the CIA and Castillo Armas.

²⁷ Jules Dubois, *Operation America: The Communist Conspiracy in Latin America*, (New York: Walker and Company, 1963), 235-236.

Castillo Armas continued to enjoy favor from the Arévalo government. After serving on the General Staff for a year, Castillo Armas became director of the Escuela Politécnica in 1947. In 1949, he became the commander of the Fourth Military Zone at Mazatenango, a post not far from the capitol.²⁸ However, with the death of Francisco Arana, Castillo Armas lost much of his influence in the military and the government. In his attempts to overthrow the government, Castillo Armas continually reminded his supporters that he wanted to avenge the death of Arana and restore “democracy” in the Guatemalan government.²⁹ A brief overview of Arana’s death will reveal Castillo Armas’s motives and goals.

As mentioned earlier, Arana had great influence in the formation of the new Guatemalan government by virtue of his control over key elements of the armed forces. He utilized his power to ensure a high position in the new government, the Chief of the Armed Forces. From this post, Arana could place loyal followers into high positions of power within the military. Because Arana had amassed so much power, there was some fear that he might overthrow the government at any time, though he continually said he only wanted to become head of the government through a future presidential election. In 1945, when President Arévalo was in a car accident, fear of Arana staging a coup heightened. Leaders of the Partido Acción Revolucionaria (PAR), a major political party at the time, thought Arana would take this opportunity to overthrow the government. In

²⁸ “Memorandum From the Acting Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency (*[name not declassified]*) to the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (Helms),” 17 March 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 16.

²⁹ “Col. Carlos Castillo Armas in Initial Stage of Organizing Armed Coup Against Guatemala Government,” 19 January 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

order to alleviate that fear, PAR leaders met with Arana and promised to support his candidacy in the 1950 presidential election in exchange for Arana not taking any military action against the government.³⁰

The agreement between Arana and the PAR did not last. Arana became more political, making friends with the elite and right-wing opponents of the government. The PAR and the Arévalo government became suspicious of his actions and the PAR retracted support for Arana's presidential campaign. Instead, the PAR would endorse Lieutenant Colonel Arbenz, who began gaining widespread support throughout Guatemala. Arbenz sought out supporters beyond the military and look towards the Guatemalan middle and working classes. Even some elites began to side with Arbenz. He promised new reforms to strengthen the Guatemalan economy and its new democracy. He met with all the major political parties to discuss what an Arbenz government would look like and they were pleased with what they heard.³¹

Despite Arbenz's campaigning, Arana continued to present himself as the favorite presidential candidate and assured himself of his victory. Rumors of Arana launching a coup in early 1949 came and went. As one Arana supporters claimed, the only thing that held him back from overthrowing the government was his "inner conflict." He wanted to come to power legitimately and preserve his status as a hero of the 1944 Revolution, but those chances grew slimmer each day. He did not gain the same support from the Guatemala middle and working classes as successfully as Arbenz. Instead, he wanted the support of the elites, which would support him, but did not have the same power they

³⁰ Gleijeses, "The Death of Francisco Arana," 532-533.

³¹ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 73-75.

once had in the new democratic Guatemala. They could not buy the votes needed to win the election nor could they manipulate the government to affect the electoral results. Furthering threatening Arana's power was the law prohibiting sitting military officers from running for president. Arana and Arbenz had to resign their posts in order to run. Arana had to organize supporters in order to find a loyal replacement as Chief of the Armed Forces to be confirmed by the Congress.³² This constitutional process only complicated matters and made it more difficult for Arana to maintain a position of power. A coup suddenly became a much more acceptable choice for Arana.

On July 16, 1949, Arana headed to the Presidential Palace and confronted Arévalo. But rather than overthrow the government right then and there, he instead gave Arévalo an ultimatum: replace all his ministers with those friendly to Arana and force Arbenz to resign from the military. In this way, Arana hoped he could ensure his election. Arévalo said it would take time to replace his government and Arana left confident his demands would be met. Yet Arévalo did not meet his demands. Instead, he met with Arbenz to discuss how best to subdue Arana without risking a civil war.³³ Arana gave them the opportunity they needed.

Arana returned to the Presidential Palace on July 18. He told Arévalo that he was going to the town of El Morlón to secure a cache of weapons. While Arana did not need the weapons for strategic purposes since he already had placed loyal officers in key locations, he wanted to demonstrate his confidence and power over Arévalo. Arévalo gave no objection to Arana's course of action. But when Arana left, he informed Arbenz,

³² Gleijeses, "The Death of Francisco Arana," 535-540.

³³ Gleijeses, "The Death of Francisco Arana," 541-543.

who then sent armed men to arrest Arana. In an ensuing gunfight, Arana was shot and killed. Whether or not Arbenz meant to arrest Arana or assassinate him remains unclear. Arana's supporters believed that the government assassinated him while the government claimed he resisted arrest and was accidentally shot. The truth of the incident remains elusive, as both Arbenz and Arévalo never revealed their true intentions.³⁴

Upon hearing news of Arana's death, many of his supporters revolted. Fighting started at the Guardia de Honor, where supporters of Arana, the *aranistas*, hoped to avenge the death of their leader. However, the *aranistas* lacked a replacement leader. The Arévalo government arrested their immediate commander, Colonel Juan Francisco Oliva, following Arana's death. The remaining soldiers attempted to take over the Presidential Palace and the police headquarters, but lacked uniformed leadership.³⁵ The one *aranista* capable of leading the revolt, Castillo Armas, was not present in the fighting.

Castillo Armas was not in Guatemala City at the time of the revolt. He remained at his post in Mazatenango. Some claim he "lacked the nerve" to participate in the fighting, even though the *aranistas* had considerably strengthened within the city.³⁶ However, Castillo Armas claimed that news of Arana's assassination "arrived tardily" to Mazatenango.³⁷ While Mazatenango is only one hundred miles away from the capital, the rugged terrain would have delayed any reinforcements by hours. The fighting in the capital probably had turned in the government's favor before Castillo Armas could have

³⁴ Gleijeses, "The Death of Francisco Arana," 544-545.

³⁵ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 67-68.

³⁶ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 67.

³⁷ "Col. Carlos Castillo Armas in Initial Stage of Organizing Armed Coup Against Guatemala Government," 19 January 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

acted. In another account, the government called Castillo Armas to bring troops to support the government, which he ignored.³⁸ This seems less likely, given that if he could send troops, he probably would have sent them to fight on the *aranista* side. It would, however, explain why the government removed him from his position a few days after the revolt.

It is also possible Castillo Armas did not participate in the revolt in order to maintain his own position of power. *Aranistas* like Colonel Gabino Santizo sided with the Arévalo government during the uprising and benefitted from that decision.³⁹ Though there is no record of an agreement between Castillo Armas and the government, he may have thought his inaction demonstrated loyalty. Unfortunately, he was wrong. Four days after Arana's assassination, Arbenz removed Castillo Armas as commander of Mazatenango. Castillo Armas claimed that Arbenz removed him because he was not "one of his men," implying that Arbenz and Arévalo could no longer trust the *aranistas*. However, he also believed he could still obtain a position within the military if he asked, so long as the position did not include him commanding any troops. This was unacceptable to Castillo Armas and so he did not pursue his military career any further.⁴⁰ With Arana and the *aranistas* defeated, Arbenz remained the only viable candidate for the presidency.

³⁸ "Memorandum From the Acting Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency ([name not declassified]) to the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (Helms)," 17 March 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 16.

³⁹ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 68.

⁴⁰ "Col. Carlos Castillo Armas in Initial Stage of Organizing Armed Coup Against Guatemala Government," 19 January 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

The United States viewed the death of Arana as signifying the “defeat of moderate elements...and substantial strengthening leftists.”⁴¹ The United States had become suspicious of the Arévalo government before than Arana’s assassination. The State Department worried that communists influenced the different segments of Guatemala and that those influences undermined the interests of American businesses. The American Ambassador met with Arévalo to discuss “pro-Soviet propaganda and attitudes” from the Guatemalan government just weeks before Arana’s assassination. Arévalo “assured his...fullest cooperation” between the U.S. and Guatemala.⁴² These early remarks began to undermine the trust between the two governments.

Dissent from the *aranistas* did not end after their defeat in July 1949 and other opponents of the revolutionary government remained. Some soldiers began to plot against the Arévalo government. Many of them were arrested, including Castillo Armas. Just a month after he lost his position in the military, the government arrested Castillo Armas. They accused him of stealing government arms, which he denied. His case was never brought to trial, though other similar cases by other officers resulted in convictions.⁴³ While in jail, Castillo Armas realized he no longer had friends within the government and, with the *aranistas* defeated, it did not seem there would be any friends in the

⁴¹ “The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Venezuela,” 21 July 1949, in *FRUS: The United Nations; The Western Hemisphere: 1949*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 655-656.

⁴² “The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Guatemala (Patterson),” 14 June 1949, in *FRUS: The United Nations; The Western Hemisphere: 1949*, 650-652; “The Ambassador in Guatemala (Patterson) to the Secretary of State,” 28 June 1949, in *FRUS: The United Nations; The Western Hemisphere: 1949*, 654-655.

⁴³ “Col. Carlos Castillo Armas in Initial Stage of Organizing Armed Coup Against Guatemala Government,” 19 January 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

government in the future. So he made new ones, ones that he believed could help him overthrow a government he no longer believed in.

While in jail, Castillo Armas met Jose B. Linares. Linares had been the chief of the Security Police under Jorge Ubico. After the 1944 Revolution, the new government arrested him and kept him in prison for the time being. Naturally, Linares loathed the new government. The two quickly became allies. Castillo Armas promised Linares a position in the new government in exchange for support. Linares accepted and became an early supporter of Castillo Armas.⁴⁴ However, Castillo Armas needed more than just prisoners to support his plans against the government; he needed assistance from people who could undermine the government from inside and people who could arm his rebels.

On December 23, 1949, the government released Castillo Armas from prison on and he immediately sought out a variety of individuals opposed to the revolutionary government, both in Guatemala and abroad. In addition to Linares, Castillo Armas requested the support of another infamous member of the Ubico government, General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes. Unlike General Ponce, who attempted to maintain Ubico's style of government, Ydígoras switched sides and supported the 1944 Revolution. After the Revolution, the new government made him Ambassador to Great Britain, which deprived him of military power but kept him pleased. However, Ydígoras began to criticize the government by claiming it had fallen under communist sway.⁴⁵ He became

⁴⁴ "Plans of Col. Carlos Castillo Armas to Overthrow Guatemalan Government," 31 October 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

⁴⁵ Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, *My War With Communism* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1963), 38-39, 42.

one of the major critics of the Arévalo and later Arbenz government, though his influence was limited to conservatives and the upper class.

Castillo Armas approached Ydígoras sometime in 1950. Juan Córdova Cerna, a landowner and lawyer for the American-owned United Fruit Company (UFCO), introduced the two. Castillo Armas proposed a military coup. Ydígoras entertained the idea, but insisted that Castillo Armas wait until after the presidential elections.⁴⁶ After the death of Arana, Ydígoras decided to run for president and did not want Castillo Armas to interfere with his chances at winning the election. He believed that if Arbenz won the election, the nation would turn to “the extreme Left” and fall into the hands of communists. Therefore, he ran on a platform of a moderate, though in actuality he only gained support from the conservative elite and his claims of widespread communist influence were exaggerated.⁴⁷ The meeting between Castillo Armas and Ydígoras in 1950 would be the first of many. While Ydígoras did not actively support Castillo Armas’s 1950 coup attempt, he later said he “was naturally in sympathy with any movement against the threat that loomed over Guatemala.”⁴⁸

Castillo Armas also claimed a variety of active military officers within his league. He claimed to have the support of the Guardia Civil, the Fort of Matamoros, the Guardia de Honor, and part of the Air Force, though he hesitated to specify which officers

⁴⁶ Ydígoras, 46; Gleijeses, 82.

⁴⁷ Ydígoras, 40, 45; Immerman, 61

⁴⁸ Ydígoras, 46.

supported him.⁴⁹ One exception, however, was Colonel Juan Jose Serra de Leon, director of the Civil Guard.⁵⁰ His plan called for attacking La Aurora Military Base outside of Guatemala City. This action, he hoped, would spark a widespread revolt by his supporters throughout other military bases in the nation. Castillo Armas believed the other officers felt betrayed by the government and just needed an encouraging push to inspire them to rise against Arévalo and Arbenz.

In addition to domestic opponents, Castillo Armas gathered foreign opponents of the Arévalo government. In particular, Castillo Armas needed to gather weapons for his coup, which he believed would be difficult without foreign assistance. Therefore, he requested help from Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua and Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. What aid these two U.S.-backed dictators gave Castillo Armas at this point is unknown, however the two continued to support him for years to come, giving him money and weapons for his cause.⁵¹ Somoza and Trujillo supported Castillo Armas and other Guatemalan counterrevolutionaries because the ideas of the revolutionary government undermined their rule. Trujillo specifically did not enjoy the Guatemalan government harboring Dominican rebels, who launched an attempt to

⁴⁹ "Plans of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas for Armed Revolt Against the Government," 23 August 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

⁵⁰ "Plans of Col. Carlos Castillo Armas to Overthrow Guatemalan Government," 31 October 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

⁵¹ "Col. Carlos Castillo Armas in Initial Stage of Organizing Armed Coup Against Guatemala Government," 19 January 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011); Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala 1952-1953* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 12-13.

overthrow him in 1949 from Guatemala.⁵² For Castillo Armas, Somoza and Trujillo could provide important material support, but he did not request any men from them for his cause, fearing that foreign troops would undermine his legitimacy and possibly put himself at the risk of Somoza or Trujillo betraying him.

Finally, Castillo Armas came into contact with the United States at this time. Less than a month after his release from prison, he talked to an unknown agent of the CIA. He did not hesitate to tell the agent his ideas about the Arévalo and Arbenz, his plans to overthrow the government, and whom he had been trying to contact for support. These early conversations with the United States would later affect the CIA's decision to choose Castillo Armas as their counterrevolutionary, in part because Castillo Armas confirmed some of the suspicion the United States already had. He claimed the civilian government had "thoroughly corrupted" the army, which could have been the counterbalance to perceived leftist individuals within the government. Any resistance within the army was subsequently controlled through "an extensive intelligence system" that monitored potential threats, which in turn would be removed and possibly imprisoned. Whether this actually happened is unknown. He also affirmed that any new government formed through his coup would not become a "military dictatorship" and instead would be a "true democracy" with "free elections." The CIA concluded that "if any man in Guatemala can lead a successful revolt against the Arévalo regime, it will be he who will do it."⁵³ The CIA liked what Castillo Armas had to say and the idea that he could potentially

⁵² Schlesinger and Kinzer, 124.

⁵³ "Col. Carlos Castillo Armas in Initial Stage of Organizing Armed Coup Against Guatemala Government," 19 January 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

overthrow a government that was increasingly in doubt. The CIA had some concern over the Arévalo government discovering Castillo Armas's plans, but continued to hope for the best.⁵⁴ On October 31, 1950, the CIA and Castillo Armas talked once more about his plans. Five days later, Castillo Armas launched an attack.

Castillo Armas launched his coup attempt on the Aurora Military Base outside of the capitol. He hoped his band of seventy men would spark a revolt across the city and the nation. They did not. One of the officers Castillo Armas counted on informed the Arévalo government of his plans. Instead of allies awaiting him at the Aurora base, soldiers opened fire on Castillo Armas and his troops. Supporters around the city did not materialize and officers remained loyal to Arévalo and Arbenz, which was consistent with crackdown on the *aranistas* a year earlier. About twenty of his men were killed in battle while the rest were wounded. *El Imparcial*, a leading Guatemalan newspaper, reported Castillo Armas among the dead.⁵⁵

But he did not die at the Aurora base. The soldiers who came upon his body saw no signs of life and began carrying him to the cemetery. However, before they could bury him along with his fallen comrades, Castillo Armas moaned. The soldiers then rushed him to the hospital where he had time to recover before being imprisoned. For his actions

⁵⁴ "Plans of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas for Armed Revolt Against the Government," 23 August 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

⁵⁵ "Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, Guatemalan Exile," 2 August 1951, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011); "Ataque Suicida Contra la Base Militar de La Aurora se Frustra," *El Imparcial*, 6 August 1950, 1; *Asi se gesto la liberacion*, (Guatemala City: L. A. H. A., 1956), 51-54; Juan José Arévalo, *Despacho Presidencial: Obra Póstuma del Doctor Juan José Arévalo Bermejo* (Ciudad de Guatemala: Editorial Oscar de León Palacios, 1998) 509-510.

against the government, he was sentenced to death.⁵⁶ Arévalo and Arbenz changed their minds about Castillo Armas and now they saw him as a serious threat to the government. When they released him from prison in 1949, they did not expect him to plot against the government. They could not let him live. But Castillo Armas did not wait to be executed. Six months after his imprisonment, he escaped. Some say he tunneled his way out while others say he bribed the guards. Regardless, his seemingly heroic escape made him more popular among the opponents of Arévalo and Arbenz. After escaping, Castillo Armas fled Guatemala and began plotting another coup.⁵⁷

A week after Castillo Armas's failed attack, Jacobo Arbenz won the presidential election. His opponent Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes had fled the country a month before the election. Ydígoras claimed the government assassinated his supporters and sought to kill him as well, though this seems very unlikely. He also claimed his opponents were trying to make him look like "the reincarnation of Jorge Ubico," which he denied.⁵⁸ This must have just been dramatics to help bring life into a campaign that was going nowhere. Arbenz already had wide support across Guatemala as a hero of the 1944 Revolution. He also had the endorsement of the major political parties at the time. The election proved this point. Arbenz obtained over 250,000 votes to Ydígoras's 72,000 votes.⁵⁹ Neither Castillo Armas's coup nor Ydígoras's campaign could topple a popular government. But they would try to in the future.

⁵⁶ Schlesinger, 123.

⁵⁷ Schlesinger, 123.

⁵⁸ Ydígoras 45-46.

⁵⁹ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 83.

Chapter 4

CASTILLO ARMAS AND REBUILDING SUPPORT FOR A COUNTERREVOLUTION

In August of 1951, the CIA and Castillo Armas met once more. After escaping from prison, Castillo Armas took refuge in the Colombian Embassy, which then granted him passage to Colombia. Rather than concede defeat and fall into obscurity, he began plotting his next coup. Now exiled, he had to rely more on foreign support. Domestic opponents of the Arbenz government were fragmented after the defeat of the Aranistas, Castillo Armas's failed coup, and Ydígoras's loss at the elections. The revolutionary government survived its second election and support for the government remained strong. The reliance on foreign opponents became the only option for Castillo Armas and other counterrevolutions. This ultimately led counterrevolutionaries to seek out the support of American businesses and ultimately the American government. Between 1951 and 1953, Castillo Armas continued to cultivate a relationship with the CIA, Trujillo, Somoza, and Ydígoras while also coming into contact with the United Fruit Company. These connections eventually led to Castillo Armas and the CIA working together on Operation PBFORTUNE, a precursor to Operation PBSUCCESS.

Before further developing the connection between Castillo Armas and the United States, it is important to have some understanding of the fear the United States had of growing communist influence in Guatemala. When Francisco Arana was murdered in 1950, the State Department voiced some concern over the composition of the Guatemalan

government.⁶⁰ Arana's death marked the end of a legitimate conservative element in the government, as no other conservative leader could gain the necessary support from large segments of the population. As a hero of the 1944 Revolution, Arana had been popular for some time, particularly within the military. Other conservative elements remaining in Guatemala were often linked to the old Ubico regime, like Ydígoras, or to the upper class and foreign interests. The reforms under Arévalo and later Arbenz weakened the traditional sources of power in favor of more power to the middle and working classes of Guatemalans. However, those reforms raised the attention of the United States, especially when opponents of the Arévalo and Arbenz governments began decrying the reforms as communist.

The Arévalo government pushed for various labor reforms and promoted more freedoms for the people of Guatemala than the previous administration. He promoted his idea of "Spiritual Socialism" while condemning global communism and the Soviet Union. This made the United States unsure about Arévalo, but did not prompt any kind of direct response.⁶¹ Conversations with Castillo Armas highlight that the United States up to 1950 initially wanted more information on Arévalo, Arbenz, and the Guatemalan government. When describing the situation in Guatemala in 1950, Castillo Armas's criticisms of the Arévalo government are primarily directed at the Minister of Defense Arbenz, particularly for corrupting the military and creating a supposed intelligence

⁶⁰ "The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Venezuela," 21 July 1949, in *FRUS: The United Nations; The Western Hemisphere: 1949*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 655-656; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 121.

⁶¹ "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Public Affairs Officer of the Embassy in Guatemala (Barrett)," 9 January 1950, in *FRUS: The United Nations; The Western Hemisphere: 1950*, 865-866; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 117.

system to monitor the officers in the military.⁶² These early reports from Castillo Armas in 1950 lack any discussion of communist influence in the government. That changed immediately after the election of Arbenz.

When Castillo Armas talked to the CIA in August of 1951, he immediately claimed that “principle posts of the [Arbenz] administration [were] occupied by communist leaders...Arbenz is dominated by the Communists.” He argued that the military and anti-communist civilians would not tolerate the Arbenz administration and believed these elements would revolt before the end of the year. Those forces, however, needed weapons and organization. Though he does not ask the United States for help, he does request that the United States “do nothing to interfere with the movement.”⁶³

The significance of Castillo Armas’s claim that communism infiltrated the Guatemalan government is twofold. First, he reinforced some of the speculations the United States had already begun making after 1949. The CIA considered Castillo Armas sincere, honest, and not giving into “exaggeration.”⁶⁴ Therefore, the agency regarded his information as reliable. Along with accusations from other dissidents and American businesses like the United Fruit Company, Castillo Armas’s switch from simple government corruption to a communist conspiracy contributed to the evidence against the

⁶² “Col. Carlos Castillo Armas in Initial Stage of Organizing Armed Coup Against Guatemala Government,” 19 January 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

⁶³ “Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, Guatemalan Exile,” 2 August 1951, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

⁶⁴ “Col. Carlos Castillo Armas in Initial Stage of Organizing Armed Coup Against Guatemala Government,” 19 January 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011); “Plans of Col. Carlos Castillo Armas to Overthrow Guatemalan Government,” 31 October 1950, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

Arbenz regime. Secondly, Castillo Armas indicated that the threat of communism in Guatemala was so great that “other anti-Communist governments” must aid “the anti-Communist forces in Guatemala.”⁶⁵ While he did not outright request help from the United States, as he asked U.S. not to intervene at least on Arbenz’s side, he nonetheless did make the situation appear much worse and hinted that situation might only be resolved by outside help. His previous failure at the Aurora Base highlights the strength of the Guatemalan government and the need for foreign intervention. He recognized that the United States had positioned itself as a beacon of anticommunism during this early phase of the Cold War.

The State Department and the CIA continually questioned Arbenz’s personal political leanings, the influence of the Guatemalan communist party, and the possibility of Soviet-Guatemalan relations. Arbenz often defended Arévalo’s government and later his own government when talking to United States. “He protested we ‘know’ he is not a Communist,” a State Department report included in March 1950.⁶⁶ A later assessment by the CIA concluded that Arbenz did “not agree with economic and political ideas of Guatemalan or Soviet Communists...[his] social reform ideas stem from the US New Deal rather than from Soviet Communism.”⁶⁷ Despite defending himself from the criticism of being a communist, the United States worried about communist influence in Guatemala, influences that Castillo Armas confirmed.

⁶⁵ “Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, Guatemalan Exile,” 2 August 1951, [database online]; available from Declassified Documents Reference System, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed August 24, 2011).

⁶⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation,” 30 March 1950, in *FRUS: The United Nations; The Western Hemisphere: 1950*, 873.

⁶⁷ “Central Intelligence Agency Information Report,” 10 October 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 39.

The United Fruit Company did not sit idly by as the Arévalo and Arbenz governments challenged its economic dominance over Guatemala. UFCO had various connections with Guatemalan exiles including Castillo Armas and Ydígoras and would fund almost anyone who vowed to disrupt the revolutionary government. How early the UFCO began aiding counterrevolutions is somewhat unclear. As early as March 1950, rumors began spreading that UFCO wanted to fund Ydígoras and his presidential campaign against Arbenz. When Arbenz brought the matter up with the U.S. Embassy, the Americans dismissed the rumors.⁶⁸ Ydígoras does recall that Walter Turnbull of UFCO approached him, along with “two gentlemen whom he introduced as agents of the C.I.A.,” after the election, but refused to work with UFCO, claiming that he found UFCO’s term’s “unacceptable.”⁶⁹ Thomas McCann, an UFCO executive, later confirmed the meeting in his own work on the company. He also revealed UFCO approached Ydígoras before anyone else and one of the CIA agents was probably E. Howard Hunt Jr.⁷⁰ However, McCann does not specify when this meeting took place.

Historians Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer place this meeting in late 1953.⁷¹ Documentation regarding Ydígoras and the CIA is sparse and does not clearly illustrate if and when this meeting took place. However, if it is true that Ydígoras was consulted in late 1953, then it would have been after the CIA had already decided to begin Operation PBFORTUNE and already begun plans to fund counterrevolutionaries

⁶⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation,” 30 March 1950, in *FRUS: The United Nations; The Western Hemisphere: 1950*, 873.

⁶⁹ Ydígoras, 50.

⁷⁰ Thomas McCann, *An American Company: The Tragedy of United Fruit* (New York, Crown Publishers Inc., 1976), 60.

⁷¹ Schlesinger and Kinzer, 121.

like Castillo Armas. The CIA recognized Ydígoras as an opponent of Arbenz as early as 1952, but regarded the strength of his supporters as the weakest of three oppositional groups, the strongest group being led by Castillo Armas.⁷² Ydígoras may have been the preferred candidate for the United Fruit Company, but the CIA did not regard him highly for reasons that will be explained below.

For the United Fruit Company, anyone willing to overthrow Arbenz and repel his reforms would be an attractive candidate and the company funneled money to other counterrevolutionaries besides Ydígoras, including Castillo Armas. Castillo Armas seems to have been offered funding from UFCO sometime after escaping from prison in 1951. A CIA assessment of the situation in Guatemala dated January 11, 1952 mentions UFCO offering aid to Castillo Armas.⁷³ How much UFCO invested in him at this time is unclear, but later counterrevolutionary leaders would complain the CIA of UFCO's favoritism with Castillo Armas. In one instance, Colonel Barrios Peña riled at Castillo Armas for receiving "large sums of money from the United Fruit Company...he had several limousines, numerous body guards, 34 exiled Guatemalan students; and he had a large body of spies and agents engaged elsewhere; the total monthly expenditures amounting to about \$30,000." Barrios then claimed UFCO had "invested" a total of \$2 million in Castillo Armas's operations, though he had no actual evidence to support his claim.⁷⁴ This was late in 1953. By this time, Castillo Armas had been receiving money

⁷² "Memorandum From the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency (King) to the Deputy Director for Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner)," 11 January 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 2-3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation," 8 October 1953, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 117.

from various sources including the CIA, so Barrios and others could not easily distinguish how his operation was paid for, though the rival counterrevolutions did recognize the influence and interests of the United Fruit Company. Even though UFCO may not have initially wanted Castillo Armas to lead the counterrevolution, they had no qualms funding any efforts to overthrow the Guatemalan government.

It is likely that Castillo Armas came into contact with United Fruit Company through Juan Córdova Cerna, a legal advisor for UFCO. Córdova and Castillo Armas had already met in 1950, along with Ydígoras. He even allowed his son to join Castillo Armas on the attack on the Aurora Base. His son died in the battle and he continued to work against Arbenz.⁷⁵ Two weeks after the CIA mentioned UFCO offering aid to Castillo Armas they reveal that Castillo Armas and Córdova were working together, along with Oscar Mendoza and Colonel Elfego Monzon.⁷⁶ As an ally, Córdova provided critical connections for Castillo Armas to build up his counterrevolutionary forces. The more allies Castillo Armas could muster, the more it appeared that he stood a chance against the strong Arbenz government.

When Castillo Armas began searching for support to overthrow the Arbenz government after his failed attempt in 1950, he did not forget the right-wing dictators who had been weary of the Guatemala Revolution of 1944 and how the government under Arévalo harbored revolutionaries from the Caribbean Legion. He reconnected with Somoza and Trujillo after escaping from prison. Additionally, he seems to have come

⁷⁵ Immerman, 142; *Asi se gesto la liberacion*, 53.

⁷⁶ "Telegram From the CIA Station in [*place not declassified*] to the Central Intelligence Agency," 25 January 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954*, 5.

into contact with a “Peruvian group,” which may have been working as an intermediary with the Peruvian government.⁷⁷ Castillo Armas may have been trying to broaden his international supporters, but it does not appear that this contact developed into anything significant.

Castillo Armas continued to seek out new foreign allies. He reached President Juan Manuel Gálvez of Honduras and his predecessor Tiburcio Carías Andino. They provided Castillo Armas with “good will,” which meant he could safely stage his coup from Honduras, in addition to the possibility of “some material.”⁷⁸ He also gained some moral support from the Venezuelan government, though the government did not seem to provide any support in terms of men or material.⁷⁹ What is important to note here is that Castillo Armas actively forged connections to foreign opponents of Arbenz without any prompt from the United States. While some governments were more willing to provide arms and men to his cause, others at least voiced support for his efforts.

Besides simply wanting to get rid of a beacon of freedom in Latin America, some of these dictators wanted a little something more from Castillo Armas. For example, Trujillo demanded that Castillo Armas kill “four Santo Dominicanos” living in Guatemala. Castillo Armas replied that “he would be glad to carry out” the task after he

⁷⁷ “Memorandum From the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency (King) to the Deputy Directory for Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner),” 11 January 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 3.

⁷⁸ “Memorandum From the Acting Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency ([name not declassified]) to the Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (Helms),” 17 March 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 13.

⁷⁹ “Telegram From the CIA Station in [place not declassified] to the Central Intelligence Agency,” 12 September 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 26-27.

had gained control of Guatemala.⁸⁰ The individuals are not named so their ultimate fate is unknown. This point does illustrate that Castillo Armas knew how to deal with his allies who were essentially more powerful than he was. The promises he made ensured a steady flow of money, weapons, and men.

One other counterrevolutionary appears to have been seeking foreign support as well, Carlos Simmons, though he was no where near as successful as Castillo Armas. Simmons found some support from a “prominent Mexican anti-Communist,” though the CIA does not specify who or what group that was and had no information on what kind of support was supplied, whether it was moral or material.⁸¹ Simmons does not appear to have support from Somoza, Trujillo, or any others supports that Castillo Armas obtained. The failure of Simmons to forge relations between any other significant opponents, foreign or domestic, of the Arbenz government eventually led to the collapse of his counterrevolutionary group in 1953 when he tried to overthrow the government on his own. This episode will require further explanation in the next chapter.

By the time the United States decided to play a greater role in undermining the Arbenz government, Castillo Armas had already established a network of supporters. Córdova, Somoza, Trujillo, and the United Fruit Company all agreed that Castillo Armas had the best chance overthrow the Arbenz government. While the CIA recognized other rebels like Simmons and Ydígoras, and Colonel Arturo Ramirez, Castillo Armas

⁸⁰ “Memorandum From Jacob R. Seekford to the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency (King),” 18 September 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 27.

⁸¹ “Memorandum From the Acting Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency ([name not declassified]) to the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (Helms),” 17 September 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 14.

appeared to have the greatest numbers of supporters both foreign and domestic. He presented himself as a “hard worker,” “studious,” and “serious” about overthrowing the Arbenz government. He also made himself flexible and “amenable to idea.”⁸² The United States had hoped Castillo Armas or another counterrevolutionary could overthrow the Arbenz government without any direct assistance from the CIA. However, while the CIA heard good things about the counterrevolutionaries, the Agency realized that the “success of any action undertaken without further outside support [was] questionable.”⁸³ His determination maintained the possibility of deposing Arbenz. Castillo Armas attempted to get enough outside support from Somoza and Trujillo, but the CIA did not think their support strengthened the counterrevolutionary forces significantly enough to threaten the Arbenz government. After careful consideration, the CIA approved Project A, later known as Operation PBFORTUNE, on September 8, 1952.⁸⁴

Operation PBFORTUNE had limited objectives. Simply put, the operation sought to strengthen the counterrevolutionary forces by providing money and arms. The CIA also encouraged Somoza and Gálvez to provide more support to Castillo Armas. The operation encountered problems almost immediately. The inclusion of Somoza proved problematic when he began openly discussing the operation. The American embassy in Guatemala heard of the Somoza’s loquaciousness and reported “President Somoza of Nicaragua apparently has gained the impression, however mistakenly, that a military

⁸² “Memorandum From the Acting Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency ([name not declassified]) to the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (Helms),” 17 September 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 15.

⁸³ “Memorandum From ([name not declassified]) to the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency to the Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner),” 9 July 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 21.

⁸⁴ “Report,” 8 July 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 29-30.

venture directed at the overthrow of the present Guatemalan Government would have the blessing of the United States.”⁸⁵ The loss of secrecy prompted Secretary of State Dean Acheson to call off the shipment of arms to Castillo Armas to prevent further diplomatic disaster.⁸⁶ Without supplies on the way, the CIA worked quickly to find money to maintain the forces under Castillo Armas, which ended up totaling \$15,000.⁸⁷

The loss of secrecy made it difficult for Castillo Armas and the CIA to work, but they did not give up. Just three weeks after the operation had been revealed, Castillo Armas told the CIA “We shall be forced to rebuild almost from the beginning... We must continue fighting.”⁸⁸ The CIA agreed and continued to meet with Castillo Armas when possible. For months, Castillo Armas attempted to rebuild his troops and organization with the aid of the CIA. The CIA kept Somoza and Trujillo at a distance this time and even questioned whether they could be of further use. By the end of 1952, it appeared that Castillo Armas had recovered much of his forces and the CIA became increasingly optimistic that he could overthrow the government. The CIA concluded in December of 1952 that Castillo Armas had “reached a high degree of organization and [had] never been in a better state of readiness” and suggested that his group attack no “later than the first of February 1953.”⁸⁹

⁸⁵ “Memorandum by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Mann) to the Secretary of State,” 3 October 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Volume IV: The American Republics* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 1042.

⁸⁶ Cullather, 31.

⁸⁷ “Memorandum for the Record,” 9 July 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 37.

⁸⁸ “Memorandum from Jacob R. Seekford to the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency (King),” 28 October 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954*, 46.

⁸⁹ “Report Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency,” 1 December 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 53.

Two months after it seemed all of Castillo Armas's work was lost, he had regained his forces and reached a new peak of power. He boasted he had over 14,000 men on his side throughout Guatemala, a mixture of civilians and soldiers and many without weapons.⁹⁰ It is unlikely that he actually amassed a force that large given that a year and a half later he had less than two hundred men.⁹¹ More importantly, Castillo Armas urged more support. He claimed he had men, but the majority of them had no weapons. In this instance, Castillo Armas, while willing to work with the CIA, understood that his success depended on how much he could get from the United States. He knew the CIA was willing to support him, especially after Somoza endangered the entire operation. He also knew he could bide his time. The situation looked worse in Guatemala as Arbenz's land reform began expropriating lands from the United Fruit Company in December of 1952.⁹² Castillo Armas tested the CIA's commitment. February 1953 came and he made no attack on the Guatemalan government. Rather than sending counterrevolutionary forces in Guatemala, Castillo Armas took the time to write *Yo Acuso*, a book denouncing the workings of Arévalo and Arbenz.⁹³ In the meantime, the CIA and the State Department continued to assess the communist influence in

⁹⁰ "Report Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency," 1 December 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 53-54.

⁹¹ Immerman, 3.

⁹² Immerman, 80.

⁹³ There do not appear to be surviving copies of *Yo Acuso*; however the CIA noted it and kept a table of contents and the book's introduction for their records. The CIA had been critical of Castillo Armas's lack of political experience and this may have been his attempt at demonstrating to the Agency that he could develop some basic political ideology. "Coronel Carlos Castillo Armas," 15 January 1953, Central Intelligence Agency, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/>.

Guatemala and the affect the agrarian land reform had on the country and American business interests.⁹⁴

With the coming of the Eisenhower administration in 1953, the CIA and the State Department gained new initiative. Whether Castillo Armas waited specifically for Eisenhower to take office cannot be determined, but it ultimately helped his cause. CIA Director Allen Dulles almost immediately brought up the idea of adding a “coordinated effort in the political field” to the operation in Guatemala in March of 1953, in order to improve the chances of Castillo Armas’s success.⁹⁵ With his brother John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State, it is possible some discussion regarding a greater effort from the State Department had already taken place by the time Allen Dulles informed the CIA. The cooperation between the CIA and the State Department would form the basis of Operation PBSUCCESS, which will be discussed further in next chapter.

From August 1951 to March 1953, Castillo Armas had solidified his relationship with the CIA. He had grown from a trusted informant to the choice candidate for an operation against the Guatemalan government. While Operation PBFORTUNE had limited resources and goals, the inclusion of Castillo Armas as the primary recipient of funds and the subsequent intervention to help him after Somoza blew his cover demonstrated that the CIA considered him a valuable resource. As the U.S. government looked at Guatemala as a breeding ground for communism, the CIA believed Castillo

⁹⁴ “Intelligence Report Prepared in the Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State” 1 January 1953, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 56-66; “Intelligence Report Prepared in the Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State,” 5 March 1953, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 70-79.

⁹⁵ “Memorandum for the Record,” 8 March 1953, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 79.

Armas stood the best chance of overthrowing the Arbenz government. He only needed the proper support to be successful.

Chapter 5

CASTILLO ARMAS AND OPERATION PBSUCCESS

Years of working against the Guatemalan government began to pay off for Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. The CIA had promised their support during Operation PBFORTUNE and kept in contact with him as the new Eisenhower administration came to power in early 1953. Allen Dulles started to consider expanding the operation beyond funding and arming counterrevolutionaries in early March of 1953. The failure of one counterrevolutionary later that month demonstrated how strong the Arbenz government had become and the weakness of the antigovernment forces.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, other counterrevolutionaries sought foreign support including Carlos Simmons, an anti-communist newspaper editor and employee of the Tropical Radio Company, which was owned by the United Fruit Company. Simmons led an anti-communist group within Guatemala and found some support from the United Fruit Company and President Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. He also gained support from Juan Córdova Cerna.⁹⁶ The CIA recognized Simmons as a Guatemalan rebel in March of 1952, but does not appear to have given him the same support they gave Castillo Armas. In July 1952, the CIA recommended giving \$225,000 to Guatemalan rebels and noted that Simmons needed \$50,000, the remaining \$175,000 going to Castillo Armas.⁹⁷ Whether Simmons actually received any of this money is uncertain, as later

⁹⁶ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 220-221; Immerman, 142; James, 253.

⁹⁷ "Memorandum From [name not declassified] to the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency to the Deputy Directory for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner)," 9 July 1952, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 21-22.

documents solely discuss arming and funding Castillo Armas. While Simmons appeared to have some supporters, the CIA probably did not consider his chances of success as great as Castillo Armas because he had no military experience.

Unable to gain any further support, Simmons decided to try his luck on March 29, 1953, at Salamá, a town surrounded by banana plantations. Accounts vary on who helped Simmons during the revolt and how many men he rallied together. According to the CIA, Colonel Julio Pablo Garcia y Garcia and Colonel Roberto Barrios Peña helped plan the attack, but were not present during the actual battle.⁹⁸ After Salamá, Barrios and Garcia continued to work against the Arbenz regime and the CIA recognized them as potential allies. César Izaguirre, a Guatemalan lawyer whom Arévalo banished in 1945 for plotting against the government, also appears to have assisted in Simmons's attack.⁹⁹ As for how many troops Simmons gathered, the estimates range from one hundred to two hundred.¹⁰⁰

Simmons's attack proved futile. After securing Salamá, Simmons and Izaguirre fled the area, knowing government troops were on their way. The government soldiers easily defeated the rebels, killing twenty and imprisoning the remainder. More importantly, the Arbenz government began cracking down on other potential rebels within Guatemala, including Córdova, who had remained in Guatemala to support Castillo Armas. Córdova fled to Honduras.¹⁰¹ This left the CIA and Castillo Armas scrambling once again to recover their strength. Two months after the attack on Salamá,

⁹⁸ "Background Information on Castillo Armas and the Salama Uprising," 29 March 1953, [database online] Central Intelligence Agency, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/> (accessed August 24, 2011).

⁹⁹ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 220-221; "Cable to Department of State From Guatemala City Re: Guatemala 1954 Coup," 30 March 1953, [database online] Central Intelligence Agency, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/> (accessed August 24, 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Cullather, 33; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 208.

¹⁰¹ Cullather, 34; "Sorpresivo Golpe Armado en Baja Verapaz Dominan," *El Imparcial*, 30 March 1953, 1.

the State Department and the CIA concluded that the remaining opposition elements in Guatemala had “little capacity to organize for effective counteraction.” The U.S. considered the possibility of military intervention from El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, but believed the “Guatemalan Army could defeat any force” those three nations could gather.¹⁰² If the United States wanted to remove Arbenz from power, it would have to require a much larger operation beyond Operation PBFORTUNE.

This operation would require a coordinated effort by the CIA and the State Department to put diplomatic and covert pressure on the Arbenz government. It also required a Guatemalan counterrevolutionary to replace Arbenz. After working with the CIA for three years, Castillo Armas became the clear choice, but there were others.

On August 19, 1953, the National Security Council condemned Guatemala. It believed communism influenced the Arbenz government, which in turned undermined American interests and national security. The U.S. begun to fear an alliance between the Soviet Union and Guatemala and the possibility of Soviet bases built in the Western Hemisphere. The NSC proposed a few different policy recommendations, including direct military intervention, covert intervention, inaction, and firm persuasion.¹⁰³ The first idea, direct military intervention, would have been more palatable earlier in the twentieth century, when American marines frequently intervened in Central America.¹⁰⁴ However, the work of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy to reverse the

¹⁰² “National Intelligence Estimate: Probable Developments in Guatemala” 19 May 1953, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Volume IV: The American Republics* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 1062, 1071.

¹⁰³ “Draft Policy Paper Prepared in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs: NSC Guatemala” 19 August 1953, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Volume IV: The American Republics*, 1074-1084.

¹⁰⁴ Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America’s Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 3-5.

previous decades of intervention helped bring more cooperation between the U.S. and Latin America, which later included the signing of the Rio Pact of 1947, a defensive pact between the U.S. and nearly all nations within Latin America, including Guatemala.¹⁰⁵ Sending in the marines in the 1950s and overthrowing a democratically elected government could have undermined America's position as leader of the free world and subsequent relations with Latin America. As for the latter two options, doing nothing and "firm persuasion," neither seemed able to produce the desired result. Doing nothing would have allowed the Arbenz government to continue pursuing agrarian land reform, which would have limited the power of the United Fruit Company and other American businesses in Guatemala. Talks between the State Department and the Arbenz government on the issue of communism and the interests of American businesses were unproductive and persuasion had already failed in the eyes of the United States. Covert intervention remained the only option, even though the current operation, Operation PBFORTUNE, appeared to be struggling. The U.S. eventually took the course of covert intervention, expanding Operation PBFORTUNE into Operation PBSUCCESS on September 11, 1953.

The document outlining the initial proposal of Operation PBSUCCESS identified Castillo Armas as the "main operational asset immediately available to the CIA."¹⁰⁶ Unlike earlier reports, there was no mention of other rebels working against the Arbenz government. Instead, the focus was solely on Castillo Armas and the work he and the

¹⁰⁵ Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 40.

¹⁰⁶ "Memorandum for the Record," 11 September 1953, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 104.

Agency had already done during the previous two years. Only later in the operation did the CIA take notice of other potential rebels. At this time, the CIA considered Castillo Armas their man for the operation.

The CIA outlined nine different tasks for Operation PBSUCCESS, ranging from discrediting the Guatemalan government and applying economic pressure to aiding friendly anti-communist nations like Nicaragua and conducting psychological warfare. Castillo Armas would play a role in two of these tasks, psychological warfare and paramilitary action. For psychological warfare, Castillo Armas and an unknown agent planned to use “contacts within the press, radio, church, army, and other organized elements susceptible to rumor, pamphleteering, poster campaigns, and other subservice action.” They intended to convert as many Guatemalans to their cause and decrease the morale of the Guatemalan population and the Guatemala Army. In addition to psychological warfare, Castillo Armas’s men would eventually attack Guatemala City in an attempt to spark a revolution. Unfortunately, from their perspective, the Guatemalan Army had nearly 3,000 troops in the capitol while Castillo Armas only had around 300 men. The CIA hoped he could strengthen his forces to at least 3,000 to match the troops in Guatemala City. The CIA proposed a budget of nearly \$3,000,000 for all parts of the operation, a significant increase from the \$225,000 recommended for Operation PBFORTUNE.¹⁰⁷ And many of those funds went towards training and arming rebels and conducting psychological warfare, all of which supported Castillo Armas.

¹⁰⁷ “Memorandum for the Record,” 11 September 1953, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 106-109.

It took three months for CIA Director Allen Dulles to approve the \$3 million budget and Operation PBSUCCESS. In the meantime, the CIA reexamined potential rebel forces. Many historians who have written about Operation PBSUCCESS have claimed that Castillo Armas was not the primary choice for the CIA. Some claim that the CIA ranked General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes and Juan Córdova Cerna of the United Fruit Company above Castillo Armas and approached them with the prospect of an operation first.¹⁰⁸ Yet the documentation does not suggest that anyone else held the attention of the CIA better than Castillo Armas, the Agency had work with him for years, while other dissenters became more obscure or failed to build any significant resistance.

Guatemalan oppositional leaders met on August 31, 1953, with the key exception of Castillo Armas. These leaders included a variety of ex-Guatemalan military officers, such as Colonel Jorge Barrios Solares, Colonel Julio Pablo Garcia, and Colonel Roberto Barrios Peña. Civilians were also counted among the rebel leaders, including Carlos A. Luna, Manuel José Ares y Valladares. Ydígoras also agreed to support the unification of oppositional forces. The obvious question is why did Castillo Armas refuse to join other Guatemalan rebels? Most likely, he did not want to work with them because they only appeared when the CIA started considering more drastic involvement in overthrowing the Arbenz government. The CIA heard of the August meeting a month after it had taken place. The unified rebels complained about the favoritism the CIA and the United Fruit

¹⁰⁸ A brief overview of the historical literature demonstrates this point. Thomas McCann's account claims Ydígoras was the preferred choice of the CIA and UFCO. José M. Aybar de Soto also places Ydígoras above Castillo Armas, preferred by the CIA and UFCO as well. Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer's work put the order as such: Ydígoras, Córdova, and Castillo Armas. Immerman follows the same order while Gleijeses narrows the field down back to Ydígoras and Castillo Armas. McCann, 60; de Soto, 248-249; Schlesinger and Kinzer, 120-122; Immerman, 141-143; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 248-250.

Company showed Castillo Armas in terms of money and material. They claimed he was “deceitful” and caused “great damage” to the anticommunist forces gathered against Arbenz. They demanded the Agency support them instead of Castillo Armas.¹⁰⁹ The CIA dismissed the complaints and continued to support their long-time ally Castillo Armas.

As for Ydígoras, Castillo Armas decided to handle the situation personally. The two met on a few occasions, including one as far back as 1950. In 1952, the two discussed working together and proposed a “gentleman’s pact.” Ydígoras promised to support Castillo Armas’s forces. In return, Ydígoras demanded to become president of the new government at some future date. In August 1953, the two met again to renew the pact.¹¹⁰ Therefore, before Operation PBSUCCESS had the green light, Castillo Armas had already eliminated his primary competition. The CIA, of course, had other reasons for not considering Ydígoras, particularly his history with the Ubico regime. In that sense, he represented the older generation and installing him into a new government would not have gone over well with the Guatemalan people, diminishing the chances of success. Fortunately, the CIA did not have to make that decision, Castillo Armas already convinced Ydígoras not to lead the counterrevolution.

The second potential candidate who is usually associated with Operation PBSUCCESS is Juan Córdova Cerna. Just as with Ydígoras, Castillo Armas met Córdova much earlier in 1950. Rather than challenge Castillo Armas, Córdova helped him. He

¹⁰⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation,” 8 October 1953, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 117-118; “Memorandum Que los Comites Military Politico Que Representan las Fuerzas Unificads de Guatemala” 13 October 1953, [database online] Central Intelligence Agency, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/> (accessed August 24, 2011).

¹¹⁰ Ydígoras mentions the “gentleman’s pact” in his own account of the situation, but claims that the pact was to ensure “free elections,” rather than the presidency for himself. Ydígoras, 50-51; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 222; Schlesinger and Kinzer, 124-125.

introduced Castillo Armas to Ydígoras and possibly the United Fruit Company. Córdova trusted the abilities of Castillo Armas so much so that he allowed his son to participate in the attack on the Aurora military base in 1950. Even after the failure at Aurora, which resulted in his son's death, he continued to work with Castillo Armas. It seems then that Córdova would not have accepted the commanding role in a CIA sponsored rebels because he already trusted Castillo Armas to do the necessary work. After Salamá, Córdova became more reliant on Castillo Armas since he could no longer work within Guatemala. The organization Córdova organized now fell under the command of Castillo Armas.¹¹¹

Historians who mention Córdova view him as a likely candidate because he was not associated with the military and therefore hoped he would appeal to the Guatemalan middle class upon taking office.¹¹² However, the Guatemalan middle class already accepted that the military could support their interests when they elected Arbenz, a military officer. The Guatemalan military demonstrated with the overthrow of Ponce in 1944 that it shared a similar distrust of dictatorship. As a member of the 1944 Revolution, Castillo Armas could better support those ideas than Córdova and recall his association with one of the 1944 revolutionary leaders, Francisco Arana. He continued to hope that his link to Arana could inspire both the Guatemalan people and the military. Though this never happened, his position and ideology seemed more appealing than those of either Ydígoras or Córdova. The two other potential candidates were not candidates at all.

¹¹¹ "Revolutionary Movement in Guatemala," 5 May 1953, [database online] Central Intelligence Agency, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/> (accessed August 24, 2011).

¹¹² Schlesinger and Kinzer, 121.

Castillo Armas had convinced both of them to support him long before Operation PBSUCCESS began. If the CIA considered Ydígoras or Córdova as potential leaders in the operation against Arbenz, then both of them would have declined and put Castillo Armas ahead of them.

As for other potential leaders, the only two mentioned are Colonel Julio Pablo Garcia y Garcia and Colonel Roberto Barrios Peña. However, the CIA would never consider these two as potential candidates because their failure at Salamá caused significant damage to the CIA's operations in Guatemala, most notably Arbenz forcing Córdova out of Guatemala. As mentioned above, Garcia and Barrios complained about Castillo Armas, but the CIA would not take their complaints seriously. They appeared more jealous than concerned about overthrowing the Arbenz government. Their efforts to "unite" oppositional forces proved meaningless without the support of Castillo Armas. The CIA would not turn their back on a long-time ally.

When Dulles approved Operation PBSUCCESS in December 1953, it had many components. It involved a coordinated effort between the CIA, the State Department, and the U.S. Army. Though the U.S. did much of the heavy lifting from this point on, Castillo Armas was no less significant. He continued to organize the rebel forces in Honduras with the help of CIA agents. He called his group "El Movimient de Liberación Nacional," the National Liberation Movement. With the help of the CIA, his Liberation Movement began broadcasting a radio program called *La Voz de la Liberación*, "The Voice of the Liberation." It announced the Liberation Movement's struggle against communism in

Guatemala and called for Guatemalans to help overthrow the Arbenz government.¹¹³ As Castillo Armas work in Honduras, the State Department worked to isolate Guatemala from the rest of the world.

The State Department began denouncing the Arbenz government's affiliation with communism. It cut off foreign aid to Guatemala and released propaganda depicting the communist influence in the Arbenz government. In March 1954, the Organization of American States met in Caracas, Venezuela. The U.S. influenced other Latin American nations to sign an agreement to keep international communism out of the Western Hemisphere. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles designed the agreement in such a way to justify intervention in Guatemala. The Guatemalan Foreign Minister Guillermo Toriello Garrido objected to the agreement, raising the question, "What is international Communism?"¹¹⁴ American influence muted his objection. With the resolution in the OAS passed, American intervention could be justified, though the U.S. remained secretive about its actual operations in Guatemala.¹¹⁵ The work done by the State Department to isolate Guatemala eventually forced Arbenz to turn to actual communist nations for assistance.

In May 1954, the Arbenz government purchased arms from Czechoslovakia. The secret deal between Guatemala and Czechoslovakia did not go unnoticed. The CIA discovered the arms shipment, but not before it reached its destination. The U.S. response

¹¹³ "Telegram From Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida to the Central Intelligence Agency," 2 March 1954, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 211; Cullather 75.

¹¹⁴ Guillermo Toriello Garrido, *La Batalla de Guatemala* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1955) 61-63; Immerman, 143-149; "Minutes of a Meeting, Held in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Holland)" 10 May 1954, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Volume IV: The American Republics*, 1102-1103.

¹¹⁵ "Memorandum for the Record," 14 March 1954, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 221.

was threefold. First, it took the situation as an affirmation of Guatemala's communist affiliations, ignoring the fact that the U.S. had effectively isolated Guatemala from other nations. Secondly, Castillo Armas's men attempted to destroy the shipment in transit from the port to the capitol. His men were determined, but unsuccessful. Thirdly, the U.S. further expanded its operations in Guatemala with Operation HARDROCK, an embargo enforced by the U.S. Navy to prevent any further weapons entering Guatemala.¹¹⁶ By the end of May, Arbenz and his government were isolated from much of the rest of the world. Soon, Castillo Armas and his men would march towards Guatemala City and try to start a new revolution.

On June 15, 1954, Castillo Armas organized his men, which numbered nearly 500, and prepared to cross the borders of Honduras and El Salvador into Guatemala. The plan called for four teams to secure a number of different military stations and sabotage railways and communications. Along the way, the Liberation Movement hoped to attract civilians and convert military soldiers to their cause, further strengthening their forces.¹¹⁷ The rebel forces faced problems almost immediately.

El Salvadorian police officers stopped and arrested rebel troops trying to cross the border on June 17th. Castillo Armas managed to have those men deported, but Salvadorian police confiscated their weapons. Despite this early setback, Castillo Armas led his band of rebels across the border on June 18th. He personally led his forces to

¹¹⁶ Cullather, 80-83; Immerman, 156.

¹¹⁷ "Dispatch From Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida to All PBSUCCESS Stations," 13 June 1954, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 324-328; "Telegram From Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida to the Central Intelligence Agency," 14 June 1954, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 221; Cullather, 87.

Esquipulas, a small town near the Honduras-Guatemalan border. The next day, Guatemalan rebel planes began bombing another small town, Gualán.¹¹⁸ These initial movements hoped to spark widespread dissent, but did not.

Castillo Armas continued his march and captured Esquipulas on the June 20. The same day, another rebel group under his command met resistance near Gualán. Despite having a larger force than the small garrison at Gualán, the rebels were defeated, most killed or captured. Another defeat came at Puerto Barrios the following day on June 21. Castillo Armas's largest force, 170 men, attempted to take the port, but met strong resistance from the local police and dock workers. Rather than continue fighting, the rebel troops abandoned the cause and fled back to Honduras. The rebels then sent a small plane to bomb Guatemala City, but the attack failed to cause significant damage.¹¹⁹ By the 22nd, Castillo Armas's forces had been stopped. While he waited for reinforcements, the Guatemalan and American governments took the battle to the United Nations.

Guatemalan Foreign Minister Guillermo Toriello went to the United Nations Security Council to request an intervention. He claimed that Nicaragua, Honduras, and the United Fruit Company organized the rebel forces and demanded that the United Nation pass a resolution to stop member nations from funding these rebels. The U.S. was put into a precarious position. Supporting the measure would undermine the operation while opposing it would force the U.S. to use its veto power, which would have been the first veto since the founding of the UN. The State Department and CIA worked quickly to

¹¹⁸ "Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency to Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida," 19 June 1954, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 350-351; Cullather, 88-89.

¹¹⁹ "Telegram From the CIA Station in Guatemala to Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida," 22 June 1954, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 370; Cullather, 90.

find a solution. The problem lay with Great Britain and France, both of which supported Toriello's claim. U.S. Ambassador to the UN Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. met with the French and British representatives and demanded they withdraw their support for Guatemala or else the U.S. would start questioning their actions in their colonies. The two nations capitulated. Then the U.S. requested that the Organization of American States, which it had influenced earlier in the year, be in charge of investigating Toriello's claims.¹²⁰ The power of the State Department prevented other nations from getting into America's business and allowed Castillo Armas to regroup his forces.

As planned, some Guatemalans joined Castillo Armas's Liberation Movement, though not nearly as many as he or the CIA wanted. He built up nearly 1,200 men in Esquipulas, the one town he could capture. However, the other rebel groups failed to recruit any additional men and in most cases began to abandon the cause all together. In the meantime, Arbenz organized his troops in Guatemala City to go out and destroy the rebellion. Some Guatemalan officers started to become fearful of a more direct intervention by the U.S., namely the sending in of U.S. Marines. This started the disunity between Arbenz and his military and also led to a victory for Castillo Armas. On June 23, Castillo Armas captured Chiquimula. The garrison there surrendered without a fight. Two days later, Guatemalan rebels successfully bombed the Matamoros fortress in Guatemala City. Castillo Armas then attempted to take another town, Ipala, but was forced back by

¹²⁰ Cullather, 93-94; Immerman, 171-172.

government troops.¹²¹ The continued pressure worried Guatemala Army officers. They realized that Arbenz had to go or else the U.S. might take more drastic measures.

On June 27, Arbenz resigned and gave power to Colonel Carlos Enrique Díaz, a close friend of Arbenz and former classmate from the military academy. Díaz vowed to keep fighting Castillo Armas in order to preserve the ideas of the 1944 Revolution. He then formed a military junta to deal with the problem. Even though Arbenz was gone, the U.S. still wanted to see Castillo Armas in power. They could not trust anyone else. Ambassador John Peurifoy personally called Díaz to tell him “you are not convenient for American foreign policy.” He resigned from the junta the next day. A cease-fire was called while members of the junta shifted. On July 1, Castillo Armas became a member of the military junta. He then went to work building his government. Two months later, Castillo Armas assumed the role of provincial president of Guatemala and began repealing the reforms under the Arbenz government.¹²²

Despite potential competition from other rebels, setbacks, and failures on the battlefield, Castillo Armas constantly remained the choice leader for the United States.¹²³ His determination against the Arbenz government paid off in the end. Without the diplomatic support of the U.S., Castillo Armas’s rebellion would likely not have succeeded. But he proved himself a reliable and enduring ally during Operation PBSUCCESS. The CIA encountered a variety of new challenges during the operation, but never withdrew its support for Castillo Armas.

¹²¹ Cullather, 97-100.

¹²² Cullather, 101-104

¹²³ “Telegram From Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida to the Central Intelligence Agency,” 1 July 1954, in *FRUS: 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 413.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION: PRESIDENT CASTILLO ARMAS

In October 1954, Guatemala elected Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas president. However, unlike the elections of Arévalo or Arbenz, this election was carefully controlled. Castillo Armas carefully screened out political opponents, especially communists. He also designated himself as the only official candidate. In the end, he received 99 percent of the vote with over 486,000 votes cast.¹²⁴ After his election, Castillo Armas spent his time repealing the work of Arévalo and Arbenz, purging the nation of communists, and promoting his idea of a “Nueva Vida,” or “New Life” for Guatemalans.¹²⁵ Despite numerous setbacks and defeats, Castillo Armas, with the necessary support from the United States achieved his goal and avenged the death of his friend Francisco Arana.

However, his presidency did not go as smoothly as he had hoped. Dissent appeared immediately after he became provincial president. In August 1954, a group of cadets from the Escuela Politécnica, the military academy Castillo Armas directed back in 1947, revolted. They wanted to disrupt a military parade in Castillo Armas’s honor. They succeeded in defeating forces loyal to Castillo Armas. He called on the U.S. Embassy to intervene once more and the U.S. threatened to send in troops if the cadets did not surrender. The rebellion ended and Castillo Armas imprisoned the rebels and closed the

¹²⁴ Immerman, 177.

¹²⁵ Stephen M. Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000), 34-35; Secretaría General de la Presidencia. *Le realidad de un mensaje* (Guatemala City, 1957), 7.

Escuela Politécnica.¹²⁶ Dissent did not end with the cadets. Two years later in 1956, university students protested against the Castillo Armas regime. The students demanded that the president repeal anticommunist laws, give up U.S. military aid, and allow exiles to return home. The protest turned violent with five students killed and over forty students and police officers wounded. Castillo Armas imprisoned and deported over one hundred protestors.¹²⁷ However, with the United States in full support of Castillo Armas, any dissent proved futile.

When things in Guatemala seemed to calm, Castillo Armas visited the United States. In late 1955, the Americans greeted him as a hero who triumphed over communism. A great celebration in New York City was held for his arrival. He met with President Eisenhower at the Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in Denver; Eisenhower had recently suffered from a heart attack. With Eisenhower in the hospital, Vice-President Richard Nixon showed Castillo Armas around, inviting him to official White House dinners and promoting the victory over communism. The two had met earlier in the year when Nixon visited Guatemala in February.¹²⁸ The support for Castillo Armas from the government and the press reached its height.

Unfortunately for Castillo Armas and the United States, the victory did not last. In July 1957, Romeo Vásquez Sánchez, a palace guard, shot Castillo Armas, killing him instantly. Vásquez then fled and was found dead soon after, apparently from suicide. Why Vásquez shot Castillo Armas remains unknown. Castillo Armas's government

¹²⁶ Streeter, 42-43; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 357-360.

¹²⁷ Streeter, 46.

¹²⁸ "Guatemalans Welcome the Touring Nixons to Capital," 14 February 1955, *New York Times*, 1; "Castillo Begins State Visit in U.S.," 1 November 1955, *New York Times*, 16; Immerman, 181.

immediately suspected a communist plot. However, later historians came up with other theories including, President Trujillo of the Dominican Republic sending Vásquez to assassinate Castillo Armas because he did not repay a loan. Other theories point to dissent within Castillo Armas's own government.¹²⁹ Regardless, his death marked another turning point in Guatemalan history. One year after his death, General Ydígoras won the presidential election, beating José Luis Cruz Salazar. Castillo Armas had personally chosen Cruz Salazar to succeed him, but the election disrupted those plans.¹³⁰ Ydígoras's presidency oversaw a new era in which Guatemala plunged into a civil war, lasting over thirty years.

Whether or not Castillo Armas could have prevented a devastating civil war can never be known. However, understanding his legacy is important in understanding a significant event in the Cold War and how the United States sought out allies in the war against communism. Castillo Armas stoked the flames of action by denouncing Arbenz as a communist and present himself as a determined and organized ally for the United States. Despite repeated failures, he endured and carefully learned from his mistakes. Rather than rush into another coup attempt, he took his time to encourage greater involvement from the United States. He befriended key competitors and ignored rebel leaders he knew the United States would not consider. He realized that only the United States could have overthrown the Arbenz government, but also understood in the new Cold War era that the U.S. did not want to simply send in the U.S. Marines. Instead, through the early connections with the CIA, Castillo Armas learned that the U.S. needed

¹²⁹ Streeter, 54-55.

¹³⁰ Streeter, 68, 73.

to work covertly. This placed Castillo Armas in a position to serve the U.S. in order to achieve his own goals.

The fall of Arbenz disillusioned many Guatemalans, including Arbenz. Guillermo Toriello, Foreign Minister under Arbenz, immediately wrote an account of the 1944 Revolution and the fall of Arbenz. He called Castillo Armas the “Judas” of Guatemala and denounced the pact he made with the U.S. State Department, UFCO, and the CIA.¹³¹ Arbenz lived in exile for the next seventeen years, moving between Mexico, Cuba, and Europe. He began to view himself as a failure. In 1971, he drowned in a bathtub in Mexico.¹³² Despite his tragic fate, the Guatemalan people recognized him as an influential leader. In 1995, his remains were brought to Guatemala and over 100,000 people attended his ceremony.¹³³ In May 2011, the Guatemalan government sought to restore Arbenz’s honor by recognizing his contributions to Guatemalan history.¹³⁴

Castillo Armas’s legacy is not nearly as prominent, though he did have a short period of popularity in the U.S. This included praise by the government, the American press, and even a children’s book entitled *Fire of Freedom: The Story of Col. Carlos Castillo Armas*, written by Jack Steffan in 1963. While he may only be remembered as the counterrevolutionary that ended a democratic state, he was not simply a pawn in America’s Cold War game. His work with the CIA, UFCO, and other counterrevolutionaries made him the ideal candidate for one of America’s earliest covert

¹³¹ Toriello, 49.

¹³² Schlesinger and Kinzer, 231.

¹³³ Kinzer, 129.

¹³⁴ “Guatemala to Restore Legacy of a President the U.S. Deposed,” 24 May 2011, *New York Times*, A6.

overthrows. His infamy cannot only be attributed to the CIA's choice, but his own actions that put him into a position of opportunity.

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