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**Operation PBSuccess: The CIA and the Covert Nature
of American Foreign Intervention in Guatemala**

Fiona Schultz

Senior Undergraduate Thesis for the Denison History Department

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Introducing Operation PBSuccess

In June of 1954, democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala resigned from his position of power. It was not Arbenz's own Guatemala that celebrated his resignation but rather the orchestrator of the coup initiated to oust him: the United States Central Intelligence Agency. Through psychological and paramilitary pressures, the CIA organized and implemented its first coup in Latin America, thus accomplishing its primary target: regime change. President Arbenz was progressive; he was left-leaning, reform-minded, and anti-American. According to CIA records, he was even a Communist. For a country that had been declared a friend and neighbor of the United States for many decades, this was unacceptable. Depicted as a threat to American interests, the United States staged a coup in Guatemala that toppled a democracy and instilled a dictatorship. The coup, while immediately celebrated as a success by the CIA following its execution, had fatal results that questioned the effectiveness of American covert action. PBSuccess triggered domestic corruption and instability in Guatemala that ultimately led to the Guatemalan Civil War, which began in 1960 and did not see an end until 1996. Political violence from the conflict took the lives of over 200,000 Guatemalans, a reality that Guatemala continues to grapple with. The repercussions of this operation beg the question: Did the short-term accomplishments of Operation PBSuccess make it an overall success?

The CIA, established in 1947, caused both triumph and controversy for the American reputation abroad through covert action. Covert action referred to secret American action conducted in order to produce certain political results. Utilized by the CIA during the Cold War, covert action reached nearly every corner of the world; from the sprawling islands of Indonesia to the landlocked Poland. Local politics became American issues during the Cold War as this

strategy was “Employed at the margins of conflict to shift patterns of trust and allegiance,” typically to fit American interests.¹ At the time of the Eisenhower presidency, Allen Dulles ran the CIA and his brother, John Foster Dulles, served as the Secretary of State. Due to this familial relationship, the CIA and State Department were as close as the brothers themselves in the 1950s. Therefore, the CIA was used to the utmost advantage by the State Department in the early years of the Cold War. As a way of producing favorable political conditions abroad, the United States engaged in covert action to pursue their ideological agenda during the Cold War. Even a small Latin American country tucked away in America’s own backyard warranted intervention through covert action, according to the Eisenhower administration. On June 27th, 1954, President Eisenhower and his cabinet members shook hands and sighed in relief, for the CIA had successfully coerced President Arbenz to step down through covert action.

American intervention stemmed from the left-wing stir President Arbenz and his administration caused in Guatemala. In 1950, after decades of authoritarian rule, Jacobo Arbenz Guzman won the presidential election; he took office the following year as the country’s second democratically elected president. In June of 1952, one year into his presidency, Arbenz enacted his Agrarian Reform Law. As this type of reform was key to his platform, Decree 900 sought to redistribute unused land. From the CIA perspective, this would make “Land available to all Guatemalans in the Communist pattern.”² This leftist reform, labeled Communist by nature, clashed with American-owned United Fruit Company’s operations and even led to a major expropriation of UFC land the following year. UFC’s issues with Arbenz may not have served as

¹ Michael Warner, “A Matter of Trust: Covert Action Reconsidered,” *Center for the Study of Intelligence* vol 63 no 4 (2019):

<https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/studies-in-intelligence/volume-63-no-4/a-matter-of-trust-covert-action-reconsidered/>, 33.

² “Summary” in “Memorandum From [name not declassified] of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency to the Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner),” July 9, 1952, October 10 1952, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala Collection*, Document 12, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d12>, 20.

the primary motivator for American intervention in Guatemala but Arbenz's "Hardening anti-U.S. policy" put his democratic regime right in the American line of sight.³ As American tensions with Guatemala worsened, PBSuccess was approved for implementation in late 1953. Following confirmation of the operation, the CIA sent various officers to PBSuccess mission stations positioned around Latin America, including its headquarters site which was based in Florida. Beginning in January of 1954, the CIA waged a psychological warfare campaign composed of anti-Arbenz and anti-Communist propaganda that targeted Arbenz's supporters, the greater Guatemalan population, and the President himself. Doing so applied psychological pressures that would ultimately prompt Arbenz to resign. As the CIA propaganda war against Arbenz persisted for several months, an anti-Arbenz paramilitary group was being trained by the CIA. At this group's helm sat Carlos Castillo Armas, handpicked by the American government due to his pro-American and anti-Communist leanings, waiting in the wings to take on the presidency. Castillo Armas was set to take Arbenz's place should the operation succeed. The "Showdown" stage of PBSuccess began in June of 1954 and involved the invasion of Guatemala City by Castillo Armas' forces.⁴ June 27th marked the date that Arbenz succumbed to American pressures, hidden by psychological warfare and the paramilitary unit, which meant that PBSuccess succeeded in its primary goal of removing the president.

Beginning in the 1970s and continuing well into present day, historical conversations regarding PBSuccess have evolved. As the historiography of the coup overlaps with other topics ranging from dependency theory in Latin America to the significant American-owned United Fruit Company, PBSuccess scholars elected to provide different explanations of the coup. Some

³ "Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency May 12, 1975," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala Collection, Document 287*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d287>, 450.

⁴ "Stage 5: Showdown" in "Draft Memorandum for the Record," November 12, 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala Collection, Document 65*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d65>.

historians used American intervention in Guatemala as a case study in the broader investigation of American foreign policy in the southern half of the Western hemisphere. In these studies, authors portrayed PBSuccess, and sometimes the Bay of Pigs episode in Cuba, as incidents in the broader trend of American intervention in Latin America.⁵ This approach emphasized the American tendency to support dictatorships over democratic regimes in the American execution of foreign policy in Latin America.⁶ In this facet of study, some historians selected a comparative approach by characterizing the coup in Guatemala as reminiscent of other instances of American intervention in Latin America, such as in Bolivia and Chile.⁷ To counter the lack of an international focus in the historiography, a movement to expand the cast of actors involved in PBSuccess developed. From acknowledgements of British involvement in the coup to the role of the United Nations in altering the course of Guatemala's political landscape in 1954, some authors argue that the United States and Guatemala were not the only significant actors in PBSuccess.⁸ Going beyond geopolitical theories, other scholars examined specific facets of the coup. The psychology involved in PBSuccess has been a large focus for some historians; by studying the role of perceptions, and therefore misperceptions, historians generated explanations

⁵ Anthony P. Maingot, *The United States and the Caribbean: Challenges of an Asymmetrical Relationship* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1994); Grace Livingstone, *America's Backyard: The United States and Latin America From the Monroe Doctrine to the War on Terror* (London: Zed Books, 2009); Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁶ Jorrit van den Berk, *Becoming a Good Neighbor Among Dictators : The U.S. Foreign Service in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Aaron Coy Moulton, "Building Their Own Cold War in Their Own Backyard: The Transnational, International Conflicts in the Greater Caribbean Basin, 1944–1954," *Cold War History* 15 no. 2 (2015).

⁷ Melissa Willard-Foster, *Toppling Foreign Governments: The Logic of Regime Change* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Kenneth Lehman, "Revolutions and Attributions: Making Sense of Eisenhower Administration Policies in Bolivia and Guatemala," *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 2, (1997); Mark T. Hove, "The Arbenz Factor: Salvador Allende, U.S.-Chilean Relations, and the 1954 U.S. Intervention in Guatemala," *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 4 (2007).

⁸ Sharon Meers, "The British Connection: How the United States Covered Its Tracks in the 1954 Coup in Guatemala," *Diplomatic History* 16, no. 3 (1992); Michelle Denise Getchell, "Revisiting the 1954 Coup in Guatemala: The Soviet Union, the United Nations, and 'Hemispheric Solidarity,'" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 17, no. 2 (2015).

of American motives for the coup.⁹ United Fruit and economic motivations of the 1954 coup is another burgeoning subsection of the PBSuccess historiography.¹⁰ Both this psychological and economic strategy in dissecting the coup are valuable measures of analyzing American motives for intervention.

Four major scholars emerged within the historiography of PBSuccess. These authors in particular informed their readers about the invalid success that the CIA saw in the coup. The first is Richard Immerman, whose 1982 book *The CIA in Guatemala: the foreign policy of intervention* took a deep dive into the complex American relationship with Guatemala where the influence of Communist ideology was greatly overblown in the Central American country. Built upon American misunderstandings and misconceptions of Guatemala, Immerman argued that PBSuccess became the biggest failure in the history of American-Guatemalan relations.¹¹

Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer wove together a retelling of the resignation of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, with special reference to American involvement and the role that United Fruit Company played in Arbenz's downfall. In *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, the authors emphasized the American economic motivations for the coup and how UNF employees misrepresented President Arbenz as a Communist to the State Department.¹²

Piero Gleijeses, whose 1991 book *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* empowered the Guatemalan perspective on the coup by utilizing interviews

⁹ Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); Kenneth Lehman, "Revolutions and Attributions: Making Sense of Eisenhower Administration Policies in Bolivia and Guatemala," *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 2 (1997).

¹⁰ Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Peter Chapman, *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2009); Blanche Wiesen Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981).

¹¹ Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

¹² Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

with Guatemalans. Through his research he worked to reverse the idea that Guatemala was idly subservient to PBSuccess pressures.¹³ Finally, Nicholas Cullather's *Secret History: The CIA'S Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala 1952-1954* is perhaps the most unique work published on the coup in Guatemala. Cullather, hired by the CIA itself to provide a written account of the previously classified coup, emphasized the shortcomings, failures, and harmful legacy of the coup. Of the four authors, Cullather most explicitly questioned the success of PBSuccess and worked to explain why the CIA found it a success in the first place. The works of these authors, when read in tandem, reveal the various motivations for PBSuccess while also tackling the difficult aftermath of the coup, thus revealing the extent to which covert action in Guatemala succeeded.

This work builds off of the arguments made by Gleijeses, Immerman, Cullather, and Schlesinger and Kinzer. Like the previously stated authors, I focus on the question: Was Operation PBSuccess successful? I pinpoint the motivations for the coup as being a product of the special relationship the United States had with Latin America at the time, which is not a new argument. Doing this allowed me to explain why the CIA used psychological warfare to oust Arbenz and why its application gave the Agency "success" in the mission. Like the four major authors, I argue that the failures of the mission outweighed what little success the CIA saw in PBSuccess. What I add to the conversation is the role that *New York Times* reporter Sydney Gruson played in determining the success of the operation. Gruson is a name well-known to the historiography of PBSuccess but few authors have elected to study his significance in-depth. Explaining what PBSuccess achieved and failed at allowed me to holistically conclude the success of the mission, just as authors before me did.

¹³ Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope - The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States: 1944-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

Three major sets of primary sources need to be analyzed in order to understand the successes and shortcomings of Operation PBSuccess. First and foremost: CIA records themselves. In 1997, the Central Intelligence Agency fulfilled a legal promise to review and declassify records relating to a number of previously confidential operations, including PBSuccess. These documents, now available to the public, depict the planning, execution, and success of the coup in Guatemala through the lens of Agency officials. CIA documents aid us in understanding how to plan a covert regime change; in other words, they showcase the methodology used in PBSuccess: primarily psychological warfare. These records also boast of the success found in the mission. This idea of success is only from the CIA perspective, however, which is why other source mediums need to be used to fully dissect the success of the mission. Congressional Records and research reports dating from 1961 to 1996 work to fill this gap and provide a less confident attitude towards PBSuccess and its aftermath. These documents acknowledge the development of negative sentiments within the House of Representatives towards CIA covert missions, PBSuccess in particular. These records are crucial in understanding how methods of American foreign policy evolved and moved away from covert action, revealing the controversy around the 1954 coup in Guatemala. CIA and Congressional records in tandem work to create a cohesive understanding of the extent to which PBSuccess was treated as a success. Lastly, *New York Times* newspapers dating back to 1954 reveal the ways in which American public opinion was shaped by the limited information coming out of Guatemala regarding the country's political turmoil. Paired with the CIA documents, some of which criticize the content published in *The Times*, we can understand how journalism and newspapers came to threaten CIA covert action in Guatemala. At the time, *The New York Times* was perhaps the most influential American news outlet; its journalists spanned the globe and influenced public opinion

domestically and abroad. Identifying the headlines, wording, and perspectives included in these articles about the events in 1954 Guatemala reveal how American journalism posed a threat to PBSuccess. These primary sources, while valuable to the understanding of American involvement in Guatemala, limit the Guatemalan perspective and prevent the Guatemalan side of the story from being heard. Supplemental materials from well-known scholars of PBSuccess, such as Piero Gleijeses counter this issue and work to empower and leverage Guatemalan voices in PBSuccess.

To understand the concept of success in regards to covert action, there are many elements of PBSuccess and its significance to cover. Chapter 1 outlines the methodology utilized by the CIA to succeed with its mission goals in Guatemala. Psychological warfare, the method of choice, served to simultaneously remove Arbenz from power while also protecting the American reputation by masking any American involvement from the ordeal in Guatemala. By pressuring Arbenz to relinquish his presidency through psychological methods, the CIA met the PBSuccess mission goals. The Agency generalized this victory through psychological warfare, which some attribute to pure luck, and deemed PBSuccess to be a valuable model for other covert action missions.¹⁴ Chapter 2 reveals a threat to the achievements of the CIA in Guatemala in the form of *New York Times* reporter Sydney Gruson. Gruson's objective reporting threatened the covertness of American involvement in the political turbulence of Guatemala; thus prompting the Agency to pursue extreme measures to curb his ability to report on the Guatemalan side of the conflict. By understanding the extent to which Gruson's articles caused anxiety within high-ranking CIA officials, we can begin to comprehend how covert action was not a foolproof model if one reporter threatened the entire fate of the mission. Gruson's proximity to uncovering the truth of

¹⁴ The Bay of Pigs mission in 1961 Cuba, modeled after PBSuccess, was considered a major failure due to the unsuccessful invasion.

the CIA's mission threatened the entire success of the PBSuccess. Finally, Chapter 3 discusses the reconceptualization of the results of PBSuccess within the United States government starting in the 1960s. Where the CIA saw success in 1954, members of the House of Representatives spanning into the 1990s only saw failure and embarrassment. This chapter takes a deep dive into the Congressional debates that revolved around covert action and dissects where Congressmen pinpointed failure, rather than success, in PBSuccess and other covert operations. Arguments regarding the appropriateness of the CIA in conducting covert action complete our understanding of the degree of success PBSuccess experienced and how the mission's repercussions dampened the reputation of the Agency.

The CIA celebrated the perceived success of PBSuccess in secret following Arbenz's resignation. Existing as a classified operation for decades, few Americans knew about the true extent of American intervention in Guatemala via PBSuccess. Those familiar with it view the mission as a harmful violation of Guatemalan sovereignty, not an American Cold War victory. The aftermath of the coup is inseparable from the American intervention via the CIA that ousted Arbenz from power. In considering this, it is difficult to accept the CIA's vision of success in PBSuccess. In the case of this operation, short success did not outweigh long term failure. The lead up, execution, and aftermath of the regime change in Guatemala continue to serve as lessons for government officials and warn against covert action. PBSuccess met its goals of covertly instigating a regime change in Guatemala but was unsuccessful in institutionalizing CIA covert action in American foreign policy.

Chapter 1: The CIA and Psychological Warfare

The Need for Covert Action

Following World War II, the United States attempted to navigate a world in which, for the first time, a Communist world power threatened American hegemony. This was the climate that Operation PBSuccess operated in. It was not just the Cold War context that the CIA would be navigating, but also the remains of what was known as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy." Described in FDR's own words as ending the "Practice of arbitrary intervention in the home affairs of our neighbors," being a "Good Neighbor" to Latin America insinuated a non-interventionist approach to American foreign policy in the region.¹⁵ While this style of foreign policy was diminished by the time PBSuccess began, the sentiments of non-intervention remained evident in the conduct of foreign relations with Latin America. It was within this tricky situation that the reformist Guatemalan President caught the eye of the American State Department. Not only did Arbenz pursue agrarian reforms that mimicked aspects of Communism, his dismissal of American influence in Guatemala raised concern in the United States.¹⁶ In a polarized world, the presence of Arbenz in the United States' own hemisphere escalated the already-anxious American government's mission to contain worldwide Communism, thus producing a seemingly justified reason for American intervention in Guatemala. Enter the CIA.

The design of the Central Intelligence Agency prioritized secrecy: both in its presence and actions. In order to maneuver within the complicated, albeit special, relationship the United States had with its Latin American neighbors, the CIA was an ideal instigator for the task of

¹⁵ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Our Foreign Policy: A Democratic View," in Frank Freidel's *FDR: The Ordeal*, 238.

¹⁶ "Central Intelligence Agency Information Report," October 10 1952, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala Collection, Document 27*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d27>, 40.

removing Arbenz from power. In this intricate relationship there existed, according to *New York Times* reporter Milton Bracker Salvador in a 1954 article, a “Supersensitivity of the Latin American to intervention.”¹⁷ Regional apprehension towards American intervention originated in events such as the Spanish American War and the construction of the Panama Canal, where the United States sat at the helm of these invasions. Because of this, Latin Americans were wary of the American presence in their countries. This incentivized the United States to employ the CIA in ousting Arbenz. Utilizing covert action would be beneficial to the United States by removing Arbenz while fostering the impression that the United States was not orchestrating this regime change. A 2008 Congressional Research Services Report defined covert action as activity pursued “To accomplish a US foreign policy objective without the hand of the US government becoming known or apparent to the outside world.”¹⁸ As the American relationship with Latin America was at stake in the proposed removal of Arbenz from power, covert action would hide any evidence that the United States influenced Arbenz to relinquish the presidency. Specializing in covert action, the CIA was the most advantageous choice for which to complete this mission.

One particular method of covert action stood out as optimal for Operation PBSuccess: psychological warfare. Described by Edward Lilly as “Non-military activity to influence and weaken the enemy’s will so that victory could be more rapidly attained,” psychological warfare aimed to target various enemies via psychological efforts throughout the 20th century.¹⁹ Utilizing this tactic would allow the United States to covertly halt the perceived threat of Communism in

¹⁷ Milton Bracker Salvador, “The Lessons of the Guatemalan Struggle,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 1954, <https://www.nytimes.com/1954/07/11/archives/the-lessons-of-the-guatemalan-struggle-the-overturn-meets-only-part.html>, 11.

¹⁸ L. Britt Snider, *The Agency and the Hill: CIA's Relationship with Congress, 1946-2004*, Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2008, <https://denison.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/government-official-publications/agency-hill-cias-relationship-with-congress-1946/docview/1679147124/se-2>, 259.

¹⁹ Edward P. Lilly, “The Development of American Psychological Operations 1945-1951,” Washington DC: Psychological Strategy Board (1951), <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp86b00269r000900020001-9>, 5.

Latin America from a distance. Psychological warfare served as one of the guiding principles of Operation PBSuccess. It also existed as a tool with which the CIA shaped positive attitudes towards the United States in Guatemala and other Latin American countries. Approved by the National Security Council to undertake a covert mission in Guatemala in August of 1953, the CIA submitted plans for PBSuccess the following month. These plans specifically outlined the psychological warfare aspect of the operation. Under President Eisenhower's administration, which authorized the mission on December 9, 1953, PBSuccess went on to utilize covert psychological tactics to undermine the trust that the Guatemalan people put in President Arbenz. While it was not the only strategy that PBSuccess applied, psychological warfare deteriorated Arbenz's will to continue being President of Guatemala over a longer period of time compared to the paramilitary phase of the operation. Furthermore, it was a clear cut method for pressuring Arbenz to step down without revealing the American role in the regime change. The CIA's initiation of a psychological warfare campaign against President Arbenz achieved its goal of removing a Latin American leader that both questioned and threatened American stakes in Latin America.

The CIA and Psychological Warfare

The 1954 CIA coup in Guatemala serves as a case study for covert American intervention in the United States' own hemisphere of the world, one of the first instances within the Cold War context. As the United States sought to maintain control over world politics within its own hemisphere and abroad, the government moved between overt and covert action in its Cold War affairs. The Central Intelligence Agency, responsible for "The collection of covert intelligence abroad" as of 1947, had the task of initiating and sustaining covert action in targeted areas in

order to protect American national security.²⁰ Whereas espionage involved information-gathering, Operation PBSuccess encompassed a distinct type of covert action that involved psychologically tampering with Guatemalans in order to produce political conditions favorable to the United States. President Arbenz and his cabinet represented, in the minds of State Department members, a threat to American interests in the Western hemisphere. Their desire to oust him from the presidency, while preserving the American relationship with Latin America, set into motion the foundation of a coup that would ultimately alter the course of modern Guatemalan history. Psychological warfare through PBSuccess sought to weaken the confidence of Arbenz himself and curb the threat of a Communist presence in the United States' neighboring region. As the CIA boasted covertness as its primary doctrine, a CIA-planned coup would leave little evidence of American involvement in the politics of Guatemala. Likewise, the specialization of the CIA in psychological warfare made it a crucial tool for tackling the situation in Guatemala without overtly indicting the United States in Guatemalan affairs.

It was with the intention of removing Arbenz "without bloodshed," and therefore without any evidence of American intervention, that psychological warfare became a primary method in Operation PBSuccess.²¹ The widespread usage of propaganda by the United States in both World Wars set up the CIA with a strategy that had previously proved useful in conflicts. Following the end of World War II, psychological warfare became an increasingly attractive yet also polarizing strategy for the United States to pursue its international objectives as it entered into a stalemate with the Soviet Union. The institutionalization of psychological warfare into American foreign policy required some petitioning by its supporters. A 1947 justification of this method, put forth

²⁰ "Intelligence Directive No 5" in "The Central Intelligence Agency and National Organization for Intelligence," January 24 1949, *FOIA*, General CIA Records, Document CIA-RDP86B00269R000500010001-4, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp86b00269r000500010001-4>, 108.

²¹ "Draft Memorandum for the Record," November 12 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, Guatemala Collection, Document 65, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d65>.

by the Ad Hoc Subcommittee of the State–Army–Navy–Air Force Coordinating Committee, argued that “The present world situation requires the U.S. immediately to develop and utilize coordinated measures designed to influence attitudes in foreign countries in a direction favorable to the attainment of U.S. objectives and to counteract effects of anti-American propaganda.”²²

The growing tensions between American and Soviet interests prompted a redesign of foreign policy, as individuals within the State Department perceived a propaganda war initiated by the Soviet Union against the United States. The methodology of PBSuccess served to elicit negative attitudes towards Arbenz and isolate him politically, socially, and diplomatically, ultimately with the goal of him resigning. Psychological warfare therefore stood as the most effective tool to meet these goals and prevent this regime change from negatively impacting the American relationship with Latin America. This methodology was in the CIA’s repertoire, which is why the Eisenhower administration entrusted the Agency with this sensitive operation. Encompassing an overall proposed budget of 3 million dollars, PBSuccess was a large undertaking for the CIA, and \$270,000 of that budget was dedicated to psychological warfare and the production of propaganda.²³ Due to its previous successes with propaganda in other conflicts, the government was not frugal with funds for this psychological mission.

Psychological warfare waged a mental battle against its targets. Through PBSuccess psychological pressures, the CIA aimed to force Guatemalans to rethink their appointment of Arbenz to power and produce “disloyalty to the ARBENZ regime.”²⁴ Once mistrust was

²² “Report by an Ad Hoc Subcommittee of the State–Army–Navy–Air Force Coordinating Committee,” November 7 1947, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945-1950, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment Collection*, Document 249, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945-50Intel/d249>, 636.

²³ “Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency,” May 12 1975, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala Collection*, Document 287, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d287>, 450.

²⁴ “Phase I” in “A Suggested Plan for Psychological Warfare Operations in Connection With Over-All Guatemalan Operations,” *FOIA, Guatemala Collection*, Document 0000914764, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0000914764>, 1.

achieved, thus indirectly weakening the president's own stamina to the point of resignation, the United States would have its ideal Guatemalan government with pro-American rebel leader Carlos Castillo Armas at the helm of this new regime. The overarching goal of psychological warfare in the context of PBSuccess was to target the support-base of Arbenz: the citizens of Guatemala who elected him. In doing so, Arbenz would be incentivized to step down on his own, rather than at the hands of an overt American military operation that would stain America's international reputation as a just and fair world superpower. While the CIA would be orchestrating these psychological pressures, to the world it would appear that Arbenz was acting on his own intuition. While psychological warfare was composed of a variety of tactics, it was propaganda that truly stole the show in PBSuccess.

KUGOWN Propaganda

Propaganda was once such method that had the ability to instill fear, confusion, apprehension, and mistrust in recipients of psychological warfare. With this mechanism at the helm of its psychological warfare initiative, the CIA, with help from other government agencies, engineered propaganda that sought to steer Arbenz towards resigning, coupled with a loss of trust among his followers. Codenamed KUGOWN in CIA memorandums and telegrams, the Agency saw propaganda as a psychological warfare tool that would prove useful to the goal of tailoring the political fabric of Latin America to fit American preferences. The CIA utilized propaganda ranging from radio broadcasts to comic books in order to target the population of Guatemala and the Latin American region as a whole in its fight against Arbenz. Psychological warfare materials planned for PBSuccess included word-of-mouth propaganda and films; pamphlets, folders, and news sheets; newspapers; and magazines spread throughout Guatemala

over the course of several months.²⁵ The CIA engineered the diverse material that composed the propaganda campaign with the intention of eliciting Guatemalan discontent regarding Arbenz, all while shielding American involvement from public knowledge. PBSuccess agents distributed the propaganda produced at the various PBSuccess stations in a manner that hid its American origin and mimicked a Latin American source. Because the United States feared culpability in the Guatemalan affair, propaganda was a viable form of psychological warfare. Through these materials, the CIA strove to inflict fear within Guatemalans that would ultimately lead to the American victory against Arbenz.

In all aspects of PBSuccess psychological warfare, accuracy and credibility was the standard in order to engineer a sense of authenticity in the material. This was especially true of propaganda. By designing convincing propaganda material that appeared to be of Guatemalan-origin, the American hand in Guatemala would continue to remain invisible. The CIA therefore required its PBSuccess agents to understand the sociopolitical fabric of Guatemala and its regional neighbors. An April 1954 CIA memorandum described this objective as follows: “In order to awaken popular revulsion against Communism, it appears necessary to tie these experiences in other countries closely to the personal lives and interests of your local audience.”²⁶ Anti-Communist propaganda produced by the CIA and other United States agencies wove in local context to elicit a favorable response from its recipients and promote a sense of familiarity. While Communism was not the primary motivator for PBSuccess, the alleged presence of it in Guatemala existed as a scare tactic to evoke fear within the populus. Propaganda plans outlined the necessity to include Guatemala’s Central American neighbors in the

²⁵ “Materials for Psychological Warfare Support,” January 24 1954, *FOIA*, Guatemala Collection, Document 0000914007, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0000914007>.

²⁶ “Memorandum From the Senior Representative, Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida (Dunbar) to the CIA Station in Guatemala,” 28 April 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954, Guatemala Collection, Document 136, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d136>, 268.

misinformation mission. In a September 1953 Memorandum, Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico were named as the “bases of support” in PBSuccess, with Honduras hosting the “Center of all the propaganda operations.”²⁷ To foster trustworthiness in propaganda materials, the author of the Memorandum emphasized the regional importance of Central America. Creating propaganda materials in Guatemala’s regional neighbors instilled credibility of the anti-Arbenz movement and further removed the United States from the material’s origin.

PBSuccess propaganda often took the form of fabricated stories, an effective tool to warp the minds of Arbenz’s support base. Planting stories of a Soviet presence in Guatemala served as a way of inflicting fear amongst Guatemalans while bolstering the reputation of the United States. Propaganda guidelines and suggestions, such as these CIA-engineered narratives installed in Guatemalan newspapers, from PBSuccess headquarters generated requests to reproduce these stories within Central America. Communism, while not the primary motivator of the coup, served as a coercive propaganda tool. Due to the “Close interrelationship in public opinion between Guatemala and other Latin American, especially Central American countries,” the replication of these propaganda materials would serve to increase credibility of the CIA-created materials.²⁸ The American government feared the interconnectedness of Latin America in the sense that administrations similar in ideology to Arbenz’s could gain power throughout the region; however, it was also treated as a positive phenomenon that the CIA would be able to use in its propaganda initiative to further PBSuccess goals. In following this propaganda plan, the CIA also went back to its intelligence-gathering roots by identifying specific target groups to receive propaganda.

²⁷ “Memorandum” in “A Suggested Plan for Psychological Warfare Operations in Connection With Over-All Guatemalan Operations,” 3.

²⁸ “Dispatch From Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida to PBSUCCESS Headquarters, Central Intelligence Agency” June 4 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala Collection*, Document 171, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d171>, 311.

Identifying Propaganda Initiative Targets

In order to further conceal American involvement in Guatemala, the CIA identified specific Guatemalan groups to more effectively wage psychological warfare against Arbenz and his supporters. The goal of Operation PBSuccess was to weaken Arbenz's administration covertly without any evidence of American intervention; however, it was specific interest groups that the CIA directly targeted in the psychological warfare operation. This was done to produce meaningful levels of fear and mistrust in the Guatemalan populus in order to successfully complete the operation. Targets of CIA propaganda shifted as PBSuccess psychological warfare plans continued to develop. A September 1953 Memorandum called for "Selected propaganda to the university centers and catholic organizations, the accredited diplomatic missions, student organizations and urban and rural labor organizations, and antiCommunist centers and newspaper and radio establishments, state organizations and the high officials of different countries of America."²⁹ In its early PBSuccess drafting period, the CIA deemed these organizations and groups important enough to be recipients of its psychological warfare initiative. By identifying specific targets, the CIA continued to pursue authenticity and validity in its psychological war against Arbenz in order to conceal its involvement in the ordeal. Ranging from nonpolitical facets of civil society to the high ranking leaders and their cabinets of countries neighboring Guatemala, propaganda content dependend on the group it was being delivered to, although the anti-Arbenz sentiments remained consistent. Tailored and specified propaganda allowed the campaign against Arbenz to reach Guatemalans on the individual level and make its message stick with them more persuasively.

²⁹ "Memorandum" in "A Suggested Plan for Psychological Warfare Operations in Connection With Over-All Guatemalan Operations," 15.

Propaganda targets also existed outside of the Guatemalan borders, according to the CIA. The September Memorandum also made a point to include future plans for the greater Latin American region in the Cold War era. In reference to targeting “High officials of different countries of America,” the plan stated: “When the campaign against Marxist penetration in the continent gets under way, a favorable atmosphere for the liberation movement of Guatemala will be created in the nations that comprise it.”³⁰ Not only was the CIA aiming propaganda at government officials throughout the region, it did so with the intention of creating a regional network of compliant Latin American officials to assist in supporting American-backed Carlos Castillo Armas. The distaste for Arbenz’s style of politics was so salient within the State Department that it proposed plans to preemptively target Latin American politicians before Operation PBSuccess even began. In doing so, the United States was able to capitalize on and continue its special relationship with Latin America, the region’s dictators in particular. Utilizing localized leaders within the region to support the anti-Arbenz movement would also foster the facade that the discontent with Arbenz was local in origin and execution. Just as ordinary Guatemalans were targeted with propaganda, leaders within Guatemala were not safe from PBSuccess’s psychological warfare campaign.

While the goals of the psychological warfare campaign remained relatively consistent throughout the operation, target propaganda audiences continued to evolve to meet the objectives of the greater PBSuccess operation. Communism continued to serve as an intimidation factor, thus indirectly putting the American ideology in a more positive light. The repeated CIA analysis and re-identification of propaganda audiences continued to bury the American presence in Guatemala. A June 13th CIA dispatch named the following groups as “To whom psychological

³⁰ “Memorandum” in “A Suggested Plan for Psychological Warfare Operations in Connection With Over-All Guatemalan Operations,” 15.

efforts should be concentrated on,” including members of the Armed Forces (labeled as “*most important*”), armed groups including police and peasant troops, workers in “key enterprises” such as the railroad industry and printer shops, young people, and housewives.³¹ As spring turned to summer in 1954 Guatemala, the military became a primary target of the psychological warfare campaign due to the approaching invasion of Castillo Armas and his CIA-trained rebel forces. The paramilitary portion of Operation PBSuccess required propaganda initiatives to resonate with any Guatemalan soldiers who held doubts about Arbenz that could be used to the American’s advantage. Many CIA-created rumors therefore targeted these army members through radio broadcasts and other propaganda initiatives.³²

Psychological warfare played a crucial role in the paramilitary stage of the operation in that the Arbenz administration was supposed to perceive higher numbers of rebel army members than the actual total, thus leading to feelings of being overpowered that would prompt a resignation. As Operation PBSuccess progressed into the summer, CIA agents saturated specific interest groups with more falsified information tailored to meet the PBSuccess agenda. In June of 1954, CIA officials urged PBSuccess agents throughout all the different stations to follow the guidelines for the “Final phase of PBSUCCESS.”³³ The dispatch emphasized, “Psychological Warfare has nevertheless a very significant role to play during this final stage.”³⁴ Where there may have been room previously to diverge from preconstructed propaganda plans, CIA agents were expected to follow the proposed final stage agenda meticulously. Any errors in the

³¹ “Policy Guidance” in “Dispatch From Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida to All PBSUCCESS Stations,” June 13 1954 *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala Collection*, Document 181, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d181>, 327.

³² “Phase III” in “A Suggested Plan for Psychological Warfare Operations in Connection With Over-All Guatemalan Operations,” 5.

³³ “Subject” in “Dispatch From Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida to All PBSUCCESS Stations, June 13 1954,” 1.

³⁴ “Policy Guidance,” in “Dispatch From Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida to All PBSUCCESS Stations, June 13 1954,” 324.

psychological warfare mission could allude to American involvement, thus crushing the operation and staining the American reputation. This same document called members of the Armed Forces “Most Important” in terms of propaganda targets.³⁵ This was primarily due to their training and status, which would allow them to become valuable assets to Castillo Armas’ rebel forces, thus multiplying his numbers. It was via radio that these army officials were bombarded with propaganda, the majority of it coming from the CIA’s “Voice of Liberation” radio station, which played a crucial role in the success of the covert operation.

Team SHERWOOD and the “Voice of Liberation” Radio Station

In the months leading up to Arbenz's resignation, the introduction of a CIA-controlled radio station altered both the medium and breadth of propaganda within the psychological warfare campaign. The kickoff of PBSUCCESS’s radio station initiative, codenamed SHERWOOD, played an essential role as a psychological warfare tool in the last two months of Operation PBSUCCESS. As a February CIA memorandum conveyed: “There will be a requirement for a small semi-clandestine radio station to handle [] communications” during the paramilitary stage of the operation.³⁶ CIA officials saw a radio station as necessary to the operation in order to maintain widespread communications across Latin America and spread propaganda through new modes. As a CIA telegram emphasized: “Key to KUGOWN effort inside [Guatemala] is SHERWOOD siting and initiation of programs.”³⁷ In early March, when the telegram was sent out, CIA officials named the radio operation a crucial aspect of psychological warfare efforts

³⁵ “Policy Guidance,” in “Dispatch From Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida to All PBSUCCESS Stations, June 13 1954,” 327.

³⁶ “Memorandum From the Assistant Director for Communications, Central Intelligence Agency ([name not declassified]) to the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency (King)” 9 February 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala Collection*, Document 95, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d95>, 187.

³⁷ “Telegram From Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida to the Central Intelligence Agency March 2 1954,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala Collection*, Document 110, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d110>.

within Guatemala and the Latin American region. At this time, SHERWOOD plans were still in the works; the physical location of the radio station itself had yet to be determined. This was a crucial point of debate within the CIA; as a CIA contact report highlighted: “SHERWOOD represents the maximum danger, the closest that they can come to proof of U.S. participation.”³⁸ SHERWOOD was therefore both relied upon and feared by the CIA. As a to-be major source of propaganda production and transmission via radio, CIA officials were aware of the urgency and caution with which to proceed with SHERWOOD. As with the operation as a whole, confidentiality was key to the radio effort, as it contained perhaps the most compromising evidence of CIA involvement in the propaganda campaign against Arbenz and the greater goal of containing Communism in Latin America. Active fear of the Guatemalan discovery of the CIA’s SHERWOOD radio station showcases most clearly the American desire for confidentiality in the regime change in Guatemala. “A Nicaraguan site for SHERWOOD is vital,” the contact report therefore concluded, giving CIA officials both the distance and proximity they sought in order to advance this radio initiative in the greater psychological warfare scheme of PBSuccess.³⁹

The creation of a radio station allowed CIA officials to keep their distance, and thus achieve clandestinity, while actively contributing to the psychological warfare operation. SHERWOOD broadcasts began on May 1, 1954 through a radio program called “The Voice of Liberation.” Sloganed with *Trabajo, Pan, y Patria* (Bread, Work, and Country), the radio station aimed to target the Guatemalan population through seemingly localized, authentic broadcasts.⁴⁰ CIA case officer David Atlee Phillips, oversaw the SHERWOOD operation in Nicaragua with the assistance of a team including three Guatemalans, who helped the CIA assess the

³⁸ “Contact Report,” March 12 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, Guatemala Collection, Document 115, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d115>, 219.

³⁹ “Contact Report,” March 12 1954, 219.

⁴⁰ David Atlee Phillips, *The Night Watch* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987), 41.

Guatemalan radio audience.⁴¹ Despite its Nicaraguan headquarters, the SHERWOOD team was able to immerse Guatemalan context clues into programming thanks to its localized team. This essentially ensured that “The Voice of Liberation” would exist as a seemingly legitimate radio show based in Guatemala thanks to the Spanish-speaking Guatemalan natives added to the SHERWOOD team. These team members also served the purpose of hiding American involvement in the generation of propaganda against Arbenz. Due to the covertness of the station paired with its fabricated authenticity, SHERWOOD was a vital addition to the PBSuccess mission. In Phillips’ own words: “Arbenz would not have resigned had he not been manipulated into what he conceived as an impossible situation by the rebel radio”⁴² This conclusion also showcases the effectiveness of general psychological warfare in giving the CIA its immediate desired results: the toppling of the Arbenz administration.

SHERWOOD programming acted as an instigator of Arbenz’s removal; by encouraging Guatemalans to overthrow Arbenz, he could potentially be discharged by his own citizens. An early CIA Memorandum outlined the primary purpose of the radio station, not even named SHERWOOD yet, as being “To impulse the people to overthrow the government and eradicate Communism completely and definitely.”⁴³ While differing in content and targets, the overarching purpose of the radio initiative was to provoke an insurrection in Guatemala to eliminate Arbenz and his harmful style of government (harmful to American interests, that is). By persuading his own constituents to turn against him, the United States would be guaranteed no evidence of its role in this regime change. Nobody would be able to question if the United States played a part if the Guatemalan people themselves rose up against their president. While this did not necessarily

⁴¹ Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1982), 167.

⁴² Phillips, *The Night Watch*, 53.

⁴³ “Memorandum” in “A Suggested Plan for Psychological Warfare Operations in Connection With Over-All Guatemalan Operations,” 34.

go as planned, the existence of this SHERWOOD goal reflected the Eisenhower administration's desire to preserve the United States' reputation in, and therefore relationship with, Latin America. The Memorandum continued: "The psychological impact of these programs has to be great and to achieve this, the themes should be well chosen and hammered into the minds of the persons for whom the campaign is directed."⁴⁴ The individuality of the different radio programs from SHERWOOD, therefore reflected a variegated approach to taking down the Arbenz government. Not only was broadcasting directed towards different demographics of citizens, the content also catered to these groups. Credibility and authenticity, the CIA stressed, were priorities of SHERWOOD's radio operation. These features were necessary in order to gain trust within the Guatemala populace and mask the American presence in this dissent.⁴⁵ SHERWOOD met the CIA's larger goal of tailoring psychological warfare efforts to different Latin American audiences to achieve the highest level of success and covertness.

The SHERWOOD broadcasting conducted by the CIA carried its psychological warfare campaign and ensured both victory and secrecy. The heading of this initiative by the CIA radio team during the final months of PBSuccess proved to be extremely beneficial to the results of the operation. Historians Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer deemed the SHERWOOD mission "The most successful covert enterprise of all" in terms of psychological warfare efforts.⁴⁶ Following the resignation of Arbenz on June 27th, a July 2nd CIA cable to SHERWOOD expressed "Heartiest congratulations" to the CIA radio team, voicing that their contributions "Added appreciably to success of [the] operation."⁴⁷ SHERWOOD was therefore, according to CIA agents and historians alike, a vital aspect of PBSuccess in both its planning, execution, and

⁴⁴ "Memorandum" in "A Suggested Plan for Psychological Warfare Operations in Connection With Over-All Guatemalan Operations," 34.

⁴⁵ Phillips, *The Night Watch*, 40.

⁴⁶ Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, 167.

⁴⁷ "Cable to Sherwood from Director, CIA Re Guatemala 1954 Coup," 2 July 1954, *FOIA*, Guatemala Collection, Document 0000920889, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0000920889>.

aftermath. The radio served as an effective tool for communicating propaganda initiatives to target groups both within and outside of the Guatemalan population. Its remote location in Nicaragua paired with the Guatemalan members of the team created the illusion that “The Voice of Liberation” was of Guatemalan origin, therefore reflecting the views of seemingly real anti-Arbenz Guatemalans. These multiple layers of legitimacy further masked American existence in 1954 Guatemala, thus contributing to the overall effectiveness and covertness of PBSuccess. Despite people touting the SHERWOOD team as the most successful element of the psychological war effort, effective propaganda production occurred elsewhere in PBSuccess plans, intermittently with help from the United States Information Agency.

United States Information Agency Support

Collaboration-based work within the American government itself ensured the achievement of PBSuccess goals in Guatemala and Latin America, notably through psychological warfare initiatives. Access to other governmental agencies such as the United States Information Agency allowed the CIA to capitalize off of American governmental resources. As a result of the “Blood ties between the chiefs of the State Department and the CIA,” the CIA had easy access to ample State Department resources and sub-departments.⁴⁸ The introduction of other agencies into PBSuccess provided an additional cast of American agents who had international experience, including in Latin America. The National Security Council expected Government departments and agencies to provide “All possible assistance voluntarily” to the CIA when requested to do so, particularly in the context of the high-priority Operation PBSuccess.⁴⁹ Expanding the troupe of American actors did not challenge the covertness of the

⁴⁸ Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, 108.

⁴⁹ “Responsibilities and Duties of the Departments and Agencies of the Government Towards the Central Intelligence Agency,” 18 July 1950, *FOIA*, General CIA Records, Document CIA-RDP78-04718A002700110012-9, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp78-04718a002700110012-9>, 1.

mission; rather, the incorporation of more government officials ensured its victory. Under the control of the State Department, The United States Information Agency was one of the major agencies employed to aid in PBSuccess and the psychological warfare campaign, particularly through the production of propaganda. Described as the agency “Responsible for all U.S. information activities abroad,” the USIA had a significant hand in PBSuccess propaganda initiatives.⁵⁰ Codenamed “QKFLOWAGE” in official CIA documents, the USIA provided PBSuccess agents throughout Latin America with aid ranging from propaganda production to assistance on psychological warfare material, all in a covert fashion. The extent to which the CIA had clearance to utilize State Department offices not only showcases the startling number of individuals and organizations involved in the coup, it also demonstrates how the American government prioritized the overthrow of President Arbenz as a result of its implications in the greater American-Latin American relationship.

The USIA worked towards the goal shared by the CIA of eradicating the Arbenz administration, thus leading to a multifaceted approach to covert action. Due to the difficult terrain in which the CIA was working in, local Guatemalan restrictions on media led to an “all hands on deck” sentiment within the United States government regarding PBSuccess. This included the further incorporation of the USIA into the covert mission’s plans. The CIA relied upon the USIA’s specialization in information production and crisis control, especially within the final days of PBSuccess. The Information Agency’s role was of particular importance in what the CIA deemed the “Crisis Period” of PBSuccess, also known as the final two months of the operation.⁵¹ As a June 26th telegram from USIA Director Theodore Streibert to different

⁵⁰ “American Society for Public Administration Washington DC Chapter Letter,” 1953, *FOIA*, General CIA Documents Collection, Document CIA-RDP70-00211R000300100032-1, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp70-00211r000300100032-1>.

⁵¹ “Report Prepared in the U.S. Information Agency,” 27 July 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954, Guatemala Collection, Document 280, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d280>, 434.

PBSuccess posts around Latin America stated: “Fast developing events on Guatemalan problem provide opportunity seize psychological offensive.”⁵² Despite Streibert’s telegram being sent in the midst of Castillo Armas’s airstrike, just one day before the resignation of Arbenz himself, it was not militant action that he was suggesting CIA agents take. Rather, he called psychological warfare a priority. Because of the covert nature of the operation, psychological warfare was the primary mode of attack against Arbenz. The production of propaganda, a USIA specialty, in the last days of the Arbenz administration was of the utmost importance as it would simultaneously weaken the president’s morale and mask American involvement in the ordeal. The final week of June 1954 in Guatemala saw an invasion, bombings, and widespread violence, all of which Streibert suggested be synthesized into propaganda material to shape the perceptions of Arbenz, his constituents, and the greater Latin America population. Reporting on these events became particularly crucial to the CIA/USIA objective of stamping out the shaky will of President Arbenz.

The CIA and USIA were able to capitalize on the interconnectedness of Latin America to spread their propaganda materials. As a progress report on PBSuccess stated: the Latin American “Independent press, sometimes with the assistance of USIA, publishes anti-Communist material of varying quantities and qualities.”⁵³ The intended meddling of USIA officials in the Latin American press speaks volumes to the prioritization of psychological warfare over direct conflict. Furthermore, this showcases the Communist intimidation method used to scare locals into opposing Arbenz simply for his Communist-leaning. In doing so, the opposition of Arbenz appeared to be stemming from Guatemala and its regional neighbors, not the United States

⁵² “Infoguide: Developments Guatemala Situation” in “Telegram From the United States Information Agency to Certain Posts” 26 June 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, Guatemala Collection, Document 237, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d237>, 384.

⁵³ “Assessment/Analysis” in “Report on Stage 1 PBSUCCESS,” 16 November 1954, *FOIA*, Guatemala Collection, Document 0000928348, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000928348.pdf.

(where it was actually sourced). The use of the local press within Latin America to implement propaganda was a trend within the psychological warfare facet of PBSuccess, particularly when the USIA was involved. As all of this propaganda appeared to be of Latin American origin, the USIA assisted in the concealment of American activity in the mission to remove Arbenz. A USIA report brought up “A successful project in January,” which consisted of the “Preparation here of a series of articles exposing Guatemalan Communists Fortuny and Gutierrez; these were planted in a Chilean newspaper and later reprinted in selected other countries with Chilean attribution.”⁵⁴ Not only did the USIA tamper with local news outlets, the agency also produced materials that they planted in newspapers across Latin America. In doing so, the USIA aided in establishing the credibility of the anti-Arbenz movement by locating it in Latin America. By duplicating these articles in other Latin American countries, the USIA fostered the impression that negative sentiments towards Arbenz were growing; spreading even across country borders. This further removed a sense of American involvement in the campaign against Arbenz and worked to retain the American-Latin American relationship. USIA involvement in Latin American press was part of a greater trend in American infiltration of Latin American newspapers.

American Propaganda in Latin American Newspapers

Aside from SHERWOOD radio programming, the CIA made use of other forms of Latin American media to further their psychological warfare initiatives. Newspapers were one such media design, and the CIA worked to capitalize on the already-established reading base of these papers. Employing propaganda initiatives in local newspapers within Latin America to produce a community-wide fear of Communism served as one such tactic. As Communism was a buzzword during the Cold War, framing Arbenz as a follower of this ideology had the potential to turn his

⁵⁴ “Report Prepared in the U.S. Information Agency,” 433.

regional neighbors against him. Turning public opinion of Arbenz sour further served the ultimate goal of covertly pressuring him to abdicate. In doing so, the CIA used this newspaper-based propaganda to meet its political goals in Latin America while preserving the American reputation and relationship with the region. The intended recipients of this specific newspaper operation was not necessarily the Arbenz regime, nor was it Guatemalans. Articles published, of CIA and USIA origin, in newspapers based in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Mexico sought to influence entire countries to adopt an “AntiCommunist campaign” that painted President Arbenz in a negative light.⁵⁵ This procedure was a reminder that while Guatemala was the target of the CIA mission to remove suspected Communist Jacobo Arbenz from power, it was the greater Latin American region that the United States was also working to influence. Control over Latin America supplied the purpose of preserving “American hegemony in the Caribbean and the entire Western Hemisphere.”⁵⁶

Simultaneously working to perpetuate its leadership role in the region while also “protecting” Latin America from a leftist, anti-American president, the Latin American media served as a useful mode of waging psychological warfare against Arbenz. In this sense, psychological warfare had many targets and goals. Waging this psychological warfare in Latin America served a political role, executed by the CIA. Doing so through newspapers and media outlets served as a covert way of influencing the Latin American public. As United Fruit public relations specialist Edward Bernays wrote in his biography: “News today makes its influence felt over national boundaries. Revolutionary action in one place affects another.”⁵⁷ Following this logic, waging the anti-Arbenz campaign across the region would exponentially increase the

⁵⁵ “Memorandum” in “A Suggested Plan for Psychological Warfare Operations in Connection With Over-All Guatemalan Operations,” 19.

⁵⁶ Ronald J. Caridi, *20th Century American Foreign Policy: Security and Self-Interest* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974), 135.

⁵⁷ Edward Bernays, *Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel Edward L. Bernays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 760.

political pressures applied to Arbenz and create a favorable political climate for the United States. Capitalizing on the preexisting media in the region allowed the CIA to create the effect that this negative sentiment towards Arbenz originated in the region, rather than the United States.

Despite the broader regional implications of PBSuccess, domestic newspapers within Guatemala were useful to the CIA in weakening the will of Arbenz and eliminating the leftist threat he posed to Latin America. A January 1954 outline of PBSuccess psychological warfare initiatives stated that “The independent press of Guatemala will include [] themes related to international Communism, imperialism and its tactics in establishing military bases of operation in the American continent to prepare for the initiation of the Third World War.”⁵⁸ Similar to the guidelines for other Latin American newspapers, it was the theme of Communism that the CIA worked to emphasize. Psychological warfare was the name of the game in Operation PBSuccess and stressing the threat of Communism via local newspapers furthered the goal of fostering negative perceptions of the ideology and those who adhered to it. While anti-Communism was not at the helm of PBSuccess, it acted as a shield for the American motivation to control the Latin American region. The implementation of propaganda into these Guatemalan and Latin American newspapers occurred over a long period of time, starting in January of 1954 when PBSuccess first kicked off. This proved useful in initiating the psychological warfare campaign, as radio programming via SHERWOOD did not commence until May 1st of 1954.

Newspaper-based propaganda differed from radio programming in a variety of ways yet both proved useful to psychological warfare aims and broader PBSuccess goals. The “Voice of Liberation” reached a base of listeners that were illiterate. While this was not necessarily the goal

⁵⁸ “Memorandum” in “A Suggested Plan for Psychological Warfare Operations in Connection With Over-All Guatemalan Operations,” 24.

of the SHERWOOD team, radio-conveyed information was perhaps more accessible to many Guatemalans and Latin Americans. On the press side, the CIA was able to exploit the fact that these newspapers had previously-established readers, adding a sense of credibility to the PBSuccess propaganda published in these papers. Loyal readers of these papers were conditioned to trust and believe this content, further shielding American involvement in the anti-Arbenz movement. At times, SHERWOOD and newspaper campaigns overlapped to ensure a multilateral approach to psychological warfare. Phillips and the SHERWOOD team coordinated advertisements that promoted a soft launch of the radio program in Mexican and Guatemalan newspapers. The reception of this initiative was positive as “Editors were delighted at the prospect of filling half a page of the edition before [Labor Day].⁵⁹ The CIA used Local Latin American papers to originally advertise the “Voice of Liberation” as a radio station, which had not previously existed until its first broadcast on the first of May. By publishing these newspaper ads for the first SHERWOOD program (although readers were not clued into the fact that it would be the first), PBSuccess agents attempted to instill credibility into this CIA-engineered radio program and hide its American origins. Just as the USIA supported the CIA in producing Latin American propaganda, the local press served to strengthen the credibility of CIA-backed stories and vessels of propaganda such as “Voice of Liberation.” Arbenz’s resignation in June of 1954 suggested that the psychological warfare waged by the CIA via radio and newspapers was effective in reaching PBSuccess goals.

The Implications of Psychological Warfare

Operation PBSuccess attempted to oust the Guatemalan president; however, this CIA covert operation also served the greater purpose of controlling Latin America. The American relationship with the region was particularly at stake in this regime change. Psychological

⁵⁹ Phillips, *The Night Watch*, 41.

warfare acted as a useful tool in the American goal to depose Arbenz, a left-leaning, anti-American figure that challenged American hegemony in the region. Through propaganda production especially, the CIA worked to configure Guatemalan, and greater Latin American, perspectives on Arbenz around pressuring the President to resign. This method was incredibly effective as it fulfilled one of the major priorities of the mission, which was to act covertly as a way of hiding the American hand that was meddling with Guatemalan politics. The combination of Arbenz's democratic election to power and the "Latin hostility toward intervention" made secrecy of the utmost importance in this American-backed regime change.⁶⁰ The United States had enjoyed its guardian-like role in monitoring the Latin American region for decades. Overtly opposing Arbenz and engineering his demise would have turned the region against the United States in this era of anti-intervention. Therefore, it was the CIA that the Eisenhower administration elected to take on this challenging role. Doing so allowed the Agency to experiment with covert action. When the mission achieved its objective, the CIA called it an overall success.

Psychological warfare was key to covert efforts in Guatemala. In waging psychological warfare during the six month operation, the CIA effectively weakened Arbenz's will; he relinquished the presidency on June 27, 1954. The regional importance of Latin America must not be undermined in the discussion of the coup in Guatemala, as it was the fate of the region that the United States attempted to influence in eradicating Arbenz's political power. It was with this in mind that the CIA took the route of covert action with PBSuccess, particularly psychological warfare that could be undertaken against Arbenz from a distance. However, a covert role in influencing Latin America was not so easily maintained and the CIA faced several roadblocks in its hidden role in Arbenz's resignation that questioned even the short-term success

⁶⁰ Caridi, *20th Century American Foreign Policy: Security and Self-Interest*, 137.

of PBSuccess. One such obstruction was in the form of a troublesome *New York Times* reporter known as Sydney Gruson.

Chapter 2: Sydney Gruson and the Precarious Nature of Covert

Action

A Threat to Covert Action

The CIA succeeded in removing Arbenz from power through covert action, but it was not a simple process. In fact, the Agency almost did not reach its goals. If it failed, the blame would have rested on the shoulders of a *New York Times* reporter. Sydney Gruson, foreign correspondent for the *New York Times* based in Latin America, wrote articles from December 1953 through June of 1954 that hinted at American involvement in the political turmoil in Guatemala. As a writer for an incredibly influential newspaper, Gruson had the opportunity to be an ally of the United States and yet he empowered the Guatemalan voice through his journalism. Doing so allowed Guatemalans suspicious of American involvement to voice their concerns regarding American intervention, thus threatening the covertness of PBSuccess as a whole. This in turn put a target on Gruson's back. Through the entire covert operation, CIA agents worked to hamper Gruson's ability to report as a way of protecting the mission. As secrecy was a key priority in removing Arbenz, a nosy reporter had no business poking around classified American foreign policy, according to CIA officials such as Allen Dulles and his Deputy Director Frank Wisner. This ultimately led to a smaller battle being waged through the months of PBSuccess, only this struggle did not involve any Guatemalan Communists.

In 2023, it is a publicized fact that the United States intervened in the politics of Guatemala through CIA covert action. In 1954, however, the secrecy of the mission skewed the American public's awareness and understanding of the situation. The covert nature of Operation PBSuccess was a priority as the Eisenhower administration desired to maintain a positive American image in regards to Latin America. Therefore, the American and Guatemalan public

could only speculate about American intervention in Guatemala; nothing was confirmed. Through American news reporting and coverage of the situation in Guatemala by major newspapers, American public opinion regarding Guatemala formed. Newspapers such as the *New York Times* informed its American and international readers on the political unrest in Guatemala despite the incompleteness of reporters' own knowledge of the events. It was Sydney Gruson who came closest to uncovering the truth of PBSuccess, thus making him a threat that the CIA needed to eliminate. Gruson's relationship with the CIA during the nearly seven month period of PBSuccess was anything but simple. The Agency's treatment of Gruson revealed many things about covert action, primarily its shortcomings and unpredictability. Sydney Gruson's reporting, counterproductive to PBSuccess goals, showcased the unreliability of covert action.

Sydney Gruson and The *New York Times*

Sydney Gruson was not a Communist spy and he was not a Guatemalan agent; rather, he was a *New York Times* reporter that threatened the covertness of Operation PBSuccess. Gruson was of Irish descent, born in Dublin in 1916. Despite not being American, he represented an influential American newspaper internationally. The *New York Times* hired Gruson in 1944 where he served as a foreign correspondent in Mexico, Germany, and Guatemala. Based in Mexico City for much of 1954, Gruson broadcasted events in Guatemala for American readers from a localized distance. Latin American politics was his typical beat for the *Times* so 1954 proved to be fruitful in political events to report on. Gruson's articles helped keep Guatemala in the consciousness of *New York Times* readers. He provided reporting that, while flagged by the CIA as counterproductive to PBSuccess efforts, allowed Guatemala to exist in American public opinion. Gruson was an unruly figure who made many enemies during the course of his 1954 Guatemala broadcasting. His ambiguous reporting made him an enemy of both the Guatemalan

and United States governments. This led to heavy government monitoring of him by both nations. The United States in particular perceived his reporting as turbulent over the course of PBSuccess, unfolding in a most unfavorable way to American interests. Due to this, the CIA decided that Gruson was wily and needed to be supervised due to the objectiveness of his reporting, which sometimes alluded to American entanglement in Guatemalan affairs. As covertness was of high priority in PBSuccess, Gruson posed a challenge to the success of the operation. The CIA therefore worked diligently to keep him from publishing in the *New York Times* any evidence of American involvement in Guatemala's shaky political climate.

It was by reading newspapers that the American public got their news at the time of PBSuccess. American newspaper circulation was on the incline by 1954, as it was reported that "In 1950, household penetration by daily newspapers nationwide was 123%."⁶¹ One paper in particular served as a primary source of knowledge for its American readers. Due to its prestige, large reader base, and overall presence in the coverage of international events, the *New York Times* existed as a news hegemon reminiscent of the way the United States itself prevailed on the international stage. So influential that 20th century foreign ministers in Latin American countries complained about it, the *New York Times* shaped international public opinion through its articles.⁶² The true strength of the *Times* rested in the prominence it maintained both within civil society and the American government itself. Referenced many times in PBSuccess declassified documents, the CIA touted the *New York Times* as a news mogul. The *Times* has been described as "Arguably the most influential newspaper in America (some might say the world)," and endured as a news tycoon well before the events of PBSuccess.⁶³ In the 1950s when

⁶¹ Leslie-Jean Thornton, "The Road to "Reader-Friendly:" US Newspapers and Readership in the Late Twentieth Century," ed. Claudia Alvares, *Cogent Social Sciences* 2 no. 1 (2016): 3.

⁶² Guatemalan Foreign Minister Toriello and Foreign Minister Nervo of Mexico complained about *The New York Times* and specific reporters painting a negative image of their respective countries throughout 1954.

⁶³ Robert Chernomas and Ian Hudson, *Gatekeeper: 60 Years of Economics According to the New York Times* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 1.

American-Guatemala relations were reaching alarming tensions, the *Times* not only served as a tool for molding American public opinion, the CIA also treated it as an American public opinion machine, or an unruly force.

The Gruson Issue Begins for the CIA

No *New York Times* reporter proved more a threat to covert CIA action in Guatemala than Sydney Gruson in 1954. As a result, the short-term success that the Agency experienced in ousting Arbenz was not so easily attained. Perceived by the CIA as a double agent at times, Gruson's specialty in Latin American reporting during PBSuccess proved to be a recurring issue for Agency officials. His tricky relationship with the CIA began, before PBSuccess had even launched, as a result of an article he wrote for the *New York Times* around Christmas time in 1953. On December 23rd, Gruson published a piece titled: "Latin Americans are Vexed at U.S for Scoring Reds but Not Dictators." In this article, he commented on Latin American distaste for American anti-Communism and overarching "Yankee interference" in the region.⁶⁴ As the United States prioritized its reputation in Latin America, which served as one motivator of the coup, the CIA saw Gruson's bad press as harmful to American interests in the region. By highlighting Latin American fear of "Unwarranted interference by the United States in Guatemalan affairs," Gruson's journalism provided a platform for Latin American leaders to share their anxieties regarding American intervention.⁶⁵ In writing about this, Gruson planted in the minds of *New York Times* readers the potential of the United States to meddle in Latin American affairs. Because this was exactly what PBSuccess sought to do, Gruson's article

⁶⁴ Sydney Gruson, "Latin Americans are Vexed at U.S for Scoring Reds but Not Dictators," *The New York Times*, December 23 1953,

<https://www.nytimes.com/1953/12/23/archives/latin-americans-are-vexed-at-us-for-scoring-reds-but-not-dictators.html>, 8.

⁶⁵ Gruson, "Latin Americans are Vexed at U.S for Scoring Reds but Not Dictators," 8.

therefore hinted at the existence of Operation PBSuccess before it even began, which caused fear within the CIA.

Gruson's December 23rd *New York Times* piece quickly prompted an inter-CIA discussion regarding the reporter and his motives. Time was of the essence in this scenario as any more bad press flowing from Gruson could have deterred the psychological warfare campaign that was to begin in January 1954. A Memorandum by PBSuccess case agent J.D. Esterline stated: "Some consideration should be given to instituting an investigation of Mr. Gruson's recent activities."⁶⁶ The Esterline Memorandum suggested an "investigation" of Gruson, which set him up to receive government monitoring. Gruson published this December 23rd article from Mexico City; his proximity to Guatemala likely also motivated the CIA to take action. Although Gruson's headlines would only prove to grow more tumultuous from December 1953 on, the CIA deemed his pre-Christmas article noteworthy enough to be flagged due to its commentary on anti-Americanism in Guatemala. As the PBSuccess psychological warfare kicked off in January of 1954, the CIA treated Gruson as an unreliable reporter who had the ability to cause trouble for the mission. This hints at the capricious nature of covert action; if one individual had the ability to hamper the overall mission, how reliable was covert action really? Suspicion of Gruson would quickly turn into heavy CIA monitoring as the operation persisted into February and March. Surveilling this *New York Times* reporter acted as a way of preemptively hiding American culpability in Guatemala.

Gruson's Expulsion and Freedom of the (Foreign) Press in Guatemala

As the CIA continued to follow his reporting for any signs of trouble, Sydney Gruson found himself in conflict with another government key to PBSuccess. Government intervention

⁶⁶ J.D. Esterline, "CIA Memorandum: Sidney Gruson – Latin Americans are Vexed at U.S for Scoring Reds but Not Dictators," January 19, 1954, *FOIA*, Guatemala Collection, document 0000914127, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0000914127>.

in Gruson's reporting did not begin with the United States; rather, it was Guatemala that made the first move in hampering Gruson's ability to cover Guatemalan affairs for the *New York Times*. While the United States feared Gruson would give the Guatemalan voice a platform to share their grievances on, Guatemalan officials found issue with Gruson doing the opposite. In a January 31st article, Gruson alerted the *Times* readership of the fact that the Guatemalan government feared that an American-sourced conspiracy was in the works. In this story, he covered the Guatemalan government's publication of a White Paper that outlined a "plot" coming from its regional neighbors and the United States.⁶⁷ Gruson ultimately invalidated this fear of invasion by arguing that most Guatemalans knew that such a plot "Could not succeed."⁶⁸ This painted the Guatemalan government as foolish in its anxiety, which quickly turned into a problem for Gruson.

The article about a "plot" that the *New York Times* published on January 31st held many truths. Gruson wrote that Guatemalan officials feared an invasion of American-supported Guatemalan exiles.⁶⁹ This suspicion was entirely valid, as the paramilitary phase of Operation PBSUCCESS centered around this exact objective. The Eisenhower administration handpicked Carlos Castillo Armas to lead this invasion, and the country itself, and CIA agents were set to begin training his army of exiles in March of 1954.⁷⁰ A January 30th PBSUCCESS Telegram stated that the Guatemalan government's White Paper "Effectively exposed certain aspects of PBSUCCESS."⁷¹ CIA officials did not blame the discovery of PBSUCCESS aspects on Gruson but

⁶⁷ Sydney Gruson, "Guatemala Story of Plot Scouted," *The New York Times*, January 31st, 1954, <https://www.nytimes.com/1954/01/31/archives/guatemala-story-of-plot-scouted-conspiracy-talk-is-called-move-to.html>, 13.

⁶⁸ Gruson, "Guatemala Story of Plot Scouted," 13.

⁶⁹ Gruson, "Guatemala Story of Plot Scouted," 13.

⁷⁰ Nicholas Cullather, "Appendix A" in *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 130.

⁷¹ "Telegram From Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida to the Central Intelligence Agency," January 30, 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Guatemala Collection, Document 91, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d91>, 181.

him publishing this news was likely unwelcomed. The Guatemalan White Paper paired with Gruson's coverage of this story reveals how tricky and unpredictable covert action was. Where the American government may have felt annoyance regarding Gruson's January 31st article, the Guatemalan government expressed outward rage towards this piece. Despite Gruson reporting on something the government itself published, the Guatemalan Foreign Ministry found major issues with the sentiments he expressed.

Sydney Gruson's January 31st article caused an uproar within the Guatemalan government, leading to drastic action against him. As reported by the *New York Times* itself, a February 2 statement from the Foreign Ministry of Guatemala regarding Gruson declared that he "Systematically defamed and slandered this republic and its Government, through the press."⁷² The Foreign Ministry, Guillermo Toriello Garrido at its helm, also alleged that Gruson was "One of the most active agents of the campaign of defamation which is being developed in a malicious and increasing manner by certain information organs in the United States against Guatemala."⁷³ As Gruson wrote content for the *New York Times* from Latin America itself, his reporting paired with that of Marshall Bannell of NPR's put him in a strained relationship with not only the American government but also the Guatemalan government. Not one but two countries considered Gruson's reporting meddlesome with motive to cause chaos. This event became an American headline, giving Foreign Minister Toriello ample room to voice his theory of an American conspiracy against Guatemala. Although no declassified CIA correspondence commenting on Gruson's expulsion exists, Toriello's accusations likely caused a stir in the CIA as they hinted at the existence of PBSuccess. The claims by Toriello and the Foreign Ministry led

⁷² Special to the New York Times, "Guatemala Ousts Two U.S. News Men," *The New York Times*, February 3, 1954, <https://www.nytimes.com/1954/02/03/archives/guatemala-ousts-two-us-news-men-correspondents-of-the-times-and-n-b.html>, 7.

⁷³ Special to the New York Times, "Guatemala Ousts Two U.S. News Men," 7.

to Gruson promptly being “Expelled from the country as undesirable.”⁷⁴ Despite the situation, Gruson remained committed to reporting on Guatemalan affairs for the *New York Times* and continued his beat from the safety of Mexico City. Gruson’s eviction, despite bringing to light the suspicion of an American plot against Guatemala, ultimately damaged Guatemala’s reputation within the United States.

Gruson’s removal from Guatemala ultimately stained Guatemala’s reputation in the eyes of the American public. Accusations of encroachment on freedom of the press peppered the headlines of the *New York Times* and other American newspapers in February of 1954. In response to Gruson’s expulsion, an unnamed *Times* writer argued: “Guatemala claims to be a democracy but how can she claim that refusing to permit newspaper men to work and transmit stories is democratic?”⁷⁵ The treatment of Gruson by the Guatemalan government caused turmoil within the United States. Guatemala’s own reputation, already shaky from the reports of an alleged Communist penetration, quickly worsened. Accusations of totalitarianism and undemocratic practices were common in relation to Guatemala during the early months of 1954, all stemming from this perceived oppression of foreign journalists. Another *Times* piece, published a day later, stated: “Press freedoms, like all liberties, are indivisible. If one correspondent is muzzled or expelled, freedom of the press ceases to exist.”⁷⁶ The expulsion of Gruson, which sought to benefit Guatemala by preventing his “harmful” on-the-ground reporting, ultimately damaged the international reputation of Guatemala. The *New York Times* framed their reporter’s banishment as a corrupt action against a foreign reporter. Freedom of the press in Guatemala therefore became a hot topic in the United States which ultimately distracted

⁷⁴ Special to the New York Times, “Guatemala Ousts Two U.S. News Men,” 7.

⁷⁵ “Censors in Guatemala,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 1954, <https://www.nytimes.com/1954/02/03/archives/censors-in-guatemala.html>, 22.

⁷⁶ “Guatemala’s Explanation,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 1954, <https://www.nytimes.com/1954/02/04/archives/guatemalas-explanation.html>, 24.

from Toriello's accusation of a conspiracy against Guatemala. This further obscured CIA covert action via PBSuccess. A CIA document expressed concern about "Agitation in the Guatemalan Congress against foreign intervention and foreign press intervention" in relation to Sydney Gruson but failed to comment on the other repercussions of Gruson's expulsion. It was not until Gruson's reporting ramped up in May of 1954 that the CIA took measures to truly hamper his ability to report, as PBSuccess was on the brink of its paramilitary phase.

Gruson and the SS *Alfhem*

Rejecting the CIA's desired narrative of an anti-Arbenz Guatemala, Gruson chose in May of 1954 to give voice to a Guatemala more concerned with American intervention. As a result, the monitoring of Gruson by the Agency heightened through the spring of 1954 because CIA agents saw this tendency in Gruson's reporting as a threat to PBSuccess goals. On May 15th, the SS *Alfhem* docked in Guatemala; it carried arms from the Czech Republic which was a Communist state at the time. The CIA jumped on this story as it could "Be used to prove Guatemalan efforts to import clandestinely arms from behind Iron Curtain."⁷⁷ As CIA agents worked to develop propaganda materials surrounding this event, they also kept a watchful eye over the American media and how it discussed this affair. A PBSuccess cable on May 21st read: "Washington Post today carries excellent editorial entitled 'Communist Beachhead'...However, article front page New York Times Sidney Gruson declares Guatemalan people now united behind government as result U.S. attitude toward arms shipment."⁷⁸ The CIA considered the way that Gruson headlined and framed this story a nuisance. His reporting did not provide the narrative that the CIA hoped to weave with this evidence of a supposed Guatemalan-Soviet

⁷⁷ "Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency to the CIA Station in [place not declassified]," May 16 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1952-1954*, Guatemala Collection, Document 152, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d152>.

⁷⁸ "Cable to Washington Sr. Rep. Guatemala City Re. Washington Post and New York Times Sidney Gruson," May 21 1954, *FOIA*, Guatemala Collection, document 0000136917, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0000136917>.

relationship. Rather, it expressed Guatemalan suspicion of the United States and not the Arbenz government, which the CIA sought to achieve through its psychological warfare methodology. From this, it can be concluded that Gruson's articles were counterproductive to American interests in Guatemala, acting as a reminder to the CIA that it was not achieving its initiative. Gruson's headline also insinuated that Guatemalans viewed the United States as villainous; the potential of this attitude to spread through Latin America would be detrimental to the American relationship with Latin America. Whereas the *Washington Post* labeled the discovery of arms as evidence of the dangers of Communism in Guatemala, Gruson in the *New York Times* chose to instead highlight that "national unity" in Guatemala resulted from the event, rather than fear of Arbenz's alleged Communist government. Press monitoring served as one of the ways in which the CIA kept tabs on Sydney Gruson and his potential to upset Operation PBSuccess.

Gruson's reporting failed to promote American interests in Guatemala, which is one of the reasons the CIA found issue with it. His coverage of the *Alfhem* arms discovery proved to be an enduring sore subject for the CIA. A May 25th meeting between various American government departments revealed: "CIA is worried about news stories written by correspondents of the New York Times and other U.S. newspapers in Guatemala because such stories are not in the best interest of the U.S. and are widely disseminated in Latin America."⁷⁹ Just one day before this meeting took place, the *New York Times* published an article by Gruson titled: "U.S. Arms Stand Alienates Guatemalan Foes of Reds." This was likely one of the reasons the CIA called the *Times* and its reporters into question during the meeting. In this piece, Gruson wrote: "Friends and foes of the [Arbenz] administration have closed ranks in support of the Government's

⁷⁹ "Meeting on 25 May Between Department of State, USIA, and CIA Representatives," April 3 1954, *FOIA*, Guatemala Collection, document 0000923225, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0000923225>.

position” regarding the purchasing of arms.⁸⁰ This suggestion that Guatemalans increased their support to the Arbenz government went against the PBSuccess psychological warfare campaign. The psychological warfare that the CIA waged against the Arbenz administration sought to make the President feel isolated, not supported as Gruson suggested. His article, which CIA officials predicted would be distributed through Latin America, did not paint the United States in a positive light. This anti-American sentiment, paired with the notion that Arbenz strengthened his support, was disadvantageous to CIA covert action in Guatemala. Gruson’s single article was enough to cause a stir high up in the State department, revealing how temperamental and unreliable covert action was.

The content of Gruson’s article on the SS *Alfhem* was harmful enough to PBSuccess plans that government officials suggested action against him. As referenced in the May 25th meeting: “Another State Department representative suggested that the Department should try to encourage the ‘Right sort of newspaperman to go into Guatemala.’”⁸¹ Based on the previous treatment of Gruson, the Representative likely referred to Gruson in saying this. Replacing Gruson with a “right sort” of reporter could have bolstered PBSuccess plans, especially if one such reporter would tout the story of Communism in Guatemala as the CIA and State Department wanted. Based on these conclusions, Gruson was a controversial enough figure that a conversation was struck up between some of the most powerful departments in the American government, including the Department of State, the CIA, and the United States Information Agency. These organs of government treated Gruson as a top-priority threat to PBSuccess due to the nature of his reporting that did not align with the narrative that the American government

⁸⁰ Sydney Gruson, “U. S. Arms Stand Alienates Guatemalan Foes of Reds,” *The New York Times*, May 24 1954, <https://www.nytimes.com/1954/05/24/archives/u-s-arms-stand-alienates-guatemalan-foes-of-reds-washington-is.htm>

⁸¹ “Meeting on 25 May Between Department of State, USIA, and CIA Representatives.”

sought to promote in regards to Guatemala. This supports the idea that covert action was unreliable if one reporter had the ability to upset the entire operation. The idea of replacing suggestions to hamper his reporting persisted through the end of May and into June.

CIA Action Against Gruson

As a way of combating rogue reporter Sydney Gruson, American government officials went to the source of Gruson's power: the *New York Times* itself. Sydney Gruson's affiliation with the *New York Times* was both a bother and a blessing for the CIA. On the one hand, Gruson produced articles damaging to the American reputation in Latin America; on the other, he worked for a newspaper that the Eisenhower administration itself had intimate connections with. CIA-*New York Times* relations were alluded to multiple times in May 1954 CIA documents, all of which suggested that Sydney Gruson be dealt with through influencing his supervisor at the *Times*.⁸² As PBSuccess was on the brink of entering into its paramilitary phase, the nature of Gruson's reporting on Guatemala continued to exist as a concern within the government. Covertness of American involvement in Guatemala became increasingly necessary in this vital mission stage, which is why Gruson's counterproductive articles required immediate action.

In PBSuccess, the CIA first exploited its *New York Times* relationship in response to Gruson's May 21st article about the SS *Alfhem*. Infiltrating the higher ranks of the *New York Times* gave the CIA more confidence in achieving PBSuccess objectives, as Gruson would be dealt with by his superiors. The author of the May 25th CIA cable suggested that the "Matter be brought attention top hierarchy New York Times," indicating an alliance between government officials and the *New York Times*.⁸³ The press that Gruson produced on the SS *Alfhem*, unfavorable to the CIA's ultimate PBSuccess goals, caused a governmental stir that prompted

⁸² Peter Grose, *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 380.

⁸³ "Cable to Washington Sr. Rep. Guatemala City Re. Washington Post and New York Times Sidney Gruson."

proposals to penetrate the United States' top newspaper with the goal of censoring Gruson. To hinder Gruson's potential to blow the PBSuccess mission as a whole, agents suggested using CIA officials' connections to *New York Times* superiors to restrict Gruson. Even officials high up within the CIA hierarchy tossed around the name "Sydney Gruson" in an anxious way.

Gruson's influence was felt so broadly that even CIA Director Allen Dulles held concerns regarding Gruson. Covert action was unpredictable, Dulles was learning through PBSuccess. He, like other CIA employees, saw Gruson as a hazard who needed to be dealt with. Dulles' biographer narrated a dinner planned by Director Dulles where he hosted the cousin of Arthur Hays Sulzberger (then-publisher of the *New York Times*) with the intention of petitioning for the removal of Gruson from the *Times*.⁸⁴ To characterize this relationship: "Such was the climate of trust between the CIA and the Times in those days that Sulzberger promptly called Gruson off his beat."⁸⁵ By Grose defining the relationship between the CIA and *Times* as having a "climate of trust," evidence arises for the mutually beneficial relationship between the leaders of a governmental organization and an American media tycoon. Sydney Gruson existed as an outlier in this relationship and challenged the authority of the American government. He dared to question its motives and involvement. As a result, the CIA ran to Gruson's superiors to remove the nuisance and ease the functioning of PBSuccess. If the CIA needed to beg a newspaper to curb one of their reporters, really how effective was covert action to American interests?

As the CIA collaborated with other American government departments on Operation PBSuccess, objections to Gruson came from outside the CIA. Equally influential, CIA Director Dulles' brother also saw issue with Gruson. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, brother of Allen and another key figure in PBSuccess, also expressed his alarm regarding Gruson's

⁸⁴ Grose, *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles*, 380.

⁸⁵ Grose, *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles*, 380.

reporting in May of 1954. According to a May 27th National Security Memorandum, “Gruson, thought Secretary Dulles, was a very dangerous character, and his reporting had done a great deal of harm,” which led to a call for action.⁸⁶ The “harm” that Gruson inflicted likely had to do with his tendency to report the Guatemalan perspective on different situations that PBSuccess created. Gruson was never swayed by American interests which sometimes prompted him to “damage” the reputation of the United States. PBSuccess was a covert mission; Gruson did not know about it. And yet he published articles that damaged aspects of the mission, such as the psychological warfare waged against Arbenz and the American desire to preserve its reputation in the whole affair. Gruson’s rogue reporting had the potential to be duplicated by other outspoken American reporters, which is likely why the Dulles brothers so adamantly antagonized Gruson’s freedom to report on Guatemalan affairs. In regards to Gruson, Grose, Allen Dulles’ biographer, continued to write, “As the operation reached its climax, Gruson’s capacity for independent witness was found inconvenient” by people such as the Dulles brothers.⁸⁷ By not being swayed by American interests in his reporting, Gruson was not an asset to the CIA and rather served as a nuisance to greater PBSuccess goals and secrecy.

The CIA continued to exploit its relationship with the *New York Times* through the last weeks of PBSuccess. When Gruson caused mayhem with his articles, it was the government connections to the *Times* that the CIA relied on to ease the situation. Spurring anxiety within the CIA’s collective mind, no one was more alarmed by Sydney Gruson than Frank Wisner. Wisner, Deputy Director for Plans at the CIA at the time of Operation PBSuccess, expressed his distaste for Gruson’s reporting on multiple occasions, including to his superiors. In a Memorandum to

⁸⁶ “Memorandum of Discussion at the 199th Meeting of the National Security Council on Thursday, May 27, 1954,” May 27 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, The American Republics Volume IV*, document 454, page 1132, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v04/d454>.

⁸⁷ Grose, *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles*, 380.

Director Allen Dulles on June 14, Wisner wrote: “I don’t know whether you plan to have any further conversations with your friend on the Times, but...you might call his attention to this Gruson piece.”⁸⁸ During an integral time of the coup, when Carlos Castillo Armas was mere days away from beginning his invasion, Wisner was turning his attention to reporter at the *New York Times* Sydney Gruson. Gruson and his reporting was such a priority in Wisner’s mind that he suggested that Gruson be dealt with through Dulles’ own connection at the *Times*, which the Director had already milked as seen through the dinner party Dulles hosted for Sulzberger’s cousin. Once again, evidence shows a relationship between the CIA and *New York Times* during the events of PBSuccess that gave the government hope in alleviating the issue of Sydney Gruson.

Wisner’s June 14th petition to sway the *New York Times* to take action against Gruson. was not his first. The salience of the CIA’s issue with Gruson’s framing of the SS *Alfhem* affair persisted through the end of May. In a May 29th cable Wisner stated: “At moment have some hope that [Gruson’s] newspaper can be prevailed upon to take some such action” in response to Gruson’s May 28th article about a political pact Guatemala proposed to Honduras.⁸⁹ In this particular article, Gruson shed light on Guatemalan Foreign Minister Toriello’s stance that the American State Department’s statement on the SS *Alfhem* arms shipment was just another item in a “Tendentious propaganda campaign” that the United States was waging against Guatemala.⁹⁰ By making note of this, Gruson gave Toriello a platform on which to preach his sermon about the American propaganda campaign that, while not public knowledge, truly was occurring through

⁸⁸ Frank G. Wisner, “Memorandum From the Deputy Director for Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner) to Director of Central Intelligence Dulles,” June 14 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, Guatemala Collection, Document 182, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d182>, 328.

⁸⁹ “Cable to Sr. Rep. Guatemala City Re. Activities of Gruson; Reports Fortuny,” May 29 1954, *FOIA*, Guatemala Collection, Document 0000136939, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0000136939>.

⁹⁰ Sydney Gruson, “Guatemala Proposes Pact with Honduras,” *The New York Times*, May 28 1954, <https://www.nytimes.com/1954/05/28/archives/guatemala-proposes-pact-with-honduras-guatemala-seeks-honduran.html>, 7.

covert CIA action. In this sense, Gruson's reporting threatened the covertness, and therefore success, of PBSuccess. By granting Toriello the opportunity to talk about his American propaganda theory, Gruson publicized the perception of a conspiracy like PBSuccess to *Times* readers. Through this May 28th *New York Times* article, one troublesome reporter empowered an equally-troublesome Foreign Minister, creating a unique power dynamic within PBSuccess.

Where Did Gruson's Loyalties Lie?

Suspicion ran high within the CIA regarding an alliance between Toriello and the reporter that once caused the Foreign Minister so much inconvenience. Accusations regarding Gruson's allegiance peppered CIA transmissions, which served to further villainize him and justify government action against him. Despite Gruson's expulsion from Guatemala in February, he petitioned the Guatemalan government to allow him entrance back into the country to continue reporting in May of 1954. On May 27th, an unnamed CIA agent described Gruson's actions as "Making a deal with Guillermo Toriello, in which Gruson promised to bend over backward to give Guatemala and its Foreign minister full and favorable treatment in his reporting."⁹¹ In order to make sense of why Gruson did not support the United States in his reporting, the CIA theorized it was due to an alleged deal between Foreign Minister Toriello and Gruson. Toriello was the culprit behind Gruson's expulsion in the first place; it would be hard for Gruson to convince him to return. Therefore, the CIA speculated, Gruson needed to incentivize Toriello by giving him favorable press. This accusation served to explain the way in which Gruson reported about Toriello's accusations, which outwardly blamed the United States for meddling with Guatemala, in his May 28th article. The CIA feared an alliance between Gruson and Toriello, as both individuals flirted with unearthing Operation PBSuccess. Whereas the CIA saw its own

⁹¹ "Reporting on Guatemala by New York Times Correspondent Sydney Gruson," May 27 1954, *FOIA*, Guatemala Collection, Document 0000923198, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0000923198>.

relationship with the *New York Times* publisher as useful, the alleged relation between Gruson and Toriello was anything but favorable.

As the CIA often accused Gruson of “siding” with the Guatemalan plight and opposing American interests, it was only natural for the CIA to point the finger at a supposed deal between Gruson and Toriello. This conspiracy, in the CIA’s eyes, could also serve to explain why Gruson so often gave the United States bad press while empowering the Guatemalan voices that PBSuccess sought to invalidate. Wisner, in a post-coup Memorandum, alleged that Gruson “Was not only going all out in reporting the Toriello-Arbenz line – he was going out of his way to support it.”⁹² By framing Gruson’s reporting as favorable to Guatemala, Wisner suggested that Gruson was working for the Guatemalan government – likely due to the fact that he owed Toriello some sort of favor. CIA officials were baffled by Gruson; they did not understand why he was writing the way he was. In order to rationalize Gruson’s actions, individuals like Wisner proposed this controversial allegiance. The CIA viewed Gruson’s reporting as favorable to the Guatemalan cause, anti-American in its sentiments, and therefore inconsistent with overall PBSuccess goals. Not only did Gruson not fit into PBSuccess plans, he outwardly threatened them by empowering individuals such as Toriello. While all sorts of conspiracies plagued PBSuccess, none were perhaps as salient within the CIA as the issue of Sydney Gruson.

Separate from his so-called relationship with Foreign Minister Toriello, Gruson allegedly expressed anti-American sentiments in other ways that harmed PBSuccess. According to a June 2nd CIA document written by Allen Reelfoot, Gruson in his articles “Decried United States statements and activities as unwarranted interference.”⁹³ Due to the fact that PBSuccess was

⁹² Frank G. Wisner, “Memorandum for the Honorable Henry F. Holland,” August 9 1954, *FOIA*, Guatemala Collection, Document 0000920167, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0000920167>, 2.

⁹³ Alan N. Reelfoot, “Guatemalan Matters Sydney Gruson,” June 2 1954, *FOIA*, Guatemala Collection, Document 0000922810, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0000922810> Preface.

occurring not so long after the Good Neighbor Policy, it is obvious why this conclusion generated anxiety within the CIA. American foreign intervention was a taboo concept, particularly in the context of Latin America where the Good Neighbor Policy dominated relations between the region and the United States. Hiding the American hand through covert action was of the utmost importance during the regime change in Guatemala. Gruson through his articles called to attention the American presence in Guatemala, which was exactly what the CIA sought to hide. The same CIA dispatch shared that “Reports from Guatemala indicate that Gruson’s activities have been harmful to the activities of PBSUCCESS.”⁹⁴ The purpose of the coup in the first place was to covertly remove Arbenz from power. Accusatory reporting such as Gruson’s posed a threat to the very nature of the coup itself. Gruson therefore posed a threat to the covertness of the coup itself and had the potential, in the eyes of the CIA, to ruin the United States’ regional and international reputation.

Gruson Vindicated

No single reporter caused the CIA more trouble than Sydney Gruson during Operation PBSuccess. Gruson’s news coverage of Guatemalan events for the *New York Times* raised alarm throughout all levels of the CIA, showcasing the priority of covertness and American innocence in the removal of Arbenz from power. Sydney Gruson did not tout the Communist accusations against Guatemala as the CIA would have liked; rather, he tended to emphasize the Guatemalan perspective of anti-Americanism. This caused concern among CIA officials, including the Agency’s director Allen Dulles, about the covertness of the American presence in Guatemala. If Gruson flirted with the idea of American involvement in the chaos of 1954 Guatemalan politics remains up for interpretation. Whether or not Gruson supported or opposed the United States, he did hold his own opinions on Guatemalan affairs. In a personal letter to fellow *Times* reporter

⁹⁴ Reelfoot, “Guatemalan Matters Sydney Gruson,” Preface.

James Reston in March of 1954, Gruson wrote: “I think our editorial writers (and the State Department) should know that there is a very strong feeling among intelligent, non-Communist Guatemalans that the U.S. has made two basic mistakes here recently. One was the arms issue howl that went up from Washington. The other is the state department’s close identification of itself with the fruit company.”⁹⁵ This passage of the letter highlights the fact that Gruson was in fact considering the Guatemalan side of the issue. It also reveals Gruson’s own perception and opinion of the American reputation in Guatemala. While Gruson wrote this letter before the United States took drastic measures to monitor him and his reporting, a sense of Gruson’s consciousness regarding the importance of American impressions and the ways in which the State Department fumbled is apparent. Reston, well after the coup occurred, in 1956, shared with Gruson that “When the boys at CIA were calling up to find out what you were going to say on the following day I had the pleasure of reminding them they were asking for information from the guy they tried to destroy during the Guatemala fiasco.”⁹⁶ This fleeting, lighthearted comment that Reston made hints at the fact that both he and Gruson were aware of the fact that the CIA sought to curb and, ultimately, “destroy” Gruson in order to halt the seemingly bad press he produced in relation to Guatemala. Whether or not Gruson knew of this CIA plot at the time is unclear but just two years later, the matter seemed of familiarity to him, and funny at that.

Sydney Gruson caused trouble for the CIA; in return, he received government surveillance. His days of being monitored by the American government in no means ended with Arbenz’s resignation. Gruson's allegiances, motivations, and ideological leanings continued to be dissected long after the Guatemalan coup of 1954. A 1961 State Department file noted that “In

⁹⁵ Sydney Gruson, “Letter to Mr. Reston from Sydney Gruson,” March 26 1954, *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library*, <https://digital.library.illinois.edu/items/a0f11930-6478-0134-1dda-0050569601ca-f>.

⁹⁶ James Reston, “Letter to Sydney Gruson regarding the Eisenhower administration and the favorable press coverage that it has received,” December 12 1956, *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library*, <https://digital.library.illinois.edu/items/a73385a0-6478-0134-1dda-0050569601ca-4>, 2.

November 1947, Sydney Gruson, then residing in Warsaw, was anti-Communist; but that in June 1948 he was reported as probably a Marxist but not a Communist.”⁹⁷ The State Department made this observation in response to Gruson’s petition to be naturalized in the United States. Similar to the remarks made by CIA officials during PBSuccess, government-based complaints about Gruson’s ever-changing views continued to haunt him. To the CIA and other American government agencies, Gruson was untrustworthy in that his beliefs were inconsistent and oftentimes anti-American. Gruson’s erratic loyalty was a threat in that he could either support the United States through his reporting or take the country down in order to pursue his alleged Communist agenda.

Just as they did with Gruson, the CIA continued to monitor the American press even after the events of PBSuccess and Gruson’s reporting which ultimately led to questions regarding the nature of the CIA’s relationship with the *New York Times*. Speculation regarding a “policy of cooperation” between the CIA and the *Times* arose in the 1970s; however, no verdict was reached in the context of Operation PBSuccess.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, events came full circle as Gruson got a snippet of retribution for the trouble the CIA caused him. In a 1977 *New York Times* article, a letter written by Gruson himself to the CIA was shared, stating that “The CIA’s persistent refusal to disclose in full its relationships with the news media has placed The Times and its employees in an untenable position. Allegations have been made and suspicions have been aroused.”⁹⁹ The connection that the Dulles brothers had to top *New York Times* persons, private to some extent, during Operation PBSuccess came to light, and Gruson aided in this exposé. Whereas the CIA feared in 1954 that Gruson would reveal the true nature of American

⁹⁷ Memorandum of Classified Information from Immigration and Naturalization Service Files Re Sydney Gruson,” June 28 1961, https://search.archives.gov/search?affiliate=national-archives&sort_by=&query=umissdoc20, 1.

⁹⁸ Sydney Gruson, “Text of the Times’ Letter to C.I.A.,” *The New York Times*, September 12 1977, <https://nyti.ms/40Z86wy>, 29.

⁹⁹ Gruson, “Text of the Times’ Letter to C.I.A.,” 29.

involvement in Guatemala through PBSuccess, it was not until the 1970s that he truly uncovered CIA interference. It is both fitting and ironic that Sydney Gruson, at the time Vice President of the *New York Times* Company, was the one spearheading this investigation, representing a swan song of sorts. Perhaps Gruson's awareness regarding government dissatisfaction with his 1954 Guatemala reporting sparked a fire in him that promoted this action. Claims continued to be made during the end of the 20th century about the corrupt nature of the CIA's relationship with the American press. In fact, the overall fitness of the CIA to conduct regime-change operations as they did in Guatemala quickly came under scrutiny following the failed Bay of Pigs mission that succeeded PBSuccess. Gruson found himself caught in the crossfire of the CIA's covert mission in Guatemala, though certainly not as much as President Arbenz himself, and experienced the hardship of government tampering with his ability to report, as all journalists should be guaranteed the right to.

The CIA treated *New York Times* reporter Sydney Gruson as a priority during PBSuccess due to the tone of the content that he was producing for the newspaper. Emphasis on the Guatemalan perception of American intervention in the fiasco put him at the top of a list of reporters to be monitored by the CIA. While it is in the nature of the CIA to prioritize covertness, the Agency during the 1950s touted this value to an extreme. The legacy of the Good Neighbor Policy between the United States and Latin America incentivized the American government to maintain the facade of nonintervention, friendly politics within the region. Removing a democratically-elected president from power was taboo at the time, which is why the CIA pursued a psychological warfare course of action that allowed American inculpability in 1954 Guatemalan politics. Sydney Gruson's reporting, which tended to give a voice to Guatemalans that suspected American involvement, proved to be a roadblock for PBSuccess plans in that

Gruson did not deny American involvement and rather empowered Guatemalans to speak on this topic, thus addressing the entire reading base of *The New York Times*. Gruson's meddling prompted government intervention into the high ranks of *The New York Times* itself, specifically publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger, as a way of silencing this reporting. Sydney Gruson's reputation with the CIA reveals the ways in which the Agency both monitored and influenced the American press as a means of ensuring covert foreign intervention. While Gruson's reporting did not prompt the Agency to pursue new courses of action in PBSuccess, his indirect role in the operation speaks volumes to the limitations of covert action. This reality questions even the short-term success of PBSuccess that the CIA achieved through psychological warfare. How could one reporter be such a threat if covert action was a valuable form of American foreign policy? The very practice of covert action as a foreign policy tactic that Gruson threatened came to be a point of contention within the government in the decades following PBSuccess.

Chapter 3: CIA Covert Action as a Political Tool?

Introducing the Legacy of PBSuccess

PBSuccess was not the first covert operation executed by the United States and it certainly was not the last. The removal of Arbenz through psychological warfare completed the primary objective of PBSuccess. While the presence of Sydney Gruson brought to light the shortcomings of covert action, the CIA scantily curbed this threat to the operation and ultimately reached the mission goals. The short-term success of the coup incentivized the Eisenhower administration to continue using covert action through the CIA. A chain of chronological events fueled the validation of CIA covert action as a useful foreign policy tool. The victory of Operation TPAjax, the 1953 CIA-staged coup in Iran to remove a progressive candidate from office and instate the pro-American Shah, was the motivation for PBSuccess. Concurrently, the perceived success of Ajax and PBSuccess led to more CIA covert operations, particularly the failed Bay of Pigs operation in 1961 Cuba.¹⁰⁰ As the CIA added covert experience and fleeting victories to its repertoire, the covert action route of American foreign policy grew seemingly more valuable and yet remained a classified secret feat.

Covert action continued to be celebrated by the American government following PBSuccess; concurrently, the repercussions of missions such as PBSuccess became more concrete. As these were classified missions, only government officials knew of their existence, and a small number at that. Members of Congress in particular speculated about CIA involvement in countries such as Guatemala but this remained unconfirmed until years after the fact. Following the defeat of the Bay of Pigs operation in 1961, Representatives began sharing strong opinions about the negative effects of the events in Guatemala, Iran, and Cuba as CIA

¹⁰⁰ “Central Intelligence Agency, History, The Battle for Iran, by Claud H. Corrigan, undated (c. mid-1970s),” <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/16423-document-3-central-intelligence-agency-history>, 80.

involvement became more clear. The purpose and validity of the CIA, as a result, came into question as Representatives challenged whether or not these operations actually proved beneficial. Where the CIA saw success, Congressional Records running from the 1960s and into the 1990s revealed negative sentiments of Representatives in regards to covert American intervention around the globe. Not only did these politicians scrutinize CIA operations such as PBSuccess and Ajax, they also contested the role of covert action in American foreign policy. The success that the CIA saw in PBSuccess was rebuffed by members of Congress, revealing the controversy of utilizing the CIA to pursue covert action abroad.

AJAX, PBSuccess, and The Bay of Pigs

Covert action through CIA operations did not begin with the events in Guatemala. While PBSuccess evolved into a model for American foreign policy execution, the CIA designed the coup in Guatemala based on a preceding operation. One short year before PBSuccess ousted Arbenz from power, Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh fell prey to TPAJAX or Operation Ajax, another covert CIA operation. Mossadegh, like Arbenz, was a reformist, left-leaning leader who belonged to a democratically-elected government. Troubled relations between the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, a British business, and Mossadegh himself prompted American intervention in Iran on behalf of both Great Britain and the United States itself. Like Arbenz and the United Fruit Company, the motive for removing Mossadegh came from both a political and economic standpoint. A CIA Memorandum outlined the goals of Operation Ajax as being: “To effect the fall of the Mossadeq government; and to replace it with a pro-Western government under the Shah’s leadership.”¹⁰¹ Mossadegh, or Mossadeq, existed as a nuisance for both the American and British governments due to his ideological leanings and policy proposals,

¹⁰¹ “Memorandum Prepared in the Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency,” March 8 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, Iran 1951–1954 Collection, Second Edition, Document 363, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54IranEd2/d363>, 916.

not unlike Arbenz. Although some CIA methods seen in Operation Ajax differed from those utilized in PBSuccess, there existed a resemblance between the Ajax “Intensive propaganda campaign” and that belonging to the PBSuccess psychological warfare initiative.¹⁰² When Operation Ajax successfully removed Mossadegh from power in August of 1953, the Eisenhower administration celebrated the CIA’s achievement of a seemingly successful covert operation. Achieving its Ajax objectives led to the CIA proposition, solidification, and execution of Operation PBSuccess.

Operation PBSuccess ended in the resignation of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman and the rise of Carlos Castillo Armas to power, thus completing its mission goals. The operation’s psychological warfare architecture was particularly unique and created “A masterpiece of deception” that pressured Arbenz to vacate his position of power.¹⁰³ The Eisenhower administration touted the methods and immediate results of PBSuccess as ingenious following the CIA’s political feat. Harmful sociopolitical conditions that developed in Guatemala in the decades following the coup, however, raised questions regarding the validity of the CIA’s achievements in Guatemala. But in the days immediately following PBSuccess, there was much to celebrate within the Eisenhower administration. As Cullather argued: PBSuccess convinced Eisenhower’s administration that “Covert operations offered a safe, inexpensive substitute for armed force,” particularly in the fight against perceived Communism abroad.¹⁰⁴ Covert action hid any evidence of American involvement in regime changes and ultimately saved money during the Cold War. What the Eisenhower administration saw in the immediate results of Ajax and PBSuccess was that covert action could achieve American policy preferences abroad. This

¹⁰² “Memorandum Prepared in the Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency,” 916.

¹⁰³ John M. Collins, “U.S. Low-Intensity Conflicts 1899-1990,” September 10 1990, Congressional Research Service, United States Congress, *ProQuest Congressional*, https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t21_d22_crs-1990-crs-0005?accountid=10474, 37.

¹⁰⁴ Nicholas Cullather, “Operation PBSUCCESS: The United States and Guatemala 1952-1954,” 1994, *Central Intelligence Agency History Staff*, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0000134974>, 1.

created a false sense of security in the method of covert action. This ultimately “Lulled [the] Agency and administration into a complacency that proved fatal at the Bay of Pigs seven years later.”¹⁰⁵

Seven years after PBSUCCESS, the 1961 Bay of Pigs Operation in Cuba ended the covert action victory streak. This covert operation went down in history as perhaps the most prominent stain on the CIA’s reputation and had detrimental effects on the covert action method. Two short years before the operation, Cuban nationalist figure Fidel Castro overthrew the pro-American Batista administration and established diplomatic relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union. This caused an uproar within the American government similar to the one sparked by the accusations of Arbenz being Communist. The goals of the Bay of Pigs mission, therefore, were “To replace Castro government with one more devoted to true interests of Cuban people and more acceptable to U.S. in such manner avoid appearance of U.S. intervention.”¹⁰⁶ How the CIA outlined the ways in which the United States would benefit from the Bay of Pigs mission was more clear cut in this proposal compared to previous missions. As all covert action by design involves secrecy, utilizing the CIA to remove Castro would prevent the world from turning to the United States as the culprit. In this sense, covert action continued to exist as a method for preserving the reputation of the United States until the disappointment of the Bay of Pigs mission. In referencing this operation, Cullather articulated that it “Was not a copy of PBSUCCESS, but an improvement built around the elements of the Guatemala operation that had been considered effective.”¹⁰⁷ One of the effective PBSUCCESS elements referenced was the psychological warfare waged through the CIA’s Voice of Liberation radio station. The CIA was

¹⁰⁵ Cullather, “Operation PBSUCCESS: The United States and Guatemala 1952-1954,” 1.

¹⁰⁶ “Briefing Papers Used to Brief President-Elect Kennedy November 18,” November 18, 1960, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1963 American Republics*, Cuba 1961-1962 Collection, Document 232, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v10-12mSupp/d232>, page 2.

¹⁰⁷ Cullather, “Operation PBSUCCESS: The United States and Guatemala 1952-1954,” 84.

unsuccessful in duplicating the results of PBSuccess in the Bay of Pigs mission, which quickly came to be considered a failure due to the surrender of CIA-backed forces after being overpowered by Castro's army. As a result, Castro maintained power until well into the 21st century and the CIA experienced a blow to its method of covert action. The winning streak of the Agency was deterred as a result of the Bay of Pigs mission, which initiated a discussion about what role the CIA and covert action ought to play in American foreign policy.

A chronological and thematic line runs through Ajax, PBSuccess, and The Bay of Pigs Operation, each happening within a decade of each other. The achievements of Operation Ajax, the 1953 coup in Iran that also utilized psychological warfare, gave the CIA the confidence to conduct a similar mission in Guatemala.¹⁰⁸ Combined together, Ajax and PBSuccess preceded the Bay of Pigs. The perceived success of removing Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh and Guatemalan President Arbenz rested in the CIA completing its goals within both regime changes. Longevity of political results and sociocultural stability were not factors that the CIA considered in measuring the success of covert action. The short-term successes of PBSuccess and Ajax gave the CIA a degree of certainty that it could remove Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro from power. In all three cases, Communism was a stated motive for American intervention and the CIA used covert action to create the facade of American innocence within these regime changes. Through later historical analysis, the outcome of each CIA covert operation differed in degree of success. A 1990 report, written by John Collins of Congressional Research Services, concluded that the CIA operation in Iran was a "Success," Guatemala a "Mixed Opinion" resolved conflict, and The Bay of Pigs a "Failure."¹⁰⁹ "Mixed Opinion" defined the outcome of PBSuccess because

¹⁰⁸ Mario Overall and Dan Hagedorn, *PBSuccess: The CIA's Covert Operation to Overthrow Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz, June-July 1954*, (England: Helion & Company, 2016), 9.

¹⁰⁹ Collins, "U.S. Low-Intensity Conflicts 1899-1990," 71.

it was a “Short term success, but a long term failure,” according to the report.¹¹⁰ Collins could see by 1990 that the repercussions of the coup weighed in on the perceived success of PBSuccess but in 1954, the CIA only saw success. Despite this new lens on the accomplishments of these three CIA operations, the CIA, following Ajax and PBSuccess, saw these covert operations as contributing positively to the United States’ political goals internationally. Interim accomplishments went a long way in this sense and these two operations empowered the Agency to continue pursuing covert action abroad in the name of American hegemony.

Temporary rather than long term success incentivized the CIA to execute the Bay of Pigs mission along with other operations. Before waiting to analyze the persisting political repercussions of Ajax and PBSuccess, the CIA continued to receive clearance to enact foreign covert action. A January 1976 Congressional Report stated that “In the international environment of the 1950’s Agency operations were regarded as an essential contribution to the attainment of United States foreign policy objectives.”¹¹¹ The “specialization” of the CIA in covert action allowed for secrecy and subtlety in achieving American political goals outside of the United States. This benefited the United States by concealing the American role in regime changes from the public eye, as seen in the Guatemalan coup. Therefore, as a result of Ajax and PBSuccess, “Both the Agency and Washington policymakers acquired a sense of confidence in the CIA’s capacity for operational successes.”¹¹² Not only did the CIA grant itself clearance to continue operating in the way it did in Guatemala and Iran, members of the Eisenhower administration also saw the Agency’s value as a result of the short-term outcomes of PBSuccess and Ajax.

Avoiding culpability in the interference of local politics in Iran and Guatemala was key to both

¹¹⁰ Collins, “U.S. Low-Intensity Conflicts 1899-1990,” 70.

¹¹¹ “Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Foreign and Military Intelligence Book 4,” April 23 1976, Select Senate Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *ProQuest Congressional*, https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t49.d48.13133-6_s rp.755_4?accountid=10474, 45.

¹¹² “Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Foreign and Military Intelligence Book 4,” 45.

operations. The fleeting success in each mission led to Agency confidence in removing other perceived anti-American threats via covert American action.

In the 1950s, the CIA touted PBSuccess as a vital achievement. American politicians began to reconsider this victory, however, due to repercussions of the coup that came in the 1960s. Likewise, Operation Ajax came under scrutiny for the same reasons. Political instability and the Guatemalan Civil War stemmed directly from the removal of a president and the installation of a dictator. As Collins claimed in his 1990 report: “The U.S.-instigated coup against Arbenz Guzman in Guatemala (1954) was a short-term success, but a long-term failure, because U.S. counterinsurgency efforts soon were required to keep his successor in office.”¹¹³ The failure of Castillo-Armas to maintain popular support proved to be an issue for the United States following the coup, as the CIA positioned him to take over the Guatemalan government due to his pro-American orientation. The success of Ajax also came under scrutiny, as the tense nature of modern day Iranian-American relations are clear.¹¹⁴ In this sense, it is the aftermath of PBSuccess and Ajax that hold the most striking resemblance. These regime changes, instigated by the CIA through covert action, led to political repercussions in each country including corruption, instability, and human rights violations. Due to this, it is impossible to call either mission a “success” as the CIA previously did. As conflicts in Iran and Guatemala progressed, members of Congress, newly enlightened regarding CIA intervention in these respective countries, began to discuss the legitimacy of CIA covert action in pursuing American political gains in the international landscape. As a January 1964 Congressional record posed: “The question remains as to whether the CIA is the proper tool for such endeavors.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Collins, “U.S. Low-Intensity Conflicts 1899-1990,” 70.

¹¹⁴ Malcolm Byrne and Mark J. Gasiorowski, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 261.

¹¹⁵ “Congressional Record January 8, 1964,” Congressional Session 88- 2 (1964), *ProQuest Congressional*, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t19.d20.cr-1964-0108?accountid=10474>, 94.

Congressional Action Against the CIA: The Post Bay of Pigs Era

The question posed above was a major topic of debate within Congress following the Bay of Pigs Operation. As Senators and Representatives became enlightened regarding the role the CIA played in toppling leftist, anti-American governments around the globe, resentment towards this reality arose. CIA historian Nicholas Cullather revealed in his 1994 PBSuccess report: “In the United States, details of official [American] involvement [in the coup] came slowly to light in the 1960s and 1970s.”¹¹⁶ While the American public remained exposed only to speculation, rather than verification, in newspapers such as the *New York Times* about the Eisenhower administration’s role in Arbenz’s resignation, Congressmen had these theories confirmed in the 1960s. Elected official knowledge regarding CIA involvement in this major Latin American event spurred questions from within the government concerning the validity and need for the CIA to covertly intervene in international politics on behalf of the United States. Members of Congress saw the Agency as existing in a “Cloak of secrecy” and began to question in 1964 whether the successes of Ajax and PBSuccess could be labeled as such at all.¹¹⁷ As Ajax and PBSuccess became history, albeit recent history, demands for CIA reform and regulations came about in the 1960s from House of Representative members all over the country. Documented in Congressional Records from the 1960s, members of Congress voiced their opposition to CIA covert action as a foreign policy method. This nullified the success of operations like PBSuccess as Representatives proposed power checks on the CIA.

As American culpability in the Guatemalan coup came to light in the 1960s, Congressmen challenged the justification of covert action through different proposed changes to the CIA. Reform was the norm during this decade; even the CIA was not safe from this political

¹¹⁶ Cullather, “Operation PBSUCCESS: The United States and Guatemala 1952-1954,” 93.

¹¹⁷ “Congressional Record January 8, 1964,” 94.

wave. In August of 1963 Representative John Lindsay of New York recommended a “Joint Committee on Foreign Information and Intelligence” that would monitor Central Intelligence activity abroad. In his speech to House Members, Lindsay referenced “The Iranian affair in 1953, and the following year the overthrow of the Arbenz regime in Guatemala” as cautionary tales that warned against the execution of CIA “special operations” overseas.¹¹⁸ He fought back against the “benefits” of covert action by calling PBSuccess and Ajax failures rather than successes. “Hostile governments,” or administrations hostile to American policy preferences, existed in Iran, Guatemala, and Cuba; the CIA supported, funded, and armed “insurgents” in each of these countries. That the Agency was conducting operations not purely intelligence-based was of major concern to Lindsay, which prompted him to propose the formation of this committee. While Congressman Lindsay was not the first to introduce the idea of a foreign intelligence-monitoring committee, his desire to curb the CIA’s unyielding power in designing covert action missions abroad made him a leader in the 1960s battle against CIA foreign policy execution. This helped initiate the Congressional movement against covert action abroad, thus challenging the success that the CIA saw with covert missions such as PBSuccess.

Lindsay’s battle for a CIA-monitoring committee pursued into 1964 and gained momentum. The introduction of this topic into the The House of Representatives as a concern thus challenged the Agency’s ability to conduct covert action as it saw fit. Fellow supporter of the committee Representative Morse of Massachusetts read to Congress an article written by Lindsay himself that *Esquire Magazine* was to publish the following month. In referencing Operation Ajax and PBSuccess, Lindsay described the “Explosive nature of the CIA’s

¹¹⁸ “Congressional Record August 15, 1963,” Congressional Session 88-1 (1963), *ProQuest Congressional*, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t19.d20.cr-1963-0815?accountid=10474>, 15082.

operational involvement in international politics.”¹¹⁹ Just as he did in 1963, Lindsay cautioned Americans, ordinary citizens and policymakers alike, about the unchecked power of the CIA and the potential it had to do damage domestically and internationally through covert action. He articulated: “The Cold War will be with us for a very long time; so will the CIA. Accordingly, our democratic government, unused to secrecy, has within it an immensely powerful and extremely expensive secret organization for the past few years.”¹²⁰ In acknowledging the Cold War context of the 1960s, Lindsay alluded to the fact that, if unchecked, the CIA would continue to create catastrophe abroad just as it did in Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, and Cuba in 1961. As the Cold War context was the motivation for these operations in the first place, Lindsay accurately predicted that the Cold War would not vanish overnight and rather persist for decades to come. The perceived longevity of the American conflict with the Soviet Union had the power to do damage to local politics worldwide if the CIA continued in this manner of conducting covert action.

Representative Lindsay was not the only Congressman to question the role of CIA covert action in foreign politics. While he spearheaded this assault on CIA power, he was not alone in his beliefs. Other members of Congress carried the torch that Lindsay lit in regards to monitoring CIA action abroad following his 1963 speech. In 1965, Representative James Scheuer of New York proposed a “Congressional check” on the CIA in the form of a Congressional commission that would examine CIA activities and determine the fitness of the Agency for continuing to conduct covert action.¹²¹ Scheur, in addressing Congress in June of 1965, stated: “The Central Intelligence Agency has vast powers that, in and of themselves, may create a fait accompli

¹¹⁹ “Congressional Record February 27, 1964,” Congressional Session 88-2 (1964), *ProQuest Congressional*, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t19.d20.cr-1964-0227?accountid=10474>, 3930.

¹²⁰ “Congressional Record February 27, 1964,” 3930.

¹²¹ “Congressional Record June 09, 1965,” Congressional Session 89-1 (1965), *ProQuest Congressional*, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t19.d20.cr-1965-0609?accountid=10474>, p. 12953.

involving us in hostilities abroad. Yet there is little, if any, congressional check or even knowledge of the activities of this Agency.”¹²² Scheur’s sentiments reflected Lindsay’s in that the rate at which the CIA was performing operations abroad without any checks to its power alarmed both Representatives. The Founding Fathers designed the United States government to have institutional checks to the different branches of government as a way of protecting against a usurpation of power. As the CIA was not even twenty years old by the time Scheur spoke out against it, there was little history with the Agency, much less checks on its power. While Scheur’s commission would focus more on research than action against the Agency (unlike Lindsay’s watchdog committee), both he and Lindsay felt the need to address the CIA’s corruption of governmental power. They also argued that this could have negative consequences abroad, just as Ajax and PBSuccess had. Thus, the movement against CIA despotism and its method of covert action gained traction.

The 1960s existed as a decade for activism against CIA covert action in American foreign policy, thus reversing the good reputation the Agency enjoyed within the Eisenhower administration. Lindsay and Scheur’s campaign against the Agency led to even more prospective CIA reforms. On March 13 1967, Representative Henry S. Reuss of Wisconsin proposed a bill “To provide for better direction and supervision of the Central Intelligence Agency and other U.S. intelligence activities.”¹²³ In speaking to Congress, Reuss warned that “The dark side of the CIA is its special operations in political action,” plainly referencing PBSuccess and other covert operations that were not intelligence-based by nature but rather geared towards direct political action against unfavorable regimes abroad.¹²⁴ By deeming a portion of CIA action as evil in

¹²² “Congressional Record June 09, 1965,” 12953.

¹²³ “Congressional Record, March 13, 1967,” Congressional Session 90-1 (1967), *ProQuest Congressional*, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t19.d20.cr-1967-0313?accountid=10474>, 6346.

¹²⁴ “Congressional Record, March 13, 1967,” 6346.

nature, Reuss condemned certain actions pursued by the Agency both within and outside of the United States. He thus challenged the positive reception that the CIA previously received from the Eisenhower administration in its execution of PBSuccess. Unlike Lindsay and Scheur before him, Reuss also introduced to the conversation the topic of CIA infiltration of civil society, such as funding student organizations.¹²⁵ He argued: “A large part of the difficulty of justifying the recently revealed CIA subsidies to private organizations is the very real doubt whether the efforts of these groups, no matter how laudable, are really vital to our national security.”¹²⁶ In saying this, Reuss referred to the Agency’s support of private groups in the United States but also in foreign intervention contexts such as the Bay of Pigs and PBSuccess. Carlos Castillo Armas and his followers was one such group that received American aid via the CIA. This proved crucial to the removal of Arbenz from power and the rise of Castillo Armas himself as a Guatemalan dictator. Reuss also questioned to what extent certain CIA covert actions actually protected United States national security, a debate often brought up in the discussion of PBSuccess. The CIA later justified some of its covert operations by labeling them as national security initiatives; Reuss inquired about the validity of these claims. He concluded his speech by stating that his bill “Would not hamper the effectiveness of the CIA,” but rather ensure that the Agency would be, “Directed by American values”¹²⁷ While Reuss’s bill differed from Scheur’s, which likewise differed from Lindsay’s, he still sought to question the motives and execution of CIA covert action around the world. All three Representatives proposed meaningful change to the CIA, which had previously managed to evade governmental checks on power and conduct foreign policy in ways that CIA officials saw fit. The Bay of Pigs may have initiated this discussion of

¹²⁵ “Congressional Record, March 13, 1967,” 6346.

¹²⁶ “Congressional Record, March 13, 1967,” 6346.

¹²⁷ “Congressional Record, March 13, 1967,” 6346.

Agency reform, but it was the Nicaraguan Contras issue of the 1980s that added even more fire to the debate.

The CIA and The Boland Amendment

Congressional questions regarding covert action were perhaps most relevant in a series of amendments proposed to halt CIA action in another Latin American affair, this time in the 1980s. While the 1960s existed as a decade of Congressional suspicion regarding the CIA, the House of Representatives did not rekindle this anti-covert action activism until the 1980s. Furthermore, it was not general discussions regarding the powers of the CIA but rather a revolution in a country that bordered Guatemala: Nicaragua. The backlash against covert action gained traction in the Nicaraguan Revolution as Congress discussed methods of American aid to provide in the conflict. As Nicaragua and Guatemala were neighbors, political parallels in these countries existed and fueled the conversation on American intervention abroad, particularly in the Latin American region. For fear of repeating the Guatemalan catastrophe in Nicaragua, Representatives fought against CIA aid to Nicaragua. Congressional debates around the Boland Amendment, an umbrella term for multiple bills proposed by Massachusetts House Representative Edward Boland in Congress in the 1980s, continued to reference PBSuccess as a reason why the CIA was unfit for influencing American foreign policy through covert action. The Boland Amendment in particular fought against American covert funding of right-wing Nicaraguans known as the Contras in the 1980s. The Contras were composed of multiple groups of Nicaraguan rebels that the United States sought to support as a way of combating the threat of Marxism within Nicaragua. The justification for CIA intervention in Nicaragua was entirely reminiscent of the build up of PBSuccess.

House Representatives throughout the early 1980s voiced either their support or opposition towards the Boland Amendment. In December of 1982 the first article within the Boland Amendment passed; more followed in 1983 and 1984. Many Representatives brought up the fitness of the CIA as an American foreign policy tool in relation to Nicaraguan politics in this policymaking period. In citing Operation Ajax, PBSuccess, and the Bay of Pigs as cautionary tales, Congressional opinions regarding CIA covert action pointed towards negative during the Boland Amendment debates, thus also denying the success of previous Agency operations. Where the CIA previously saw success in its covert operations such as PBSuccess, members of Congress picked apart these triumphs to voice their dissent, all rooted in the context of the Nicaraguan Revolution. Congressional protests against covert action in the Boland debates grew more urgent as the atrocities committed by the CIA in Guatemala had the ability to be replicated in Nicaragua.

As a way of objecting CIA support of the Contras, and thus hampering covert action abroad, some Congressmen contextualized the Nicaraguan Revolution with memories of American intervention in Guatemala. Howard Wolpe of Michigan was one of many House Representatives that supported the Boland Amendment. In 1983 he challenged the CIA's role in American foreign policy by posing the question: "Are we really better off today in Guatemala after overthrowing the government in a coup in 1954?"¹²⁸ This rhetorical question served to criticize CIA intervention in foreign governments, particularly one in the United States' own backyard. By bringing PBSuccess into the conversation of the Nicaraguan issue, the legacy of covert action of the 1950s lived on and continued to impact American foreign policy methods. In

¹²⁸ "Legislative Histories of Statutory Restrictions of Funding for Covert Assistance for Military or Paramilitary Operations in Nicaragua," Congressional Research Service, United States Congress; Congressional Research Service - American Law Division, United States Congress, July 27 1983, *ProQuest Congressional*, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t21.d22.crs-1987-aml-0090?accountid=10474>, CRS-76.

this context, however, Wolpe viewed PBSuccess through a lens of failure and warned against overthrowing the Nicaraguan government due to the negative repercussions in Guatemala following the coup. Wolpe furthermore made the point that covert action pursued by the United States had not only removed “unfriendly” foreign governments but also supported “Governments that would not otherwise remain in power because of an absence of popular consensus within their own countries.”¹²⁹ Historians such as Jorrit van den Berk have observed that in Latin America in particular, United States foreign policy tended to favor right-wing dictators over left-wing presidents due to differences in policy preferences.¹³⁰ This dictatorship over democracy trend was evident in Operation PBSuccess as the CIA interfered in Guatemalan democracy and ousted Arbenz only to replace him with a right-wing dictator. American policy preferences abroad were detrimental to a Latin America democracy in 1954; the CIA could have reproduced this political reality in Nicaragua if given the chance. American support of dictators such as Carlos Castillo Armas proved destructive to Guatemalan society for decades and it would have the potential to do the same in Nicaragua. In this sense, Wolpe’s argument for the Boland Amendment brought in the historical failure of PBSuccess as a means opposing CIA covert action in American foreign policy.

The CIA often conducted covert operations in the name of combating leftist reformers that appeared Communist in ideological leaning. In referencing American meddling in foreign politics and governments, Wolpe also shed light on the Cold War context and how it prompted American foreign intervention via the CIA. He voiced to Congress: “Time and time again there have been governments that have arisen in Central America, or Latin America more generally,

¹²⁹ “Legislative Histories of Statutory Restrictions of Funding for Covert Assistance for Military or Paramilitary Operations in Nicaragua,” CRS-76.

¹³⁰ For more, see van den Berk’s book: *Becoming a Good Neighbor Among Dictators : The U.S. Foreign Service in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras*.

that have taken upon themselves the label of anti-Communist. And the moment they have done that, knowing in advance that that was a sure-fire means of guaranteeing an American response, we have come trotting to their assistance.”¹³¹ The phenomenon that Wolpe laid out fits well within the context of PBSuccess, where Castillo Armas declared himself a pro-American, anti-Communist individual, which immediately put him in the United States’ favor and set him up to become Arbenz’s replacement. By hiding behind the guise of safeguarding the world from international Communism, the United States worked to defend its actions abroad, oftentimes executed through the CIA. Wolpe furthermore made the claim that “In the name of anti Communism, we have supported time and time again rightwing dictatorships that have been violative of the rights of the people,” specifically citing examples of CIA intervention in Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.¹³² Once again, attributing American intervention abroad to meddling in democratic politics is brought up in the context of utilizing the CIA to provide the most favorable political conditions overseas to fit American political preferences. Due to the fact that dictators were more willing to collaborate with and support the United States, they became the preferred political allies of the United States despite the atrocities they would go on to commit against their populations. This served as a major counterargument for utilizing the CIA as a foreign policy instrument.

Military aspects of CIA missions such as PBSuccess came under scrutiny during the Boland debates. As paramilitary activity encompassed parts of Operation Ajax, PBSuccess and the Bay of Pigs, Representatives referenced these instances to oppose American funding of pro-American militias in Nicaragua. James Albert Smith Leach of Iowa was another

¹³¹ “Legislative Histories of Statutory Restrictions of Funding for Covert Assistance for Military or Paramilitary Operations in Nicaragua,” CRS-142.

¹³² “Legislative Histories of Statutory Restrictions of Funding for Covert Assistance for Military or Paramilitary Operations in Nicaragua,” CRS-142.

Representative who spoke in favor of the Boland Amendment on July 27th, 1983. In relation to the CIA, he argued that “Resorting to military means can neither resolve deep-seated economic and social problems nor serve long-term U.S. interests.”¹³³ Leach’s argument against CIA intervention revolved around the repercussions of military-based CIA covert intervention into foreign countries’ politics. In Operation PBSuccess, this was seen in the CIA training and funding of Carlos Castillo Armas’ rebel forces that stormed Guatemala City, serving as a military-based incentive for Arbenz’s resignation. Leach continued: “The historical analogies offered by the sorry debacle at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 and the CIA overthrow of the Arbenz regime in Guatemala in 1954 indicates both the likelihood of failure as well as the long-term counterproductive effects of any short-term “successes.””¹³⁴ Leach in his point alluded to the fact that where the CIA previously saw success in their covert operations, individuals such as himself could only see failure to the fallout from missions such as PBSuccess. The American installment of Castillo Armas as Guatemala’s new leader in 1954 solidified a military regime that proved detrimental to the people of Guatemala in the years that followed. Side effects of operations such as these, while not immediately visible, were easy to spot by the time that Leach and other Representatives argued for the ratification of the Boland Amendment. The climate of Guatemala by 1983 served as a strong indicator of why CIA-sponsored paramilitary efforts were destructive rather than productive.

Despite the bulk of the Boland Amendment being passed, the 1980s continued to see discussions regarding covert American aid to Nicaragua via the CIA and the issues with it. As the Reagan administration continued to grapple with the reality of the Nicaraguan Revolution,

¹³³ “Legislative Histories of Statutory Restrictions of Funding for Covert Assistance for Military or Paramilitary Operations in Nicaragua,” CRS-91.

¹³⁴ “Legislative Histories of Statutory Restrictions of Funding for Covert Assistance for Military or Paramilitary Operations in Nicaragua,” CRS-91.

Congress saw debates from all sides of the aisle about how American aid should play out. A major feature of both the Boland Amendment and the debates at the end of the decade revolved around the Contras. The Contras were composed of multiple groups of Nicaraguan rebels that the United States supported as a way of combating Marxism within Nicaragua. Representative Claiborne de Borda Pell of Rhode Island was one member of Congress who saw resemblance in American Contras support to the events that played out in 1954 Guatemala. He stated to other Representatives in 1986: “U.S. support for the Contras brings to mind our involvement, through the CIA incidentally, three decades ago when we conspired to overthrow the Arbenz Government in Guatemala.”¹³⁵ Similar to Representatives before him, Pell treated the CIA coup in Guatemala as a stain on the United States’ international reputation and viewed it as an event that the American government should not repeat. Whereas the CIA in the immediate years following PBSuccess conceptualized the operation as a meaningful achievement in the progression of American covert action, Pell, reminiscent of the sentiments of Lindsay, Wolpe, and Leach, labeled it an embarrassing failure due to the fallout and consequences of Guatemalan politics after the fact. He attributed covert action to the issues persisting in Guatemala in 1986. He added that the results of the coup “Condemned the people of Guatemala to over 30 years of brutal military rule characterized by killings, torture, and other forms of human rights abuse.” Pell finished his speech by urging Congress: “Let us not condemn the people of Nicaragua to that fate of Guatemala.”¹³⁶ Pell contemplated the potential repercussions of American aid to Nicaragua from a historical perspective. By the time he addressed his fellow Representatives in 1986, the Guatemalan Civil War had been raging for 26 years. The removal of Arbenz from power via PBSuccess in 1954 played a major role in the political climate, which laid the foundation for the

¹³⁵ “Congressional Record, August 11, 1986,” Congressional Session 99- 2 (1986), *ProQuest Congressional*, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t19.d20.cr-1986-0811?accountid=10474>, 20477.

¹³⁶ “Congressional Record, August 11, 1986,” 20477.

civil war in 1960. Pell rightfully treated PBSuccess as a cautionary tale against American involvement in domestic Latin American conflicts, something the CIA was unable to even conceive of in 1954. Putting PBSuccess and other covert operations into conversation with the Nicaraguan Revolution alluded to how CIA intervention in the conflict could have devastating impacts on Nicaragua, thus taking the stance that the CIA should not execute covert action abroad on behalf of the United States.

Congressional Reports

Regarding the success of CIA missions around the world, opposition towards Agency covert intervention was backed up by the progression of history itself. By the time the mass declassification of PBSuccess documents occurred in the 1990s, a variety of Congressional research teams published reports about the role played, moreso the damage inflicted, by the CIA in countries abroad such as Guatemala. As the 1990 “U.S. Low-Intensity Conflicts 1899-1990” report written by John Collins for the Congressional Research Service theorized: “Whether any of the coups d’etat cited strengthened U.S. politico-military positions is debatable, because pluses and minuses seldom were clean-cut.”¹³⁷ In writing this, Collins commented on the ambiguity of the results of regime changes such as PBSuccess. While the Guatemalan coup ensured that no left-wing, anti-American politician would take power for several decades, it also led to many human rights violations against the Guatemalan population. In short: “Short-term benefits often became long-term liabilities.”¹³⁸ Collins argued that the failures of covert operations such as Ajax or PBSuccess, previously viewed as successes, rested in the fact that they caused more issues for the United States in the years that followed the coups. In the case of Guatemala, American aid backed counterinsurgency efforts in hopes of supporting the

¹³⁷ Collins, “U.S. Low-Intensity Conflicts 1899-1990,” 38.

¹³⁸ Collins, “U.S. Low-Intensity Conflicts 1899-1990,” 38.

Guatemalan government in curbing the Guatemalan Civil War. Since then, the United States has had a major hand in influencing Guatemalan politics and continues to mitigate the effects of harmful political phenomena there. A counterargument for CIA covert operations therefore emerged, rooted in the fact that these missions tended to produce later, long term results that proved unproductive for American interests.

Common in the 1990s were arguments revolving around the morality of American covert intervention, particularly rooted in the context of reversing democracies abroad. The CIA conducted operations Ajax, PBSuccesss, and the Bay of Pigs all in the name of preventing supposedly harmful politicians from maintaining power, according to American opinion at least. In citing the CIA missions in Iran, Guatemala, and Indonesia, a 1996 Congressional Research Service report highlighted that “In all three cases, U.S. intervention ultimately undermined U.S. interests and fostered the impression that the United States had allied itself with oppressive regimes.”¹³⁹ The allegiance of the American government with oftentimes right-wing regimes in foreign countries ultimately turned abroad public opinion regarding the United States sour. These regimes, backed by the United States, also led to violations against local populations. In this sense, CIA covert action came under scrutiny for the potential it had to do damage when operating in other countries. The goal of instilling pro-American regimes often led to authoritarian, oppressive leaders taking power in places where the CIA implemented covert action. In the 1950s, the American foreign policy trend of favoring right-wing dictators over left-wing progressives became evident. The destruction of democracy through PBSuccess ushered in a line of corrupt Guatemalan dictators, all resulting from American covert

¹³⁹ Richard A. Best Jr, “Covert Action: An Effective Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy?,” October 21 1996, Congressional Research Service, United States Congress; Congressional Research Service - Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, United States Congress, *ProQuest Congressional*, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t21.d22.crs-1996-fnd-0151?accountid=10474>, CRS-40.

intervention through CIA psychological warfare. Therefore, CIA intervention was incredibly damaging when indigenous democracies were concerned.

The notion of democracy came up often in the Congressional discussion of the failures of PBSuccess, Ajax, and The Bay of Pigs. A major question emerged within this conversation: What role did democracy play in these operations? Concurrently, how did the United States utilize foreign dictatorship to its own advantage? One 1991 Congressional research report criticized in particular the “CIA’s inherent tendency to abhor democratic disorderliness.”¹⁴⁰ This issue was particularly prominent in the case of the Arbenz presidency. Guatemalan democratic practices elected Arbenz in a time where military dictators typically ruled over Central and Latin America. A left-leaning politician, Arbenz’s reforms and policy stances caused an uproar in the United States, leading to the popular American-touted accusation that President Arbenz was Communist. Democracy was what put him in power; therefore, the CIA needed undemocratic practices to remove him from power. This tendency, the report continued, produced the American “Almost unvarying support for status quo regimes, however malodorous or socially regressive they may be.”¹⁴¹ The favoring of dictatorship over democracy was therefore a principle that the CIA normalized and implemented in many corners of the world, including Guatemala and Iran. This trend also existed within Operation PBSuccess itself, as the CIA found itself working closely with Latin American dictators in the plans to remove Arbenz from power. While the dictator-like leaders of El Salvador and Honduras acted with hesitancy in aiding the United States, dictator (President) Somoza of Nicaragua engaged in full compliance with

¹⁴⁰ “Relations in a Multipolar World,” Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, November 1991, *ProQuest Congressional*, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t29.d30.hrg-1991-for-0033?accountid=10474>, 8.

¹⁴¹ “Relations in a Multipolar World,” 8.

PBSuccess plans and ultimately played a large role in the short-term triumph of PBSuccess.¹⁴²

The Congressional research reports of the 1990s therefore denounced CIA covert action, primarily due to the harm it did in reversing democracies and installing dictators in countries around the world.

The Controversy Continues

Success is subjective; this truth is seen particularly in the analysis of the aftermath of Operation PBSuccess. Paired with Operation Ajax, launched one year prior in Iran, the political repercussions of American involvement via CIA covert action is evident. The CIA was still young in the days of Ajax and PBSuccess; it therefore used these missions, labeled as successes, as models for which American foreign policy could be built upon. Congress, particularly the House of Representatives, later scrutinized this lens of success with which the CIA viewed PBSuccess and other operations such as Ajax. Through conversations about the lack of governmental checks on the CIA, the potential for American covert action to do damage in the Nicaraguan Revolution, and the question of whether or not the CIA should be utilized in foreign conflicts, all the previous glory experienced by the CIA dissipated as a result of Congressional discussions following the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Congressional Records spanning from 1961 to 1989 revealed that there was a large body of House Representatives advocating for a reconsideration of CIA covert action as a method of foreign policy. In referencing Ajax, PBSuccess, and the Bay of Pigs, all interrelated CIA missions, members of Congress fought against covert action abroad into the decade of declassification where the atrocities committed by the CIA against indigenous populations was made available to the public. The function of time empowered Representatives to rethink the ways in which the United States should interfere in

¹⁴² “Memorandum From Jacob R. Seekford to the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency (King) for Jerome C. Dunbar,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954*, Guatemala Collection, Document 76, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d76>.

localized conflicts abroad, leading to a fight against the previous standard of CIA-driven foreign policy. Congressional solutions to foreign policy issues in the late 20th century did not point to covert action as a result of the harm it caused in Guatemala.

Measuring the Success of PBSuccess

In 1954 the Central Intelligence Agency served as a vessel for implementing political conditions favorable to the United States in Guatemala. Although Operation PBSuccess succeeded in removing President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman from power, it also revealed the darker side of covert action that questions whether or not the coup can be called a success. The Eisenhower administration saw the newly-formed Central Intelligence Agency as the ideal organization to reach its political goals in Guatemala. The special relationship that the United States had with Latin America, based primarily on nonintervention principles, limited the United States in its ability to oust the leftist, anti-American President Arbenz. As the preservation of the American-Latin American accord was a high priority, the Eisenhower administration saw the CIA as an optimal tool to utilize due to its clandestine nature. By using the CIA method of covert action to conduct a regime change, the United States would be able to hide its involvement altogether while still receiving the desired outcome. As a result, Operation PBSuccess ran from January 1954 through June of that year, waging psychological warfare against President Arbenz that ultimately led to his surrender and the rise of pro-American Carlos Castillo Armas. *New York Times* reporter Sydney Gruson existed as a threat to the success of the regime change, revealing the issues with covert action. The short-term success of this operation thus solidified the CIA as a method of conducting foreign policy for a short-lived portion of the Cold War until covert action repercussions became clear.

Operation PBSuccess operation sought to benefit American interests in Guatemala, and the larger Latin American region. While it achieved this in June of 1954, ousting Arbenz ignored the wants and needs of the Guatemalan population. Arbenz was elected democratically by the people of Guatemala, defeating the other presidential candidate by receiving over 60% of the

country's support.¹⁴³ He was a candidate that the majority of Guatemalans wanted as their president; the United States ignored this democratic practice by putting its own interests above those of Guatemala. Eradicating the Arbenz regime quickly proved detrimental to the sociopolitical climate of Guatemala. While the United States celebrated its victory over Arbenz in the months following his resignation, Carlos Castillo Armas quickly worked to establish an authoritarian regime that ensured obedience through the mass arrests of political rivals. Though he was assassinated in 1957, Castillo Armas' presidency, a direct result of the PBSuccess, ushered in a trend of military-led governance in Guatemala that proved fatal. Operation PBSuccess has been credited with institutionalizing political instability in Guatemala that ultimately led to the bloody Guatemalan Civil War in 1960, lasting over 30 years.¹⁴⁴ The CIA confidence in declaring the Guatemalan coup a success suddenly faltered as counterinsurgency efforts had to be taken by the United States in the Guatemalan Civil War. Hundreds of thousands of Guatemalan lives were lost during this many-year battle, and the covert action had a major role in this reality. PBSuccess immediately eliminated an anti-American threat in Guatemala but at a great cost.

CIA covert action through PBSuccess succeeded in its removal of a Guatemalan leader unfavorable to American interests but failed to institutionalize this method of foreign policy due to domestic repercussions in Guatemala. Psychological warfare served as the CIA's primary method in the coup in order to remove Arbenz while hiding the American role in this regime-change. Covertness ranked high in terms of PBSuccess goals, as it served to preserve the facade of a positive American relationship with Latin America. The covert nature of Operation

¹⁴³ Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 83.

¹⁴⁴ Nicholas Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 118.

PBSuccess came under threat as a result of the reporting done by *New York Times* correspondent Sydney Gruson, based in Latin America. In order to ensure the feat of the mission, top CIA officials tampered with Gruson's ability to report, revealing just how temperamental covert action was. If one reporter threatened the success of the entire mission, how could the CIA call PBSuccess a triumph? The celebration of PBSuccess as a major feat in Latin America was quickly halted as members of Congress began to criticize the role that the CIA played in ousting Arbenz. The later decades of the 20th century saw a Congressional movement against using covert action in American foreign policy as Representatives began to understand the repercussions of PBSuccess. Questioning the success of Operation PBSuccess allows us to see the ways in which the CIA met its goals, such as removing Arbenz, but also how covert action was destructive and unfit for American usage.

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