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American Propaganda, Popular Media, and the Fall of Jacobo Arbenz

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AMERICAN PROPAGANDA, POPULAR MEDIA, AND THE FALL OF

JACOBO ARBENZ

By

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Bachelor of Arts

University of Tampa

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A thesis, submitted in partial fulfillment of

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ABSTRACT

AMERICAN PROPAGANDA, POPULAR MEDIA, AND THE FALL OF JACOBO ARBENZ GUZMAN

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In June 1954, President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman of Guatemala resigned in the face of a coup led by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. While the United States publicly denied involvement, the coup was in fact the culmination of a plan called PBSUCCESS (CIA codeword), led by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Although PBSUCCESS lived up to its namesake, it was aided (both intentionally and unintentionally) by various U.S. media outlets. For the duration of Arbenz Guzman's regime, he and his country had been the subject of U.S. suspicions of undue Communist and Soviet influence. A general anti-Communist attitude permeated virtually all of the period's journalism and governmental deliberations on Guatemala, leading to regular instances of sensationalism, exaggeration, and unjust accusations of Communist influence. In addition to a number of secondary sources and declassified CIA records, this paper examines the reporting of the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Time*, *Life*, *The New Republic*, and *The Nation*. An analysis of these sources' perspectives will ascertain the nature of government-media relations, and their effect in building momentum for/implementing PBSUCCESS. There was no massive government-media conspiracy at work, but mutually supporting governmental and journalistic biases sealed Arbenz Guzman's fate.

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CHAPTER 1

GUATEMALA AS THE FIRST DOMINO

Following the conclusion of World War II, the United States faced an increasingly bipolar world. Brought together by the Nazi threat, the U.S. and USSR's marriage of convenience rapidly deteriorated following the defeat of Germany, Italy, and Japan. The two nations soon contested territories and formed opposing alliances, from NATO in the West to the Warsaw Pact in the East. Mutual fear and suspicion grew quickly, highlighted by the threat of nuclear warfare. In such a tense environment, small threats loomed large and differing opinions became intractable problems. Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin saw capitalist movements in Europe with the same skepticism as U.S. President Harry Truman viewed socialist rumblings in Latin America. The division of occupied Germany and Berlin, in which the two competing alliances shared a border, only exacerbated these tensions.

Guatemala was the first location in which American suspicion in the Western Hemisphere turned into active regime change, as the United States financed and supported Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, who ousted the democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in 1954. By overthrowing a democratically elected government in the name of anti-communism, the United States established a precedent of direct intervention against left-leaning or socialist/Communist leaders to guard against a perceived threat from the USSR. American policymakers especially feared that such leaders would be Soviet puppets and allow Russian weapons and basing privileges only a few hundred miles from American borders. Arbenz Guzman appears to have had no intention of doing that, yet he was overthrown because of American fears that he might

have eventually compromised U.S. security. To launch an intervention against such a small nation in the absence of a direct, concrete threat to the United States required a heightened fear of Communism on the part of both the government and the American people. That fear and the accompanying desire to actively counter it were shared in varying degrees by US media outlets. US policymakers were keenly aware of the media's role in shaping public opinion, and its subsequent effects on achieving popular backing for the government's anti-Communist initiatives.

This paper will examine key print media outlets' coverage of United States' foreign policy in Guatemala, with a focus on the tenure and overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. The fundamental purpose will be to ascertain the degree to which those outlets supported the U.S government's evolving stance on Arbenz Guzman. An examination of the government's efforts to control media messaging and a comparison to the print medias' position casts light on the effects of such efforts in Arbenz Guzman's removal. Put more simply, was the media an active aide to the government's plans? Was the media vulnerable to the same anti-Communist fears that drove policymakers, and did the media wittingly encourage the American public to adopt the U.S. governments' anti-Communist, anti-Arbenz Guzman position?

Jacobo Arbenz Guzman was the first Latin American leader who was displaced because of American fears of Soviet infiltration. He rose to power in a fairly conventional fashion, as an army officer who participated in the 1944 overthrow of the autocrat Jorge Ubico Castaneda, who resigned under pressure from popular protests. Juan Jose Arevalo, an exiled college professor, then won the 1944 presidential election and assumed power. Although many of his fellow revolutionaries believed that corporations, particularly the

United Fruit Company (UFCO), were to blame for Guatemala's low standard of living, Jose Arevalo imposed only modest regulatory measures directed at the UFCO. The army, however, considered Jose Arevalo too reformist, and attempted nearly thirty coups during his six-year tenure.¹

Arbenz Guzman ran for president in 1950 on a platform of economic reforms and a need to replace the "old system," in which a handful of companies and rich landowners controlled the bulk of Guatemalan wealth. Although his opponent, former general Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, criticized Arbenz Guzman as Communist agent, the State Department regarded Arbenz Guzman as "realistic" and the US charge in the Guatemala embassy saw his attitude toward UFCO as "devoid of prejudices." The White House and CIA were more ambivalent after Arbenz Guzman's 3-to-1 trouncing of Ydigoras Fuentes, but believed he was more conservative and more pro-business than Jose Arevalo.²

Arbenz Guzman's administration maintained a policy of non-alignment in foreign affairs, but made several high-profile statements and actions that heightened US suspicions of his Soviet sympathies. First, he publicly withdrew his predecessor's offer to supply troops in support of the Korean War, a conflict heavily criticized by Guatemala's government newspaper, *Diario de Centro America*. *Diario* also repeatedly cited Czechoslovakia as a model of socialist worker society. More significantly, Guatemala was the only Latin American nation to support a UN resolution by the Soviet Union requesting the admission of The People's Republic of China into the organization. When Stalin died in 1953, the Guatemalan Congress, observed a moment of silence in his

¹ Zachary Karabell, *Architects of Intervention* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 96-97.

² *Ibid.*, 100 (quote)-101.

honor; again, the only Latin American nation to do so. The largely symbolic nature of the UN vote and moment of silence suggested that Arbenz Guzman did to a certain extent sympathize with Communist ideology. As the leader of a nation with a history of corporate exploitation and high levels of income disparity, Arbenz Guzman felt a degree of kinship with the USSR, but wanted to achieve progressive change slowly so as to gradually build a broader power base and avoid inviting US ire.³

Arbenz Guzman surprised Department of State and CIA analysts when he moved further to the left in 1952 with Decree 900, which stipulated a framework for agrarian land reform: "Decree 900 announced that uncultivated land on estates greater than 224 acres was subject to expropriation. Landowners were to be compensated with long-term bonds for the land taken."⁴ Although the reforms affected a maximum of .5 percent of all private estates,⁵ Decree 900 proved to be the beginning of Arbenz Guzman's undoing, as it spurred the US to create a plan for his removal. The Eisenhower administration privately believed the decree appealed to the Guatemalan peasantry as a long-overdue measure, but opposed it nonetheless.⁶ Within the CIA from 1952-53, assessments of Arbenz Guzman began to describe an active threat to the United States as opposed to a simple opportunist.⁷

In addition to its effects on the United States, Decree 900 served to unite Arbenz Guzman's opposition, composed of traditionally anti-Communist groups within the

³ Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 10.

⁴ Karabell, *Architects of Intervention*, 105.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Stephen M. Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000), 19.

⁷ Marth L. Cottam, *Images & Intervention: U.S. Policies in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994), 40.

church, business community, and army. Arbenz Guzman's association with known Communist leader Victor Manuel Gutierrez caused concern even among Guatemalan liberals.⁸ The United States also received dire warnings from neighboring right-wing Central American dictators (including Juan Manuel Galvez of Honduras, Oscar Osorio of El Salvador, and Anastasio Somoza Garcia of the Dominican Republic) about Guatemala's apparent leftward lurch. Although Truman left office without intervening, Eisenhower moved more aggressively.

Truman was not ideologically opposed to intervention, but did adhere more closely to the non-intervention feature of President Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy in Latin America. Eisenhower criticized Truman's less engaged approach during his 1952 presidential campaign, and promised change. The clearest public expression of this change came during the 1953 Organization of the American States (OAS) conference in Caracas, Venezuela. Latin American delegations entered the conference hoping for U.S. recognition of their grievances; among their concerns was confirming the principle of U.S. non-intervention in Latin America. Guatemala's Foreign Minister, Guillermo Toriello, challenged John Foster Dulles' argument for the "Caracas Resolution:" that Communist influence in the region would be cause for U.S. action. Dulles coaxed, cajoled, and threatened other nations' representatives to rally support for the resolution. In the end, Guatemala cast the only 'no' vote, and the United States achieved a veneer of legitimacy for its future action in Guatemala.⁹

Aside from the obvious party distinction, Eisenhower was also more enamored of

⁸ Karabell, *Architects of Intervention*, 117.

⁹ Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 274-76.

covert operations. As Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, Eisenhower was impressed with the exploits of the CIA's forerunner, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).¹⁰ By 1953, the CIA could also point to an operational success, when it engineered regime change in Iran, removing the nationalist leader Mohammed Mossadeq and replacing him with Shah Reza Pahlavi.

Eisenhower found a similarly willing partner in Castillo Armas. A former army officer, Castillo Armas had fled Guatemala in 1951 after leading a failed assault on a Guatemala City army base, being wounded in the battle, and finally escaping from his prison cell that June. In November 1951, he met with U.S. officials in Panama, and maintained contact through his ultimately successful coup in June 1954.¹¹

Eisenhower and the U.S. government maintained that they were forced to act because the Guatemalan government had been taken over by Communists and their poisonous ideology; indeed, it was the only issue that mattered. According to Stephen G. Rabe, the planners of PBSUCCESS "interpreted inter-American affairs solely within the context of the global struggle with the Soviet Union."¹² The State Department regarded Arbenz Guzman's predecessor, Jose Arevalo, as an "extreme leftist rather than a Communist," but the CIA was more concerned over his Communist sympathies, warning that he was "a potential threat to U.S. security interests."¹³ To the United States, Jose Arevalo's potential Communist energy became more kinetic after Arbenz Guzman's election. After three months in office, the State Department reported that "the ascending

¹⁰ Mark T. Gilderhus, *The Second Century: US-Latin American Relations Since 1889* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2000), 147.

¹¹ Karabell, *Architects of Intervention*, 98, 124.

¹² Gilderhus, *The Second Century: US-Latin American Relations Since 1889*, 142.

¹³ Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions*, 13.

curve of Communist influence has...continued upward on an accelerated incline," and the CIA also grew more skeptical.¹⁴ Although their concerns about Arbenz Guzman's political inclination were justified, the CIA's own estimates only counted 1,000 members of the Guatemalan Communist Party.¹⁵

After the fact, John Dulles admitted to the Brazilian Ambassador on May 11, 1954, that it would be "impossible to produce evidence clearly tying the Guatemalan Government to Moscow; that the decision must be a political one and based on our deep conviction that such a tie must exist." Nonetheless, plans proceeded apace under the assumption that if Arbenz Guzman did not present an immediate threat, he would become more dangerous over time. This sentiment meshed with the overarching anti-Communist agenda of the Eisenhower administration; in 1953 and 1954, anticommunism was the defining feature of Eisenhower's Latin American policies.¹⁶ By fall 1953, the United States had begun planning in earnest for Arbenz Guzman's removal.

From January to fall 1953, U.S. assessments of the situation in Guatemala grew increasingly dire. In February 1953, CIA Director Allen Dulles described the situation as an "approaching crisis"; and, in April, John Moors Cabot (Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs) met with Arbenz Guzman and reported that the Guatemalan president had "obviously sold out to the Communists." A number of reports and intelligence estimates continued in that vein throughout the summer and early fall. In a telling example of the hyperbole and paranoia that pervaded U.S. conceptions of communism, an August National Security Council (NSC) assessment concluded that not

¹⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵ Karabell, *Architects of Intervention*, 126.

¹⁶ Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 57 (quote), 59.

intervening would be "suicidal." Alarmist language aside, many US analysts knew that there was no hard, physical evidence linking Arbenz Guzman to Moscow, but that fact was essentially irrelevant. In another example of the US government's reflexive fear of anything resembling socialism or communism, a State Department (DoS) report admitted that evidence of an Arbenz Guzman-Soviet partnership was "largely circumstantial," yet went on to assert that "it is abundantly clear that what has happened in Guatemala is a part of Moscow's global strategy."¹⁷

In addition to the geopolitical perspective, domestic political implications influenced Eisenhower. He maintained a good relationship with the press, occasionally playing golf and cooking for its members. Although he did not expect loyal subservience, "...he considered reporters to be quasi-members of his staff."¹⁸ In his 1952 campaign, he promised to provide strong leadership and be tougher on Communism than the Democrats. Instead of relying on Truman's containment policy, Eisenhower promised to retake the initiative and roll back Soviet influence. Despite the firm rhetoric, Eisenhower was attacked from the right wing of the Republican Party for appeasement following the 1953 Korean armistice, as well as for being insufficiently aggressive in dismantling Roosevelt and Truman's expansive social programs. The political pressure grew so great that by the summer of 1953, Eisenhower was driven "almost to despair of being able to succeed in the presidency," and saw the benefit in achieving a foreign policy triumph to appease his critics. From Eisenhower's standpoint, U.S. international credibility, his personal leadership and credibility, and his prospects for a successful term (domestically

¹⁷ Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions*, 17.

¹⁸ Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower, Volume Two: The President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 53.

as well as internationally) demanded that he remove Arbenz Guzman.¹⁹ Furthermore, Eisenhower genuinely believed that Arbenz Guzman was either a Communist or controlled by them. This conviction caused him to ignore State Department skeptics and proceed with the operation.²⁰

PBSUCCESS was not designed as a simple military invasion. U.S. strategists feared that a direct U.S. military intervention would damage the country's credibility in Latin America and, therefore, opted for a covert intervention.²¹ The operation sought to alienate the Guatemalan army from the Arbenz Guzman government. The CIA planned a combination of restrictions on arms and materiel imports, followed by an intensive propaganda campaign; it was hoped that these actions would convince the army that supporting Arbenz Guzman was a fool's errand.²² The CIA took extra precautions in the form of bribery, authorizing \$10,000 a month for payoffs to Guatemalan officials.²³ The CIA actually attempted to bribe Arbenz Guzman to leave, but was turned down.²⁴ Arbenz Guzman recognized the U.S.'s efforts to discredit him, and attempted to reassure the military leadership, eventually resorting to importing a shipment of Soviet arms when the United States refused to fill his orders.²⁵ The United States then seized upon news of the May shipment as evidence that Arbenz Guzman was in fact a Soviet agent, even though the CIA missed the initial shipment. U.S. government reaction was swift and

¹⁹ Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions*, 25.

²⁰ Ambrose, *Eisenhower, Volume Two: The President*, 192.

²¹ Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions*, 20

²² Karabell, *Architects of Intervention*, 129.

²³ Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 97.

²⁴ William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* (Monroe, LA: Common Courage Press, 1995), 77.

²⁵ Karabell, *Architects of Intervention*, 132.

exaggerated; although the arms were no more advanced than conventional howitzers and machine guns (many were outdated and rusty), Speaker of the House John McCormick (D-MA) referred to the shipment as an "atomic bomb" and Ambassador Peurifoy called for direct intervention. On May 24, 1954, U.S. Navy ships blockaded Guatemala.²⁶

On June 6, Arbenz Guzman heard about a broadcast over the Guatemalan state radio station from a retired head of his air force issuing a (heavily CIA-edited) call for revolution. The CIA had been using the same frequency since mid-May, when the state station went down for an antenna change. Arbenz Guzman panicked, arresting or killing hundreds of suspected subversives. His rash response only encouraged the CIA's propaganda efforts. Castillo Armas invaded from Honduras on June 18 with a force of less than a thousand men, termed by CIA agent Richard Bissell as an "Extremely small and ill-trained" group.²⁷ His assessment was correct, as Castillo Armas's offensive was quickly snuffed out by a combination of police, military units, and dockworkers. Desperate to revive the stalled invasion, President Eisenhower authorized a secret deployment of three CIA-piloted aircraft, which proceeded to bomb and strafe a variety of targets, including a Christian missionary radio station, a British freighter, and Guatemala City's largest military parade ground. Although the CIA's false broadcasts continued, they failed to spark the populace into revolt.²⁸

Despite suffering defeats on the battlefield, the army and populace were convinced that allowing Arbenz Guzman to remain in power would lead to destructive conflict with the United States. Arbenz Guzman also recognized that reality and resigned his office on

²⁶ Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, 98.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 96 (quote), 99.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

June 27,²⁹ ceding power to Colonel Carlos Enrique Diaz, who pledged to fight Castillo Armas' forces. CIA officer (and former *Time Magazine* Berlin bureau chief) Enno Hobbing subsequently convinced Colonel Enrique Diaz that resistance was hopeless; after a series of military juntas, Castillo Armas took power in late August, and was feted at the White House shortly thereafter.³⁰

PBSUCCESS succeeded in part due to the effectiveness of its propaganda on the Guatemalan people, but the operation also required a base of domestic U.S. political support for anti-Communist measures. There has been no thorough study of the government's efforts to stimulate popular support for the operation, or of the U.S. print media's involvement. By studying several mainstream media outlets in conjunction with the efforts of prominent government officials and agencies, the complex relationship among media, government, and the public during Arbenz Guzman's fall will be clarified. This investigation also develops a clearer idea of the domestic political factors that undergirded PBSUCCESS.

²⁹ Karabell, *Architects of Intervention*, 133.

³⁰ Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 103.

CHAPTER 2

ALL TOGETHER NOW: U.S. COLD WAR ATTITUDES

The clear anti-Communist bias of U.S. media outlets during the 1950s and overwhelming anti-Communist public sentiment invited the possibility of purposeful governmental propaganda efforts. To be sure, the government was aware of the importance of press outlets in shaping public opinion, and sought to control public perceptions of government policies. After examining a significant sampling of mainstream press coverage as well as internal government documents, there is no evidence of a concerted propaganda campaign.³¹ Government analysts became more concerned over time about Arbenz Guzman's politics. A similar pattern prevailed in mainstream media outlets, but there is little basis for accusing the government of causing the press to become more nervous about the issue. The CIA mentioned open source articles internally as part of its information-gathering process, revealing incidental, not purposeful coordination. That said, government figures did have the opportunity to generate news themselves, putting the burden on the media to analyze the validity of their opinions. Whenever a high-level government official expressed concern about Arbenz Guzman or Guatemala's reliability, news organizations covered it. If they could not definitively disprove it, the story or truth effectively became the statements of the official

³¹ Media sources were selected based on several criteria, designed to capture an accurate sampling of media perspectives: geographic distribution (sources from New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles), differing political ideologies (conservative, moderate, and liberal), and circulation figures to indicate which publications had larger readerships, and subsequently provided clues as to the mindset of their readers.

in question. This situation was frequently the case, and left journalists captive to their sources. Even in June 1954, at the height of interest in Guatemala, *New York Herald-Tribune* reporter Homer Bigart noted that many journalists assigned to be on the ground reporters preferred to cover events from the Hotel Prado in Guatemala City, breaking away only occasionally to be escorted around by rebel fighters and representatives.³²

It must be remembered that journalists were people of their time. In a country where fear of Communism ran rampant, it should not be surprising that journalists may have held anti-Communist biases that overpowered the ethics of their profession. Nothing in the materials discussed here indicates that journalists acted against their own attitudes or perceptions in reporting Guatemalan events. It was the truth as they saw it. Neither government nor the media operated in a vacuum, and each was aware of the other. There were unethical ties and relationships, but again, the collective governmental and media bias that brought down Arbenz Guzman arose from a confluence of factors.

Before World War II, few Americans seriously considered an organized government effort to influence foreign nations and peoples, except during a national emergency. After the shock and horror of World War I, both the Soviet Union and the United States sought ways to extend their power through informational, non-violent means. A combination of U.S. government propaganda, private groups, and media outlets helped to establish the consensus view that the United States had to lead worldwide opposition to Communism.³³ It is indicative of the anti-Communist hysteria of the time that Harry Truman believed the Soviet Union would not initiate war with the United

³² Betsy Wade, *Forward Positions: The War Correspondence of Homer Bigart* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1992), 156.

³³ *Ibid.*

States, lacked the infrastructure and resources to maintain such a conflict, and yet did not employ those opinions in an effort to reduce public alarm over the Soviet Union.³⁴

Even while World War II raged, Communism and Soviet power were at best tolerated in the United States. Many U.S. officials privately hoped that the Russians and Germans would destroy each other, thereby relieving America of two enemies at once. U.S. laws restricted Communist as well as Nazi organizations under the Smith Act of 1940. After the war, the Smith Act was challenged in 1948 and argued before the Supreme Court. Truman's Justice Department contended that the Bill of Rights was never intended to be "a hiding place for enemies of the state." The U.S. government won the case, upholding the convictions of eleven Communist activists. In his dissenting opinion, Justice Hugo Black considered the American public's general attitude towards Communism: "Public opinion being what it now is, few will protest the convictions of these Communist petitioners."³⁵

The U.S. government took full advantage of that consensus with the passage of the January 1948 Smith-Mundt Act, which authorized the formation of the United States' first formal, global propaganda program. After the act passed, the DoS's budget for information operations doubled to \$31.2 million and the U.S. message became more blunt, as Voice of America (VOA) broadcasters were instructed to openly and explicitly "point the accusing finger at the Russians." The DOS's budget jumped again to \$115 million in 1952, as part of Truman's "Campaign of Truth", which had sprung from the Smith-Mundt Act's global aspirations. One VOA official later recalled that "anything

³⁴ Arthur Krock, *Memoirs* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 261.

³⁵ Chalmers M. Roberts, *First Rough Draft: A Journalist's Journal of Our Times* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 80, 97-98 (quotes).

more subtle than a bludgeon was considered ‘soft on communism.’”³⁶ The program was in fact designed to judge the veracity of information by its source alone. In essence, if the United States said it, it was true, and if the Russians said it, it was false. Mainstream media sources generally supported of the plan; the *New York Times* did its part by engaging in a supportive PR campaign.³⁷

Truman’s truth campaign also co-opted private media outlets. The Office of War Information (OWI) leased transmitters from CBS and NBC and hired journalists to conduct its propaganda operations. Those journalists eventually returned to private media employment, effectively creating a group of loyal propaganda employees in the private sector. The Associated Press (AP) and United Press (UP) also supplied scripts to be used in OWI broadcasts, and the U.S government subsidized the overseas distribution of various publications, including *Life*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. All of these actions furthered the Truman administrations’ belief that news and propaganda went hand in hand.³⁸

There was indeed something to fear from Stalin’s brand of Communism. His government executed many dissenters, sent thousands more to Siberian gulags, and starved millions of its own people. The United States, however, reacted far more strongly against a far weaker domestic Communist presence than its wartime European allies. Communist parties thrived in France and Italy without overtaking their host governments, and Winston Churchill refused to establish a British equivalent of the U.S.’s House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). In 1950, the United States, population of 150

³⁶ Kenneth Osgood. *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 37, 43.

³⁷ Shawn J. Parry-Giles, *The Rhetorical Presidency, Propaganda, and the Cold War, 1945-1955* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 17, 31.

³⁸ Parry-Giles, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, 6.

million, contained a Communist Party of 30,000; the same number of members that were counted in the American branch of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church. While the Soviet Union was a threat to the United States, Communism was not a threat in the United States.³⁹

Irrational fears of Communism in the United States maintained only a tenuous relationship with verifiable facts about the threat; actual knowledge could be (and was) filled with ominous assumptions and worst-case scenarios. With that framework in place, a wide range of panicky reactions and unwarranted fear and nervousness became the norm. By 1947, *Life* magazine had already declared the United States “Won the War and Lost the Peace.”⁴⁰ This alleged loss, of course, came at the hands of the Soviet Union, which was presumed to be behind all worldwide Communist activity. The well-known pollster George Gallup encapsulated the nation’s wariness of Communism neatly: “Communist deeds are the exact opposite of its words.”⁴¹ This belief had profound consequences, as Eisenhower partially ignored a genuine opportunity for increased rapprochement with the Soviet Union following Stalin’s death, because the president believed that the sudden increase in peaceful Soviet overtures was not genuine. The National Security Council (NSC) also recognized a clear departure from Stalin’s tactics, but likewise assumed that the peaceful overtures were part of a “treacherous stratagem.”⁴²

Truman’s administration agreed that Stalinist movements always masqueraded as nationalists, and subsequently wary of any nationalist uprising (Vietnam, for example).

³⁹ Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 4.

⁴⁰ Terry Anderson, *The Sixties* (New York: Longman Publishers, 1999), 3.

⁴¹ George Gallup, “The Challenge of Ideological Warfare,” in *Propaganda and the Cold War*, ed. John B. Witton (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1963), 56.

⁴² Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 62.

The Korean War birthed the Domino Theory, which obligated the United States to combat Communism everywhere, at any time. This theory, in turn, sparked involvement in areas of the world that held little strategic value. Because no administration wanted to let the first domino fall and thus set off a destructive chain reaction, exaggerated threats and unnecessary panic became commonplace. By the 1960's, the United States had military commitments to forty-seven nations and maintained hundreds of overseas bases.⁴³

The public attitudes that encouraged anti-Communist information and reporting were striking in their virulence and popularity. A 1954 national poll revealed that 80 percent of those polled wanted to revoke American Communists' citizenship, 77 percent wanted Communists banned from the radio, 52 percent wanted to have all Communists jailed, and 42 percent believed no member of the *press* should be permitted to criticize the "American form of government."⁴⁴ Even after an increase in peaceful overtures from the Soviets following Stalin's death, the American public's suspicion of Communism remained unchanged. "Of 1,116 articles discussing the Soviet Union in March and April 1953, only fifty suggested that the United States might or should accept a 'truce' with Moscow."⁴⁵ The non-Communist American left was weakened as well; key labor leaders such as the AFL-CIO's George Meany resembled their corporate lobbyist counterparts, and the Socialist Party candidate in the 1952 presidential election won fewer votes than

⁴³ Anderson, *The Sixties*, 6.

⁴⁴ Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 14-15.

⁴⁵ Kenneth Osgood, "Eisenhower's Dilemma: Talking Peace and Waging Cold War," in *Selling War in a Media Age*, ed. Kenneth Osgood and Andrew K. Frank (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2010), 148-49.

any of his predecessors.⁴⁶ The specter of Communism also tinted other key areas of public life, with significant consequences. Many civil rights advocates and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) activists were regarded as members of a Communist conspiracy, and Truman's plan for national health insurance failed in part due to a claim from the American Medical Association (AMA) that the result would be a "monstrosity of Bolshevik bureaucracy." These details, of course, came in addition to U.S. government loyalty tests, enemies' lists, and the blacklisting of Hollywood entertainers. CBS was proactive in this regard, as it launched its own loyalty oath campaign to root out Reds, as it fired employees who refused to complete the questionnaire.⁴⁷

In an environment and culture of such anti-Communist intensity, the print media exhibited blatant anti-Communist biases. Fear of Communist subversion enabled policymakers to calmly lie about U.S. government involvement in Guatemala, secure in the rationalization that the United States was the "good" actor in the end. U.S. officials also knew that instilling a certain degree of fear was useful for securing both domestic political backing and maintaining support for a costly national defense and foreign affairs strategy.⁴⁸

Compared to the deep anti-Communist perspective that colored Cold War journalism, coverage of the Soviet Union during World War II was remarkable for its positivity and focus on Soviet sacrifice. Instead of an ideologically driven force, the

⁴⁶ Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 20.

⁴⁷ Whitfield, *Ibid.*, 23 (quote), 167.

⁴⁸ Osgood, "Eisenhower's Dilemma: Talking Peace and Waging Cold War," in *Selling War in a Media Age*, ed. Kenneth Osgood and Andrew K. Frank (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2010), 141.

Soviet Union was represented in U.S. media as an institution embodied by the Red Army. A March and September-only sample of coverage in four publications (*New York Herald Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Time*) from 1944-1947 revealed a stark contrast in wartime and postwar coverage of the Soviet Union. The sample's total figures for all publications involved indicated a 37.6 percent rate of positive news articles and editorials. However, after separating the information into mid-and post-war phases (May and September 1944-45, and in 1946-47), the differences became clear. In 1944-45, the rate of pro-Soviet articles was 72.5 percent of the 580 overall articles. In 1946-47, the rate of pro-Soviet articles dropped precipitously to 13 percent of the 822 overall articles. Some of the increase in overall articles was sparked by former Prime Minister's famed "Iron Curtain" speech. The *Chicago Tribune's* coverage in both phases ran strongly to the right, with only two of its fifty-two editorials in the sample being pro-Soviet. Even during the war, the *Tribune* viewed the Soviet Union in negative terms and refused to recognize it as a significant fighting force. Stalin and his state press did not help matters by making little effort to win over the American public and restricting U.S. journalists' access to the Soviet Union.⁴⁹

During World War II, the U.S. government and domestic press had a relatively cooperative relationship. The Office of Censorship's press wing was staffed by journalists on leave from their regular jobs, and the press routinely complied with government requests to withhold information.⁵⁰ Understandably, many journalists regarded World War II as a kind of team effort, and reported as such.

⁴⁹ Louis Liebovich, *The Press and the Origins of the Cold War, 1944-1947* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 25, 28, 152, 154.

⁵⁰ David R. Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945-1965* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006) 31.

Following the war, the media assumed a more traditional, adversarial role. The government still attempted to control the information flow under the pretext of safeguarding America from Communist threats. In addition to institutional caution, the government itself was growing rapidly. The appearance of new bureaucracies and agencies caused a corresponding jump in the public relations field (a 1949 federal survey counted 45,000 public relations workers), and subsequently changed the ways in which journalists covered government sources. While the number of Washington correspondents increased, they were unable to thoroughly cover their rapidly expanding field of responsibility, causing some correspondents to complain that their contemporaries resorted to simply accepting government press releases in the interest of saving time. Because reporters were continually forced to deal with PR representatives instead of the actual officials and sources, *US News and World Report* publisher David Lawrence feared his reporters were increasingly subject to government manipulation, and that government propaganda was making its way into newspapers.⁵¹

In addition to fears of government propaganda seeping into daily newspapers' traditional reporting, the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy in the public consciousness presented newspaper publishers and editorial boards with another challenge. Many did not agree with his right wing opinions and largely baseless accusations of Communist infiltration of government and other institutions, but they felt obligated to reprint his statements because of his popularity. Other editors and reporters sympathized with his overall goal of ridding America of Communist influence. Unfortunately, when journalists reported McCarthy's unproven accusations, anyone tainted by his charges was left with a

⁵¹ Ibid., 36-37.

virtually ineradicable stigma.⁵² To both report the news and provide accompanying evidence and analysis, most newspapers turned to interpretive writing. That meant not taking a politician at his/her word. One of the primary advocates of the editorial was Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of the *New York Times*. The newspaper editorial, therefore, provides a clear window into that publication's institutional viewpoint. Put more simply by veteran reporter Louis Lyons: "If a politician distorts it, the newspaperman needs to straighten it out for the reader."⁵³

The distortions Lyons referenced often arose from domestic political concerns of the politician that generated them. After the temporary unifying effect of World War II had ended, anti-Communism became the paramount concern. Only a year after the war had ended, the chairman of the Republican National Committee offered voters a choice between "Communism and Republicanism."⁵⁴ In the 1948 presidential election, the Republican Party regularly accused Truman of being "soft on Communism." The administration, in turn, attempted to demonstrate its anti-Communist credentials.⁵⁵ Even though Truman cared little for Senator Joe McCarthy, his administration backed McCarthy's overall warning of Communist subversion. Truman's attorney general, in phrasing that would have sounded comfortable in a McCarthy speech, alleged that Communists in America were "everywhere...undermining your government, plotting to destroy the liberties of every citizen."⁵⁶ Although Truman won re-election in 1948, his Vice President, Adlai Stevenson, lost to Dwight Eisenhower four years later. The 1952

⁵² James Aronson, *The Press and the Cold War* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1970), 72

⁵³ Davies, *Postwar Decline of American Newspapers*, 43 (quote), 44.

⁵⁴ Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 19.

⁵⁵ Aronson, *The Press and the Cold War*, 42.

⁵⁶ Anderson, *The Sixties*, 5.

election further validated communism as the predominant political issue in the United States. As Mao Tse-Tung's Communist Party took power in China and with the outbreak of the Korean War, Dwight Eisenhower campaigned by running on a "crusade (against) Korea, Communism, and corruption."⁵⁷ Even Eisenhower's crusade did not translate into political success for his Vice President, as Richard Nixon lost the 1960 presidential election to John F. Kennedy, who convinced the public that he would be more assertive in the fight against Communism than Eisenhower.⁵⁸ The press covered both sides, thereby propagating the anti-Communist narrative.

No major media figure questioned the basic assumptions of the Cold War. Truman wanted to combat Soviet propaganda about the United States, and sought to enlist the entire country in the effort. He realized the impact of popular media, and explicitly appealed to editors for ideological support of the national security state. None of them blanched at the request.⁵⁹ Although Truman was sometimes brusque with editors and publishers, he indulged many working reporters that he had come to know in public office. By June 1945, Truman had determined to take a firm line with the Soviets, and shared his intentions with several newsmen on a weekend fishing trip. Those present dutifully passed on the information to their superiors, including Henry Luce of *Time*, who was pleased that the course had been set.⁶⁰ Truman's defense secretary, James Forrestal, also realized the importance of PR, and hired three consecutive newsmen to the post of

⁵⁷ Roberts, *First Rough Draft*, 104.

⁵⁸ Robert D. Schulzinger, "Cementing and Dissolving Consensus: Presidential Rhetoric During the Cold War, 1947-1969," in Osgood and Frank, eds, *Selling War in a Media Age*, 102.

⁵⁹ Nancy E. Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 85.

⁶⁰ Liebovich, *The Press and Origins of the Cold War*, 72.

assistant secretary of defense for administrative and public affairs, including one from the *New York Times*;⁶¹ an interesting selection, as Truman felt that the *Times* had been unfairly critical of his policies.⁶²

President Eisenhower maintained a positive relationship with the media, but also distrusted the *New York Times*. Secretary Dulles called *Times* reporter Sydney Gruson a "dangerous character" who was following "the Communist line," and Eisenhower believed that "the *New York Times* was the most untrustworthy newspaper in the United States."⁶³ Despite his skepticism of the *Times*, he chose a former *Times* reporter, Jim Hagerty, as his press secretary. Eisenhower seldom made a decision without running it by Hagerty to surmise how it would read in the next day's papers.⁶⁴

Eisenhower fully appreciated the value of public relations and propaganda from his experiences in World War II; he had "learned the importance of truth as a weapon in the midst of battle."⁶⁵ After barely a day in office, Eisenhower appointed C.D. Jackson as his Psychological Warfare Adviser. Before his stint with Eisenhower, Jackson was a part of Henry Luce's media empire, overseeing the publication of *Life* and *Fortune* magazines. While serving under Eisenhower, Jackson passed dozens of tips and stories to his former (and future) employer that furthered the administration's Cold War goals. Eisenhower could therefore count on the *Time-Life* conglomerate to support his initiatives.⁶⁶

If Truman and Eisenhower did not particularly like the media and journalists

⁶¹ Bernhard, *U.S. Television News And Cold War Propaganda*, 133.

⁶² Parry-Giles, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, 10.

⁶³ Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America*, 59.

⁶⁴ James Reston, *Deadline* (New York: Random House, 1991), 195.

⁶⁵ Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 48.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

personally, they nonetheless understood the importance of public relations. Truman gave an average of three to four press conferences per month during his tenure, and was on familiar terms with reporters. Eisenhower was less enthusiastic, holding only fourteen press conferences during his first eight months in office.⁶⁷ However, Eisenhower attempted to turn the advent of television news in his favor by allowing presidential press conferences to be televised starting in 1955.⁶⁸ He also worked to manipulate the press, by turns flattering the importance of their work, encouraging them to write supportive stories and threatening censorship if they strayed too far.⁶⁹

Presidents were not the only ones who understood the importance of managing political opinions. Whereas commanders-in-chief could take their case directly to the public, the CIA took advantage of its secretive nature and often worked with political figures to advance a cooperative anti-Communist agenda. Senator Alexander Wiley (R-WI), then chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, readily acceded to the Director of Central Intelligence's (DCI's) request to publicize a Guatemalan arms shipment from the USSR in 1954. In addition to the CIA's ideological compatibility with some members of Congress, CIA Director Allen Dulles was not above "trying to get the jobs of newspapermen who criticize his agency."⁷⁰ The latter was designed to block reporters' desire to dig too aggressively into the CIA's affairs. In general, most government agencies maintained a healthy amount of skepticism of the press. As one Truman-era State Department official put it: "...the press is looked on as a dangerous,

⁶⁷ Jim Willis, *The Media Effect: How the News Influences Politics and Government* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 108-109.

⁶⁸ Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers*, 56.

⁶⁹ Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 50.

⁷⁰ David M. Barrett, *The CIA and Congress: The Untold Story from Truman to Kennedy* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2005), 163, 202 (quote).

unattractive beast, which you can lead along for a little bit of the way, but which is likely to turn and bite you at the slightest opportunity.”⁷¹

The Department of State also played a key role in Arbenz's removal. The CIA took the most active role, but the DoS provided valuable diplomatic and political intelligence. As the United States' premier foreign policy bureaucracy, the DoS was also in a position to shape public opinion. It sometimes resorted to outright falsehoods to exaggerate the Communist threat in Guatemala. In one example, DoS claimed that Guatemalan Communists had instigated a May 1954 banana workers' strike, when they in fact had raised only a few hundred dollars for the strikers' fund.⁷² Along with the DoS, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was responsible for creating and distributing pro-American information and propaganda. During the 1950s, the USIA spent \$5.2 million on an anti-Communist campaign throughout Latin America.⁷³

A comparison of the views examined in internal government documents with mainstream media reporting helps to clarify the extent of U.S. government propaganda efforts and effects on the press. The CIA was the operational agency in PBSUCCESS, which warrants a primary focus on its reports and discussions. The CIA has declassified and collected all of its PBSUCCESS-related documents on its website. In addition to that valuable source, I also consulted the State Department's declassified Guatemala-related documents, included in the *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

The CIA's concerns about Arbenz Guzman grew over time, mirroring the views their civilian counterparts. The media used government sources, and the CIA used

⁷¹ Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 168.

⁷² Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution*, 22.

⁷³ Gilderhus, *The Second Century*, 143.

mainstream media reports to inform its own analysis. This relationship was somewhat incestuous, but largely unintentional. Of course, there were exceptions to the rule, but none so great as to significantly impact the broader course of events. The media and the government arrived at parallel positions by parallel means. The prime difference was that no voice of dissent existed within the CIA. Liberal publications such as *The Nation* or *The New Republic* were critical of the government's actions in Guatemala, but there was no comparable CIA or DoS official registering an objection.

Despite the CIA's skeptical attitude towards the media, it was often beaten to the punch on emerging stories, and incorporated open-source reporting for its own benefit. One example came in June 1952. A memorandum to the agency's Western Hemisphere Division chief summarized a *New York Times* piece that reported on Anti-Communist disturbances in Guatemala. The author of the memorandum (name still classified) drily noted that "We have received no confirmation of the above reports from our own sources."⁷⁴ Declassified records also include several reports and remarks on TV programs and Walter Winchell radio broadcasts. Occasionally, the CIA appropriated open source reporting to reinforce its own propaganda. The importance of doing so was indicated in a May 1954 memorandum concerning a video from NBC-TV: "This material, if determined to be useful, is urgently needed, and it is therefore requested that you give this matter a high priority."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program. *Memorandum For Chief, WHD*. Washington D.C.: June 13, 1952. http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000915044/DOC_0000915044.pdf (accessed July 9, 2011).

⁷⁵ Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program, *Memorandum For Chief, Graphics Register, OCD*. Washington D.C.:18 May 1954.

As late as October 1952, the CIA was confident that Arbenz Guzman was not a Communist, stating that “he personally does not agree with the economic and political ideas of the Guatemalan or Soviet Communists.” The intelligence report also noted that Arbenz Guzman was aware of his country’s economic dependence on the United States, and even observed that his social reform ideas stemmed more from the “US New Deal than from Soviet Communism.”⁷⁶

Internal government deliberations about the proper course of action in Guatemala took a turn with the appointment of John Peurifoy as the new ambassador to Guatemala in November 1953. By September 1, 1953, a CIA memorandum indicated that Peurifoy had been briefed, and embraced, the CIA’s intention to “take strong action against the government of President Arbenz Guzman in the hope of facilitating a change to a more democratically oriented regime.”⁷⁷ Oddly enough, other reports noted that the desire for a more “democratic” government came more from the United States than Guatemalan citizens. A September 11 CIA memorandum exhibited the typical concerns about Communist infiltration, but also admitted that the government enjoyed considerable popular support: “no internal conditions (existed) that could be developed into a vital threat to the present Arbenz Guzman administration without determined support from the

http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000915108/DOC_0000915108.pdf (accessed July 8, 2011).

⁷⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Retrospective Volume, Guatemala. Central Intelligence Agency Information Report*. Guatemala City: October 10, 1952. <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d27> (accessed July 11, 2011).

⁷⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Retrospective Volume, Guatemala. Memorandum for the Record*. Washington, D.C.: September 1, 1953. <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d45> (accessed July 11, 2011).

outside.”⁷⁸ Even though most Guatemalans were satisfied with their government, the US government’s desires mattered more than the Guatemalan peoples’.

In addition to addressing the supposed Communist threat itself, the CIA also saw the small country as a valuable proving ground for new tactics and techniques. To avoid proof of US involvement, money was funneled through Castillo Armas. To provide a broader rumor mill, the CIA developed “Intelligence and rumor nets...within Guatemala and in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras.”⁷⁹ As operations progressed, the agency upped its level of support to match. Not content with mere broadcasts and rumors, the agency sent over 2 million propaganda items to Castillo Armas, including several tape recorders and mimeograph machines.⁸⁰

PBSUCCESS began in earnest in November 1953. The draft memorandum for the operation laid out the CIA’s basic goals: to covertly remove Arbenz Guzman’s government, replace it with a pro-United States version, and to do so while maintaining plausible deniability. On this score, the CIA succeeded. During the coup, no mainstream media outlet accused the US government of direct or indirect intervention, only of tacit approval. The justification for PBSUCCESS was simple, but so general as to question the

⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Retrospective Volume, Guatemala. Memorandum for the Record*. Washington, D.C.: September 11, 1953. <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d51> (accessed July 11, 2011).

⁷⁹ Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program. *Memorandum for the Record*. Washington D.C.: October 29, 1953. http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000924003/DOC_0000924003.pdf (accessed, July 9, 2011).

⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Retrospective Volume, Guatemala. Memorandum for the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division*. Washington, D.C.: January 6, 1954. <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d80> (accessed July 11, 2011).

rationale for intervention itself: “The Communists have become strongly entrenched in Guatemala and in the Guatemalan government, thus constituting a threat to United States welfare in the Western Hemisphere.”⁸¹

Another example of the CIA’s emphasis on media messaging came during the *Alfhem* incident. Internal meeting notes during that period reveal that the CIA had some foreknowledge of the shipment, but elected to wait until it had been completed to raise the alarm. In particular, the CIA sought to delay exposure until the period of time when it would be “most compromising to the Guatemalans.”⁸² CIA efforts paid off, as a report the following month described the Guatemalan army’s nervousness over receiving the arms. In particular, the military was concerned that the arms delivery would trigger U.S. involvement. The CIA was only too happy to encourage that apprehension, noting that it would attempt to “exploit uneasiness by rumor, black propaganda, etc.”⁸³

During the coup, messaging and propaganda played a key role. The CIA even went so far as to author Castillo Castillo Armas’s introductory broadcast, which stressed religious and anti-Soviet themes. Of course, the speech emphasized the indigenous nature of the revolt: “This is not a foreign intervention, but an uprising of the honest, Christian,

⁸¹ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Retrospective Volume, Guatemala. Draft Memorandum for the Record*. Washington, D.C.: November 12, 1953. <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d65> (accessed July 11, 2011).

⁸² U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Retrospective Volume, Guatemala. Memorandum From the Deputy Director for Plans to the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division*. Washington, D.C.: April 8, 1954. <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d121> (accessed July 12, 2011).

⁸³ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Retrospective Volume, Guatemala. Telegram From the CIA Station in Guatemala to Operation PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida*. Guatemala City: May 20, 1954. <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d156> (accessed July 12, 2011).

freedom-loving people of Guat (sic) to liberate our homeland from the foreign intervention which has already taken place, from control by the Soviet Union which has made Guat (sic) and advanced outpost of international commie aggression, from rule by Soviet puppets.”⁸⁴

Despite all the sound and fury over Soviet penetration of Guatemala, the actual evidence was scant. After the coup, Castillo Armas and the CIA scoured government records for evidence of Soviet influence. They were sorely disappointed. Both parties believed that the former administration had destroyed most of the incriminating records, which accounted for the lack of smoking guns. The CIA reported that of the 500,000 documents it studied, only 2,095 were duplicated; the agency was forced to admit that, despite a cooperative Guatemalan press, “very few Communist damaging” documents were found. The likely cause is that few existed.⁸⁵

Piero Gleijeses’s seminal work *Shattered Hope* documented the Soviets’ reluctance to aid Guatemalan Communists. No Arbenz Guzman official visited the Soviet Union, and only one PGT (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo, Guatemalan Communist Party) official landed in Russia during Arbenz’s tenure. Even that visit was only a short stopover enroute to the 1952 Asian and Pacific Peace Conference, and the official was only tolerated, not welcomed, by low-level Soviet officials. The Soviet Union was afraid

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Retrospective Volume, Guatemala. Telegram from PBSUCCESS Headquarters to the Broadcasting Unit*. Location Not Indicated: June 18, 1954. <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d202> (accessed, July 12, 2011).

⁸⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Retrospective Volume, Guatemala. Editorial Note*. Location Not Indicated: No Date Given. <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d286> (accessed, July 12, 2011).

of appearing to open a beachhead in the hemisphere in a country of little strategic value, and also considered military officers in third world nations as imperialist stooges. On another occasion, the Soviets' commercial attaché in Mexico visited Arbenz Guzman in Guatemala to discuss the purchase of bananas. No agreement materialized because Guatemala had no vessels to ship the fruit. After Stalin died in 1953, the Russians did begin to consider Guatemala as more fertile ground, but even then interest was minimal. The Kremlin did send copies of *Pravda* to Guatemala; presumably as a symbolic measure, as no Guatemalan Communist could read Russian. Guatemalan labor official Carlos Manuel Pellecer, who was the subject of a profile piece in *Life*, summed up the PGT-Soviet relationship neatly: "We were knocking on the door, but the Soviets didn't answer."⁸⁶

Jules Dubois' murky association with the CIA aside, declassified CIA documents mention only one journalist's reporting: the *New York Times*' Sidney Gruson. His name first appeared as a result of his article on December 23, 1953. In it, he wrote that some Latin American leaders were skeptical of the United States' seeming double standard about governments in the region: dictatorships were tolerated, but Communists were not. After a fact-finding trip in the region, Gruson reported a "a fixed concern over the United States intentions in Latin America and an almost constant suspicion coloring reaction to anything Washington does or says regarding the area."⁸⁷ It should be noted that Gruson did not inject any obvious personal opinions on the topic. He reported only the impressions and beliefs he encountered on his tour. Nonetheless, the CIA was concerned

⁸⁶ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 186 (quote), 188.

⁸⁷ Sydney Gruson, "Latin Americans Are Vexed at U.S. For Scoring Reds but Not Dictators," *New York Times*, December 23, 1953, 8.

with Gruson's reliability, despite a significant body of previous work that did not overtly criticize U.S. policy in the region, and in fact appeared to share the government's suspicion of Communist influence in Guatemala.

Several weeks after the December 1953 article was published, the CIA's Western Hemisphere Division wrote a memo to its chief detailing its concerns. The memo discussed another newsman's association with Mr. Gruson, which confirmed that the CIA used current and former journalists as sources. Unfortunately, the source of the memorandum is still classified, likely to conceal the CIA's media contacts. The source gave a positive impression of Gruson's professional abilities, and viewed the article in question as a well-meaning error. The CIA was less forgiving, as the memorandum recommended that "some consideration should be given to instituting an investigation of Mr. Gruson's recent activities."⁸⁸

The agency's fears were further inflamed when Gruson reported that the *Alfhem* shipment had united the Guatemalan people behind its government. After praising a recent *Washington Post* editorial that concurred with the CIA's assessment of Guatemala as a potential Communist outpost, Deputy Director of Plans Frank Wisner turned his attention to Gruson: "Question again raised: What is Gruson motivation? We have suggested to ODACID (US Embassy) this matter be brought attention top hierarchy New York Times and would like suggest your consideration you have someone ask Gruson

⁸⁸ Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program, *Memorandum for Chief, Western Hemisphere*. Washington, D.C.: January 19, 1954. http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000914127/DOC_0000914127.pdf (accessed July 12, 2011).

what is his evidence.”⁸⁹ Although Wisner signed the message, its ‘From’ line read Director, CIA. Suspicion of Gruson had reached the highest levels of the CIA.

The issue quickly snowballed. On May 27, the CIA produced a three-page assessment of on Gruson’s reporting. The report first discussed Gruson’s expulsion from Guatemala at the behest of Guillermo Toriello, Guatemala’s Minister of Foreign Affairs. Toriello objected to by Gruson’s reporting and complained that he had exaggerated Communist influence in Guatemala. The CIA’s internal assessment of Gruson’s reporting found that he strove for objectivity, but approvingly reported that “In virtually every article referring to Guatemala Gruson characterized the country with some descriptive phrase mentioning Communist influence.”⁹⁰ Evidently the CIA and Toriello Garrido agreed on this point.

In May 1954, Toriello Garrido invited Gruson to return to Guatemala, which he did. The CIA compared Gruson’s reporting with other foreign correspondents and judged his work was not particularly leftist or pro-Guatemalan. Interestingly, the agency opined that quoting Guatemalan official statements would indicate a definite bias on the part of the reporter; while the analysis did not state it explicitly, the corollary seemed to be that US statements were to be taken at face value. Nonetheless, the CIA believed that Gruson had made a deal with Toriello Garrido, “in which Gruson promised to bend over backward to give Guatemala and its Foreign Minister full and favorable treatment in his

⁸⁹ Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program. *Memorandum to Sr. Rep. Guatemala City From DIR, CIA*. Washington, D.C.: May 21, 1954. http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000136917/DOC_0000136917.pdf (accessed July 12, 2011).

⁹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program, *Reporting on Guatemala By New York Times Correspondent Sydney Gruson*. Washington, D.C.: May 27, 1954. http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000923198/DOC_0000923198.pdf (accessed July 12, 2011).

reporting.”⁹¹

Evidently alarmed by this chain of events, Frank Wisner (writing on behalf of Allen Dulles) cabled the CIA’s senior representative in Guatemala City that Gruson was possibly being used as a spy for the Arbenz Guzman regime. Wisner requested to be informed if and when Gruson left the country, and expressed his hope that he would be removed from the Guatemala beat, or something “possibly even more drastic.”⁹²

The drumbeat of opinion against Gruson quickly grew louder. PBSUCCESS headquarters in Florida released a scathing memorandum on Gruson’s reporting only a week after the CIA’s more balanced analysis. The new assessment criticized Gruson’s articles: “their tone is definitely unfriendly to PBPRIME (United States) policies...Gruson has more or less accepted the official Guatemalan line with respect to the recent arms shipments...has habitually disregarded the opinions of independent papers and other news outlets in Guatemala...makes no attempts to present a balanced study of the views of different elements in the local society and business community...The net result is a biased report and a slanting of the news to fit a preconceived attitude....Gruson, himself, claimed to be a socialist.”⁹³ The differences between the two analyses were remarkable. The same day, Frank Wisner wrote a memorandum to Allen Dulles concerning Gruson’s personal politics. Wisner asserted that

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program, *Memorandum From Director, CIA to Senior Rep, Guatemala City*. Washington, D.C.: May 29, 1954. http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000136939/DOC_0000136939.pdf (accessed July 12, 1954).

⁹³ Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program, *Memorandum from Lincoln (PBSUCCESS Headquarters in Florida) to PBSUCCESS Headquarters* Location Not Indicated: June 2, 1954. http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000922810/DOC_0000922810.pdf (accessed July 12, 2011).

Gruson gave “distinct evidence of Marxist and pro-Communist sympathies... It is hoped that the TIMES will not see fit to post Gruson to any of the Latin American hot spots at any time in the near future.”⁹⁴ Allen Dulles shared Wisner’s sentiments, and asked Arthur Hays Sulzberger (*New York Times* publisher) to remove Gruson from his current assignment, and Sulzberger obliged.⁹⁵ There is scant evidence of the Dulles-Sulzberger relationship in the CIA’s declassified records: one veiled reference from Wisner, remarking on Dulles’ “friend on the *Times*,”⁹⁶ (presumably Sulzberger given the suggestion to remove Gruson) and a personal memorandum from Dulles to Sulzberger referencing the passage of information “from a friend to a friend.”⁹⁷ The CIA was encouraged by its success in removing Gruson from the Guatemala beat, and the agency often tried to recruit *Times* reporters to serve as covert informers, and passed false information to other reporters without taking responsibility as the source.⁹⁸

Wisner’s next missive to Dulles contained another criticism of Gruson’s reporting, but more significantly mentioned the CIA’s own contribution to the mainstream media: “I believe you have already received by now a copy of the piece that

⁹⁴ Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program, *Memorandum For The Director of Central Intelligence.* Washington, D.C.: June 2, 1954. http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000928355/DOC_0000928355.pdf (accessed July 12, 2011).

⁹⁵ Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 71-72.

⁹⁶ U.S. Department of State Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Retrospective Volume, Guatemala. *Memorandum From the Deputy Director for Plans, Central Intelligence Agency to Director of Central Intelligence Dulles.* Washington, D.C.: June 14, 1954. <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d182> (accessed July 11, 2011).

⁹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program, *Personal And Confidential Letter From Allen Dulles to Arthur Hays Sulzberger.* Washington, D.C.: July 10, 1954. http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000924578/DOC_0000924578.pdf (accessed, July 12, 2011).

⁹⁸ Reston, *Deadline*, 209.

we have worked up and given to *Time* magazine, entitled The Friends of Guatemala.”⁹⁹ A review of the *Time* archive does not show an article by that name, but the June 21 edition did contain an article discussing the growing unrest in Guatemala. Given the probable source, it was appropriately named: “Guatemala: Plots & Rumors.”¹⁰⁰

Time again pleased the agency with its cover story on June 28. Wisner reported “*Time* cover story this week excellent but almost unique job.”¹⁰¹ This is the only CIA record that explicitly confirmed the CIA directly feeding a story to a mainstream media outlet. The US Information Agency issued a post-mortem of their information operations after the coup, but did not explicitly mention similar actions.¹⁰²

After the fact, Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times* accused two of his colleagues of being “God’s gift to the United Fruit Company...they unintentionally saw and wrote exactly what the State Department wanted to see.” Such inaccuracies and biases were not limited to the publications in this study. *U.S. News and World Report* repeatedly made blanket assertions of Communist influence without providing documentation to support their allegations. The *Christian Science Monitor* presented a more complex view of the situation, but uncritically printed alarmist predictions by US Congressmen; by the time the coup had begun, the *Monitor* had bought the government’s

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Unknown Author, “Guatemala: Plots & Rumors,” *Time*, June 21, 1954.

¹⁰¹ Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program, *Memorandum from Director, CIA to (Unnamed)*. Washington, D.C.: June 27, 1954.

http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000136982/DOC_0000136982.pdf (accessed July 12, 2011).

¹⁰² U.S. Department of State Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Retrospective Volume, Guatemala. *Report On Actions Taken By The United States Information Agency*. Washington, D.C.: July 27, 1954), <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d280> (accessed July 11, 2011).

line that Guatemala was under Communist control.¹⁰³ Both *Time* and the *New York Times* wrote adulatory profiles of Allen Dulles.¹⁰⁴ Unsurprisingly, CIA officials regarded *Time* and the *New York Times* as their most “active and rewarding relationships.”¹⁰⁵

The CIA did not restrict their relationships to print outlets. Its relationship with CBS grew so close that CBS’s news president Sig Mickelson installed a private phone line to the CIA that bypassed the network’s switchboard; he had grown tired of using a pay phone to contact them.¹⁰⁶

The causes and effects of biased reporting in the American press were varied and complex. The government and UFCO mounted active propaganda campaigns, which included planting and sourcing stories in the mainstream press; but, we must consider the practicalities of journalism. In the absence of contradictory evidence from Guatemalan sources, it was difficult to critically analyze UFCO statements, government opinions, and the howls of alarmist legislators. The news business entails covering the opinions of opinion-makers. When those opinions are almost uniformly of a certain view, it should come as no surprise that the coverage of those statements was slanted accordingly. Rumors operated in much the same way. When the CIA planted an unverifiable rumor, the media coverage itself lent the rumor a degree of certitude, as it could not be disproven. In addition, the CIA “had everything to gain by hyping the Red menace and much to lose should the suspicion take hold that the Russians might not actually pose

¹⁰³ John Kirch, “*Covering A Coup: The American Press and Guatemala in 1954.*” Paper presented at the annual international meeting for the AEJMC National Convention, Washington, D.C., August 2007. 9 (quote), 20.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Bacevich, *Washington Rules: America’s Path to Permanent War*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010) 37.

¹⁰⁵ Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda*, 184.

¹⁰⁶ Bernhard, *Ibid.*, 186.

such a dire threat after all.”¹⁰⁷ Essentially, the Soviet threat was the CIA’s raison d’etre, and the public was happy to oblige it.

In many ways, government and media analyses were simply products of the culture from which they sprung. Popular culture did not question the existence of a Communist threat, but merely questioned what form the threat would take.¹⁰⁸ This assertion was borne out by polls of the time. In the mid 1950’s, Communism’s unfavorable ratings never dipped below 87.5 percent.¹⁰⁹

Given the country’s anti-Communist mood, journalists may have found such information more credible since it reinforced widely held suspicions and stereotypes. Like most American citizens and officials, journalists agreed with the basic assumptions of the Cold War and rarely questioned the presuppositions of national security doctrine.¹¹⁰ In an insightful chapter on U.S. government-press relationships, Delmer Dunn noted that “Social psychologists generally hold that people frequently interpret information so that it agrees very closely with what they already think.”¹¹¹ Richard Immerman described the concept of representative heuristics as it applied to Arbenz: “...people evaluate the extent to which the characteristics of a person...are representative of a category of that same object: Guatemala’s Jacobo Arbenz Guzman must be a

¹⁰⁷ Bacevich, *Washington Rules*, 42.

¹⁰⁸ Cyndy Hendershot, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc, 2003), 144.

¹⁰⁹ Tom W. Smith, “The Polls: American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union and Communism,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47 (1983): 280.

¹¹⁰ Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda*, 157.

¹¹¹ Delmer Dunn, “The Mass Media in America,” in *Government and the News Media*, ed. Dan Nimmo and Michael W. Mansfield (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1982), 213.

Communist. If it looks like a duck and acts like a duck, it is a duck.”¹¹² In a similar vein, if the journalists themselves held reflexively anti-Communist views then they may have written the way they did regardless of the government’s efforts. Even if there had been a few newsmen of conscience that fought the government line, it is impossible to know their impact; the coup may have occurred regardless. But, there were no such journalists, and the print media served only to reinforce both the U.S. governments’ message and popular American beliefs.

¹¹² Richard Immerman, “Psychology,” in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 160.

CHAPTER 3

MEDIA PERSPECTIVES ON JACOBO ARBENZ GUZMAN

Both before and after World War II, American newspapers generally reflected the widely-supported ideology of anti-Communism. In general, newspapers were fairly conservative institutions that supported the pro-business agendas of their owners; the *Chicago Tribune* was notably conservative, sometimes equating anti-New Dealers with anti-Communists.¹¹³

The field of popular media took on a new dimension in the 1950s. From 1952 to 1957, the number of television stations increased from 108 to 544, and 78 percent of American homes had a television set. Newspapers seemed to benefit from television's rise, seeing a steady rise in overall circulation that peaked at 58,881,746 in 1960. Reflecting the demographic trend of city dwellers fleeing to the suburbs, major metropolitan dailies saw their share of overall circulation drop from two-thirds to one-half of overall circulation by 1962. New weeklies and community dailies undercut the major papers. News magazines also fared well, with *US News and World Report*, *Newsweek*, and *Time* enjoying increased circulation. By 1956, *Time's* circulation had reached 2 million.¹¹⁴

Given *Time's* extensive popularity, it is worth describing the politics behind it. *Time* and *Life's* publisher, Henry Luce, was personally involved with his magazines.¹¹⁵ Therefore, his personal opinions are instructive in analyzing *Time/Life's* political stance.

¹¹³ Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945-1965*, 39-40.

¹¹⁴ Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers*, 51-52, 60, 89.

¹¹⁵ Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the 20th Century* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1964), 260.

Luce was, if nothing else, a believer in American leadership and primacy, writing (in *Life*) that the American people should “exert upon the world the full impact of our influence for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit.”¹¹⁶ A 1956 United Auto Workers (UAW) study concluded that Luce’s empire was effectively GOP-biased. Unsurprisingly, Luce’s politics were generally conservative--a key detail given Time Inc’s status as the nation’s largest magazine publisher by 1963. *Life*, as indicated by its name and large photo spreads, was *Time*’s less somber sibling. It was also enormously successful, leading all magazines in advertising revenue by 1963 (*Time* was third).¹¹⁷

At the other end of the political spectrum, *The Nation* was, and continues to be, a key shaper and indicator of liberal thought. During the Guatemalan coup, it was the most reliable and skeptical source of the government’s claims about Arbenz Guzman, as well as the wisdom of removing him. Although several years too late for Guatemala, the magazine ran a critical expose on the CIA in 1961.¹¹⁸

Theodore Peterson described *The New Republic* as a magazine that “stood alongside *The Nation* as an organ of liberalism,” albeit a better-funded one. Its coverage of events in Guatemala bore out his conclusion, although its articles were slightly less skeptical than *The Nation*’s. By the mid-50s the magazine had staked out a position of moderate liberalism.¹¹⁹

The *Los Angeles Times* owner, Norman Chandler, bought into the Cold War wholeheartedly, even going so far as to offer one of his television stations to his friend

¹¹⁶ Bacevich, *Washington Rules*, 12.

¹¹⁷ Peterson, *Magazines in the 20th Century*, 243-44, 334.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 417.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 423 (quote), 427.

Louis Johnson, so Johnson might advance his employers' agenda.¹²⁰ At the time, Johnson was the Secretary of Defense. In general, the *Los Angeles Times* adopted a moderate political position, often copying foreign policy articles from the *New York Times*.

A period account of prominent newspapers' foreign policy biases described the *Chicago Tribune* as such: "The American newspapers that are noted for their coverage of foreign affairs...are virtually all staunch defenders of a liberal internationalist foreign policy...The *Chicago Tribune* is the major exception to this generalization."¹²¹ A midwest powerhouse, the paper's circulation topped one million after World War II. It was unapologetically conservative, prompting Harry Truman to call it the "worst newspaper in the nation."¹²²

As the most prolific producer of Guatemala-related articles, the *New York Times* generated the bulk of primary source material; therefore, this paper devotes significant attention to analysis of those articles. Aside from the quantity of sheer content, the *Times* must be considered for its reputation. Mid-1950s contemporaries of the *Times* regarded it as the preeminent example of foreign policy reporting, the prime source for writers, politicians, and statesmen of the day. Its trickle-down effect was significant, as many papers with a less-robust foreign presence simply cribbed articles from the *Times*. Government officials held the *Times* in similarly high esteem, (quotes unattributed in source): "You can't work in the State Department without the *New York Times*...everyone's Bible of information...every man's CIA around here...Foreign Service officers get to their desks early in the morning to read the *New York Times*, so

¹²⁰ Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda*, 98.

¹²¹ Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, 126.

¹²² Franklin D. Mitchell, *Harry S. Truman and the News Media* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 33.

they can brief their bosses on what is going on.”¹²³

The *New York Times*, as befitted its reputation, provided the most extensive coverage of the resources examined for this paper, and the vast majority of Jose Arevalo’s coverage in particular; by the time the *Chicago Tribune* first mentioned Jose Arevalo in 1947, the *Times* had already published nine articles pertaining at least indirectly to the Guatemalan leader. A ProQuest search of the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune* from January 1, 1940 to Jan 1, 1960 yielded the following results: a keyword search for “Arevalo” returned 258, 90, and 75 results respectively. A keyword search for “Arbenz” returned 653, 175, and 150 results respectively. Again, the *New York Times* led in terms of sheer volume. Generally speaking, the aforementioned newspapers were suspicious of Jose Arevalo’s and Arbenz Guzman’s political leanings and commitment to democracy. While the *Tribune* tilted further to the right than the other two, fear of Communist influence in Guatemala permeated them all.

Jose Arevalo’s rise to power was not covered extensively, and therefore did not elicit the harsh skepticism that engulfed Arbenz Guzman. Jose Arevalo’s first appearance in the *New York Times* came on September 3, 1944. It was a brief article, mentioning then candidate Jose Arevalo as being “supported by the Popular Liberator Front and the National Reform Party,” but with no discussion of leftist leanings¹²⁴. During that December’s presidential election, the *Times* ran three articles, one each on December 19, 20, and 22, discussing Jose Arevalo’s impressive margin of victory. Jose Arevalo tallied

¹²³ Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, 129, 135 (quotes).

¹²⁴ Unknown Author, “Candidate Arrives in Guatemala,” *New York Times*, September 3, 1944, 7.

256,514 votes against his nearest competitor's 20,550.¹²⁵ None of the articles mentioned Communism, leftism, or the possibility of electoral fraud. Although there is little evidence to suggest vote-rigging, the sheer size of Jose Arevalo's victory would have made it easy for media outlets to cast aspersions on the results. The U.S. government was not wary of Jose Arevalo at that point, as the specter of international Communism had not yet taken hold. In addition, with World War II in full swing, the relative lack of coverage of Guatemalan events was not surprising.

World War II's predominance aside, Jose Arevalo's reforms raised little U.S. concern in and of themselves. Juan Jose Arevalo was a voluntary exile who was teaching in Argentina when the right-wing dictator Jorge Ubico Castaneda was overthrown. Ubico Castaneda had left behind a segregated government and justice system. Jose Arevalo's common sense and inclusive reforms, therefore, were uncontroversial. Race and social groups lay at the heart of the matter. Ladinos, who possessed European ancestry and maintained modern lifestyles, were favored over the native Indians, who experienced political and criminal repression under Ubico Castaneda's regime. Guatemala's 1945 constitution, with Jose Arevalo's approval, granted suffrage to all Indian males, most of whom were illiterate; illiterate female Indians remained disenfranchised. Jose Arevalo also enacted a complex labor code in 1945, which gave workers the right to strike, bargain collectively, claim compensation for accidents, and earn a higher minimum wage.¹²⁶ More controversially, Jose Arevalo enacted the "Law of Forced Rental" on

¹²⁵ United Press, "Guatemala Elects Arevalo," *New York Times*, December 22, 1944, 5.

¹²⁶ Nathan L. Whetten, *Guatemala: The Land and the People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961), 65, 67.

December 12, 1949, which enforced rental of uncultivated lands.¹²⁷ However, the law required the request for land be made from the petitioner to the landowner, which greatly hindered the law's implementation. Arbenz Guzman's subsequent land reform efforts were much more sweeping and forceful, and thus raised larger protests.

Jose Arevalo's reforms did not go entirely unchallenged. Conservative groups, including large landowners, foreign corporations, and many of the Landino elite in Guatemala City resented their loss of power and profits. As a result, Jose Arevalo had trouble financing his government and frequently claimed to discover plots against his administration, which enabled him to invoke public safety laws that stifled dissent.¹²⁸ Jose Arevalo dealt with Communists in a way that Arbenz Guzman would later mimic; Jose Arevalo viewed Communists as useful tools he could control but did not necessarily agree with.¹²⁹ Ideologically, Jose Arevalo practiced "spiritual socialism," but explicitly rejected Communism both in public pronouncements and in practice; the Communist Party was outlawed under his government.¹³⁰ The United States was initially cordial toward Jose Arevalo, due in part to his willingness to accept foreign capital; by 1950, Guatemala was receiving \$105.9 million dollars in foreign investment. The goodwill did not last long though, as Jose Arevalo bristled at U.S. Ambassador Richard C. Patterson's direction that he fire seventeen Communists in his government.¹³¹

The first inkling of nervousness about Jose Arevalo came in a *Times* article on

¹²⁷ Thomas Melville and Marjorie Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership* (New York, The Free Press, 1971), 37.

¹²⁸ Whetten, *Guatemala*, 333.

¹²⁹ Ronald M. Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala; 1944-1954* (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1958), 23.

¹³⁰ Melville and Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership*, 29.

¹³¹ Susanne Jonas, *The Battle For Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and U.S. Power* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 28.

June 9, 1945, expressing concern about the president's appointments of personal friends to key government posts. The article did not discuss Jose Arevalo's personal political leanings, but did include alarmist language: "The changes were viewed here as a symptom of an internal crisis that might have serious repercussions." The article's sub-headline read "Honduran Paper Implies New President Is Not Democratic," but the *Times* offered no editorial opinion, merely repeating the Honduran paper's account.¹³² Jose Arevalo received only one reference in 1946; it criticized his restrictions on press and religious freedom. Three similar articles appeared in 1947.

Nineteen forty-seven was also the year that the *Chicago Tribune* submitted its first piece on the Communist threat in South America. Jules Dubois, the *Tribune's* Latin American correspondent, exhibited a marked distaste for Communism and typically wrote about diplomatic developments with an urgency and aggressiveness unmatched by his counterparts in Los Angeles and New York. His first submission mentioning Jose Arevalo appeared in his June 16, 1947 article on rifts between Latin American Socialists and Communists. While offering no evidence, Dubois wrote that "There is no international socialist liaison with socialist parties in Mexico or with the Central American and Caribbean republics, except Guatemala."¹³³ The implication of international connections was important, as US officials particularly feared the Soviets using Latin American nations to establish a toehold in the region. That fear would color dozens of media reports and articles about Guatemala throughout the next decade. Dubois also asserted that Jose Arevalo condoned Communism, but stopped short of accusing

¹³² Unknown Author, "Guatemalan Is Criticized," *New York Times*, July 2, 1945, 7.

¹³³ Jules Dubois, "Latin American Socialists War On Communists," *Chicago Tribune*, June 16, 1947, 15.

Jose Arevalo of personally adhering to the ideology.¹³⁴

Dubois held his fire throughout 1948, and the *New York Times* ran only three articles about Jose Arevalo during the year. All three articles dealt with supposed Guatemalan plots to undermine its neighbor, Nicaragua, which was under the control of the pro-American dictator Anastasio Somoza Garcia. Although the first article included a denial from Jose Arevalo, the following two merely published Somoza Garcia's accusations without offering further context or evidence. Moreover, the wording of the articles' headlines portrayed Guatemala as worthy of suspicion despite the lack of evidence in their attending articles: "Guatemala Plot Seen,"¹³⁵ and "Somoza Sees Plot Against Nicaragua."¹³⁶

Jose Arevalo's first significant mention in 1949 came in a salvo from Jules Dubois. The broadside was prompted by the July 18 assassination of army chief Francisco Javier Arana. A political rival of both Arbenz Guzman and Jose Arevalo, Javier Arana attempted a soft coup on July 16, demanding that Jose Arevalo dismiss his cabinet (including Arbenz Guzman) in favor of Javier Arana's handpicked replacements. Javier Arana then would have occupied a favorable position for the 1950 presidential election. Jose Arevalo asked for time to comply with Javier Aranas' ultimatum, but worked behind the scenes to deport the general. Apparently unconcerned with the possibility of resistance or betrayal, Javier Arana informed Jose Arevalo on July 18 that he was traveling to secure a small weapons cache. On the return trip, Javier Arana was shot and killed in a gunfight. Jose Arevalo did in fact order his forces to capture Javier

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Unknown Author, "Guatemala Plot Seen," *New York Times*, March 1, 1948, 10.

¹³⁶ Associated Press, "Somoza Sees Plot Against Nicaragua," *New York Times*, October 16, 1948, 10.

Arana, but the identity of the assailants and the nature of the gunfight remain a mystery.¹³⁷ The effect on one of Javier Arana's subordinates, however, was less ambiguous. Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas would carry out his coup with greater caution.

From Dubois' perspective, this was a blatant act of politically motivated murder by Jose Arevalo and Arbenz Guzman. If Dubois had any knowledge of the political conflicts preceding Javier Arana's killing, he did not include any of those details in his August 8 article. Under the headline "Dictator Drops An Iron Curtain On Guatemala: Seeks to Spread Red Revolution," Dubois launched a number of incendiary charges at Jose Arevalo and his government, including multiple references to a Guatemalan-Soviet connection and an unsubstantiated plan to spread Communism throughout the region. Dubois twice asserted that Jose Arevalo was "determined to spread a Communist revolution thruout (sic) the western hemisphere," and that Jose Arevalo and Arbenz Guzman were "trying to convert Guatemala into a soviet satellite."¹³⁸ His charges were exaggerated, but the fears that begat them would be repeated.

Guatemala attracted further U.S. attention in October 1949, but not for political reasons. The country was struck by floods that killed several hundred civilians; still, even a topic as seemingly innocuous as flood relief became a point of contention. The *New York Times* ran an article detailing the disaster, as well as President Truman's instruction to offer "all possible aid,"¹³⁹ but took no political position on the issue. The *Chicago Tribune*, however, criticized Truman's position, asserting the Guatemalan government

¹³⁷ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 63, 67.

¹³⁸ Jules Dubois, "Dictator Drops An Iron Curtain On Guatemala," *Chicago Tribune*, August 8, 1949, 3.

¹³⁹ United Press, "U.S. Envoy Reaches Guatemala," *New York Times*, October 24, 1949, 39.

had exaggerated the flood's effects to gain more development aid and enhance its domestic political position. The editorial's headline was less nuanced: "Taxing Americans To Spread Socialism."¹⁴⁰ Regardless of the actual extent of the damage, the editorial board argued that it would be foolish to "assist socialist governments dedicated to destroying free enterprise. There is no reason for such expenditures in Guatemala, whose government and economic actions have little effect on the American economy."¹⁴¹

The *New York Times* did run an article concerning Jose Arevalo on July 18, but it dealt with Guatemalan support of U.S. involvement in the Korean War. Anxious to assuage U.S. concerns about his involvement with the USSR, Jose Arevalo insisted that "no political tie whatsoever existed with the Soviet Union."¹⁴² The *Times* did not question the assertion, but printed a skeptical piece eleven days later titled "Guatemalan Reds Said To Attend Cabinet."¹⁴³

Nineteen fifty marked a notable increase in media coverage of Guatemala, primarily due to that year's presidential election. President Jose Arevalo, constitutionally prevented from seeking another term, was on his way out. Arbenz Guzman was considered the candidate to beat from the beginning, owing to his military experience, his role in the 1944 coup that ousted Jorge Ubico Castaneda, and his association with Jose Arevalo's government. He was also an avowed liberal with designs on land redistribution, which caused concern in the U.S. media and government.

¹⁴⁰ Editorial Board, "Taxing Americans To Spread Socialism," *Chicago Tribune*, October 31, 1949, 24.

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² Unknown Author, "Revolt Breaks Out In Guatemala After Shooting of Army's Leader," *New York Times*, July 18, 1949, 6.

¹⁴³ C.H. Calhoun, "Guatemalan Reds Said To Attend Cabinet," *New York Times*, July 29, 1950, 5.

The *New York Times* first sounded the alarm on February 21, 1950. Using a report from the Guatemalan newspaper *Hora* detailing the labor unions' decision to back Arbenz, the *Times* agreed with *Hora's* fear that Guatemala was headed for a "dictatorship of the proletariat." The *Times* predicted a government that would be "more Socialist than Communist, but following the latter in international relations." Issuing a warning that would become more frequent throughout the decade, the *Times* cautioned its readers that the Communists would appear "not as Communists, but as labor leaders and selfless saviors of the working classes."¹⁴⁴

Jules Dubois picked up the theme a few months later and linked Guatemala to the Soviet Union, writing that Guatemala was "on the verge of becoming a totalitarian dictatorship of the Moscow type."¹⁴⁵ This was a key distinction. By tying Guatemala to the USSR (again without providing evidence), Dubois raised the stakes of the debate. Dubois did not accuse Arbenz Guzman of being a Communist, but asserted that he was "known to be sympathetic to the Communists."¹⁴⁶

Dubois was not the only one homing in on alleged Soviet infiltration in the Americas. In June 1950, the *New York Times's* Will Lissner released the first of a six part series on "Soviet penetration in Central America and on the economic and political relations of that area." Significantly, it was the first front-page article on Guatemala among any of the publications discussed in this paper. Such a prominently placed article carried with it an intimidating headline: "Soviet Agents Plotting To Ruin Unity, Defenses

¹⁴⁴ Unknown Author, "Guatemala Facing Peril Of Dictator," *New York Times*, February 21, 1950, 16.

¹⁴⁵ Jules Dubois, "Dictators Rule in 8 Lands Of Latin America," *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 1950, 28.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Of Americas.” The sub-headline charged that the Soviets were planning to use Guatemala as a base for operations in the region, and declared that the Guatemalan Communist Party functioned as an arm of the Soviet Information Bureau. Lissner identified the Guatemalan Communists’ guiding principles as “terror and organization,” and went on to discuss their personal traits. Confusingly, he ridiculed the Communists’ goon squads as “...callow youth...who could not survive a day’s battle in a New York or Chicago slum,” but then singled out a group of them that “...more closely resembled New York mobsters.”¹⁴⁷ In this manner, Lissner encouraged his readers to mock the Communist enforcers as weaklings, yet at the same time fear their rough looks and tactics. Though starkly different, both examples engender a view of the Communists as an evil “other,” whether weak and sneaky or strong and fearsome. It was at this point that the *Los Angeles Times* began reporting on Guatemala, although in this instance only by re-printing Lissner’s article on June 25, 1950.

Lissner’s second installment came the following day, June 23. He again focused on Soviet efforts to establish a presence in the western hemisphere. In his second consecutive front-page article, he detailed the process by which the Soviets sought to accomplish their goal. He identified five slogans that would be used as covers for Soviet penetration, warning that they would appear as “...nothing more than a good liberal program.” Lissner also referred to the “Communist-supported” Arbenz Guzman, and charged that Moscow was attempting to put Guatemala “...squarely in the Soviet

¹⁴⁷ Will Lissner, “Soviet Agents Plotting To Ruin Unity, Defenses of Americas,” *New York Times*, June 22, 1950, 1.

camp.”¹⁴⁸ However, it should be noted that the *Times* carried a story on page 3 that same day, covering an Jose Arevalo meeting with US Senator Ralph Brewster with the headline “Reds Few in Guatemala, Arevalo Tells Brewster.”¹⁴⁹ As with the first installment, the *Los Angeles Times* carried Lissner’s story several days later, albeit on page eighteen.

Lissner did not mention Jose Arevalo or Arbenz Guzman in the third, fourth or fifth installments, and featured an interview with Jose Arevalo in the sixth. Lissner admitted that hard evidence about Communist penetration in Latin America, such as names and pictures of their agents, was lacking. He explained this by citing “inadequate support and underestimation of the seriousness of Communist intentions in Washington,” rather than the absence of actual evidence.¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, excerpts from his interview with Jose Arevalo were generally uncritical, with Jose Arevalo claiming distaste for the Communists. The *Times* ran a similarly uncritical article on July 18, with Jose Arevalo denying the existence of any political contacts with the Soviet Union.

Despite Jose Arevalo’s testimonials, both the *Times* and the *Tribune* kept up the drumbeat of Soviet influence. The *Times* ran a headline on July 29 alleging Communist influence in the Guatemalan cabinet. Jules Dubois released a more aggressive report on August 1 under the headline “Guatemala Red Terror Bared For First Time.” He accused Jose Arevalo’s government of moving yet another step “toward the dictatorship of the

¹⁴⁸ Will Lissner, “Soviet Uses ‘Liberation’ Bait In Americas to Win Foothold,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1950, 1.

¹⁴⁹ Associated Press, “Reds Few in Guatemala, Arevalo Tells Brewster,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1950, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Will Lissner, “Central Americans Pin Hopes On Point Four,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1950, 20.

proletariat.”¹⁵¹

Jose Arevalo’s supposed march toward proletarian dictatorship ended in November 1950, when he adhered to his country’s constitution and did not seek another term as president. Faced with the prospect of a possibly more powerful liberal leader in Arbenz Guzman, the *Tribune* began to treat Jose Arevalo with a gentler tone. As presidential voting opened in mid-November, the *Tribune* wrote that Jose Arevalo had “raised living standards, improved schools, hospitals and roads, and gave workers their first protective laws.”¹⁵² The *Los Angeles Times* also ran an article without accusing Arbenz Guzman of those sins, but did label Jose Arevalo’s regime “leftist” the following day.¹⁵³ The *New York Times* ran a more detailed article about the Communist question in Guatemala, but maintained a balanced view, noting that “The Communist Party, as a political organization, is prohibited in Guatemala, but some observers maintain that it has helped more than it has hindered the operations of a clandestine party.”¹⁵⁴

Arbenz Guzman did command significant popularity, and won by a sizable majority of 266,778 votes out of 416,187 cast.¹⁵⁵ The *New York Times* noted Arbenz Guzman’s wide margin of victory, as well as the opposition’s accusation that he was aided by fraudulent and plural voting. Specifically, the piece described the ink used to mark voters’ fingers as faulty, easily reproducible ballots, and truckloads of voters told to

¹⁵¹ Jules Dubois, “Guatemala Red Terror Bared For First Time,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 1, 1950.

¹⁵² Associated Press, “Open Three Day Crucial Voting In Guatemala,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 11, 1950, 11.

¹⁵³ Associated Press, “Administration Backer Leads Guatemala Vote,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 1950, 10.

¹⁵⁴ C.H. Calhoun, “Arbenz Victory Held Sure in Guatemala,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1950, 11.

¹⁵⁵ Associated Press, “Guatemala Race Won By Arbenz,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 12, 1954, 24.

vote for Arbenz Guzman.¹⁵⁶ Unlike many previous articles, the evidence originated from the *Times*' on the ground correspondent, as opposed to unnamed sources or unproven opinions.

Like Jose Arevalo, Arbenz Guzman initially received comparatively little coverage following his inauguration. Aside from an article covering his inauguration in March and an article featuring a labor union leader praising Arbenz Guzman in May (both appearing only in the *New York Times*), none of the three newspapers found much decisive to report. As Arbenz Guzman entered his third month as president, some reporters began to doubt his ability to control Communists in his country, regardless of his personal inclinations.

C.H. Calhoun of the *New York Times* was the first to write a substantive critique of Arbenz Guzman's behavior toward Communists in his country. In addition to Communist activists, Calhoun blamed the dictatorial Ubico Castaneda regime and feudal planters for creating conditions ripe for Communist intrusion. He also noted that "the demands the workers are making and the things they are doing to employers are perhaps little worse than the things that the workers suffered during the period that ended with the overthrow of the dictatorship of the late General Ubico Castaneda." Despite these caveats, he still alleged that the Communists had increased their power "at an alarming rate" under Arbenz Guzman.¹⁵⁷

Several days later, Calhoun's employer introduced a new metaphor for Communist influence in Guatemala in an editorial entitled "The Guatemalan Cancer,"

¹⁵⁶ Unknown Author, "Guatemala Picks Arbenz As Leader," *New York Times*, November 14, 1950, 16.

¹⁵⁷ C.H. Calhoun, "Guatemalan Reds Trade On Old Ills," *New York Times*, June 5, 1951, 6.

which again discussed the possibility of Guatemala being used as a Soviet front. Using Calhoun's June 5 article as its primary reference, the editorial alleged that Communists and Communist sympathizers had seized control of the Guatemalan Congress and labor unions. Although the editorial board tempered its charges by mentioning Guatemala's lack of military threat to the United States, it also cautioned that the real threat came from Guatemala's example, not its size: "The chief danger is its influence on other Central American countries...and what happens in Guatemala is going to be echoed for good or ill from Cape Horn to the Rio Grande," the editorial claimed in a restating of the domino theory.¹⁵⁸

The *Times*' editorial board re-emphasized its concerns the next month, this time under the headlined "Communists In Guatemala." It optimistically reported only small anti-Communist demonstrations while fretting about a Guatemalan labor party event which featured large portraits of Lenin and Stalin. The article again mentioned Guatemala's regional importance, but surprisingly stated "We cannot suppress communism there." The editorial suggested using the power of example and persuasion instead of coercion.¹⁵⁹ For the first time, a major newspaper had pre-emptively ruled out U.S. intervention in Guatemala, and the country was not mentioned again in a significant way until that fall.

The concern over Guatemalan officials' presence at Communist-sponsored events received new emphasis that November, when Arbenz Guzman and other high-level officials did not respond to invitations to attend an anti-Communist rally. The article drew an explicit comparison between this rally and the leftist labor conference event in

¹⁵⁸ Editorial Board, "The Guatemalan Cancer," *New York Times*, June 8, 1951, 26.

¹⁵⁹ Editorial Board, "Communists In Guatemala," *New York Times*, July 14, 1951, 12.

July. The author did not mention if the leaders in question had legitimate scheduling conflicts, but such a distinction was absent from the headline: “Guatemala Leaders Shun Anti-Red Rally.”¹⁶⁰

The U.S. media had become increasingly wary of Arbenz Guzman’s true political goals since his inauguration. Aside from the aforementioned symbolic events, he had not promoted a legislative program that caused great American concern. That all changed when he embarked upon his ambitious land-reform program (Decree 900), which sought to appropriate land from wealthy plantation owners and Western corporations (the United Fruit Company in particular) and divide it more equally among the Guatemalan citizenry. Specifically, the plan called for the division and distribution to as many peasants as possible of idle land on properties with more than 223 acres.¹⁶¹ The merits of the program notwithstanding, it did spark greater interest from the U.S. press. Indeed, many believed that Decree 900 revealed Arbenz Guzman’s true colors.

Before Decree 900 was enacted in June 1952, the Guatemalan government negotiated with the United Fruit Company (UFCO) regarding its tax obligations and wage scales. UFCO agreed to wage guarantees and the government’s demands in order to maintain their profitable monopoly on the nation’s banana industry. The *New York Times* saw a shadowy third party involved in the negotiations in the form of Soviet agents (Headline: “A Test For The Cominform”). Without providing evidence, the *Times* reporter asserted that the Soviets had chosen Guatemala as a proving ground for its anti-American program: “It can be anticipated that a battalion of strategically placed

¹⁶⁰ Unknown Author, “Guatemala Leaders Shun Anti-Red Rally,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1951, 9.

¹⁶¹ Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala; The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), 65.

Communist agents will now seek to disrupt the negotiations.”¹⁶² The author did not accuse the Guatemalan government of outright Socialism or Communism, but charging it with being a Soviet puppet sent the same message. The next *Times* article about the land reform effort carried a similarly suggestive headline: “United Fruit Opposed: Red-Led Guatemalan Unions Back President’s Program.” Repeating the subtle implications of Guatemalan-Soviet ties, the author mentioned Guatemalan Congressman Victor Gutierrez’s recent trip to Moscow.¹⁶³

The *Times* briefly broke from its string of alarmist reports on March 29. Herbert Matthews submitted a page 4 article entitled “Guatemalan Reds Are Strong But They Don’t Run Country.” Matthews acknowledged the arguments in support of a rapidly growing Communist threat, and proceeded to make his case that such concerns were overblown: “the Communists hold no top positions in the government...are not well organized; they are amateurish...There is infinitely more personal ambition than Communist ideology behind the political developments in Guatemala.” Instead of labeling Arbenz Guzman a Communist in waiting, Matthews described him as a relatively weak leader, albeit one surrounded by a wise group of advisers. Finally, the author argued that “success is likelier to be achieved by patience and understanding than by vilification or reprisals.”¹⁶⁴ This article proved to be only a brief respite; the next *Times* piece concerning Arbenz ran under the headline “Guatemalans See Red Theme.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Unknown Author, “A Test For The Cominform,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1951, 30.

¹⁶³ Unknown Author, “United Fruit Opposed: Red-Led Guatemalan Unions Back President’s Program,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1952, 3.

¹⁶⁴ Herbert Matthews, “Guatemalan Reds Are Strong But They Don’t Run Country,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1952, 4.

¹⁶⁵ Unknown Author, “Guatemalans See Red Theme,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1952, 3.

As Decree 900 moved closer to implementation, the *Times* and other outlets began to examine its effects more closely. Sydney Gruson wrote the first detailed piece on the land reform plan, which reinvigorated fears of Communist influence in Guatemala. The headline left little doubt as to the contents of the piece: “Guatemala Plans Seizure Of Lands; Opponents View Bill to Take Farms From Owners as Step in Communization of Country.” Although Gruson did quote government officials, the most alarming details came from unnamed officials in the National Association of Agriculturists (NAA). The NAA represented the large landowners who stood to lose the most from Decree 900, and therefore had the most incentive to exaggerate the program’s effects, as well as the political ideology behind it. Those unnamed officials predicted economic chaos (which did not materialize), and warned Gruson that the decree was “a major step in the communization of the country.”¹⁶⁶

Gruson expanded his argument four days later, detailing four instances of supposed Communist intrusion in Guatemala under the headline “Ideas Of Reds Held Ruling Guatemala; Ideologies Wear a Nationalist Cloak but Observers See a Kremlin Program.” Gruson did not view Arbenz Guzman as an active part of a Soviet plot, titling one of the articles’ paragraphs “Arbenz Himself not a Member.”¹⁶⁷ That is not to say the author viewed Arbenz Guzman positively; even if Arbenz Guzman was not a Communist agent, the Kremlin could still manipulate him.

That same day, the *Times*’ editorial board published its opinion on Decree 900.

¹⁶⁶ Sydney Gruson, “Guatemala Plans Seizure Of Lands; Opponents View Bill to Take Farms From Owners as Step in Communization of Country,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1952, 11.

¹⁶⁷ Sydney Gruson, “Ideas Of Reds Held Ruling Guatemala; Ideologies Wear a Nationalist Cloak but Observers See a Kremlin Program,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1952, 14.

Surprisingly, it was largely sympathetic to the Guatemalan government. The board wrote that “Agrarian reform has been long overdue in Guatemala as in many Latin American countries. It is a recognized feature of our times that in promoting social justice there should be a relatively fair distribution of the land.” Even more surprisingly, the board correctly identified the reflexive anti-Communist nature of media coverage; however, the article did not mention the *Times*’ own indiscretions in this regard. The *Times* concluded perceptively that “There is always a tendency to label every move made in Guatemala as ‘Communistic’...Meanwhile, it would be unfair to call attempts at agrarian reform Communistic in Guatemala, socialistic in England and democratic in Italy, just because of the complexion of the governments involved.”¹⁶⁸ Despite this astute assessment, the first *Times* article following the decree’s enactment on June 16, 1952, described the program as “Communist-backed,” but did not characterize it as part of a broader Communist movement or plot.¹⁶⁹

Jules Dubois of the *Chicago Tribune* had a much different take. In an article titled “Guatemala’s Regime On Road To Communism; Land Seizure Law Latest Pro-Red Move,” he accused Arbenz Guzman of personally leading Guatemala’s leftward procession. To be fair, Dubois did publish Arbenz Guzman’s denial that his land reform decree was a Communist program. Still, given the title of the article, there can be no doubt of the article’s intended effect upon the reader.¹⁷⁰

As the company with the most to lose from the land reform bill, the UFCO

¹⁶⁸ Editorial Board, “Land Reform In Guatemala,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1952, 26.

¹⁶⁹ Associated Press, “Guatemalans Adopt Land Reform; Communist Backed, It Splits Farms,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1952, 1.

¹⁷⁰ Jules Dubois, “Guatemala’s Regime On Road To Communism; Land Seizure Law Latest Pro-Red Move,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 29, 1952, 12.

engaged in a public relations campaign of its own. It financed and disseminated a book to members of the U.S. congress and other key American opinion molders. The book pointedly criticized the Guatemalan government as a “Moscow-directed Communist conspiracy.” UFCO also issued a weekly newsletter to 250 journalists; *New York Times* publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger himself received tips from UFCO PR chief Edward Bernays.¹⁷¹ The CIA was aware and approved of Bernays’ PR campaign; both the CIA and Bernays knew that the US press was vulnerable to the broadsides he lunched in conjunction with the State Department and other agencies.¹⁷²

Decree 900 was evidently a perishable topic, as coverage fell off shortly after its implementation. The *Los Angeles Times* introduced a broad overview of Communist influence in Latin America two weeks after Decree 900’s passage without mentioning the program. The article did not include much specific information on Guatemala in particular, only mentioning its legal battles with UFCO and Arbenz Guzman’s “tendency to yield to Communist pressure.” Still, the article was intended to raise the readers’ awareness of the Communist threat through its headline: “Latin-American Communists—They’re Few But Dangerous.” This type of headline had become common, but the article’s distinguishing feature was its graphic: an image of Latin America with a hammer and sickle superimposed over the map, along with a worker with his fist raised on the bottom right hand corner. Regardless of the text, the picture reinforced the notion of unseemly Soviet penetration of the continent. Another subtle warning came in its concluding quotation from an unnamed source: “The Communists are even now better

¹⁷¹ Kirch, *Covering a Coup*, 7.

¹⁷² Henry Raymont, *Troubled Neighbors: The Story of US-Latin American Relations from FDR to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2005), 100.

prepared to win Latin America than the Nazis ever were.”¹⁷³ This reference did not mark a common comparison or trend of including the Nazi ideology as a scare tactic, but was the first instance of the word appearing in relationship to Latin American Communism, and yet another instance of exaggerating the Communist threat.

Guatemalan coverage fell off for the remainder of the summer, resuming in time for the 1953 Guatemalan congressional elections. Even then, the run-up only received two four-paragraph articles in the *New York Times* between July 1952 and January 1953. The stories were short, but the headlines were clear: “Guatemala Reds In Bloc,”¹⁷⁴ and “Guatemalans Back Reds.”¹⁷⁵ The former article did not include any strong accusations, but the latter published local observers’ views that Arbenz Guzman was trying to “strengthen the Communist position in this Central American republic.”¹⁷⁶

The elections themselves received only slightly more coverage. C.H. Calhoun of the *New York Times* published the only in-depth piece, but focused mainly on the Communists’ campaign efforts, namely, “Shrill Communist Campaign Makes Name Anathema as 3-Day Tally Starts.”¹⁷⁷ After the results were announced, a *Times* editorial analyzed the Guatemalan government’s new composition. Although two Communist candidates were defeated (which the editorial referenced as “bright spots,”) the make up of the Guatemalan government was essentially unchanged, with pro-government parties firmly in control of the congress. Overall, the editorial charged that “the Arbenz

¹⁷³ Russell Fitzgibbon, “Latin American Communists—They’re Few But Dangerous,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 1952, B5.

¹⁷⁴ Associated Press, “Guatemala Reds In Bloc,” *New York Times*, October 8, 1952, 7.

¹⁷⁵ Associated Press, “Guatemalans Back Reds,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1952, 4.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ C.H. Calhoun, “Anti-Reds Fearful In Guatemala Vote; Shrill Communist Campaign Makes Name Anathema as 3-Day Tally Starts,” *New York Times*, January 17, 1953, 4.

government is still in partnership with the Reds.”¹⁷⁸

The *Los Angeles Times* editorial board took a harsher stance than their east coast contemporaries. Their January 28 editorial included several common strands of anti-Communist logic. The headline was sufficiently ominous: “Almost on Our Doorstep.” It employed the domino theory argument: “The pattern of the Communist revolution in Guatemala may well serve the revolutionists in the other hot republics;” this despite the fact that no mainstream media outlet or the Guatemalan leadership claimed that the 1944 revolution was a Communist one. The *Times* also characterized Jose Arevalo as an “extreme leftist;” again, an unprecedented charge. The article did not accuse Arbenz Guzman of being a Communist, but noted he was “elected with Communist support.” It also made multiple references to Guatemala-USSR connections. The first dealt with an avowed Communist labor official, Victor Manuel Gutierrez, who had recently returned from Moscow. After he returned, “things began to happen,” the article intoned. The editorial’s conclusion contained the more blatant accusation, which predicted a Communist dictatorship and “A solid Moscow beachhead in the Americas seems about to be captured.”¹⁷⁹

Several months later, Sydney Gruson stated that the beachhead was a reality. In perhaps the boldest headline on the topic, the *Times* led Gruson’s piece with the following title: “How Communists Won Control Of Guatemala: Country Presents Case History of Shift From a Dictatorship to Communism.” Interestingly, the article’s preamble said that Gruson had just returned from a trip to Guatemala and was presenting

¹⁷⁸ Editorial Board, “Guatemalan Elections,” *New York Times*, January 23, 1953, 18.

¹⁷⁹ Editorial Board, “Almost on Our Doorstep,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 1953, A4.

a report on how Guatemala had swung from a dictatorship to a Communist-influenced government, not a Communist controlled one, as referenced in the headline. Gruson accused Arbenz Guzman of accepting Communist support, but not of being one. His conclusion was far more equivocal than the headline indicated: “it is now a question in Guatemala whether Arbenz Guzman uses the Communists for his ends or the Communists use him.”¹⁸⁰ This article was yet another example of a dramatic headline overshadowing critical nuances contained within the accompanying column.

Two months later, *Time* made its first foray into Guatemalan coverage with a one-page piece describing Guatemala’s May Day, under the headline “Guatemala: Reds In The Backyard.” Though the article criticized Arbenz Guzman as a “fanatical spokesman,” it repeatedly said that he was not a Communist. The article also made a key distinction regarding the nature of the country’s Communists by describing them as native products as opposed to Moscow-trained agents.¹⁸¹

The beachhead was a longer time in coming than the *Los Angeles Times* predicted, but the west coast paper jumped back into the breach. After publishing a relatively neutral article on May 3, Russell Fitzgibbon wrote two more accusatory stories on June 19 and June 23. In both pieces, he made the case for a Communist threat in Guatemala without directly accusing the government of being party to that danger. In his June 19 article, he wrote that “few responsible people charge that the government of Guatemala is Communist. It is equally clear, however, that Communists wield relatively more influence in Guatemala and do it more openly than in any other of the American

¹⁸⁰ Sydney Gruson, “How Communists Won Control Of Guatemala: Country Presents Case History of Shift From a Dictatorship to Communism,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1953, E6.

¹⁸¹ Unknown Author, “Guatemala: Reds In the Backyard,” *Time*, May 11, 1953, 2.

republics.” Although he included references to Ubico Castaneda’s harsh regime and the inequality of land distribution that Decree 900 aimed to remedy, those details appear as contextual window-dressing, given the articles’ headline: “Guatemala Is the Reds’ Strong Point in America.”¹⁸² His theme implied an organized Communist program to spread influence throughout the continent. Fitzgibbon’s June 23 article made a similar point about the influence of a few Communist schemers infecting the country. Again, he avoided accusing Arbenz Guzman’s government of Communist plotting while simultaneously making several such suggestions. Under the headline “How a Few Communists Manipulate Guatemala,” Fitzgibbon described local Communists’ political support for Arbenz Guzman and asserted that the land reform program was “made to order for the Communists.” Again avoiding direct allegations, Fitzgibbon concluded his piece with a rhetorical question: “Will Guatemala become the Western Hemisphere’s first satellite state?”¹⁸³ Given the article’s content, the implied answer was that Guatemala was certainly headed that way.

Life submitted its first Guatemala-focused article in October, entitled: “The Red Outpost In Central America: Guatemala’s Communists thrive under fellow-traveler government.” The magazine did not call Arbenz Guzman or his government Communist, but clearly held a negative view of them. In addition to the accusatory headline, the article described Communists as “forever in need of something to hate,” and criticized Decree 900’s valuation of UFCO properties without mentioning that the figures were

¹⁸² Russell Fitzgibbon, “Guatemala Is the Reds’ Strong Point in America,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 1953, A4.

¹⁸³ Russell Fitzgibbon, “How a Few Communists Manipulate Guatemala,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1953, A4.

based on UFCO's own tax estimates.¹⁸⁴

Aside from a Gruson article on the Guatemalan Army's allegiance to Arbenz Guzman in early August, the *New York Times'* Guatemala coverage was light until November 1953. On November 8, Gruson published another update on the Communist threat in Guatemala. Continuing the trend of his previous reporting, this article again warned of growing Red influence. Entitled "Guatemala Reds Increase Powers," the column alleged an increase of Communist influence equivalent to dominating the government, and concluded that "President Arbenz Guzman has become a prisoner of the embrace he so long ago gave the Communists."¹⁸⁵ Gruson portrayed the regime in a slightly softer tone two days later, when he described Arbenz Guzman's government as only "Red-Supported." More significantly, this article marked the first reports of the U.S. government taking a harder line towards Arbenz Guzman. To this point, the United States had watched developments in Guatemala with a wary eye. Gruson's article focused on the appointment of the avowed anti-Communist John Peurifoy to the position of U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala. Peurifoy had previously held a similar role in Greece, where he had established a reputation as an able Cold Warrior. As further proof of the U.S. move toward more aggressive measures, Gruson quoted a speech by Under-Secretary of State for Latin-American Affairs John Moors Cabot in which he declared that Guatemala "...was 'playing the Russian game' and would receive no economic aid from the United

¹⁸⁴ Unknown Author, "The Red Outpost In Central America: Guatemala's Communists thrive under fellow-traveler government," *Life*, October 12, 1953, 169.

¹⁸⁵ Sydney Gruson, "Guatemala Reds Increase Power," *New York Times*, November 6, 1953, 3.

States while it did.”¹⁸⁶

The *Los Angeles Times* picked up the theme the following month, including Cabot’s statement along with Senator Alexander Wiley’s (R-Wis) accusation that “Communism has established a strong beachhead in Guatemala.” The bulk of the article discussed the USSR’s party organ *Pravda*, which had declared support for the Guatemalan government. *Pravda* may well have served to heighten Guatemalan fear of unwanted US attention rather than providing reassurance of Soviet support. Nonetheless, the article reported the common observation that “Arbenz, a leftist, and most of his government are not Communists but they insist that the Reds play a dominant role in the country.”¹⁸⁷ The *New York Times* carried the same article on the same day, but added the prophetic passage, “*Pravda* predicted that ‘imperialists and their lackeys in Central America’ might make new efforts at ‘open intervention in Guatemala’ in the coming months.”¹⁸⁸

Sydney Gruson continued his coverage of Communist influence in 1954. On January 3, he submitted a regional overview in which he noted that Guatemala was the only country in which Communism had made significant inroads. He predicted increasing Communist control, and charged that they had “no popular support,” but had “...succeeded in capturing the Administration.”¹⁸⁹

The next month, Jules Dubois returned to the fray. Using characteristically blunt

¹⁸⁶ Sydney Gruson, “U.S. To Re-Examine Guatemalan Role,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1953, 9.

¹⁸⁷ Associated Press, “*Pravda* Gives Full Support to Guatemala,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 1953, 23.

¹⁸⁸ Associated Press, “*Pravda* Commends Guatemala Regime,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1953, 23.

¹⁸⁹ Sydney Gruson, “Central America Feels Communist Pressure,” *New York Times*, January 3, 1954, E4.

language, his February 2 article was titled “Unions To Step Up Guatemalan Hate-U.S. Drive.”¹⁹⁰ Several anti-American propaganda posters distributed by the Guatemalan General Confederation of Labor to various labor leaders at a conference had provoked Dubois’ ire. He then implicated Arbenz Guzman in the affair by reporting that the Communist Party’s manifesto called for increased support of the president. While his description of the manifesto’s contents was accurate, it enabled Dubois to continue his guilt-by-association efforts.

On February 7, Sydney Gruson reported that Guatemala City, the nation’s capital, had been enveloped by “an atmosphere of crisis,”¹⁹¹ and that the Communists had begun a drive to consolidate their power. The next significant report on Guatemala came from the Gruson family, but not Sydney. The 3-page report was filed by Gruson’s wife Flora Lewis, and was also the longest study of the country to date. The article was relatively neutral and historical in nature. In contrast to the insinuations of many previous reports, she addressed the issue of Soviet influence directly: “There is no reason to suppose that after hours of study in the Kremlin map room, some cold-eyed commissar waved away the rest of the hemisphere and pointed to Guatemala, saying, Ah, that is the place to start.” She went on to describe the various ways in which Arbenz Guzman was connected with the Communists, but concluded that it was primarily a marriage of convenience for Arbenz Guzman. Since Arbenz Guzman could use them to put his preferred programs in place, he was “willing to let them sing while they work.”¹⁹² Lewis’s report was countered

¹⁹⁰ Jules Dubois, “Unions To Step Up Guatemalan Hate-U.S. Drive,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 2, 1954, 18.

¹⁹¹ Sydney Gruson, “Country Is Tense,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1954, 25.

¹⁹² Flora Lewis, “Communism in Guatemala: A Case History,” *New York Times*, February 21, 1954, SM11.

by another *Times* article the same day, under the headline “Guatemala Rally Reflects Red Grip: Party’s Tactics and Close Tie With Officials on View at Farm Workers’ Congress.”¹⁹³

Lewis also wrote for the liberal magazine *The Nation* and submitted that publication’s first Guatemala-focused article on February 13. Perhaps due to the venue, she was less aggressive toward Arbenz Guzman and his government. She described Guatemala’s neighbors’ puzzlement over the United States’ myopic focus on the Communist issue; her headline read “The Peril Is Not Red In Central America.”¹⁹⁴ Arbenz Guzman, meanwhile, insisted that Communism in Guatemala was free of Soviet influence, and existed only as a part of a pluralistic democratic society. In his March 1, 1954, Report to Congress, Arbenz Guzman asserted that “The Magna Carta of the Republic prohibits in a final manner all types of political discrimination,” including discrimination against Communists.¹⁹⁵

Milton Bracker published a more detailed account of the Guatemalan government’s political leanings several weeks later in the *Times*. The article had an unusually large heading; one headline and three sub-headlines, all of which were somewhat alarming: “Guatemalan Reds Exploit Reforms; Utilize Agrarian Law in Effort to Build Up Peasant Force to Serve Communist Ends; Double Threat Is Posed; A Disruptive Internal Conflict and Provoking of Unilateral Act by U.S. Are Held Goals.” Bracker made two new and interesting accusations: first, that the agrarian committees in

¹⁹³ Milton Bracker, “Guatemala Rally Reflects Red Grip: Party’s Tactics and Close Tie With Officials on View at Farm Workers’ Congress,” *New York Times*, February 21, 1954, 21.

¹⁹⁴ Flora Lewis, “The Peril Is Not Red In Central America,” *The Nation*, February 13, 1954, 127-129.

¹⁹⁵ Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala*, 191.

charge of assigning new parcels of land under Decree 900 were possibly building up a peasant force that could be exploited by the Communists. His only evidence for this assertion was the wording of the oath a land recipient gave in order to receive his/her parcel: to defend it “with the flag in one hand and my arms in the other.” Bracker’s second submission raised the possibility of the Communists seeking to provoke a U.S. intervention. Although his evidence was purely circumstantial, such an argument helped insulate the United States from charges of imperialism. Bracker’s creative accusations aside, this article provides another example of sensationalist headlines trumping more nuanced text. Though one could hardly assume such an assertion from the headlines, Bracker’s first paragraph said that “The regime of President Jacobo Arbenz is neither Communist nor dominated by Communists.” Bracker also noted that land reform was overdue, and that the Communist threat was “not so much a security threat to the Panama Canal or a financial threat to private United States interests as it is a bustling outpost of Soviet propaganda right in the heart of the Americas.” Despite this moderate context, Bracker devoted his final paragraph to the customary charge that Guatemala was the subject of an “international Communist effort” to transform it into a thorn in the U.S.’s side.¹⁹⁶

On May 17, the Swedish ship *Alfhem* arrived in Guatemala with a cargo of arms from the Soviet Union. After the United States had repeatedly refused to lift its embargo on his country, Arbenz Guzman desperately looked to the Soviets for weapons needed to supply and placate his army. The CIA confirmed the shipment, but Allen Dulles

¹⁹⁶ Milton Bracker, “Guatemalan Reds Exploit Reforms; Utilize Agrarian Law in Effort to Build Up Peasant Force to Serve Communist Ends; Double Threat Is Posed; A Disruptive Internal Conflict and Provoking of Unilateral Act by U.S. Are Held Goals,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1954, 11.

conceded that there was “nothing illegal about what they are doing.”¹⁹⁷ That inconvenient detail aside, he and his brother, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, set about fanning the American public’s fury. Despite various concerned and indignant opinions from US politicians, the mainstream media took less offense, at least initially. Gruson wrote an article (re-printed that day by the *Los Angeles Times*) accusing Washington of poor tactics and noted that “Friends and foes of the administration have closed ranks in support of the Government’s position that it had not only the right but the duty to buy arms wherever it could after the United States had refused to sell arms.” Gruson also discussed the critical Arbenz Guzman-Army relationship, and opined that the arms buy had pleased the army, and that its officers saw “no present danger from Communism in Guatemala.”¹⁹⁸

Together with the press criticism of the U.S. response to the *Alfhem* incident, the drumbeat of concern continued unabated. The *Los Angeles Times* alone published six pieces on Guatemala from May 26-May 30, an unprecedented run. The first article charged that “Communism has taken a firm hold, which has been increasing of late....All of this goes to prove that the Communist movement that some observers either ignore, or try to minimize, is now known to operate on a full-time basis.”¹⁹⁹ The second and third articles appeared on May 28. The former was a two-page piece by A.T. Steele, alleging an “Unsurpassed Example of Infiltration by Communist Party,” along with several

¹⁹⁷ Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 156.

¹⁹⁸ Sydney Gruson, “U.S. Arms Stand Alienates Guatemalan Foes of Reds,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1954, 13.

¹⁹⁹ Polyzoides, “Guatemala Gives Cause For Worry,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1954, 7.

implications of Soviet support.²⁰⁰ The latter was notable primarily for the flimsiness of its source, a former Canadian Communist turned “professional anti-Communist” named Pat Walsh. Walsh’s credentials seemed to consist of only his vague profession and his testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Despite his thin resume and ability to offer no further context or evidence, the *Times* felt comfortable in printing his accusations that “International Communists, not native Communists, put the popular front government of Guatemala in power in 1950.” Walsh also cited a group of international citizens that were responsible for Guatemalan Communist Party actions, all working for the Russian Cominform.²⁰¹ This kind of reporting was typically biased against the Guatemalan government, especially because it offered no context or balance to the allegations of one avowed anti-Communist activist.

In his fourth article, Steele alleged “the Communists are burrowing ever deeper into Guatemala’s government structure....There is little doubt that Guatemala is being used by nationalists and Communists as a base for intrigue.”²⁰² However, like the bulk of his contemporaries, he stopped short of labeling the government or Arbenz Guzman as Communists. The fifth article was comparatively short and non-descript. It described Arbenz Guzman’s answers to a questionnaire provided by the Associated Press: a representative quote held that Guatemala was “interested in improving relations with the United States on the base of good understanding and mutual respect that should exist

²⁰⁰ A.T. Steele, “Guatemala Shows How Reds Succeed,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 28, 1954, 2.

²⁰¹ New York Times News Service, “Ex-Red Charges Aliens Set Up Guatemala Rule,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 28, 1954, B8.

²⁰² A.T. Steele, “Communists Use Latin Upheavals,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1954, 2.

between sovereign states.”²⁰³ Surprisingly, the *Times* printed his conciliatory answers without questioning his motivations or political leanings. Although Arbenz Guzman had tried to embrace friendly rhetoric, by May 1954 it was too little too late.

On May 30, 1954, Sydney Gruson noted the rising pressure in Guatemala, sub-headlining his article “People Look for a Climax to End Crisis—Rumors Add to Mood of Nervousness.”²⁰⁴ Gruson mentioned the possibility of economic boycotts, an exile invasion, or even a landing of US troops to decide the matter. This was a key distinction, since prior articles had discussed a need to “do something” without specifically including a physical intervention. Gruson did not suggest that intervention would be a good idea, and mentioned it only as a possibility. His article, published the same day, examined the rapidly evolving US policy toward Guatemala. He described the Soviet arms shipment as a catalyst for change, since it dramatically increased Guatemala’s military advantage over its neighbors.²⁰⁵ Gruson did not mention that many of the arms were rusty and outdated at the time, but reported those developments in a July 9, 1954 article.²⁰⁶

Russell Fitzgibbon of the *Los Angeles Times* attempted to decipher the rapidly shifting environment in Guatemala on May 31. Although he used the virus metaphor to describe the danger of Communism in Guatemala, his overarching tone was one of caution, not alarm: “At this stage the problem, which is the patient, needs psychiatric treatment rather than surgery. Let us hope this country is wise enough to recognize that

²⁰³ Associated Press, “Guatemala Head Open To Bid By Eisenhower,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1954, 2.

²⁰⁴ Sydney Gruson, “Guatemala Grim As Tension Rises,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1954, 16.

²⁰⁵ Sydney Gruson, “U.S. Takes a New Look At Central Americans,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1954, E4

²⁰⁶ Sydney Gruson, “Reds Sent Duds To Guatemalans,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1954, 1.

and strong enough to act upon it even if it calls for more patience and fewer scare headlines.”²⁰⁷ Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was not similarly inclined. The *New York Times* quoted him two weeks later as saying that the “Communist type of terrorism” in Guatemala was all that stood in the way of an indigenous coup.²⁰⁸

The Nation submitted an editorial on the subject as well. It criticized the government for exaggerating the *Alfhem* incident while noting that the State Department itself did not consider Guatemala a Communist country. It also pointed out the circuitous logic that characterized the US reaction to the arms shipment: “And so, obsessed with its role as boss-defender of the hemisphere, it refuses to sell arms to Guatemala, refuses to allow Guatemala to buy arms from friendly nations, and then denounces Guatemala as a threat to security when it gets arms where it can.”²⁰⁹

As unrest simmered in Guatemala, several articles looked back in search of its sources. A June 19 *Los Angeles Times* story traced the origins to the fall of Jorge Ubico Castaneda, followed by the assassination of Francisco Arana in 1950, and Arbenz Guzman allowing Communism to flourish.²¹⁰ Jules Dubois argued that Arbenz Guzman took a more active role in the Communist Party, as evidenced by the headline, “How Arbenz Encouraged Reds.” Dubois charged Arbenz Guzman with a variety of sins, including being the handpicked candidate of the Communist party, echoing the Communist party line, backing a “hate America” campaign, sending officials to Moscow,

²⁰⁷ Russell Fitzgibbon, “Danger Of Error In The Guatemalan Case,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1954, A5.

²⁰⁸ Unknown Author, “Dulles Pictures Guatemalan Fear,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1954, 8.

²⁰⁹ Editorial Board, “Again the Big Stick,” *The Nation*, May 29, 1954.

²¹⁰ United Press, “Revolution Simmering Since 1944,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 1954, 4.

loaning government buildings to Communists for meetings, and being part of a clique that ordered Javier Arana's assassination.²¹¹

With rumors of a coup abounding, commentators began to discuss the prospects of U.S. involvement in the uprising. The *New York Times* had published the contents of an Arbenz Guzman broadcast on June 20 in which he accused the United States of backing the coup.²¹² On June 21, Milton Bracker wrote a more detailed account of the U.S. government's possible support or knowledge of the coup attempt. He stated it was "assumed in informed quarters that Washington was fully aware of the probable march of events in Guatemala" since the *Alfhem* arms shipment. Bracker also believed that the United States would be blamed for assisting the intervention regardless of its level of actual involvement, and turned responsibility toward Arbenz Guzman, who should have seen the intervention coming and changed his policies accordingly.²¹³

The *Los Angeles Times* preferred to focus on Russian involvement. When Russia was the only nation to veto a UN motion to refer the Guatemalan coup to the Organization of American States, *Times*' reporter Polyzoides (actual name unknown) regarded it as proof that the Soviets were working with Arbenz Guzman. Polyzoides accused the Soviets of "...starting other backfires right in the U.S. backyard," while including only the official Washington version of the affair.²¹⁴ The *Times*' editorial board ran a similar accusation the same day, baldly asserting that the Russian veto proved that "the Communists are, in effect, running the Guatemalan government." The board

²¹¹ Jules Dubois, "How Arbenz Encouraged Reds," *Chicago Tribune*, June 20, 1954, 2.

²¹² United Press, "U.S. Spurred Rebels, He Says," *New York Times*, June 20, 1954, 18.

²¹³ Milton Bracker, "U.S. Likely to Get the Blame However Latin Revolt Ends," *New York Times*, June 21, 1954, 2.

²¹⁴ Polyzoides, "Russia Clarifies Role In Guatemala," *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1954, 9.

evidently found U.S. claims of non-involvement more credulous than Soviet ones. The editorial rejected claims of U.S. involvement and argued that “to charge that we have a hand in it is almost certainly to exaggerate...it is highly unlikely anybody in the American government has made any moves to promote the Guatemalan revolt.”²¹⁵ US officials did not find out until after the fact just how erroneous their assumptions were. Given that the U.S. government had long displayed its irritation with Arbenz Guzman and other media outlets had at least mentioned the possibility of U.S. involvement, the *Times* editorial board chose to ignore U.S. action against Arbenz Guzman.

In its first article on Arbenz Guzman’s Guatemala, *The New Republic* ran only a short piece on the issue and differed sharply from the majority of U.S. media opinions. Rather than accusing the Russians of meddling, the article compared Soviet attitudes about Guatemala to American attitudes about intervention in Korea and Indochina, since both the USSR and the U.S. were “vitaly concerned with the protection of their respective and differing influences, anywhere.”²¹⁶

The *Times* continued its series of broadly accusatory articles on June 27, this time in the form of an interview with Father Sebastian Buccellato, who had left Guatemala prior to the coup. Under the breathless headline “I Saw The Reds Taking Over!” the interview hammered home the theme of Soviet intrusion into Guatemala. The sub-headline asserted that Guatemala had been turned into a “menacing Kremlin outpost,” and the priest described Guatemala as “indistinguishable from a Soviet satellite.” He concluded with the warning that, unless checked by citizens of bravery and conscience,

²¹⁵ Editorial Board, “Moscow Shows Hand in Dispute,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1954, A4.

²¹⁶ Unknown Author, “Guatemalan War,” *The New Republic*, June 28, 1954, 3.

“we will one day soon see an Iron Curtain descend on the American continent.”²¹⁷

By the time Father Buccellato’s interview hit the newsstands, the outcome of the revolt was no longer in doubt, as Arbenz Guzman resigned the next day, June 28. Many Latin American governments disagreed with the priest’s assessment of the situation in Guatemala and sided with Arbenz Guzman regardless of political inclination. The *New York Times* reported pro-Guatemalan demonstrations in Brazil, Ecuador, Chile, Uruguay and Mexico, in addition to an official resolution of support from the Argentine Congress. The author did not accuse the US of providing material support to the revolt, but did allege tacit approval.²¹⁸

The Nation was less conflicted over the meaning of the turmoil in Guatemala. J. Alvarez del Vayo denounced the violence as an “unwarranted attack against a small country, whose only crime has been to challenge, on behalf of its own national sovereignty, the sovereignty of a foreign private company and to run its internal affairs to suit itself.” Alvarez Del Vayo contributed an important piece of reporting that did not appear in any of the other outlets studied here. Referring to the *New York Times*’ piece that carried Secretary Dulles’ allegations of Communist terrorism, Alvarez del Vayo noted that the sources of the charges had been recanted by their originators. Guatemalan exiles in Mexico admitted forty-eight hours after the fact that their allegations were “grossly exaggerated.”²¹⁹ Again, neither the sources of the report nor their withdrawal were addressed by the mainstream media outlets.

²¹⁷ Father Sebastian Buccellato, “I Saw The Reds Taking Over!,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1954, J7.

²¹⁸ Sam Pope Brewer, “U.S. Prestige Ebbs In Latin America,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1954, 10.

²¹⁹ J. Alvarez del Vayo, “Aggression Is The Word: The Guatemala Crisis,” *The Nation*, June 26, 1954, 537-538.

On June 28, Arbenz Guzman resigned, and all three newspapers carried the event on their front pages. The *Chicago Tribune*'s headline read "President Arbenz of Guatemala Quits" and referenced Arbenz Guzman's "pro-Communist government."²²⁰ The *Los Angeles Times* carried a more subdued headline: "Guatemala President Steps Down in New Move." The attendant article described his Communist ties, but also pointed out that Arbenz Guzman himself was not a Communist.²²¹ The *New York Times*' headline read simply "Arbenz Is Deposed," but did not reference Communism or Socialism in any form.²²²

Following Arbenz Guzman's resignation, the press analyzed the aftermath and way forward. The *Los Angeles Times*' editorial board seemed satisfied, writing that the "focus of Communist infection seems to have been wiped out." In making their case, the editors omitted key details. Specifically, they alleged that the *Alfhem* shipment was a payoff for the land redistribution law, when in fact it was a desperation move to placate the army after the US had refused to fill the order.²²³ The *Tribune*'s editorial board was less sanguine, rejoicing in the removal of the "Communist stooge," but warning that "the unrest which the Communists promoted in Guatemala will be quieted immediately."²²⁴

Jules Dubois issued his own assessment several days later, celebrating the end of the "nightmare" of Communist rule in Guatemala while lauding the coup's leader,

²²⁰ Unknown Author, "President Arbenz of Guatemala Quits," *Chicago Tribune*, June 28, 1954, 1.

²²¹ Unknown Author, "Guatemala President Steps Down in New Move," *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1954, 1.

²²² Paul Kennedy, "Arbenz Is Deposed," *New York Times*, June 28, 1954, 1.

²²³ Editorial Board, "Guatemala Problem Seems to Be Solving," *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 1954, A4.

²²⁴ Editorial Board, "Guatemala And Its Consequences," *Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1954, 8.

Colonel Castillo Armas. In a concluding bit of creative license, he described the revolt as a great victory for a population that was “99 per cent anti-Communist” --a doubtlessly exaggerated figure, but a detail that was characteristic of his reporting.²²⁵ The *New York Times* described Armas as “unquestionably a patriot and a man of deep-seated anti-Communist convictions.”²²⁶

Russell Fitzgibbon was also pleased with the coup, with the *Los Angeles Times* headlining his article “Anti-Red Victory Is Model for U.S. Policy.” He approved of indirect U.S. support, preferring that method to belligerent rhetoric and unilateral military interventions. Interestingly, he also asserted that “It was widely assumed that the United States was giving moral and perhaps material support to the invaders.”²²⁷ When the assumption had been mentioned before the intervention, it was rejected by Fitzgibbon’s own editorial board.

Major newsmagazines also ran prominent stories on the coup. *Life*’s lead story was revealingly entitled “A Guatemalan Revolution That Everybody Expected.” *Life* also ran twice as many large pictures as paragraphs (6 to 3), and described the former government as “notoriously pro-Communist.”²²⁸ *Time* provided a much more substantive story, and featured Arbenz Guzman’s visage on that week’s cover. The article placed blame for the coup squarely on Arbenz Guzman and his administration, and dismissed the “Communist-line” government’s accurate accusations of US involvement. The piece also

²²⁵ Jules Dubois, “Guatemala City Letter; How Reds Brought On Own Fall,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 5, 1954, 13.

²²⁶ Editorial Board, “The Castillo Armas Regime,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1954, E8.

²²⁷ Russell Fitzgibbon, “Anti-Red Victory Is Model for U.S. Policy,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1954, A4.

²²⁸ Unknown Author, “A Guatemalan Revolution That Everybody Expected,” *Life*, June 28, 1954, 12-13.

blamed Arbenz Guzman personally, claiming he had started the trouble by “flinging wide the palace doors and welcoming Communists into his government.” *Time* apparently assumed that even if the U.S. was not involved in the coup, it would have been justified in doing so on that basis alone. The article discussed Arbenz Guzman’s biography at length, noting his scholastic accomplishments (including historically high grades at the country’s military academy). But when examining his political philosophy and warming to Communist ideas, the article described him as “no heavyweight thinker.” It is unknown if this was intended to show that Arbenz Guzman was fooled into following the ideology, but there is clearly a negative implication. Although the article accurately described the lack of Communists in official positions, it accused them of having undue influence in Arbenz Guzman’s government. It also asserted that the *Alfhem* incident and the arms imports made war inevitable. Unsurprisingly, there was no mention of Arbenz Guzman’s pleading for US arms beforehand: “Guatemala’s explosive purchase of Red arms in such quantity made the Kremlin’s tampering fingers visible to the most myopic.”²²⁹

After Arbenz Guzman’s resignation, debate continued over its meaning and effects. In another piece of analysis in *The Nation*, J.A. del Vayo accused the United States of cynically backing the invasion while condemning China for selling arms to the Vietminh. Alvarez Del Vayo imagined Secretary Dulles logic as: “We are not opposed to the overthrow of legally constituted governments. We are only against it when the overthrowers are Communists.”²³⁰ Nonetheless, he did not directly accuse the United

²²⁹ Unknown Author, “Guatemala: Battle of the Backyard,” *Time*, June 28, 1954.

²³⁰ J.A. del Vayo, “War Against The UN: The Guatemala Chapter,” *The Nation*, July 3, 1954, 3-4.

States of financing or supplying the coup. *Life* adopted the opposite perspective by accusing Communists of trying to pin the war on the U.S. and using the conflict to advance its cause.²³¹ *Time* struck a more neutral stance, publishing Arbenz Guzman's farewell address but accusing his regime of slowly moving towards Soviet orbit and citing Arbenz's alleged "Marxism."²³²

The analysis continued in the next week's editions. Freda Kirchney of *The Nation* noted Arbenz Guzman's accusation that American newspapers had helped instigate the fury against his government, as well as the United States' flawed logic on the *Alfhem* issue. *The Nation* ran three similar articles over the next month as well.²³³ Kirchney raised the question of, but did not accuse, the United States of direct involvement. *Time* raised similar concerns, noting that Castillo Armas's bases in Honduras could have been stopped with a U.S. "frown."²³⁴ *Life* ran a small article that included ten pro-rebel photographs.²³⁵

The New Republic waited until July 19 to run a significant feature; its cover story was entitled "Perspective On Guatemala." As the headline indicates, the article featured several sides of the argument. It highlighted the necessity of land reform, the importance of native Indians achieving political representation, press freedom enjoyed under Arbenz Guzman's administration, and the danger of Communist intervention.²³⁶

During the run-up to PBSUCCESS, few mainstream publications suspected behind-the-scenes U.S. involvement. Although the *Washington Post* did not link the CIA

²³¹ Unknown Author, "Reds' Priority: Pin War On US," *Life*, July 5, 1954, 8,11.

²³² Unknown Author, "Guatemala: Exit the Colonel, Complaining," *Time*, July 5, 1954.

²³³ Freda Kirchney, "Guatemala Guinea Pig," *The Nation*, July 10, 1954, 21-23.

²³⁴ Unknown Author, "The Hemisphere: After the Fall," *Time*, July 12, 1954.

²³⁵ Unknown Author, "The End Of A 12-Day Civil War," *Life*, July 12, 1954, 21-22.

²³⁶ Edwin Lahey, "Perspective On Guatemala," *The New Republic*, July 19, 1954, 10-13.

to Guatemala in its June 1954 editions, the *New York Times* published several features accusing the United States of at least tacit approval. The *Times* actually mentioned CIA chief Allen Dulles in relation to the Guatemalan unrest, and due to its wide readership on Capitol Hill the CIA's involvement was a poorly kept secret. Nonetheless, both papers' editorial columns backed the general idea that the Kremlin was interfering in Guatemala, and that something should be done to counteract it. The *Times* even kept their Mexico City-based reporter Sydney Gruson out of Guatemala at the behest of Allen Dulles.²³⁷ In the end though, every mainstream outlet, whether liberal or conservative, dismissed the charge that the U.S. had been plotting against Arbenz Guzman; even *The Nation* remained silent on the issue.²³⁸

Overall, the evidence suggests that mainstream U.S. print media outlets generally exhibited a pro-U.S., anti-Communist bias. Accusations of Communism and Soviet influence appeared far more frequently than the solid evidence needed to support them. Mainstream media outlets frequently told only the U.S. side of the story and did not report relevant details that would have balanced the readers' view. There is little evidence to suggest a large-scale government effort to directly manipulate the mainstream press in favor of intervention. There are only two solid pieces of evidence to support such an assertion. The first comes from a 1957 *Time* article. In it, the author discusses Jules Dubois, the *Tribune* reporter who penned the most vehement accusations against Arbenz Guzman and his government. He and Castillo Armas were old friends, dating from when Castillo Armas studied under Dubois at the U.S. Army's command and general and staff

²³⁷ Barrett, *The CIA and Congress*, 166-67.

²³⁸ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 262.

school during World War II.²³⁹ In and of itself, this report could be dismissed as a mere coincidence. However, more substantive information appearing several decades later reinforced the possibility of Dubois' calculated bias. A 1977 *New York Times* article reported the CIA's links with domestic and international journalists, including the eyebrow-raising note that twenty-two American media organizations had employed journalists who were also working for the CIA. The noted Cold Warrior Jules Dubois was identified as "an 'asset' ...the late Latin American correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, described by one former official as 'well and favorably known; to the agency though never on the payroll.'²⁴⁰ He was not alone, since most CIA-media personnel began as journalists and volunteered their services to the CIA.²⁴¹ Dubois' loyalties notwithstanding, he represented only a slightly more aggressive viewpoint in mainstream American journalism. The central anti-Communist sentiment remained.

Although the aforementioned publications varied ideologically, the types of reporting exhibited were primarily a matter of degree rather than a genuine difference of opinion. Except for *The Nation*, all shared the conviction that Arbenz Guzman was a dangerous character who posed a Communist threat to the region. Jules Dubois was more strident in his criticism, but it was simply a matter of using harsher words to express the same sentiment.

As the largest producer of Guatemala reporting in the period, the *New York Times* represented the most important data set. Despite its liberal reputation, the paper's reporting on Arbenz Guzman's regime maintained a steadily skeptical tone. There were a

²³⁹ Unknown Author, "The Press: Freedom Fighter," *Time*, April 15, 1957.

²⁴⁰ John M. Crewdson, "C.I.A. Established Many Links To Journalists in U.S. and Abroad," *New York Times*, December 27, 1977, 73.

²⁴¹ Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda*, 185.

smattering of sympathetic passages among the hundreds of articles produced, but overall the *Times* adopted the traditional anti-Communist perspective. This is a key detail, because many journalists and government officials regarded the *Times* as the premier newspaper in the country. Therefore, if a given *Times* article evinced an anti-Communist point of view, that perspective would be replicated throughout the country's newspapers and readership.

The nature of journalism in the 1950s virtually required that media coverage of any Communist-related matter be slanted heavily to the right. The U.S. government maintained a steadfast anti-Communist stance, many of the largest media moguls (most notably Henry Luce) were avowed anti-Communists, many of their reporters had served in the military or worked as government propagandists during World War II, and the audience which they served was overwhelmingly anti-Communist. In an environment where anti-Communist information was considered true and right, and any notion to the contrary elicited deep skepticism, even hostility, the avalanche of accusations against Arbenz Guzman was the norm for leaders that did not conform to the United States' belief system, regardless of the veracity of the accusations.

It should be remembered that, political bias and opinion aside, profitability was a key driver for what newspapers printed and when. Like any organism, the first responsibility of a business is to survive. Although newspapers are businesses that ideally serve the public good, they are businesses nonetheless. If they were not so, Joseph Pulitzer II (publisher of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*) would not have instructed his reporters to treat Joe McCarthy fairly and generously because the paper's readership generally shared McCarthy's anti-Communist sentiments. Even with the growth of

interpretive journalism after World War II, its ratio compared to the amount of advertising content dropped from 60:40 to 40:60 after the war, so publishers could keep pace with increased overhead.²⁴² Given increased costs, media sponsors' opinions became more important. Quite simply, sponsors and advertisers did not want to risk dollars on politically unsafe products, and shied away from programs and articles that questioned the rapid build-up of the national security state.²⁴³ Therefore, we must consider the impact of popularity, or the instinct of a newspaper to avoid directly challenging popular ideas and notions, regardless of their basis in fact, in order to maintain its readership.

In hindsight, PBSUCCESS has lost its luster. CIA agent Richard Bissell, who helped engineer the coup, later noted "I would be surprised if there was anyone at Opa Locka-or even the CIA Washington headquarters of PBSuccess-who had a thoughtful understanding of what was going on in Guatemala." The CIA's successes in Iran and Guatemala led later presidents to overestimate its capabilities, which led (in part) to the ill-fated operations in the Bay of Pigs. Guatemala itself suffered a series of revolutions and counter-revolutions, leaving a trail of poverty and unrest in which over 100,000 died.²⁴⁴

Contrary to the old adage, the failings of the U.S. government and the U.S. media had many fathers. The U.S. government maintained a policy of anti-Communism, and produced propaganda to support that viewpoint. The American people were instructed to be fearful of Communism, as were most journalists. The journalists themselves had often

²⁴² Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers*, 43, 135.

²⁴³ Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960*, 5.

²⁴⁴ Raymont, *Troubled Neighbors*, 103.

worked as propagandists and reporters, sometimes mixing the two. From that citizenry sprung an eagerness to counter Communism aggressively in even the most innocuous of countries. Newspapers and magazines believed in the Communist threat, and pleased their readership with reporting that fit that narrative. Fear led to alarmist warnings and overreactions. Government officials were subject to those same influences, and attempted to shape media coverage to fit a narrative of ever-increasing Communist threat in Guatemala. Examples of direct intervention were few, but also unnecessary. Journalists often covered what the government said without challenging the facts, and relied on suspicious accusations to fill in the blanks. In such an environment, fair reporting and reasonable discourse about the fate of Guatemala became impossible. The simple norm of anti-Communism drove U.S. domestic and foreign policy, and the assumed inherent rightness of the U.S. government's perspective fundamentally slanted the reporting on Guatemala and its doomed President. This is how democracies overthrow democracies.

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