Guatemala- Account of the overthrow of Arbenz

Convinced that Arbenz threatened U.S. national security because of his alleged Communist sympathies, Eisenhower approved the first-ever clandestine military action in Latin America. Codenamed PBSUCCESS, the program aimed at not only deposing Arbenz in favor of a U.S.-selected leader, but also looked to send a clear warning to the Soviets that the American government would not tolerate the spread of communism in the Western Hemisphere.

By 1953, the highly secretive PBSUCCESS had become a top priority for CIA officials. Prohibited by Eisenhower from using American troops to accomplish their goals in Guatemala, the CIA established training camps for the opposition army in the bordering nations of Nicaragua and Honduras. To compensate for both the small number of men choosing to involve themselves in the operation and the widespread support for the Arbenz government, the CIA devised a massive propaganda campaign in Guatemala to convince the populace of the invincibility of the forces seeking to take control of the country. Furthermore, CIA agents also conducted an intense psychological battle against the supporters of Arbenz, ranging from phone warnings in the middle of the night to death threats. On June 18, 1954, after approximately one year of preparation, U.S.- backed troops invaded Guatemala with the intention of overthrowing Arbenz. Realizing his army had forsaken him and fearing for his life, Arbenz resigned as president on June 27th and fled to Mexico. The U.S.-chosen leader of the military coup, Carlos Castillo Armas, assumed control of the government, thus ensuring the promotion of American interests in Guatemala.

Shortly following the change of power in Guatemala, CIA Director Allen W. Dulles met with Eisenhower to discuss the details of PBSUCCESS. During the presidential briefing, Dulles and other CIA officials exaggerated the efficiency of the program, claiming only one U.S.-backed soldier perished, when in reality, at least forty-eight men lost their lives in the attack. Consequently, Eisenhower and later American presidents came to rely on covert operations when faced with the threat of communism in Latin America; based on the faulty assumption that the overthrow of Arbenz was quick and bloodless, PBSUCCESS became the model for future CIA actions in the region. However, despite the initial determination that the U.S. intervention in Guatemala served as a triumph over communism, the decision to remove an elected leader by force seemed flawed when members of the army assassinated Castillo Armas only three years after he gained power. The aggressive American foreign policy implemented during the early years of the Cold War in Guatemala, therefore, succeeded in its immediate goal of removing a suspected communist sympathizer, but the unforeseen consequences of PBSUCESS (four decades of instability and civil war in Guatemala) remain the ultimate legacy of the initial CIA covert operation in Latin America.

**Lumumba Letter to Wife:**

My beloved companion,

I write you these words not knowing whether you will receive them, when you will receive them, and whether I will still be alive when you read them. Throughout my struggle for the independence of my country, I have never doubted for a single instant that the sacred cause to which my comrades and I have dedicated our entire lives would triumph in the end. But what we wanted for our country — its right to an honorable life, to perfect dignity, to independence with no restrictions — was never wanted by Belgian colonialism and its Western allies, who found direct and indirect, intentional and unintentional support among certain high officials of the United Nations, that body in which we placed all our trust when we called on it for help.

They have corrupted some of our countrymen; they have bought others; they have done their part to distort the truth and defile our independence. What else can I say? ‘That whether dead or alive, free or in prison by order of the colonialists, it is not my person that is important. What is important is the Congo, our poor people whose independence has been turned into a cage, with people looking at us from outside the bars, sometimes with charitable compassion, sometimes with glee and delight. But my faith will remain unshakable. I know and feel in my very heart of hearts that sooner or later my people will rid themselves of all their enemies, foreign and domestic, that they will rise up as one to say no to the shame and degradation of colonialism and regain their dignity in the pure light of day.

We are not alone. Africa, Asia, and the free and liberated peoples in every corner of the globe will ever remain at the side of the millions of Congolese who will not abandon the struggle until the day when there will be no more colonizers and no more of their mercenaries in our country. I want my children, whom I leave behind and perhaps will never see again, to be told that the future of the Congo is beautiful and that their country expects them, as it expects every Congolese, to fulfill the sacred task of rebuilding our independence, our sovereignty; for without justice there is no dignity and without independence there are no free men.

Neither brutal assaults, nor cruel mistreatment, nor torture have ever led me to beg for mercy, for I prefer to die with my head held high, unshakable faith, and the greatest confidence in the destiny of my country rather than live in slavery and contempt for sacred principles. History will one day have its say; it will not be the history taught in the United Nations, Washington, Paris, or Brussels, however, but the history taught in the countries that have rid themselves of colonialism and its puppets. Africa will write its own history and both north and south of the Sahara it will be a history full of glory and dignity.

Do not weep for me, my companion; I know that my country, now suffering so much, ‘will be able to defend its independence and its freedom. Long live the Congo! Long live Africa!

PATRICE

**Support for the Contras**

(1984)

Ronald Reagan

**Introduction**

With the help of the U.S. government, the Somoza family ruled as dictators in Nicaragua from 1934 until 1979. In that last year, the Sandinista rebels overthrew Somoza and promised democratic elections. In 1980, part of Ronald Reagan's campaign was an emphasis on controlling the "evil empire" of the Soviet Union. Three days after taking office, President Reagan accused the Soviet Union and Cuba of sending military supplies to Communist guerrillas in El Salvador through Nicaragua and cut off aid to Nicaragua. Reagan immediately began supporting the anti-Sandinista guerrillas known as the Contras. Sharply criticized for comparing the Contras to the U.S. Founding Fathers, Reagan made this national address on May 9, 1984, to clarify his administration's policies in Central America.

**Source**

The defense policy of the United States is based on a simple premise: We do not start wars. We will never be the aggressor. We maintain our strength in order to deter and defend against aggression, to preserve freedom and peace. We help our friends defend themselves.

Central America is a region of great importance to the United States. And it is so close: San Salvador is closer to Houston, Texas, than Houston is to Washington, DC. Central America is America. It's at our doorstep, and it's become the stage for a bold attempt by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Nicaragua to install communism by force throughout the hemisphere. . . .

Right now in El Salvador, Cuban-supported aggression has forced more than 400,000 men, women, and children to flee their homes. And in all of Central America, more than 800,000 have fled—many, if not most, living in unbelievable hardship. Concerns about the prospect of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing Communist oppression to seek entry into our country are well-founded.

What we see in El Salvador is an attempt to destabilize the entire region and eventually move chaos and anarchy toward the American border. . . .

. . . So far, we have . . . provided just enough aid to avoid outright disaster, but not enough to resolve the crisis, so El Salvador is being left to slowly bleed to death. Part of the problem, I suspect, is not that Central America isn't important, but that some people think our administration may be exaggerating the threat we face. Well, if that's true, let me put that issue to rest.

I want to tell you a few things tonight about the real nature of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

The Sandinistas, who rule Nicaragua, are Communists whose relationship and ties to Fidel Castro of Cuba go back a quarter of a century. . . .

The Cuban-backed Sandinistas made a major attempt to topple the Somoza regime in Nicaragua in the fall of 1978. They failed. They were then called to Havana, where Castro cynically instructed them in the ways of successful Communist insurrection. He told them to tell the world they were fighting for political democracy, not communism. But most important, he instructed them to form a broad alliance with the genuinely democratic opposition to the Somoza regime. Castro explained that this would deceive Western public opinion, confuse potential critics, and make it difficult for Western democracies to oppose the Nicaraguan revolution without causing great dissent at home. . . .

The Sandinistas listened and learned. They returned to Nicaragua and promised to establish democracy. . . . Well, Somoza left, and the Sandinistas came to power. This was a negotiated settlement, based on power-sharing between Communists and genuine democrats. . . .

The Sandinista rule is a Communist reign of terror. Many of those who fought alongside the Sandinistas saw their revolution betrayed. They were denied power in the new government. Some were imprisoned, others exiled. Thousands who fought with the Sandinistas have taken up arms against them and are now called the contras. They are freedom fighters. . . .

Shortly after taking power, the Sandinistas, in partnership with Cuba and the Soviet Union, began supporting aggression and terrorism against El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. They opened training camps for guerrillas from El Salvador so they could return to their country and attack its government. . . . Nicaragua is still the headquarters for Communist guerrilla movements. . . .

The Sandinista regime has been waging war against its neighbors since August of 1979. This has included military raids into Honduras and Costa Rica, which still continue today.

And they're getting a great deal of help from their friends. There were 165 Cuban personnel in Nicaragua in 1979. Today that force has grown to 10,000. And we're being criticized for having 55 military trainers in El Salvador. Manpower support is also coming from other parts of the terror network. The PLO has sent men, and so has Libya's dictator, Qadhafi. Communist countries are providing new military assistance, including tanks, artillery, rocket-launchers, and help in the construction of military bases and support facilities. . . .

. . . We Americans should be proud of what we're trying to do in Central America, and proud of what, together with our friends, we can do in Central America to support democracy, human rights, and economic growth while preserving peace so close to home. Let us show the world that we want no hostile Communist colonies here in the Americas—South, Central, or North.

“Nicaragua Informational Paragraph”

Throughout his presidency, Reagan pursued an aggressively anti-Communist foreign policy. Early in his first term, Reagan had authorized a covert CIA operation to overthrow leftist governments in Nicaragua. Radicals known as Sandinistas had overthrown Nicaragua's military dictatorship and were threatening to do the same in El Salvador. The Contras were a coalition of paramilitary groups that opposed the Sandinistas. Fearing the spread of communism in the Western hemisphere, Reagan dubbed the Contras “freedom fighters” and channeled weapons and C.I.A. support to them. Congress remained skeptical, though; in 1984, it passed the Boland Amendment banning U.S. military aid to the Contras. Administration officials did not give up their support of the Contras, however; they merely looked for new sources of funds, other than federal appropriations from Congress, to send to Nicaragua.

National security advisors hatched a plan to fund the Contras with money brought in by the sale of weapons to Iran. Officials also hoped the weapons sales would make Iran more favorable to helping the U.S. negotiate with Islamic radicals who had taken several Americans hostage in Lebanon. The proposed sale of weapons, however, was illegal; the U.S. had passed an embargo and publicly denounced Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism since the Iran hostage crisis in 1979. In order to hide U.S. actions, Reagan officials sold millions of dollars worth of weapons secretly through an intermediary.

The profits from this illegal arms trade, along with other money that was raised secretly from foreign governments, were then used to fund the Contras in their war against Nicaragua’s radical Sandinista government. Several NSC officials went to jail, and much evidence suggested that Reagan had condoned the illegal acts. At the very least, it is clear that he supported the sale of weapons to Iran for the release of hostages and he supported the covert aid to the Contras. No one ever testified that he approved the weapons sales in order to fund the Contras. Although Democratic lawmakers shied away from any effort to impeach the still-popular president, the Iran-Contra Affair nonetheless deprived Reagan of his ability to set the national political agenda for the remainder of his term.

