United States Policy Toward Guatemala

An annotated bibliography

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LIS 541: Government Documents
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INTRODUCTION

The United States has long had interest in the Central American republic of Guatemala. During the 19th Century and the first half of the 20th Century, Guatemala was a major agricultural exporter to the U.S., largely through the United Fruit Co. In 1944, students led a revolution in Guatemala which eventually overthrew a right-wing leader whom the Americans had friendly relations. Following the ascension of President Arbenz, a communist sympathizing leader, the United States funneled military assistance to capitalist dissidents and military leaders. This lead to a coup in 1954, which was followed by close to forty years of civil war between the government of Guatemala and armed guerrillas. Through those periods of warfare, U.S. administrations offered military and security assistance to the Guatemalan regimes, though often with reservations. In the mid 90s, the UN brokered a peace agreement between the government and rebel guerrilla groups. Today, U.S.-Guatemalan relations are focused on expanding free trade and fighting drug trafficking.

METHODOLOGY

The documents assembled in this bibliography were culled from a variety of sources. The Congressional Serial Set, THOMAS, and GPO Access were all useful in researching U.S. policy toward Guatemala in Congressional and Executive acts. While print collections were useful for a few State Department documents, free text searching helped differentiate between meaningful and unhelpful documents. There were
numerous bills that mentioned, or dealt with Guatemala, but few actually articulated U.S. policy toward the country. For this reason, the full text searching made available by the Congressional Serial Set, THOMAS, and GPO Access was especially helpful.

Though those sources were adequate for some research, through several decades the Untied States conducted its affairs in Guatemala clandestinely. Documents describing these activities would have to be classified, and these were made available by the National Security Archives hosted by George Washington University, and from a number of State Department publications containing declassified documents about Guatemala. Those publications are also listed in the annotated bibliography.

I was also able to find the peace agreements signed by Guatemala and the rebel groups through the Digital Library of International Peace, which has full text peace accords. The documents section on the United Nations site unfortunately did not contain those peace agreements, so I had to consult an outside source.
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY


   This is a letter written by one Henry Savage to the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives. Henry Savage was an American businessman living in Guatemala, who, over a period of two decades, had served in a de-facto role as an American ambassador. This is a letter requesting compensation for his services, and illustrates the hands-off approach that the United States took toward Guatemala in the 19th Century.


   Through most of the 19th Century, trade was of paramount importance between the United States and Guatemala. This document is a report given to the Senate, which details the tariffs levied by Central American countries, including Guatemala.


   This is another document prepared by the International Bureau of American Republics, this time dealing with immigration and the sale of public lands in Central America. While immigration was less important than it is today, the sale of public lands was an issue considered very important. The United Fruit Co., an American company, was the largest landowner in Guatemala at the time. As such, the federal government had a keen interest in the sale of public lands, as this could benefit US industry.


   This is a 112-page Senate Executive Document that details everything about Guatemala, which discusses everything from the political situation to transportation to agriculture. During this period of U.S.-Guatemalan relations, Guatemala primarily
served as an agricultural supplier to the United States via the Untied Fruit Co. This document gives the best account of the U.S. assessment of Guatemala in that era.

5. U.S. Senate. President Woodrow Wilson. *President Estrada Cabrera of Guatemala. Message from the President of the United States, transmitting, in response to a Senate resolution... a report from the Acting Secretary of State concerning the signing and observance of articles of capitulation under the terms of which President Cabrera...January 18 (calendar day January 21), 1921. – Read; referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations, and ordered to be printed. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921. Serial Set Vol. No. 7794, Session Vol. No. 16.*

This is a message from President Woodrow Wilson to the Senate concerning the resignation of Guatemalan President Estrada Cabrera. President Cabrera had repressed a social movement known as the Unionistas. In the judgment of the Secretary of State, the Unionista movement had been completely lawful, and President Cabrera had acted unwisely in his oppression. The document also notes that much of the violence had been exaggerated by Cabrera, as well as a rumor that the Unionistas sought to unify all Central American Republics. The document shows both U.S. opposition to a unified Central American Republic and a laissez-faire attitude toward local social movements, provided they are lawful.


In 1941, The United States signed the Inter-American Coffee Agreement, which allowed coffee imports of certain levels for a number of different Latin American countries, including Guatemala. The Act was designed to protect a certain share of the market for each of the coffee producing nations, in an effort to maintain longstanding agricultural partnerships.


During World War II, Guatemala was a participant in the lend-lease program, as President Roosevelt deemed its protection vital to U.S. national interests. The entire Central American region participated in the lend-lease program, but this is an indication of the increased role the United States would play in the region following the war.

This is a communication between President Harry Truman and Congress concerning escape clauses in trade agreements. In 1944, there was a social revolution in Guatemala, where the government had been overthrown. The U.S. paid it little attention until the early 1950s, when the new government began proposing major land reforms, which would threaten U.S. interests, particularly those of the United Fruit Co. The document illustrates the increased willingness by the United States in Guatemala to oppose any perceived communist expansion.


This is a communication between two directors at the CIA, detailing the situation in Guatemala at the beginning of the year. The document details communist, as well as anti-communist activities in the region. The memo discusses the illness of President Arbenz, a U.S. foe, and discusses the possibility of succession by a pro-American leader.


The National Intelligence Estimate is a document compiled by the intelligence agencies for the President. The 1952 NIE details a growing communist presence in Guatemala, lead by student revolutionaries and armed guerillas. The document urges American intervention to halt the further spread of communism, particularly in the American-dominated western hemisphere.


This memo further details the communist presence in Guatemala, this time noting that guerilla control of certain roads have made business near impossible for the United Fruit Co. The memo further details plans by the CIA to back an anti-communist coup against President Arbenz.

Another memo between directors at the CIA, this discusses the assessment of the CIA that the reforms taken by the Arbenz government were leading to popular unrest throughout the country. It also discusses Col. Castillo Armas, an exiled military leader, and his plans to overthrow the Arbenz government.


This memo from the CIA adds more nuance to the U.S. position towards Arbenz. While the CIA does not believe that President Arbenz believes whole-heartedly in Soviet style communism, they do believe that many of his advisors do. So while Arbenz himself was not considered as threatening to U.S. interests, the memo fears a 'palace coup', where communist advisors would take control.


This CIA report details the complicated and changing situation in Guatemala at the time. The Arbenz government was not fighting anti-government forces throughout the country. The CIA was monitoring activities of the government, while also aiding anti-government forces. This document is best used to show the detailed level of involvement in all aspects of this civil war.


This is an intelligence assessment conducted by the Department of State. Again, it details the desire of leftist nationals in Guatemala to institute land-reforms and institute a communist or socialist government in Guatemala. It provides a detailed assessment of the threat posed by Guatemalan communism to U.S. interests.


This intelligence memorandum details the agrarian nature of the reforms taking place in Guatemala in the early 1950s. It particularly stresses the threat these reforms
posed to the interests of American landholders in Guatemala, particularly the United Fruit Co.


This CIA memo describes the situation in Guatemala in 1953, claiming that President Arbenz has grown in power, and now represents the leading base of Moscow based operations in Central America. The document goes on to state that unlike assessments of the previous year, it is not believed that President Arbenz can be threatened through a popular revolt.


This is a memo of a conversation between two rebel officers and a CIA operative. The officers are leading members of the Guatemalan opposition forces. The discussion details concerns that the United Fruit Co. was funding the activities of another dissident military officer, though one opposed to the officer’s forces, Col. Carlos Armas. The document is telling in its illustration of the complexity of alliances and support, with the United Fruit Co. and the CIA apparently both providing funds to opposing forces.


Operation PBSUCCESS was a clandestine operation, which meant “Presidential Board Success”. This was the code name given to the organized effort to support a coup d’etat in Guatemala. This document, produced as a briefing in PBSUCCESS headquarters, details the communist situation in Guatemala, and framing it against other Soviet style communist regimes.


While the clandestine services were already deeply involved in Guatemala, the U.S. Senate sought to publicly declare their intention to be the dominant influence in the western hemisphere. This statement chastises the Soviet regime for exerting influence in the western hemisphere, specifically in aiding the Arbenz government in Guatemala.
This intelligence report provides a brief description of all activities and positions taken by U.S. intelligence in what is known as “The Guatemalan Situation”. In 1954, President Arbenz was overthrown and replaced by military dictator Col. Carlos Armas. U.S. intelligence services were active in supporting the coup, though exact details were omitted from this report. The report mentions that as documentation has become available, the communist nature of the Arbenz government has been confirmed, as well as atrocities committed by the Arbenz government against anti-communists.

This is the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House on the situation in Guatemala following the 1954 coup. The report discusses areas of resistance to the current government, and affirms support for the new government. The report shows how U.S. policy in Guatemala returned to something more similar to the years before World War II, though it also shows that the U.S. will likely be more involved military in Guatemala in the ongoing future.

This State Department publication contains several hundred documents, primarily memoranda and communications, concerning U.S. policy in Guatemala from 1955-1957. The documents show that the U.S. supported the country’s pro-capitalist dictatorship in an ongoing struggle with communist guerillas. U.S. interests continued to revolve around agricultural interests, particularly those of the United Fruit Co.

Intelligence Note October 23, 1967. Guatemala: A counter-insurgency running
Through the 1960s, Guatemala was consumed by violence and political upheaval. U.S. policy in the region continued to support all pro-capitalist forces, including the government’s counter-insurgency campaigns. This intelligence note questions the current government’s ability to control the forces it has enlisted to conduct their “antiterrorist campaign” against communist guerrillas. The note shows that American officials were aware of the tactics, including torture and execution, utilized by the Guatemalan government.

http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB11/docs/06-01.htm

In 1970, President Carlos Arana Osorio began a year-long state siege of subversives strongholds in the countryside. This intelligence report shows continued U.S. support, albeit mostly clandestinely, for the campaign.


This State Department publication is a detailed account of U.S. involvement in Guatemala dating back to 1952. It is useful to better understand the campaign in a holistic sense, especially as this consists primarily of analysis, as opposed to statistics or figures.

http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB11/docs/16-01.htm

After nearly 30 years of war dating back to the 1950s, human rights organizations like Amnesty International had begun to bring attention to human rights abuses occurring in Guatemala. This State Department cable shows how the Reagan State Department believed that the reports of those groups were largely exaggerated, and in some cases fabricated by groups that are “well-known communist fronts”.


The United States continued its support for the Guatemalan government with this joint statement. The U.S. expressed its commitment to Guatemala and support for
fiscal and economic measures being taken by an adjustment program in Guatemala. The statement promises further economic assistance.


This document, a State Department briefing paper, shows the extent that relations had begun to fray between the untied States and Guatemala by 1990. Vice-President Quayle met with the President of Guatemala to condemn the government’s failure to investigate a wave of violence, which had recently claimed the life of an American. The President of Guatemala had stated, however, that he felt he could continue to be unresponsive to American requests.


By the end of 1990, human rights abuses in Guatemala had reached a level that military assistance was halted. This is a simple cable ordering all security assistance halted until a new government took power.


While the Bush Administration eventually restored security assistance to Guatemala, the new regime of President Serrano continued to commit human rights violations. This is a measure that was introduced in the Senate by Tom Harkin (D-IA), which sought to hold the government responsible for human rights abuses in Guatemala. Though it was introduced, no further action was taken on this bill.


This State Department cable discusses the International Military and Education Training (IMET) program in Guatemala. The Secretary of Defense (Dick Cheney) spoke with President Serrano about human rights abuses. After receiving a pledge from President Serrano that his government would stamp out such abuses, the Defense Department believes that IMET will be an effective tool in educating and training the Guatemalan military, which will ultimately curb abuses. This document, coupled with the measures introduced by Senators Harkin and Bingaman, illustrates the partisan difference that existed on Guatemala in the early 1990s.

A measure introduced by Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and several other prominent Democratic Senators to condemn the actions of President Serrano. Though the measure ultimately stalled in the Senate, and would have been largely symbolic, it illustrates the increased pressure from liberal American groups to address human rights abuses in Guatemala.


This is a cable from newly appointed ambassador Marilyn McAfee to the State Department about the current situation in Guatemala. She expresses concern that the conditions imposed by the IMET program were causing friction between the Guatemalan government and the military. She suggests the Clinton administration reconsider their approach. The report shows the Clinton administration is willing to work with the Guatemalan government, but also wants to undo some of the approaches of the Bush administration.


The Guatemalan government had continued its antiterrorist campaign against dissident guerillas through the decades. Those guerillas had united under the banner of Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG). In 1994, the government signed a series of peace accords with URNG. This is a timetable for negotiating a lasting peace agreement between the two parties. The timetable was set to have a lasting agreement by the end of 1994. The accords were signed under the framework of the United Nations and firmly supported by the Clinton administration.


The government of Guatemala and the URNG agreed to establish a commission, in cooperation with the UN, to clarify past human rights abuses committed by the government and by URNG. While the agreement stopped short of laying blame at the feet of either side, the agreement acknowledges that both sides have committed abuses, and that they will be addressed.

In 1996, after establishing a general framework for a peace agreement, the government of Guatemala and the UNRG signed a definitive ceasefire, ending over 30 years of warfare between guerillas and the government.


In addition to a full ceasefire, the two parties agreed to a series of constitutional reforms designed to bring legitimacy and transparency to the Guatemalan government.


After the peace accords signed between Guatemala and the guerilla forces, Congress issued this resolution congratulating the people of Guatemala and offering U.S. assistance in the future.


With the peace agreements of 1994 and 1996, the relationship between the U.S. and Guatemala was relatively quiet. Both the Clinton and Bush administration have focused on issues of free trade and drug enforcement. This is a hearing concerning drug trafficking operations in the Dominican Republic and Guatemala. The DEA and government of Guatemala were committed to working together to fight narcotic trafficking.

In 2004, the U.S. government entered into a free trade agreement with Guatemala and several other Central American countries. The agreement was designed to further facilitate trade within the two nations, though some in both countries complain there are too few environmental and labor restrictions.


The United States and Guatemala continue to work together, along with a number of other Central American and Caribbean nations, to increase free trade and commerce in the western hemisphere. This is a bill implementing the terms of the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States FTA.


Narcotics trafficking remains an ongoing concern for officials in both the United States and Guatemala. This is a bill authorizing American assistance to the police and military in Guatemala for the purposes of curtailing drug cultivation and trafficking, as well as the organized criminal activities that accompany the drug trade.