

Blood in the Banana Republic: The Guatemalan Coup d'Etat of 1953

CLARKMUN XIV

Clark University Model United Nations



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Letter from the Crisis Director

Hello Esteemed Delegates,

My name is Brady Kershaw and it is my honor and privilege to welcome you to this committee. I am very excited to meet you all and see how this debate unfolds. Meghan and I have put a ton of work into this committee and I hope you all have as much fun in this committee as we had creating it.

First, a bit about myself. I am a current first-year student at Clark University studying Theater Arts with a possible minor in philosophy. I have been heavily involved in MUN for going on 4 years and in my senior year of high school I did a research project on the benefits that competing in MUN provides. I am very active on the ClarkMUN team and have competed in 2 collegiate conferences. Outside of academics, I enjoy snowboarding, watching films, reading, being outside, raspberry ginger tea with honey, and spending a little too much time with my friends.

As your crisis director, I know this is a very sensitive topic and trust that it is treated as such. However, that being said I am very much open to creativity (I encourage you to think outside the box), and I am very excited to see how your crisis arcs will shape the committee. If you have any questions please feel free to email me.

Sincerely,

Brady Kershaw (He/Him/His)

Clark 2027

Crisis Director

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Letter from the Chair

Dear Honorable Delegates,

Welcome to ClarkMUNXIV and the Blood in The Banana Republic: The Guatemalan Coup D'Etat of 1953! I am a first-year student here at Clark studying Political Science on the International Relations track and a minor in Education. This is my 4th year in Model UN after 3 years of Massachusetts High School MUN and serving as a head delegate of my high school's team. At Clark, I am an active member of the travel team having traveled to 3 conferences during the fall semester and even competing as Guatemala in the UNODC! In addition to MUN, I am a student-athlete on the Swimming and Diving team.

The idea for this committee came to me by inspiration from my fall semester class on Dictators and Revolutionaries in Latin America. The class is being taught by none other than my Academic Advisor, Political Science Department Chair, and Model UN at Clark University Faculty Advisor Professor Paul Posner! Our expectations for this committee are that this topic be treated with the utmost respect and professionalism considering that these are real historical events that impacted real people in Guatemala. With that being said we are open to respectful goofiness, creativity, and rewriting history. Brady and I both competed at ClarkMUN as delegates before coming to Clark and had wonderful experiences that we hope to create for all of you. Please feel free to reach out to me or Brady via Email with any questions!!

Ur fav Guatemalan Politics lover <3,

Meghan Burr (She/her) Class of 2027

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DISCLAIMER

This is a sensitive topic and has affected the lives of millions of people in Guatemala. Please keep this in mind when you are creating your character arcs, and writing your speeches as any sort of discriminatory language or violent actions and pre-written arcs, crisis notes, and directives, etc will NOT be tolerated and will lead to disqualification from awards and possible removal from the committee. This is not meant to stifle your creativity or enjoyment, but this topic can be sensitive as it affected real people and occurred only 70 years ago.

Timeline

This committee took place in the heat of September 1st, 1953 following the Eisenhower administration's authorization of CIA involvement in the removal of President Árbenz. As the committee progresses more specific dates and times will be provided in crisis updates.

Introduction

As the Cold War slowly gets hotter, The United States has determined that its stance on communism will remain hostile. As the US attempts to keep the ideology out of the Western Hemisphere according to the Monroe Doctrine. The year is 1953 and President Jacobo Árbenz is the current president of Guatemala. He has allowed for massive land reforms that have allowed the less fortunate to acquire land of their own, he has presented a hand to communist organizations and has allowed them to be recognized, and the West believes that his anti-U.S. agenda makes him a potential communist supporter. The United Fruit Company also had its eyes set on Árbenz, after his land expropriation robbed them of a massive amount of their land. The United Fruit Company turned to the West, and the two began to develop a plan to solve the issue of Árbenz.

President Arbenz is the controversial successor to spiritual Socialist Arevalo who led the Guatemalan leftist guerilla revolution against the liberal democracy and US-backed leader and classical liberal capitalist Jorge Ubico. Arbenz himself is a social democrat and moderate capitalist who sought to redistribute wealth via land redistribution of the United Fruit Company's land. His policy Decree 900 sought to change the distribution of wealth via land redistribution policies. Due to the United Fruit Company's under-appraisal of their land, they received little to no reimbursement for the land that the Guatemalan government seized which left them with less land, less money, and less labor and natural resources to exploit.

Delegates in this committee will be challenged with de-escalating the current political crisis occurring in Latin America and globally taking into account the current Cold War and global fight against communism. The committee will seek to provide some stabilization to the current political and economic systems of Guatemala, resolve the current military conflict, and make a deal with the United Fruit Company to redistribute land to the indigenous people of Guatemala. This committee is an advanced historical crisis committee that will require a broad scope of knowledge of history and the global political climate of 1953.

The Stain of Spanish Colonization on the People of the Mayan Empire

Unlike most of the developing world at this time, the situation of political and economic instability began during the 1500s when Pedro de Alvarado and his men arrived in Guatemala. The movement to colonize Latin America by Spain was motivated mainly by the three Gs (Gold, Glory, and God). The main reason that Spain initially engaged in colonization was to theoretically evangelize the native population and provide them salvation.

However, the Maya people had been engaging in their own religion and had a fully functioning economic and political system based upon subsistence farming and their own

theocracy which was based on polytheism. They had very advanced agricultural practices which made up the vast majority of their economy. They had a feudal social structure that was based on theocracy.

As the Spanish arrived they brought their social class system overseas with them, which often made up their motivations for coming overseas. The most common social class group was the *Hidalgos* who had some kind of relationship to the Spanish nobility but lost their source of wealth. These *Hidalgos* would become the ruling class of the colonies because of their relation to the nobility. In the colonies, they would become known as the *Peninsulars*. Following the *Peninsulars* were the *Creoles* who were people who were a mix of European Spanish descent and African descent. The *Mestizo* population were people who were a mix of Spanish and indigenous descent, and often working class. Below these groups were the *Mulattos* who had mixed ancestry between White Europeanism and African descent. These words should not be used as modern-day descriptors of people as they carry heavy connotations in regards to racial oppression and the global institution of slavery; However, are necessary to understand the social hierarchy of the colony of Guatemala. The use of these words to describe any individuals in the modern-day during committee will not be acceptable.

The Spanish were able to enforce this social standing through the practice of the *Encomienda* systems which became the most common system globally in regards to the forced labor of Indigenous and African people.

THE SITUATION IN GUATEMALA

The date is September 1st, 1953 and global politics are on fire. Guatemala has just held its first free and fair election in 1944 elected socialist revolutionary Juan Jose Arevalo who led the Guatemalan revolution against the US-backed liberal dictatorship of Jorge Ubico. Jacobo Arbenz, the successor and close friend to Arevalo, has just won Guatemala's

second free and fair election since its independence. The US is already nervous about communism spreading to their “backyard” as established by the Monroe Doctrine and new leadership in Guatemala is not helping their fears of communism spreading to the US.

The vast majority of Guatemalan farmland has been bought out by a multinational corporation, The United Fruit Company. It began in 1898 after the Spanish-American war ended in the chasing out of European powers from Latin America. With the passage of the Monroe Doctrine 1823 US industry flooded into the region. One of which is the United Fruit Company as it would come to own a max of 42% of Guatemala’s land under Jorge Ubico from 1931-1944.

The effect of the United Fruit Company’s huge extraction of export commodities, namely bananas, coffee, and sugar quickly led to the exploitation of Guatemalan labor. The United Fruit Company’s buy-out of Guatemalan farmland would lead to a huge disruption of the indigenous sustenance farming practices of the Maya people. The Mayan were as a result forced into wage-earning jobs working these UFCO plantations. However, another working-class group in Guatemala also existed, known as the Ladino population. These people descended from a mixed heritage of Spanish colonizers and indigenous people or African enslaved people. Their work on the UFCO plantations led to a shared struggle and a phenomenon known as semi-proletarianization which would lead to the leftist guerrilla revolt of 1944. This revolt was successful and led to the free and fair election of Juan Jose Arevalo and later Jacobo Arbenz. This historical context will be important to the committee in what military actions can reasonably be taken.¹

1

1. Vanden, Prevost “Politics of Latin America: The Power Game” Ch. 20 Guatemala, 2020
2. UMBC Center for History Education “Background on the Guatemalan Coup of 1954
3. Britannica “ladino” April 4th 2016

The COLD WAR BEGINS!!

Joseph Stalin, the famed USSR leader has just died leading to more unrest in the US's biggest rival state. Stalin has now been succeeded by Nikita Khrushchev, former First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The USSR has been the only state to openly declare support for the Guatemalan cause. The Soviets have a substantial trade agreement with the Guatemalans for importing commodity goods (Bananas, Sugar, Cocoa, etc.). However, an even greater influence was traveling Argentine socialist, Che Guevara who heavily influenced the student leftist organizer.

The US is feeling heavily attacked by this new growth of communism in what they consider to be America's backyard. The US's approach to ending the spread of communism was a strategy known as containment based on the domino theory. This essentially stated that once a state fell to communism all states around it would also fall to communism. The US could not sit back and watch all of Latin America fall to communism because that would mean the US would fall to communism! The communist threat was no longer just overseas in Europe and the USSR it was right in their backyard and even in their home as well. The 1950s saw the development of the Second Red Scare after the USSR rose to prominence after the Second World War. The US will not sit back and watch Guatemala be the first domino to fall in Latin America to communism. However, The USSR will seek to defend the ideas and principles of Marx, while the Guatemalans seek a functional democracy which has just been developed for the first time since its independence from Spain. ²

2

1. Britannica, Hingley, Francis "Joseph Stalin", Dec 31 2023
2. Britannica, "Domino Theory" Jan 28 2020
3. Journal of Cold War Studies; Getchell, Michelle "Revisiting the 1954 Coup in Guatemala: The Soviet Union, the United Nations, and "Hemispheric Solidarity"
4. History.com; "Che Guevara" April 2023

The Rise of Juan Jose Arevalo, Jacobo Arbenz and Guatemalan Socialism

Guatemalan socialism was kick-started by committee predecessor, Juan Jose Arevalo, who led the revolt over US-trained and supported classical liberal dictators. Arevalo was a self-proclaimed "Spiritual Socialist" meaning that he took the core values of Marx and applied them in a way that modeled a social democracy taking into account his emphasis on religion. He placed a strong ideological emphasis on the psychological determinants needed to free a group of people from such an authoritarian regime. He even compared his ideology to the likeness of US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. His policies revolved around a redistribution of wealth and the creation of functional democracy, both of which were vastly unpopular with the US leading to an ousting of Ubico through guerrilla warfare. Now that Ubico was gone, the Guatemalan state had a lot of rebuilding to do which would be started by Arevalo and further developed by Arbenz in his short-lived rule as he focused on the creation of a minimum wage, expanded suffrage rights, and increased educational capacity before deciding to retire to endorse Arbenz. ³

Arbenz Takes Power!!

Jacobo Arbenz, the handpicked successor to Arevalo, was the real leader of progress toward a functional Guatemalan state after winning 65% of the vote in one of the first free and fair elections in the country's history. His biggest and most well-known policy, Decree 900 was an attempt at a redistribution of wealth through land distribution reform. The plan essentially distributed land to private actors based on who would increase the production of domestic Guatemalan goods. This may seem very radical however, he planned to reimburse companies such as UFCO with government tax bonds because UFCO had severely undervalued the fact that they owned over half of Guatemala to avoid taxes thus meaning they received very little in reimbursements. Arbenz also heavily focused on getting women

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into economic activity, a project that was headed by the AFG, and held conferences to lower rates of gender inequality in the economy. This also led to the creation of the PGT (Guatemalan Workers Party) headed by Arbenz. At this point, the US became involved in a counter-revolution to the Arbenz regime. ⁴

Colonel Weapons and Operation PBSUCCESS

The US-led counter-revolution was not as overt as declaring war on Arbenz for being communist, as communism has not yet proved to be an ideology that would constitute such a reaction from the international community. That did not stop the US government from funneling 2.7 million dollars in the supposed-Guatemalan counter-revolution which was led by Colonel Armas (Weapons) who was a US-trained military leader. However, this is where things begin to get a little fishy, both Allen and John Dulles sat on the Board of Directors of the United Fruit Company while John Dulles was The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, meaning that any loss for UFCO was a loss for the CIA and the Dulles Brothers. The US used the 2.7 million dollars they funneled into the counter-revolution to assassinate those who threatened this order, as well as launched mass disinformation campaigns about the PGT and Arbenz painting them as radical and dangerous communists. This project would be known as Operation PBSUCCESS, and this is the point at which committee debate will begin.⁵

4

1. The New York Times, Golden, Tim “Juan Jose Arevalo Is Dead at 86; Guatemala President in Late 40’s”
2. Wikipedia, “Juan Jose Arevalo”
3. Cullather, Nick “Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of it’s operations in Guatemala 1944-1945”
4. Vanden, Henry, Gary, Prevost “Politics of Latin America: The Power Game”
1. ⁵Cullather, Nick “Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of it’s operations in Guatemala 1944-1945”
2. Doyle, Kate and Kornbluh, Peter The George Washington University; “CIA and Assassinations: The Guatemala 1954 Documents”

Questions to Consider

How will your character consider their own vested economic and financial ties to the region when considering solutions such as a treaty, increase in funding, etc?

How does the Catholic Church play into the conflict, and what is the role of the ideology of the Liberation Doctrine in the revolution?

Should Multinational Corporations (MNCs) such as UFCO stay, should they be more regulated, or should they be barred from Guatemala completely?

What is US/USSR "Soft-Power" and how does this play into diplomatic relations in the region?

How will these solutions affect the ongoing Cold War and the broader implications for US relations with Communist Countries?

Is the Monroe Doctrine justified in its use to allow for the operation of American-based MNCs in Latin America?

How can the US's economic interests in the natural resources of Guatemala be balanced with creating a functional government for the Guatemalan people?

Suggested sources to begin your research

(any sources cited in footnotes or bibliography are also a great jumping-off point :))

(Insert any links in footnotes plus some jstor articles on PBSsuccess, most of the citations are class textbooks that are physical books that they will not read nor purchase)

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ladino>

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/border-patrol-guatemala-dictatorship/>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Guatemala>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jacobo-Arbenz>

[liberation-theology](#)

https://www2.umbc.edu/che/tahlessons/pdf/historylabs/Guatemalan_Coup_student:RS01.pdf

<https://www.history.com/topics/latin-america/che-guevara>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26926192?seq=27>

<https://blog.uvm.edu/sosten-centralamerica/2019/05/10/mano-dura-firm-hand-policies-in-central-america/>

Character List

Guatemalans



1. **Maria Vilanova:**

Maria Vilanova is President Arbenz's wife, born to a wealthy El Salvadoran Family. She is a particularly passionate communist and her family background has yielded her a large fortune and some potentially powerful connections, as well as some potential influence over the president himself.

2. **Jose Manuel Fortuny:**

Jose is the leader of the Party of Guatemalan Workers and a close friend and advisor of President Arbenz. Jose is an active right-wing communist and founded the Communist Party of Guatemala which later merged with another communist faction led by Victor Manuel Gutierrez. Jose is loyal to President Arbenz but his dedication to his political party may sometimes get in the way of that loyalty.

3. **Francisco Arana:**

Francisco Arana is the acting Minister of Defense of Guatemala. As a former member of the Presidential Honor Guard, Arana is well-equipped to handle military affairs and has a fair understanding of political knowledge. While Arana is a loyal Guatemalan it

is unclear if his loyalties lie with the presidency or not. (Arana is deceased at the time of this committee but for the purposes of this topic he will be alive)

4. Juan Jose Arevalo:

Juan Arevalo is the former president of Guatemala and led the revolution of 1944 to oust Jorge Ubico. He is a valuable figure in Guatemalan politics as was responsible for advancements in education and workers' rights. Arevalo is known for his strong commitment to social justice, inclusivity, and social justice.

5. Ricardo Rosales:

Ricardo Rosales is a student leader for several different student organizations at the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. He is quite interested in the Guatemalan Labour Party and his passion is infectious. Rosales has a great deal of respect amongst his peers and they view him as a voice of their wishes.

6. Charles Enrique Diaz de Leon:

Charles Enrique Diaz de Leon is the Chief of the Guatemalan Armed Forces and a fierce supporter and friend of President Arbenz. Diaz has control over the armed forces of Guatemala and has vowed to defend Arbenz with his life. Diaz is a very valuable member of Arbenz's cabinet.

7. Victor Manuel Gutierrez:

Victor Manuel Gutierrez is one of the most influential labor leaders in the past decade. Gutierrez is a devout Catholic and a member of the Communist Party of Guatemala. As the head of the Confederación General de Trabajadores de Guatemala, Gutierrez has a great deal of oversight when it comes to the trade routes and imports and exports of Guatemala. Gutierrez is calm and rational and his involvement in a variety of fields makes him an important voice in all matters.

8. Augusto Charnaud Macdonald:

Augusto Charnaud Macdonald is the Secretary General of the Party of the Guatemalan Revolution (PRG). He represents the values of his party to the letter and supports President Arbenz and his policies. Macdonald is also the minister of finance in Arbenz's cabinet and takes his role quite seriously.

9. Alfonso Martinez:

Alfonso Martinez is the Chief of the National Agrarian Department and is responsible for distributing the land allocations to the lower class following Decree 900 passed by Arbenz. Martinez is responsible and level-headed and believes that he can make life better for the people.

10.Castillo Armas:

Castillo Armas is a member of the National Liberation Party and opposes the current President. His extensive military background and knowledge come with considerable connections. He was exiled to Honduras following the failed coup of President Arevalo but unknown circumstances have caused him to return. Armas is a formidable political adversary whose presence in Guatemala should not be taken lightly.

11.Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes:

Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes was the conservative opposition to Arbenz in the past election, he has a lot of political influence in Guatemala, and his background as a general provides him with knowledge surrounding the functions of Guatemala's military. He is the former governor of the province of San Marcos and is often paranoid, moody, and unpredictable.

Americans



12.John Foster Dulles:

John Foster Dulles is the current Secretary of State in the United States. He has an expansive political background ranging from a political advisor to a UN delegate. Outside of politics, Dulles is also a member of the board of directors of the United Fruit Company, a company heavily impacted by the new laws of Arbenz. As a member of the board, a politician, and a proud anti-communist Mr. Dulles has a substantial role to play.

13. John E Peurifoy:

John Peurifoy is the United States ambassador to Guatemala at this current time. As a militant anti-communist and skilled negotiator Peurifoy has taken charge of negotiations between the various parties at play. John Peurifoy is a clever man and his connections throughout departments are expansive.

14. Dwight D Eisenhower:

Dwight D Eisenhower is the current president of the United States. He has expansive military knowledge being a five-star general in WWII. Eisenhower has a very strong relationship with the press and is aware of their value. Being the President of the United States comes with a lot of connections but even more scrutiny.

Soviets

**15. Nikita Khrushchev:**

Nikita Khrushchev is the Head of State of the USSR and a close economic ally with Guatemala and many Latin American countries leading to a sizeable political influence on Latin America. Khrushchev is the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and his involvement in this committee is largely due to the rumors of the rise of communism in Latin America. Given his vast array of political knowledge and connections, his presence may have a considerable impact on the flow of the committee.

16. Nikolai Bulganin:

Nikolai Bulganin is the Minister of Defense of the USSR and a proud member of the centralist communist party of the Soviet Union. Bulganin was appointed to this position following his service in WWII. He is mild-tempered and often dismissive of matters which he does not deem to be of great importance. However, this is not to be dismissed as a lack of intellect. Bulganin commands great respect from his colleagues and his reputation as a warrior and a banker are not easily forgotten.

17. Vasily Garbuzov:

Vasily Garbuzov is the Minister of Finance of the USSR. He is responsible for leading the economic alliance with Guatemala to purchase their primary products to support their economy. He has oversight over many Soviet financials and is skilled at managing those assets. Garbuzov is a member of the Socialist party of Soviet Ukraine and his connections throughout Soviet Ukraine may prove beneficial to his duties.

Caribbean Legion members



18. Fidel Castro:

Fidel Castro is a prominent communist student activist and law student (Castro has yet to take power in the timeline of this committee). He is a natural leader and has gained great support from students across Cuba, Guatemala, and Columbia. Castro is known to be a man of action and respect and this has made his name welcome in many rebellious minds.

19. Che Gueverra:

Che Gueverra is a traveling political activist originally from Argentina who joined the Guatemalan fight for independence in the 1940s. A dedicated Marxist, Guevara is well-connected throughout Latin America given his background in activism and the places he has been. Guevara is a fierce voice for the people and his political background and network provide him with many points of interest.

References

Cia documents

https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000134974.pdf

GWU NSA

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB4/>

Office of the Historian: CIA involvement in Arbenz

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d287>

Digital History: (looks at 1954)

https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=1119

Arbenz Information Report (Arbenz and Martinez)

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d27#:~:text=Arbenz%27%20personal%20idol%20is%20FDR,in%20other%20Latin%20American%20countries.>