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SUCCESS CANNOT BE ADVERTISED: COLD WAR COUP AUTHORIZED AND INFLUENCED

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SUCCESS CANNOT BE ADVERTISED:

COLD WAR COUPS AUTHORIZED AND INFLUENCED

BY PRESIDENT EISENHOWER

A Master Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

American Public University

by

Lukas J. Griffith

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of

Master of Arts

April 2017

American Public University

Charles Town, WV
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my closest family members. To my mother, Donna, for her tireless proofreading. To my father, Roger, for his unwavering support. To my sister, Alison, for her unparalleled encouragement. To my brother-in-law, Baron, for his reliable counsel. And to my adopted cat, Janine, for her subtle patience.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

SUCCESS CANNOT BE ADVERTISED:

COLD WAR COUPS AUTHORIZED AND INFLUENCED

BY PRESIDENT EISENHOWER

by

Lukas J. Griffith

American Public University System

Charles Town, West Virginia

Dr. Jon Mikolashek, Thesis Professor

This thesis will focus on the long-term consequences manifested by covert actions authorized by the Central Intelligence Agency and President Dwight D. Eisenhower, with a specific emphasis on coups d'état engineered by the American intelligence machine in various foreign nations between 1953 and 1973. With the aid of intelligence cables, White House memoranda, declassified documents, interviews, and decades of investigative journalism, the following will address how coups instigated by the Eisenhower administration established precedent for future presidents and intelligence leaders to utilize the act of government-toppling to complement Cold War policy. This specific covert action was brought to the forefront of Cold War methodology as a means of forging swift blows against “communist-friendly” governments. While not every coup pursued by the U.S. intelligence establishment was successful, those that achieved short-term success for American interests ultimately sparked negative long-term consequences.
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I

INTRODUCTION

Through the capabilities of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), President Dwight D. Eisenhower channeled the authority of the executive branch and the dubious language of national security legislation to implement covert actions resulting in coups that ultimately garnered negative long-term consequences and established a dangerous example for future presidents and intelligence professionals. Following its establishment under the National Security Act of 1947, the CIA developed into a customary conduit for international secret missions in less than a decade. Commonly referred to as covert actions, these classified missions were theoretically devised to antagonize the growth of communism around the globe and aid the success of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. ¹ Beginning in the 1950s, the American intelligence machine played an increasingly prominent role under the stealthily proactive presidency of former General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who assumed office in 1953. Eisenhower’s past experience with the World War II-era intelligence mechanism known as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), coupled with the ominous and potentially unpredictable Cold War, permitted the President to grant a sharp emphasis on peace-time intelligence operations. The National Security Act lacked specificity with regard to clandestine missions overseas, but Eisenhower took advantage of the law’s vaguely worded passage that permitted the CIA to conduct “other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security” by authorizing the apparatus to instigate foreign coups d'état in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954), and planning further operations in the same vein for Indonesia and Cuba. ²

² Ibid.
With the President’s blessing, the CIA’s strength and methodologies expanded, allowing the entity the capability of instigating foreign coups d'état. This specific methodology with respect to waging the Cold War had not been authorized by any previous president. Because of this revised and cavalier approach to suppressing communism, and the demonstration that it could be successful with the agency’s covert actions that manifested successful coups, Eisenhower galvanized executive use of the CIA and thus set a dangerous precedent that ultimately stirred severe consequences throughout the twentieth century.

In spite of Allen Dulles’ supremely engaged and proactive reign as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), it was President Eisenhower who approved the covert actions that led to two major coups within the first two years of his presidency. After being told an overthrow of a leftist regime in Guatemala had “zero” chance of success unless “the CIA had more planes and bombs,” the President ordered the agency in the eleventh hour to “go ahead and get the planes.”

The initial success that followed accumulated several casualties and was no easy feat; however, the agency had conclusively demonstrated its ability to stage coups with the proper planning and the green light from the White House.

Eisenhower was in the dubious position of being the first president to use the CIA for the purpose of instigating foreign coups, but subsequently provided this option to future presidents who replicated the design in Cuba (1961), the Dominican Republic (1961 and 1964), South Vietnam (1963), Brazil (1964), and Chile (1973). Duplicating the practice of the Eisenhower Cold War legacy sparked negative long-term repercussions, such as depletion of international democracies, the spawn of “right-wing death squads” in Guatemala, the establishment of a repressive Shah in Iran, enduring tensions in Central America, two decades of military

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dictatorship in Brazil, and the rise of a violent regime in Chile. What became a staple in the fight against communism also ended up replacing democratically elected governments with military juntas (as in Guatemala, South Vietnam, Brazil, and Chile) or weak leaders who proceeded to oversee destabilization in their countries (as in the Dominican Republic). Alternately, the attempted coups that failed, as in Indonesia and Cuba, only strengthened the leadership of those countries, which proved worrisome to U.S. interests and pushed the globe closer to the brink of nuclear war. As the White House counsel reminded National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger in the midst of engineering a coup in Chile, just as Eisenhower had done two decades prior in Iran, “…one who sets in motion a coup attempt can be assessed with the responsibility for the natural and probable consequences of that action.”

The thesis will address questions regarding the specific involvement President Eisenhower invested in the planning process and authorization of the early coups, and what role he played in condoning and counseling future presidents such as Kennedy and Johnson to implement similar methods during their terms as commander-in-chief. The subject of Eisenhower’s example for President Nixon will also be explored, as Nixon was highly involved in the intelligence facet of the Eisenhower administration while Vice President. The purpose of the thesis will be to chronicle an aspect of the Eisenhower Cold War legacy that is not commonly revisited, and in doing so, argue that the thirty-fourth President should be held accountable for the appalling long-term consequences that wreaked havoc in specific regions around the world as a result of his penchant for authorizing coups. By overthrowing foreign leaders, Eisenhower jeopardized U.S. relations with international governments, negated the reputation of American

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diplomacy, and endangered the long-term status of American interests. Predominantly revered as the hero of D-Day and the President who oversaw America’s sentimental 1950s era, Eisenhower also condoned, in the words of historian Michael Howard, “activities of a kind unjustifiable by any criteria other than the most brutal kind of raison d’état, and by the argument that [our] enemies were doing the same.”\(^6\) This policy set the standard for one of the most dangerous and pivotal eras of American history.

II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The historiography with respect to CIA-related subjects has grown more prominent over recent decades, mostly due to the release of information by former agents, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and the simple elapse of time itself which has been instrumental in drawing conclusions regarding the long-term effects of past agency covert actions. Thanks to the CIA’s tradition of classifying documents, information kept top secret by the federal government posed an obvious constraint for historians attempting to weigh all of the details regarding covert operations. As former Director of Central Intelligence Leon Panetta plainly conveyed, “When historical information is no longer sensitive, we take seriously our responsibility to share it with the American people.”

Early intelligence and national security historians were prone to rely on investigative journalism and sources outside of the agency itself. A 2013 study of CIA historiography titled *Intelligence Studies in Britain and the US: Historiography Since 1945* affirms that the “‘vernacular’ history of the CIA is often thought to begin in early 1960.” The two earliest works of prevalence about the CIA include Andrew Tully’s 1962 book *CIA: The Inside Story*, and 1964’s *The Invisible Government* by David Wise and Thomas B. Ross. Tully’s work was published after major coups in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954). In stark contrast to some of the more modern criticisms of CIA activity, Tully concludes that it was “hard to find fault in the

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9 Ibid., 19.
CIA’s performance in Guatemala” and minimizes his criticism regarding the coup in Iran.\textsuperscript{12} The Invisible Government argues that the CIA and its authority posed dangers to American democracy.

After the initial wave of early CIA histories and the passing of the Eisenhower era, a number of relevant memoirs and biographies surfaced. While obviously biased, given the perspective of the author, some memoirs prove greatly insightful as they include direct quotes from transcripts and meetings involving key members of the White House and intelligence establishment. Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Mandate for Change,\textsuperscript{13} first published in 1963, fails to dwell on the coups he authorized in Iran, Guatemala, and Indonesia, as this information was still classified. The former President only subtly reflects on his opinion that Iran benefited from the regime change in 1953. Kermit Roosevelt, the CIA mastermind behind the Iranian coup, published his account of the operation, titled Countercoup,\textsuperscript{14} in 1979. While predominantly dramatic and self-aggrandizing, the literature still provides valuable firsthand accounts of Roosevelt’s debriefing at the White House following the operation. RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon,\textsuperscript{15} released in 1978, consist of typical bias, but sheds light on Nixon’s relationship with Eisenhower and Allen Dulles, as well as a rarely-mentioned phone call between President Kennedy and Nixon that occurred in the midst of the failed coup at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, wherein, the former Vice President encouraged the sitting President to enlist aggression and continue to pursue the purge of Castro. Another profound memoir, A Look Over My Shoulder,\textsuperscript{16} was published in 2003 by Richard Helms, who endured a long career with the CIA before

\textsuperscript{12} Tully, CIA, 66.
\textsuperscript{13} Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963).
becoming its director during the Johnson administration. Unapologetically candid, Helms cites a plethora of primary sources taken from cables, meeting notes, and similar documents to review every major CIA-involved event during his tenure.

More recent publications, with the help of declassified sources and elaborate oral histories, have generally presented fuller accounts of the covert action-assisted coups, or bluntly condemned them. Journalist Tim Weiner’s *Legacy of Ashes*,¹⁷ winner of the National Book Award, presents a significantly complete and especially scathing view of the CIA’s history covering everything from the World War II era that prefaced the CIA, to the aftermath of 9/11 and its intelligence failures. Of considerable significance is Weiner’s summation of CIA covert actions and the extreme nature of supporting foreign coups, wherein the author charges, “The conspiracies to commit murder had started in the White House under Eisenhower, the most revered Republican president of the twentieth century.”¹⁸ In his 1986 work *Presidents’ Secret Wars*,¹⁹ historian Dr. John Prados is not as combative with condemning the agency in comparison to Weiner, but he warns that the agency-backed coups are generally detrimental to America’s national interest. He also focuses upon the legacy of the Eisenhower administration, claiming the coups in Iran and Guatemala had “short-term effects” that exacerbated “virulent anti-Americanism” in the former, while U.S. intervention in the latter “turned the country away from democracy, the supposed aim of the covert action.”²⁰ Additionally, historian David F.

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¹⁸ Ibid., 337.
²⁰ Ibid., 466.
Schmitz credits Eisenhower with cultivating “a new approach: covert action through the Central Intelligence Agency,” as opposed to traditional diplomacy in Latin America.  

Biographer/historian Stephen Ambrose, who penned multiple works on the thirty-fourth President, conveys that the coups in Guatemala and Iran were ordered out of interest for the greater good. Author and Harvard alum Evan Thomas, on the other hand, claims the CIA’s primary architects of the covert action in Guatemala “would regret the outcome” of the coup years later, blaming “the White House and the State Department.” Thomas’ notion is mainly supported by a number of interviews and memoirs by CIA cold warriors, namely Ray S. Cline, who penned *Secrets, Spies and Scholars* in 1976. Cline’s book, not lacking in tones of regret and bitterness, details his participation in major clandestine missions. Another significant work titled *The Hidden Hand Presidency*, originally published in 1982 by Princeton’s Fred I. Greenstein, concisely analyzes Eisenhower’s leadership style. Likely due to its release date and primary focus, the word “coup” is mentioned once, and Eisenhower’s role as an influential intelligence leader during the CIA’s heyday is not explored. There is simple mention that “Communist leaning’ governments in Iran and Guatemala had been eliminated.”

Finally, the other major category of literature with respect to source material involving Eisenhower and the CIA coups, is a series of official histories delegated for comprisal by the agency itself. Published by the Center for the Study of Intelligence in 1994, Nick Cullather organized and wrote a detailed history of the U.S. involvement with Guatemala from 1952-1954,

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25 Ibid., 213.
solely drawing from CIA documents. A similar treatment was given to the CIA official history of
the Bay of Pigs in 1979. Furthermore, author Peter Kornbluh, predominantly associated with the
National Security Archive, has actively pushed for the declassification of CIA documents via the
FOIA. This resulted in a compilation of documents from the Bay of Pigs invasion, which
Kornbluh edited in 1998, and a robust account of CIA intervention in Chile titled The Pinochet
File,26 which included two decades of declassified information.

In sum, a number of scholars and historians have explored the historical weight of the
aforementioned Cold War coups. Nonetheless, their studies have either lacked the proper
analysis considering the extended consequences of the first coups instigated by the Eisenhower
administration, or they have failed to draw profound parallels between the coups enacted
between 1953 and 1973. For example, a 1973 teleconference between President Nixon (who
served as Eisenhower’s Vice President for eight years) and Kissinger reflects how Eisenhower’s
covert action legacy was on their minds. Kissinger asserts, “…in the Eisenhower period we
would be heros [sic]” for dethroning Chile’s President Allende.27 Nonetheless, accounts of the
Chilean intervention generally fall short of blaming Eisenhower for setting the example that
inspired and/or allowed Nixon to authorize the implicated coup.

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III
EISENHOWER AND THE FIRST USE OF CLANDESTINE COUPS

“Under the cloud of threatening war,” declared President Dwight Eisenhower during his third month in office, “it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”28 The dire assertion characterized his disdain for the times, believing the Cold War to be “not a way of life at all.”29 He entered office on January 20, 1953 as only the second commander-in-chief to serve during the conflict that pitted the free Western world against the communist Soviet Union. Naturally, Eisenhower as President recognized a responsibility to continue the general framework of the American foreign policy. He duly subscribed to the Cold War containment protocol promoted by the influential foreign policy expert George F. Kennan, who determined that “harsh governmental measures of repression may be the only answer,” and that “such regimes and such methods may be preferable alternatives, to further communist successes.”30

On July 26, 1947, President Harry S. Truman signed the National Security Act, establishing the National Security Council (NSC) and a “Central Intelligence Agency with a Director of Central Intelligence” to collect information, advise the NSC, and recommend any governmental activities as a result of the intelligence collected.31 Maintaining a peacetime network designed to manufacture sabotage and subversion was a first in American history. Two years later, Congress additionally granted the CIA a license to spend government funds without the traditional “provisions of law and regulations,” and wholly excused the agency from

29 Ibid.
disclosing information about “personnel employed by the Agency.”\textsuperscript{32} Simply stated, federal law granted the CIA open-ended funding and an exemption from accountability. The year before Eisenhower’s inauguration, for example, one central European country alone hosted forty different CIA covert action projects. In a regretful letter to a confidant years later, Truman mused, “It was not intended as a ‘Cloak & Dagger Outfit!’ It was intended merely as a center for keeping the President informed on what was going on in the world.”\textsuperscript{33} The seeds for a modern American intelligence machine were planted, but it was Eisenhower who lifted the agency’s capacity to a new level. With swift reforms, the first Republican President in twenty years would have the CIA toppling foreign governments overnight.

A major staple of the Eisenhower administration was a new approach to national security, aptly called the “New Look,” which aimed to fight a cold war by using the threat of nuclear weapons and covert action, as opposed to the exorbitant expenses of traditional warfare. The President believed the U.S. faced a two-pronged threat comprised of military and economic challenges. He pledged, “We must hold our position of strength without bankrupting ourselves.”\textsuperscript{34} Therefore, Eisenhower strategized that “because the dual threat was a continuing one, domestic and military expenditures would have to be properly balanced for an extended period.”\textsuperscript{35} The primary method by which to maintain said balance was utilizing covert action, with a particular emphasis on instigating coups to exterminate the rule of undesirable foreign leaders. Theoretically, the coups would prove less expensive and less controversial than traditional full-scale war. Eisenhower, who had remained “up to date…on the state of the art in

\textsuperscript{32} Wise and Ross, \textit{The Invisible Government}, 96-97.
\textsuperscript{33} Harry S. Truman, letter to David M. Noyes, December 1, 1963, David M. Noyes papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
\textsuperscript{34} Greenstein, \textit{Hidden-Hand Presidency}, 48.
electronic intelligence gathering, air reconnaissance, cameras, and other devices used in scientific spying” right up until winning the presidency, complemented the CIA and its purpose.36 In addition, the agency’s willingness to execute complex, clandestine missions to hinder communism precisely aligned with the New Look policy.

Although he referred to espionage as “a distasteful but vital necessity,” Eisenhower fully embraced the agency’s potential and its power at his disposal as President.37 Speaking eloquently and honestly during a ceremony at CIA headquarters in 1959, Eisenhower stated, “In peacetime the necessary acts…and their correct interpretation are essential to the development of policy to further our long-term national security and best interests.”38 Under the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), America’s wartime intelligence entity established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, then-General Eisenhower observed America’s grand venture into espionage and intelligence gathering. While advocating a postwar intelligence entity in late 1944, OSS director William “Wild Bill” Donovan affirmed, “In a global and totalitarian war, intelligence must be global and totalitarian.”39 Donovan’s advocacy and influence in creating what would become the CIA proved seminal for Eisenhower, who eventually used the agency to provoke violent covert actions around the globe. His choice for a Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), Allen W. Dulles, had also served as an OSS officer in Germany and station chief in Switzerland. Eisenhower and Dulles embodied the principle that “American participation in World War II opened many eyes to the potential uses of special operations…”40

37 Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, xiii.
39 William Donovan, letter to Joint Psychological Warfare Committee, October 24, 1942, National Archives and Records Administration.
40 Prados, Presidents’ Secret Wars, 15.
Dulles had some very definite ideas on how he would run the agency, including an increase of its power and capabilities. “I want to be absolutely sure you understand how important covert operations are right now,” Dulles confided to agency official Richard Helms, a future DCI. “The White House and this administration have an intense interest in every aspect of covert action.” Together, Eisenhower and Dulles brought unique firsthand experience with intelligence to the presidency. The promise of the new administration inspired The New York Times to announce, “The day of sleep-walking is over. It passed with the exodus of Truman…and the policy of vigilance replacing Pollyanna diplomacy is evident.” With an ambitious and unhesitant DCI at his disposal, Eisenhower had the option of steering the CIA down any policy avenue of his choosing. Instead of idling with traditional espionage, he chose to implement the practice of organizing foreign coups.

**Iran**

Ultimately, the Eisenhower administration launched one hundred seventy major covert actions within forty-eight nations over the span of eight years. The President occasionally authorized agency-related projects by using Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, the older brother of Allen, as an intermediary who would then convey Eisenhower’s wishes to the DCI. In other instances, Eisenhower collaborated directly with Allen Dulles. Regardless, the President called the shots, and the newly-revised intelligence machine under Eisenhower worked quickly. On the night of August 14, 1953, only six months after Eisenhower’s inauguration, the CIA began instigating its first coup in the Republic of Iran on behalf of containment and U.S. strategic interests.

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41 Helms and Hood, *A Look Over My Shoulder*, 104.
Coincidentally, it was the grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt who implemented the first coup authorized by Eisenhower, a fellow Republican President. The privileged Harvard graduate Kermit “Kim” Roosevelt, Jr. worked as a station chief in Cairo for the OSS during World War II before becoming the Near East Operations Chief for the CIA. Beginning in November 1952, Roosevelt collaborated with British intelligence to preserve the stability of Iran’s Anglo-Iranian Oil Company which proved essential to the Royal Navy and other Western interests. The petrol company enjoyed the planet’s largest oil reserves and earned revenues ten times as large as what it actually paid to Iran.44 Iranian nationalists grew increasingly frustrated by Britain’s refusal to split the profits fifty-fifty, particularly because their oil laborers lived in significant poverty. The turning point arrived when the Iranian government and its popular prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, voted to nationalize the country’s oil production on May 2, 1951. London immediately sought to overthrow Mossadegh; despite the fact he governed a constitutional monarchy as opposed to a communist dictatorship.

The international ordeal inevitably attracted Washington’s attention. As Soviet Russia’s southern neighbor, Iran’s geographic location maintained an interest for U.S. foreign policy. An NSC memo from late 1952 warned, “The loss of Iran by default or by Soviet intervention would be a major threat to the security of the entire Middle East, including Pakistan and India.”45 The CIA hoped to collaborate with British Intelligence on devising a remedy for the situation, and Roosevelt offered his expertise. Both intelligence agencies began discussing a joint plan to “unseat Mossadegh” in late 1952.46 The scheme became known as Project AJAX, and revolved around persuading the Iranian military to oust Mossadegh and transition Shah Mohammed Reza

44 Prados, Presidents’ Secret Wars, 92.
46 Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 560.
Pahlavi into power. Placing the Shah into authority was essential to elude chaos, unrest, and anarchy following Mossadegh’s exit. Although President Truman had signed the National Security Act, he remained cautious and did not host the same experience with intelligence as Eisenhower. Truman totally rejected intervention in Iran, and AJAX was paused until a new President came to power. The decision to continue AJAX was a profound moment in presidential history, as Eisenhower was willing to go where no White House policy had reached before. Where Truman had hesitated and blinked, Eisenhower dispensed a steady and encouraging hand to the CIA.

To Eisenhower’s credit, he did not quickly endorse the coup in a hasty manner. Rather, his years of experience and judgment, combined with the fact that he was still adjusting to the White House, made for a contemplative approach to the issue. In a speech before the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 16, 1953, the President sounded a far cry from one who would launch coups against democratic societies. This speaks to Eisenhower’s clandestine skills during the Cold War. His public persona did not mirror the man’s private planning, which pursued a clandestine action to depose a foreign leader in a region halfway across the globe. Publicly, Eisenhower affirmed that “any nation’s right to form a government and an economic system of its own choosing is inalienable,” while further declaring “any nation’s attempt to dictate to other nations their form of government is indefensible.” Despite the public message, Eisenhower hypocritically proceeded to aid in the dictating of empowerment to world leaders and subsequently authorized the coup against Mossadegh four months after making the address.

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By May 1953, Mossadegh was essentially begging the President for extended financial aid. Eisenhower initially contemplated dispersing a $100 million stimulus loan to Iran as a hopeful boost for its waning economy, but backtracked when Mossadegh increasingly moved to the political left.48 “I refused to pour more American money into a country in turmoil in order to bail Mossadegh out of trouble rooted in his refusal to work out an agreement with the British,” Eisenhower reflected in his memoir.49 On June 29, he informed Mossadegh “it would be unfair to the American taxpayers for the United States government to extend any considerable amount of economic aid to Iran so long as Iran could have access to funds derived from the sale of its oil and oil products if a reasonable settlement were reached.”50 After Eisenhower’s final denial, Mossadegh dipped into his country’s national insurance company and pension funds as a last resort to revive his economy. The action antagonized his national popularity, prompting Mossadegh to rig upcoming elections.

Finally, although not a communist but a “populist nationalist” by definition, the prime minister turned to the Soviets for financial aid on August 8.51 This was the last straw for Eisenhower, who believed election manipulation and outreach to the Soviets solidly confirmed Mossadegh’s communist credentials. To make matters worse, the communist party of Iran, known as the Tudeh, launched an outspoken demonstration in Iran that Mossadegh failed to crush. From Eisenhower’s perspective, the prime minister was essentially soft on communism. State Department official Andrew I. Killgore admitted in a 1988 interview that “Mossadegh, in

48 Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 84.
50 Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, 162.
51 Prados, Presidents’ Secret Wars, 96.
the press, was referred to at the time as a dangerous leftist, maybe allied with the Communists…. Actually, of course, he was a conservative landlord. He was a nationalist.”

Completely reversing the attitude of Truman, Eisenhower explicitly ordered the green light for AJAX. Some members of the administration held doubts with respect to the U.S. aiding the overthrow of a foreign leader. Ambassador Loy Henderson uttered to Secretary Dulles, “I don’t like this kind of business at all. You know that. But we are confronted by a desperate, a dangerous situation and a madman who would ally himself with the Russians. We have no choice but to proceed with this undertaking. May God grant us success.” The CIA made a strong case that eclipsed the voices of dissent. Dulles warned the NSC that Moscow’s interception of Middle East oil would “seriously deplete our reserves for war and lead to gasoline rationing in the United States.” Needing little encouragement to validate his decision, Eisenhower did not distance himself from AJAX behind the scenes.

Roosevelt and his agents were given guns, cash, and generous authority to make AJAX successful. They distributed pro-Shah pamphlets throughout the country, paid religious figures to castigate Mossadegh, targeted the Tudeh party, and bribed Iranian citizens to form a pro-Shah mob and demonstrate through the streets. Various politicians and Mossadegh’s manservant were on the CIA payroll as well. $50,000 was paid to CIA contacts in Iran with the instruction to stage a “pro-communist” riot that essentially framed the Tudehs and convinced the populace that the communist party was wreaking havoc around the capital. On August 19, the CIA prepared to set the final step into motion, assembling a mob at dawn in Tehran that started, in the words of the

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53 Roosevelt, Countercoup, 18.

54 Allen Dulles, Briefing notes for NSC meeting, March 4, 1953, National Archives and Records Administration.
American Ambassador William Rountree, “an almost spontaneous revolution.”\textsuperscript{55} The angry mob grew, chanting pro-shah slogans and condemning Mossadegh. They seized members of the prime minister’s cabinet and burned newspaper outlets. One hundred people perished in the chaos, with three hundred wounded. Two hundred more died when the CIA encouraged the Imperial Guard to seize the prime minister’s palace.\textsuperscript{56} Mossadegh was later sentenced to three years of solitary confinement on treason charges and spent the remainder of his life on house arrest. The Shah bragged, “Ninety-nine percent of the population is for me. I knew it all of the time.”\textsuperscript{57} His regime lasted for the next twenty-six years.

Publicly, Eisenhower remained considerably vague about his personal connection to Mossadegh’s demise. CIA records reflect the President privately awarded Kim Roosevelt the esteemed (and top secret) National Security Medal in 1955.\textsuperscript{58} The agency paid over one million dollars to the pro-Shah military, spent several thousand dollars in bribes, and ran a propaganda campaign of at least $150,000.\textsuperscript{59} The overall cost is estimated between ten and twenty million dollars.\textsuperscript{60} Still, it was a modest price with a relatively low death toll considering the ultimate goal of the mission. Ambassador Rountree recalled, “The CIA did remarkably well in creating a situation in which, in the proper circumstances and atmosphere, a change could be effected.”\textsuperscript{61} Killgore said the coup “was regarded as CIA’s greatest single triumph” and “a great American national victory” that “changed the whole course of a country…”\textsuperscript{62} The New Look approach to

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{55} Weiner, \textit{Legacy of Ashes}, 90.
\bibitem{56} Ibid., 91.
\bibitem{57} Roosevelt, \textit{Countercoup}, 107.
\bibitem{59} Weiner, \textit{Legacy of Ashes}, 86, 89, 91.
\bibitem{60} Prados, \textit{Presidents’ Secret Wars}, 97.
\bibitem{61} Weiner, \textit{Legacy of Ashes}, 91.
\bibitem{62} Killgore, interview, 42.
\end{thebibliography}
foreign policy and containment, in collaboration with a gung-ho intelligence network, proved applicable for Eisenhower.

Not all agency men championed the initial success in Iran. CIA strongman Ray S. Cline held reservations about the “impression of CIA’s power” the coup had created. “It did not prove that CIA could topple governments and place rulers in power; it was a unique case of supplying just the right amount of marginal assistance in the right way at the right time.”63 The ultimate feedback derived from Kim Roosevelt, who had endured the most experience throughout the multi-year process of AJAX. He had encountered profound obstacles while trying to prop up the anti-Mossadegh army, and persuade the Shah to pledge support for a coup. At a White House debriefing, Roosevelt concluded, “If we, the CIA, are ever going to try something like this again, we must be absolutely sure that the people and army want what we want.”64 Secretary Dulles frowned upon the advice, while Eisenhower and the CIA simply ignored it. The conclusion of AJAX in 1953 created the perfect illusion that the President could authorize a foreign coup with a fair dose of ease. With no consideration regarding how repressive the Shah’s rule would be, and the Iranian Revolution far in the future, Eisenhower considered coups a valid aspect of foreign policy, so long as American involvement was kept relatively quiet. He would attempt the same undertaking in Latin America.

**Guatemala**

Less than one year after the coup in Iran, the White House and CIA collaborated to suppress communism in the Central American country of Guatemala, marking the agency’s first clandestine mission in the region. Located on the southern border of Mexico, the threat of

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63 Cline, *Secrets, Spies, and Scholars*, 132.
communist intervention proved disquieting for the containment policy. Guatemala’s
democratically elected president, Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, adamantly denied his status as a
communist, but intelligence recognized that his campaign manager was in fact the founder of the
Guatemalan Communist Party. “In the agency’s view, President Arbenz’s toleration for known
Communists made him at best a ‘fellow traveler’ and at worst a Communist himself.”
Árbenz, a former colonel who received an impressive sixty-five percent of the vote in the 1950
presidential election, championed the lower classes by implementing land and agriculture
reforms that expropriated certain unused parcels to Guatemala’s poorest citizens.

Containing communism in Guatemala was not the only aspect of U.S. interests in the
country. Like oil in Iran, the small Latin nation hosted American financial interests through the
United Fruit Company of Boston, which established itself within Guatemala’s borders shortly
after the turn of the century. John Foster Dulles had negotiated contracts for the prior to
becoming secretary of state. The DCI and six other major individuals in the Eisenhower
administration also maintained connections to United Fruit. These interests were greatly
antagonized when Árbenz’s agriculture policy expropriated 400,000 acres of the company’s
property. The New York Times called it “a raw deal.”

After meeting with Árbenz, American ambassador and anti-communist hard-liner John
M. Peurifoy cabled, “I am definitely convinced that if the President is not a communist, he will

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65 Rabe, The Killing Zone, 38.
67 Ambrose, Ike’s Spies, 223.
68 Prados, Presidents’ Wars, 98.
69 Herbert L. Matthews, “United Fruit Becomes Victim Of Guatemala ‘s Awakening: Company is Caught
certainly do until one comes along.” Eisenhower ultimately believed communist influence was evident. On August 12, 1953, Eisenhower and the NSC formally authorized covert action against Árbenz and the Guatemalan government. The mission was called Operation PBSUCCESS. American media outlets in the anti-communist vein regularly aided the administration’s attitude. Political columnist Flora Lewis visited Guatemala and wrote for The New York Times Magazine in February 1954, “Guatemala City is a tranquil town… It doesn’t look or sound like the one place in the Americas where devoted, angry-tongued Communists have deeply entrenched themselves. Nevertheless, it is.”

On May 15, 1954, a two-thousand-ton shipment of arms from Soviet-dominated Czechoslovakia arrived via Swedish vessel at Puerto Barrios, Guatemala. The State Department immediately cited the delivery as a violation of the Monroe Doctrine, which forbids European nations from interfering in the region. Eisenhower fretted that the “quantity of arms far exceeded any legitimate, normal requirements for the Guatemalan armed forces.” When directly asked about the arms shipment at a press conference on May 19, Eisenhower labeled the incident “disturbing” and accused Árbenz of attempting to establish an “outpost” of “Communist dictatorship.” In reality, Árbenz simply planned to dispense the weapons to his cronies in an effort to form a Guatemalan version of the National Guard. However, details regarding the arms were widely blown out of proportion in the U.S. A number of the vintage weapons donned a swastika stamp, indicating they were aged from the days of World War II. Many were rusted or

73 Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, 424.  
useless. Secretary Dulles misspoke regarding the actual size and magnitude of the cargo, and the State Department used the shipment as an excuse to convict the Árbenz regime as a communist menace in the eyes of the American government. The CIA later found that “when military advisers surveyed the equipment” in the days after Árbenz had been removed from power, “they found it obsolete and in poor condition.”\(^75\) The *Christian Science Monitor* unbiasedly reported on May 19:

> There is a feeling among some Latin American sources in Washington that the United States has overplayed the present issue. They point out, as did the Guatemalan Embassy spokesman here, that Guatemala has the right to buy arms where it can. They also point out that the United States has refused to sell arms to the Central American republic, so where else would they turn.\(^76\)

Worried that this influence was becoming too prevalent in Central America, Eisenhower reacted by air-mailing fifty tons of guns and ammunition to U.S.-friendly forces in neighboring Honduras and Nicaragua to serve as a buffer against any potential communist takeover. On June 15, the President authorized the CIA to officially launch the invasion against Árbenz, who became the second foreign leader befallen by a U.S.-backed coup. “I want you all to be damn good and sure you succeed,” Eisenhower told the DCI. “When you commit the flag, you commit it to win.”\(^77\)

PBSUCCESS was led by a dubious character named Colonel Al Haney, who, while serving as CIA station chief in Seoul, South Korea in 1952, had recruited “con men” as agents who delivered fictional intelligence about Korea to the agency.\(^78\) Still, Dulles appointed the colonel as special deputy to PBSUCCESS. The plan had been stirring in the CIA playbook for

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75 Cullather, *Operation PBSUCCESS*, 83.
nearly three years, but the satisfactory achievement in Iran galvanized the White House to launch it. Kim Roosevelt declined to participate, citing the fact that the agency was ignorant to the social and political environment of Guatemala. The CIA had not one spy in the country. Haney trained anti-Árbenz militants in Florida who would eventually act as a rebellious force within Guatemala and overtake the presidential palace, with the aid of the military and CIA. The American-trained, right-wing Colonel Castillo Armas was chosen to replace Árbenz. Tracy Barnes, an OSS veteran, Silver Star recipient, and the CIA’s chief of political warfare, called Armas “bold but incompetent.”

The rebel Guatemalan soldiers received “wads of dollar bills” from the CIA, although little fighting ultimately ensued and the agency did the heavy lifting. A radio program secretly produced by the CIA (code-named SHERWOOD) played propaganda messages for the Guatemalan populace. Bribes were solicited to drum up support for Armas, and the Guatemalan people were also exposed to pamphlets advertising phrases like, “Struggle against Communist atheism…struggle with Castillo Armas!” The psychological warfare campaign was designed as a precursor to the actual removal of Árbenz. E. Howard Hunt, the mission’s chief executor for the CIA, elaborated, “What we wanted to do was to have a terror campaign, to terrify Árbenz particularly, to terror his troops, much as the German Stuka bombers terrified the population of Holland, Belgium, and Poland at the onset of World War Two.” By this estimate, the American President had essentially authorized Nazi tactics against a democratically elected world leader.

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80 Richard H. Immerman, The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 162.
81 Russell Crandall, America’s Dirty Wars: Irregular Warfare from 1776 to the War on Terror (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 243.
Henry Hecksher, a CIA officer tasked with persuading the Guatemalan military to turn against Árbenz, urged Haney, “The ‘crucial spark’ has to be generated by heat-United States-heat…”83 This heat was demonstrated by way of CIA-funded pilots bombing Guatemala City to simulate the impression the nation was under attack.

Árbenz attempted to blow the CIA’s cover with the public announcement that “the governing circles of the United States is responsible for what is happening to us.”84 Major newspapers published the president’s insistence that a “counterrevolutionary plot” fostered by a “Northern government” was occurring in Guatemala.85 Guatemala’s national publications, such as the government daily newspaper, covered the event. The New York Times quoted Guatemalan Foreign Minister Guillermo Toriello, who openly accused the U.S. and United Fruit of supporting Armas’ invasion.86 Ironically, Árbenz’s exposure effort only encouraged the CIA to ensure the completion of PBSUCCESS before formal charges could be brought against the U.S. at the United Nations. CIA officer Frank Wisner informed Dulles, “There is not the slightest doubt that if the operation is carried through many Latin Americans will see in it the hand of the U.S.”87 Top secret CIA documentation from that time reflects that by June 1954 “the consensus in Washington was that ‘Arbenz must go; how does not matter.’”88

83 Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 97.
87 Frank G. Wisner, Memorandum from the Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency to Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles, April 24, 1954, Central Intelligence Agency, Job 79–01025A, Box 151, Folder 6.
On June 18, Colonel Armas attempted to lead an assault of CIA-trained rebels across the Atlantic coastal side of Guatemala, but to no avail. His forces were defeated by police officers and dockworkers. Despite the bold propaganda campaign, a popular uprising failed to foment among Guatemalan citizens, as Árbenz continued to enjoy national popularity. The CIA witnessed their plan failing and panicked. On June 19, Ambassador Peurifoy urged Dulles, “We have gone as far as we can with talk…. Many people have been to see me saying one bomb on palace would do the job. Bomb repeat Bomb.”

Haney messaged his superior at the CIA the same day, “Are we going to stand by and see last hope of free people in Guatemala submerged to depths of Communist oppression and atrocity until we send American armed force against enemy? …This is the same enemy we fought in Korea and may fight tomorrow in Indo-China.”

The dramatic pleas inspired Dulles to meet with Eisenhower personally. The agency was in over its head to the point that only the President, who had authorized the mission in the first place, could grant further authority to see the coup through. On the afternoon of April 22, the DCI explained to Eisenhower that the agency-backed rebellion would fail in Guatemala without the aid of airstrikes, and perhaps have only a twenty percent chance of total success with them. With little hesitation, Eisenhower requested the additional air support. Three Thunderbolt fighter aircrafts sent from Puerto Rico began aiding the Guatemalan rebels with air attacks within twenty-four hours.

The fighter planes made all the difference, dropping a montage of fire on the Guatemalan military (and haplessly on an American Christian radio station and a British freighter), while the

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89 Telegram from the CIA Chief of Station in Guatemala to the Central Intelligence Agency, Central Intelligence Agency, June 19, 1954, Job 79–01025A, Box 91, Folder 6.
SHERWOOD radio station played war sound effects over the airwaves. President Árbenz, as well as the Guatemalan people, believed thousands of rebel troops were invading the capital. A terrified and drunken Árbenz isolated himself in the presidential palace, fully understanding the U.S. stood behind his demise. He finally relinquished power on June 27 and faded into political asylum. CIA documents declassified four decades later reveal “until the day that Arbenz resigned in June 1954 the option of assassination was still being considered” by “high level” officials “within the Agency,” although the names of specific individuals involved in the assassination plot have been censored in the documentation. Armas officially assumed the presidency two months later. In November 1955, he was welcomed to the White House where Vice President Nixon toasted, “Led by the courageous soldier who is our guest this evening, the Guatemalan people revolted against communist rule, which in collapsing bore graphic witness to its own shallowness, falsity, and corruption.”

Eisenhower’s clandestine leadership had toppled two foreign leaders in nine months. The cost of the second coup ranged between five and seven million dollars – a seemingly small price to pay to ensure containment south of America’s border. The success of replacing Árbenz allowed the option of clandestine coup operations to become more viable and attractive for future Presidents. Sources arguing about the true motivation behind PBSUCCESS remain mixed. E. Howard Hunt retrospectively stated, “I’ve often said of that project that we did the right thing for the wrong reason. I wasn’t a mercenary worker for United Fruit. If we had a foreign policy objective…then fine, that is one thing; but because United Fruit…had its interests confiscated or

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92 Haines, “CIA History Staff Analysis,” 9.
94 Ambrose, *Ike’s Spies*, 226.
threatened, that is to me no reason at all.” Regardless of the true motivation, Eisenhower had broken tradition not once, but twice, by authorizing the CIA to aid a coup against a world leader. Because both instances did not result with initial failings of epic proportion, the mark had been made, and the tradition had been established.

The debriefing for Eisenhower following PBSUCCESS proved the CIA was willing to lie to the President. In an agency-prepared slideshow presented to Eisenhower in the East Wing of the White House, CIA officials claimed only one man from Armas’ rebel army died during the Árbenz coup. Eisenhower understandably replied, “Incredible.” In truth, over forty had perished in the invasion, but the agency led the President to believe otherwise. Jake Esterline, the new station chief in Guatemala, admitted that the agency “really didn’t think [PBSUCCESS] was much of a success.”

As far as the White House was concerned, coups were a feasible, low-cost methodology proven to be a remedy for containing communism abroad. In March 1954, Dulles joined a private appropriations meeting with three U.S. senators. The meeting’s briefing notes reflect that covert operations were labeled “risky or even unwise for the long pull of the Cold War,” and that “unplanned, urgent, one-shot operations not only usually failed, but also disrupted and even blew our careful preparations for longer-range activities.” No one took heed of the warnings and Eisenhower increased intelligence funding after his reelection. Eisenhower proceeded to support anti-communist efforts in Vietnam and Laos, providing the French with bombers in the former

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95 Ibid., 218.
98 Allen Dulles, Notes for Briefing of Appropriations Committee: Clandestine Services, March 1, 1954, National Archives and Records Administration.
and training soldiers in the latter. 99 In a discussion with the NSC, Eisenhower correctly predicted that the South Asian jungle would “absorb our troops by divisions,” although many top advisors (including Vice President Nixon) urged him to intervene militarily. Incidentally, the number of American military advisors in Vietnam grew to nine hundred in the mid-1950s as the North Vietnamese threat increased. 100

General Walter Bedell Smith, who oversaw covert actions for the administration over a period of nineteen months, angrily disclosed to Nixon, “I want to tell you something about Ike….I was just Ike’s prat boy…. Ike has to have somebody to do the dirty work that he doesn’t want to do so that he can look like the good guy.” 101 This, from a man who faithfully served as Eisenhower’s chief of staff during World War II. The example had been set, and the seeds Eisenhower had sown proved difficult for future presidents to ignore. Historian Dr. John Prados succinctly explains, “The CIA was unleashed in the name of democracy, but democracy as defined by American foreign policy came to mean governments that followed pro-American policies.” 102 This was the identity Eisenhower had morphed the agency into. Without executive authority and oversight from the White House, would have not reached new heights of empire-toppling. Eisenhower initiated clandestine ventures rooted in a tunnel vision that fell short of considering the long-term consequences of their end results. While preaching democracy, the American government and its significantly inexperienced, freshly-minted intelligence machine established what would become longstanding dictatorships in two nations that had practiced

102 Prados, Presidents’ Secret Wars, 107.
democracy prior to the misguided, arrogant, and ignorant American intervention. The coups inflicted by Eisenhower were misguided in that the framework and operations of the covert actions nearly failed in several areas, arrogant in that the U.S. dictated who the leaders of foreign nations should be and how they should govern, and ignorant in the lack of regard for the long-term effects the coups would have on the populations of the countries involved and American popularity in those regions.

Following PBSUCCESS, Eisenhower solicited the assistance of the retired Lieutenant General James H. Doolittle to lead an independent, comprehensive view of covert operations with a focus on how to “equate the costs of the overall efforts to the results achieved.” 103 Doolittle, who had established his credentials as an American hero by leading bombing raids over Japan in 1942, delivered a blunt assessment on September 30, 1954. The Doolittle Report asserted, “As long as it remains national policy, another important requirement is an aggressive covert psychological, political and paramilitary organization more effective, more unique and, if necessary, more ruthless than that employed by the enemy. No one should be permitted to stand in the way of the prompt, efficient and secure accomplishment of this mission.” 104 The report chillingly stated that “no rules” applied to a conflict as fierce as the Cold War, and that “acceptable norms of human conduct do not apply.” 105 These controversial conclusions, drawn by a retired military officer of the highest standards, warned of the lack of humanity involved with covert action, and the idea that such missions could elicit unknown and extreme behavior from the parties involved. Furthermore, the report suggested, “It may become necessary that the

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105 Ibid.
American people be made acquainted with, understand and support this fundamentally repugnant philosophy.” 106 On the contrary, Eisenhower consistently elevated the value of covert action during his presidency, and the White House never followed the suggestion to acquaint the American people with clandestine missions, let alone persuade them to support it.

**Indonesia**

With proven successes in Iran and Guatemala, and the conclusions of the Doolittle Report already forgotten, the administration launched a major clandestine effort in 1958. On this occasion, Eisenhower and Dulles instigated a coup against President Achmed Sukarno of Indonesia, designed to install a leader more aligned with U.S. interests. Like Mossadegh and Árbenz, Sukarno was not a communist, and banned the nation’s major communist party in 1949 after it tried a coup of its own to unseat him. Notwithstanding, Sukarno held no reservations about publicly meeting with Soviet and Chinese diplomats. Nor did Sukarno indicate interest in the Cold War, as his major focus was to unite the diverse social spectrum of his country, which was mainly composed of Muslims, Buddhists, and an animistic tribal faction. Acclaimed Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer hailed, “Sukarno was the only Asian leader of the modern era able to unify people of such differing ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds without shedding a drop of blood.” 107

Incidentally, Sukarno’s neutrality was irritated Washington. Indonesia’s geographic location in southeast Asia, with an archipelago of six major and three thousand minor islands proved significant to U.S. interests. It was also the fifth-largest nation on the planet in the 1950s,

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106 Ibid., 3.
harboring “twenty billion barrels of untapped oil.” George Kennan wrote in 1948 that “the problem of Indonesia” is “the most crucial issue of the moment in our struggle with the Kremlin. Indonesia is the anchor in that chain of islands stretching from Hokkaido to Sumatra which we should develop as a politico-economic counterforce to communism on the Asiatic land mass.”

The administration worried that the leaders of neighboring Red China would attempt to manipulate Sukarno. In a letter to global aid administrator Paul G. Hoffman, Eisenhower wrote, “With Sukarno’s ambitions and his leftist leanings, with his readiness to take Communist support, and his seeming preference for the radicals rather than the more conservative sectors of Moslem people, the situation could well become serious in that area of the world.”

Unlike the coups conducted during the first two years of the Eisenhower presidency, basically every step the agency took to penetrate Sukarno capsized in failure. And, like previous covert action missteps, the White House and CIA seemed to learn very little from it. The administration’s formally stated main object was “to prevent Indonesia from passing into the Communist orbit in traditional form” and “assist Indonesia to develop a…free government.”

The White House’s intentions were clear: “The loss of Indonesia to Communist control would have serious consequences for the U.S. and the rest of the free world.” A March 1957 memorandum for the DCI stated, “The Communist Party of Indonesia…is giving enthusiastic support to Sukarno and his plan and has thrown the full force of its organizational and mass

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108 Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 142.
109 George Kennan, letter to George C. Marshall and Robert Lovett, December 17, 1948, Policy Planning Staff Records, Box 33.
112 Ibid.
propaganda talents into the campaign.” It warned of the imminent consequences regarding increasing influence of communists in the Indonesian government.

The agency continued to denounce Sukarno as communist-friendly. Dulles believed he was “beyond the point of no return” and “would henceforth play the communist game.” Secretary Dulles condoned a coup. Ambassador John M. Allison, an experienced man in Asian relations and diplomacy, later criticized the Dulles brothers for being reckless and ignorant. “They did not know Asians and were always inclined to judge them by Western standards,” he complained. They had condoned the Indonesian coup because “they were both activists and insisted on doing something at once.” With recent history repeating itself, Eisenhower ordered the CIA to overthrow Sukarno on September 25, 1957. The President unraveled an entirely unoriginal plan that echoed the approach taken in Guatemala and Iran. The three main objectives as articulated by Eisenhower were to supply “arms and other military aid” for “anti-Sukarno military commanders,” enhance “the determination, will and cohesion” of rebel armies, and “stimulate into action, singly or in unison, non- and anti-Communist elements” in Indonesia.

By 1958, Eisenhower was prepared to up the ante. The NSC accepted the recommendation by a special committee on Indonesia to “employ all feasible covert means to strengthen anti-Communist forces in the outer islands.” The agency acted in accordance, secretly supporting two separate anti-Sukarno factions that included the nation’s military (not unlike its backing of Colonel Armas in Guatemala) and Indonesia’s disorganized rebel groups.

113 Draft Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence, Subject: The Current Situation in Indonesia, March 1, 1957, Central Intelligence Agency, 2.
114 NSC minutes, August 1, 1957, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.
116 Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 147.
118 Walter S. Robertson, Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs to Secretary of State Dulles, January 2, 1958, Department of State, Central Files, 611.56D/1–258.
number of the most formidable leaders in the Indonesian military were trained in the U.S., and
proudly called themselves “the sons of Eisenhower.” Meanwhile, an agency-established
propaganda radio station in Jakarta, like the SHERWOOD airwave outlet during PBSUCCESS,
began broadcasting on behalf of the rebels on February 10.

Civilian and military targets in villages and harbors were bombed by American pilots
flying Indonesian planes, killing hundreds of innocents and stirring “great anger” throughout the
nation’s population. In his first public comment on the Indonesian situation, Eisenhower
dishonestly claimed America maintained neutrality. “Now on the other hand,” he stated during
an April 30 press conference, “every rebellion that I have ever heard of has its soldiers of
fortune.” The President privately fumed over the lack of secrecy surrounding the operation.
First Lieutenant Allen L. Pope, one of the American bombers running missions for the CIA, later
bragged, “I enjoyed killing Communists. I liked to kill Communists any way I could get
them.” While conducting a raid on May 18, Pope’s B-26 bomber was shot down by
Indonesian air and naval forces loyal to Sukarno. He was taken prisoner, and Dulles furiously
cancelled all operations on May 19. The failure to gain traction, the intelligence leaks, and
Pope’s disappearance during battle sealed the fate of Eisenhower’s effort to overthrow Sukarno.
The Indonesian president realized what the American government had tried, and the aftermath
only boosted the strength of the government, as well as the popularity of the communist party in
Indonesia, which grew for nearly a decade thereafter. Historian Brian May concluded, “The

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119 Audrey Kahin and George McTurnan Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy* (Seattle: University of
American intervention was a gift to Sukarno.”  

CIA officer Richard Bissell, who later helped construct the Bay of Pigs invasion plan, recalled how the agency contemplated assassinating Sukarno. “There was planning of such a possibility. The planning progressed as far as the identification of an asset whom it was felt might be recruited for this purpose. The plan was never…perfected to the point where it seemed feasible. The difficulty concerned the possibility of creating a situation in which the potential agent would have access to the target.” Had Sukarno been more accessible to a CIA-hired assassin, the outcome in Indonesia may have been very different. Bissell appropriately deemed the operation “a complete failure.”  

In an interview with Pulitzer Prize-winning author Tim Weiner, Lieutenant Pope tragically concluded, “They said Indonesia was a failure. But we knocked the shit out of them. We killed thousands of Communists, even though half of them probably didn’t even know what Communism meant.”

Following the Indonesian debacle, Eisenhower gravely reconsidered the competency of the CIA, despite the fact the agency had barely achieved its mission objectives during AJAX and PBSUCCESS. Instead of considering a lack of judgment on his own part, the President looked to blame the CIA for failing to carry out an extremely challenging facet of clandestine foreign policy in a nation the American government did not properly estimate or understand. What Eisenhower seemed to realize late in the game was that the agency had not been terribly proficient all along. In a candid meeting with James Doolittle, Eisenhower stated, “We must

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124 Bissell testimony, President’s Commission on CIA Activities (Rockefeller Commission), April 21, 1975, declassified 1995, Gerald R. Ford Library.
remember that here is one of the most peculiar types of operation any government can have, and it probably takes a strange kind of genius to run it.”

Nearing the end of his two-term presidency, however, Eisenhower privately distressed over what he perceived to be the shortcomings of the intelligence establishment and the so-called strange genius. Without tailoring the CIA to follow his clandestine foreign policy, the coups would not have had a vehicle for execution.

Although his administration did not fully heed the conclusions of the 1954 Doolittle Report, Eisenhower enlisted Ambassador David K.E. Bruce to further monitor the inter-workings of the CIA. Bruce’s stirring report stated, “We are sure that the supporters of the 1948 decision to launch this government on a positive psychological warfare and paramilitary program could not possibly have foreseen the ramifications of the operations which have resulted from it.”

The report basically wallowed in amazement at how Eisenhower had grown the CIA, and particularly how he had evolved covert action into a tool for destroying entire foreign regimes. A 1955 intelligence study group encouraged the implementation of a congressional joint committee to regulate the intelligence machine, garnering significant support from the legislative branch including a major bill authored by Senator Mike Mansfield (D-MT). Eisenhower, however, disagreed with the study group and worked to torpedo the bill. Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson, who eventually learned to loathe the CIA as President, helped to kill the Mansfield bill in 1956. Had the bill passed, Congress may have potentially prevented future Presidents from supporting coups over the next two decades, or at best, raised concerns regarding the aftermath of planned coups. Eisenhower’s answer to the Mansfield bill was to establish the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB). This merely created the illusion of checks and

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balances for covert ops, as the intelligence community was not ultimately forced to answer to the PFIAB. It was nothing less than a formality and further proof Eisenhower did not want outside authorities interfering in covert actions.

Before leaving office and, incidentally, an intelligence apparatus full of ongoing, loose ties rooted in covert operations involving Cuba and Vietnam, Eisenhower feared the agency was nothing short of “a legacy of ashes.” In a moment of uncensored resentment and rage, he confessed to Dulles, “The structure of our intelligence organization is faulty. I have suffered an eight-year defeat on this.” Eisenhower actively worked to limit congressional oversight with regard to covert action, expressed disgust when the agency failed to execute a third coup, and realized forging international coups involved incredible risks and challenges. With that legacy, which had started with the toppling of democratically-elected leaders in the Middle East and Latin America, Eisenhower handed the reigns to an incoming president significantly younger, full of naivety, and serving an entirely different political party.

129 Memorandum of Discussion at the 473rd Meeting of the NSC, January 5, 1961, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.
130 Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 167.
IV

THREE FOR FOUR: KENNEDY, JOHNSON, AND THE COUP METHODOLOGY

Senator John F. Kennedy assumed the presidency on January 20, 1961, inheriting authority over an intelligence machine consumed with several profound and preexisting covert actions. To complicate matters, there is no evidence that President Eisenhower, who had encouraged and allowed the CIA’s growth over a period of eight years, properly communicated the grave risks involved with certain covert actions. The new President’s experience paled in comparison to Eisenhower, who had laid a complex clandestine foundation. Kennedy suddenly found himself standing face to face with a CIA that remained remarkably void of congressional oversight, including a DCI who believed “no policy approval was required” for his decision-making. Nonetheless, the White House still followed U.S. Cold War foreign policy, endorsed containment, and recognized the value of clandestine missions.

The Kennedy administration allowed the CIA to launch 163 different covert ops over a period of three years, slightly fewer than all of the clandestine actions initiated by Eisenhower over his two terms. According to Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, who worked as the CIA’s inspector general from 1952 to the end of the Kennedy era, “We got what we asked for. It was a war, and Congress couldn’t say no.” Many in Congress did not necessarily wish to know details regarding the black ops the CIA was undertaking behind the scenes. As Senator Leverett Saltonstall (R-MA) admitted, “…it is a question of our reluctance, if you will, to seek information and knowledge on subjects which I personally, as a Member of Congress and as a

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131 Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 115.
132 Ibid., 180.
citizen, would rather not have.”\textsuperscript{134} Approximately two-thirds of the agency budget during the fifties and early sixties went toward covert ops (in contrast to a lackluster five percent in the 1990s).\textsuperscript{135} Before his tragic assassination in November 1963, Kennedy managed to either continue or enact covert operations in Laos, Thailand, Iran, Pakistan, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Venezuela. The most notable ventures in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, South Vietnam, and Guyana – all resulted in coups. During a November 1961 interview, JFK declared, “The United States supports the idea that every people shall have the right to make a free choice as to the kind of government they want.”\textsuperscript{136} Even in light of “a Marxist” regime, he insisted, “the United States doesn’t object” if “that choice was made by an honest election.” Privately, Kennedy promoted clandestine policy that condoned the exact opposite of those words. This was exactly the formula followed by Eisenhower: publicly preach democracy and free international elections, privately work to overthrow governments of potential menace.

\textbf{Cuba}

When blatantly asked if President Kennedy wanted Cuba’s radical leader Fidel Castro dead, former Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms admitted, “There is nothing on paper, of course. But there is certainly no question in my mind that he did.”\textsuperscript{137} The most significant facet of Eisenhower’s intelligence machine inherited by Kennedy was the coup methodology and its planned application in Cuba. Before becoming the leader of the Caribbean island nation, Castro was an unpredictable figure to the CIA. He had once been called “a new

\textsuperscript{134} Harry Howe Ransom, \textit{The Intelligence Establishment} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 169.
\textsuperscript{135} Thomas, \textit{The Very Best Men}, 181.
\textsuperscript{137} Weiner, \textit{Legacy of Ashes}, 187.
spiritual leader of Latin American democratic and anti-dictator forces” in an agency briefing.\footnote{138} A 1958 CIA report stated Castro was definitely not a communist and “the United States should not be taken in by President Fulgencio Batista’s attempt to label the revolutionary movement as Communist…”\footnote{139}

Batista, who had been Cuba’s president since March 1952, led a corrupt and repressive regime, but also supported U.S. business interests such as gambling and night clubs. During an occasionally sardonic speech at a Democratic dinner in Ohio while campaigning for President in the fall of 1960, Senator Kennedy proclaimed, “Fulgencio Batista murdered 20,000 Cubans in 7 years…. In October 1958, just a few days before Batista held a rigged and fraudulent election, Secretary of State Dulles was the guest of honor at a reception held by the Batista Embassy in Washington. The reception… was used by Batista to show how America favored his rule.”\footnote{140}

When Castro became prime minister of Cuba in February 1959, he was not a communist or even a member of Cuba’s leading communist party. His own group, known as M-26 or the Twenty-sixth of July Movement, maintained a membership at least four times the size of the Cuban communist party. Nonetheless, American intelligence reports predicted communist influence in his rebel group would take over, while yet another stated “Castro remains an enigma.”\footnote{141} Eisenhower strongly disagreed, and his DCI assured in early 1960 that “over the long run, the U.S. will not be able to tolerate the Castro regime in Cuba.”\footnote{142}


\footnote{139}Ibid., 9.


and Havana hotels were expropriated by the government that same year, just as Mossadegh had done with oil, and Árbenz with land. After leaving the White House, Eisenhower wrote, “Though our intelligence experts backed and filled for a number of months, events were gradually driving them to the conclusion that with the coming of Castro, Communism had penetrated the hemisphere.”

By March 1960, Eisenhower felt it was time to act. He instructed Dulles, “…if you’re going to make any move against Castro, don’t just fool around with sugar refineries. Let’s get a program that will really do something about Castro.” The CIA presented a plan to unseat Castro with a coup, vowing to establish “a responsible, appealing and unified Cuban opposition” and arm them with weapons and ammunition. The outline was very familiar. Notes from the meeting reflect, “The President says he knows of no better plan…. The great problem is leakage and security…. Everyone must be prepared to swear that he had not heard of it.” The last two coups the CIA had attempted, especially in Indonesia, had been exposed by the opposition. Despite the colossal failure in southern Asia and Eisenhower’s unease with the Doolittle and Bruce reports, the President did not discourage another agency-fueled coup. After all, Cuba was located much closer to America than Indonesia.

The CIA plan to support a rebel invasion of Cuba to overthrow Castro, titled Operation ZAPATA (after the Zapata Swamp located in Cuba’s Bay of Pigs that would act as the landing site), assembled many of the same personnel involved in PBSUCCESS. CIA case officer E. Howard Hunt later concluded, “If the Agency had not had Guatemala, it probably would not

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144 Prados, Presidents’ Secret Wars, 177.
have had Cuba.”

Jake Esterline, appointed as the agency’s task force chief for Cuba, recalled, “I think their first reaction was, God, we’ve got a possible Communist in here; we had better get him out just the way we got Arbenz out.” Following the same mold as the paramilitary action in Guatemala, ZAPATA’s success depended on the agency organizing, training, and supporting a faction of rebels, and just enough air support from CIA pilots to support combat efforts on the ground during an invasion of Cuba. Between $13-15 million was requested for the training stages of the plan, known among the intelligence community as Operation PLUTO. When the administration’s budget director, Maurice Stans, questioned the substantial amount to be allotted in the fiscal budget, Eisenhower calmly reasoned, “I authorized Dulles to spend that money but I did not authorize any specific military action by the anti-Castro Cubans. That will have to come later and I won’t give it an OK unless I’m convinced it is essential and I’m convinced it won’t fail.”

Curiously, Operation PLUTO was set into motion before Castro had established diplomatic ties with the Soviets. He initially turned to Moscow for economic aid after the U.S. denied Cuba a loan. Nevertheless, the training phase was underway by the time Cuba became diplomatic partners with Soviet Russia in the summer of 1960. Anti-Castro Cuban refugees in Miami were drafted by the CIA and trained in the U.S.-friendly nation of Guatemala. While Florida was ripe with potential trainees, Castro sent spies who infiltrated the agency’s training program. Once the Cuban leader caught wind of an imminent invasion, he began suppressing Cuban dissidents on the island to decrease the possibility of nationals who might join an American-inflicted coup. Up to 20,000 people may have been rounded up by Castro’s secret

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147 Immerman, The CIA in Guatemala, 190.
police, making an effective uprising during the rebel invasion essentially impossible.150 U.S. subversion in Cuba only went downhill from there.

Eisenhower deserves credit for resisting pressure to launch the Bay of Pigs invasion before Election Day, 1960. He became more cautious after the U-2 spy plane of Francis Gary Powers was shot down over Soviet Russia in May 1960, sparking an international upheaval. He cautioned the CIA about “the danger of making false moves” and “starting something before we were ready.”151 The consequences of covert actions were taking a toll on the weary president, but not enough to cancel ZAPATA. According to Ambassador Gordon Gray, Eisenhower would consistently say, “Now boys, if you don’t intend to go through with this, let’s stop talking about it.”152

While meeting with President-elect Kennedy before his inauguration, the tired veteran warned the young Democrat about Castro. A memorandum of the discussion indicates, “President Eisenhower stated in the long run the United States cannot allow the Castro Government to continue to exist in Cuba.”153 Technically, Eisenhower had never explicitly authorized an invasion of Cuba – only the CIA plan to preface the invasion and aid Cuban rebels. This was unbeknownst to Kennedy, and the lack of communication permitted the action-hungry agency to back the novice president into one of the worst moments of the Cold War. To a certain degree, Eisenhower had set Kennedy up to fail. Richard Bissell, chief of the CIA’s clandestine service, clarified, “It’s only fair to say that the Kennedy administration did inherit a military

150 Prados, Presidents’ Secret Wars, 206.
152 Prados, Presidents’ Secret Wars, 193.
153 Memorandum from McNamara to Kennedy, January 24, 1961, Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 65 A 3464, 381 Cuba, 18 Jan. 61.
organization here that would have been difficult to dispose of and embarrassing to dispose of in any way other than by allowing it to go into action.” 154

The organization, however, was grossly lacking in the proper planning. The five hundred anti-Castro Cubans being trained in Guatemala paled in comparison to the Cuban army of sixty-thousand. “I really thought that what we were doing should stop and that this new administration coming in should have time…to develop their own options and think about how they might want to deal with this problem,” said Esterline in an interview years later. “I was told that it was not good to be that way…” 155 With no one to properly warn the new inhabitants of the White House about the dangers of authorizing coups in foreign countries, Kennedy was soon in over his head before realizing it. The budget for the operation had ballooned over the months, not unlike AJAX and PBSUCCESS – both of which cost more than originally estimated. PLUTO and ZAPATA reached a total cost of over $100 million by the end. 156 The original idea of the New Look policy included fiscal responsibility; however, the increasing budgets of covert actions by the 1960s revoked this aspect of the Eisenhower legacy.

While briefing the White House, the CIA failed to alert Kennedy of certain unalienable truths surrounding the invasion plan. The most important constraint of the mission was the fact that a small rebel army of inferior numbers could not successfully land on a beach, drop anchor, and unload while under heavy fire from the Cuban military, which also included overhead bombers. Esterline, who joined meetings between administration officials and Dulles, remembered, “Nobody in the administration at high levels seems to know that and nobody made it clear to President Kennedy.” 157 The planning stages for the invasion were awash with poor

154 Ambrose, *Ike’s Spies*, 315.
156 Prados, *Presidents’ Secret Wars*, 193.
157 Ibid., 262.
quality and plain confusion. The agency lacked an understanding with regard to Cuba’s terrain, as its absurdly vintage survey maps had been drawn in 1895. The President struggled to make sense of the plan, and key questions about how the rebels would maintain an element of surprise during the invasion went unanswered. Historian and Latin American policy adviser Arthur Schlesinger, Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles, and former Secretary of State Dean Acheson were among the dissenting voices of whom Kennedy did not listen when he confirmed the invasion. The CIA proved too convincing.

To satisfy JFK’s request for a stealthier coup, Bissell reduced the number of bombers included in the plan who would take on the formidable task of suppressing Castro’s air force. The bombers ended up destroying only half of the air force on April 15, just as a throng of 1,511 CIA recruits were enroute to the Bay of Pigs to endure the invasion. They encountered more resistance from Castro’s army at the landing site than predicted. Kennedy, however, refused to allow further air support for the rebels on April 17, the morning of the invasion. The fate of the rebels became encased in doom. Commander Pepe San Roman of the rebel faction radioed his CIA contact in the midst of the invasion: “Do you people realize how desperate the situation is? Do you back us up or quit? Please don’t desert us…. Will fight to the end if we have to.” In all, 1,189 Cuban rebels were captured, 114 were killed, and four American pilots working for the agency perished. (The pilots’ families were not notified of their truthful cause of death for many years after.) The ill-conceived and ill-executed operation morphed into a failure of epic

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159 Telegram From the Commander of Special Task Group 81.8 (Clark) to the Commander in Chief, Atlantic (Dennison), April 18, 1961, Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State.
proportion. Esterline said the Cuban rebels were left to die “like sitting ducks on that damn beach.”161

The official CIA history of the operation, declassified fifty years after the invasion, concludes:

The Agency was not well served by the Kennedy White House…. The changes, modifications, distortions, and lack of firm positive guidance related to air operations – the key to the success or failure of US policy vis-à-vis Castro – make clear that the collapse of the beachhead…was a shared responsibility. When President Kennedy proclaimed his sole responsibility for the operation, there was more truth to his statement than he really believed or than his apologists will accept.162

An independent review of the CIA’s covert operations conducted in 1967 concluded, “We cannot overemphasize the extent to which responsible Agency officers felt themselves subject to the Kennedy administration’s severe pressures to do something about Castro. The fruitless and, in retrospect, often unrealistic plotting should be viewed in that light.”163 According to a document produced by the CIA History Staff, the “safe, inexpensive” method of covert operations “and other ‘lessons’ of PBSUCCESS lulled Agency and administration officials into a complacency that proved fatal at the Bay of Pigs seven years later.”164

What would eventually be remembered as the Bay of Pigs fiasco proved a resonating failure and one of the worst moments for both the American intelligence machine and the Kennedy legacy. Bissell, who had deceitfully coaxed the president into following through with the plan, later admitted his clandestine unit was “not the place where one would expect to look for professional competence.”165 Simply stated, the CIA had incidentally insisted the president invest his faith in an intelligence service of limited proficiency. Dulles, quite shaken by the

161 Ibid., 175.
163 U.S. Senate, Final Report of the Select Committee, 313.
164 Cullather, Operation PBSUCCESS, 1.
incident, privately told former Vice President Nixon, “I should have told [Kennedy] that we must not fail. I came close to doing so but I didn’t. It was the greatest mistake of my life!” Kennedy took responsibility for the disaster, but privately blamed the CIA. He confided to at least two aides, Schlesinger and adviser Theodore Sorensen, that the DCI had assured him ZAPATA would succeed. Dulles supposedly told Kennedy, “Mr. President, I stood right here at Ike’s desk and told him I was certain that our Guatemalan operation would succeed, and Mr. President, the prospects for this plan are even better than they were for that one.” Kennedy’s inexperience, limited time in the White House, and faith in a misleading agency helped him fail to realize that the method of authorizing CIA-backed coups barely worked during the previous administration, and were doomed to fail in the Bay of Pigs scenario. By that estimation, the direct correlation between the example established by Eisenhower and PBSUCCESS with the failure of Kennedy’s misstep to oust Castro is clear. The baton of clandestine coups practiced by Eisenhower could not effortlessly be handed to the next President without shortcomings. A smooth transition was impossible, offering more evidence of the dangers involved with Eisenhower’s coup methodology.

South Vietnam

“This is the worst one we’ve got, isn’t it?” asked Kennedy after reading an urgent report on the conditions of Vietnam in January 1961. “You know, Eisenhower never mentioned it. He talked at length about Laos, but never uttered the word Vietnam.” The American government had placed support behind Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic in a heavily Buddhist country who had been President of South Vietnam since 1955. Washington hoped a solid influence in Saigon

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would permit an advantage in the effort to stop a communist takeover by the North Vietnamese. The administration’s concerns were articulated in a memo drafted in November 1961 that plainly stated “the loss of South Viet-Nam to Communism would not only destroy” stability in Southeast Asia, “but would undermine the credibility of American commitments elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{169} The memo, later featured in the controversial Defense Department study on U.S. involvement in Vietnam known as the “Pentagon Papers,” and partially reprinted in the \textit{New York Times}, also reflected the personal concern from the administration that the “loss of South Viet-Nam would stimulate bitter domestic controversies in the United States and would be seized upon by extreme elements to divide the country and harass the Administration.”

While dictating the political climate in South Vietnam, Kennedy also concentrated on the military aspect by ordering the CIA to “make every possible effort to launch guerrilla operation in North Vietnam” to penetrate the strength of the communists.\textsuperscript{170} When 217 of the 250 South Vietnamese agents who parachuted into North Vietnam were killed, captured, or exposed as traitors, General Maxwell Taylor warned the president of “an acute crisis of confidence” in Diem’s country.\textsuperscript{171} A more concentrated effort was made to influence and then strengthen the Diem’s government in Saigon.

Diem began behaving erratically, which proved detrimental to U.S. interests on the political front. A struggle was emerging from both angles; the formidable North Vietnamese military inspired military advisers to drag more American military forces into Vietnam, while Diem continued to frustrate U.S. control in the South. Lucien Conein, an OSS veteran and one of

the first American intelligence personnel in Vietnam, was tasked with infiltrating the Saigon government. Conein later explained that “Diem had been out of touch with reality” by 1963.\(^{172}\)

Obsessed with converting his nation into a Catholic stronghold, Diem pursued this agenda by repressing and murdering Buddhists. Diem’s military launched a particularly vicious attack on a Buddhist entourage on May 7, 1963 – Buddha’s 2,527th birthday. Diem used his secret police force, originally trained by the CIA, to harass monks and raid pagodas. Women and children were among the victimized. The terrible turn of events provoked one infamous monk to set himself on fire in the middle of a Saigon intersection on June 11 out of protest. The increasing power of Diem’s younger brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, also raised concerns for U.S. interests. Although void of experience, Nhu served as Diem’s political counselor and wielded significant command over the military and security forces in Saigon.

Kennedy eventually decided the time had come to remedy the Diem situation. By this stage, Diem proved counterproductive and maintained little political support. He was emerging as an obstacle for the military as it tried to battle the Vietcong. Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., a former member of the Eisenhower administration, accepted appointment to the ambassadorship of South Vietnam in late summer. JFK cleared a cable dictated by American Ambassador of Far Eastern Affairs Roger Hilsman to Lodge on August 23 that would ultimately seal the fate of the Vietnamese president. The message, which Kennedy later regretted, conveyed:

It is now clear that whether military proposed martial law or whether Nhu tricked them into it, Nhu took advantage of its imposition to smash pagodas with police…. Also clear that Nhu has maneuvered himself into commanding position. US Government cannot tolerate situation in which power lies in Nhu’s hands. Diem must be given chance to rid himself of Nhu…. If, in spite of all of your efforts, Diem remains obdurate and refuses, then we must face the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved…. Ambassador and country team should urgently examine all possible alternative leadership and make

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detailed plans as to how we might bring about Diem’s replacement if this should become necessary.173

Perhaps the most damning line of the cable, quite certainly phrased to accord with the school of plausible deniability, stated, “You will understand that we cannot from Washington give you detailed instructions as to how this operation should proceed, but you will also know we will back you to the hilt on actions you take to achieve our objectives.”174 Lodge replied, “We are launched on a course form which there is no turning back: the overthrow of the Diem government….there is no turning back because there is no possibility, in my view, that the war can be won under a Diem administration”175 Kennedy approved. Less than three months later, Diem and Nhu were murdered. While it was a very different scenario from the Bay of Pigs, and a coup Kennedy had greenlit from the start, the President was not hesitant to entertain the idea of overthrowing another foreign leader. It were as if Eisenhower had opened a clandestine Pandora’s box, irresistible to his successors.

The Kennedy approach to the coup was unique compared to the Eisenhower method, in that the ambassador of the implicated country was actually a key player in the clandestine action. During PBSUCCESS, for example, the Guatemalan ambassador was left in the dark to enhance the rate of plausible deniability and stir genuine surprise from the State Department. When Rusk and McNamara – two vital individuals in the administration – expressed reservations about “the course of action” in Vietnam, Kennedy decided “Ambassador Lodge is to have authority over all overt and covert operations.”176 He ignored dissenting opinions and invested confidence and


174 Ibid.


authority in Lodge as opposed to the NSC. John A. McCone, a Republican who had faithfully served as Secretary of the Air Force under Truman and Chair of the Atomic Energy Commission under Eisenhower, had become the DCI in November 1961 following the aging Allen Dulles’ departure in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs operation. In a conference with Eisenhower in September 1963, McCone disclosed that the August intelligence cable to Ambassador Lodge was “one of the government’s greatest errors.”

Eisenhower was appalled that Kennedy had not consulted the NSC before sending such a cable and detested the fact that the State Department was leading the covert action for a coup. Though JFK was following the Eisenhower tradition with regard to authorizing coups, he was not following suit with the approach and order of operations. Eisenhower “expressed much concern over the future of the United States.” The impression is that he felt Kennedy’s management of covert action and foreign policy was growing reckless.

The CIA allegedly utilized $40,000 to support the expulsion of South Vietnam’s increasingly troubled Diem. McCone continued to be a critical voice, warning that “a complete lack of intelligence” was steering American foreign policy in Vietnam, and Conein’s infiltration of Saigon was “exceedingly dangerous” to the point of “absolute disaster for the United States.” Lodge insisted the U.S. “should not thwart a coup” because “the next government would not bungle and stumble as much as the present one has” and “this is the only way in which the people in Vietnam can possibly get a change of government.”

Robert Kennedy, who distrusted Lodge, voiced opposition to the coup, urging, “I would think that we’re

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178 Ibid.
180 John A. McCone, Memorandum on Special Group 5412 Meeting, October 18, 1963, Central Intelligence Agency; McCone, Memorandum on Discussion with President, October 21, 1963, Central Intelligence Agency.
just going down the road to disaster.” Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Vice President Johnson, and General Taylor concurred. By October, Diem sensed imminent danger. While privately meeting with a CIA officer Rufus Phillips, Diem asked point blank, “Is there going to be a coup against me?” Phillips remembered, “I looked at him and just wanted to cry, and said, ‘I am afraid so, Mr. President.’ That was all we said about that. To this day I am affected by memories of that because after the coup occurred, which was several days later, I went to the palace and the two seats that we had been sitting on in this waiting room were riddled with bullet holes. And I had just been there a few days before.”

The coup was launched at high noon on November 1, 1963, as an anti-Diem military faction led by war veteran General Duong “Big” Minh shut down the airport, destroyed communication lines, seized police headquarters, and targeted establishment politicians. Diem and his brother eventually resigned to Minh the next morning. Confusion subsequently erupted when Conein attempted to pinpoint the location of Diem and his brother. Minh claimed a double suicide had occurred, but Conein was not convinced. He cabled the news to Washington, but Secretary Rusk, at 2:50 a.m. D.C. time, replied, “News of Diem, Nhu suicides shocking here…important to establish publicly beyond question that deaths actually suicide if this true and it not by violence.” The real truth was that under orders from Minh, the brothers were murdered with a pistol and bayonet by Captain Nguyen Van Nhung in the back of an armored vehicle. During a meeting with the DCI, Robert Kennedy, Rusk, McNamara, and General Taylor at 9:35 that morning, Kennedy received an emergency cable from Saigon that confirmed the

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deaths of Dim and Nhu. General Taylor wrote in his memoir that the president “rushed from the room with a look of shock and dismay on his face which I had never seen before.” Kennedy was reportedly pale and shaken by the turn of events. Barely speaking above a whisper, the president remarked, “Pretty stupid.”

In less than a decade, Diem’s reign in South Vietnam spiraled into complete disaster that ended with his death. “I feel that we must bear a good deal of responsibility for it beginning with our cable of early August in which we suggested the coup… I should not have given my consent to it without a roundtable conference,” Kennedy recorded two days later. In a remarkably melancholic tone, the president continued, “I was shocked by the death of Diem and Nhu. I’d met Diem… many years ago. He was an extraordinary character. While he became increasingly difficult in the last months, nonetheless over a ten-year period he’d held his country together, maintained its independence under very adverse conditions. The way he was killed made it particularly abhorrent.” Vietnamese Buddhists would have taken issue with the idea that Diem had held his country together, but the final result of the coup clearly devastated Kennedy, who had set the plan in motion, and bolstered it with U.S. support.

General Edward Lansdale, who served the CIA as a political action specialist in Vietnam from July 1954, had established a close rapport and friendship with Diem. Lansdale later admitted supporting Diem’s coup was a mistake. “I think we should never have done it,” he concluded. “We destroyed the Vietnamese Constitution, not we, but the people we were working

\[188\] Ibid.
with, threw it in the waste basket.” \(^{189}\) After inheriting the presidency, Lyndon Johnson felt Kennedy’s assassination was karma for Diem’s murder. “We killed [Diem]. We all got together and got a goddamn bunch of thugs and we went in and assassinated him.” \(^{190}\)

Minh replaced Diem, leading a military junta for all of three months before falling victim to another coup. Several coup attempts thereafter plagued Vietnam. Johnson solicited Eisenhower’s advice on July 2, 1965. By this time, nine separate military dictatorships had occupied power in Saigon since Diem’s assassination. LBJ asked the aging former president, “You think that we can really beat the Vietcong out there?” \(^{191}\) Eisenhower articulated that good intelligence was essential to victory, but “this is the hardest thing.” Since supporting Diem in 1954, Eisenhower’s foundation regarding U.S. policy in Vietnam had ballooned into varying facets of hardship and disaster. So-called democracy in South Vietnam had been overtaken by corrupt and repressive thugs and Kennedy had used the Eisenhower method of coup instigation to depose of Diem without a decent replacement. Adding insult to injury, he allowed the State Department to lead the crusade.

**Brazil**

The first-ever recording on the Kennedy administration’s Oval Office taping system, first installed in mid-1962, was a conversation with regard to dethroning President João Goulart of Brazil. In yet another example, Kennedy subscribed to the containment policy by following the Eisenhower example of blocking a festering communist influence in Latin America with a carefully arranged covert action coup. Fearing a second Cuba in the Western Hemisphere,


\(^{190}\) “President Lyndon Johnson Conversation with Senator Eugene McCarthy,” February 1, 1966, tape WH6602.01, conversation 9602, Presidential Recordings of Lyndon B. Johnson, Miller Center, University of Virginia, http://web1.millercenter.org/clips/lbj_mccarthy.mp3.

\(^{191}\) LBJ Tapes, July 2, 1965.
Kennedy schemed with the U.S. Ambassador to Brazil, Lincoln Gordon, to eject Goulart from power. “The main thing is at the same time,” Kennedy told Gordon on July 30, “to organize forces which are both political and military to, either reduce his power…in an extreme case perhaps to push him out, if it comes to that.”192 Gordon informed the President, “The military, I can see that they are very friendly to us; very anti-Communist, very suspicious of Goulart.”193 He assured JFK that the CIA would “make it clear, discreetly, that we are not necessarily hostile to any kind of military action whatsoever if it’s clear that the reason for the military action is” against Goulart.194 The President agreed. Both men also concurred Goulart was “giving the damn country away to the…Communists.”195

Goulart was perceived as anti-capitalist and a threat to regional stability after he assumed power in August 1961 in the midst of President Jânio da Silva Quadros’ resignation. Goulart happened to be visiting communist China the moment Quadros stepped down. Like Cuba and Guatemala, Brazil concerned Kennedy due to its geographic location. Like Indonesia had concerned Eisenhower due to its ample population, Brazil was the fifth largest country on the planet, with a massive population of 75 million people. With its size, the U.S. simply could not afford the magnitude of Brazil falling to communism. The CIA, as it had in the past, began throwing money at political and military factions aligned against the leftist government. Kennedy agreed to subvert Brazil’s upcoming parliamentary balloting because “the elections really could be a turning point.”196 He authorized the CIA to spend “$5 million funding the

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193 Ibid., 19.
194 Ibid., 18.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid., 16.
campaigns of anti-Goulart candidates for 15 federal seats, 8 state governorships, 250 federal deputy seats, and some 600 seats for state legislatures.”

Over the course of two years, the U.S. did not halt its efforts to support right-wing leadership in Brazil. A National Intelligence Estimate report from July 1963 sounded the alarm, fretting, “Under Goulart, Communists and their sympathizer have achieved a strong position from which to carry a continuation expansion of influence over Brazilian policy…. This could lead to the establishment of an extreme leftist regime with a strongly anti-US character.” An article in the Wall Street Journal called Goulart a “desperately devious, totally ambitious figure whose aim is to seize power and run a fascist state.”

After inheriting the presidency from Kennedy, Johnson’s approach to relations with Brazil did not ease the tension. Goulart also committed the mortal sin of recognizing Cuba, introducing land reform, and promoting policies that would grant national control of capital from foreign businesses. All three were interpreted as red flags for U.S. interests. According to Gordon, “the Goulart movement” took control of “private oil refineries…railroad ports, merchant shipping…important units of the ministries of justice and education,” and labor entities. Johnson soon warmed to the idea of supporting right-wing Army Chief of Staff General Humberto Castelo Branco, thought to be widely supported and of “competent leadership,” to oust Goulart in a coup. It was PBSUCCESS repeat, but with a much larger country. Gordon warned a coup could “help avert a major disaster…which might make Brazil

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197 Stephen G. Rabe, “JFK and Latin America” Diplomatic History 23, no.3 (Summer 1999), 544.
201 Ibid., 8.
the China of the 1960s.”202 He communicated on March 27, “My considered conclusion is that Goulart is now definitely engaged on campaign to seize dictatorial power, accepting active collaboration of the Brazilian Communist Party…. If he were to succeed it is more than likely that Brazil would come under full communist control…”203 A coup was likely the last resort after it was determined Goulart could not “be mustered for impeachment” by Brazilian parliament.204

On March 31, 1964, the Brazilian military began moving against Goulart. During a phone call with Undersecretary of State George Ball, Johnson stressed, “I think we ought to take every step that we can, be prepared to do everything that we need to do.”205 With secret support from the U.S. government in the form of arms, ammunition, gasoline, and funding, Branco met success the following day, sending Goulart on his way to exile in Uruguay. An intelligence cable dated April 2 confirmed: “Joao Goulart, deposed president of Brazil, left Porto Alegre about 1 p.m. local time for Montevideo.”206 LBJ rejoiced, issuing a statement to Brazil’s new provisional President that conveyed his “warmest good wishes” and condolences for resolving the issue “within a framework of constitutional democracy and without civil strife.”207 He told Mann, “I hope they give us some credit, instead of hell.”208 Branco officially became President on April 11. He immediately ordered the persecution of political rivals.

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204 Ibid., 5.
207 James N. Green, We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 22.
208 Ibid.
According to Peter Kornbluh, the National Security Archive’s Brazil Documentation Project director, “The CIA's clandestine political destabilization operations against Goulart between 1961 and 1964 are the black hole of this history.”\(^{209}\) Fifty years after the fact, it is possibly the least declassified out of the coups discussed in this thesis. Kornbluh recently urged President Obama to declassify top secret documents from the Kennedy and Johnson years to learn more about the U.S. role in this profound event of the Cold War. The underlying evidence reflects that both American Presidents desired Goulart’s disposal, allotted generous funding to do so, and solicited the CIA, in the tradition of the Eisenhower-era coups, to suppress the communist threat from Brazil in due time.

**Dominican Republic**

The day before Kennedy’s inauguration, Eisenhower advised him that the communist presence in Cuba “would be helped if we could handle the Dominican Republic at the same time.”\(^{210}\) Essentially, the thirty-fourth commander-in-chief encouraged his predecessor to simultaneously pursue the dethroning of two separate major world leaders. The U.S. maintained an extended history with the small Caribbean island-nation and its increasingly reckless and antagonistic leader, Generalissimo Rafael Trujillo, who had presided since 1930. Although American businesses and economic aid had played a role in comfortably keeping Trujillo’s country well within the sphere of American influence, the man was also a tyrant who hung enemies from meat hooks, ordered political assassinations, and steered his reign via brute force. By 1961, “there was a lot of pressure from various political groups, civil rights groups and others, not only in the U.S., but throughout the hemisphere, that something just had to be done


\(^{210}\) Meeting of the President and Senator Kennedy, transfer, January 19, 1961, declassified January 9, 1997, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.
about this man.”  Ultimately, Trujillo’s demise would be the closest example of an American President directly ordering the CIA to assassinate a foreign leader. This unfolded after a supply of small arms were sent to anti-Trujillo rebels in the Dominican exactly one day before Kennedy’s inauguration. On May 29, Henry Dearborn, the CIA’s station chief in Santo Domingo, received an intelligence cable approved by JFK that read: “We don’t care if the Dominicans assassinate Trujillo, that is all right. But we don’t want anything to pin this on us.” Trujillo perished in a hail of gunfire two weeks later when his ’57 Chevrolet Bel Air was ambushed by seven men outside of the Dominican capital. The murder weapons may have been from the CIA shipment. The main reaction within the White House was concern for the future. Robert Kennedy wrote, “The great problem now is that we don’t know what to do.”

Unlike Kennedy, and very much in the opposite vein of Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson had no desire to engage the American intelligence machine, and seemed to have little interest in communicating with the CIA. In fact, he never visited the agency’s headquarters once during his presidency. One month after the death of JFK, Johnson clarified to the DCI that the agency’s role should not involve instigating coups in foreign governments. McCone stated, “The President immediately brought up his desire to ‘change the image of the CIA’ from a cloak and dagger role.” He did not approve of its behavior or methods, citing that “he was tired of a situation that had been built up that every time my name or CIA’s name was mentioned, it was associated with a dirty trick.”

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212 U.S. Senate, Final Report of the Select Committee, 213.
213 Ibid., 215.
215 Ibid.
bad taste in the folksy Texan’s mouth. McCone was “highly dissatisfaction over the fact that President Johnson did not get direct intelligence briefings…as was the custom with President Kennedy and Eisenhower.”216 The Johnson administration changed its approach to clandestine action in terms of planning procedures, but the methodology of authorizing coups remained. This proved that even without a commander-in-chief proactively engaged with the intelligence apparatus, the coup methodology could still be implemented and achieved. In short, Eisenhower’s predecessors were finding new means by which to continue his covert action practice.

The second half of the Dominican-U.S. relationship of the 1960s involved an invasion by U.S. troops to prevent a continued presidency of Juan Bosch, who had originally become president in 1962 following Trujillo’s assassination. By the spring of 1965, Dominican unrest persisted to the point that it could not be ignored if the U.S. wanted to avoid another potential communist takeover, as leftists supported the reinstatement of Bosch. Even worse, Admiral William F. “Red” Raborn, the president’s, choice for DCI, believed Castro-trained terrorists were behind the Dominican unrest. “Our CIA says this is a completely led…Castro operation,” Johnson told Abe Fortas, his personal counsel. 217 To curtail the Dominican leftists, the President sent 2,500 paratroopers and over one thousand marines to the island by May 1, and prepared to deploy more. It was the first major landing involving U.S. forces in Latin America in nearly forty years. Eventually, American forces dissipated the in-fighting among the Dominicans and a U.S.-friendly conservative government was installed.

A decorated World War II naval officer, Raborn happened to be grossly incompetent when it came to the intelligence game. A contradicting CIA memo reported, “There is no

216 Memorandum for the Record by John McCone, April 27, 1964, Central Intelligence Agency, DCI (McCone) Files, Job 80–B01285A, DCI Meetings with the President.
217 LBJ Tapes, April 30, 1965, 10:50 a.m.
evidence that the Castro regime is directly involved in the current insurrection.”218 Secretary McNamara questioned the allegations regarding Castro terrorists in the Dominican. Johnson insisted, “CIA told me that there were two Castro leaders involved. And a little later, they told me eight, and a little later, they told me fifty-eight.”219 McNamara bluntly replied, “I just don’t believe the story.” One intelligence analyst observed in hindsight that “the language, arguments, and techniques of the Arbenz episode were used in Cuba in the early 1960s,” and “in the Dominican Republic in 1965.”220

When not ignoring the CIA, Johnson sparred with them, or fell for bad intelligence that ultimately led to public embarrassment. This not only illustrates that Eisenhower’s relationship with the CIA was unique and difficult to replicate, but the methods and collaborations he established with respect to toppling foreign governments could not be properly mirrored by predecessors. The precedent was dangerous, and set presidents up for failure and missteps in Cuba, Vietnam, and the Dominican Republic. Notwithstanding, LBJ’s successor, who also happened to be Eisenhower’s Vice President, would exemplify the coup methodology in Latin America one more time in the oncoming decade.

219 LBJ Tapes, April 30, 1965, 5:05 p.m.
NIXON, KISSINGER AND THE EISENHOWER LEGACY

Richard Nixon’s prominent association with the intelligence establishment dated back to the authorization of the CIA Act, originally passed into law on May 27, 1949. As a member of California’s 12th District in the House, Nixon approved funding for secret operations, which fundamentally granted the agency legal authority to launch covert action against foreign nations. As explained by author Tim Weiner, “The act gave the agency the ability to do almost anything
it wanted, as long as Congress provided the money in an annual package." \(^{221}\) Nixon carried the sentiment of operating covertly with blind congressional approval into the Oval Office years later, as he prepared to stage a coup against Chile.

As Vice President from 1953-1961, Nixon was kept in the national security loop by Eisenhower. He resided on the NSC and generally observed the President’s relationship with covert action planning, often conveying his own views on crucial issues. When the CIA scrambled to conceive ideas that would dismantle the Castro regime, Nixon indicated approval for “a drug, which if placed in Castro’s food, would make him behave in such an irrational manner that a public appearance could well have very damaging results on him." \(^{222}\) As President, he most likely would have authorized the invasion just as Kennedy, but with a more aggressive and experienced approach. Upon learning about the Bay of Pigs disaster the night of April 19, 1961, Nixon called the White House and encouraged Kennedy to acquire “proper legal cover,” but still “go in” after Castro. \(^{223}\) A Cold Warrior to the end, he would have pursued Castro in the direst of straits. Nixon was also a cheerleader for ousting the Sukarno regime. He advocated that “the United States should work through the Indonesia military organization to military opposition to communism.” \(^{224}\) These examples are very telling with regard to Nixon’s psychology toward the use of covert action. He had witnessed Eisenhower, an American hero who also happened to be his President, running mate, and boss, implement the shrewdest of tactics to unseat world leaders on multiple occasions. In Nixon’s own words, Eisenhower “was a

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\(^{222}\) Pfeiffer, “Official History of the Bay of Pigs,” 246.

\(^{223}\) Nixon, *RN*, 234.

\(^{224}\) Kahin and Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy*, 190.
far more complex and devious man than most people realized.”\textsuperscript{225} It is no surprise Nixon adhered to the same methods and clandestine principles as President.

Nixon’s unique experiences, coupled with an aggressive attitude as a cold warrior, set the stage for an administration potentially ripe with covert action when he was elected president in 1968. Although President Johnson told Nixon that Richard Helms, the DCI, was “extremely competent” and “loyal,” Nixon never fully trusted the man.\textsuperscript{226} He never saw Helms alone and did not bother reading daily intelligence summaries sent by the CIA. In 1970 alone, Nixon privately muttered vitriol aimed at the CIA, calling them “those clowns…out there in Langley,” and threatening to “read the riot act to the entire intelligence community.”\textsuperscript{227} Nixon implacably declared, “The U.S. is spending $6 billion per year on intelligence and deserves to get a lot more than it is getting.”\textsuperscript{228} This abrasive relationship with the agency inspired Nixon to pursue covert actions in his own way, mainly by granting less power to the DCI and more power to Kissinger. Nixon created a covert oversight group called the 40 Committee, but then consistently bypassed it. The 40 Committee created the illusion that the President practiced formal counsel and considered varying opinions while considering covert action initiatives, yet he and Kissinger worked unilaterally to a certain extent, as with the covert operation that led to a coup in Chile.

\textit{Chile}

In 1973, the Nixon administration backed a successful coup that overthrew the leftist leader of Chile and established a right-wing military junta. This covert operation was particularly personal for Nixon, as he had experienced the torrent of anti-Americanism in South America as

\textsuperscript{227} Nixon, \textit{RN}, 447; Record of President’s Meeting with the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, July 18, 1970, declassified December 2006, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1972, Vol. II.
\textsuperscript{228} Record of President’s Meeting with the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, July 18, 1970.
Vice President, which had largely manifested from the terrible consequences of Operation PBSUCCESS. During a tour of South America in May 1958, protesters descended on Nixon’s vehicular transport, throwing vegetables and spitting. Some held signs berating the administration for its Guatemala policy. Historian James Dunkerley, who served as Director of the Institute for the Study of the Americas wrote, “The Guatemala intervention shaped the attitudes and stratagems of an older generation of radicals, for whom this experience signaled the necessity of armed struggle and an end to illusions about peaceful, legal, and reformist methods.” Nevertheless, the Nixon administration went on to frustrate the anti-American, anti-Eisenhower sentiment in Latin America by intervening in Chile, which had previously maintained democratic elections and remained a U.S. ally for several years.

American intelligence efforts had been monitoring the rising of Chile’s Marxist-friendly politician Salvador Allende Gossens for a number of years, attempting to curb his political progress. Under authorization by President Kennedy, the CIA spent three million dollars to successfully buy votes in the 1964 Chilean election, which Allende lost. The next election season six years later, however, championed Allende as a front-runner. Allende advocated a “peaceful evolution” to socialism and swore to follow a “second model” of Marxism that would be tailored specifically for the needs of Chile. Nixon unsurprisingly opposed an emerging Marxist government in the U.S. sphere of influence. He later called Allende’s reign “an anti-American government all the way.” As previously illustrated with regard to the coups in Iran, Guatemala, and Cuba, American business interests during the Cold War also traditionally feared

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a communist-oriented government that might nationalize certain industries and antagonize international capital. This was no different when it came to Chile.

Nixon led with the philosophy that legalities took a back seat when it came to national security. State Department Intelligence Bureau Director Thomas Hughes called Nixon and Kissinger “incurably covert” and “inveterate manipulators.” These personality characteristics informed their authorization of a complicated, multi-faceted clandestine mission to oust Allende. Publicly, Kissinger stated, “I am not interested in, nor do I know anything about, the southern portion of the world from the Pyrenees on down.” Privately, he waxed the contrary, concluding, “I don’t see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people.” This arrogance echoed the disposition of the Eisenhower era that saw public praise for democracy by a White House that, in turn, ordered the overthrow of democratically elected foreign leaders.

In a memo, Helms reminded the White House, “There have been numerous instances when, facing the threat of a Communist Party or popular front election victory in the Free World, we have met the threat and turned it successfully.” Almost directly referencing the undertaking of AJAX and PBSUCCESS, this reminder complemented the administration’s approach to the Chile situation. The 40 Committee hatched a plan to antagonize Chile’s 1970 elections of mid-September to prevent Allende’s election. The element of election intervention became known as “Track I,” while the more extreme plan to instigate a coup in the event Allende

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235 Paul E. Sigmund, The United States and Democracy in Chile (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 40.
236 Henry Kissinger, Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs to President Nixon, undated, National Archive, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 711, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Vol. VI.
was actually elected president assumed the label of “Track II.” The Ambassador to Chile, Edward M. Korry, was not told about Track II. Unlike Eisenhower, who swore by plausible deniability and therefore tended to leave ambassadors in the dark on covert action details, Nixon granted the State Department partial knowledge of the Chilean clandestine stratagem.

The 40 Committee initially allotted $700,000 for the CIA to use against leftist candidates in the 1970 Chilean election.\(^{237}\) Other American companies with stakes in Chile’s copper mines provided funding as well, while a full-fledged propaganda campaign involving popular publications demonized Allende in America. An in-house CIA report recorded, “ Particularly noteworthy in this connection was the *Time* cover story which owed a great deal to written materials and briefings provided by CIA.”\(^{238}\) According to Helms, “Posters were printed, news stories planted, editorial comment encouraged, rumors whispered, leaflets strewn, and pamphlets distributed.”\(^{239}\) Once again, direct comparisons can be drawn from the PBSUCCESS operation sixteen years earlier.

Allende believed *Time* magazine “openly called” for an invasion of his country. He grieved, “We are suffering the most brutal and horrible pressure, both domestic and international.”\(^{240}\) The clandestine mission in Chile echoed the painful tradition that American leaders and intelligence agency counterparts fail to understand the culture of those nations in which they intervene. Ambassador Korry complained, “I had never seen such dreadful propaganda in a campaign anywhere in the world. I said that the idiots in the CIA who had helped create the ‘campaign of terror’- and I said this to the CIA - should have been sacked

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\(^{237}\) Prados, *Presidents’ Secret Wars*, 316.
\(^{239}\) Helms and Hood, *A Look Over My Shoulder*, 400.
\(^{240}\) U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record of the 105th*, 20881.
immediately for not understanding Chile and Chileans." Adding insult to injury, Allende still won the presidency on September 4, 1970. Furious that Allende survived to his inauguration, Nixon threatened to cut the agency’s funding. Budget Director George P. Schultz remembered, “Nixon railed against the CIA and their lousy intelligence. ‘I want you to cut the CIA’s budget to one-third its present size,'” The reaction was similar to Eisenhower’s disdain toward the agency in the last years of his presidency after the attempted Indonesian coup. In doing so, he seemingly established another tradition: presidential distrust and impatience with an intelligence entity that fails to deliver. Nixon was left with the choice of implementing Track II and authorizing another American-backed coup.

Notes taken from a September 1970 meeting by Helms specify that, with regard to the Chilean coup, Nixon was “not concerned [with] risks involved,” wanted “no involvement of the Embassy,” suggested at least ten million dollars was available for the Chile mission, wanted the “best men we have” on the job, and ordered the CIA to “make the economy scream.”

Thereafter, the only aid increases allotted to Chile from the U.S. benefited the military. Before a special select Senate committee on alleged assassination plots, famously known as the Church committee (after Idaho Senator Frank Church) tasked to report on alleged assassination plots, Helms later testified, “The President came down very hard that he wanted something done, and he didn’t much care how and that he was prepared to make money available.” The CIA spent approximately $7.5 million on Chile between fiscal years 1971-1973. Unlike Eisenhower, who

244 Ibid.
245 Prados, Presidents’ Secret Wars, 319.
had consistently used Secretary Dulles as an intermediary between the White House and CIA for such matters, Nixon left his secretaries of state and defense in oblivion. Helms, who had experienced his share of coup-staging, became nervous with the Nixon approach. When the coup plot leaked to Ambassador Korry, he succumbed to fury. After confronting CIA officials with a screaming match, he cabled Kissinger, warning that “any attempt on our part actively to encourage a coup could lead us to a Bay of Pigs failure.” As with the Bay of Pigs and South Vietnam, dissenting voices did not deter the President of the United States and his coup strategy. Helms instructed the CIA station agent in Santiago to “create at least some sort of coup climate” and “sponsor a military move.” Korry later estimated that nine different assassination plots were conceived as part of Track II, including one against Allende.

Like all the coups undertaken from Eisenhower on, the Chile operation was riddled with missteps and ill-conceived premises. Said Richard Helms in a 1978 interview: “One of the things not generally realized by people who are not familiar with the process, that advanced planning is critical for any covert operation. You have to have assets in place - real estate, individuals, money…. You have to have everything organized and ready to use. We had nothing in place in Chile. We really had to extemporize from the very beginning and it was an almost impossible situation.” Nixon found the agency increasingly incompetent. “The CIA isn’t worth a damn,” he lamented. However, when Allende cozied up to Castro, he exacerbated the President’s situation.

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246 Edward M. Korry, Backchannel Message from the Ambassador to Chile to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs, October 9, 1970, National Archives, RG 59, Chile–ITT–CIA 1963–1977, Lot 81D121.
248 Prados, Presidents’ Secret Wars, 320.
motivation to oust him. Nixon suddenly needed the CIA more than ever. A new chief of the agency’s Latin American division promised to “bring our influence to bear on key military commanders so that they might play a decisive role on the side of the coup forces.” It took three years, but finally the White House received an intelligence cable declaring “that a coup attempt will be initiated on 11 September” wherein “all three branches of the armed forces…are involved in this action.”\textsuperscript{251} The administration encouraged rebels who ultimately pushed Allende to commit suicide with an automatic rifle as they attacked and bombed the La Moneda presidential palace.

An American President had contributed to the downfall of yet another democratically-elected world leader. Allende was replaced by the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, whose junta reportedly murdered anywhere between 5,000 and 25,000 Chileans.\textsuperscript{252} Over the next seventeen years, tens of thousands were jailed and tortured under Pinochet’s rule in a repression commonly known as the “Caravan of Death.”\textsuperscript{253} He died in 2006 after being indicted for the killings.

A number of CIA documents, declassified and released for public perusal in September 2016, remain redacted in certain paragraphs. Peter Kornbluh of the National Security Archive contends that “the CIA is trying – but failing – to hold history hostage” and “attempting to cover up what Nixon knew about coup plotting in Chile and when he knew it, as well as hiding the CIA’s own contacts and connections to the coup plotters.”\textsuperscript{254} Regardless, enough declassified information, oral histories, and testimonies prove the Nixon administration played a key role in

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\item[252] Prados, Presidents’ Secret Wars, 321.
\item[253] Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 316.
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assisting the rebels, who explicitly asked for American aid in 1973, and actively pursued Allende’s downfall. Additionally, American military advisors had resided in the field with members of the Chilean army who executed the coup, and a U.S. electronic intelligence aircraft coincidentally flew above the Andes Mountains the very day Allende perished in the coup.

A phone call about “the Chilean thing” between Nixon and Kissinger five days after Pinochet’s takeover included the President hinting, “Well we didn’t – as you know – our hand doesn’t show on this one though.”255 Kissinger replies, “We didn’t do it. I mean we helped them. [censored space] created the conditions as great as possible.” Nixon confirms, “That is right. And that is the way it is going to be played.” Two decades after Nixon assumed the presidency, Helms surmised, “Richard Nixon never trusted anybody. Here he had become President of the United States and therefore chief of the Executive branch, and yet he was constantly telling people…the State Department was just a bunch of pinstriped cocktail-drinking diplomats, that the Agency couldn’t come up with a winning victory in Vietnam…. On and on and on…. ‘They are dumb, they are stupid, they can’t do this, and they can’t do that.’”256 Aside from this mindset, Nixon followed suit of the man he had observed in the White House for eight years, and used the CIA to instigate another coup in the Western Hemisphere with terribly negative consequences for Chile’s population and the region’s opinion of the United States.

Prior to 1974, not one of the two hundred intelligence oversight bills introduced by Congress were passed. Following the controversies of Watergate, Vietnam, and various investigative committees conducted by the United States Congress, however, Nixon’s successors shied away from considering the extreme and vigilant coup methodology. Eisenhower had set the standard into motion, and the subsequent two decades of flimsy checks and balances on covert

256 Richard Helms, interview by Professor Stanley I. Kutler, July 14, 1988, Wisconsin Historical Archives, box 15, folder 16.
actions allowed the tradition to continue for a limited time. Had he not observed Eisenhower’s repeated demonstration of this clandestine policy, Nixon may have been inspired to explore different covert avenues when it came to Chile. Nonetheless, the damage had been done.

VI

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

Authorizing coups to influence foreign leadership offers strictly short-term benefits. A special committee tasked with producing a report on clandestine services for the CIA in 1968, known as the Covert Operations Study Group, confidentially concluded, “Covert operations can rarely achieve an important objective alone. At best, a covert operation can win time, forestall a coup, or otherwise create favorable conditions which will make it possible to use overt means to
finally achieve an important objective.”  

Dr. John Prados concisely explains, “Making alliances with indigenous groups inevitably involves buying into the less wholesome features of such groups. Even if only through guilt by association, this in turn may discredit CIA programs as well as the larger aims of American policy.”

The aforementioned less wholesome features of the governments backed by the U.S. in the previously explored coups generally dealt with abundant cases of repression, bloodshed, and imprisonment. Therefore, very few positives resulted from the coups authorized by Eisenhower onward.

The long-term consequences of the coups authorized and inspired by Eisenhower’s example manifested two basic results. The first, and most obvious, is the disastrous effect CIA-intervention had on the political, economic, and humanitarian life of the countries themselves. The second long-term consequence derives from the original example established by the Eisenhower administration which inspired future Presidents to invoke similar coup tactics in the 1960s and ‘70s, in spite of the warnings and high risks involved. In contemplating the risk of exposure while conducting coup-laced covert actions, CIA veteran Frank G. Wisner argued in 1954 that “a serious question is raised as to whether any operation of this kind can appropriately be included as one of the U.S. cold war weapons, no matter how great the provocation or how favorable the auspices.”

Former Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Richard J. Kerr criticized the Presidents who followed Eisenhower by explaining how they maintained “the

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258 Prados, *Presidents’ Secret Wars*, 287.

259 Memo from Wisner to Dulles, April 24, 1954.
expectation that intelligence could solve every problem, or that it could not do anything right, and then moved to the opposite view.”\textsuperscript{260}

The consequences that followed the coup in Iran proved profoundly catastrophic on the long-term spectrum. The Shah, who would have likely resisted his reinstatement of power had it not been for the CIA’s persuasion, was committed to doing anything in his power to repress all opposition, including the jailing of thousands of political prisoners. Three years of martial law engulfed Iran following the 1953 coup, as the Shah rigged elections and used a Gestapo-style street gang to enforce rule. The future leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, had personally witnessed the chaos and violence instigated by U.S.-backed factions that ultimately led to the liquidation of the Mossadegh government.\textsuperscript{261} By witnessing this firsthand, Khomeini, like an entire generation of Iranians, learned to resent America.

In his 1963 memoir \textit{Mandate for Change}, the retired President Eisenhower gloated about the initial achievements of the Iranian regime change. “For the first time in three years,” he wrote, “Iran was quiet - and still free.”\textsuperscript{262} As he died exactly one decade before the Iranian Revolution, Eisenhower was not able to view the terrible repercussions of American intervention in the Middle East. In 1971, President Nixon praised the Shah for running “a virtual dictatorship in a benign way.”\textsuperscript{263} The unpopularity of the Shah, who fled Iran in January 1979, inspired an overwhelming surge of support for the Shia Muslim cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, who called the

\textsuperscript{260} Weiner, \textit{Legacy of Ashes}, xv.
\textsuperscript{262} Eisenhower, \textit{Mandate for Change}, 166.
U.S. “the great Satan,” established a radical Islamic Republic, and replaced the Shah as the Supreme Leader of Iran, in the wake of the Iranian Revolution.²⁶⁴

In the midst of the revolution, fifty-three hostages were infamously taken from the American Embassy in Tehran by the Ayatollah’s followers – not to be freed for 444 days. CIA veteran Ken Pollack, a long-time analyst of the Middle East, wrote, “…the taking of the embassy was a response to the 1953 coup against Mosaddeq. To some extent, it was about preventing a repeat performance…a far more compelling cause for the Iranians was revenge. It was an act of vengeance for the 1953 coup, designed to humiliate the United States, to cause pain to the American people, and to assuage the angry psychological scars that the Iranian people still bore from that event.”²⁶⁵ Tim Weiner aptly writes, “A blaze of glory for the covert operators of the CIA’s greatest generation became a tragic conflagration for their heirs.”²⁶⁶ Every American President from that point forward, clashed with the radical successors whom had conducted a coup of their own to oust Iran’s Eisenhower-backed puppet. While a celebrated success in 1953, Eisenhower’s approval of Operation AJAX clearly resulted in a barrage of disturbing, unconsidered consequences still felt within the region and political climate in modern times.

The aftermath of the Guatemalan coup saw Colonel Armas dictating a brutal regime immediately upon assuming leadership. Declassified CIA documents reflect that “US officials had reason to believe Castillo Armas’s rightist tendencies would be offset by his openness to advice from the United States.”²⁶⁷ The agency believed they could mold Armas’ leadership style and policies once he replaced Arbenz. The U.S. relationship with the colonel hardly went as

²⁶⁶ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 374.
²⁶⁷ Cullather, Operation PBSUCCESS, 91.
planned. Before his assassination in 1957, Colonel Armas proved a tyrannical, corrupt leader who censored the media and ruled with an iron fist. Although one of the supposed strong suits of covert action was to compliment the New Look and benefit American interests economically, Armas regularly asked the U.S. for handouts, which were then misused to grant his cronies kickbacks. Eisenhower had previously refused additional monetary aid to Mossedegh’s democratic government in Iran, yet the State Department solicited a $20 million loan from the International Monetary Fund for crooked Armas.  

Following the turmoil that ensued after Armas’ death, Guatemala suffered under a coercive military rule that ultimately killed an estimated 200,000 Guatemalan civilians over the next four decades, leaving yet another questionable layer for Eisenhower and the CIA’s legacy. At least ninety percent of said deaths were inflicted by the Guatemalan military. When lawmakers attempted to implement a new constitution in 1965, the document was banished by military rule. Armas and his successors arguably tolerated as much democracy as U.S. cold warriors tolerated communism. In the end, Eisenhower’s choice to unseat a democrat with leftist tendencies and install an unproven military dictator devastated generations of Guatemalans, incited a cruel streak of violence throughout the country, encouraged anti-American attitudes in the region, and failed to aid in winning the Cold War.

The repercussions of PBSUCCESS also ignited a profound streak of anti-Americanism in Latin America, which stretched through the decades. In major cities such as Havana, Santiago, Rio de Janeiro, and Mexico City, “large crowds gathered to burn the stars and stripes and effigies of Eisenhower and Dulles.” The Latin American populace was clearly aware of who was

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268 Ibid., 89-90.
269 Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 458.
270 Cullather, Operation PBSUCCESS, 86.
behind their troubles. The State Department was reportedly “frightened by reactions all over.”\(^{271}\) The troubles continued through several decades, as political prisoners and assassinations remained commonplace in Guatemala. “What we’d give to have an Arbenz now,” groaned a State Department official in 1981. “We are going to have to invent one, but all the candidates are dead.”\(^{272}\) Philip C. Roettinger, a case officer for PBSUCCESS, stated as a retired CIA agent in 1986:

Operation PBSUCCESS was a failure. The new regime burned books. It disfranchised three-fourths of Guatemala’s people. It dismantled social and economic reforms such as land redistribution, social security, and trade-union rights. Our overthrow began thirty-one years of repressive military rule and the deaths of more than 100,000 Guatemalans…. It’s painful to look as my government repeats the mistake in which it engaged me thirty-two years ago. I have grown up. I only wish my government would do the same.\(^{273}\)

A full account of Operation PBSUCCESS composed by the CIA History Staff in 1994 admitted, “In light of Guatemala’s unstable and often violent history since the fall of Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán in 1954, we are perhaps less certain today than most Americans were at the time that this operation was a Cold War victory.”\(^{274}\) The White House intervened on an earnest, reformist government that had demonstrated democracy as opposed to the intention of converting the entire nation into a sinister communist state. “PBSUCCESS…interrupted a revolutionary process that had been in motion for over a decade,” however, the President considered Guatemala’s revolutionary land reforms to be communist subversion in a country that happened to be located only two borders away from American soil.\(^{275}\) Eisenhower viewed the actions of Árbenz through a Cold War lens, not from a Guatemalan perspective. The President flaunted a total disregard for the small country’s history. In a memorandum from April 1968, Richard


\(^{274}\) Cullather, *Operation PBSUCCESS*, iii.

\(^{275}\) Ibid., 2.
Helms indicated support for six of the eight established military juntas in the Western Hemisphere. “Latin American military juntas were good for the United States,” he wrote.276 “They were the only force capable of controlling military crises. Law and order were better than the messy struggle for democracy and freedom.”

The blowback of Operation ZAPATA at the Bay of Pigs was dire on several fronts. Most significantly, the failed coup radicalized Fidel Castro and his anti-Americanism, nearly leading to nuclear war the following year with the Cuban Missile Crisis. Furthermore, the CIA discovered, thanks to Major Florentino Aspillaga Lombard, a chief of Cuban intelligence for the Soviets who defected in 1987, that every Cuban recruited by the agency after the Bay of Pigs had been a double agent, secretly loyal to Castro.277 Still, the Kennedys pursued Castro with various assassination plots in a $50 million covert action known as Operation Mongoose designed to achieve the Cuban communist’s demise.278 Kennedy’s continued effort to destroy Castro was secret to the point that even Vice President Johnson was oblivious to the fact the U.S. had been attempting to assassinate Castro for nearly three years. The failed coup, originally commissioned by Eisenhower, had led Kennedy to explore dubious and unproven mechanisms with the end goal of a foreign leader’s assassination.

Ironically, it was Castro who ended up serving a long duration as Cuba’s President until 2008, while Kennedy died by an assassin’s bullet on November 22, 1963. The agency failed to achieve its ultimate objective, U.S.-Cuban relations dwindled for several decades, and the floodgates opened for theories that Castro was repaying Kennedy for the ZAPATA and Mongoose operations. The CIA deliberately withheld information about Mongoose during the

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277 Weiner, Legacy of Ashes, 417.
278 Ibid., 188.
investigation into President Kennedy’s assassination known as the Warren Commission.

President Gerald R. Ford, who served on the Commission as a Congressman from Michigan, later admitted the agency had “made a mistake in not giving us all of the data they had available. And their judgment was not good in not giving us the full story.” Such testimony would have served as “an absolutely vital factor in analyzing the events surrounding the Kennedy assassination.” Helms revealed in a candid 1978 interview with British broadcaster David Frost, “If you become involved in the business of eliminating foreign leaders, and it is considered by governments more frequently than one likes to admit, there is always the question of who comes next…. And if you kill some else’s leaders, why shouldn’t they kill yours and so forth.”

A 1967 report by the Inspector General on CIA covert operations stated that “the killings of a Diem or of a Trujillo by forces encouraged but not controlled by the U.S. government” should not be overlooked. It stated the significance of the events but did not weigh the White House with the full blame. The long-term consequences and missteps in Vietnam sprung from the fact that American forces, like in Latin America, did not understand or appreciate the culture, history, or people. CIA Operations Officer Richard L. Holm, who endured missions in Laos, later lamented “the ignorance and the arrogance of Americans arriving in Southeast Asia…. We had only minimal understanding of the history, culture, and politics of the people we wanted to aid… our strategic interests were superimposed onto a region where our president had decided to

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‘draw the line’ against communism. And we would do it our way.” Following the murder of President Diem in the 1963 coup authorized by Kennedy and engineered by Ambassador Lodge, more coups, chaos, and military dictatorships dominated the increasingly uncontrollable political climate of South Vietnam. While Diem’s erratic behavior and violence toward the nation’s Buddhists proved abhorrent and counterproductive to U.S. interests, the flood of turmoil that replaced his presence further frustrated matters in Saigon.

The military aspect of the containment approach in Vietnam increased with significant heat, and the complicated situation inherited by President Johnson finally converted into war with the passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution less than one year after President Kennedy’s death. The Resolution, which claimed North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin the night of August 4, 1964, was based on lies. CIA officer Ray S. Cline, who served as the deputy director of the intelligence at the time, later explained in an oral history that the attack had not occurred, but “it was just what Johnson was looking for” to validate a reason to openly bomb Vietnam and launch a full war. Given Johnson’s cavalier attitude toward war-making, the declaration of war was likely inevitable. However, a more stable government in Saigon following Diem’s coup could have lessened complications and better promoted U.S. interests during the course of what would become one of the most tragic and controversial wars in American history.

While encouraging support for the coup against President Goulart in Brazil, Ambassador Gordon concluded, “The alternative of risking a communist Brazil appears unacceptable, implying potentially far greater ultimate costs in both money and lives.” Nonetheless, the detestable replacement regime of General Branco, who had supposedly championed a “great victory for the free world,” arrested over 50,000 political prisoners in the first thirty days of his reign alone. President Johnson shrugged, “I don’t give a damn. I think that...some people...need to be locked up here and there too.” Well aware of the repression, Washington provided $50 million in economic aid to Branco. The United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank, and other major corporations flooded Brazil with investments, while the conservative militaristic government ruled for the following two decades. Despite impressive economic growth between 1968 and 1974, the government was empowered as a result of the U.S.-backed coup which adhered to the consistent violation of basic human rights, imprisoned artists, tortured and raped female activists, and oversaw the murder of an estimated three thousand Brazilians by the state military and police. This was the same police force trained by a program authorized by Kennedy called the Office of Public Safety. A 1968 CIA report on covert operations warned, “On balance, exposure of clandestine operations costs the United States in terms of world opinion. To some, exposure demonstrates the disregard of the United States for national rights and human rights.” This rang true in light of the aftermath of the various coups encouraged by the U.S. However, the notion proved especially valid in Latin America. Historian Stephen G. Rabe concludes, “The United States had succeeded in exporting

288 Rabe, The Killing Zone, 110-111.
289 Study Group on Covert Activities, 9.
its Cold War concerns to Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America, with appalling consequences.\textsuperscript{290}

Similar to other long-term consequences of U.S.-backed coups in other nations, Allende’s 1973 replacement in Chile devastated an entire generation of its country’s citizens. The Nixon-supported General Pinochet rounded up thousands of Chileans who were subsequently tortured, raped, or executed. Two percent of the population was forced into exile while an estimated 3,197 were reportedly murdered by Pinochet’s men and 36,000 formally reported their own torture.\textsuperscript{291}

General Pinochet’s intelligence director, Colonel Manuel Contreras, especially provided the U.S. with troubles long after it had supported the 1973 coup. Contreras was responsible for a 1976 Washington D.C. car bombing that killed American aide Ronni Moffitt and Orlando Letelier, the former Chilean ambassador to the United States. Justice failed to prevail on Contreras for this political assassination on American soil because the Chilean intelligence officer blackmailed the U.S. government by threatening to expose its role in the coup against Allende; his trial for murder was ultimately blocked. Essentially, the coup authorized by Nixon had granted power to a dictator willing to commit political assassination on American soil, promote terrorism, and tolerate astounding acts of violence within his own country’s borders.

Additionally, with the release and declassification of information, the long-term consequences of the coups on the domestic front sparked a wave of unrest among certain circles of the American populace. The CIA’s 1968 report on covert affairs stated the first cost of clandestine activity with respect to consequences in the United States: “The impression of many Americans that the United States is engaging in ‘dirty tricks’ tends to alienate them from their

\textsuperscript{290} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{291} Ibid., 143.
government. This is especially true of the intellectual community and the young. 

As a result, “enlisting the cooperation of the academic community has become much more difficult.” Therefore, the CIA itself, as well as observers of the historic implications of the more significant covert operations, can conclude that this methodology maintains the potential to divide Americans ideologically. Although he carefully attempted to infuse the coup missions with plausible deniability, the exposure of Eisenhower’s coups and similar covert actions fueled a counterproductive element of distrust between the American people and their government in later years.

Finally, the cost-effective aspect of covert actions – one of the main motivations behind Eisenhower’s decision to invest in such operations – proved the opposite in the long run. After completing the initial coups, particularly in Iran, Guatemala, and Chile, the U.S. put itself in a position that required long-term support for the leaders it had helped to install in the coups’ aftermath. Therefore, the long-term costs outweighed the initially inexpensive price-tags of limited clandestine missions considerably. The humane, diplomatic, domestic, and fiscal long-term consequences of the coups authorized by Eisenhower and those that followed in his tradition, created severe and sizeable detriments.

292 Study Group on Covert Activities, 9.
VII

CONCLUSION

President Eisenhower left the United States a questionable legacy regarding the American intelligence machine and the specific ways in which it could be utilized to fight the Cold War and promote U.S. foreign policy. He viewed the use of espionage, clandestine activity, and covert ops as an imperative contribution to the struggle against communism, and set a dubious example by authorizing coups in democratic foreign countries to exercise containment. This set a dangerous precedent that failed to entertain long-term consequences, proved costlier than estimated, negated foreign and domestic opinion regarding the American government, and set the
stage for various human rights violations. Furthermore, none of Eisenhower’s successors possessed the unique experience and dealings with intelligence the thirty-fourth President channeled when deciding to implement the first of what would be several U.S.-backed coups. This made it all the more treacherous to those who believed they could utilize intelligence in the Eisenhower vein and emerge triumphantly.

During a speech at CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia in October 1959, Eisenhower declared, “Success cannot be advertised; failure cannot be explained. In the work of intelligence, heroes are undecorated and unsung, often even among their own fraternity.” Most relevantly, the success of the Eisenhower coups and their legacy that included inspiring future Presidents to implement similar policy, cannot be advertised because they were merely short-term successes at best. Senator Frank Church (D-ID), who led an investigative intelligence committee in 1975 that produced six volumes of reports drawn from multiple interviews, hearings, and testimony, addressed the issue of extreme covert actions after his findings. “I must lay the blame, in large measure, to the fantasy that it lay within our power to control other countries through the covert manipulation of their affairs,” he stated. “It formed part of a greater illusion that entrapped and enthralled our Presidents - the illusion of American omnipotence.” No President did more to demonstrate and promote this illusion of American omnipotence than Eisenhower. Upon leaving the presidency and some years thereafter, Eisenhower’s critics charged him with being a hands-off simpleton obsessed with golf. New Yorker journalist Richard Rovere called him a “standard American” with an “unschematic” mind “distrustful of fine distinctions” who was bored by “the whole operating side of government.”

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293 “Dwight D. Eisenhower,” CIA.
295 Greenstein, Hidden Hand Presidency, 5-6.
Eisenhower had authorized elaborate coup plots and devious, consequential national security schemes that festered a global wrath for decades to come. The President once reflected, “The United States never lost a soldier or a foot of ground in my administration. We kept the peace. People ask how it happened - by God, it didn’t just happen, I’ll tell you that.” By technicality this statement rings true but it does not consider the number of U.S.-backed rebels who perished during uprisings instigated by the CIA at Eisenhower’s approval.

The CIA exists to serve the President of the United States and White House foreign policy. Without a need to pursue clandestine missions and accumulate information, the agency’s role is moot. Therefore, the CIA takes on the tone and identity granted to it by whomever the President may be at the time. This is essential in understanding the profound impact President Eisenhower draped over the intelligence community, as his daring decision to authorize repeat coups in foreign nations granted permission to a relatively young entity to assist in the overthrow of world leaders. It was Eisenhower’s choice to utilize the CIA in that manner, which established a major pattern in 20th century American presidential history. Eisenhower’s unique experience prior to the presidency made him “better equipped than his predecessor to make judgments concerning the feasibility of covert actions.” Despite being warned by Kim Roosevelt in 1953 of the faulty framework by which these covert actions were conceived, the President’s fondness for Cold War policy took priority over the risks involved. Prior to Eisenhower, no President either had the opportunity or the tenacity to use the CIA to encourage coups. After Eisenhower, Presidents were unable to resist the consistent implementation of the methodology for at least two decades.

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297 Prados, Presidents’ Secret Wars, 108.
Conclusively, the coup methodology implemented by Eisenhower set a terrible example for future Presidents who followed suit with the same inconsiderate and dangerous framework, spearheading a slew of negative consequences around the world. The coup method illustrated, in the darkest of ways, that Cold War-era American foreign policy placed more value on decimating communist governments, whether or not ample evidence existed to verify their status as practicing communists capable of definitive threat. Erasing potential communists outweighed the administration’s concern for genuinely supporting or installing international democracies, as those aforementioned countries who fell victim to American intervention proved generally better off before their coups. This substantially captures the painful hypocrisy of the era, and every President who ordered intelligence officials to forge coups, because the underlying motive for deterring the advancement of communism was theoretically to promote a freer and superior way of life for global populations. On the contrary, Eisenhower’s influence on covert action and the long-term consequences of dethroning foreign leaders, demonstrated the opposite. Fundamentally, this speaks to the paranoia of the times, a short-sightedness in policy-making, and an absence of consideration for the greater good.
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APPENDIX:

DEFINITION OF TERMS

303 Committee – The special board established to review and authorize covert actions during the Johnson administration. The 303 Committee was formerly known as “Special Group 5412” until changing its name in June 1964, as directed by National Security Action Memo (NSAM) No. 303.

CIA – The Central Intelligence Agency, founded in 1947, acts as the preeminent intelligence entity specifically geared toward foreign relations.

CIA Act of 1949 – Legislation that granted further funding and authority to the agency. The law prevented the agency from being forced to disclose “organization, functions, officials, titles, salaries, or numbers of personnel employed.”

Covert Operations or “ops” – A stealthy mission designed to reach its goal without revealing the culprit or initiator.

DCI – Director of Central Intelligence acts as the head of the CIA.

National Security Act of 1947 – Legislation that established the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Council, the position of “Secretary of Defense,” and separated the Department of the Air Force into its own entity. The pivotal law completely restructured America’s approach and capabilities regarding national security and defense during the Cold War.

NSC – The highly exclusive and carefully selected National Security Council functions as a network of advisers toward the president’s national security and foreign policy decisions.

NSC 5412 – Also defined as the “National Security Council Directive on Covert Operations,” this directive was approved on March 15, 1954, acting as the American government’s basis for covert operations.
OSS – The Office of Strategic Services was the American war-time intelligence entity between 1942-1945, acting as a preface to the CIA.

Operation AJAX – The long-term covert mission devised by the CIA and British Intelligence that instigated a coup to oust Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953.

Operation PLUTO – The precursor to the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion wherein anti-Castro Cuban refugees were drafted by the CIA and trained in Guatemala.

Operation PBSUCCESS – CIA covert operation, formally approved by the NSC on August 12, 1953, devised to instigate a coup to oust President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán in Guatemala.

Operation ZAPATA – The CIA clandestine mission to invade Cuba with a faction of rebels and overthrow President Fidel Castro.

Paramilitary action – Similar to covert action, wherein armed forces supported by the U.S. are utilized to influence events or conditions in other countries.