

The position of the United States of America on the presidential elections in Guatemala in 1966

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Abstract

The Guatemalan armed forces led by the Minister of Defense launched a military coup in 1963 to prevent the return of former Guatemalan President Arevalo to the presidency and the country shifted from civilian rule to military rule. As a result, the US administration asked the head of the military government to hold elections to return to constitutional civilian rule, and after pressure and demands from the ambassador American John Bell in Guatemala, elections were held during 1966, and the US administration was keen to choose a candidate who would serve its political and economic interests in Guatemala and work to combat communism in the country.

INTRODUCTION

The United States of America was interested in Guatemala for political and economic reasons. After the outbreak of the Cold War and the division of the world into two western camps represented by the United States of America and its allies, and an eastern one represented by the Soviet Union and its allies, the Cold War moved to Latin America as the Soviet bloc tried to spread communism among Latin American countries, which provoked the United States of America, which It prevented any interference in Latin America under the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, in 1954 the United States of America succeeded in invading Guatemala to topple the pro-communist government of JacoboArbens, and supervised the training of Cuban exiles using Guatemalan lands in 1961 to invade Cuba and topple the pro-communist government of Fidel Castro, and in 1963 the administration stood The US government is against the return of former Guatemalan President Arevalo to run for the presidential elections in 1963 and supported the Guatemalan armed forces plans for a military coup in the event that Arevalo returns to Guatemala Constitutional, elected by the people.

The Prime Minister, Enrique Peralta Azurdia⁽¹⁾, announced a year after assuming power that the country would return to constitutionalism and called for the convening of the Constituent Assembly in May 1964 that set a conference on May 25, 1966, to choose a candidate for the presidency, who would assume his post on July 1 of the year 1966⁽²⁾, and Peralta promised to issue a new constitution for the country to replace the constitution that was suspended in the aftermath of the coup in 1963 and was issued on September 15, 1965, which stipulated that political parties must provide the National Election Assembly with a list of no less than fifty thousand supporters to register in the elections and following The new constitution Participation in the May 1966 elections is restricted to three moderate left-to-center parties chosen by the Peralta regime⁽³⁾.

One of these participating parties is the Institutional Democratic PartyPartidoInstitucionalDemocrático(PID)This government-sponsored party was established in 1964 with a broad base similar to the Mexican PRI party ⁽⁴⁾, The PID party had little popular support as it consisted of businessmen and government employees Aguilar de Leon is the presidential candidate for the PID party This candidate was distinguished by his loyalty to Peralta. He declared long ago that he was loyal to the United States and had expressed his strong support for the American work in the Dominican Republic Gustavo MironPorras is the

vice president of the party, and Miron has maintained a friendly attitude towards the United States and the US embassy considers him the most competent among the six candidates ⁽⁵⁾.

The second party nominated in the elections is the National Liberation Party (MLN) Movimiento De Liberación Nacional⁽⁶⁾, the national liberation movement was formed in the form of a break with the old National Democratic Movement (MDN) under Castillo Armas, and the MLN is a right-wing conservative, anti-communist, anti-Arevalo and opposition For left parties, the presidential candidate of MLN is a strong opponent of the PID party and its candidate and prefers cooperation with the (PR) Revolutionary Party Despite this, cooperation between the MLN party and the conservatives of PID is possible, the official candidate of the MLN party is Miguel Angel Ponciano Samayoa, Colonel Ponsciano resigned from the position of Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and from active service in the army on August 2, 1965, to run for the presidency He is anti-communist and is believed to be a friend of the United States, Manuel Villacorta Vielman is the vice president's candidate ⁽⁷⁾.

The third candidate is the Revolutionary Party (PR) is a moderate liberal national reform party that was formed in 1957, and the PR was the most active and perhaps the most powerful politicians in the country, Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro ⁽⁸⁾, the presidential candidate of the Revolutionary Party ⁽⁹⁾, who replaced his brother Mario Mendez Montenegro who was assassinated in 1965 ⁽¹⁰⁾, Mendes is a famous lawyer, but he is an unknown politician who is considered by some to be politically naive and thus he is easy prey for leftists and communists and declared that he is pro-US and anti-communist Clemente Marroquin Roja, the party's vice president's candidate for the revolution, is an anti-communist but critical of US policy toward Guatemala ⁽¹¹⁾.

Although Peralta curtailed political participation to establish military supremacy and preserve the electoral process, he failed to secure a coalition to institutionalize the military as the dominant force in the political system, and instead, the army and the right were divided between PID and MLN, This left the PR party as the only civilian opposition to the Yemini state and military ⁽¹²⁾.

The US administration worked to identify the presidential candidate who best serves American interests, and it realized that if Colonel Aguilar was able to achieve the victory of the PID party, it would be through illegal means and both the MLN party and the PR party would oppose his presidency, which creates more instability and if The MLN party returned to power through the presidency of Colonel Miguel Ponciano political polarization will certainly increase under an extremist right-wing government and weaken the development programs set by the Alliance for Progress program. However, the US administration did not oppose Mendez, the PR candidate at the beginning, as Some American officials feared that Mendez would take a turn to the left, and the possibility of his support for the Guatemalan Communist Party PGT Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo and other left-wing extremists. Nevertheless, subsequent reports of the US administration described Mendez as a good and popular candidate, and a safe candidate for the interests of the United States if he was not seen. American officials came to Mendez with the look of suspicion and hostility they showed towards Arevalo, and American officials believed that Mendez would have to rely on his relationship with Washington ⁽¹³⁾.

It is noted that the United States did not prefer the PID candidate because it leads to the excitement of the other two parties, which leads to instability and thus provides an opportunity for the communist elements to achieve gains in Guatemala and endanger US interests, and the US administration realized that the victory of the MLN party candidate, which represents the extreme conservative right, leads Creating chaos and instability through the use of arbitrary methods against guerrillas, and since it is a right-wing conservative party, it will refuse to deal with the United States of America.

Members of the National Liberation Party (MLN) believed that it had a weak chance to win the elections, so it tried to use the threat of guerrilla warfare to start justifying a coup against Peralta to gain power and as a result, the threat of guerrilla warfare and MLN's belief that Ponciano would lose the elections stimulated plots to overthrow Peralta, and the military split between PID, MLN and the possibility of conflict in late 1965 led to the US administration's intervention to prevent violence within the armed forces. PID focused on Peralta, which was supported by moderates and loyalists in the army. In return, Ponciano received loyalty from influential members of the armed forces. These developments raised the concern of the administration. The American who intervened to avoid a coup led by the MLN party and the US embassy was still unable to determine the extent of the military support for Ponciano and expressed its fear of the potential destruction that he would pose, indicating that the army's support for Ponciano is still unclear, however, the army is currently divided in its loyalty. Which means that the coup attempt at this time will not be decisive quickly and thus could lead to a chaotic situation in the country, in response to that it intervened and Washington has warned Ponciano and the MLN party directly that it will not support or recognize the government resulting from the coup and urged adherence to the scheduled elections⁽¹⁴⁾.

The American administration feared that the chaos would lead to a military coup led by the right-wing elements, and thus take over a government that did not obtain the approval and permission of the US administration, which means that US political and economic interests are at risk.

The US ambassador to Guatemala, John Gordon Mein⁽¹⁵⁾, met President Peralta on December 21, 1965, and found him able to deal with any coup attempt. The ambassador indicated that Peralta was aware of Colonel Ponciano's actions and was completely uninterested in the US administration's approach to Ponciano, and William J. Bowdler⁽¹⁶⁾ of the National Security Council stated that Ambassador Maine did not raise with Peralta the issue of OAS⁽¹⁷⁾, monitoring of the Guatemalan elections⁽¹⁸⁾.

In a private meeting with the American ambassador Maine on December 22, 1965, Ponciano confirmed that he does not believe that there will be an attempt to bring down Peralta, except that dissatisfaction within the army is clear and the coup-plotting continues between civilian politicians and military officers. In the security situation, or if the March elections were rigged, the army might feel compelled to decide to stage a military coup⁽¹⁹⁾.

Despite promises that the vote would be unhindered and the ballot would be fair, President Peralta showed bias during the campaign for the pro-government PID party, which led to the other two candidates, Mendez, from the moderate left of the PR party and Colonel Miguel Ponciano of the far-right MLN party, protesting the government's bias. Peralta confirmed that he does not want observers from the Organization of American States to attend, but there will be a large press representation during the elections, about 25 journalists from the United States⁽²⁰⁾.

In Guatemala, there was an expectation that if the presidential elections were held on March 6 as scheduled, the three candidates would win and the final selection would be through Congress, and the intense competition between political parties and the renewal of communist terrorism could lead to an increase in instability and violence, which could lead to the cancellation of the elections. The candidate of the revolutionary party, Mendez, had advantages, including being the only popular candidate running against two conservatives who would divide the right-wing votes, but there is a general belief within the revolutionary party that Mendez will not be allowed to win, as although the conservatives are a minority, they are the strongest groups in the country and the revolutionary party stressed the notion that its defeat would be evidence of fraud and fraud. Several attempts were made to merge the government-sponsored PID party and the MLN party, but the latter refused to accept the unpopular PID candidate Aguilar and Aguilar told US embassy staff that the PID victory was

Stressing that the party enjoys full support, PID has set up a five-year plan for national development ⁽²¹⁾. On the other hand, Mendez accused PID of conspiring against his life and destroying his papers. The propaganda of its elections and the use of the army to operate medical facilities during the doctors' strike attests to the readiness of the Peralta regime to achieve its goals, and the Constituent Assembly deputies who support the cancellation of the elections have asked Prime Minister Peralta, who ruled since his military coup three years ago, to remain in office for four years. However, Peralta was determined to transfer power to an elected government ⁽²²⁾.

Peralta and his leaders agreed at their meeting on March 11, 1966, not to take strict measures against the revolutionary party, as Peralta was at this stage in control of the army. However, there was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the election results and for this reason, Peralta tried to find a legal way to deprive Mendez's followers of the seats allotted to them in the conference scheduled to be held on May 5, 1966, and if Peralta succeeded in this procedure, Mendez and his group would resort to violence ⁽²³⁾.

A Central Intelligence report indicated that the Peralta government favors Aguilar from the PID party and Ponciano from the MLN party and Mendez from the PR party. It is not certain that the army will allow Mendez, the only candidate from the center-left, to take office if he wins the election, and Mendez told the US embassy that he expected a popular reaction against the government if the elections were rigged, or if the army would intervene to remove him from his post. Peralta emphasized that the elections would be peaceful and despite this, there was a possibility that the electoral results would lead to violence as it was reported that the communist guerrilla war was ready to take advantage of any disturbance in the political situation to renew civil terrorism, which the country has been relatively free of for more than two months ⁽²⁴⁾.

Ambassador Maine referred to the position of the US administration and what it should do to ensure a peaceful transition to the constitutional order and that it is in its interest to hold free elections and for a constitutional government to assume power. Despite this, its ability to exert any positive impact is limited, especially since the relationship with the current system is weak. Maine explained, **"It is in the interest of the American administration in the coming months that elections should be held and they must be free, and that any attempt to overthrow the regime could be considered again for the Communists and thus could have serious repercussions not only for Guatemala but also for the rest of the Western Hemisphere and the new government must be supported."** When it takes to power on July 1, 1966, to enable it to confront the country's problems, so as not to resort to extremists for support, especially if the revolutionary party candidate supported by the left wins" ⁽²⁵⁾.

The parties participating in the elections were looking for ways to prevent Mendez from becoming the new president of Guatemala, and the anti-Mendez forces were obsessed with the fear that Mendez's moderate left party would become a means for a communist renaissance. % Of the vote, compared to 33% for the government candidate from PID and 23% for the right-wing candidate from the MLN party ⁽²⁶⁾, and the PR party won 30 of the 55 congressional seats against 20 for PID and 5 for MLN, Peralta went on to emphasize the army will maintain its word and hand over power to the winning party. Mendez made great efforts to convince the military leaders that his party is anti-communist and to assure that he has no plans to interfere in the leadership structure of the armed forces, and in the event, Peralta resigns, the military leaders will choose his successor to lead the armed forces according to the laws established by the Peralta system, but there is still a risk of difference in opinion of the two sides and fear of a collision, which leads to a deterioration of the internal situation ⁽²⁷⁾.

On March 10, 1966, Ambassador Maine met with Peralta and discussed the latter's position on the Yemeni and military protests over the election of Mendez to the presidency.

Peralta had expressed his determination not to change the timetable for the return to constitutionalism. When Ambassador Min asked him whether Mendes and the PR party would be allowed to hold the post an elected case and he answered that the elections will not be final until Congress chooses a president from the three candidates in May 1966. Ambassador Maine, along with embassy staff on March 10, 1966, toured between the party's candidates and some business and military leaders and President Peralta to convey to them the US administration's desire to see The results of the elections are fair and to prevent them from being postponed or canceled, and the US administration has expressed its desire to transfer power peacefully and to provide cooperation and support to Peralta to achieve this⁽²⁸⁾.

Prime Minister Peralta withstood the pressure of conservative army officers intent on depriving the revolutionary party of its clear victory in the elections. On March 11, 1966, Peralta visited the main military installations in the capital to explain to the officers that his regime had decided to allow the revolutionary party to assume power if it legally won the elections. To them that after the president comes to power, the high command will carefully monitor the system for evidence of communist infiltration and will act if indicated, and senior army officers who have expressed their intolerance and fear of the revolutionary party winning may demand support to prevent the leadership of the revolutionary party. Peralta's warning about the danger of civil war and American opposition to the coup influenced the motives of the officers⁽²⁹⁾. Opponents of the Revolutionary Party PR continued to seek a way to prevent it from gaining power. The problem may increase due to the lengthy period leading up to the Congress's election to the president, as the congress opens on May 5, 1966, and despite the efforts made by members of the Revolutionary Party and Peralta to calm and reassure those elements that fear From the Mendez government, the extremists on the left and the right may succeed in exploiting the situation in their favor. Moreover, the head of the revolutionary party, Julio Cesar Mendez, refused to sign a memorandum of understanding between his party and the armed forces out of fear that it was a trap⁽³⁰⁾.

The country has been subjected to several bombings following the victory of the revolutionary party, and these bombings have been attributed to the right-wing MLN party, as this party hopes, after its loss in the elections of March 6, 1966, to postpone the convening of the conference scheduled for May 5 to choose the winning president even though the MLN claims it has With military support for its actions, Prime Minister Peralta has promised to return to constitutionalism and may retain sufficient support to implement his pledge⁽³¹⁾.

Interim President Peralta announced the imposition of a 30-day blockade due to the increase in terrorism and the kidnapping of key officials in the capital, and this decree was supported and approved by the new president who was installed on May 5, and a curfew was imposed, constitutional guarantees were suspended, and the army assumed certain tasks of the police⁽³²⁾.

Preparations for the handover of power to the new president continued on July 1, 1966, and many delegations had already arrived in Guatemala City. With these preparations, there were three bombings and the kidnapping of a Guatemalan lawyer on June 24, 1966, along with the reported plans for more violence before the opening that may leave some doubt about the possibility of changing the government without more violence and terror. Some extremist members of the right-wing National Liberation Movement (MLN) and many major military supporters have indicated that they will do everything in their power to prevent the transfer of the position. Despite this, the higher leadership rejected these plans and that the extremists of the MLN and the armed forces FAR They do not have the power or support to overthrow the government or prevent Mendez from taking office⁽³³⁾.

These groups have contributed to the increase in tensions that already exist in Guatemala. Governmental police and security forces have been strengthened to protect delegations scheduled for the inauguration and some preventive arrests have been made, but

Guatemalan security officials are said to be unsure of the effectiveness of the measures they have taken ⁽³⁴⁾.

President Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro started his presidency with an ambiguous future. The army commanders did not trust him, but they were ready to give him a chance to prove his success. He promised reforms during his election campaign, Mendez agreed to exclude extremists from the followers of Arévalo and agreed not to interfere in the internal affairs of the army (choosing the defense minister, Chief of Staff, Commanders of the garrisons) and Mendez also agreed to give the army full control in counterinsurgency operations against the guerrillas ⁽³⁵⁾.

Mendez had to face the ongoing left-wing guerrilla war as well as some extremists from the right and some economic, social, and political problems in the country. As the first civilian president since 1951, he could have more support from the people and Mendez chose a moderate government and the Communist Party was the PGT and his movement FAR, They plan to give Mendez six to eight months before ramping up their activity ⁽³⁶⁾.

After the far-right National Liberation Movement (MLN) won five legislative seats, its members continued to seek support for the coup between the right-wing elements in the army, but at this time the movement did not pose any serious threat to the new government and many of the ministers appointed to the Mendez government have Left-wing backgrounds, which might anger the army, and Mendez tried to absorb the anger of the rightists by trying to appease them ⁽³⁷⁾.

Conclusion

-The United States of America was forced to recognize the Peralta military government, although it was denouncing the military rule because it saved the country from communism, it demanded elections to take over a constitutional civilian government because of its fear of Peralta's nationalist tendencies, especially its rejection of US military and economic aid, and the US administration pressured through its ambassador to Guatemala John Bill to hold elections.

- The US administration was keen to choose the candidate who would serve its political and economic interests in Guatemala, so it chose the PR candidate because of the party's moderate orientations. Its candidate, Mendez, promised to make peace with the guerrilla fighters by peaceful means and without the use of violence. Although Mendez is left-wing, he is moderate and the US administration was reassuring For his political orientations.

-The US administration opposed MLN because it is an extremist rightwing party. If it takes office, it will disturb security and stability and use violence and abuse methods against guerrillas, which paves the way for the Communists to achieve political gains for them in Guatemala. It also realized that MLN impedes the programs of the coalition for progress due to its nationalism.

- The US administration stood against MLN's moves to stage a coup and take over the government, as the US ambassador, Maine, intervened, announcing that the United States of America would not support or recognize the government resulting from the coup.

References

(1) *Enrique Peralta (1908-1997)* Peralta was born in Guatemala in la Nueva and entered the Guatemalan army in 1926 and rose to the rank of colonel, held various administrative positions and also worked as Guatemala's ambassador to Cuba, El Salvador and Costa Rica during the 1940's and 1950's, and during the 1944 revolution he was offered by senior military officers and Guatemalan businessmen to become the new president of Guatemala, but he refused, and Peralta held many political positions as he served in several embassies, headed the Escuela Politécnica School, and became Minister of Agriculture in 1959, and when nearly a third of the army staged the rebellion against Ydigoras in 1960, Peralta was He was the one who persuaded the majority of the officers to remain loyal to the president and was rewarded with his promotion to the defense minister in 1961, and led a military coup to overthrow Ydigoras on March 30, 1963, to prevent former President Juan José Arévalo from returning to power, and Peralta presided over democratic elections in 1966 whose military government relinquished power Victor Julio Méndez Montenegro on July 1, 1966, Peralta Azordia was the presidential candidate for the right-wing national liberation movement MLN in 1978, except that he was defeated by a narrow margin by Fernando Romeo Lucas García For more seen:

Harris M. Lentz, *Heads Of State Governments And A Worldwide Encyclopedia of Over 2,300 Leaders, 1945 through 1992*, First published, London, 1994, pp. 344-345.

(2) CIA, *The Current Situation In Guatemala*, 10, July, 1964, p.19.

(3) Jim Handy, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1986, p.393.; CIA, *Guatemalan Constituent Assembly Sets March Election Date*, 9, September 1965, p.22.

(4) Virginia Garrard-Burnett Mark Atwood Lawrence And Julio E. Moreno, *Beyond The Eagle's Shadow New Histories Of Latin America's Cold War*, University of New Mexico Press, 2013, p.55

(5) CIA, *Guatemala on the Eve of the Elections*, 4, March 1966, p.5.

(6) *The National Liberation Movement*, a political faction of anti-communist ideology, overthrew President Jacobo Arbenz in June 1954. This group was organized abroad in Honduras under the leadership of Carlos Castillo Armas and in the document known as the Tegucigalpa Plan, the members of that movement define themselves as the "opposition The organization is against Communism in Guatemala. "The slogan of the party was a three-color flag, blue, white and red, with a cross crossed in the center, and the slogan "God, the Fatherland, Freedom "and" Truth, Justice, and Work, "this party resulted from the split of the MDN Democratic Movement in 1960, and in the year 1990 The elections in which the party participated were canceled, after which the supporters of this party began to decrease, and in 1999 this party completely disappeared For more seen:

Asociación de Amigos del País, Diccionario Histórico Biográfico de Guatemala, Guatemala, 2004, p.653.

(7) CIA, *Guatemala on the Eve of the Elections*, 4, March 1966, pp.5-6.

(8) *Julio Cesar Mendes Montenegro (1915-1996)* Julio was born in Guatemala, la Nueva, educated in Guatemala, and obtained a law degree. He worked at the University College of San Carlos from 1950 and became director of the Law School. Mendez Montenegro

was a candidate for the revolutionary party after the re-establishment of democratic institutions In Guatemala in 1966, he was elected and assumed office on July 1, 1966 For more seen:

Harris M. Lentz, *Ibid*, pp.345.

(9) CIA, *Guatemala on the Eve of the Elections*, 4, March 1966, pp.7-6.

(10) Georges A. Fauriol and Eva Loser, *Guatemala's Political Puzzle*, New Brunswick, 1988, p.47.; Thomas P. Anderson, *Politics In Central America Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, And Nicaragua*, London, 1988, p.25.

(11) CIA, *Guatemala on the Eve of the Elections*, 4, March 1966, pp.7-6.

(12) Virginia Garrard-Burnett Mark Atwood Lawrence And Julio E. Moreno, *OP.Cit*, p.56.

(13) John Bedan, *The Price Of Progress Guatemala And The United States During The Alliance For Progress Era* Doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon, 2018, p.347.

(14) Virginia Garrard-Burnett Mark Atwood Lawrence And Julio E. Moreno, *Op.Cit*, p.57.

(15) John Gordon Maine (1913-1968), Ambassador was born in Cadiz Kentucky, and he was a graduate of Georgetown College, Kentucky. He also obtained an LL.B degree from George Washington University, and he completed graduate studies at the American University and was appointed in the diplomatic corps in 1942 when he worked as an office manager Southwestern Pacific Affairs, Ambassador Maine worked in Rio de Janeiro, Rome, Oslo, Jakarta, Manila, and Washington, and during the years 1953-1954 he worked at the National War College and from 1960 to 1962 he was Adviser to the Minister at the United States Embassy in Manila, and on January 20, 1963, He was appointed in Rio de Janeiro as Minister Counselor and Deputy Head of Mission, and in 1965 he was appointed Ambassador to Guatemala, and in 1968 he was killed by guerrillas For more see:

U.S ,Department of State ,News Letter, No:89, September, 1968, p.2-4.

(16) William Baudler (1924-2016), born in Buenos Aires, is a naturalized citizen who obtained a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Richmond in 1948, a master's degree in Latin American affairs from the Fletcher School of Law, and a diploma in 1949 and from 1944 to 1944. 1946 Served in the army abroad, then Baudler assumed the duties of Deputy Coordinator for Cuban Affairs for the years 1963-1964 and Ambassador to El Salvador for the years 1968-1971 and Guatemala in 1973 and was appointed as a professional minister, the second-highest rank in the diplomatic corps in 1973, and he was appointed Deputy Assistant Minister for State Affairs Two years later, he was appointed as an envoy to South Africa, as he served as ambassador to the Republic of South Africa in April 1975 For more seen:

U.S ,Department of State ,News Letter, No:197, January, 1978, p.14.

(17) *The Organization of American States: It is a regional international organization in the American continent, founded on April 30, 1948, with its headquarters located in Washington. The number of members of the organization is 35 from independent countries in North and South America, and its establishment aimed to work with the*

United Nations in promoting peace Justice, and solidarity in the Western Hemisphere, and the emphasis on non-interference in the affairs of American states. For more, see:

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- (26) CIA, The Presidents Daily Brief, 9, March 1966, p.3.
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- (28) F.R.U.S, 1964–1968, Volume Xxxi, South And Central America; Mexico, Memorandum From William G. Bowdler of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson, Washington, 10, March 1966, p.209; CIA, Central Intelligence Bulletin Current Intelligence Relating To National Security, 11, March 1966, p.6.
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