

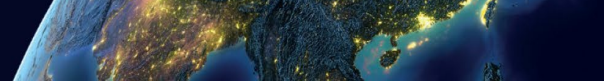
## **Volume 2: Chapter 12**

### **Source 12.2**

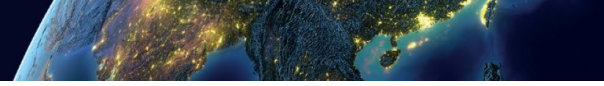
#### **Jacobo Árbenz's Resignation Speech, 1954**

*Since 1944, Guatemala had been led by democratically elected presidents who supported labor and land reforms. By this time, the United Fruit Company, a US-based corporation, controlled the majority of land in Guatemala and had a monopoly on the nation's railroads and arable land holdings. In 1952, Guatemalans elected a new president, Jacobo Árbenz, who enacted an agrarian reform program that aimed to redistribute land to landless farmers. In 1954, the United States collaborated with right-wing army officers in Guatemala to oust Árbenz. On June 27, 1954, he gave a resignation speech that was broadcast on the radio. On the same day in the United States, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles broadcast a speech on the radio announcing that peace and freedom had been restored for Guatemalans, but he did not mention the role of the US in facilitating the coup and removal of Árbenz.*

Workers, peasants, patriots! Guatemala is going through a hard trial. A cruel war against Guatemala has been unleashed. The United Fruit Company and US monopolies, together with US ruling circles are responsible for ellipsis. Mercenaries have unleashed fire and death, respecting nothing. We all know how cities have been bombed and strafed, women and children have suffered. We know how representatives of workers and peasants have been murdered in occupied cities, especially in Bananera. That was an act of vengeance by the United Fruit Company. We are indignant over the cowardly attack by mercenary US fliers. They know Guatemala has no adequate air force so they try to sow panic. They bomb and strafe our forces preventing operations. Today they sank a ship taking on cotton in San Jose. In the name of what do they do these things? We all know what. They have taken the pretext of Communism. The truth is elsewhere in financial interests of the United Fruit Company and



other US firms that have invested much in Guatemala. Time will show if what they say is true, but there are those who claim that Guatemala is the cause of what happens. My Government has been called Communist in nature. We have used every means to convince world reactionaries that what US Government circles say is untrue. After thinking it over I have taken a great decision of great importance for our country. I have decided to quite power, turn the executive over to Carlos Enrique Diaz, Chief of the Armed Forces. All social conquest will be kept. I believe that democratic political organizations and all other popular organizations should give him full support. I ask this as my last act as governing man. I have had to fight in very difficult conditions. The sovereignty of a nation is not maintained without material elements for defense. I am thinking only of the people. I think it is my duty to contribute to save what we have gained. The military situation is not difficult, not at all. The enemy commanding barbarous mercenaries is incompetent, cowardly. We have seen this in the few battles fought. The enemy took Chiquimula only by air power. I took presidency with great faith in the democratic system, in freedom, in the idea that economic independence could be won. I still believe the program is fair. My faith in democratic freedom, in the independence of Guatemala has not been lost. Some day the enemy forces will be defeated. I am still a combatant of freedom and progress for my country. I say goodbye with sorrow, but firm in my convictions. These years of sacrifice and fight and the arguments of the enemy have not defeated me. Rather the material elements he has for destruction. Unless we do away with our powerful enemies' pretext Guatemala might be destroyed. I thank deeply for their collaboration the many good servitors of the nation — the officials, public employees and especially the Civil Guard and Army. I thank you from my heart for the support of PAR, PRO, PRN, POT, popular organizations like CGTO and CNCG. They have defended the wishes of the people. In my heart I do not think I am making a mistake. Only the future can



say. Let peace be restored. Let the gains be kept. With the satisfaction of having done my duty I say long live the October Revolution! Long Live Guatemala! . . .

Source: Jacobo Árbenz, “Arbenz’s Resignation Speech,” *Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room*, Speech, June 27, 1954.

[https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000920952.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000920952.pdf).

- How does Árbenz frame the conflict in Guatemala? Specifically, how does he characterize the role of the US government and the United Fruit Company?
- What does Árbenz’s speech reveal about Árbenz’s views on communism and democratic governance?
- What does this account reveal about the constraints facing Latin American leaders during the Cold War era?