

# **The Birth of a Revolutionary: The Rise of Ché Guevara**

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Global relationships have become deeply embedded in the advancement of the human species. International relations have helped spread technology into areas far beyond the lands in which they were developed. In the process, societies developed new complexities and these new connections nourished an environment promoting outward expansion. Trade increased wealth and growing ideologies united various people under shared beliefs. As these global relationships created the conditions needed for advancement, they have also paved the way for imperial conquests. Although time has progressed, the globalized world of today still carries the traits of the past. As the world becomes more intertwined and the global market expands, the question that must be asked is: How will society approach the international relationships of the future?

This study reveals how international relations surrounding the Cold War transformed a young physician named Ernesto Guevara de la Serna into a global revolutionary. Guevara was born into a middle-class Argentine family but abandoned his comfortable lifestyle to fight oppression.



Many studies that have been done on Guevara have concentrated on his life as a devout communist, guerrilla soldier, or revolutionary leader. This study offers a unique perspective by focusing on what drove Guevara as a young adult to abandon his life in Argentina to become a revolutionary. The transformation Guevara experienced was driven by what he witnessed during his journey across Latin America. At age twenty-three, Guevara left Buenos Aires, Argentina, as a medical student determined to help society through medicine; but within three years, at age twenty-six, Ché Guevara emerged after witnessing Cold War imperialism crush the progress that Latin America yearned for.



What Guevara witnessed while exploring Latin America came as a result of decades of United States imperialist policies, toppled with the start of a new era in U.S. foreign policy enacted at the start of the Cold War. While conducting research on Guevara's journey, it became clear that there was a pattern of U.S. involvement in Latin America which played a direct role in not only Guevara's transformation, but also in shaping Latin American society as a whole. The link between U.S. foreign policy in Latin America

and the societal conditions Guevara witnessed during his explorations required this study to be structured in two connected components. In the first component, there is an examination of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America leading up to Guevara's journey, illustrating the U.S. role in creating the conditions Guevara encountered during his exploration. In the second component, there is an analysis of Guevara's journey as he personally encountered the outcome of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America. Both of these linked components combined resulted in the rise of Ché Guevara.

Four of the most influential events in defining Latin American political and economic development during the first-half of the twentieth century occurred in the U.S. The U.S. developed several foreign policies directed towards Latin America. Three critical U.S. policies towards Latin America were: the Roosevelt Corollary, developed by President Theodore Roosevelt in conjunction with his famous Big Stick Diplomacy; Dollar Diplomacy, declared by President William Taft; and the Good Neighbor Policy, announced by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The fourth event that helped shape Latin American development was the National Security Act of 1947. It was under this act that the Central Intelligence Agency was established. In the five decades leading up to the Cold War and Guevara's journey, Latin America was deeply influenced by U.S. foreign policy.

The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine was announced in 1904. The Roosevelt Corollary positioned the U.S. to become the leading nation within the Western Hemisphere while providing the framework for U.S. foreign policy in Latin America. This declaration occurred at a time when the U.S. political agenda favored imperialist expansion. In 1900, Senator Albert Beveridge addressed Congress praising imperialist expansion while also re-igniting the notion of

Manifest Destiny and Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. Senator Beveridge exclaimed, "We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God. We will move forward to our work, not howling out regrets like slaves."<sup>1</sup> Four years later, the Roosevelt Corollary set an influential precedent by considering U.S. intervention in Latin America an obligation. President Roosevelt announced, "Chronic wrong-doing... ultimately requires intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States to the exercise of an international police power."<sup>2</sup> The concept of the U.S. being the international police power within the Western Hemisphere strongly influenced U.S. and Latin American relations on the decades that followed.

President William Taft developed a new U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America known as Dollar Diplomacy. This approach moved away from conventional military interventions and redirected its efforts to gain economic control in Latin America through economic imperialism. The U.S. purchased Latin American debt owed to Europe, and in the process gained control of the Latin American economy. The purchased debt was used as leverage to control of Latin American exports, including seizing customs houses. Francis Mairs Huntington Wilson was Assistant Secretary of State under President Taft and designed Dollar Diplomacy. Wilson claimed this policy would "substitute dollars for bullets."<sup>3</sup> When describing Dollar

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<sup>1</sup> Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America*, York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 88.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (1904)," *Major Problems in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era: Documents and Essays*, Edited by: Leon Fink, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 272-273.

<sup>3</sup> F.M. Huntington Wilson, "The Relation of Government to Foreign Investment (1916)," *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary*

Diplomacy in regards to Latin American development, Wilson argued, “Neighboring countries comprise an environment. The strongest will dominate that environment.”<sup>4</sup> Although Latin America provided the vital resources needed to fuel U.S. economic growth, with Dollar Diplomacy, the progress of those developing countries was of no importance.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office and announced his Good Neighbor Policy. President Roosevelt denounced the international police power concept and attempted to reengineer Latin American relations to promote mutual development. President Roosevelt declared, “Never before has the significance of the words ‘good neighbor’ been so manifest in international relations. Never have the need and benefit of neighborly cooperation in every form of human activity been so evident as they are today.”<sup>5</sup> With President Roosevelt’s call for “neighborly cooperation in every form of human activity,” foreign policy towards Latin America seemed to be progressing. Unfortunately, while the Good Neighbor Policy called for more cooperation, U.S. dependency on vital resources from Latin America allowed oppressive dictators to gain power as long as they cooperated with U.S. interests.<sup>6</sup>

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*History*, Edited by: Eric Zolov [eds.], (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 111-113.

<sup>4</sup> F.M. Huntington Wilson, “The Relation of Government to Foreign Investment (1916),” *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, Edited by: Eric Zolov [eds.], (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 111-113.

<sup>5</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The Good Neighbor Policy declaration in Washington D.C. (1933),” *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, Edited by: Eric Zolov [eds.], (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 133-134.

<sup>6</sup> Carleton Beals, “A Skeptic Views the Good Neighbor Policy (1938),” *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, Edited by: Eric Zolov [eds.], (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 147-149.

In the decades leading up to the Cold War, international relations between the U.S. and Latin America evolved in stages based on presidential preference. The Roosevelt Corollary positioned the U.S. to be the international police power, gaining the political power to interfere in Latin American affairs. As economic ties with Latin America became more influential in determining U.S. economic growth, Dollar Diplomacy promoted U.S. interests at the expense of Latin American development. The Good Neighbor Policy attempted to create international relations based on cooperation, but further prevented Latin American development by collaborating with oppressive totalitarian regimes. Ultimately, each of these policies played a key role in the societal development of Latin America. As the Second World War came to an end, the Cold War was about to begin a new chapter in international relations between the U.S. and Latin America.

Once the Cold War began, the U.S. reclaimed its international police power in order to control the Western Hemisphere. The National Security Act of 1947 created new ways for the U.S. to intervene in Latin American affairs. Within the National Security Act, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was created. Under Sec.102 (d)(5) of the National Security Act, the newly created CIA was granted the power to engage in covert actions abroad in the name of protecting U.S. interests. Sec.102(d)(5) states that the National Security Council can order CIA operations “to perform such other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the National Security Council may from time to time direct.”<sup>7</sup> As the Cold War began to dominate global discourse, the founding of the CIA marked the beginning of a new era in U.S.

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<sup>7</sup> “National Security Act of 1947,” *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, Edited by: Eric Zolov [eds.], (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 178.

foreign policy. It was under the guidance and authority of the CIA that paramilitary operations abroad came to directly influence Guevara's transformation.

The U.S. role as lead nation within the Western Hemisphere strengthened the U.S. sphere of influence. After decades of influential international relations between the U.S. and Latin America, Guevara entered the world in a position to witness the outcomes of long-lived imperialist policies. Guevara was born on June 14, 1928. While Guevara's parents were from the generation living under the U.S. international police power gained with the Roosevelt Corollary, followed by Dollar Diplomacy's move towards economic imperialism, Guevara himself experienced the slight taste of progress under the Good Neighbor Policy leading up to the Second World War. Unfortunately, Guevara also experienced the reversal back towards imperial interventions at the start of the Cold War as covert CIA operations began in Latin America.



Although many people lived in poverty throughout Latin America, Guevara grew up fairly comfortable in a middle-class Argentine family. His father, Ernesto Guevara Lynch, was a businessman who held a variety of professions. His mother, Celia de la Serna, was a free-thinking woman who challenged the social norms surrounding the Argentine middle-class.<sup>8</sup> Guevara grew up watching his mother open their kitchen to children living in the neighborhood. Celia would portion the

food distributed amongst her family to make sure that the children from the neighborhood could also eat.<sup>9</sup> As an adult Guevara carried many of his mother's personal characteristics, including her rebellious nature and compassion for others. As Guevara became a teenager his father introduced him to world affairs. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Guevara followed the conflict closely with his father. Young Guevara even created his own military map where he placed flags illustrating frontline positions. When the Second World War began in 1939, Guevara and his father joined a local organization, supporting the Allies, which monitored the German immigrant population for Nazi subversion.<sup>10</sup>



When Guevara approached adulthood, he began to advance as a student and read heavily. He made plans to go to college and study engineering, but later changed his focus to medicine after witnessing the death of his grandmother.<sup>11</sup> When asked why he chose medicine Guevara said, "I dreamed of becoming a famous investigator... to find something that could be definitively placed at the disposition of humanity."<sup>12</sup> At a young

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<sup>8</sup> Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*, (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 20.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 23-24.

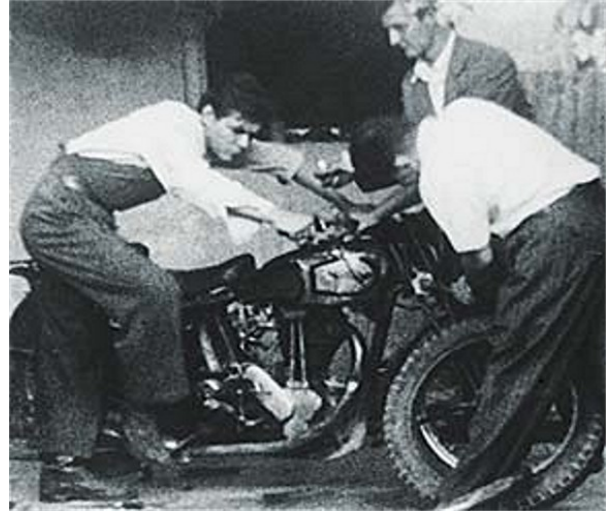
<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*, (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 42.

age, Guevara wanted to use medicine as a vehicle to help humanity. During his years in college, Guevara was not political and did not subscribe to any ideology. He began to read social philosophers, including Karl Marx, but admitted that he did not understand the complexity of Marxism during this time.<sup>13</sup> At one point in college Guevara attended a Federación Juvenil Comunista (Communist Youth) meeting, but once the meeting began, Guevara walked out.<sup>14</sup>

Guevara's passion was in medicine not politics, but he also began to feel a strong passion to explore. Guevara and his friend Alberto Granado developed a plan to travel across Latin America. As Granado and Guevara discussed the details of their journey, Latin American leaders called for a new economic system that would promote Latin American development. In 1950, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) put forth the case that U.S. policies in Latin America over the last five decades created an unbalanced relationship benefiting only the U.S. Leading the debate was Raúl Prebisch, the Executive Secretary of the ECLA. Prebisch argued that Latin America produced "the raw materials for the international economy" but were marginalized into the "peripheries" of the global trade system.<sup>15</sup> While the system should have provided the developing countries that produce raw materials with technological and industrial imports, Latin America was not receiving the imports it needed to develop. Prebisch declared, "This disequilibrium destroys the very premise underlying the very nature of the International Division of Labour Agreement."<sup>16</sup> While Latin American leaders attempted to expose

the unbalanced system shaping Latin America, Granado and Guevara were preparing to witness these conditions for themselves.



In January 1952, at the age of twenty-three, Granado and Guevara left Buenos Aires, Argentina, to explore Latin America. The journey that lay ahead was nothing short of epic. Their mode of transportation was Granado's Norton 500 motorcycle, and their travel plan was based on one key principal: improvisation.<sup>17</sup> It was not long into their journey that Guevara realized that he was embarking on a journey across two different worlds. As Granado and Guevara approached Chile on their way out of Argentina, they began to witness societal conditions deteriorate. When they reached Junin de los Andes, near the Chilean border, they encountered a town Guevara described as "unable to break the monotony of its stagnant life."<sup>18</sup> Despite attempts to invigorate the town, the lack of local employment made increasing the standard of living impossible.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 50-51.

<sup>15</sup> Raúl Prebisch, "A New Economic Model for Latin America (1950)," *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, Edited by: Eric Zolov [eds.], (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 189-191.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 189-191.

<sup>17</sup> Ernesto Guevara, Journal entry dated: "October 17, 1951," *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey*, (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2004), 33.

<sup>18</sup> Ernesto Guevara, Journal entry titled: "Circular Exploration," *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey*, (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2004), 47-48.

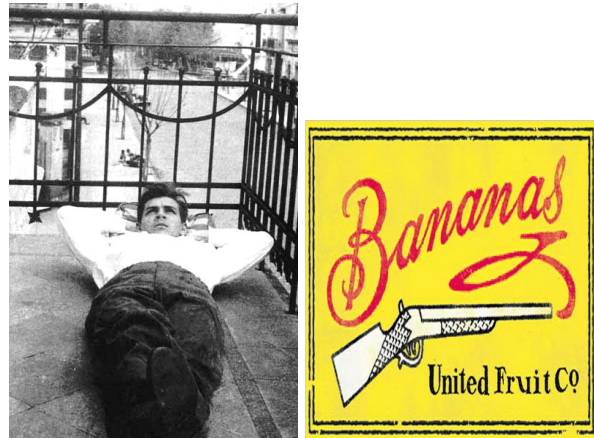




At this time, Guevara did not display any contempt or hostility towards foreign companies in the region. On the contrary, he defended the foreign-owned operations in Junin de los Andes. Guevara wrote in his journal, "The day it was 'discovered' as a tourist haven the town's climate and transport difficulties were solved and its subsistence secured."<sup>19</sup> Although Guevara does sarcastically label the area "discovered," in a way that insinuates one cannot discover a place already inhabited, he does credit foreign investments for supplying better transit routes and sustenance for the local population.

When Granado and Guevara entered Valparaiso, Chile, on March 7, 1952, Guevara had an encounter that had a profound impact on his conscience. While exploring the city, Guevara was approached by a local man who asked Guevara to visit the man's sick mother. Once Guevara made it to the woman's bedside, he was moved by what he witnessed. The room was filled with "the acrid smell of concentrated sweat and dirty feet mixed with dust."<sup>20</sup> Such conditions only amplified her

severe asthma and worsening heart condition. After conducting a medical examination, Guevara advised her on a healthier diet and gave her the remaining Dramamine tablets that he used for his asthma.<sup>21</sup> This encounter marked a significant point in Guevara's journey. For the first time, Guevara wrote extensively in his journal about the societal impact resulting from the impoverished condition surrounding his travels. Guevara wrote, "It is at times like this, when a doctor is conscious of his complete powerlessness, that he longs for change." He further wrote, "Individuals from poor families who can't pay their way become surrounded by an atmosphere of barely disguised acrimony; they stop being father, mother, sister or brother and become a purely negative factor in the struggle for life." In concluding his entry, Guevara noted how the poor are subsequently viewed by the community as a "personal insult to those who have to support them."<sup>22</sup> It was becoming clear to him that the harsh conditions he was encountering in Latin America permeated every underlying layer within society.



<sup>19</sup> Ernesto Guevara, Journal entry titled: "San Martin de los Andes," *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey*, (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2004), 45.

<sup>20</sup> Ernesto Guevara, Journal entry titled: "La Gioconda's Smile," *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey*, (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2004), 70.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 70.



Following his encounter in Valparaiso, Granado and Guevara set out to visit one of the world's largest copper mines in Chuquicamata, Chile. The mine was owned by the Anaconda Mining Company, an international mining company owned by U.S. investors. While Granado and Guevara waited for permission from the company to visit the mine, they met a young Chilean couple looking for work in the mines. While sitting around a candle in the cold Chilean desert, the couple began discussing their lives as Chilean miners. During the conversation the couple mentioned that they could only seek employment in the most dangerous mines: the sulfur mines. When Guevara asked why they could only work in the sulfur mines, the couple replied that it was because they were communists.<sup>23</sup>

In Guevara's mind, that couple, poor and socially exiled for their political beliefs, represented the oppressed around the world. After his encounter with the Chilean mining couple, Guevara wrote, "The couple, numb with cold, huddling against each other in the desert night, were a living representation of the proletariat in any part of the world."<sup>24</sup> As

<sup>23</sup> The Law for the Defense of Democracy was passed in Chile in 1948. This made it illegal to be a communist in Chile.

<sup>24</sup> Ernesto Guevara, Journal entry titled: "This Time, Disaster," *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey*, (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2004), 78.

a result of this encounter, Guevara began to challenge his view of humanity. In his journal Guevara wrote, "It was one of the coldest times in my life, but also one which made me feel a little more brotherly towards this strange, for me at least, human species."<sup>25</sup> While Guevara contemplated the legal persecution and repression of the mining couple, he wrote, "It's a great pity they repress people like this," who they label "communist vermin" because they are viewed as the threat to "decent life." Guevara continues by writing that they were people who adhered to "a theory they do not understand." They related to the "strange doctrine" of communism when they read "bread for the poor." In concluding his journal entry, Guevara wrote that all they yearned for was a "natural longing for something better."<sup>26</sup>

The couple had such a profound impact on Guevara that he gave them the only money he had. Early in the trip, Guevara stopped to visit his girlfriend Chichina before leaving Argentina. Before Guevara departed she gave him fifteen American dollars to buy her a bathing suit if they made it to Florida. Although Chichina broke off their relationship soon after giving Guevara the money, removing the responsibility for him to save it, Guevara gave the money to the couple instead of spending it on himself. The fact that Guevara gave the couple all the money he had, while he and Granado struggled to eat, shows how powerful that encounter was. The acts of compassion Guevara witnessed from his mother as a child were now being relived in Guevara himself as he encountered the impoverished Latin American commoners.

Guevara could not understand how an industry as large as the copper industry could be surrounded by such impoverished conditions. Guevara explained in his journal that "Chile produces 20 percent of the world's

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 79.

copper,” and because it was a time of “potential conflict,” the need for copper increased dramatically in order to produce “weapons of destruction.”<sup>27</sup> Guevara continued his analysis of the copper industry by describing the political conflict emerging between those who want to nationalize the mines and those who want them to stay in foreign hands. Even after the experience Guevara had with the Chilean mining couple, he still did not choose a side in the political conflict. Instead, Guevara further shows his view as a growing humanitarian. Guevara wrote, “Whatever the outcome of the battle, one would do well not to forget the lesson taught by the graveyards of the mines, containing only a small share of the immense number of people devoured.”<sup>28</sup>

During his journey, Guevara began to feel compassion for the people he encountered. In his journal Guevara wrote, “These people who watched us walk through the streets... are a defeated race. Their stares are tame, almost fearful, and completely indifferent to the outside world.”<sup>29</sup> He began to feel a sense of unity amongst people who shared a common ancestral history, but lived as if they were a “defeated” race. On his twenty-fourth birthday, Guevara was volunteering at the San Pablo leprosy colony in Peru. The hospital staff hosted a birthday celebration and Guevara was asked to give a celebratory speech. In his journal Guevara wrote a narration of his emotional speech:

Although our insignificance means we can't be spokespeople for such a noble cause, we believe, and after this journey more firmly than ever, that the division of [Latin]

<sup>27</sup> Ernesto Guevara, Journal entry titled: “Chuquicamata,” *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey*, (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2004), 80.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>29</sup> Ernesto Guevara, Journal entry titled: “Tarata, The New World,” *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey*, (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2004), 93.

America into unstable and illusory nations is completely fictional. We constitute a single mestizo race, which from Mexico to the Magellan Straits bears notable ethnographical similarities.<sup>30</sup>

After leaving Peru, Granado and Guevara spent a short time in Colombia and Venezuela. In Venezuela, Granado and Guevara separated ways. Guevara flew into Florida, only to catch another flight back to Argentina where he planned on finishing his medical degree and continue back on his journey.

The anguish surrounding the “unstable” nations throughout Latin America that Guevara described in his birthday speech was overtly present during his journey. In order to illustrate the societal conditions in Latin America while Guevara explored the area, it is useful to provide additional evidence beyond the personal testimony of Guevara. The United Nations Statistical Yearbook provides additional statistical evidence to further validate the conditions surrounding Latin America during Guevara’s journey. In 1952, the U.S. infant mortality rate (per 1,000) was 28.5. Every country reported in South America had over triple the U.S. infant mortality rate. Chile reported a rate of 133.6, four and half times that of the U.S., while Colombia and Venezuela reported 110.7 and 79.4 respectively.<sup>31</sup> The unbalanced system that Raúl Prebisch attempted to expose in 1950 was continuing to stall Latin American development.

Guevara returned to Argentina to finish his medical degree with a new perspective on life. After returning to Argentina in August 1952, Guevara finished his graduate exams and wrote his doctoral thesis in remarkable time. Within six months, Guevara passed

<sup>30</sup> Ernesto Guevara, Journal entry titled: “Saint Guevara’s Day,” *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey*, (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2004), 149.

<sup>31</sup> United Nations Statistical Yearbook, (New York: 1953), 43-45.



thirteen graduate exams and wrote his doctoral thesis to receive his medical degree.<sup>32</sup> After receiving his degree, Guevara packed his luggage to continue his journey. His plans were to travel Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and then finally to Venezuela to reunite with Granado. But along the way his plans changed.

Once Guevara left Argentina, he headed to Bolivia to witness the growing agrarian revolution. Several enormous land reforms made Bolivia the second country in Latin America, behind Mexico, to initiate large-scale land reform.<sup>33</sup> After arriving in La Paz, Bolivia, Guevara met a man named Ricardo Rojo. During their time in La Paz, Rojo introduced Guevara to several men from Guatemala also there to witness the revolution. After witnessing the events unfold in Bolivia, Guevara decided to travel to Guatemala instead of continuing towards Venezuela to meet Granado. Guatemala was also in a historic position during this time, and Guevara wanted to be there to witness it.



*Guatemalan President Jorge Ubico*

<sup>32</sup> Ernesto Guevara Lynch, *Young Che: Memories of Che Guevara by His Father*, (New York: Vintage, 2008), 181.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

After years of oppression under the brutal regime of Guatemalan President Jorge Ubico, the people of Guatemala revolted. In 1944, protests, strikes, and a large dissent movement pushed Ubico out of power and the rebel military granted the Guatemalan people their country's first free election. A university professor named Juan José Arévalo was elected President of Guatemala. In 1947, Arévalo passed labor codes in an attempt to increase revenue. For the first time in Guatemalan history, a governmental system was working within democratic lines in order to improve the economic and societal future of Guatemala. In 1950, Colonel Jacobo Árbenz Guzman was elected president in Guatemala's first democratic transition of power. Unfortunately, the proliferation of the Cold War promoted U.S. imperialist policy, which would soon shatter the small slice of progress the people of Latin America had desired for decades.



*President Jacobo Árbenz Guzman*

In 1952, Árbenz enacted agrarian land reform, which expropriated unused land from large plantations with the agreement to pay for the land under the prices calculated by the most current tax records. The United Fruit Company, a lucrative U.S. company, owned huge amounts of land in Guatemala. Of that land only fifteen percent was used while eight-five percent went unused. In 1953,

when Guatemala offered United Fruit \$627,572 in compensation based on the tax value claimed the previous year, the U.S. State Department claimed that the property was worth over \$15.5 million.<sup>34</sup> United Fruit severely undervalued the value of the land in order to pay Guatemala less taxes. It was this excitement surrounding the huge agrarian land reform that led Guevara to Guatemala.

Guevara arrived in Guatemala in December of 1953. With Guevara in Guatemala City, the CIA, under the authorization of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, initiated the main offensive in Operation PBSUCCESS in June of 1954. Operation PBSUCCESS was an intensive paramilitary and psychological campaign to remove President Árbenz, Guatemala's democratically elected president. According to the U.S. Department of State, the operation had two specific objectives:

1. To remove covertly, and without bloodshed if possible, the menace of the present Communist-controlled government of Guatemala;
2. To install and sustain, covertly, a pro-US government in Guatemala.<sup>35</sup>

The operation consisted of several stages, including implementation of "aggressive sabotage" followed by "para-military force enters target country, proclaims authority, declares target regime null and void."<sup>36</sup> With Cold War tension justifying covert action against the growing "Communist-controlled

government" in Guatemala, the U.S. Government stripped Guatemala's democratic progress in a Latin American region where such progress was extremely rare.

The communist threat in Guatemala was propagated in order to maintain U.S. economic interests. In assessing the actual communist threat in Guatemala, testimony from Guatemalan and U.S. officials created two opposing arguments. Luis Cardoza y Aragón served in several ambassadorial posts under Árbenz. Aragón argued that the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT), which the U.S. claimed was infiltrated by Soviet-driven communists, in reality, contained no communists.<sup>37</sup> In his report, Aragón summarized the events in Guatemala by stating, "The U.S. squashed a little butterfly that wished to fly a little more freely within the capitalist system, and to emerge from a barbaric, inhuman situation to better living conditions for its people, of all classes."<sup>38</sup>

On the other side of the debate, John C. Dreier argued that the communist threat was very real and becoming a growing concern. Dreier was the U.S. representative to the Organization of American States (OAS), and claimed that the U.S. had proof that there was a Soviet-lead communist conspiracy within the Guatemalan government. When asked for details regarding the evidence used to anchor these claims, Dreier stated that the U.S. would reveal the evidence at "the right time."<sup>39</sup> If any such evidence existed at that time, it was not presented.

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<sup>34</sup> Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 149.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Relations of the United States (1953)," *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 152.

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Relations of the United States (1953)," *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 154.

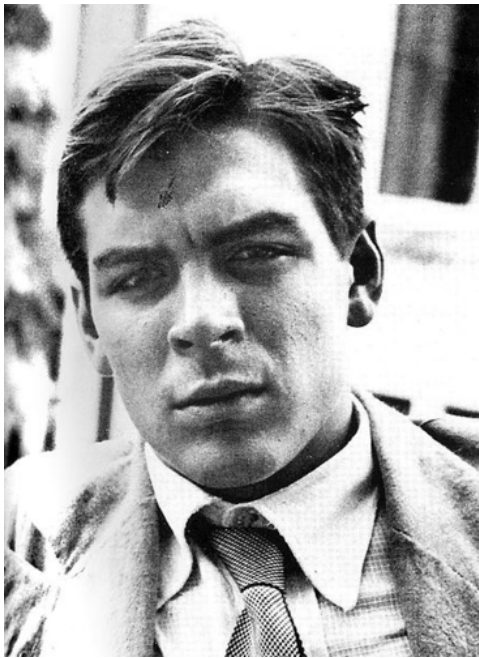
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<sup>37</sup> Luis Cardoza y Aragón, "Terminating a Revolution in Guatemala – A View from Guatemala," *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, Edited by: Eric Zolov [eds.], (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 195-196.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 195-196.

<sup>39</sup> John C. Dreier, "Terminating a Revolution in Guatemala – A View from Washington," *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, Edited by: Eric Zolov [eds.], (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 192.

While each of these arguments build a case favoring each respected side, more recent research uncovered evidence supporting the Guatemalan claims that there was no communist threat. Historian Nick Cullather was hired by the CIA in 1992 to analyze Operation PBSUCCESS documents in an effort to have them declassified. During the process, new evidence revealed that in 1946 (one year prior to the CIA being created) FBI operatives investigated Guatemalan leaders suspected of conspiring with Soviet-influenced communists, but found “little of interest.” CIA operatives took over the investigation in 1947, but also concluded that “Guatemala remained a low priority.”<sup>40</sup> Although this information shines new light on justifications used to authorize covert actions against Guatemala, the majority of Operation PBSUCCESS documents remain in classified status nearly sixty years later.



*Ernesto Guevara de la Serna*

<sup>40</sup> Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 14-15.

Witnessing this event from the streets in which the fighting occurred caused all the feelings and emotions built in Guevara over the previous two years to fully transform him into a revolutionary. In January 1954, five months before the CIA invasion began, Guevara wrote a letter addressed to his entire family. In this letter, Guevara praised Guatemala as the most democratic nation in Latin America. Ernesto wrote, “The way I see things, in the whole of America, ‘and I know about these things’, there is no country as democratic as this one (Guatemala).”<sup>41</sup> Guatemala was a place Guevara truly enjoyed. In a letter to his Aunt Beatriz, Guevara wrote that he hoped to find stable employment in Guatemala in order “to stay for two years.”<sup>42</sup> The fact that Guevara was searching for a way to stay in Guatemala instead of continuing his travels is further proof that Guevara had high hopes for Guatemala.

Once the CIA invasion occurred, Guevara’s hopes for Guatemala and Latin America were shattered. On the last day of the CIA lead invasion, on June 20, 1954, Guevara wrote his mother and expressed the discontent that cause his transformation into a revolutionary. Guevara wrote, “various military installations of the country were bombed... two days ago an aircraft bombed the lower neighborhood... killing a two-year-old girl.” Guevara continued by stating, “The danger is not... the number of troops... nor in the aircraft that do nothing but bomb the houses of civilians and machine-gun some of them; the danger is how the gringos (read here the Americans) manage their puppets at

<sup>41</sup> Ernesto Guevara, “Letter addressed to whole family (dated: January 15, 1954),” *Young Che: Memories of Che Guevara by His Father*, (New York: Vintage, 2008), 229-230.

<sup>42</sup> Ernesto Guevara, “Letter to his Aunt Beatriz (dated: February 12, 1954),” *Young Che: Memories of Che Guevara by His Father*, (New York: Vintage, 2008), 229-230.

the United Nations.”<sup>43</sup> In this letter, Guevara also discusses the reversal in U.S. foreign policy resulting from Cold War political polarization. Guevara wrote that the “Americans have totally dropped the good-guy mask that Roosevelt had given them,” and now “are committing an outrage” by these “shamefaced attacks.”<sup>44</sup> This statement proves that Guevara was fully conscience of the reverse in U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America as the Cold War began dominating global discourse. In closing his letter to his mother, Guevara informed her that he “registered with the urgent medical-assistance service” and “joined the youth brigades to receive military instruction.”<sup>45</sup>

After Operation PBSUCCESS overthrew Guatemala’s democratically elected president, Ché Guevara rededicated his life to changing the world through revolution. The twenty-three year old medical student who hoped to help society through medicine no longer existed. Instead, the man who emerged took up arms and set out to fight for those who had no voice. Although Ché Guevara went on to participate in controversial conflicts at a time in history when the Cold War polarized world affairs, the events leading to his transformation provide valuable lessons for future international relations.

The Roosevelt Corollary gave the U.S. enormous power within the Western Hemisphere, and during the Cold War that power was increased after the National Security Act of 1947 added the ability to engage in covert actions without national or international accountability. Dollar Diplomacy linked U.S. economic interests, both private and public, to national security. The Good Neighbor Policy attempted to turn the U.S. away from engaging in military

interventions in Latin America, but the policy continued to promote economic relationships that favored U.S. financial interests at the expense of human suffering. The U.S. foreign policy exercised during the first-half of the twentieth century still influence the globalized world long after the death of Ché Guevara.



After Ché Guevara was killed in 1967, international relationships continued to create new dilemmas. The Vietnam War flared into the 1970s, while relations in the Middle-East intensified following the overthrow of the Shah of Iran. In the 1980s, the U.S. intervention in Nicaragua led to increased turmoil in Central America. The Persian Gulf War in the early 1990s marked another U.S. intervention abroad. The U.S. war in Afghanistan and the U.S. war in Iraq, starting in 2001 and 2003 respectively, carried the U.S. into war well past the first decade of the twenty-first century.



<sup>43</sup> Ernesto Guevara, “Letter to his mother (dated: June 20, 1954),” *Young Che: Memories of Che Guevara by His Father*, (New York: Vintage, 2008), 229-230.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 229-230.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 229-230.

The most recent full-scale U.S. conflict, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, contains the most striking characteristics resembling Cold War imperialism. In the early 1950s, the U.S. allowed Cold War fears to justify the CIA invasion of Guatemala under unproven assumptions that the Guatemalan government had been infiltrated by Soviet-influenced communists. As a result of the CIA invasion, Ché Guevara redirected his life to become a revolutionary. Ché Guevara went on to fight in many several bloody battles, but he also went on to address the United Nations (UN), showing civility as a guerrilla leader.



*Ché Guevara Addressing the UN*

Nearly fifty years later, in 2003, the U.S. allowed the threat of terrorism to justify the invasion of Iraq under false information claiming Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. The results of the 2003 invasion of Iraq are still unraveling today, but one can already see that the nature of these outcomes incorporate brutal reactions. The days of a revolutionary leader like Ché Guevara addressing the UN are over. That civility has now been replaced with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide bombers.

Although the Cold War ended decades ago, the fear that fueled Cold War policies has shifted from the fear of communism to the fear of terrorism. It is true that acts of terror pose a real threat in today's world, but it is important that the lessons of the past do not go overlooked. Critical evaluations of history

improve our prospects for making wiser decisions by examining the outcomes of past actions. International relations continue to evolve, and every relationship carries its own consequences. Many of these reactions often go unseen to most of society. Unless one travels abroad, well out of their daily life, the poverty and despair surrounding much of the world gets overlooked. As Raúl Prebisch stated, it is these countries that become socially marginalized in the "peripheries" of world affairs. Guevara set out to explore Latin America, and in the process was able to witness the harsh reality of unbalanced international relations. After witnessing such conditions, Guevara began to yearn for social justice. Unfortunately, as Guevara began to witness progress, he also witnessed the power of imperialism shatter the hopes of millions in Latin America. The result, Ché Guevara emerged and set out to spread revolution across the world to fight imperial oppression.

It is important for everyone to take responsibility and to be held accountable for their actions as individuals. But when international relationships create the world in which these individuals live, those parties who determine the societal conditions are also responsible. The actions taken by the revolutionary rebels during the American Revolution were ultimately the responsibility of those men and women as individuals reacting to the conditions pressed upon them by Great Britain. If the actions of Great Britain were ignored while evaluating that historic event, the results would not correctly illustrate who or what lead to such a daring reaction. The same principal holds true when analyzing the actions surrounding the rise of Ché Guevara. Ché Guevara was only one man, illustrating only one example of how the complexities involved in international relations can create an eventual collision between the people involved. It is important for the safety and prosperity of all humans to consider the outcomes of one's actions.