

F O R U M

SELF-PLAGIARISM AND FOREIGN POLICY

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As the Secretary of State looks out over the Potomac River, pondering reports from his embassies to the south, the fundamental question: "What is it?" comes to him again and again. Is a new regime in a Latin American country controlled by "agrarian reformers," "moderate socialists," "malleable leftists," "Christian Democrats," "safe militarists," or—others?

Identification is difficult; it is also significant, for on identification depends policy.

Justifications of policy are often made by governments in vari-colored collections of documents at times of crisis. The government of the United States is more prone than others to issue such books in crises less vital than outbreaks of world wars. In 1946, for example, the Department of State published what came to be known as the "Blue Book" on Argentina, and in 1961 and 1964 a "White Book" and a "Red Book" on Cuba.<sup>1</sup> There is also the voluminous and well known (pale) "Blue Book," entitled *United States Relations with China, with Special Reference to the Period 1944–1949*.<sup>2</sup>

These publications customarily reproduce carefully selected quotations from diplomatic correspondence, memoranda written by governmental officials, and commentaries supportive of policy. Usually, if more than one about a subject is issued, the existence of earlier volumes is noted.

However, in the recent documentation on inter-American affairs there is one curious variation from normal practice in these matters: the publication by the Department of State of a "Green Book" on the Guatemalan question of the 1950's, which does not acknowledge the publication of an earlier "Blue Book" on the same subject, to which it is obviously greatly indebted. A reading of the "Green Book"<sup>3</sup> created a disturbing impression that the phraseology had a familiar ring, cadence and terminology, and a re-reading of the "Blue Book"<sup>4</sup> demonstrated that this impression was fully warranted. A large portion of the text of the "Blue Book" was reproduced in the "Green Book" verbatim, in different order, with some omissions, additions and corrections, but without any reference to the "Blue Book" either simply as predecessor or as source.<sup>5</sup>

Why this self-plagiarism? If it were no more than an individual author's warming up left-overs for a pot-boiler, the question would be barren. But this is

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the Department of State, concerned about both policy and image, and it is the policy aspects of this case of self-plagiarism that concern us here. It may be that the "Green Book" was no more than a presentation by the Public Services Division, and the responsible policy officers may not have had the opportunity to comment on the final text. For purposes of this article, however, it is sufficient that the "Green Book" bears the imprimatur of the Department of State.

## II.

The "Blue Book" consists in Part One of public statements by Secretary John Foster Dulles and officers of the Department, together with other public documents; and in Part Two, "The Guatemalan Communist Party: A Basic Study (Revision May 1954)," of "a case history of a bold attempt on the part of international communism to get a foothold in the Western Hemisphere by gaining control of the political institutions of an American Republic. The situation in Guatemala has changed since this document was prepared. Nevertheless, it is the view of the Government of the United States that the facts herein constitute a grim lesson to all nations and peoples which desire to maintain their independence."<sup>6</sup>

The change in Guatemala was the overthrow of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán in June 1954 by Guatemalan political refugees, led by Col. Carlos Castillo Armas, and encouraged and provided with equipment by the government of the United States.

The basic study of the Guatemalan Communist Party printed in the "Blue Book" apparently had been written for use in the Department of State, and not for public consumption. From internal and other evidence, it is highly probable that it was prepared in the Department's Office of Intelligence Research. The most striking aspect of the study's analysis of the development of the Guatemalan Communist Party, was its failure to give unqualified support for the statement by Secretary Dulles that the growth of communism in Guatemala was "an intrusion of Soviet despotism."<sup>7</sup>

The text of the "Green Book" was compiled in the Public Services Division of the Department of State. Intended for wide distribution, it seems clear that the new publication, having suitably, if clandestinely, amended the old, was aimed at demonstrating that "Latin America, the southern citadel of our hemispheric defense, is again the target of an offensive on the part of international communism."<sup>8</sup>

The lack of congruity between document and doctrine in the "Blue Book" was probably due to haste in getting out the publication in a summer month in 1954. Sober second thought then apparently suggested rectification—not of doctrine, but of document, and hence of contradictory and possibly embarrassing data.

The rectification was made in the "Green Book" and it took several forms. One of these was the omission of entire sentences or paragraphs that suggested that Guatemalan communism might have sources other than "international subversion." In this connection, the most important portions of the "Blue Book" that did not appear in the "Green Book" are:

The landowning classes and the bulk of the middle classes were unresponsive to the broad appeal of social change and resistant to the narrower attraction of communism and there was no industrial proletariat to speak of. There was no corps of experienced, Moscow-trained Communists to take charge of developments nor an underground party. The Marxist-oriented among the lower middle class, thus, represented virtually the only element in the social environment favorable for the cultivation of a Communist growth.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of the middle class obtained in the years 1871–1944 a sufficient stake in the economy to be content to hope for modernization by evolutionary means. The minority, made up of those 'intellectual' elements such as schoolteachers, whose resentment of Guatemala's backwardness was sharpened by lack of ties to the existing structure, became something of an insoluble lump in the Guatemalan social organism. This was not perhaps because of any conscious desire for separation on the part of the 'intellectuals' but more probably because the archaic social structure would not provide the necessary solvent.<sup>10</sup>

World War II gave a great impetus to the revolutionary forces which were to open the way for the crystallization of an organized Communist movement. The slogans of the Four Freedoms, the Atlantic Charter, and the United Nations disarmed the natural defenders of the existing Guatemalan authoritarian system and fired the ambition if not the understanding of wide segments of the middle strata of society. For many intellectuals, to judge by their subsequent writings and actions, the war was a vindication of faith in the superiority of the Socialist (i.e. Soviet) system over 'Fascist distatorship,' by which they understood, with little discrimination, the Ubico authoritarian system at home and the complex police states abroad.<sup>11</sup>

For another important group, the younger army officers who were also mostly recruited from the lower middle class, the war provided another type of stimulus. The presence of United States Army air bases and the sending of Guatemalan officers to United States service schools helped to focus the general dissatisfaction against the Ubico regime by contrasting the superior material status of foreign officers and the advanced technological development of a modern nation with the miserable pay and primitive methods in vogue in Guatemala.<sup>12</sup>

In party doctrine, the function of the agrarian reform is to accelerate these social changes, and thus pave the way for the long-run triumph of communism. But, in the short run, the agrarian reform serves as a punitive weapon against all the propertied elements, whose interests and traditions have historically been an important factor serving to cement Guatemala into the Western World. More di-

rectly, the PGT [the Guatemalan Communist Party] seeks to break down the Guatemalan-Western relationship by concentration on the fight against the economic interests of the United States in Guatemalan ('foreign monopolies') and on support to the construction of competing Guatemalan 'national' enterprises.<sup>13</sup>

The ascendancy of Communist ideology in the 'National Democratic Front' is attributable not only to the void left by the failure of a non-Communist ideology to evolve, but also to an active factor, the infiltration into the PAR, PRG, and RN leadership of Communist sympathizers, some of whom may be secret members of the PGT.<sup>14</sup>

The labor movement has been primarily concerned with politics rather than pure labor matters since its inception in a modern form in 1944. To a large extent this was inevitable, both because no labor organization of any complexion had much chance of establishing itself without collaborating closely with the administration and because Communists and Communist sympathizers proved to be the only labor organizers prepared to set a new labor movement on its feet.<sup>15</sup>

Occasionally, the "Green Book's" account of developments in Guatemala was directly opposite to the statements in the "Blue Book." For example, the "Blue Book" states, as the first sentence of a paragraph: (p. 64–65) "The primary but *seldom* publicly professed aim of the PGT is to act in the role of the vanguard in Guatemala of the 'inevitable' triumph of world communism led by the Soviet Union." In contrast, the "Green Book's" version is: "These and other Communist leaders *often* publicly professed that the aim of their Communist Party was to act as the vanguard in Guatemala of the 'inevitable' triumph of world communism led by the Soviet Union." (P. 29, italics supplied) The remainder of this paragraph is almost word for word a copy of the "Blue Book's" text.

A third type of rectification was the incorporation in the "Green Book" of a large part, but not quite all, of a sentence from the "Blue Book." In the following examples, the full text is from the latter, and parts omitted by the "Green Book" are indicated by italics:

These are two of the seven points of the 1952 program of the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT).

4. Give increasing support to progressive measures undertaken by the democratic Government of President Arbenz, *such as the highway to the Atlantic which will allow Guatemala, by competing with the U.S.-owned IRCA Railroad, to free itself from monopolistic exploitation.*

5. Improve the living conditions of the masses, *especially by struggling for a minimum daily wage of 80 cents and urban wage of \$1.25.*<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, the approaches of the two books may be compared through this

differential quotation. The "Blue Book" states that the Communist Party (PGT) had built up a system of control in the Arbenz regime by "maintaining close relationship with the administration; *working harder than any other Guatemalan entity*; infiltrating key Government agencies; establishing an interlocking directorate between the PGT Central Committee and the nation's labor, women's, youth, and students' organizations; and achieving a position of pre-eminence in the National Democratic Front of administration parties *while shrewdly working against the consolidation of a non-Communist 'revolutionary' movement.*"<sup>17</sup> The "Green Book" prints the same paragraphs, omitting the italicized portions above.<sup>18</sup>

### III

As a result of this juggling by the Department of State of its own basic study, we are turned back to our original question: "What is it? Was this "the brazen attempt of international communism to establish a Soviet satellite in the Western Hemisphere;" ("Green Book," p. 2) or was it "The thinking of Guatemala's intellectuals during the 1930's and the early 1940's" which "became covered with a glaze of nationalism and Marxism, a scrambled compound which was short of the full strength of militant communism?" ("Blue Book," p. 44). Or was it some composite of opportunism by Salvadoran communists aided after a time by Moscow, together with a chaotic political situation and exploitable economic and social conditions and attitudes in Guatemala that followed the ousting of President Ubico in 1944?

It is beyond the scope of this essay to opt among these perceptions, other than to indicate the possible complexities of choice, and the importance to policy of the original perception.

Our main concern here is that the question: "What is it?" when applied to a new regime in a foreign country, should be answered as clearly, straightly and realistically as possible by those having first responsibility for reacting to the new situation. In 1954, the Secretary of State recognized the importance of the question, and he had an answer for it:

What we do need to do is to identify the peril; to develop the will to meet it unitedly, if ever united action should be required; and meanwhile to give strong moral support to those governments which have the responsibility of exposing and eradicating within their borders the danger which is represented by alien intrigue and treachery.<sup>19</sup>

The difficulty with this answer was that, as indicated above, there were portions of the memorandum in the same publication that did not support the Secretary's position, for they suggested other explanations for Guatemalans' dissatisfaction, such as the existence of "monopolistic exploitation," and the growth of nationalism. Someone had blundered in juxtaposing, in the "Blue

Book” the Secretary’s speech, and the “Basic Study” of the Guatemalan Communist Party prepared by a division of his own Department. The Department’s appreciation of the blunder is demonstrated by the very issuance of the “Green Book,” as much as by its text.

One straightforward way of dealing with the error would have been an acknowledgement of the existence of the “Blue Book,” coupled with a statement in the “Green Book” that new evidence had been discovered (as indeed it had) from documents made available by the Castillo Armas regime that indicated the existence of a greater Soviet influence in Guatemala than had at first been realized. Such acknowledgement, however, would have drawn attention to the “Basic Study” and embarrassing questions might then have been asked not only about relationships between analyses made by intelligence officers, and policy judgments by their superiors, but even about the accuracy of those judgments themselves. So, the risk was apparently taken that comparisons would not be made between the “Blue Book” and the “Green Book” if the former were ignored. Perhaps the Public Services Division viewed this risk as one that might safely be run in view of the general lack of both public and scholarly concern in the mid-1950’s with relations between the United States and Latin America. Had the officials of that Division been less pressed, and sufficiently energetic and imaginative to have refrained from copying literally large parts of the previous publication, it is possible that the “Green Book’s” effort at documentary substitution and the clandestine rewriting of history might have gone unnoticed, and so might have earned no opprobrious epithet.

The “Green Book” is, then, the product of a public relations division of the Department of State, which twisted the “Basic Study” produced by a research division of that Department, with the evident intent of obliterating the memory of any intelligence findings that might be used to dispute the Secretary’s conclusion as to the “identity of the peril” that he found in Guatemala. His conclusion was that the peril was “alien despotism;” a conclusion of the “Basic Study” was that the peril was “a glaze of nationalism and Marxism, *a scrambled compound which was short of the full strength of militant communism.*” The italicized clause was, characteristically and entirely consistently, omitted from the “Green Book’s” version of this sentence.<sup>20</sup>

A denial of its own analysts by the Department was thought to be required in order to establish external subversion, as distinct from domestic nationalism, or even domestic communism or socialism, as the prime source of “leftist” governments in Latin America. It is strange to reflect that in this instance, hopefully unique, the twisting of the hard facts of identity came at the very fount of the data; the rewriting of the official documentation to gloss over the inconsistencies was done by those in whose serious concern for the facts we should be entitled to have every confidence.

The effects of this denial may be far-reaching, and two may be noted briefly here. The first and least important is the presumptive lowering of the morale of intelligence officers who, in the "Green Book," saw their advice copied in part, distorted in part, ignored in part, in order to support a different conclusion independently reached by their departmental chiefs. Why should they, in the future, exert their powers of discrimination when their careers might be furthered by accepting, and even buttressing a sanctioned, uncomplicated and safe explanation of disturbing events abroad?

Secondly, and far more importantly, are possible effects on the climate of public opinion and on political leaders. Self-plagiarism, as a warped attempt to set the record straight, may generate self-persuasion. Assuming that the "Green Book" was an effort at massive persuasion of the validity of the simple doctrinal line that "alien despotism" was responsible for Guatemala's turn to the left in the decade 1944–1954, who was persuaded? We cannot, of course, answer this question with any degree of precision. Since the "Green Book" was published after ten years of the cold war, it may well have been little more than a reflection of already firmly held opinions. Nevertheless it was a distinctive move in itself, aimed, presumably, at a public attentive both to Latin American political affairs, and, broadly, to international politics. One of the most sensitive sectors of that public, and perhaps at that time one of the largest, was in Washington officialdom, and especially in the Department of State itself.

By making the "Green Book's" doctrine fashionable and authoritative, the Department's effect may have been to re-enforce self-persuasion, and from there it is but a little step to self-delusion. To employ or withhold power rationally, it is essential that we be free from the constraints of slogans; otherwise we shall not be able to make crucial discriminations among communists, nationalists, socialists and Christian Democrats, in Central America, the Caribbean, or in any other place.

#### NOTES

1. *Consultation Among the American Republics with Respect to the Argentine Situation*, Memorandum of the United States Government, (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1946), Dept. of State Publication 2473, Inter-American Series 29. 86 p. *Cuba*, (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1961), Dept. of State Publication 7171, Inter-American Series 66. 36 p. *U.S. Policy Toward Cuba*, (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1964), Dept. of State Publication 7690, Inter-American Series 88. 22 p.
2. Dept. of State Publication 3573, Far Eastern Series 30, Division of Publications, Office of Public Affairs, Released August 1949. This document, of 1054 pages, contains on the title page the statement: "Based on the Files of the Department of State;" it is sometimes referred to as the "China White Paper."
3. *A Case History of Communist Penetration: Guatemala*, (Washington, D.C., U.S. Govern-

- ment Printing Office, 1957), Dept. of State Publication 6465, Inter-American Series 52, Released April 1957, Public Services Division. 73 p.
4. *Intervention of International Communism in Guatemala*, (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954), Dept. of State Publication 5556, Inter-American Series 48, Released August 1954. 96 p.
  5. A different policy was followed in a later case. The Department of State announced publicly that it would revise a pamphlet *Background Berlin—1961*, "to make sure 'no criticism is implied or intended' of General Eisenhower's wartime belief that the Western armies could be more usefully employed elsewhere rather than in an assault on Berlin." *New York Times*, September 20, 1961.
  6. "Blue Book," p. ii.
  7. Address, June 30, 1954, text in "Blue Book," p. 30.
  8. "Green Book," p. 1.
  9. "Blue Book," p. 42.
  10. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
  11. *Ibid.*, p. 44–45.
  12. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
  13. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
  14. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
  15. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
  16. "Blue Book," p. 66; "Green Book," p. 36.
  17. "Blue Book," p. 68.
  18. "Green Book," p. 37.
  19. "Blue Book," p. 7. Speech by Secretary Dulles, Caracas, March 8, 1954. Earlier in the same speech, the Secretary said: ". . . we would be false to our past unless we again proclaimed that the extension to this hemisphere of *alien despotism* would be a danger to us all, which we unitedly oppose." (*Ibid.*, p. 6) Italics supplied.
  20. "Blue Book," p. 44; "Green Book," p. 13.