

Chapter 2 (1950-1972)

The Recalcitrant Claim

This Chapter introduces the Belizean people and the independence movement that took shape in 1950, and relates their first steps in engaging with the Guatemalan claim. The British actions, first to continue to dominate the colony of British Honduras and shape political developments there, then to rid themselves of the burden of a colony that was giving them more problems than benefits, are explained. The ill-fated mediation by the government of the USA is explored and new facts disclosed to unveil the truth about this much-misunderstood enterprise. The four years following the mediation were marked by British efforts to get Belizeans to accept coming under Guatemala's sphere of influence as the price of independence, a period that ended with Guatemala's plan to invade Belize.

Belize “Inherits” the Claim

The Nationalist Movement

In 1862 Belize was declared a colony of Britain, and in 1871 it became a Crown Colony, ruled by a Governor and with a Legislative Council made up of officials and nominated members. In 1936 an elective element in the Council was allowed; in 1945 the Council consisted of four official members (British), four nominated members and six members elected on a very narrow franchise (in a population of close to 60,000, the electorate numbered 822).

The population of Belize then was about 60,000, of which 60% were of mainly African and Afro-European descent (hereinafter referred to by the local term “Creole”), about 27% were Mestizo and Maya, 7% “Black Carib” (now known as Garifuna), 4% European and 2% of Indian descent.¹

The abolition of slavery had not meant the end of racism and exploitation. Many acts of rebellion and resistance occurred, the most important being the workers riots of 1894 and 1919 and the uprisings led by workers and unemployed between 1934 and 1939. Power and wealth, and especially land ownership, were highly centralised and unequal. Real power lay with the Governor, who supported the local oligarchy, in particular the British-owned Belize Estate and Produce Company, which held a fifth of the colony's land—over a million acres. The economy still depended heavily on the exploitation of the forests, and conditions for the workers were little better than during slavery. Economic conditions had become worse after World War II, a British reporter concluding that “Belize [City] with its 22,000 people is about the most shockingly depressed spot in the whole British West Indies—perhaps in the Commonwealth. Hunger, poverty, the filthy conditions under which the people exist are incredible”.²

The devaluation of the Belize dollar on 31 December 1949, imposed unilaterally by the Governor, was the spark that gave birth to the organized nationalist movement. A People's Committee formed to protest against devaluation quickly became a movement for self-government. In September 1950 the People's Committee transformed itself into the People's United Party, “to achieve and preserve for the people of this country national unity and political and economic independence”. Two months later the Party won elections to the Belize City Council. For the next three years the PUP continued its campaign for constitutional reform, and endured the usual colonial assaults including harassment and imprisonment of its leaders, but its popular support continued to grow. The PUP from its outset defined a strategy which was at odds with the prevailing British policy of very gradual decolonization.

¹ *Census of British Honduras, 9 April 1946*, Belize, 1948.

² *The Daily Mail*, quoted in *The Belize Billboard*, 16 February 1950.

Thus, in July 1952, PUP leader Leigh Richardson insisted that “political independence is the first essential step forward, in order that a government may be established representative of the people and not subservient to the exploiting monopolist interests”.

A major political issue at the time was that it appeared to Belizeans that the British were determined to deny them independence through the proposed British West Indies Federation, which they saw as an imperial device to create one big colony out of several small ones. What concerned people most was the prospect of mass immigration from the West Indies at a time when unemployment was very high. The rejection of Federation became a major plank of the PUP’s campaign for constitutional change, and the party’s insistence on Belize’s Central American destiny was countered by the British with the charge that it was favouring Guatemala’s claim to the country.

The PUP and Guatemala

In July 1951, on the ground that they refused to place a portrait of the King in the Council, the Governor dissolved the PUP-controlled elected Belize City Council. On 14 October the publishers and owners of *The Belize Billboard*, which voiced the PUP’s policies, were charged with sedition for reporting a speech by Leigh Richardson, who said that “the peoples of the British colonies can make war on the British Parliament and people to force them to give the colonies their human rights”. Richardson, along with Phillip Goldson, then Assistant Secretary of the PUP, were found guilty and began to serve their 12-month sentence on 7 November 1951. Twelve days later, Party Leader John Smith resigned from the PUP, complaining that “the PUP has been accused of getting aid from a foreign country, Guatemala, against its own, yet it has decided to do nothing to vindicate itself”. Just a month before, he had signed a letter to Central American Ministers of Foreign Affairs, where the PUP denounced British attempts to force Belize to join the proposed Federation, declared that Belize is geographically an integral part of Central America and that its future development depended on its relations and interchange with Central America, and asked for their support.

The PUP had in fact repeatedly refuted the pro-Guatemala charge: “We want the end of British colonialism in our country. We do not want the beginning of Guatemalan colonialism. The present evil is British colonialism. That evil the people must fight until it is dissolved”.³ The politics of the Guatemalan government until the coup of 1954 gave rise to interesting contradictions: on the one hand its claim on Belize's territory presented problems for Belize's nationalists, while on the other hand its reformist policies and anti-imperialist positions were attractive to them.

In October 1951, for example, Phillip Goldson addressed a public meeting on his week-long visit to Guatemala, and the *Billboard* published it under the heading “Seven Days of Freedom”.⁴ It begins: “Ladies and Gentlemen. Quite recently I escaped from behind this Green Curtain and for one whole week breathed the sweet air of liberty. I went to Guatemala”. He said that in the humble homes of labourers he saw modern toilet and bathing facilities and piped water to the kitchens, things which “mighty few” people in Belize had. Their workers were protected by progressive labour laws, with Labour Courts, extensive social welfare services, a medical fund and unemployment fund. In general, he lauded the achievements of the Arbenz government and drew unfavourable comparisons with the colonial government of Belize. He ended with a call to “part the Green Curtain which separates us from our neighbours and let us have free and beneficial intercourse with those neighbours”.

We too need to take a closer look at what was happening in neighbouring Guatemala at that critical point of the development of the independence movement in Belize, to better understand the attitude of PUP leaders to that country between 1950 and 1954.

³ *The Belize Billboard*, 7 February 1951. Of course that was true then and for a decade after, but today Belize is more connected to the former British colonies of the Caribbean through institutions like CARICOM and the UWI than to its Central American neighbours, and it is the Guatemalan claim not British colonialism that is the ‘present evil’ now.

⁴ Philip Goldson, “Seven Days of Freedom,” *The Belize Billboard*, Sunday 7 October, 1951.

Guatemala in the Cold War Context

The Guatemalan people had not fared well as an independent country. Its majority indigenous population continued to live under feudal conditions of peonage, workers had no rights, governments were corrupt and repressive, and there was a succession of brutal dictatorships, particularly those of Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920) and Jorge Ubico (1930-1944).⁵

Ubico was forced to resign in July 1944 and the subsequent free and fair election in December was won by Juan José Arévalo, “a mild-mannered schoolteacher [who] was seen to personify the civic virtues of democratic government”.⁶ His administration produced the reformist 1945 Constitution and passed laws introducing labour, educational and health reforms, social security, freedom of expression and democratic elections. The second period from 1951 to 1954 was led by President Jacobo Arbenz, elected in free elections with a large majority.⁷ During his mandate, “the process was radicalised and the government leaned toward revolutionary nationalism, giving voice to the demands of the dispossessed classes, acquiring a definitive agrarian character that was anti-feudal and anti-imperialist”. The agrarian reform law of June 1952 expropriated idle lands concentrated in the hands of national and foreign landlords. An official of the UN’s Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) described the law as “constructive and democratic in its aims . . . It would bring about a land structure and a system of land tenure largely centering around the needs and aspirations of the individual peasant families”.⁸ But these attempts at bringing a modicum of social justice to a people that had been ravaged by centuries of colonialism and more than a century of repressive governments were doomed because they occurred at the height of the Cold War.

⁵ Gabriel Aguilera Peralta, “The Militarization of the Guatemalan State,” in Fried et al. (eds), *Guatemala in Rebellion: Unfinished History*, New York, 1983, p. 115.

⁶ Dunkerley, pp. 137-138.

⁷ Arbenz won 266,278 votes. His nearest rival, Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, got 76,180: Gustavo Berganza (ed.), *Compendio de Historia de Guatemala 1944-2000*, ASIES, Guatemala, 2004, p. 13.

⁸ Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope. The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954*, Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 150.

During the entire period of the involvement of the people of Belize in dealing with the Guatemalan claim to their territory until independence and a few years after, there existed in the world something known as “the Cold War”. In a nutshell, this was a stand-off between the USA and the USSR (Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, the heart of which was Russia) which developed after World War II. The USSR and its allies in Eastern Europe, collectively known as the Soviet Bloc, were communist states, and a rivalry was created between them and the major capitalist states, led by the USA. In 1947 the US government committed itself to give support to countries which the USA itself might decide were threatened by Soviet forces or communist insurrection. This is considered the declaration of the “Cold War,” as opposed to the potential nuclear war that hung over the world as a constant threat, given that the USA and the USSR had the biggest nuclear arsenals. Although Europe was the epicentre of the Cold War at its outset, it quickly spread to the entire world, spawning the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War and many other conflicts, both hot and cold.

To a great extent, the world was divided into two “blocs” or spheres of influence, that of the USA and that of the USSR, the two Great Powers of a bi-polar world. The countries of the Americas were considered by the USA as within its sphere of influence. The rulers of the USA branded as “communist” any country that sought to improve the living conditions of its majorities or attempted to define an independent economic policy, particularly if that clashed with US economic interests.

In Guatemala, the US-owned United Fruit Company was the virtual ruler of the country for decades. It controlled banana production and two affiliated companies produced most of the country's electricity and owned its rail network. When Arévalo became President under the country's first free elections in 1944 and introduced labour reforms, President Truman authorised planning for a CIA coup, but his Secretary of State Dean Acheson thwarted that initiative. A United Fruit vice-president described Guatemala's government as “the region's

weakest, most corrupt, and most pliable. Then something went wrong: a man named Jacobo Arbenz became President”.⁹

Arbenz pledged “to convert Guatemala from a backward country with a predominantly feudal economy into a modern capitalist state, and to make this transformation in a way that will raise the standard of living of the great mass of our people”.¹⁰ Arbenz’s land reform law in 1952 required large landowners to sell their unused lands to the government for distribution to peasant families. United Fruit was the country’s largest landowner and biggest employer, with 566,000 acres of the country’s land (of which 85% was uncultivated) and more than 15,000 workers.¹¹

The USA believed it had the right to control Guatemala, exploit its wealth and ensure that its policies benefitted US interests. Dwight Eisenhower became US President in 1953 and appointed John Foster Dulles his Secretary of State and his brother Allen Dulles as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Both men had worked as lawyers for and owned stock in United Fruit, and they decided to eliminate the Arbenz government. They got the OAS to pass a resolution on 28 March 1954 declaring that “the domination or control of the political institutions of any American state by the international Communist movement . . . would call for appropriate action in accordance with existing treaties”.¹² They used a US air force base in Florida to prepare CIA-contracted pilots to fly bombing raids over Guatemala, created a “liberation army” commanded by Guatemalan colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, and enlisted the most prominent US Catholic, New York’s Francis Cardinal Spellman, to cause Guatemala’s church leaders to emit a long pastoral letter on 9 April in all Catholic churches in Guatemala,

⁹ Stephen Kinzer, *The Brothers. John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles and their secret world war*, Times Books, New York, 2013, pp. 148-149. For a more detailed account of the CIA coup, see the same author’s (with Stephen Schlesinger) *Bitter Fruit, the story of the American coup in Guatemala*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 2005. In comparison, the British owned Belize Estate and Produce Company, owned about one-fifth of the colony’s land, over one million acres, well into the 20th century.

¹⁰ Kinzer, p. 149.

¹¹ Kinzer, p. 150 and Gleijeses, p. 90.

¹² Kinzer, p. 166.

proclaiming that “anti-Christian Communism is continuing its brazen advance in our country, masquerading as a movement of social reform for the needy classes . . . Every Catholic should fight Communism for the simple reason that he is Catholic.”¹³ The deeply religious people of Guatemala were profoundly affected by this message coming from their trusted priests, and the CIA ordered a relentless religious-based propaganda war warning that churches would be closed, religious instruction in schools would be stopped, etc.

On 16 June, President Eisenhower met with the Dulles brothers and approved the plan to remove Arbenz, insisting: “I want all of you to be damn good and sure you succeed. I’m prepared to take any steps that are necessary to see that it succeeds. When you commit the flag, you commit it to win”.¹⁴ Two days later the CIA’s hand-picked Colonel Castillo Armas led a band of 150 “rebels” from Honduras into Guatemala, advanced six miles and stopped to await the unfolding of the plot. False radio broadcasts reported successes by the “rebel army,” while CIA pilots flew from Honduras and Nicaragua on bombing raids. When additional planes became necessary, Eisenhower deployed them without hesitation: “If you at any time take the route of violence or support of violence, then you commit yourself to carry it through, and it’s too late to have second thoughts”. The US ambassador made it known to Guatemala’s senior military commanders that the US was behind it all and would not relent until Arbenz was removed. They in turn gave Arbenz a “final ultimatum” on 27 June; he made a radio broadcast saying that in order to avoid bloodshed he would surrender to “the obscured forces that today oppress the backward and colonial world,” and walked to the Mexican Embassy for asylum. Colonel Castillo Armas, later installed as President, dissolved Congress, suspended the Constitution, disenfranchised three-quarters of the population by banning illiterates from voting, and repealed the land reform law.¹⁵ There followed decades of dictatorial rule propped up by the US government and a civil war that was to last until 1996 and claim 200,000 lives.

¹³ Kinzer, p. 170.

¹⁴ Kinzer, p. 171.

¹⁵ Kinzer, pp. 169-173.

The British government played an important role in providing the US with crucial diplomatic support in this grim episode that killed a budding democracy and ushered in decades of tyrannical rule. In May 1954, when the US was preparing the invasion and determined to detain and search any ship to prevent arms reaching Guatemala, Britain agreed to cooperate although it knew it was a deliberate violation of international law. After the invasion began and Guatemala appealed to the UN Security Council, the British connived with the USA to prevent any action, and then pressured UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold not to publish his legal determination that the US had been “completely at variance with the Charter” when it argued that Guatemala was wrong to appeal to the UNSC rather than the OAS.

Although the British government defended its position against very strong attacks in Parliament and the press, it told the US that “it was never comfortable for the Government to defend a line at home which it did not really believe”. Still, the British government published a White Paper on the issue, “specifically targeted to allay US anxieties,” and ensured that it was sufficiently “anti-communist” in tone. Years later, the author of the White Paper admitted that “Jacobo Arbenz was no more a threat to his country than Harold Wilson was to ours”.¹⁶

Meers refers to the dire consequences for the Guatemalan people of the 1954 coup, and concludes that “the legacy of the Arbenz coup has been no more pleasant for London. In need of some rallying point for their demoralized nation, Guatemalan rightists have vigorously pursued their country’s claim to Belize and ultimately broke relations with London in 1963 over the matter”.

The Independence Movement and British Duplicity

In Belize, a national strike called in October 1952 by the General Workers Union resulted in a massive increase of support for both the Union and the PUP; by then the leaderships of both organizations were virtually the same. Universal adult suffrage was won in 1954.

¹⁶ Meers, Sharon I., “The British Connection: How the United States covered its tracks in the 1954 Coup in Guatemala,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. XVI, no.3, 1992.

Less than two months before the first general elections with adult suffrage in 1954, the British staged an “impartial inquiry” by a commissioner from London into allegations that the PUP was having “contacts” with Guatemala. The Commissioner could find no evidence that the PUP had received money from the Guatemalan government or that it was trying to sell out the country to Guatemala. In the event, the most potent slogan for the elections became “Contact or no Contact, Vote PUP All The Way”.¹⁷

On nomination day, 6 April 1954, the Governor delivered a blistering attack on the PUP, warning the people to be “on your guard all the time against International Communism . . . there are foreign states who do not wish us well who are eager to embarrass us by assisting agitators”.¹⁸ The PUP generally ignored those accusations and insisted that the real issue was a solution to the people’s social and economic problems, and in the end the question before the electorate was whether to vote for or against the movement to self-government and independence. When, contrary to the expectations of the Colonial Office, the PUP won an overwhelming majority (67%) in the elections, the British Cabinet was reassured that the Governor would take steps to guarantee that the PUP would not be in a position to oppose British policy.¹⁹

Upon winning the elections, the PUP stated that it would cooperate with the colonial government only so far as that cooperation “will not retard the campaign against the colonial system”. But when the “cooperation” of Richardson and Goldson extended to supporting the proposed West Indies Federation, which was still hugely unpopular in Belize, confrontation became inevitable. In 1956, Richardson, Goldson and ten other leaders resigned from the Party and Price became the leader, a position he was to hold unchallenged for four decades.²⁰ Goldson has said that “Richardson became an advocate of

¹⁷ Shoman, *Birth*, p. 25

¹⁸ *The Daily Clarion*, 7 and 8 April 1954.

¹⁹ Cabinet memo., 17 May 1954, CAB 129/68, C (54) 164. The Cabinet agreed with the recommendation to go ahead with the planned second stage of the constitution.

²⁰ Shoman, *13 Chapters*, pp. 192-201. For an authorized biography of George Price, see Godfrey P. Smith, *George Price, A Life Revealed*, Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston, 2011.

Federation in the course of time, while Price was adamantly opposed to it . . . Price tended towards Central America and Guatemala and the rest of us tended towards the Caribbean—this was perhaps the real reason for the split”.²¹ He did not explain why he and Richardson so radically changed the strong views they had professed just a few months before. Richardson and Goldson formed the Honduran Independence Party (HIP), and in March 1957 it, along with the National Party (NP), contested the general elections, but the PUP won all nine seats.

London was still concerned about the PUP’s anti-colonialist rhetoric, and decided to play the Guatemalan card again. During a visit by Price and his colleagues to London to discuss financial assistance and constitutional advance in 1957, the British accused Price of secretly meeting with a Guatemalan official in London. Colonial Secretary Lennox Boyd broke off the talks, alleging that Price had entertained “a most improper offer” from the Guatemalans “which involved severing the connection of British Honduras with the British Crown and associating it in some form with the Guatemalan Republic”.²² The Governor dismissed Price from the Executive Council and in a radio address declared that Price “was prepared in certain circumstances to see you, the people of this country, handed over to the Guatemalan Republic lock, stock and barrel”.²³ This incident was an important crucible affecting how the Guatemalan claim was to be handled by Price, other Belizean politicians, the British and the Guatemalans in the future. It demands further consideration.

In early 1957 the Guatemalan government proposed to the British that they open talks on their dispute over Belize. Dr José Luis Mendoza met in London on 13 March with Henry Hankey, head of the

²¹ Interview with Goldson, in Assad Shoman, *Party Politics in Belize, 1950–1986*, Belize, 1987. Goldson maintained control of *The Belize Billboard*, which became the organ of his party; the PUP established *The Belize Times* as its organ.

²² Hansard, vol.578, col. 1159–1162, 27 November 1957.

²³ Telegram to SOSOC, 2 December 1957, FO 371/126383. The Governor gave his own version of the facts in a long address, but refused Price access to the radio station to give his version, arguing that “this is not a matter, in my view, for public discussion over the wireless”.

American Department in the FO and later Undersecretary, who proposed a settlement including free port facilities for Guatemala, transit arrangements for developing industries (which included oil exploration)²⁴ and a customs regime. Hankey offered to hold talks in London, and said that representatives of the newly constituted government of Belize would be invited to participate.²⁵ There were two further meetings between British and Guatemalan officials in March, where it became clear that a major concern of Guatemala was the fear of Belize joining the West Indies Federation, and the British reassured Mendoza that there was no strong reason to suppose that the people would opt for such a course.²⁶

On 14 March, a meeting of Foreign Office and Colonial Office officials agreed that they could consider “an alteration of a minor character” of the frontier as a final trump card to clinch an agreement, provided it had the support of the Belize delegation.²⁷ The British officials discussed among themselves other possible solutions, including “some form of closer association with any one or all of the Central American Republics”²⁸ and “a minor rectification of the frontier,” if the area involved were uninhabited.²⁹ This last idea, however, “is not one that ought to be mentioned to George Price at this juncture. It is potentially too explosive”.

It was in this context that Price, having been told by Governor Thornley that his delegation would join talks with the Guatemalan representative Jorge Granados in London,³⁰ accepted an invitation for his delegation (which included two members of his party and a nominated member to the Legislative Council) to meet Granados for lunch to hear the

²⁴ Kennedy (CO) to Thornley, 6 June 1957, FO 371/126379.

²⁵ Hankey to Mendoza, 15 March 1957, FO 371/126377.

²⁶ “Anglo-Guatemalan discussions over British Honduras,” 20 March 1957, FO 371/126377.

²⁷ Note of the meeting by WIAD, 14 March 1957, CO 1031/2596. This is the first reference I found to British willingness to concede land cession.

²⁸ Thornley to Kennedy, 21 May 1957, CO 1031/2596. The British themselves did not seem to consider this “a most improper offer”.

²⁹ Kennedy to Thornley, 6 June 1957, FO 371/126379.

³⁰ Thornley to SOSC, 21 July 1957, FO 371/126380.

proposal Granados was going to put to the British, which involved some sort of association of Belize with Guatemala—something the British had already agreed to among themselves. Price listened and encouraged his colleagues to ask questions, and undertook to consider the proposal.³¹ Two of his colleagues told the Governor about the meeting, and when challenged by Secretary of State Lennox Boyd, Price said he wanted more time to discuss the matter with his colleagues. He later told the Governor that he and his colleagues had agreed to keep the discussions with Granados private for the time being for political reasons. Thornley replied that he “could conceive of no sort of political reason for considering for one moment [the] proposal that relations between their country and the British Crown should be severed.”³² This was rather disingenuous, given the fact that severing the ties of Belize with the British was precisely the entire *raison d’être* of the PUP’s struggle for independence.

Governor Thornley himself had reported in May that “I did not myself believe that either George Price or any of the present PUP leaders were in favour of the absorption of this country by Guatemala,”³³ at a time when he knew about British willingness to accept the close association of Belize with Guatemala and even land cession. It is hardly credible, therefore, that the British really considered it traitorous that Price had told Granados that his delegation would consider his proposal.³⁴

In any event, Price went home to a hero’s welcome,³⁵ and although two of his party leaders defected, he maintained the support of the members and of most of the people of the country. That incident having failed to significantly affect the PUP’s support, the British in 1958 charged Price with sedition for having allegedly made uncomplimentary remarks about the Queen, but a jury acquitted him and his popularity

³¹ Interview with Price.

³² This is Thornley’s version of the event, given in his radio address in Belize on 2 December 1957, FCO 371/126383.

³³ Thornley to Kennedy, 21 May 1957, CO 1031/2596.

³⁴ For an account of this incident which was endorsed by Price, see Castillo, *Profile*, pp. 87–93.

³⁵ *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 December 1957; *The Times*, 2 December 1957.

soared.³⁶ In municipal elections in November 1958 the PUP won 29 of 33 seats in seven municipalities, and Price became the mayor of Belize City.³⁷ Meanwhile, in July 1958, the HIP and the NP merged to form the National Independence Party (NIP). Goldson became the leader in 1961 and made the NIP a one-issue party, based on the charge that the PUP was selling out the country to Guatemala. Goldson claims he had become convinced that Price was compromising himself with Guatemala; he also feared that the PUP's embrace of a Central American destiny would threaten Belize's "ethnic balance" and lead to its "latinization".³⁸

Colonial Office officials, even in late 1957, believed that "independence" for British Honduras could only be as a member of the Federation.³⁹ It is not surprising, then, that in 1959 a British constitutional commissioner, Sir Hilary Blood, rejected calls for self-government, allegedly on the ground of "the Guatemalan complication".⁴⁰ The fact is that the British, acting as thought police, kept wanting to control political developments in their colonies. Guyana had no "Guatemala complication," but the British desired to control the whole process of decolonization and to give *any* reason that seemed convenient for doing so.

Still, in 1961 a new Constitution introduced a quasi-ministerial system with greater executive powers for the elected leaders. In elections that year the PUP won all 18 seats and the British finally came to accept that the PUP had overwhelming popular support and that the people wanted independence. In any case, the world consensus, epitomised in UN Resolution 1514 of 1960,⁴¹ made it evident that colonialism was doomed. The British were also consoled by the changed attitude of Price. When he was called upon to form a government with some degree of authority in development matters, he realised that the Party

³⁶ Shoman, *13 Chapters*, p. 195.

³⁷ *The Belize Times*, 18 November 1958.

³⁸ Interview with Goldson, in Assad Shoman, *Party Politics in Belize, 1950-1986*, Belize, 1987, p. 26.

³⁹ Rogers to Hankey, 18 October 1957, FO 371/126381.

⁴⁰ "Report of the Constitutional Commissioner (Sir Hilary Blood), 10 October 1959," Belize.

⁴¹ See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this resolution.

needed more than just mass support—it needed to deliver on its promises for social and economic improvements, which would require the cooperation of the British.

Price accepted the British scheme of step-by-step constitutional decolonization, and the embrace tightened when, after a hurricane in November 1961 devastated the country and destroyed Belize City, the British provided unprecedented amounts of aid, including the building of Belmopan, the new capital city inland, long a cherished Price dream. The British rewarded him two years later by agreeing to a new “self-government” constitution. In 1964 that Constitution came into effect, and Guatemala broke diplomatic relations with Britain in protest; it was not to renew those relations, despite Britain’s persistent attempts to do so, for twenty-two years, five years after Belize attained independence.

Guatemalan Dictators and the USA

The rule of Castillo Armas, imposed by the CIA coup of 1954, did not last very long; he was an incompetent and repressive ruler, and in July 1957 he was assassinated. After a period of transitory rule, elections were called in January 1958, and Ydígoras Fuentes won under the slogan “a hand of stainless steel in a velvet glove”.⁴² Ydígoras had “an exaggerated sense of the idea of nationalism . . . which was just a ruse to divert public attention from social problems”.⁴³ He started the propensity of Guatemalan governments to use the Belize issue for that purpose. He was also a bit of a clown; in April 1958, barely a month after taking office, he crossed Belize’s western border and arrived at the town of Benque Viejo del Carmen, declaring that it was Guatemalan territory and he had come to take possession. He left after he was politely asked to by the police, but the incident was given global publicity.⁴⁴ Ydígoras was as aggressive and corrupt as his predecessor, and carried out the anti-communist crusade with vigour, cracking down

⁴² Berganza, p. 24.

⁴³ Berganza, p. 29.

⁴⁴ Miguel Ángel Cospín, *Ydígoras Fuentes ante la Faz de sus Contemporáneos*, México, 1970, p. 73.

on student demonstrations and passing “land reform” legislation that benefitted the rich rather than landless peasants. He was unable to gain the support of either popular sectors or of the right.

And then an event occurred which had profound effects everywhere: the Cuban Revolution triumphed in January 1959 with Fidel Castro as its leader, and the US government quickly regarded it as a serious threat that had to be eliminated. As early as January 1960 Eisenhower had decided to “throw Castro out,” and the CIA got to work, first concocting plans to murder Fidel with the help of the Mafia and then planning to support subversive violent operations inside Cuba.⁴⁵ CIA operatives recruited followers of the ousted Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista in Miami and trained them in camps in Florida, Puerto Rico, the Panama Canal Zone and Guatemala. After John F. Kennedy won the presidential elections in November 1960, Eisenhower decided that “rather than smuggle small teams of infiltrators into Cuba, the CIA would launch a full-scale invasion, perhaps with support from the US military.⁴⁶ That plan to invade outlived the humiliating defeat that Cuba meted out to Washington at the Bay of Pigs invasion. As recently released CIA papers show, the US had prepared a 261,000-strong military force poised to invade Cuba in October 1962, an invasion that was only prevented by the presence of Soviet missiles on the island.

When Washington asked the Guatemalan government for the use of its territory to prepare the invasion force, it could not refuse: “after the example of power applied against President Arbenz, the country was not in a position to refuse the orders of the US government that masqueraded as diplomatic requests . . . Besides, Ydígoras believed that if Guatemala supported the US invasion it would receive the diplomatic support of the US in its claim for Belize”.⁴⁷

Opposition to the CIA operation on Guatemalan soil together with anger at the extent of official corruption provoked a coup attempt on

⁴⁵ In October 2017, secret US Government documents relating to the assassination of President John F Kennedy in 1963 were released, and disclose the hand of the CIA in many assassination attempts on Fidel, Che and Raúl.

⁴⁶ Kinzer, 288-293.

⁴⁷ Berganza, pp. 30-31.

13 November 1960”.⁴⁸ The revolt was put down by other elements in the army and bombardments by the CIA pilots training for the invasion of Cuba. Two of the top rebel leaders later returned from exile and launched the guerrilla war that lasted more than thirty years.

Ydígoras continued to lose support; he put down demonstrations with brutal force; he appointed a military cabinet and accepted US support for counter-intelligence operations. Elections were due in 1963, and the exiled Arévalo, the President in 1945-1950, was a candidate. Although he had become even more moderate than before, he personified the revolutionary decade, and “was entirely unacceptable to the military, the bourgeoisie, and even President Kennedy”. Fearing the real possibility of Arévalo’s victory in the elections, Kennedy gave his approval for the removal of Ydígoras by a coup led by Defence Minister Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia on 30 March 1963.⁴⁹

The new regime dissolved Congress, suspended party political activity and ruled by decree. “This period marks the beginning of a process whereby the military would impose its own political project, over several years and frequently against the popular will expressed in elections. Here began the complex system of military control of power and of the society, which would later acquire more violent manifestations”.⁵⁰ A new Constitution was declared in 1965 and included this provision on Belize:

Art. 1.-It is declared that Belize is part of the territory of Guatemala. The Executive should realize all the actions necessary to resolve the situation in conformity with the national interests, and in the meantime the following norms shall prevail:

(a) In order to recognize the natives of Belize as natural Guatemalans, they should expressly opt for Guatemalan nationality. In any case it is in the discretion of the Executive to grant the recognition.

(b) With regard to this territory, there shall be applied the constitutional and legal regulations relating to the frontiers of

⁴⁸ Dunkerley, pp. 439-442.

⁴⁹ Dunkerley, p. 443.

⁵⁰ Berganza, p. 34.

the Republic, as well as those relating to customs and migration, except as agreed by the Executive.⁵¹

Although several social projects were advanced, the major aim was to prevent the resurgence of “communism,” through the strengthening of the military and projects to benefit the middle classes under the “Alliance for Progress,” a US program instituted by President Kennedy in 1961 in an attempt to forestall Cuban-style revolutions in Latin America. Its real effect was to spawn dictatorships all over Latin America. The US provided 24 million dollars of military aid to Guatemala between 1964 and 1966 and the army established new bases all over the country.⁵²

During this period the guerrilla war in Guatemala gathered strength, and the repression was brutal, with hundreds of “disappearances” of radical political leaders and suspected sympathisers. The military leaders were divided about who to put forward as the presidential candidate, and different factions postulated their own candidates. One political party's candidate was Julio César Méndez Montenegro, a lawyer of some professional and academic prestige, who was associated with the Revolution of 1944. He was the only civilian candidate, and so enjoyed more popular support, and he emerged victorious and became President (1966-1970) in name only.

The armed forces conditioned their allowing him to assume the presidency: he had to sign a pact that gave the army *carte blanche* to prosecute the anti-insurgency war, and forbade any negotiations with the guerrilla leaders. A regime of impunity was established, assuring that the armed forces would not face judicial sanctions for any abuses committed in the name of counterinsurgency. And by prohibiting negotiations with the insurgents, the country was condemned to a prolonged war.⁵³

It was during that period that the US agreed to engage directly in the Anglo-Guatemala dispute, and we will take up the Guatemala story

⁵¹ Constitución de Guatemala, Título X, Disposiciones Transitorias y Finales, Capítulo Único, 1965. Author's translation.

⁵² Berganza, pp. 34-38.

⁵³ Berganza, pp. 39-40.

again at that juncture. Now we must turn briefly to another major player in this issue, the United States of America.

In the Backyard of the USA

US policy toward countries in the region has been characterised as “outright imperialism wrapped in a thick ideology with geopolitical and neo-Darwinian racism” along with “a profound and sustained sense of the geopolitical importance of the Caribbean.”⁵⁴ During all the decades of the Cold War US policy was expressed in terms of the need to stop communism, but the determination of the US to control the region went back at least as far as 1898 when the US declared war on Spain and invaded Cuba on the pretext of the blowing up of the *USS Maine*, and ended up colonising Puerto Rico and occupying Cuba.⁵⁵ When the Belize issue appeared on the radar of US policy analysts in the 1960s, their vision of the region was heavily influenced by the impact of the Cuban revolution. The US fully supported the Guatemalan dictatorships as a bulwark against any communist influence—meaning any nationalism that could be construed as limiting US interests.

CIA-backed coups overthrew elected governments in Ecuador, Brazil and the Dominican Republic, which the US army invaded in 1965. Given this record of US intervention in the hemisphere, the fact that it did not take a more openly partial role in aiding Guatemala to take Belize can only be explained by Britain’s control of the territory; the US relied on Britain to ensure that Belize did not become a port of Cuban penetration in the isthmus.

In a bipolar world dominated by the US and the USSR, British pretensions to be a competing “third force” were soon shown to be an illusion. It became clear, especially after the Suez crisis in 1956, that Britain’s only chance of remaining a relevant power in the world lay in nurturing the “special relationship” that supposedly had been

⁵⁴ Anthony P. Maingot and Wilfredo Lozano, *The United States and the Caribbean: Transforming Hegemony and Sovereignty*, New York, 2005, pp. 1 and 3.

⁵⁵ In the Pacific it also ended up controlling Guam and the Phillipines, formerly Spanish possessions.

created during the war by Churchill and Roosevelt, even when this really meant subservience to the US.⁵⁶ In March 1957 US and British officials agreed that “the best counter to Soviet aims is to pursue resolutely and systematically the constructive policy of leading dependencies as rapidly as possible toward stable self-government or independence in such a way that these governments are willing and able to preserve their political and economic ties with the West”.⁵⁷

Clearly, the most important aspect of the special relationship for the US was the Cold War, which was “of central importance in the redefining and repositioning of the empire”.⁵⁸ The British minister of defence declared that “our Colonial Empire in its varying stages of development is likely to be a vital ‘cold war’ battlefield,” where the communists might strike directly or “exploit troubles basically of a nationalist character”.⁵⁹ A good example of how this US-British relationship played out in our area is the case of Guyana (then British Guiana). At the time that the country was poised to gain independence from Britain, the US feared that the party that enjoyed majority support—the People’s Progressive Party (PPP), led by Cheddi Jagan—would not give free rein to US capital to exploit the country, which it interpreted as “leading the country into the communist camp”.

The PPP won the first general election under universal adult suffrage in April 1953, but by September the Colonial Office determined that the Party had a “Communist political bias” and that this “would seriously embarrass the UK in its diplomatic relations with US”. Accordingly, in October 1953, the British government sent in ships and troops, overthrew the government, suspended the Constitution and fomented a split within the PPP, leading to a splinter party, People’s National Congress (PNC) led by Forbes Burnham, who they saw as more moderate and ‘reliable’ than Jagan. Although the PPP

⁵⁶ Sir Michael Howard, “Afterword: The ‘Special Relationship’,” in W. Roger Luis and Hedley Bull (eds), *The ‘Special Relationship’: Anglo-American Relations since 1945*, London, 1986, p. 387.

⁵⁷ Hyam, Ronald, *Britain’s Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918–1968*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 302–303.

⁵⁸ Boyce, p. 114.

⁵⁹ “Internal Security in the Colonies,” 29 December 1954, CAB 129/72.

nonetheless went on to win the elections in 1957 and 1961, the US told Britain in February 1962 that “it is not possible for us to put up with an independent British Guiana under Jagan”. President Kennedy himself pressed this point, and the British changed the electoral system to facilitate the defeat of the PPP in 1964. Two years later, Guyana became independent, and at the strong urging of the US, the UK left British troops in the territory until the Guyanese security forces were strong enough to cope with any attempts at subversion by the PPP and “communism”—not for protection against any threat from Venezuela, which claimed a large part of its territory.⁶⁰

The case of Guyana shows clearly that “in the competition in the American mind between the ‘Special Relationship’, ‘anti-colonialism’ and ‘anti-communism’, the last always prevails”.⁶¹ Two concepts have to be understood clearly here, however. The so-called ‘special relationship’ really means that the British pretend to believe that they enjoy a reciprocity in equality with the USA that they don’t actually have. For the US, more accurately, it means they can count on the British government to do their bidding. Secondly, the US justification of its domineering actions and aggressions as “protection against communism” is clearly an absurdity. The US government has acted to dominate the region (and later the world) long before, and long after, they could use any communist threat as an excuse. So when US presidents and officials talk about their desire for ‘stability’ in the region, they mean that they will destabilize governments of which they disapprove, whether they are democratic or not, and stabilize those which do their bidding, no matter how tyrannical they are—Guatemala being a case in point.

William Rogers, who as Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America until 1977 had dealt with British officials on the Belize question, was brutally blunt on the question: “Latin America probably yields less

⁶⁰ O. Nigel Bolland, *The Politics of Labour in the British Caribbean*, Kingston, 2001, pp. 600–629, Minute by J. W. Vernon, WIAD, 16 September 1953, CO 1031/119, Rusk to Home, 20 February 1962, PREM 11/3666, Lord Home to Rusk, 26 February 1962, PREM 11/3666, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, vol. XII, Washington, 1966, pp. 607–609, FO record of Kennedy–Macmillan meeting, 30 June 1963, PREM 11/4586, pp. 33–36.

⁶¹ Wm. Roger Louis, “American Anti-colonialism,” in Louis and Bull (eds), p. 283.

evidence of a unique relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom than any other part of the world . . . No other major grouping of developing countries is so dominated by an economic and military superpower as Latin America is by the United States”.

Rogers displays his own disdain and arrogance when he refers to the case of Belize:

Britain's last remaining defence commitment on the mainland of the hemisphere is Belize, and this is strictly marginal in Washington's scheme of things. America's concern is for the nurturing of the tender shoots of democracy in Guatemala, the restraint of its military, and the enhancement of development in that last firebreak between a Central American conflagration and Mexico. So the festering problem of Belize has been an irritant and a side-show as far as American strategy in Central America is concerned for years.⁶²

The status of Belize as a “side-show” in the US scheme of things became painfully apparent during the three decades that the Belize government sought to gain independence for Belize.

Defence Matters

British defence policy was always crucially important for the issue of Belize's independence. Upon taking office in 1964, Prime Minister Harold Wilson believed that Britain, because of its imperial history, had a unique global defence role “which no other country, not excluding America, can provide”.⁶³ This grandiose vision of Britain's power role could not be sustained. In 1968 Wilson declared that “apart from our remaining Dependencies and certain other necessary exceptions, we shall by [1971] not be maintaining military bases outside Europe and the Mediterranean”.⁶⁴

⁶² William D. Rogers, “The ‘Unspecial Relationship’ in Latin America,” in Louis and Bull (eds), p. 342.

⁶³ Hansard, 5th Series, Volume 704, 16 December 1964, cols. 421, 423-4.

⁶⁴ Hansard, 5th Series, Volume 756, 16 January 1968, cols. 1580-81, 1583.

Wilson's second government (1966-1970) enunciated its defence policy with respect to Belize: no defence guarantee after independence. Prime Minister Edward Heath's Conservative government (1970-1974) maintained this policy. In March 1974 Wilson's government (re-elected in February) announced that it had initiated a review of current defence commitments in order to save several hundred million pounds per annum, although Britain would "continue to maintain forces in the dependent territories of Hong Kong, Gibraltar, Belize and the Falkland Islands".⁶⁵ In April 1975, a referendum on remaining in Europe resulted in an overwhelming "yes" vote. Britain had embraced its European destiny, and sought to remove or reduce its few remaining world-wide defence commitments.

It is within this context of the US attitudes toward Belize and Guatemala respectively in the context of the Cold War, the "special relationship" between the USA and Britain, and Britain's defence policy, that we must consider and explain the role played by the US and Britain in the mediation process undertaken by the United States under President Johnson.

To Webster and Beyond

First Belizean Involvement in Negotiations

In November 1961, the British government agreed to a Guatemalan proposal for informal talks, with elected ministers of Belize present.⁶⁶ In preparation for talks, an internal Colonial Office memorandum considered that if the Guatemalans were to propose territorial adjustments they should be looked at, "but I doubt whether this would appeal to the British Honduras delegation".⁶⁷ This is what the British government thought about Belize:

⁶⁵ Ritchie Owendale, *British Defence Policy since 1945*, Manchester, 1994, p. 151, Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1975, Cmnd. 5976, March 1975, London, pp. 1, 7, 14-15.

⁶⁶ British Embassy Guatemala to FO, 5 January 1962, CO 1031/3689.

⁶⁷ Baker to Piper, 15 February 1962, CO 1031/3689.

British Honduras is an embarrassment to Her Majesty's Government, both politically, militarily and financially . . . Politically, it is anachronistic to maintain a colony on the American continent in the 1960s: its existence complicates Her Majesty's Government's relations with all the Latin American States (who are passionately anti-colonial) . . . Indirectly, this also has repercussions on our relations with the United States. Militarily, the maintenance of a garrison in British Honduras is a commitment which we ought to shed as soon as possible. Financially, British Honduras costs Her Majesty's Government half a million pounds per annum simply to balance the budget. Added to these general disadvantages is our long-standing dispute with Guatemala, which is costing us about £1 million per annum in lost trade already, and if the Guatemalan Government decides to break relations with us, could lead to the loss of substantial British assets as well.⁶⁸

They felt there was “no visible prospect of the territory becoming economically viable, unless incorporated within some larger economic framework,” but admitted that it was tacitly accepted in Belize that independence was the goal. They believed the solution was for Belize to join the Organización de Estados Centroamericanos (ODECA) and the Organization of American States (OAS) on attaining independence. When the British put these thoughts to the US State Department, the officials were non-committal, although one was heard to murmur that “an independent country of 92,000 people would land on the American plate”.⁶⁹

Talks were held in Puerto Rico in April 1962. The British delegation declared that “Castroism and communism could only be defeated in the area if all its enemies were united and did all they could to remove causes of friction. The future of BH was such a cause”.⁷⁰ The British delegate announced that a constitutional conference in 1963 would

⁶⁸ Draft joint memo by the Foreign and Colonial Secretaries, undated (but probably March or early April 1962), CO 1031/3690.

⁶⁹ British Embassy Washington to Hankey, 16 April 1962, CO 1031/3690.

⁷⁰ Record of Anglo-Guatemalan Talks, 16 to 19 April 1962, CO 1031/3691.

agree on full internal self-government for Belize and independence would follow soon after, and then Belize would be free to join or associate with whomsoever she wished. The Guatemalans objected that Belize was too weak to stand alone and would fall prey to communists. Moreover, Belize was a disputed territory, and Britain could not unilaterally grant independence to Belize. It proposed that a transitory regime of joint administration be established, supervised by an international organization, and that after an appropriate time a plebiscite be held, which would guarantee Belizeans the right to self-determination.⁷¹ Britain maintained that it had already promised independence to Belize, and would not renege on that promise unless the Belizeans so requested. Price affirmed that Belizeans had already decided their future, which was independence, and that the transitory regime was not acceptable.

It became clear that there was no basis for a meeting of minds, but they agreed that the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) activate the recommendation it had made in 1961⁷² to undertake a study to consider the implications for Belize to join the Central American economic system. They also decided to establish a Permanent Commission of Cooperation to recommend measures for cooperation and joint development.⁷³ In the event, neither of these resulted in any positive outcome: the Commission never met, and the ECLA study was not completed until 1968, when it advised that Belize had nothing to gain from closer economic ties with Central America.⁷⁴ No further talks were held.

The Guatemalan delegation advised its government that in order to thwart Britain's plans for making Belize independent, it must endeavour to get the support of the US State Department.⁷⁵ In January 1963, Guatemala sought the "friendly intervention" of the government of the

⁷¹ Alberto Herrarte, *El caso de Belice y la Mediación de Estados Unidos*, Guatemala, 1980, p. 163.

⁷² ECLA, IX Session, Santiago de Chile, May 1961, Resolution 195 (IX).

⁷³ Record of Anglo-Guatemalan Talks, 16 to 19 April 1962, CO 1031/3691.

⁷⁴ ECLA, "Possibilities of Economic Cooperation between British Honduras and Central America," December 1968, E/CN 12/809 Rev. 1.

⁷⁵ Herrarte, p. 168.

Guatemala's Claim to Belize...

US, but the State Department responded that US policy was not to intervene in this kind of dispute.

US “Good Offices”

When Belize attained self-government in 1964, the Guatemalan government broke off diplomatic relations with Britain,⁷⁶ but maintained its consulate in Belize. On the advice of the *Consejo de Belice*⁷⁷ Foreign Minister Alberto Herrarte asked the US to mediate the dispute, but the US instead only agreed to use its ‘good offices’. As a result, three meetings were held towards the end of 1963 in Washington between the British and Guatemalan ambassadors.⁷⁸ Guatemalan delegate Molina Orantes proposed a federation between Belize and Guatemala.⁷⁹ The British representative replied that a federation that meant the incorporation of Belize into Guatemala would certainly not be acceptable to Belizeans, and declared that any other proposal would have to be discussed in the presence of Belizeans.

The Guatemalans then asked Britain to send a “top flight diplomatist” to Guatemala for talks. In September Britain sent Ambassador Sir Douglas Busk to Guatemala with the message that federation was unacceptable to the Belizeans and therefore to Britain. The Guatemalans refused to receive Price unless he came prepared to discuss the federation proposal. Price refused, and a quick visit by Busk to Belize on a US-provided aircraft did not budge him.⁸⁰ Busk concluded that

⁷⁶ Herrarte to Buxton, 24 July 1963, in Herrarte, pp. 179-180.

⁷⁷ The *Consejo de Belice* had operated as an informal advisory body to the Guatemalan Foreign Ministry under President Arévalo, and was established as a statutory body by virtue of a governmental decree of President Castillo Armas on 30 December 1955. Its composition has included different sectors of public opinion and persons with experience in international affairs, Herrarte, p. 282.

⁷⁸ WIAD, note for SOSC, 22 Dec 1964, CO 1031/4938.

⁷⁹ Herrarte, p. 196.

⁸⁰ Busk to FO, 21 September 1964, CO 1031/4935; Busk to FO, 25 September 1964, CO 1031/4935; Stallard to SOSC, 26 September 1964, CO 1031/4936; Busk to FO, 28 September 1964, CO 1031/4936; SOSC to Stallard, 3 October 1964, CO 1031/4936.

“the major factor in all our talks was very intense mistrust of Mr Price (only equalled by his mistrust of them)”.⁸¹

The Guatemalans then proposed either arbitration or that the UK and Guatemala jointly ask the US government to mediate.⁸² The US government noted that “they have serious worries about the wisdom of British Honduras proceeding to independence with the dispute with Guatemala unresolved; they also question the economic viability of an independent territory of 100,000 inhabitants”.⁸³

Mediation by the Government of the United States

British and Guatemalan officials met in Miami in May 1965, at which a large delegation of Belizeans headed by Price and including Opposition members was present, and there was agreement in principle to seek a mediator.⁸⁴ At further meetings in London, the British government bowed to the Guatemalan demand that the mediator be the US government, despite the objections of the Belizeans, who expressed their preference for the mediation not to be undertaken by the US alone, but rather with other governments.⁸⁵ The US government eventually agreed in September 1965, but the Belizeans made it clear that they were accepting this with great reluctance, and only “provided this [the Belizean] Government has tacit right to veto any recommendation of mediator which it finds unacceptable”.⁸⁶

The US government appointed Bethuel Webster, a member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, as its mediator, and the first meetings

⁸¹ Busk to FO, 19 October 1964, CO 1031/4936, containing his full report and recommendations.

⁸² Busk to FO, 2 October 1964, in SOSC to Stallard, 3 October 1964, CO 1031/4936.

⁸³ British Embassy Washington to FO, 19 October 1964, in SOSC to Stallard, 20 October 1964, CO 1031/4936.

⁸⁴ A full record of the Miami talks is enclosed in Sutherland to Slater, 7 May 1965, CO 1031/4738.

⁸⁵ This was stated at a meeting in London on 29 June 1965. See Herrarte, pp. 217–220 and Hall to Purves, 12 July 1965, CO 1031/4938.

⁸⁶ Kaiser to FO, 28 September 1965, CO 1031/4938, Stallard to SOSC, 23 September 1965, CO 1031/4938.

of the parties with Webster took place on 18-19 November 1965 at the State Department.⁸⁷ By subsequent exchange of notes, Britain, Guatemala and the US agreed that the objective of the mediation would be *the definitive resolution of the dispute between Britain and Guatemala over the territory of Belize, taking into account the position and rights of both countries with respect to Belize*. It was agreed that the proceedings would not be made public while the mediation was in progress without the consent of the mediator and both governments.⁸⁸

Further meetings took place in New York on 13-14 December 1965, where Luis Aycinena led for Guatemala, Assistant Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs Sir John Rennie for the UK and Deputy Premier CLB Rogers represented Belize. Webster put some ideas forward: joint access to roads and waterways, joint customs arrangements, a joint commission for road and water transportation, and Belize's entry into the Central American Common Market (CACM). In a separate meeting with the British delegation (including Rogers), Webster suggested further that the UK provide a *quid pro quo* for the cart road of Article 7 as well as assistance for economic and cultural development. He asked about possible arrangements for "relatively free movement of people" across the western border of Belize, consular representation for Belize by Guatemala and cooperation on public safety.⁸⁹ Webster visited Guatemala in January 1966,⁹⁰ and went on to Belize, where he was struck by the obvious desire of Belizeans not to become part of Guatemala. As a result of his visits, he was "very much more impressed by the difficulties of reaching a political solution than he was before".⁹¹

In early March, Webster met with the Guatemalans in New York and then with the British and Belizeans (including two Opposition members), whom he told that the position of Guatemala had been "very rigid". He said that "the present Guatemalan military fear was

⁸⁷ CO 1031/4939. Aycinena led for Guatemala, Rennie for Britain, and Minister Alexander Hunter represented Belize.

⁸⁸ Bruce to FO, 8 December 1965, CO 1031/4939. Recall that "both" meant Guatemala and the UK.

⁸⁹ CO 1031/4939.

⁹⁰ Trew to Hall, 27 January 1966, CO 1031/5186.

⁹¹ Johnstone to Slater, 31 January 1966, CO 1031/5186.

that British Honduras might become a channel for infiltration into Guatemala (e.g. from Cuba).⁹² Webster promised to reflect on all he had heard from both sides and present a paper in the near future. The Belizeans asked him to go slow on projects such as road links, border facilities and hydro schemes “until such time as they could negotiate with the Guatemalans on an equal footing”. They declared that they were opposed to the removal of the British military presence and would not be prepared to share with Guatemala responsibility for the sea coast or land border.⁹³

The First Webster Proposals

In January 1966, according to Herrarte, Webster submitted to Guatemala an outline agreement for development of the contiguous areas of Belize and Petén.⁹⁴ A seven-member Joint Authority would be established of three from each side and an international personality chosen by both as executive President. The areas within the Authority’s competence would include natural and human resources and the environment, transport and communications facilities, free ports in Belize, free movement of capital and labour, education and culture. The headings of public security and public information were mentioned but not developed.

The Guatemalans proposed instead that the faculties and powers exercised by Britain pass to a ministerial-level Administrative Authority of indefinite duration comprised of three members named by each of the governments of Guatemala and Belize; the seventh member would preside, and be named by those six, and if they could not agree, by the ODECA. International representation for the development plans of Belize would be managed by the Authority in coordination with the government of Guatemala. The defence of Belize would be undertaken by the government of Guatemala, with the coordination of the Authority and the local government of Belize. Guatemala would patrol the coasts of Belize and establish naval bases anywhere along

⁹² CO 1031/5186.

⁹³ Governor to SOSEC, 1 April 1966, CO 1031/5186.

⁹⁴ Herrarte, pp. 238–241. I could not find this in either British or US archives. That does not mean it is not true.

its coast. Additional provisions covered the free movement of persons and goods; free ports for Guatemala at Belize City and Dangriga; a joint police force responsible to the Authority; free trade; and mutual recognition of educational certificates.

Guatemalan diplomat Luis Aycinena delivered these amended proposals (based on a Guatemalan Cabinet paper)⁹⁵ to Webster in March 1966, arguing that they represented a significant move away from their traditional position, which was the total recuperation of the territory. But Webster felt that if he presented the Guatemalan proposals as they stood to Belize it would mean the failure of the mediation.⁹⁶

The Second Webster Proposals, 1966

In April 1966, Webster presented fresh proposals to the Guatemalans, asserting that they had been approved by the British and the Belizeans, and that they reflected the policy of the United States on the matter.⁹⁷ Neither the British nor the Belizeans, however, had seen them. He proposed that Britain abandon all claims over Belize and cease to exercise all governmental functions. Guatemala would assist the government of Belize in the conduct of its international relations and, when requested, represent Belize internationally and protect Belizean nationals in other countries. During the transitional period, the Governments of Guatemala and Britain would share responsibility for defence. After that period, Guatemala would be responsible for those defence matters agreed to between it and the government of Belize. Guatemala and Belize would cooperate in the use of their internal security forces. There were provisions for freedom of transit, movement of goods and persons, free trade, free ports and other matters. The Authority to be established to deal with these matters would be composed in the same way as in Webster's previous proposal.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Webster reported this to the British in May: "Record of discussions held at the Foreign Office from 4 to 6 May 1966," CO 1031/ 5187.

⁹⁶ Herrarte, pp. 246-248.

⁹⁷ Herrarte, p. 249.

⁹⁸ Herrarte, pp. 250-253. The draft treaty is in CO 1031/5187.

Webster told the Guatemalans that he expected that they would notice that he was attempting to establish a type of federation between Belize and Guatemala without calling it that. Herrarte has opined that this official proposal of the US Government was constructive and that although Guatemala would not have formally recuperated the territory, it would have put an end to Britain's sovereignty and created permanent ties assuring a political and economic community between Belize and Guatemala. The Guatemalans submitted the proposal to their Cabinet and other political organs, and they indicated to Webster that they accepted the proposals in principle.

On 4–6 May Webster met with FO officials in London and explained that, on the advice of the State Department, he had earlier submitted draft proposals to the Guatemalans, which they had accepted, although they had made many suggestions for detailed changes in the draft.⁹⁹ John Rennie told him that at official level the UK “were in sympathy with the general aim and with the form of the agreement”. The British proposed an amendment to Webster's defence arrangements, calling only for exchange of information, but Webster insisted that “there was a problem of Communist infiltration and there should therefore be policing of joint enterprises and the joint use of security forces to deal with . . . Cuban penetration”. That manufactured fear of “Cuban penetration” was pure fantasy, a US contrivance to impose control. Webster asked the British to write him a letter agreeing to his proposals, but Rennie insisted that any UK agreement in principle would be valueless without Belizean agreement. He believed that “it would be nearly impossible to sell the draft as it stood” to them, whereupon Webster conceded that “everyone must be fair with Mr Price and provide him with a complete disclosure”.¹⁰⁰

The FO prepared a redraft of Webster's proposals, softening some provisions, limiting internal security provisions to exchange of information and removing from the Authority the power to make regulations

⁹⁹ “Record of discussions held at the Foreign Office from 4 to 6 May 1966,” CO 1031/ 5187. The proposals, in the form of a draft treaty, undated, are at CO 1031/5187. Webster did not refer to the January draft mentioned by Herrarte.

¹⁰⁰ “Complete disclosure,” as we shall see, is something the British withheld from Price many times in the ensuing years.

and to have enforcement responsibility, but maintaining Guatemala's authority to participate in the defence of Belize.¹⁰¹ The British were worried about showing the draft to Price—"his reaction might be so adverse that it may prejudice our chances of dispelling suspicions that he may well form"¹⁰² and decided to bring the Belizeans to London for talks prior to going to New York to meet the mediator. British Secretary of State Michael Stewart told his Cabinet that "there are no difficulties from a purely United Kingdom point of view" in Webster's proposals, but that it would be difficult to sell to the Belizeans. He acknowledged that "*our obligations under Article VII of the [1859] treaty are still unfulfilled*" and asked Cabinet to approve a grant of £2 million pounds over the next four years for setting up the Authority. Stewart then made this remarkable pitch:

The conclusion of an agreement . . . on the lines suggested by the mediator will mean the recognition by Guatemala of an independent British Honduras; the end of a troublesome, at times bitter, dispute; . . . the resumption of diplomatic relations as early as 28 June this year; the end of the Guatemalan threat; the removal of the garrison from British Honduras; an assured economic future for British Honduras; the removal of a serious obstacle in our relations with the American continent; and the final fulfilment of a commitment undertaken by the United Kingdom under the Treaty of 1859.¹⁰³

Two million pounds must have appeared to the British Cabinet a small price to pay for all these (entirely fanciful) benefits, and the grant was approved.¹⁰⁴ The Belize delegation (5 from the PUP led by Price and 2 from the NIP led by Goldson) met with the British in London on 1-3 June 1966 and saw the drafts for the first time. They argued for, and won, several changes to the re-draft that the British

¹⁰¹ The UK redraft is at CO 1031/5187, dated by hand 10 May 1966.

¹⁰² SOSC to Stallard, 12 May 1966, CO 1031/5187.

¹⁰³ "Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee," 20 May 1966, CO 1031/5187.

¹⁰⁴ It is hard to escape the conclusion that the FO was being either deliberately deceptive or remarkably naïve in arguing that the Webster proposals would be good for Belize or that the Guatemalans would accept a part of a £2 million grant as sufficient fulfilment of Britain's obligations under the 1859 Treaty.

wanted to put to Webster, including a crucial paragraph on defence which stated that “the Government of Belize shall be free to negotiate such regional or other Defence Assistance Agreements as it considers necessary”.¹⁰⁵ On the issue of representation abroad, the agreed article read: “The Government of Guatemala and/or the Government of the United Kingdom, if requested, shall afford assistance to the Government of Belize in its international relations”.

On the question of the Joint Authority, the Belizeans were assured that it “would have no say in the control of the internal economy” of Belize. The NIP representatives went along with these proposals, insisting, as did the PUP delegates, that they were not accepting the Webster proposals but only, as Mr Goldson put it, indicating “agreement in principle as a basis for the conclusion of a treaty,” and with the amendments they were suggesting. Where the NIP did differ from the PUP was in their insistence that the name “Belize” was unacceptable, as was early independence, since “it would take at least ten years” for Belize to become viable.¹⁰⁶ The British and Belizean delegations moved on to New York, where they met with Webster on 6–7 June, argued forcibly for changes in Webster’s draft, and succeeded in winning his approval for most of them, pending his meeting with the Guatemalans a few days later.¹⁰⁷

There was never any real prospect of the Guatemalans agreeing to the alternative proposals put forward by the Belizeans; indeed, as they made clear in subsequent meetings with the mediator, they desired to strengthen some of his own proposals in their favour. Before the Guatemalans could reject the proposals, however, developments in Belize put a spanner in the works. The FO had said of Goldson that on 3 June “he was seen in London briefing the Daily Mirror Overseas

¹⁰⁵ “Record of discussions held at the Foreign Office from 1 to 3 June 1966,” CO 1031/5188.

¹⁰⁶ As we shall see, more than ten years later they were still demanding a postponement of independence for at least ten years.

¹⁰⁷ “Record of discussions held at the Bar Association, New York, 6–7 June 1966,” CO 1031/5188. The CO reported that “Webster agreed to include in his new draft proposals all the amendments which we and the British Honduran representatives considered essential,” 9 June 1966, CO 1031/5188.

Group Caribbean correspondent. A few days later a distorted account of the talks appeared in the *Trinidad Mirror*.¹⁰⁸ When Goldson returned to Belize from New York he reprinted that account, which alleged that “Britain wants to quit British Honduras and in effect hand the colony over to Guatemala as soon as possible,”¹⁰⁹ and later published the original Webster proposals without the amendments negotiated.¹¹⁰ Why he did so, having partaken in an exercise to amend those proposals and expressed his “agreement in principle as a basis for the conclusion of a treaty,” and before negotiations with Guatemala on the basis of the revised proposals had begun, is a matter for speculation.

The subsequent public outcry¹¹¹ motivated Price to make a statement to the House of Representatives on 17 June 1966, in which he explained that the proposals were not final, and that whenever the mediator presented his final proposals the government of Belize would be consulted. Price denied the allegations made by the *Trinidad* newspaper, and asserted that the policy of his government was to attain full sovereignty and independence for Belize within the Commonwealth. He said that the British government had given a solemn undertaking not to impose a solution unacceptable to the people of Belize.¹¹² The mediation recessed for the summer.

On 1 July 1966 Julio César Méndez Montenegro was installed as President of Guatemala, and Emilio Arenales became Foreign Minister. The three parties met with the mediator in September and November; Webster presented amended proposals which in the view of Guatemala considerably watered down the proposals he had made in April.¹¹³ Further meetings in January and March 1967 were equally

¹⁰⁸ “Memorandum,” American Department, FO, 12 July 1966, CO 1031/5189.

¹⁰⁹ *The Belize Billboard*, 10 June 1966.

¹¹⁰ At public meetings and in *The Belize Billboard*, 19 June 1966.

¹¹¹ This included violent demonstrations, the stoning of government buildings and the Guatemalan consulate, a strike by the Public Officers Union, and many public meetings. A six-day curfew was imposed and public meetings and processions banned in Belize City: “Note for Sir John Paul,” 5 August 1966, CO 1031/5249; *The Times*, 28 June 1966.

¹¹² “Statement by the Premier to the House of Representatives,” Belize, 17 June 1966.

¹¹³ The November talks are summarised in “Guatemala-British Honduras Mediation

frustrating for the Guatemalans, who felt that they were being accused of being inflexible when in their view it was the British who were being intransigent by insisting on an independent Belize within the Commonwealth. They attempted to bring Webster back to his proposals of April 1966, which they alleged had been accepted by both Britain and Guatemala, but Webster said that there was no possibility of agreement along those lines.

British Foreign Minister Sell-out

With Webster's approval, Guatemala then undertook direct and secret negotiations with Britain, and Arenales hammered out an agreed text with Foreign Secretary George Brown in London in July 1967.¹¹⁴ This "July text," according to Herrarte, declared that after a designated date the UK would transfer supreme authority over the territory to Belize, which would exercise its powers in accordance with the stipulations of the treaty. The 18 articles of the draft dealt with the free transit of goods, vehicles and persons; free ports; rights of Guatemalans to work in Belize and vice versa; and cooperation in transport and communications, education and cultural and scientific exchanges. An authority composed as in previous drafts would be established to deal with those matters. Belize would become a party to the CACM. On internal security, the two police forces would consult and cooperate with one another. Article 14 effectively gave Guatemala control over Belize's international relations, and Article 15 made Belize's defence dependent on Guatemala, with port and airport facilities made available for the maintenance of Guatemalan vessels and aircraft.¹¹⁵

UK Progress Report: January 1967," FCO 7/475.

¹¹⁴ Herrarte, pp. 267–268. This draft, subsequently referred to as "the July text," is not available in the National Archives, although references to it and to the meeting do appear; a FO briefing paper of 18 August 1967 states that in July 1967, at the suggestion of the mediator, Arenales met Brown in London and that "the substance of the discussion remains confidential to those concerned," FO 252/795. Further evidence supports Herrarte's version of the agreed text: see, e.g. record of conversation between Brown and Arenales, 21 September 1967, FO 252/796; and a report of British and Guatemalan delegates meeting with Webster on 9–10 November 1967, FO 252/796.

¹¹⁵ Herrarte, pp. 268–280.

The Brown-Arenales talks were leaked, and a London paper declared that a secret plan to hand Belize over to Guatemala “has been drawn up in Whitehall under powerful American pressure”.¹¹⁶ British and Guatemalan delegates met with Webster in New York on 9-10 November 1967, and British attempts to amend the “July text” were rejected by the Guatemalans, who insisted that their instructions did not permit any renegotiation of that text.¹¹⁷ Rennie stated that Price had strongly repudiated Articles 14 and 15 as seriously derogating from the sovereignty of Belize. Webster then shocked Guatemala by stating that Article 14 “really meant that Belize’s foreign policy was to be governed by Guatemala,” and declaring that “he was not disposed to put his name, or the name of the United States Government, to the sort of provisions which appeared in Article 14 of the July text, because some of them were offensive to British Honduras and he could not foresee their being accepted there”.

Furthermore, he said, the Mexicans would only drop their claim if there was self-determination in substance, which the July text would not provide. The Guatemalan delegate, on the contrary, insisted that unrestricted independence would not serve to preserve peace and stability in the area. Webster then vacillated, stating that he had been asked by Mr Frank (his State Department assistant) to make it clear that he was not in favour of unrestricted sovereignty. They agreed to meet again a few days later to try to resolve the remaining differences over the July text. There were further meetings in November, with the Guatemalans insisting that no changes be made to the text agreed to by ministers in July and the British protesting that they had made clear that Belize would have to be consulted; it had been, said the British, and they had objected to many of the articles agreed to.¹¹⁸

What had occurred between July and November that could explain Britain pulling back from an agreement reached by its Foreign Secretary?

¹¹⁶ *Daily Express*, 5 August 1967.

¹¹⁷ “Meeting in the Mediator’s Office,” 9-10 November 1967, FO 252/796.

¹¹⁸ The British record of the meeting at the State Department between British and Guatemalan representatives on 21-22 November 1967 is at FO 252/797. There was wide disagreement on several points, and the parties agreed to report separately to the mediator.

For one thing, the British press had accused the government of bowing to US pressure and selling out the country to Guatemala,¹¹⁹ and for another Goldson had appeared before the UN Fourth Committee (for an explanation of this Committee, see Chapter 3) on 30 August 1967 to denounce the mediation process. He alleged that the nefarious plans to subjugate his country to Guatemala continued, and accused Price of working in favour of Guatemala's ambitions. He denounced the Brown-Arenales talks and asked that the UN administer a referendum to determine the wishes of the people of Belize.¹²⁰

On 4th December 1967, after two further meetings had taken place between the parties and the mediator, Belize's minister C L B Rogers addressed the Fourth Committee, stating that "absorption of the people of Belize by Guatemala would amount to the extinction of Belizean society and the denial of the human rights of the Belizean people". He took some time to refute Goldson's allegations against Mr Price and the PUP, and called on the UK government "to fulfil its obligations to the people of Belize and lead them to absolute independence in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Charter". He put the onus on the UK for any recommendation which the mediator might make:

We realize, of course, that the success or failure of mediation depends on the extent to which the disputants are prepared to yield ground. No doubt, in its own interest, the UK will be prepared to yield some ground but we hope not so much, or of such a kind, as to render the results unacceptable to us. But were that not to be the case, and should the mediation fail and matters develop unfavourably, Belize would look to the UN as our last great hope to ensure that Belize could attain a secure and meaningful independence.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ *The Economist*, 7 September 1967; *The Times*, 27 September 1967; *The Independent*, 28 September 1967; cited in Herrarte, pp. 283-284.

¹²⁰ A/AC.109/PV.548, 30 August 1968, UN.

¹²¹ A/C.4/694/Add.1, 4 December 1967, UN.

Webster's Final Proposals¹²²

When Arenales was informed in April 1968 that the mediator had a final draft ready to present, he protested that in December 1967 the mediator had promised to present a “semi-final version” of his proposals, arguing that further negotiations on the proposed text were necessary.¹²³ But the State Department over-ruled Guatemala's objections, and declared that the US government “is not prepared suggest draft giving Guatemala more control”. In any case, it remarked, “although Arenales has alluded to compromises, he has never been prepared to get down to brass tacks”.¹²⁴ On 18 April the State Department wrote to the governments of the UK and Guatemala enclosing the final proposals of the mediation in the form of a treaty. Arenales expressed shock at the proposals, claiming they were “less than the British had previously accepted”. The US ambassador in Guatemala concluded that Guatemala “will probably reject results of mediation”.¹²⁵ US Secretary of State Dean Rusk, however, argued that

Even though the Treaty will result in an independent Belize, Guatemala will receive numerous tangible benefits and the opportunity to exert significant influence over Belize now, and greater influence as time passes by. Resolving the dispute and at the same time *protecting essential Guatemala interest of bringing Belize within its sphere of influence* will be of great importance to Central America as well as Guatemala.¹²⁶

¹²² See Appendix 4 for the full text.

¹²³ US Embassy Guatemala to Secretary of State, 3 April 1968, RG59, POL 32-1 Guat-UK, NARA.

¹²⁴ State Department to US Embassy Guatemala, 9 April 1968, RG59, POL 32-1 Guat-UK, NARA.

¹²⁵ US Embassy Guatemala to Secretary of State, 19 April 1968, RG59, POL 32-1 Guat-UK, NARA.

¹²⁶ Rusk to US Embassy Guatemala, 20 April 1968, US Embassy Guatemala to Secretary of State, 3 April 1968, RG59, POL 32-1 Guat-UK, NARA. Emphasis added.

The draft Treaty¹²⁷ did not differ much from the 1966 proposals. There was still to be a Joint Authority with wide powers. The article on external affairs required Guatemala to assist Belize in the conduct of its international relations when requested, and they were to conclude arrangements concerning matters of external defence of mutual concern, but again there was a need for a request from Belize to trigger action on the part of Guatemala. There was also a suggestion that the defence of Belize should be handled through the Rio Treaty, and that Belize would not need bilateral defence arrangements with other countries.

The Guatemalans were shocked at both the timing and the content of the terms of the treaty—not only because Webster had promised further talks, but also because Foreign Secretary Brown had invited Guatemala to meet in London in the spring of 1968 to discuss new ideas for a settlement.¹²⁸ As to the content, they felt that the mediator had not only failed to take into account those areas in which Guatemala and Britain had reached agreement, but that he had been unduly influenced by the Belizean insistence for early and complete independence, and neither the conduct of its defence or its foreign affairs was sufficiently tied to Guatemala. Foreign Minister Arenales tried very hard to prevent the publication of the proposals and to ensure the continuation of the mediation, but the British instead proposed that negotiations continue after the proposals had been made public and the Belizeans had made known their reaction.

A bipartisan Belizean delegation went to Washington to receive the proposals, and upon seeing them Price, conscious of the Guatemalan dissatisfaction with them, remarked that “everyone at this table knows the sensible thing for us to do is to keep quiet and let the Guatemalans reject the mediation treaty”.¹²⁹ On his return to Belize, however, Goldson held a public meeting on 29 April and prematurely disclosed and denounced the proposals, saying they were the same as those the

¹²⁷ For text, see enclosure in Oliver Covey to Acting Secretary, 29 March 1968, RG59, POL 32-1 Guat-UK, NARA.

¹²⁸ Herrarte, p. 302.

¹²⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation,” State Department, 7 May 1968, RG59, POL 32-1 Guat-UK, NARA.

people had rejected two years before. There were disturbances in various parts of Belize City after the meeting, and for several days following there were demonstrations “on an unprecedented scale accompanied by acts of fire-raising and explosions”.¹³⁰

Declassified State Department documents now allow us to conclude that Price had been right when he had said that it was best to wait for Guatemala to reject the Proposals. At a meeting in Washington on 23 April 1968 Guatemalan Foreign Minister Arenales told Rusk that the draft treaty was unacceptable to his government.¹³¹ In other words, before the Belizeans had even seen the proposal, and six days before Goldson's riot-inducing speech, the Guatemalans had already officially rejected the Proposals, they were already dead in the water.

On 8 May Price took to the airwaves to denounce the violence and to reveal that although Goldson had publicly rejected the proposals on 29 April, he himself had done so months before, but privately, given the need to respect the rules of confidentiality of the mediation.¹³² He read from a memorandum he had sent to the UK government on 8 August 1967, explaining why his government was rejecting the then current draft treaty, and added that although the final draft had made some changes, it still did not satisfy the basic imperative stated by his government in that memorandum:

Any agreement, if it is to be approved by us, must accept the aspirations and rights of the Belizean people to be an independent and sovereign nation in the full sense of the word. This must not be qualified or restricted in any way.¹³³

On 14 May 1968, the House of Representatives passed a resolution rejecting the proposals.¹³⁴ On June 18 the State Department received a diplomatic note indicating that the U.K. Government found the draft unacceptable.

¹³⁰ John Paul to FCO, 7 May 1968, FCO 7/482.

¹³¹ Document 103, pp. 241-243, FRUS 1964-1968.

¹³² “Address to the Nation by Premier George Price,” 8 May 1968, FCO 7/483.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Reports of the House of Representatives, Belmopan, 14 May 1968.

Subsequently, there was some debate in the State Department on whether or not the US should continue to be involved in seeking a solution to the dispute, and in the end the arguments of Richard Frank, Assistant Legal Adviser for Inter-American Affairs, won the day. He gave seven reasons why the US should drop that particular hot potato, the main ones being “because of Arenales’ reaction to the mediator’s proposal, Mendez Montenegro’s disinterest in the dispute, the politics and emotions in British Honduras manifested after the treaty was published, and the British unwillingness to resolve the dispute with a large cash settlement”.¹³⁵

In notes to both countries on 20 September, the US government acknowledged that its role as mediator had terminated, but declared that it continued to be interested in the resolution of the dispute and offered to be of assistance to that end in the future if the parties so requested.¹³⁶

Lessons of the Mediation

Webster’s mediation failed because the only party disposed to accept his proposals was the one that, in the circumstances, least mattered—the United Kingdom. Perhaps the most shocking lesson for many Belizeans was that the British government could not be trusted to safeguard Belizean interests, although it had for so long appeared to champion the rights of the territory, condemning Price for merely having contacts with Guatemala. Now it had tried very hard to convince the Belizean leaders that they should accept what in effect amounted to Guatemalan control of the country, and it was the British Foreign Secretary who had secretly agreed to sell out the country “lock, stock and barrel”.

This attitude was not dissociated from the Cold War context. Guatemala was now considered to be in the “free world” and a close ally of the US, while a free Belize could fall under communist influence from Cuba. And the US considered Guatemala essential to its domination of the region:

¹³⁵ Document 113, pp. 266-268, FRUS, 1964-1968.

¹³⁶ US Note, 20 September 1968, RG59, POL 31 Guat-UK, NARA; FCO 7/483.

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It's strategic geographic location and proximity to the US mainland, the Panama Canal, and to Cuba; its position in the Central American regional integration movement; and its potential as a base for spreading subversion, all make Guatemala an area of importance for the United States. For the same reasons, it is also an important target for Castro-communism.¹³⁷

While the State Department acknowledged the legitimate right of the Belizeans to self-determination, it also required that any solution meet “the political needs of the Government of Guatemala,” since the interest of the US was to “prevent a breakdown of regional stability,” by which it meant any reduction of its domination. Given this perspective, it was inevitable that the US try to do everything possible to satisfy the perceived political needs of the Guatemalan government.

The Belizeans felt all along that the US could not be an impartial mediator because of its commitment to Guatemala. The government delegates could not be as blunt as Goldson (who told the UN Fourth Committee in 1967 that “it is generally known that the United States is heavily committed to Guatemala; therefore it cannot be an impartial mediator”), but they made it clear that they shared exactly the same sentiments. The intervention by Rogers at the UN Fourth Committee, also in 1967, expressed strong concern regarding Britain itself: “no doubt, *in its own interest*, the UK will be prepared to yield some ground but we hope not so much, or of such a kind, as to render the results unacceptable to us”.

The Guatemalans, meanwhile, kept insisting that it would be dangerous “to grant independence to people who were not prepared for it,” and they were gratified by similar statements from the NIP, who were also proclaiming that Belize was not ready for independence, and that it would take at least ten years for independence to be viable. As we shall see in future situations up to and even after independence, the Guatemalan government always sought to take advantage of such demonstrations of division on the Belizean side.

¹³⁷ Country Analysis and Strategy Paper, Guatemala, FY 1971, 23 February 1969, RG59, POL 17 Guat-US, NARA.

Most revealing is the fact that we now know for certain that Guatemala totally rejected the final Webster Proposals even before they were shown to Belize, and that by prematurely revealing the Proposals and inciting public fury Goldson, no doubt unwittingly, played into the hands of the Guatemalans. The aspirations of Belizeans for a secure independence with no ties to Guatemala would have been better served if a united front had been maintained and Britain had been pressured into granting independence with some sort of defence guaranty after Guatemala's rejection of the proposals had been made public.

There has been some sober reflection on that whole incident recently. Amandala's Publisher wrote in 2018 that

When the American attorney/mediator, Bethuel Webster, released the Seventeen Proposals in April of 1968 as his US-sponsored set of proposals/solutions for the territorial dispute over Belize between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Guatemala, I would say that the vast majority of Belizeans, especially those Belizeans who were already in the United States, were inclined to blame Hon. George Price and his ruling People's United Party (PUP) for the Seventeen Proposals. This was our colonial mentality at work. No one blamed the United States and very few Belizeans blamed the United Kingdom.¹³⁸

Mediation, by its very nature, can only succeed if the parties are willing to move some distance toward each other's position and find some common ground. If there were two parties to the dispute, Britain and Guatemala, then no doubt the mediation would have succeeded. But there was a third party, which was the one that really counted—the people of Belize—and as between their position and that of Guatemala's there was really no middle ground, and therefore no possibility of success for the mediation.

The problem remained after the mediation terminated, and as long as the security of a new Belizean state would not be guaranteed by

¹³⁸ "From the Publisher", *Amandala*, 6 January, 2018.

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Britain or any other power, then attempts would have to continue to resolve the Guatemalan claim to the territory.

The Two-Treaty Package

Belize had been forced to negotiate and to resist British attempts to make Belize subservient to Guatemala, the British even using the mechanism of mediation by a power that could not possibly be, and was not, an honest broker. That had failed, and inevitably so. Price believed that no further negotiations or mediation would result in Belize's independence with no strings attached, and from that moment on he was against any negotiations with Guatemala. In his view, Guatemala's problem was with the UK, over its alleged non-fulfilment of Article 7 of the 1859 Treaty, and that was Britain's problem, not Belize's. Britain should negotiate alone with Guatemala and resolve that dispute, independently of Belize. But Britain had the obligation now, because of the international principle of decolonisation, to grant Belize its independence and ensure its security by an appropriate military guarantee. That was the policy of George Price then, and it did not vary until independence was achieved in 1981. He wanted no negotiations, but was forced by the British to endure them, knowing all along there was no chance of success.

Almost immediately after the failure of the mediation, Price began to press the British to call a conference for an independence constitution. In May 1968, his cabinet decided that in the light of the mediation's failure, the UK should guarantee the security of an independent Belize, and in reporting this to London the Governor said he saw "no alternative to moving ahead on independence with a firm guarantee of the future security of B.H".¹³⁹ Mr James C. Morgan, assistant undersecretary in the FCO, visited Belize in July and reported that Price insisted that he would brook no further mediation, that Britain should resolve its dispute with Guatemala bilaterally without infringing the sovereignty of Belize and guarantee Belize's security. He planned to request a

¹³⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation," State Department, 23 May 1968, RG59, POL 32-1 Guat-UK, NARA.

constitutional conference to be convened by mid-November to prepare for Belize's independence in September 1969.¹⁴⁰ The Governor, however, urged London "to drag heels on conference while exploring possibilities for settlement of dispute".¹⁴¹

The following four years were spent with Price demanding a stop to negotiations and a move to independence with a British defence guarantee, the British insisting on negotiations and the Guatemalans dragging the British along to prolong the process while making impossible demands or deliberately stalling the process. The details of this futile diplomatic dance need not detain us here; I will merely outline the main events.

In March 1969 the British offered the Guatemalans a "considerably larger sum" than the £2 million formerly offered to satisfy the road obligation, but Guatemala refused, insisting that elements of the mediation proposals were essential to a settlement. Price showed no surprise when this was reported to him, and repeated his call for a defence guarantee. Although Morgan explained that the British policy of retrenchment made this impossible, he as well as the Governor appeared to favour a defence guarantee, but felt that general elections in Belize would be required before an independence conference was called. Morgan guessed that independence would occur in mid-1970.¹⁴² The US Consul in Belize suggested that if Belize

is determined to move to early independence and the dispute is still unresolved we should consider urging HMG to extend a defence guaranty to an independent Belize on the basis this would best assure the continued stability of the area as well as satisfying understandable GOG concern over Belize as a corridor for Cuban infiltration.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ "Memorandum of Conversation," State Department, 15 July 1968, RG59, POL 32-1 Guat-UK, NARA.

¹⁴¹ Smith to State Department, 12 July 1968, RG59, POL 32-1 Guat-UK, NARA.

¹⁴² Tepper to State Department, 8 March 1969, RG59, POL 32-1 Guat-UK, NARA.

¹⁴³ Tepper to State Department, 22 March 1969, RG59, POL 32-1 Guat-UK, NARA.

In May 1969 Price told Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart that “unrealistic discussion” was pointless, and urged that Stewart reconsider, accept that further negotiations were futile, and agree to give a defence guarantee.¹⁴⁴ In August 1969, Stewart informed Price that “Her Majesty’s Government has taken a firm decision that a defence guarantee will not be given to your country after it becomes independent,” and warned that any decision the Belize government took would be in full knowledge of that position.¹⁴⁵ Price then clearly enunciated the policy that would guide his government for the next dozen years:

The independence of Belize cannot, in our opinion, be dependent upon the policy of the Government of Guatemala towards the Anglo-Guatemalan dispute. Moreover in the absence of an honourable settlement we cannot accept a discharge of the United Kingdom’s responsibility to this country without an arrangement for her defence.¹⁴⁶

The Meaning of Cooperation

Lord Shepherd visited Belize in October 1969 and reported that the Guatemalans had agreed to negotiate on the basis of a “two-treaty package,” a treaty of recognition of Belize by Guatemala and a treaty of “cooperation”. Price agreed to join Britain in those negotiations, on the understanding that the UK would call a conference “to agree the terms of the new independence constitution” and “to organize such defence arrangements as shall insure the new nation against aggression”.¹⁴⁷

Shepherd, accompanied by Belize ministers Alexander Hunter, C L B Rogers and V H (Harry) Courtenay, met Guatemalan Foreign

¹⁴⁴ Stewart to Price, 12 May 1969, FCO 44/230, Price to Stewart, 22 May 1969, FCO 44/230.

¹⁴⁵ Lord Shepherd to Price, 19 August 1969, Memorandum by the Secretary of State and Commonwealth Affairs to Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 5 September 1969, Annex F, FCO 44/232.

¹⁴⁶ Price to Shepherd, 25 August 1969, *ibid.*, Annex G.

¹⁴⁷ Price to Shepherd, 5 October 1969, FCO 44/233.

Minister Alberto Fuentes Mohr in New York City on 23 and 24 October 1969 to discuss the two-treaty package.¹⁴⁸ Fuentes Mohr expressed the hope that economic cooperation between the two countries could provide the basis for a settlement. He thought that greater Central American economic integration was important for Guatemala, and that the Belize question could best be resolved through economic cooperation in a wider Central American common market and customs union. Fuentes Mohr's vision was suppressed after the elections in 1970 produced General Carlos Arana Osorio as President (1 July 1970–1974), who discarded the economic approach and opted for exploring the possibilities of the use of force.¹⁴⁹

Price called early snap elections on 5 December 1969; the PUP won 17 of the 18 parliamentary seats. Price took the Opposition by surprise, at a time when there was a leadership struggle within the NIP. Dean Lindo, a relatively young lawyer from the Creole middle class, challenged Phillip Goldson for the leadership, and when he lost he took his supporters and formed the People's Development Movement (PDM). The Opposition was in disarray, and only Goldson won his seat.

In January 1970, Lord Shepherd tabled the British draft "Treaty of Recognition of the Territorial Integrity of Belize" (TOR), by which Guatemala, Mexico and the UK would "recognise and respect the territorial boundaries and the territorial integrity of Belize". In the event of a breach, the contracting parties would consult with respect to the measures necessary to ensure observance. The draft "Treaty of Cooperation" (TOC) required Belize and Guatemala to cooperate in all matters of mutual interest and established a framework for regular meetings between their representatives to review progress and to suggest other areas of cooperation.¹⁵⁰

The Guatemalans saw the "cooperation" agreements as being the vehicle by which they would incorporate Belize into Guatemala and control its economic development, defence and foreign affairs. They

¹⁴⁸ Record of meeting in New York, at 11:30 a.m. on 23 October 1969, FCO 44/233.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Francisco Villagran Kramer by author, 24 January 2008.

¹⁵⁰ "British Honduras: Tripartite Meeting at U.K. Mission, New York at 3:30 p.m. on 12 January, 1970," Annexes A and B, British record, PF.

had come to accept the inevitability of Belize becoming independent, but felt they could strengthen the “cooperation” aspects and so in effect “incorporate” Belize into Guatemala through the mechanism of “integration,” if necessary using CACM as a cover. The Belizeans, on the other hand, were determined to have full and unfettered independence, but were willing to look at cooperation agreements such as would normally be undertaken by two neighbouring sovereign states. The British vacillated between attempting to get Belize to bend as much as possible to Guatemala's demands and staying true to their often, and publicly, repeated pledge not to force through an agreement that Belize did not want.

Price knew that the TOR did not provide any real security, and that the TOC was a ruse to integrate Belize into Guatemala, and he told Stewart: “We can only go to the conference table again if you can, as our “honest broker,” unequivocally ensure that the Treaty of Recognition precisely sets out action on the part of the signatories should the sovereignty of Belize be either threatened or violated”.¹⁵¹ As to the cooperation side of the proposed package, Harry Courtenay summed up Belize's position succinctly, denouncing that the proposal “resulted in one all power Corporation too powerful to be acceptable and too grandiose to be practical. It amounts to giving up our sovereignty on economic development & would result in economic absorption”.¹⁵²

Elections in the UK in 1970 produced a Conservative government; Joseph Godber, the new Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, told Price that with regard to the question of a UK military or independence guarantee, “the Secretary of State has asked me to tell you that there has been no change in the policy of HM Government”.¹⁵³

Months of further negotiations took place, and in January 1971, the FCO sent a message urging Belize to make greater efforts to get closer to the Guatemalan draft of the TOC,¹⁵⁴ prompting Price to comment

¹⁵¹ Price to Shepherd, 3 March 1970, PF.

¹⁵² Handwritten note by Courtenay, on record of meeting, PF.

¹⁵³ Governor's memo. to Price, 13 July 1970, PF.

¹⁵⁴ Telegram FCO to Governor, 26 January 1971, PF.

that the UK appeared to be supporting Guatemala's position.¹⁵⁵ There were more negotiations that led nowhere, but still in his National Day Address on 9 September 1971, Price announced that "from here we look to the future and we see the year 1972 as the year when [we] shall most likely fulfil the mandate to lead Belize to sovereign independence".¹⁵⁶ In his reply, Governor John Paul said "Your reward is and will be the pride of citizenship in the new Belize under God, united, sovereign and independent". In his address to the General Assembly of the UN later that month, Foreign Minister Herrera warned that "we shall oppose any change in the juridical or political status of the territory unless the problem of Guatemala's rights thereto is first completely resolved".¹⁵⁷ The statements by Price and John Paul really seem to have rattled the Guatemalan government and military, with Price's suggestion of imminent independence apparently endorsed by the British Governor.

Major Guatemalan Invasion Planned

In mid-January 1972, the UK received intelligence reports of an impending Guatemalan invasion of Belize.¹⁵⁸ The Costa Rican Foreign Minister informed the British of plans by Guatemala and El Salvador to occupy Belize, perhaps in February or March.¹⁵⁹ Nicaragua's Somoza confirmed this.¹⁶⁰ Mexico told the UK that if the Guatemalans invaded Belize "the Mexican army would also enter . . . so as to preserve from Guatemala their now dormant rights to the northern part of the territory".¹⁶¹ The US Pentagon noted that the Guatemalan invasion would have ended in failure because of the immediate arrival of British troops.¹⁶² Fabio Castillo, a former member of a Salvadoran Junta who later became

¹⁵⁵ Summary record of meeting of EAC on 1 February 1971, British record, PF.

¹⁵⁶ Price, National Day Address, 9 September 1971, PF.

¹⁵⁷ Reported in telegram from UK Mission in New York to the Governor, 1 October 1971, PF.

¹⁵⁸ "Research Department Memorandum. The Belize (British Honduras) – Guatemala Dispute March 1972 – June 1974," 22 July 1974, FCO 7/2638, p. 19.

¹⁵⁹ Hankey to Monson, 12 January 1972, FCO 7/2280.

¹⁶⁰ Vincent to FCO, 17 January 1972, FCO 7/2280.

¹⁶¹ Hope to FCO, 22 January 1972, FCO 7/2280.

¹⁶² Roberto Bardini, *Belice: historia de una nación en movimiento*, Tegucigalpa, 1978, p. 118.

a champion for Belize's cause, told the US congress years later that Salvadoran President Sánchez made a deal with President Arana to join an invasion of Belize and that the *quid pro quo* for the deal was to send El Salvador's "surplus population" to Belize.¹⁶³

Governor John Paul left the colony in December 1971, and his designated replacement, Richard Posnett, was called to the FCO in London and told about an urgent report from Weymes, the British Consul in Guatemala, with more evidence that an invasion was imminent.¹⁶⁴ British military planners concluded that if Guatemala invaded, "British Honduras would be militarily extremely difficult to retake [and] that trying to do so, in an essentially post-colonial world, was likely to be politically unacceptable too. **If the Guatemalan army rolled over the border, Belizeans would, in all probability, have simply to be abandoned to their fate**".¹⁶⁵

On 26 January 1972, the British government took the decision to reinforce urgently, ordering the British navy's premier aircraft carrier, HMS *Ark Royal*, to steam towards Belize with warplanes.¹⁶⁶ An assessment from the British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) put the Guatemalan army at 10,000 strong, trained at the US Jungle Warfare School, and thought it was "probably the best in Central America". Its air force had squadrons of troop transports and helicopters, eight Mustangs, eight Cessna A-37s and eight T-33s. Meanwhile in Belize, the handful of British forces there had no radar, no surface-to-air missile defence of the airfield and no aerial reconnaissance.¹⁶⁷ Clearly, in the circumstances, Britain had no choice but to make a swift and effective show of force, and it did.

¹⁶³ Testimony of Fabio Castillo to the Sub-Committee on International Organizations of the US House of Representatives, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 8-9 June 1976, in *Human Rights in Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador: Implications for US Policy*, 1976, p.43; noted in Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*, London, 1982. The author later became close to Fabio, who confirmed this story and became very active in promoting the cause of Belize's independence.

¹⁶⁴ White, 264-265.

¹⁶⁵ White, p. 131. Emphasis added.

¹⁶⁶ White, 292-293. In addition, the guided-missile destroyer HMS London, frigates HMS *Phoebe* and HMS *Dido*, and an RAF Regiment Tiger Cat missile squadron were on their way too: p. 321.

¹⁶⁷ White, 339-341.

Still, when Britain reinforced its garrison in Belize the Guatemalans protested that there had been no plans to invade Belize and denounced the British build-up as an intolerable threat of aggression.¹⁶⁸ In the House of Commons Joseph Godber, questioned about the troop movements, declared that they “were part of a long planned exercise in the Caribbean area”.¹⁶⁹ In April 1972, Guatemala presented a resolution to the OAS denouncing Britain for increasing its troop levels in Belize, and calling for the removal of the troops and sanctions. It later withdrew the resolution after the UK agreed that an OAS observer mission could go to Belize to verify the number and type of forces it had stationed there. The mission visited Belize in May, did an extensive and detailed study of the British troops stationed there and determined that the British garrison in Belize was basically defensive in nature.¹⁷⁰

Premier Price, believing it would be useless and counter-productive to support the official cover-up of the reinforcements as “a long planned exercise,” announced that “the scope and size of the British troops increased because there circulated in Central American capitals reports that Guatemala intended to invade Belize. This temporary increase has now been reduced to a force of about 600, here solely for defence purposes ... the level which the UK considers adequate for our defence needs”.¹⁷¹

The Story So Far: What Does It Mean?

The Guatemalan claim became relevant to the people of Belize because of the impending end of the British Empire, otherwise the Guatemalan protest over Article VII would just have carried on as a never-ending dispute between a great power and a banana republic. Why did this end of Empire happen when it did?

¹⁶⁸ *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 February 1972.

¹⁶⁹ Hansard, vol. 831 col. 18-19, 14 Feb 1972.

¹⁷⁰ OEA/Ser. G, CP/doc.198/72, 31 May 1972.

¹⁷¹ George Price, address on Radio Belize, 30 April 1972, PF.

Many European countries had colonies in Africa, Asia and the Americas, but Britain was the largest colonial power: the sun never set on its dependencies. The resistance, in some cases by armed struggle, of the dominated is the fundamental cause of the overthrow of colonialism. Subject peoples will always seek ways to gain their freedom, and when world events present an opportunity, people will grasp it. After the First World War the grip of colonialism everywhere began to loosen, and between 1918 and 1939 nationalist movements began to gain ground, hastened by the Great Depression sparked by the Crash of '29, which worsened living conditions for the colonised. The Second World War, in the course of which England was "a hair's breath away from destruction,"¹⁷² dealt a severe blow to Britain's imperial ambitions. With Britain's expulsion from many Asian countries by Japan, "the myth of the invincible white man was exploded overnight". Besides, its colonial subjects everywhere had played a significant part in Britain's war effort, and now demanded to be treated like people and given their right to freedom. After the war Britain was in dire financial straits, and in return for a loan from the US of \$3.75 billion it had to abolish imperial trade preferences and currency controls, which had been the economic lifeblood of the British Empire.

The growth of the global economy after 1945 made the trade policies of colonialism obsolete and was one of the root causes of decolonisation. Furthermore, the revival of the western economies in the 1950s led Britain to shift its emphasis from its empire to Europe and North America, where trade in manufactured goods was growing rapidly. Moreover, the US was pressing Britain to take up its role as a leader in Europe and to shed its colonial empire. After 1945, colonial rule crumbled far quicker than anticipated, and dozens of states became independent from Britain. In almost all cases the phenomenon of nationalism was critical in determining the nature and timing of independence. Belize was an exception to this because its independence was delayed by the Guatemalan claim, but it did have a strong and militant nationalist movement for a decade before Britain conceded the promise of independence.

¹⁷² Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger*, p. 178.

In the early 1950s, when Britain had not yet decided to decolonize, it used the alleged connections between the PUP and Guatemala to seek to demonize the nationalist party and favour a more pliable pro-British party. Although the British were prepared in 1957 to see Belize associated with Guatemala and even to consider land cession in order to settle the dispute, they condemned Price for simply hearing out Guatemala's proposals, and provoked divisions within the country that were to impair its ability to gain and consolidate its independence for decades.

After the PUP won all seats in the 1961 general elections, Britain finally conceded that the PUP was the best option for its decolonization agenda. It wanted to be rid of Belize as soon as possible, but to do so it needed to settle the Guatemalan claim. Britain was more than willing to make wide-ranging concessions to Guatemala, but it did not count on the intransigence of Price, who refused to make any concessions, whether of territory or sovereignty. In this he was joined by Goldson and the Belizean people generally.

In the 1960s, Britain was eager to disengage from its remaining colonial responsibilities, and especially to reduce its military commitments, and dismissed its previous concerns about “viability” and “readiness”. But it insisted on satisfying the Guatemalan claim against itself for failure to carry out a treaty obligation by making Belize, not Britain, pay the price. Britain pressured Belize to have the USA as a mediator, knowing full well that the US favoured Guatemala. The US mediation proposals would have brought Belize within Guatemala's sphere of influence, as US Secretary of State Dean Rusk remarked—but not enough to satisfy Guatemala, and it absolutely rejected the Proposals even before Belizeans had seen them. One can only speculate about what might have happened if that scenario had been allowed to play out and a united Belize had capitalised on Guatemala's rejection to demand independence with a security guarantee from Britain.

Britain recognized that the Americas were within the US sphere of influence, and was sensitive to US paranoia about “communism,” even though there was not the slightest evidence of any such movement in Belize. During the mediation, the British Foreign Secretary showed

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his willingness to give Guatemala wide-ranging powers of control over a pseudo-independent Belize, and Webster admitted he was under State Department pressure not to provide Belize with unfettered independence.

As time went by and the anachronism of the UK holding on to a colony in mainland America weighed ever heavier on British ministers, they became more reckless with considering proposals which would clearly violate the wishes of the Belizean government and people. The UK did not accept the Belizean argument that the British government must itself settle the claim that it had brought upon itself, without trying to make Belize pay the price.

For the Guatemalans, the pace of decolonisation after 1960 was a clear signal that the clock was ticking against them, and that they could either gain some control over the territory while Britain exercised sovereignty or lose it all to an independent Belize. The Guatemalan policy therefore consistently demanded that there should be no change of status unless Guatemala was consulted and that “the present *status quo* including the maintenance of British presence and garrison here was infinitely preferable to any form of agreement”.

The US, for its part, emerged from its attempt at mediation with some degree of frustration, having failed to bring about a solution that would be acceptable to the Guatemalan regime, which was its bulwark against “the threat of communist infiltration in Central America”. Although it would have been happy to see Guatemala exercise control over Belize's defence and foreign policy, its special relationship with Britain restrained its policy choices, and it thereafter assumed the attitude of not interfering too openly in the dispute, having allies on both sides to satisfy.

The talks beginning in October 1969 on the two-treaty package might have had a slim chance of providing at least some hope for a settlement based on economic cooperation, which was the focus of Alberto Fuentes-Mohr, who served for a short time as Guatemala's Foreign Minister. But his job had already been made more difficult by the prior outbreak of an actual hot war in Central America, between Honduras and El Salvador, the so-called Football War of July 1969, which had deep economic causes. Honduras had fared very badly in

the CACM compared to its more advanced neighbour. More importantly, over 150,000 Salvadoran immigrants had crossed to Honduras over the decades, and while they were important for the economy, they presented an easy target for chauvinist xenophobia. With the Salvadoran economy in bad shape, in early 1969 tens of thousands of Salvadorans had been forced by State-sponsored harassment to flee back to their country as dispossessed refugees. In the context of a long-standing border dispute, the military regimes in both countries fanned the flames of popular anger generated by wild propaganda on both sides, and on 14 July 1969 Salvadoran forces invaded Honduras and there ensued a four-day war ended by Guatemalan diplomatic action and an OAS-controlled ceasefire. The war produced serious economic setbacks for CACM, which had been especially beneficial for the Guatemalan economy.

The second event that destroyed any hopes for Fuentes Mohr's economic diplomacy was the election in March 1970 of Carlos Arana Osorio, who took office on 1 July. He replaced Mendez Montenegro, a civilian that the military allowed to assume the Presidency in exchange for giving them a free hand in the civil war. But they were not to make the same mistake again. Henceforth and until 1986, every President would be a military man, either through fraudulent elections or by coup. The British were well aware of Arana Osorio's propensities, and the Foreign Office feared what they called a "mad-dog action" from him. And there was more than enough intelligence to conclude that if the British had not reinforced in time, Arana Osorio would have invaded Belize. Had they done so, the British felt it would have been successful and irreversible.

But the British did reinforce in time, although there were many officials, including Governor Posnett, who had taken the threat lightly. Prime Minister Heath, who like Callaghan in the later episode was instrumental in deciding to reinforce, said "The Governor is very smug. He would be the first to complain if the Guatemalans had acted".¹⁷³

Although Britain was prepared to negotiate away Belize's sovereignty and territorial integrity, for as long as Belize was the sovereign territory of Britain it could not allow Guatemala to stage a successful invasion of

¹⁷³ White, p. 447.

the country. This would have been an affront to imperial pride, and would damage the prestige of Great Britain. As the British saw it, their choices were limited: maintain Belize as a colony, get Belize to accept a negotiated settlement by giving up what was necessary to get it, or provide a defence guarantee for an independent Belize. In the 1970s, neither the first nor the third alternative was acceptable to any British government, and they concentrated on trying to force Belize to accept a negotiated solution.

In Guatemala, the regime of Arana Osorio was followed by that of his Defence Minister, General Kjell Laugerud García, who had been instrumental in planning the Belize invasion. Under his presidency, Guatemala strengthened its demands in the negotiations to such a degree that, unwittingly, they played into the hands of Belize's strategy.

Price had been convinced, during and after the mediation process, that a settlement acceptable to Belize could never be achieved before independence, but he was forced by circumstances to continue what he knew to be fruitless negotiations. His statement in September 1971 that independence would likely be achieved in 1972 was designed to force the hand of the British to seriously consider the demand for a defence guarantee. It played a part in creating a sense of urgency in the Arana government and military, which may have brought forward the plan to invade. But that planned invasion, in Price's view, gave greater credence to his demand for a defence guarantee, since Britain would in any case be spending millions of pounds to reinforce its garrison whenever a Guatemalan President/General decided to threaten an invasion.

After the invasion threat of 1971/1972, Price became even more convinced that a settlement would never be reached before independence, that delaying independence would cause more insecurity and pose greater risks, and that Belize must take a more independent stance *vis à vis* the United Kingdom and devise and implement a strategy of its own to attain independence—he must stop just asking for a defence guarantee and find a way to force Britain to provide it.

How that was accomplished is the subject of the next Chapter.