



## Chapter 3

# Internationalisation

*This Chapter will cover the period 1972 to 1977 and deal with all that was done to secure international support for Belize's independence and pressure Britain into providing a defence guarantee, as well as to restrain Guatemala from attempting military action against Belize. It includes the negotiations that featured Guatemala's demand for land, British and US attempts to pressure Belize into agreeing to land cession, and two further Guatemalan plans to invade Belize. How the first three Belize resolutions at the UN fared is a central part of the narrative.*



## Belize on the World Stage

### First Steps in Belize's International Campaign

Although the Belize internationalisation initiative began to intensify in 1972, from the moment that Price and his colleagues formed the People's Committee and then the PUP in 1950 they were aware of the need to seek regional and international support for their cause. They sent appeals to all Central American governments, including Guatemala, for support in their anti-colonial stand. Price followed closely the global wave of decolonisation, and recognised the special role that the United Nations was playing in the process. In 1958 he wrote to the



UN Secretary General requesting that “if the question of our self-government and self-determination is raised by some friendly nation, the matter will be put on the agenda for the next General Assembly of the United Nations”.<sup>1</sup>

Upon achieving self-government, Price and two ministers undertook a Central American tour in March 1964 to seek support for Belize's right to self-determination and independence.<sup>2</sup> They were received by heads of state in Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and El Salvador. It appeared that although Central American governments routinely supported Guatemala's claim publicly, they privately held a different view, and were sympathetic to the aspirations of the people of Belize for independence.

In August 1964 Price and his entourage paid an official visit to Mexico, where they were warmly received by outgoing President López Mateos, whose government assured the Belizeans of support for independence as well as for economic development. Price met with President-elect Díaz Ordaz, who promised “to increase our solidarity with the noble people of Belize in their quest for freedom and independence”.<sup>3</sup> Price was so encouraged by his visits to Central America and Mexico that he told the Mexican press that he expected Belize to become independent within three to five years.<sup>4</sup> The Guatemalans were so incensed that their Constituent Assembly approved a resolution recommending the severance of diplomatic relations with Mexico.<sup>5</sup>

But Price was constrained by Britain's insistence on a negotiated settlement with Guatemala. As long as the British refused to consider a defence guarantee for an independent Belize, he had to play the game by their rules: negotiations had to be conducted confidentially and the Guatemalans were to be provoked as little as possible by public denunciations. And so Belize kept relatively quiet on the international front during the 1960s, even though in the first elections after attaining

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<sup>1</sup> Price to Secretary General UN, 16 August 1958, PF.

<sup>2</sup> “Report on the Goodwill Tour of Central America,” Belize, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> Díaz Ordaz to Price, 13 August 1964, *ibid.* Author's translation.

<sup>4</sup> Press conference in Mexico City on 12 August 1964, *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Atkinson to Rogers, 20 August 1964, CO 1031/4935.

self-government, the *PUP Manifesto* (1965) promised to go to the United Nations to promote Belize's independence.<sup>6</sup>

It was in the course of the talks begun in 1969 that Price began to plan for Belize to take independence without reaching any agreement with Guatemala, but with a defence arrangement with Britain or with other countries.<sup>7</sup> In 1971 he invited Assad Shoman to create the Belizean Independence Secretariat (BIS) and assigned to it a young bright and motivated public officer, Robert Leslie, to assist him. The BIS acted as a think tank and as the executive arm of the international campaign for independence, studying the regional and international context, preparing papers on international relations and international law, planning campaigns, conferences and briefings nationally and internationally. It focused first on winning Latin American support. Already Belize could count on the principled support of Cuba<sup>8</sup> as well as all four of the independent Commonwealth Caribbean states: Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados. The BIS launched a campaign in Mexico and Central America, targeting academics, journalists, and political as well as worker organisations, and the story of Belize from the Belizean perspective slowly began to be heard.

In 1972, at the VI Congress of Latin American Workers held in Venezuela, Minister Florencio Marin along with Shoman lobbied the delegates (which included Guatemalans) and emerged with a unanimous resolution which recognised that Belize was “in every sense a nation with its own people, its own history, its own territory” and that Guatemala's claim “constitutes a violation of the principle of self-determination and a threat to the peace of the hemisphere”.

<sup>6</sup> *PUP Manifesto*, 1965.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Price.

<sup>8</sup> As early as 1961, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, Cuba's delegate to the fifth plenary session of the *Consejo Interamericano Económico y Social* in Punta del Este, declared: “aceptamos el hecho de Belice independiente, porque Guatemala ya ha renunciado a su soberanía sobre ese pedazo de su territorio,” when even a limited self-government was three years away: *Discurso en la reunión del Consejo Interamericano Económico y Social (CIES) celebrada en Punta del Este, 8 de agosto de 1961*.

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It urged full support for the right of the Belizean people to self-determine their destiny.<sup>9</sup> In 1975 the youth wing of the governing party in Costa Rica, Liberación Nacional, issued a widely publicised declaration supporting Belize's right to become a free Central American State and rejecting "Guatemala's intentions of annexation of the territory of Belize".<sup>10</sup>

At the state level, Price visited Honduras, Costa Rica and El Salvador in 1972, and "was everywhere well received";<sup>11</sup> he also met the Foreign Ministers of Mexico and Brazil.<sup>12</sup> Governor Posnett noted that "the limitations upon what can be done in Latin America are well understood and Mr Price is working painstakingly, and with some success, within those limitations". The Governor was reflecting the views of Price, and was therefore far ahead of his British colleagues, when he wrote:

I can see no prospect of advancing British or Belizean interests if we do no more than keep trying to talk to the Guatemalans . . . the only way we could expect to make progress [is] by getting the problem into an international forum on a political basis.<sup>13</sup>

In March 1973 a special meeting of the Security Council of the UN (UNSC) was held in Panama, principally to discuss the Panama Canal issue, and Price attended, despite British objections.<sup>14</sup> Guyanese Foreign Minister Shridath Ramphal spoke forcefully against Guatemala's claim and invited the Security Council to "take note of the fear which [Belizeans] felt and to consider what steps could be taken to safeguard their right to self-determination".<sup>15</sup>

The mechanism by which Price and his small team (this earlier included others, but the core team became Deputy Premier C L B "Lindy" Rogers and Ministers Harry Courtenay, Assad Shoman and

<sup>9</sup> Resolution of the VI Congress of Latin American Workers, PF.

<sup>10</sup> McQuillan to Johns, 16 June 1975, FCO 7/2848.

<sup>11</sup> Posnett to FCO, 25 January 1973, FCO 7/2454.

<sup>12</sup> Posnett to British Embassy Panama, 1 Feb 1973, FCO 7/2454.

<sup>13</sup> Posnett to Hankey, 25 January 1973, FCO 7/2454.

<sup>14</sup> Posnett to FCO, 25 January 1973, FCO 7/2454.

<sup>15</sup> Malcolm to FCO, tels #45 and #56 of 16 March 1973, FCO 7/2454.

Said Musa) engaged in foreign affairs in relation to the British government was through an External Affairs Committee (EAC), which met at irregular intervals with the Governor presiding. Of course, most of the planning and strategizing was done by Price and his team outside of this official committee, in private meetings at Price's office or home. The EAC was used mostly to receive and transmit information and messages between the British government and Price's team.

Governor Posnett kept up a running battle with British officials in London, New York and Guatemala, attempting to convince them that Price was right in insisting on international action. Those officials had expressed grave doubts about the UN supporting Belize, and cited the cases of the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar to show that no favourable resolution could be expected to pass at the UN. Posnett reminded them that "in those territories the people (as I understand it) wish to remain British. Here the majority (I think) do not. There the governments are not seeking independence. Here they are".<sup>16</sup> He added that while there was no international lobby for the people of Gibraltar or the Falkland Islands, there was a strong and growing lobby for Belize. He asked that there be "careful examination before we lump Belize into the same basket with other dependencies for United Nations purposes". He noted that talks with Guatemala had led nowhere, and that only by introducing a new element into the situation would Guatemalan complacency with the *status quo*<sup>17</sup> be changed, and concluded that "it does seem to me rather sanguine to pin all our hopes on bilateral talks".

The British government, no doubt wanting to control the process of decolonisation in Belize as they did elsewhere, argued against the effectiveness of an international campaign by Belizeans themselves, but the Belize government decided it was the only way it stood a chance of gaining independence without losing sovereignty or territory. It is now necessary to describe the international environment in which they were preparing to plunge.

<sup>16</sup> Posnett to Hankey, 23 March 1973, FCO 7/2454.

<sup>17</sup> Posnett had reported earlier that the Guatemalan Consul "twice said that the present *status quo* including the maintenance of British presence and garrison here was infinitely preferable to any form of agreement": Posnett to FCO, 12 January 1973, FCO 7/2454.

## The International Arena: The Commonwealth, NAM and the UN

### The Commonwealth

Originally known as The British Commonwealth of Nations, the British saw the Commonwealth as a way of maintaining their status as a great power after their real power in the world had waned. The white-dominated “Dominions” (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa<sup>18</sup>) that had become self-governing states would constitute a partnership of free societies exercising a powerful moral influence on world affairs.<sup>19</sup> With the advent of the non-white independent ex-colonies, the British opted to allow all ex-colonies to membership, including those who became republics. British politicians and officials saw the new Commonwealth “as a means of supporting Britain’s role as a great power: independence within the Commonwealth would enable decolonised states to play a positive role in Commonwealth defence and the sterling area”.<sup>20</sup> In this sense decolonisation could be seen as “the continuation of empire by other means”.<sup>21</sup> But the newly independent countries regarded their Commonwealth links as only one aspect of their foreign relations, as Britain’s patronage became less and less important compared to other foci of world influence, and they developed diverging interests and sympathies.

The Commonwealth came to have a more practical advantage for the newly independent states when, following an initiative by Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah, the Commonwealth Secretariat was

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<sup>18</sup> South Africa withdrew, before they could be evicted, from the Commonwealth in 1961 and re-joined in 1994 after Apartheid ended and Nelson Mandela became President.

<sup>19</sup> A. P. Thornton, “The Transformation of the Commonwealth and the ‘Special Relationship’,” in Louis and Bull (eds), *The ‘Special Relationship’: Anglo-American Relations since 1945*, London, 1986, p. 372.

<sup>20</sup> White, p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> Darwin, “The Fear of Falling: British Politics and Imperial Decline Since 1900,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. XXXVI, 1986, p. 42.

established in 1965. This instrument was to play a crucial role in the Belize question, particularly because Shridath Ramphal, former Attorney General of Guyana, became the Secretary General of the Commonwealth in 1975 and radically changed its focus and its range of action.

### The Non-Aligned Movement

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is an “international social movement rooted in the national liberation movements waged by the three continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America against Western colonial and neo-colonial domination”.<sup>22</sup> Its ideological origin is traced to the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in April 1955, where 29 countries led by India’s Nehru, Indonesia’s Sukarno, Ghana’s Nkrumah, Yugoslavia’s Tito and Egypt’s Nasser proclaimed their non-alignment from either of the superpowers.

The First Summit of the NAM was held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in September 1961, and it set very broad parameters for membership: a country should have an independent foreign policy based on the peaceful co-existence of states with different political and social systems, support national independence movements, and not belong to a multilateral military alliance concluded in the context of Great Power conflicts.<sup>23</sup> The movement privileged multilateralism and consistently sought to strengthen the role of the UN in world politics.

The NAM came of age at the Fourth Summit in Algeria in 1972: seventy-five countries attended, representing two-thirds of UN membership. Belize sent Deputy Premier Lindy Rogers to that meeting; its Political Declaration emphasised the problems of Latin America (the threats against Cuba and Allende’s Chile, the continuance of colonial situations) and declared that

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<sup>22</sup> A.W. Singham, and Shirley Hune, *Non-Alignment in an Age of Alignments*, London, 1986, p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> M. S. Rajan, “The Non-Aligned Movement and the Criteria for Membership,” *The Non-Aligned World*, 1:2, 1983, p. 234.

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As long as colonial wars, apartheid, imperialist aggression, alien domination, foreign occupation, power politics, economic exploitation and plunder prevail, peace will be limited in principle and scope . . . Peace is indivisible: it cannot be reduced to a mere shifting of confrontation from one area to another.<sup>24</sup>

Although the NAM had no constitution or permanent secretariat, it did have some institutional organs, the most important of which was the Conference of Foreign Ministers of Non-Aligned Countries. Belize presented its case to the fifth such conference, held in Peru in 1975, launching its internationalisation campaign.

## The United Nations and Decolonisation

The framers of the UN Charter never used the word “decolonisation,” and there is no call to make colonised countries independent. Britain and the other “administering powers” believed that the timing and nature of any constitutional advance was a matter for them alone: Churchill had said at the Yalta Conference that he would “never consent to the fumbling fingers of forty or fifty nations prying into the life’s existence of the British Empire”.<sup>25</sup>

But by 1960, when sixteen new African states became UN members, the UN membership of 49 in 1945 had doubled to 98, and the recently independent states led the move to pass the “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,” adopted by the General Assembly on 14 December 1960 (Resolution 1514), radically changing the rules of the game and in effect expanding the Charter. The Resolution demanded a “speedy and unconditional end to colonialism” and declared that “lack of preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence”. A Special Committee, known as the Committee of 24 or C24, was established

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<sup>24</sup> Singham and Hune, p. 127.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Jensen and Fisher, p. 96. The Yalta conference by the leaders of the USSR, USA and UK was held in February 1945 to decide post-War arrangements.



within the Fourth Committee of the UN to assist colonial countries to attain independence.<sup>26</sup>

In interpreting Resolution 1514, UN practice in the C24 was “suffused with a strong bias in favour of one particular result, independence,” and held that “any decision to merge with an already existing political unit must follow independence . . . and cannot be a substitute for it,” and established the norm of respect for the former colonial boundaries.<sup>27</sup>

## Negotiations with Guatemala

President Arana Osorio and his associates were naturally very unhappy with the foiling of their attempt to invade Belize in early 1972. In September 1972 Jorge Arenales became Foreign Minister and succeeded in leading the British down the garden path for years, promising meetings that never materialized or led anywhere. The British, believing or pretending to believe him, kept urging Price to desist from his international lobbying, and he kept telling them that attempts to negotiate a settlement with Guatemala had all been crushed by Guatemalan intransigence and British “appeasement,” and that as a result of Belize’s lobbying, Latin American support for Guatemala was crumbling. His repeated demands for negotiations to cease and for the UK to provide a defence guarantee for an independent Belize were forever met with British insistence that it would never do so. The British were wary of Price’s determination, one emissary in June 1973 reporting that “He has in the past, and is now I suspect once again conducting negotiations in foreign relations which he keeps secret from us . . . I am pretty certain he will sabotage our bilateral talks by some action at the UN.”<sup>28</sup>

At a meeting in July 1973, Arenales said he had a “plan” for a solution of the dispute, but it could only be discussed after the elections in Guatemala in March 1974. Meanwhile, Britain should not allow Price

<sup>26</sup> Jensen and Fischer, p. 101.

<sup>27</sup> Rosalyn Higgins, quoted in Michla Pomerance, *Self-Determination in Law and Practice: The New Doctrine in the United Nations*, The Hague, 1982, pp. 18-25.

<sup>28</sup> Kershaw to Secretary of State, June 1973, FCO 7/2455.

to raise the matter at the UN.<sup>29</sup> In the following months, British officials kept repeating how difficult and uncertain any action at the United Nations would be, and urged that Belize abandon plans to float a resolution and simply ask its friends to refer to the matter in their UN speeches.<sup>30</sup>

Rogers went to the UN in July 1973 and spoke to ambassadors from Africa and the Middle East, who all pledged support for Belize. In August, the government of Trinidad & Tobago expressed concern about Belize, "since it represented a serious obstacle to further regional integration and cooperation in the Caribbean". They had recently detected signs that the Latin American countries adjoining the Caribbean were coming under pressure from Africans at the UN "to take a more active interest in securing independence for Belize".<sup>31</sup> Price went to London in September and repeated his belief that the Belize issue must be internationalized, and then he visited Jamaica, where Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dudley Thompson advised him to press for a resolution at the UN. But the British kept dissuading him. They had their own reasons for not wanting to take the Belize case to the UN. The FCO feared that "if Anglo-African relations are further strained, e.g. as a result of some development in Southern Africa, then opposing the UK would almost certainly have a priority in African thinking over supporting a remote non-African territory in its bid for independence". The British had their way and no resolution was introduced at the UN, but Price wrote to the President of the General Assembly, reiterating Belize's right to independence and seeking the support of the UN.

### In Guatemala: the Terror Continues

The army unleashed a campaign of terror which engulfed the civilian population. A guerrilla front had been established in Zacapa, and in 1967 Coronel Arana Osorio commanded an operation there which was particularly brutal in its effects on the civilian population, earning

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<sup>29</sup> Record of Meeting, 28 July 1973," FCO 7/2456.

<sup>30</sup> Jamieson to Plumbly, 27 July 1973, Jamieson to Hankey, 2 August 1973, FCO 7/2456.

<sup>31</sup> Diggins to Roberts, 13 August 1973, FCO 7/2456.

him the sobriquet of “Butcher of Zacapa”.<sup>32</sup> In the run-up to the elections in March 1970, the guerrilla kidnapped foreign minister Alberto Fuentes Mohr (who was actively engaged in negotiations with Britain over Belize). The general climate of insecurity favoured a “hard hand” candidate who promised to end the war and bring peace and stability, and Arana Osorio won the elections and assumed office on 1 July.<sup>33</sup> The army felt that the experiment with a civilian president, albeit with hands tied by the army, had not been productive, and it resolved not to make the same mistake again: henceforth all presidents would come from the military, until the democratisation process began tentatively in 1985. Guatemala was not alone: throughout much of Latin America military governments were installed; in Central America, only Costa Rica maintained democratic governments.

Arana Osorio’s government carried out a program of modernisation of the state, including the public services and financial institutions, but this went hand in hand with a legal strengthening of the repressive state apparatus, working along with the illegal death squads. The counterinsurgency state was consolidated and a climate of terror was created; any assassination or violation of human rights was justifiable if its aim was to combat communism, their definition of which was so broad and self-serving as to oppose any attempts at democratisation. The presence of US military advisers with experience in Vietnam inspired many of the measures to reorganize State security.

Alberto Fuentes Mohr, the Foreign Affairs minister kidnapped and later released by the guerrilla, along with the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of San Carlos University and many trade union and popular leaders were threatened by the paramilitary groups linked to the State, and forced to seek exile abroad. Fuentes Mohr called Arana’s regime “an authentic fascist regime,” sustained by the political right, the army, “the new oligarchy of millionaire gangsters headed by Anastasio Somoza”

<sup>32</sup> Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads and US Power*, Boulder, 1991, p. 121.

<sup>33</sup> Gustavo Berganza (ed.), *Compendio de Historia de Guatemala 1944-2000*, ciudad Guatemala, 2004, pp. 43-44.

in nearby Nicaragua and “the United States through its Embassy, its military missions and the CIA”.<sup>34</sup>

The elections called for 1 March 1974 were obviously just a smokescreen for a decision that was to be taken by the military high command, who excluded all anti-system politics, and all the contending parties presented military candidates. The Christian Democrats (DC) put forward General Ríos Montt as their presidential candidate with Alberto Fuentes Mohr, who had returned from exile, as vice presidential candidate. This strange combination managed to get the support of democratic and even progressive forces, since it posed a possible counter-point to the official candidate, Defence Minister General Kjell Laugerud. Besides, Ríos Montt, who was to have a gory reputation as a future dictator, was then considered an honest person within the military, and his enmity with President Arana Osorio was well known.

The elections were held in a climate of political violence, amid threats, disappearances and assassinations. On election day it became clear early on that the DC candidate was ahead, and the government suspended all information regarding the elections. There was a power outage which silenced all radio and television until the following day, when news channels reported figures very different from what they had been broadcasting the day before, and announced that General Kjell Laugerud García had won the elections.<sup>35</sup> The electoral fraud had been prepared months before, and Arana Osorio had ensured that his Defence Minister, now President, would continue his counter-insurgency and terrorist policies—and also have another go at invading Belize.

With Laugerud, as with previous and following leaders, the Belize issue was used to divert attention from the grave internal problems the governments were unable to resolve. Guatemala's entire state apparatus was based on racism, ruthless class exploitation and oppression. In such circumstances, the ruling class seeks to create an external enemy to rally people against, to blame for their problems, to hate more than they hate their rulers, to make them believe that once that enemy is conquered things will be better for them. This kind of aggressive, false

<sup>34</sup> *Washington Post*, 8 March 1979.

<sup>35</sup> Berganza, pp. 44-50.

nationalism, this chauvinistic jingoism, is common in repressive regimes worldwide.

### The British: Taken for a Ride Again

On 1 May 1974, Belize acceded to membership of CARICOM, and the Guatemalan government submitted a formal protest against this “unilateral” decision.<sup>36</sup> But the Guatemalans told Weymes, the British Consul in Guatemala, that this was only a formality, and that the Arenales plan was still alive, although President Laugerud would want to consult with his new foreign minister before presenting it.<sup>37</sup>

The “Arenales plan,” which had won Guatemala an entire year of diplomatic respite, was finally laid to rest in July 1974, when the new Foreign Minister Molina Orantes told the British Consul that parts of Arenales’ plan were “not convenient,” and that Arenales worked too secretly, whereas he, Molina, intended to consult the *Consejo de Belice* and other high organs of state before talking to Britain. He suggested a meeting sometime in late September at the UN.<sup>38</sup> Weymes believed him, and said that he was struck by Molina’s sincerity about the need to move ahead resolutely and resolve the dispute.<sup>39</sup>

While the British were prepared to hang their hopes on the sincerity of Molina and forget their having been duped by his predecessor, Price would have none of it. He often consulted with Jamaica’s Dudley Thompson and sometimes Dudley accompanied him to meetings. Posnett reported in July 1974 that Price was sceptical about Guatemala and Molina and asked to meet the Secretary of State before meeting Molina, “but I warn you he might bring Dudley along as his adviser”.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Note Verbale from Spanish Embassy in London on behalf of the Guatemalan government, 22 May 1974, FCO 7/2637.

<sup>37</sup> Weymes to FCO, 7 June 1974, FCO 7/2637.

<sup>38</sup> Weymes to FCO, 10 July 1974, FCO 7/2637.

<sup>39</sup> Weymes to FCO, 11 July 1974, FCO 7/2637.

<sup>40</sup> Posnett to Cox, 15 July 1974, FCO 7/2637.

## Belize: Pursuing Its Own Diplomacy

The Belize government had been pressing the British for years to give it more room in pursuing international relations. In January 1974, the Governor issued a Letters Patent stating that “the Governor, acting in his discretion, may, by directions in writing delegate, with the prior approval of the Secretary of State, to a Minister designated by him after consultation with the Premier such responsibility for matters relating to external affairs as the Governor may think fit upon such conditions as he may impose”.<sup>41</sup> This was used to make it possible for Belize to accede to CARICOM, but the Belize government stretched it to cover a lot more.

In July 1974 Dudley Thompson visited Belize and told the Governor that some Latin American countries were becoming disenchanted with the Guatemalan position; they understood the differences between Belize and the Falkland Islands and could possibly be a source of support in the OAS in the future. Posnett considered this idea “quite unrealistic”.<sup>42</sup> The UK Mission to the UN suggested that Salim Salim, the Tanzanian Chairman of the C24 would not want to entertain an issue that would divide Latin American and the Caribbean,<sup>43</sup> but Salim told British Ambassador Ivor Richard that he felt it would be very useful if Price were to address the C24, and added that he had considerable sympathy for the Belize cause.<sup>44</sup>

By August 1974, Britain's Mission to the UN was moving tentatively towards the idea that a Price visit to the UN could in fact be useful.<sup>45</sup> The British no longer expected the Guatemalan proposals to be substantial, and felt it would not hurt to apply some “gentle pressure” to Guatemala. They thought that 1974 was too soon to try for a favourable resolution, but it might help to have Price talking to delegations “plus, incidentally,

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<sup>41</sup> “Letters Patent passed under the Great Seal of the Realm amending the British Honduras Letters patent 1964 to 1973,” 25 January 1974, Belize Gazette, February 23, 1974.

<sup>42</sup> Posnett to Cox, 15 July 1974, FCO 7/2637.

<sup>43</sup> Moreton to Cox, 6 August 1974, FCO 7/2637.

<sup>44</sup> Moreton to Cox, 9 August 1974, FCO 7/2637.

<sup>45</sup> McLaren to Jones, 12 August 1974, FCO 7/2637.

demonstrating that his skin was not milk-white”. But his campaign must be sufficiently low-key not to provoke the Guatemalans, and the British must not be seen to be orchestrating it.

In July 1974, at its very first meeting in St. Lucia, the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM expressed opposition to all policies calculated to impede fulfilment of the wish of the people and government of Belize to terminate the territory’s colonial status, and pledged to take all steps necessary to help Belize achieve independence and secure and preserve its sovereignty.<sup>46</sup> The following month Rogers met with members of the C24 at the UN and concluded that Belize had strong support in the Committee, including a majority of Latin American members, and returned to Belize with a more favourable impression for successful action in the Fourth Committee than the British had anticipated.<sup>47</sup>

At the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 1974, the Foreign Ministers of Guyana, Barbados and Jamaica made statements supporting Belize’s bid for independence, and the Guatemalan ambassador made a lengthy legalistic response.<sup>48</sup> The Belize government wrote to the President of the General Assembly, noting that elections would be held in Belize on 30 October and that the PUP was preparing the people of Belize to assume the responsibilities of independence.<sup>49</sup> Referring to the PUP’s platform, the Governor informed London that “Ministers will cooperate over continued negotiations with Guatemala but they have no confidence in their success in light of their frustrating experience over the past ten years. They will therefore continue and intensify their efforts to bring the Belize case to a wider international public”.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Cited by the Barbados representative in the Fourth Committee debate, 3 December 1974, A/C.4/SR.2124, UN.

<sup>47</sup> Moreton to Posnett, 6 September 1974, FCO 7/2638.

<sup>48</sup> Johns to Carless, 11 October 1974, FCO 7/2638.

<sup>49</sup> Letter dated 11 October 1974 from the PR of the UK to the President of the General Assembly, 16 October 1974, A/9802, UN. The FCO objected to the last phrase, believing that the Guatemalans could misinterpret this to mean UDI. See FCO to Posnett, 8 October 1974, FCO 7/2638.

<sup>50</sup> Posnett to Allen, 11 October 1974, FCO 7/2638.

The PUP won the elections by a handsome majority,<sup>51</sup> and a month later Rogers put Belize's case to the Fourth Committee and requested support for suitable security arrangements that would enable Belize to achieve independence.<sup>52</sup> When the Barbados delegate said that "Belize had remained for far too long between the threats from a neighbouring country, on the one hand, and the empty promise of independence, on the other,"<sup>53</sup> he was referring, in the second instance, to Britain's refusal to provide a security guarantee.

Two other developments that would affect Belize's prospects at the UN occurred in December 1974. Firstly, there was a meeting of the six Central American presidents, including Panama, with the President of Venezuela in Ciudad de Guayana, and they issued a joint declaration stating that they supported without reservation "the just Guatemalan claim" over the territory of Belize.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, Venezuela had vacated its seat on the Committee of 24, and the US lobbied to get Guatemala in the Committee, but President of the General Assembly Ambassador Bouteflika of Algeria announced that he proposed to name Cuba to the Committee, and there was no dissent.<sup>55</sup>

Guatemala's intended invasion in 1972 and the sabre-rattling by the Guatemalan military kept the British looking at how well Belize was defended at any particular time. In September 1974 Britain's Defence Department warned that to grant Belize independence would probably provoke a war which the UK could win only by making a major military effort and antagonizing the United States as well as all Latin American governments. It concluded that "unless we can reach a political settlement with Guatemala we are faced with an indefinite commitment to defend Belize as a dependent territory".<sup>56</sup> Reaching a political settlement, however,

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<sup>51</sup> The PUP gained 12 of the 18 parliamentary seats; it took 51.3% of the vote and the UDP 38.1%: Grant, pp. 276-277.

<sup>52</sup> A/C.4/SR.2122, 29 November 1974, UN.

<sup>53</sup> A/C.4/SR.2125, 3 December 1974, UN.

<sup>54</sup> Duncan to Carless, 19 December 1974, FCO7/2639.

<sup>55</sup> Moreton to Weir, December 1974, FCO 7/2843, and interview with Ricardo Alarcón, Cuban ambassador to the UN.

<sup>56</sup> FCO 7/2638, Defence Review Consultations – Non-Nato Commitments, from Defence Department 26 Sept 1974.



would not be easy, as was demonstrated when the parties had their next negotiating sessions in 1975.

### Talks in 1975: Guatemala Draws the Line

The Guatemalans finally showed their hand on 20 February 1975, when a delegation led by Dr Luis Aycinena met Richard in New York. They declared that the area encompassing Punta Gorda, Monkey River and the offshore cayes was vital for Guatemala's security in the Gulf of Honduras, and Guatemala could never agree to share this area with another country. The proposal was that the area of Belize below 16 degrees 30 minutes (just south of Placencia) be incorporated into Guatemala "at once"; this was the line that closed off the Gulf of Honduras, which was the decisive factor for Guatemala.<sup>57</sup>

Richard felt that this was Guatemala's opening bid, and that the proposals formed a possible basis for discussion. Posnett, however, warned that the chance of Belize accepting any land cession was nil, reminding the FCO of Price's long-standing declaration that he would never relinquish "one inch of Belizean territory".<sup>58</sup> In Belize, Price told Richard that the new proposals were "a ruse to keep us all talking another five years," and that they should focus on the internationalisation of the dispute. Richard, however, insisted on probing the Guatemalan offer further; he thought less territory could be offered. Price said that he could consider the possibility of internationalising an area of three miles on either side of the Sarstoon for joint exploitation, but with sovereignty unchanged. Also, he intended to abide by his party's manifesto, which had laid out the policy of claiming 12 miles of territorial sea and 200 miles of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Price argued that further pressure at the UN was needed to force Guatemala to present more reasonable proposals.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> See Map 3 for a depiction of this and other land demands made by the Guatemalans.

<sup>58</sup> Posnett to FCO, 21 February 1975, FCO 7/2844.

<sup>59</sup> Record of a Meeting held at Belize House, Belmopan, 24 February 1975, FCO 7/2845.

Price told the British team that if a solution were not found soon, there could be a change of government in Belize, and the new government would want Belize to remain a colony, which would be “a ridiculous anomaly”.<sup>60</sup> E. N. Larmour, Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the FCO, asked whether the Moho River could be an acceptable border,<sup>61</sup> and Price protested that some Maya villages and Barranco, a Garifuna village, lay to the south of the Moho. He was, however, willing to consider “a symbolic and token concession”. He had in mind the rectification of the western border from Garbutt's Falls northward to make it accord with the terms of the 1859 Treaty.<sup>62</sup>

In March 1975 Price went to London, where it was agreed that there should be another round of talks, primarily to test Guatemala's willingness to concede independence. On their own, the British decided to find out “whether, if the Guatemalans were to receive a significant cession of territory, the Mexicans would still stand on their limited demand for sea access to Chetumal or would demand a cession of territory also”.<sup>63</sup> Price returned to Belize via Jamaica, to prepare strategies for the **internationalisation** with Prime Minister Michael Manley. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) was to be held in Jamaica in late April, and Manley agreed to sponsor a Belize resolution at the meeting.

When a British team including Larmour and Richard visited Belize in mid-April 1975 to prepare for talks with Guatemala in New Orleans, Price told them that Belize was not prepared to consider any “territorial arrangement”. Instead, the British should pay compensation to Guatemala and offer Guatemala unimpeded passage to the sea, an outlet for the resources of the Petén and trade arrangements.<sup>64</sup> But the British had brought quite specific ideas for territorial cession, complete with maps illustrating them: cession of the Sapodilla Cayes; of territorial sea and continental shelf; of parts of the western frontier involving “fairly

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<sup>60</sup> Record of a Meeting held at Belize House, Belmopan, 27 February 1975, FCO 7/2845.

<sup>61</sup> See Map 4 for a depiction of this and other land cession proposals made by the UK and the US in the period 1975-1981.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Price.

<sup>63</sup> Cox, 20 March 1975, FCO 7/2846.

<sup>64</sup> “Notes for preparation of Belize side to meet British,” 17 April 1975, PF.

substantial cession of territory,” including several villages; and cession of territory in the south up to the Moho.<sup>65</sup> Richard warned that a promise from Guatemala of independence for Belize in exchange for cession up to the Moho “could not be dismissed by the British government out of hand”.<sup>66</sup> Price retorted that “the price for independence must be otherwise than territory. You would not cede British territory, and Britain must pay the price, you created the problem”.<sup>67</sup>

Richard insisted that he “could not accept a Belizean veto”. Belize was not willing to go to independence without a defence guarantee and Britain would not give a defence guarantee, so a settlement must be reached.<sup>68</sup> When he asked Price whether “a ladder of negotiating positions” could be put to the Guatemalans, Price said that the “Belizean ladder excluded land cession”.<sup>69</sup>

The meetings with Guatemala were held in New Orleans on 21 April 1975, with Aycinena leading for Guatemala and Richard for the UK; Courtenay represented Belize. Richard explained that Belize rejected territorial cession, but Britain was prepared to discuss any proposal from Guatemala; the UK was under increasing pressure to grant independence to Belize and it could not resist this pressure indefinitely. Aycinena replied that a territorial arrangement was essential, as well as something to regulate relations between Belize and Guatemala.<sup>70</sup> The Belize side stood firm on no land cession.

During the lunch break, according to the FCO record of the discussion, the British met separately with Courtenay, who said that he had become convinced, unlike Price, that land cession was essential to the

<sup>65</sup> They did not formally present the ideas at the meeting, but they gave Price a copy of their brief, entitled “Brief no. 2 Belize-Guatemala: Meetings in Belmopan and New Orleans, April 1975”; this copy is marked in Price’s hand with comments rejecting all these ideas, PF.

<sup>66</sup> “Record of a meeting held in Belmopan on 18 April at 2:40 p.m.,” FCO 7/2847.

<sup>67</sup> “Record of a meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1975,” PF.

<sup>68</sup> “Record of a meeting held in Belmopan on 19 April 1975 at 9:30 a.m.,” FCO 7/2847.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> “Record of UK/Guatemalan Discussions in New Orleans on 21 April 1975 at 10 a.m.,” FCO 7/2847.

Guatemalans, and that he believed that cession up to the Moho River would be acceptable with unfettered independence.<sup>71</sup> In the resumed session in the afternoon, Richard formally proposed that the border be the Moho River, but Guatemala's final position was the Monkey River, and if it were anything less, there would have to be restrictions on Belizean independence proportional to withdrawal from this line.<sup>72</sup>

It might be deemed testimony to British disingenuousness that Richard felt that "a real possibility for settlement now exists. We have a long way to go, and one of our major problems will undoubtedly be with Price himself. I am now reasonably convinced that the Guatemalans are serious, but that independence for Belize will involve it ceding some land. I am also reasonably convinced that this is now Courtenay's view and that he at least feels the price worth paying".<sup>73</sup> Price himself, as well as his other colleagues, clearly did not think so. Years later, Richard admitted that "I was convinced that Price did not want to give up any land. He told me so very strongly on a number of occasions. We obviously heard that Courtenay was more accommodating about giving up some land. But I never got the impression that Price was willing to consider giving up land".<sup>74</sup>

This meeting in New Orleans must be recognized for what it was: a clear sign by Britain, through an official offer, that it was fully prepared to cede a part of Belize to Guatemala. It was what gave the Guatemalan government the conviction that they could indeed get territory from Belize, and it was just a matter of how much. And so, like good negotiators, they spent the next few years bargaining with the British, now increasing their territorial demands, now decreasing them, in the certainty that they would get something, since the British clearly did not want (and indeed said it publicly) to defend the country after independence. This also encouraged the Guatemalan government to

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<sup>71</sup> "Record of Discussion with Mr Courtenay in New Orleans on 21 April 1975 at 12:15," FCO 7/2847. There is no evidence to suggest that any other minister would have agreed to the Moho proposal.

<sup>72</sup> "Record of UK/Guatemala Discussions in New Orleans on 21 April 1975 at 2:15 p.m.," FCO 7/2847.

<sup>73</sup> Richard to FCO, 23 April 1975, FCO 7/2847.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Richard.

prepare invasions of Belize over the years, with the double purpose of putting the stakes up for Britain (reinforcing cost millions) and making her more willing to pressure Belize into giving up territory, and of scaring the Belizean people, hoping they would pressure their government to make concessions—or to abandon the idea of becoming independent. I am not guessing at this: it was told to me thirty years later by one of the key players in Guatemalan policy over Belize, Francisco Villagrán Kramer. And it makes sense, in terms of Guatemala's strategic goals and their knowledge that Britain was willing to pressure Belize to agree to territorial concessions.

### The CHOGM in Jamaica

Price went to Jamaica to lobby the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in May 1975, and the British reported that Price saw “absolutely no prospect of anything ever coming out of talks with the Guatemalans,” and that he was “declaring loudly that not one inch of Belizean soil would be ceded”.<sup>75</sup> Secretary of State James Callaghan told Price that Britain could not accept defence responsibilities for countries over whose internal affairs she had no control, and warned that “internationalising a matter did not always help. The current problems in Cyprus were an example”.<sup>76</sup>

In the plenary meeting, Caribbean leaders urged the UK to guarantee an independent Belize's territorial integrity, but British Prime Minister Harold Wilson said Britain felt that negotiations were the best prospect, since it would not offer a defence guarantee.<sup>77</sup> At the request of Manley, Callaghan, Prime Ministers Barrow of Barbados and Pindling of Bahamas and Price prepared a draft passage for the communiqué which emphasised support for Belize's independence and territorial integrity. However, by the time it reached the floor Callaghan had deleted the reference to territorial integrity, arguing that this could endanger the talks with Guatemala, and that the form of wording proposed, while not explicit,

<sup>75</sup> Duncan Watson to Larmour, 6 May 1975, FCO 7/2847.

<sup>76</sup> Record of the meeting, 1 May 1975, FCO 7/2847.

<sup>77</sup> Callaghan to Posnett, 6 May 1975, FCO 7/2847.

## Guatemala's Claim to Belize...

gave tacit recognition to the principle of maintaining the country's territorial integrity. The agreed paragraph read:

The Heads of Government offered their full support for the aspirations of the people of Belize for early independence. Noting that talks had recently been resumed with Guatemala, and bearing in mind the special responsibilities of Britain as the administering power, the Heads of Government urged the parties to take all necessary action for a speedy solution to the problem, which could be endorsed by the international community through the United Nations, in accordance with the principle of the self-determination of peoples as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Callaghan had warned Price against precipitate action at the UN, but the British were sure that Price “will be returning to Belize in a bullish mood, dreaming of early independence for Belize simply imposed on the Guatemalans and supported morally and militarily by stout friends in the Caribbean and elsewhere. We shall have to try and get the pendulum swinging back again somehow”.<sup>78</sup>

Others in the FCO, however, were warming up to the internationalisation idea, noting that support for Belize was growing in Third World<sup>79</sup> countries, and if this continued it could embarrass Guatemala not only in the UN but also in the OAS.<sup>80</sup> But Callaghan hardened his position after his experience with Price at the CHOGM; he told Richard at the British Embassy in Washington that in Kingston *he had recommended to Mr Price against taking the matter to the UN*, and that

Price must therefore decide whether to go for independence after a peaceful solution or a continuation of the grievance with

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<sup>78</sup> Watson to Larmour, 6 May 1975, FCO 7/2847.

<sup>79</sup> The phrase “Third World” was popularly used in the period, and until the end of the Cold War, to refer to countries that wished to be allied to neither of the two big power blocs (hence “third”), and was more generally used to refer to what were also called “underdeveloped” or “developing” countries, now often referred to as “South” countries.

<sup>80</sup> Collins to Duff, 5 May 1975, FCO 7/2847. This perception was soon to change with Cuban military support for African liberation struggles.

the problem internationalised. *If Mr Price pushed matters too far he would consider withdrawing our troops.*<sup>81</sup>

Price kept pushing; at the ECLAC meeting in Trinidad & Tobago later that month he spoke strongly for Belize's secure and unfettered independence.<sup>82</sup> The British reported that Price's statements went down well, and that "there were also behind the scene moves of support for Belize, principally from Cuba".<sup>83</sup> Governor Posnett reported that on his return, Price remained adamant about no land cession, although

When talking with Courtenay alone I formed the impression that he was less pessimistic about obtaining support for a settlement involving modest territorial cession than he was prepared to say in the presence of Rogers or Price. But if so he is in front of his colleagues. Price's first observation when asked about renewed talks was to insist that territorial cession was unacceptable to Belize.<sup>84</sup>

### Talks Deadlocked

Richard, however, continued to "hope we can pursue the Moho idea for at least one more round". After that, he reflected, "we are faced with three choices (A) to negotiate a settlement including territorial cession over Belize's head; (B) to revert to the earlier two-tier scheme, though the Belizeans must realise that Guatemala would insist on far closer a relationship than Belize could accept; (C) to abandon the talks and take the matter to the UN".<sup>85</sup>

The latter course was what Price had been pushing for years, but he was forced to go through the motions of negotiations in order to keep the British on side. He sent Courtenay and Attorney General Assad Shoman to London in June to tell the British that he did not regard

<sup>81</sup> Barrett to Larmour, 8 May 1975, FCO 7/2847. Emphasis added.

<sup>82</sup> Statement by Premier Price to ECLA Conference, 12 May 1975, FCO 7/2847.

<sup>83</sup> Sutherland to Allen, 27 May 1975, FCO 7/2847.

<sup>84</sup> Posnett to UK mission, New York, 19 May 1975, FCO 7/2847.

<sup>85</sup> Richard to FCO, 29 May 1975, FCO 7/2847.

land cession as a possibility, and that preparations should get underway to take the matter to the UN in September.<sup>86</sup> The British reported that Callaghan had spoken to Kissinger, but that the US regarded itself as very much on the side-lines. Richard emphasised that in his view no amount of pressure, whether from the US or the UN, would persuade the Guatemalans to abandon their claim; a negotiated solution must be found, which was why he had proposed the Moho boundary. Courtenay repeated that Price would not accept cession, “but he might be willing to listen if minor boundary adjustments were proposed as part of a reasonable package”.<sup>87</sup> On the UN initiative, the Belizeans insisted that there be a reference to self-determination and territorial integrity in the proposed resolution, but Richard still felt that it would be “impossible” to get a resolution ordering the Guatemalans to withdraw their claim.

Another round of talks was held in July 1975; the Guatemalans declared that their proposals were non-negotiable.<sup>88</sup> The talks broke down; the meeting lasted barely an hour, and as far as the Belizeans were concerned the stage was set for taking the issue to the United Nations. The Guatemalans met with Richard privately after the meeting and suggested that the way forward may be to arrange a “mediation” that would produce an agreed result. The Guatemalans knew that Price was still determined not to cede any territory, and that he had, in practice if not in theory, the power of veto over the British negotiating position.<sup>89</sup> Richard liked the idea of a pre-agreed “mediation” result, but felt that

we shall first have to make one more effort to convince Price that he cannot have his independence and the whole of his territory too; and indeed I think we might have to tell him that if the Guatemalans accept the outcome of any such mediation and if we ourselves think it is a fair settlement in all the circumstances,

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<sup>86</sup> Record of meeting held in FCO on 19 June at 11:00 a.m., FCO 7/2848.

<sup>87</sup> Record of meeting held in FCO on 20 June 1975 at 11:30 a.m., FCO 7/2849.

<sup>88</sup> Record of discussions held in New York on 15 July 1975, FCO 7/2849.

<sup>89</sup> Richard to Rowlands, 21 July 1975, FCO 7/2849.



then he should not count upon our acquiescing in a Belizean rejection of the terms.<sup>90</sup>

Fortunately for Belize, however, there were others in the FCO who held a different view. FCO officer Patrick Duff<sup>91</sup> advised that it would be fruitless to try to persuade Price to agree to cession of territory. He argued that Britain should assist in promoting a resolution in the UN giving maximum support for Belizean self-determination and independence. And while Courtenay, in his report to Price after the London talks in June had suggested that “a number of sweeteners should be considered” to propose to the Guatemalans, including “Richard’s Moho proposal,”<sup>92</sup> the line adopted by Price and his team was presented by Courtenay to the House of Representatives after the July talks:

This Government will not accept or agree to any proposal that includes the cession of . . . any Belizean territory . . . the sovereignty and independence of Belize is not for negotiation. The question that now faces government is whether any useful purpose will be served by continuing to participate in talks on proposals so flagrantly inconsistent with the declared policies of the Belizean government.<sup>93</sup>

When the Guatemalan negotiators declared in July that their proposals were non-negotiable, that meant that they had decided that negotiations were futile and that they would seek other means of achieving their objectives. British intel at that time was so poor, however, that it was not until several weeks later that they realized that the Guatemalan government had indeed hit upon an alternative to negotiation: the threat of invasion.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Duff was head of the WIAD at the FCO, the lead department on the Belize issue.

<sup>92</sup> Courtenay to Price, 25 June 1975, PF.

<sup>93</sup> Statement by Courtenay to the House of Representatives, Belmopan, July 1975, PF.

## Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers in Peru

Rogers and Shoman were dispatched to Peru to lobby delegates at the V Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in August, where they received enthusiastic support. Guatemala, aware of Belize's intentions, had applied to be admitted to the Conference as an observer, but Guyana and Cuba blocked this application; Guatemala was only able to be present as an "invited country". Guyanese Foreign Minister Fred Wills made a forceful statement to the Conference:

I say to Guatemala emphatically and categorically – I say "HANDS OFF BELIZE". Renounce your nonsensical claims. Let the people of Belize remain a nation in waiting no longer. The peace of this hemisphere would be substantially assisted by a Guatemalan retreat from absurdity.<sup>94</sup>

The blunt and passionate language of Wills as well as the strong statements of other CARICOM ministers helped to bring home to the delegates how important the issue was for the NAM. Cuba played a major role in gathering support for Belize's cause. Foreign Minister Raúl Roa also made an impassioned plea for support for Belize. The final communiqué of the Conference declared:

The Conference expresses full support for the people of Belize whose aspirations for independence continue to be frustrated by territorial claims. In affirming the territorial integrity of Belize and the right of its people to independence, the Conference agreed to lend its support to all efforts directed to those ends.

The Belize delegation had especially requested the inclusion of support for Belize's territorial integrity, and this had been accepted by the seventy-eight members present, representing about two-thirds of the member states of the United Nations. Important too was the fact that the meeting had been held in Latin America, and that Guatemala had been denied observer status.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Rogers and Shoman to Price, 31 August 1975, PF.

<sup>95</sup> Indeed Guatemala, who had been present as an "invited country," officially withdrew in a huff after the Belize paragraph had been agreed. Rogers and Shoman to Price, 31 August, 1975, PF.

## Mission to the UN

On 10 September, then Belize's National Day, Premier Price announced, in the presence of his guest Prime Minister Barrow of Barbados, that "we are arranging a mission to the United Nations, headed by former Attorney General, the Honourable Assad Shoman, who has been appointed Minister of State with an office in New York City".

Shoman, with Robert Leslie from the BIS and Ms Shirley Harvey, Premier Price's trusted secretary, set up an office in New York. From a small apartment in Manhattan near to the UN, they prepared papers, sought interviews with dozens of representatives of countries in every continent, and had access to the floor of the General Assembly with passes provided by the British. They established a small group of advisers who included the ambassadors of Barbados, Cuba, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, and often consulted too with the Mexican ambassador. After 1976, this select group included Panama's ambassadors in New York and Washington; Panama's leader Omar Torrijos had put them and their offices and resources completely at Belize's disposal.

## Preparing the Resolution

In 1975 there were a number of particularly propitious circumstances favouring Belize: the importance of the UN and NAM at that time, the period of détente between the US and the USSR, the fact that both CHOGM and NAM held important meetings in the region in which Belize gained significant support. There was no guarantee that these circumstances would endure, so it was necessary to get a resolution supporting Belize's strongest position in relation to independence and territorial integrity, although a balance would have to be struck between the strength of the resolution and the need to get as many countries as possible to support it.

The Belizeans recognised that it would be impossible to gain US support for a resolution favouring Belize, since the US still considered Guatemala its bulwark against "Castro-Communism" gaining a foothold in the area.

As for the Latin American countries, all except Cuba felt the need to express solidarity with one of their own. Belize therefore took a decision to forego this support for the time being, in favour of putting on record the strongest resolution possible. The Caribbean Community countries and Cuba were solidly behind Belize, and would agree to any resolution Belize itself proposed; to a lesser extent this also applied to the Commonwealth countries and to most of the Non-Aligned countries. It was understood that certain countries would have reservations because of their own peculiar circumstances, but the most important country that would have to be nudged into accepting Belize's proposed resolution was Britain itself. It was absolutely essential for Belize to have Britain fully on board, because Britain was crucial to the defence of Belize, it was a permanent member of the Security Council, and it influenced the votes of European Community countries.

Britain, of course, was also aware of the importance of these factors, but it could not simply ram any resolution down Belize's throat. For one thing, the broad support Belize had gained from so many countries during the previous months forced Britain to show respect for Belize's position. An important factor that enabled Belize to get the resolution it did was its enlisting of Rashleigh Jackson of Guyana, Frank Abdullah of Trinidad & Tobago and Don Mills of Jamaica to join the Belize delegates in back-room negotiations with Britain over the wording of the resolution. These men had tremendous prestige at the UN, not only because of the high standing of the leaders of their countries in the Third World, but also because of their own diplomatic skills and their finesse in negotiating accords.

Richard wanted to have a fairly mild resolution, even one that could achieve consensus, since "we didn't think we could get much support for a strong resolution, and if we did get a strong resolution it would affect the negotiation".<sup>96</sup> Britain was anxious to avoid angering Guatemala, especially for security reasons, and so as not to appear to the other Latin Americans as an old-style colonial power. In this context, Britain's skeleton in the closet was the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands). And Britain had a hidden agenda: it had come to the firm conclusion that the best way

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Richard.

to get out of the situation would be for Belize to agree to give up some of its territory in the south, and so it did not want “territorial integrity” mentioned in the resolution.

At that time, there were 141 member States of the United Nations. By lobbying individual countries as well as country groupings based on geography or culture, such as the African Group, the Latin American Group and the Arab Group, and with the committed support of the Commonwealth, and the NAM, Belize was able to gain support from most members of the UN, with the exception of most Latin American states.

### Another Invasion Threat

In mid-1975, the British learned that the US planned to sell Guatemala patrol boats and C-47 aircraft, and asked the US to delay the sale while there were still prospects for a negotiated settlement.<sup>97</sup> US Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, William Rogers, informed that the Guatemalans had purchased ten Arava light transport planes from Israel for delivery at the end of the year, and agreed that if the US sold the C47s as requested this “would alter the balance of forces in the area, something the US was not disposed to do”. The US would therefore block the sale of the C47s, but the patrol boat sale would proceed, unless the UK “solemnly” asked that it not, in which case they would reconsider. Rogers “seemed particularly impressed by the degree of Third World support which Price is gaining”.<sup>98</sup>

The British were worried about the Israeli aircraft, which they believed “will seriously increase problem of defending Belize by (A) eliminating the need for large concentration of Guatemalan troops on border which at present would be one of early warning indicators of intention to attack Belize; (B) enabling Guatemalans to consider more flexible plans including delivering major assault by air, taking advantage of small fields in Belize City area which new aircraft could use, and

<sup>97</sup> FCO to Washington Embassy, 29 May 1975, FCO 7/2847.

<sup>98</sup> Ramsbotham to FCO, 16 June 1975, FCO 7/2848.

since not dependent on Belize City airport could try to render it unserviceable for UK reinforcements". MOD recommended that the garrison be increased to 857 men, i.e. an additional company, to be equipped with Blowpipe (one-man anti-aircraft system) to meet this new threat". They warned that certain elements of the Guatemalan military may be contemplating "unconventional military action" against Belize immediately after the UN debate, should they suffer defeat in New York.<sup>99</sup> The timing of the planned reinforcement of the Belize garrison worried British officials considerably. They felt that Guatemala's military capacity would be "formidable" once they took delivery of the Israeli aircraft early in 1976.<sup>100</sup>

In 1972, the British had very little hard intelligence about Guatemala's military plans, and by 1975 they had not improved much. They did not regard the information they got from US military advisors in Guatemala "as wholly reliable—or, at least, reliably comprehensive". But now they were given some serious intel: "an agent run by the Americans had seen and revealed details of Guatemalan plans to invade the Toledo District. Their source, who had access to government and military documents, confirmed that a two-pronged attack was planned: a combined air and sea assault on Punta Gorda and a land incursion across the western border north of Cadenas".<sup>101</sup>

On 8 September 1975 the Commander of the British forces in Belize flashed London: there was a "substantial build-up at Melchor de Mencos/La Polvora . . . Their aspirations appear to be directed at an incursion into south Belize, probably Punta Gorda, which is particularly vulnerable & would place HMG in most embarrassing situation requiring major operation to resolve". He confessed that "we seriously lack good intelligence on Guatemalan capabilities".<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> FCO to Posnett, 28 August 1975, FCO 7/2850.

<sup>100</sup> Cable to Carless, 27 August 1975, FCO 7/2850

<sup>101</sup> White, pp. 448-449.

<sup>102</sup> Commander British Forces, Belize to MODUK Army, 8 September 1975, FCO 7/2850.

Ramsbotham to FCO, 10 October 1975, FCO 7/2852.

The FCO was reluctant to reinforce, thinking it would adversely influence the UN debate, and they managed to delay matters for a while. By early November, however, the British, convinced by the mounting evidence that the Guatemalans were indeed contemplating an invasion, decided to reinforce their garrison in Belize. On 3 November Callaghan informed the British Consul in Guatemala that reinforcements would begin the next day and complete in six days, and on the 4<sup>th</sup> told him to tell the government that the increase to 1100 men need not be binding, and that he was sending a detachment of Harriers.<sup>103</sup> In addition, Royal Navy Frigate HMS Zulu was brought into the area, and troop reinforcements were “supported by three Westland Puma HC1 helicopters flown in aboard 53 Squadron’s big Shorts Belfast C1 transports”. Soon after, a C-130 Hercules loaded with engineers, ground crew and equipment headed for Belize, to be joined a few days later by two RAF Harrier GR1As.<sup>104</sup>

### Kissinger Nixes Reinforcement

When the British reinforced the garrison in Belize in early November, Kissinger scolded Callaghan:

Your recent reinforcement will increase the pressures within Guatemala to attack . . . The likelihood of an attack is also increasing, we think, because of the increasing likelihood of passage by the UN of your draft resolution. As we now see it, the resolution, by appearing to the Guatemalans to leave nothing of substance to negotiate, may have so weakened the position of moderates within the Guatemalan government as to make it impossible for them to prevail against military adventurism.<sup>105</sup>

Kissinger then went on to outline ideas for “positive and immediate measures which you might wish to consider in an effort to head off resort to force”. While disclaiming the idea that he was proposing any

<sup>103</sup> Callaghan to Guatemala, 3 and 4 October 1975, FCO 7/2856.

<sup>104</sup> White, p. 450.

<sup>105</sup> Kissinger to Callaghan, 5 November 1975, FCO 7/2856.

sort of “package,” he set out several proposals: limitations on both countries to enter into military accords with third countries; cooperation on security information; pledges not to allow the territory of one State to be used as a base for attack against the other; and a commitment that an independent Belize would adhere to the Rio Treaty. On economic matters, he proposed a maritime boundary for guaranteed access; fishing and seabed rights in the Gulf; and Guatemalan access to Belizean ports. Kissinger repeated that “I am not at all certain that an initiative along either of these lines would stave off a Guatemalan military move”.

A few days later Callaghan informed Kissinger, who had also suggested referring the dispute to the ICJ, that ideas similar to his had been proposed by Britain and rejected by the Guatemalans in July, and added:

I wish to bring Belize to secure independence as soon as possible and I am under mounting pressure from the Belizeans, the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Group. A reference to the ICJ would be regarded by these groups as a transparent attempt to deprive Belize of its independence by putting the whole issue in cold storage for several years. It would appease one of our customers but would stir up the rest of them.<sup>106</sup>

The US and Britain had failed to see eye to eye on the critical political issues involved. One consequence would be that in 1975 and for the next four years the US did not support the pro-Belize UN resolutions. What was behind this US position?

## US Attitudes to the Guatemalan Claim

For the US, its relationship with the UK and its proclaimed support for self-determination had to be balanced against its concern for “stability in the region” (meaning the maintenance of US domination over regional economies and governments) and for upholding established pro-US governments in Central America. It relied heavily on Guatemala to maintain the *status quo*, and supported successive governments there since 1954 with military aid in their counter-insurgency policies.

<sup>106</sup> Callaghan to Kissinger, 12 November 1975, FCO 7/2858.



The UK was always very concerned about how the US viewed the Belize issue. As one high official at the time remarked, “one of the first questions we asked in an office meeting was, what will the Americans think of this?” London believed that if Belize became independent without Guatemalan agreement and the British forces withdrew and the Guatemalans invaded, “the Americans would not . . . lean on the Guatemalans and force them to withdraw. The most to be expected from them would be noises in the OAS”. And should Guatemala be successful in absorbing Belize, the US “would prefer such a solution to the creation of yet another potentially unstable mini-state, particularly on the mainland”.<sup>107</sup>

### The Mexican Factor

In 1975, moreover, Belize suddenly found itself having to worry about the positions being taken by Mexico. In international organs in the 1950s, whenever Guatemala asserted its claim to Belize, Mexico would issue a protest.<sup>108</sup> At the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1958, the Foreign Secretary affirmed that if the present status of Belize is altered, Mexico will claim its rights, but it believed that “a solution of the question of Belize must be based on freedom and independence for the people of that territory”.<sup>109</sup> That line was consistently held by Mexico thereafter.

In April 1974, Mexico’s Foreign Minister Emilio Rabasa told Price that Mexico supported Belize’s independence, but Mexico wanted such strips of land as were necessary to guarantee her ships access to Chetumal Bay through Mexican waters.<sup>110</sup> Mexico’s position was more formally defined by Manuel Tello, then a director at the foreign ministry and later himself Foreign Minister:

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Arthur Collins, who was deputy head of the Latin American department of the FCO.

<sup>108</sup> María Emilia Paz Salinas, *Belize: El Despertar de una Nación*, Siglo Veintiuno, México, 1979, pp. 129-142.

<sup>109</sup> Records of 771<sup>st</sup> meeting, 6 October 1958, UN.

<sup>110</sup> Fonseca to FCO, 30 April 1974, FCO 7/2637. The Anglo-Mexican treaty only allowed passage for merchant vessels.

If Belize became genuinely independent more or less in its present form, Mexico would be perfectly content with a treaty guaranteeing access and would not require any change of existing median lines or any cession of territory . . . But if Belize were to become part of Guatemala then Mexico would not feel secure as regards access to Chetumal and would want something more substantial than a treaty. That was what Rabasa had in mind when he talked about ceding a strip of territory, and he was determined to keep this option open.<sup>111</sup>

When President Echeverría met Guatemalan President Laugerud at the Mexican/Guatemalan border on 31 May 1975, however, he appeared to radically alter Mexican policy, declaring that “leaving aside any possible Mexican requirement based on rights to Belizean territory . . . we prefer without reserve and without conditions the friendship of our Guatemalan brothers . . . we want the demands of the Guatemalan people to be satisfied, in accordance with history, reason and right.”<sup>112</sup>

It is difficult to account for this totally dissonant note on the part of Echeverría. Tello told British Ambassador Galsworthy that Echeverría had declined to read the brief prepared for him prior to his meeting with the Guatemalan President, and as a result had spoken completely out of line with established Mexican policy on Belize.<sup>113</sup> Decades later, Rabasa was still hard put to explain Echeverría's attitude, claiming that he contradicted himself publicly and officially in an improper manner, tended to look only at the immediate and not the long-term, and didn't have a historical perspective. Rabasa presented his resignation for the President's inconsistent attitude to the Belize issue.<sup>114</sup>

In October 1975, with the Belize offensive at the UN in full swing, Echeverría, accompanied by the Guatemalan Vice-President, told the press that Mexico had no territorial claim to put forward to Belize

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<sup>111</sup> Galsworthy to FCO, 10 April 1975, FCO 7/2846.

<sup>112</sup> Galsworthy to FCO, 2 June 1975, FCO 7/2847.

<sup>113</sup> Galsworthy to FCO, 2 October 1975, FCO 7/2851.

<sup>114</sup> Author's Interview with Rabasa.

and that he had great respect for the historical rights of Guatemala.<sup>115</sup> The Mexican press gave considerable coverage to the Belize issue and published an interview with Price, who was in Mexico and expressed his grave concern about the President's position.<sup>116</sup>

The President had announced a visit to Guatemala in November. Rabasa worked hard to get Echeverría back on track, and finally got him to agree to allow Mexico to put forward a compromise resolution, which he felt would be acceptable to Guatemala. British Trade Secretary Peter Shore was in Mexico at the time, and discussed the issue at length with Echeverría. The President noted that the Guatemalans were “dangerously excited” and had a “mania” about the danger of Cuban penetration via an independent Belize. He referred to the proposed Mexican resolution at the UN as a way of taking the heat out of the present situation.<sup>117</sup> The Mexican press was covering the Belize issue extensively, with “a steady increase in the volume of editorial comment in favour of the right of Belize to self-determination”; this was making a significant impression on Echeverría.<sup>118</sup>

During his visit to Guatemala, President Echeverría failed to express unequivocal support for Guatemala's claim, and fell out with the Guatemalan press.<sup>119</sup> Rabasa then went to Belize and proposed that the newly tabled Mexican resolution, which would be amended to include self-determination, be allowed to pass along with the Caribbean one. Guatemala would support the Mexican draft and therefore be moving a step forward by accepting the principle of self-determination. He opined that the Caribbean resolution would drive Guatemala further away than ever from the negotiating table. The Belizean ministers explained that after 12 fruitless years at the table, mere readiness to talk was a discredited concept; only talks recognizing the essential principles would be worth holding. They regarded the Mexican draft as contrary to the best interests of Belize and would not support it.<sup>120</sup> During this

<sup>115</sup> Duff to Green, 27 October 1975, FCO 7/2854.

<sup>116</sup> Galsworthy to FCO, 15 October 1975, FCO 7/2853.

<sup>117</sup> Galsworthy to FCO, 11 November 1975, FCO 7/2857.

<sup>118</sup> Galsworthy to FCO, 13 November 1975, FCO 7/2858.

<sup>119</sup> McQuillan to FCO, 16 November 1975, FCO 7/2859.

<sup>120</sup> Posnett to FCO, 18 November 1975, FCO 7/2859.

time, there were constant consultations with the Mexicans and others at the UN on the several draft resolutions, to which we will now turn.

### The Resolutions at the UN 1975

In the Fourth Committee, the first draft resolution was submitted on behalf of Guatemala on 24 October 1975, co-sponsored by the five Central American countries (not including Panama) and six other Latin American countries. It stated that resolution 1514 was designed to end colonialism “*while at the same time ensuring the maintenance of the national unity and territorial integrity of Member States,*” and called on the UK and Guatemala to continue negotiations to find a peaceful solution to the problem, taking into account “the interests of the people of Belize”.<sup>121</sup> On 31 October, a meeting in Guatemala of Heads of State of Central America, including Panama, issued a declaration requesting support for the resolution.<sup>122</sup> On 20<sup>th</sup> November, a revised draft of the Guatemalan resolution was submitted, omitting the words italicised above, and with two additional sponsors, Panama and Ecuador.<sup>123</sup>

On 4 November, the Caribbean draft resolution was circulated in the Fourth Committee. It was sponsored by 62 member states, and survived without amendment despite attempts by several countries, including Britain and Mexico, to amend it. The draft fully supported the right of the people of Belize to self-determination, independence and territorial integrity.<sup>124</sup>

Mexico sought to amend the resolution to ensure the support of other Latin American countries, but the Belizeans felt that they needed to get, at the outset, the strongest possible resolution, to send a clear message to both Guatemala and Britain that Belize would not make concessions on the key issues of territorial integrity and full sovereign independence. Mexico therefore submitted its own draft resolution

<sup>121</sup> A/C.4/L.1094, 24 October 1975, UN. Emphasis added.

<sup>122</sup> Statement by Guatemala representative to Fourth Committee, A/C.4/SR.2163, p. 165.

<sup>123</sup> A/C.4/L.1094/Rev.1, 20 November 1975, UN.

<sup>124</sup> A/C.4/L.1096, 4 November 1975, UN. See Appendix 5 for a copy of this resolution.

calling on the UK and Guatemala to negotiate a peaceful solution to the problem, taking into account “the rights of the people of Belize to self-determination”.<sup>125</sup>

By early November, as we have noted, the British began reinforcing their garrison in Belize, and it is in this context of heightened world interest that the debates on Belize, and the presentation of the different resolutions, took place a few days later in the Fourth Committee.

### The Fourth Committee Debates

The Belize issue dominated the Fourth Committee hearings on decolonisation for about a week. The hearings began on 7 November 1975, with Premier Price affirming that Belize would have become independent many years before, were it not for “the unfounded and unjust claim of Guatemala to the territory of Belize and its thinly veiled threats to pursue their claim by force if necessary.”<sup>126</sup> Price spent very little time defending the British title to the territory, and instead focused on the right of the Belizean people to self-determination:

They have a distinct national personality, which is a blend of various origins and cultures very much like that of the nations of the Caribbean Community. They are a people of predominantly African descent, with a rich admixture of Maya, Mestizo, Carib, Asian and other elements, living together in peace and harmony, and they have no desire to become a disadvantaged minority living in the midst of a majority whose way of life is alien to them.”

He added that more than 95 per cent of the current population had been born in Belize; they had a unique national identity, and handing them over to Guatemala would amount to an act of cultural genocide. Belize’s economic development had been seriously hampered by deliberate policies of Guatemala, whose attempt to have the OAS impose economic sanctions against Belize had been averted with the help of the Caribbean representatives in the OAS. Belize was bound

<sup>125</sup> A/C.4/L.1102, 10 November 1975, UN, A/C.4/L.1102/Rev.1, 19 November 1975, UN.

<sup>126</sup> A/C.4/SR.2162, 7 November 1975, UN, pp. 151- 155.

to these countries not only by ethnic, historical, and cultural ties, but also by membership of the Caribbean Community.

Ambassador Richard noted that in negotiations over the years Guatemala had always made demands that neither Britain nor Belize could accept, as they all made a mockery of the principle of self-determination. Because of the undue delay in Belize achieving independence, it had assumed a number of responsibilities in the field of foreign affairs, such as its relations with the Caribbean Community. "But a situation of half-dependence and half-independence," he added, "is by its very nature impermanent and unstable and cannot be maintained in perpetuity".<sup>127</sup>

Jorge Skinner-Klee of Guatemala gave a long account of Guatemala's version of the roots of its claim and its legal arguments. He insisted that the Fourth Committee was not competent to take decisions on a matter that was legally a dispute between States. Guatemala was opposed to any unilateral granting of independence to the territory and any act that would alter the *status quo* in Belize behind Guatemala's back. He claimed that Belize had never been a colony, but rather a territory of Guatemala illegally occupied by the UK; it was therefore not subject to the UN process of decolonisation.<sup>128</sup>

In the Fourth Committee debates, a total of 31 other countries intervened, 22 for Belize and 9 for Guatemala. Tanzania's Salim Salim declared that the application of the principles of the Charter nullified all legal claims by other countries.<sup>129</sup> Rashleigh Jackson of Guyana noted that in 1964 the Organisation of African Unity had declared that its members would respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence. That principle, he said, was absolutely applicable to the case of Belize.<sup>130</sup>

Before the vote on the resolutions, Mexico's delegate explained that since neither the pro-Guatemalan nor the Caribbean drafts had been

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<sup>127</sup> A/C.4/SR.2162, 7 November 1975, pp. 155-158.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 158-163, and A/C.4/SR.2163, 10 November 1975, UN, pp. 164-170. The suggestion that the Caribbean countries had imperialist ambitions over Belize did earn him a few sniggers.

<sup>129</sup> A/C.4/SR.2164, 11 November 1975, UN, pp. 175-176.

<sup>130</sup> A/C.4/SR.2165, 11 November 1975, UN, pp. 180-181.

able to achieve consensus, his delegation would withdraw its own resolution and abstain on both of the remaining drafts, although he particularly regretted abstaining on the Caribbean resolution, since the concepts reaffirmed in it were among the fundamental principles of Mexico's foreign policy.<sup>131</sup>

The Committee then voted on the pro-Guatemalan resolution, and rejected it by a vote of 62 to 22, with 41 abstentions. In addition to the Latin American countries, those voting in favour included Greece, Israel, Morocco and Spain. Most European countries abstained, but the Scandinavian countries, along with the UK, voted against. Mexico also abstained, as did the US. This resolution, it will be recalled, merely invited the UK and Guatemala to hold negotiations to settle the dispute concerning sovereignty over Belize.

The Caribbean resolution was adopted by a vote of 103 to 12, with 13 abstentions. In addition to the six Central American countries, including Panama, the votes against included five Latin America countries. The sole extra-regional vote against came from Morocco, which had designs on Western Sahara similar to those Guatemala had on Belize. The other Latin American countries (except Cuba) abstained, as did the US. Israel, Japan and the Philippines were the extra-regional members abstaining. We should note that not all who abstained disagreed with the resolution; Japan, for example, did so because Guatemala had agreed to support its candidacy for the ICJ.<sup>132</sup> That kind of horse-trading was part of the UN scenario.

### The Vote at the UNGA in 1975

On 8 December 1975 the Report of the Fourth Committee was considered by the General Assembly. The Foreign Minister of Guatemala made a lengthy presentation, in the course of which he made bitter allusions to the delegations that had supported the Caribbean resolution in the Fourth Committee.<sup>133</sup> He insisted that the UNGA had no competence to pass a resolution which arrogated

<sup>131</sup> A/C.4/SR.2172, 20 November 1975, UN, p. 258.

<sup>132</sup> Richard to FCO, 1 December 1975, FCO 7/2860.

<sup>133</sup> A/C.4/SR.2172, 20 November 1975, UN, pp. 1170-1173.

to it the attributes of a jurisdictional body, and demanded that a motion of no-competence should be submitted to a vote before voting on the resolution.<sup>134</sup> The six Central American countries along with Paraguay and Uruguay supported Guatemala's contention. Spain, Israel and nine Latin American countries abstained. The other 114 countries present rejected the motion.<sup>135</sup> The Assembly then adopted the Caribbean resolution by 110 votes to 9, with 16 abstentions.<sup>136</sup> This was a wildly favourable result for Belize, far greater than the British ever thought possible.

It is important to state clearly what this resolution, which would be used as a basis for future resolutions, actually proclaimed. It reaffirmed the inalienable right of the people of Belize to self-determination and independence and declared that the inviolability and territorial integrity of Belize must be preserved. It called on all States to facilitate the attainment by Belizeans of their goal of a secure independence. It called upon Guatemala and Britain, in close consultation with Belize, to urgently pursue their negotiations, and, most importantly, paragraph 5 "Declares that any proposals for the resolution of these differences of opinion that may emerge from the negotiations between the administering Power and the Government of Guatemala must be in accordance with the provisions of paragraphs 1 and 2 above," which declared that the inviolability and territorial integrity of Belize must be preserved.

That paragraph severely limited Britain's bargaining chips, by requiring the entire territory of Belize to become independent, regardless of whether or not Guatemala's claims were justified. On reflection, it is incredible that so many States supported that declaration, and even more incredible that Britain voted for it, since it was to tie its hands in achieving what it most desired, a negotiated settlement with Guatemala before independence. As we shall see,

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<sup>134</sup> A/C.4/SR.2172, 20 November 1975.

<sup>135</sup> A/C.4/SR.2172, 20 November 1975, p. 1181.

<sup>136</sup> A/C.4/SR.2172, 20 November 1975, pp. 1181-1182. Morocco, Paraguay, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic and the Central American countries voted against (but Guatemala did not participate in the vote). Sixteen countries abstained, including nine Latin American countries Israel, Japan, Malawi, Mauritania, Philippines, Spain and the USA.



Britain tried hard for six years to violate that declaration it had voted for, and Belize kept sticking it in her face.

## After the Resolution: Persisting Pressures

### By-Passing the Resolution

In late November Rowlands visited Guatemala and Mexico. In Guatemala, Rowlands told President Laugerud that he did not regard the UN resolution as “all-embracing,” and that he was prepared to deal with matters of vital concern to Guatemala in the fields of security and foreign affairs. He reported home that “the Guatemalans were clearly relieved at this interpretation of the resolution”.<sup>137</sup> Laugerud insisted that a territorial arrangement—at one point he referred to “a small slice”—would be necessary, and Rowlands said that the territorial question could be looked at later. In Mexico, Rabasa said that if Belize wanted independence soon, she might well have to cede territory, although he would not formally advise Belize along those lines. In his view, a small territorial concession would not oblige Mexico to revive her claim. Echeverría advised he would favour a British reduction of forces to strengthen the hand of the Guatemalan moderates (in which he included Laugerud!).<sup>138</sup>

Rowlands reported to Callaghan that Guatemala had agreed to resume negotiations in February, and he recommended that Britain withdraw one company of troops from Belize. He stated that Britain would soon have to decide whether to press the Belizeans to make a small territorial concession. Callaghan, no doubt having a better political handle on the situation, told Rowlands that “you should not press the Belize Government on concessions,” and that “I am not in favour of withdrawing troops yet—or aircraft”.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Galsworthy to FCO, 29 November 1975, FCO 7/2860.

<sup>138</sup> Galsworthy to FCO, 2 December 1975, FCO 7/2861.

<sup>139</sup> Callaghan to Rowlands, in Dales to Rowlands, 15 December 1975, FCO 7/2861. Emphasis in original.

And so ended 1975, a momentous year for Belize's struggle for independence. That year too Generalissimo Franco, Spain's long-time dictator, died, and Spain's colony of Western Sahara became embroiled in a claim to the territory by Morocco, their Guatemala; Margaret Thatcher was elected leader of the Conservative Party (in her watch as Prime Minister the Union Jack would be lowered in Belize); the last US troops were evacuated from Vietnam; and Cuba's troops saved the newly independent Angola from being overrun by the South African army.

### Negotiations in 1976

Talks had been scheduled to take place in February, but the earthquake that devastated Guatemala on 5 February 1976 forced their postponement until the end of April. FCO officer Patrick Duff prepared a paper on British policy, taking account of Callaghan's desire for a settlement by the end of 1976. He wondered, presciently, whether the Guatemalan government would find it easier "to accept the independence of Belize if it were to be decided by us unilaterally rather than for them to have to justify their acceptance of Belizean independence by means of a Treaty which, however worded, would acknowledge their 'surrender'".<sup>140</sup> Duff considered several options, but favoured independence in March 1977, and asking the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to start considering the "granting of a short term (18 months-2 years) defence guarantee to Belize as an alternative to maintaining a garrison in Belize indefinitely". At a meeting with MOD and Treasury representatives, the MOD favoured "forcing Belize to give up a slice of territory in order to get a settlement". The Treasury representative said money was tight, and asked about "the option of abandoning Belize". The MOD added that "we have considered abandoning other territories," and that "if principles were too expensive they were sometimes abandoned".<sup>141</sup> The FCO's Undersecretary Stanley argued that the *status quo* was more expensive, what with escalating costs and having to reinforce the garrison on occasion, as had happened twice within the previous five years. Some flexibility was required to carry

<sup>140</sup> Duff to Stanley, 27 February 1976, FCO 7/3112.

<sup>141</sup> "Record of a Meeting in FCO on 1 April 1976," 1 April 1976, FCO 7/3113.

forward the negotiations, which necessitated the offer of a continued, if limited, British presence after independence. The MOD noted that such an offer would require clear ministerial consent, and Stanley was forced to agree to postpone consideration of a defence guarantee, but insisted that some movement on the Belize Defence Force (BDF) was necessary, or else the Belizeans would back off from the negotiations. It was agreed to submit an urgent case to the Treasury for assistance with the costs of creating a BDF.

### The New Orleans Talks

In preparation for talks in New Orleans, Secretary of State Callaghan conceded that “the prospects of the talks leading to a successful conclusion are poor,” as the Guatemalans were demanding about a fifth of Belizean land, which was unacceptable to the Belizeans and to himself. He had given the MOD an undertaking that the draft treaty would not commit the UK to the military defence of Belize after independence, but warned Prime Minister Wilson that there may be “a need to consider some sort of interim short-term defence arrangement . . . immediately following independence”.<sup>142</sup>

Rowlands informed the US that Britain would be putting forward proposals, many of the provisions of which were “very close to Kissinger’s ideas while some go further in trying to meet Guatemala’s fears for security”. The British offer would not include land, and the hope was that Molina would not raise that issue “at this early stage of the negotiations”.<sup>143</sup> When Kissinger visited Guatemala after the earthquake, however, Molina told him that “some cession of territory would be an indispensable part of a settlement”.<sup>144</sup>

The talks were held in New Orleans in April 1976. Rowlands decided to have private meetings alone with Molina “as a substitute for real negotiation in the plenary sessions”. He proposed that Belize would sign a treaty with Guatemala and the UK limiting its right to enter into military accords,

<sup>142</sup> Callaghan to Wilson, 12 March 1976, FCO 7/3112.

<sup>143</sup> Briefing note, WIAD, 23 January 1976, FCO 7/3111.

<sup>144</sup> Note by Samuel, 8 March 1976, FCO 7/3112.

establish a Joint Defence Council and agree to consult on matters of foreign policy. There would also be provisions for economic cooperation, “with agreement on territorial waters, access to ports, free transit of goods, etc., and a Joint Development Fund to which the UK would pay a substantial sum”. Molina did not present any proposals himself, but he made it clear that the British offer was insufficient, principally because there was no territorial element. Rowlands reported to Callaghan that “we should not necessarily slam the door on territorial adjustments,” and added:

But in the last resort we shall have to be in a position to appeal to the UN and to “threaten” to bring Belize to independence without a settlement. This might involve us in some sort of military confrontation and raises the question of a defence guarantee for a period of time after independence. This, I fear, may be our only real hope—either of compelling Guatemala to negotiate reasonably or of achieving independence for Belize. I hope my pessimism is unfounded.<sup>145</sup>

It was not, but London was so entrenched in its refusal to provide a defence guarantee after independence, and so persistently hopeful, against all evidence, that it was possible to reach a negotiated settlement with Guatemala, that it took another five years and a change of government before the British faced up to the realities.

### The *Sandinistas* and General Torrijos

The urgent task for Belize was to expand its support base, particularly in Latin America. In Central America, guerrilla movements were struggling against massive odds that included US support for the repressive regimes, and there seemed to be no prospect of immediate victory. In Latin America, military dictatorships predominated. The only cause that had broad regional and international support was that of the Panamanian people, led by General Omar Torrijos, to regain the Panama Canal territories from the US. Price had been to Panama

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<sup>145</sup> Rowlands to Secretary of State, FCO, 29 April 1976, FCO 44/1350.

several times attempting to meet Torrijos, but had never succeeded in doing so.

Then in May 1976 a small Nicaraguan delegation, representing the *Frente Sandinista por la Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) that was fighting a guerrilla war against the US-supported dictator Anastacio Somoza, came to Belize clandestinely, headed by Catholic poet-priest Ernesto Cardenal, seeking support and arms for the revolution. Although all that Price could offer was quiet solidarity, he and Cardenal struck up a friendship, and Cardenal came away with a commitment to Belize's struggle for independence. He thought highly of Price: "apart from being a great leader and statesman he is also a saint, which is something very unusual in a statesman".<sup>146</sup> Cardenal felt that international solidarity for Belize would make a Guatemalan invasion impossible, and in his future solidarity work for Nicaragua, he would always mention the Belize cause, convinced that a democratic independent state in Central America would aid the cause of democracy in Nicaragua and elsewhere in the isthmus.

Cardenal was close to Torrijos, and he arranged for Price to meet Torrijos in Panama, and thereafter Price could see Torrijos whenever he wanted to; they became fast friends.<sup>147</sup> Omar Torrijos, whose government had the year before supported a declaration affirming Guatemala's rights to Belize, became a total convert to the Belize cause, and with the convert's zeal he did everything he could to further that cause, putting his resources, including diplomatic personnel throughout the region, at the disposal of Belize. Torrijos offered his executive jet to Price for lobbying around the region, and arranged meetings for him with Latin American leaders. In the end, he went so far as to offer to send 1,000 troops to defend Belize. He had a team of collaborators that he put to work on the Belize case, urging them on with statements like "Price is the José Martí of Belize".<sup>148</sup> Torrijos' support became a critical factor in Belize's internationalisation strategy.

<sup>146</sup> Cardenal interview in *Gombay*, Belize, February 1979.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Price. See also Robert Leslie, "Price Takes on the World," in *George Price Father of the Nation Belize*, ION Media, Belize, 2000, pp. 49-56, and Godfrey Smith, *George Price, A Life Revealed*, Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston, 2011, 99. 207-210.

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Aristedes Rojo, President of Panama from October 11, 1978 to July 31, 1982.

## The New York Meetings: Going Off Course

In the meantime, the Belizeans had to continue negotiating. A meeting of officials was held in New York in June 1976: Aycinena led the Guatemalan team, while Richard headed the British delegation and Rafael Fonseca<sup>149</sup> represented Belize. The Guatemalans presented a new draft which they said merely “filled in the gaps” of the British draft from the New Orleans talks, but which in fact included significant new elements. First of all, the Guatemalan draft was a single bilateral treaty rather than the trilateral two-treaty package. Also, the territory of Belize was not specified, the economic clauses proposed a much closer relationship, and Guatemala would have “the automatic right to send troops into Belize whether invited to or not and some power to intervene in Belize’s internal affairs”.<sup>150</sup> The British went through the draft with the Guatemalans and the following day presented what they called a “marriage” of the two drafts. The British side accepted the Guatemalan proposal for a bilateral treaty and agreed that the entire treaty would be incorporated in Belize’s independence constitution, thereby ensuring its compliance.<sup>151</sup>

The following day the Guatemalans came back with revised proposals; they dropped their demand for the right to send troops into Belize and interfere in its internal affairs. But they made several changes to the British draft designed to give them greater influence in Belize, and proposed that in the case of deadlock in the Joint Defence Council (JDC) the matter must be submitted to the Central American Defence Council. Richard reported that his preliminary impression was that “we have at last begun a genuine negotiation which might conceivably lead to an acceptable settlement”.<sup>152</sup> This, despite the fact that he had

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<sup>149</sup> Rafael Fonseca was a long-standing civil servant, Price’s trusted Financial Secretary who often acted as Governor in the Governor’s absence.

<sup>150</sup> Richard to FCO, 16 June 1976, FCO 44/1363.

<sup>151</sup> Record of meetings on 15-17 June 1976, FCO 44/1363.

<sup>152</sup> Richard to FCO, 17 June 1976, FCO 44/1363.

reported the day before that “we are in no doubt that the Guatemalans continue to have in mind a substantial cession of territory.”<sup>153</sup>

Richard had significantly exceeded what the Belizean government had agreed as the remit for negotiations. Price had sent a minister, Santiago Perdomo, to Guatemala and he reported back that the Guatemalans were delighted to have achieved a bilateral form of treaty. They believed the British would help them get at least two of the Sapodilla Cayes and some land in the south and that the British would not give Belize a defence guarantee. They claimed that Kissinger was pressing Callaghan to bring about an early settlement.<sup>154</sup> In July Price visited London and told Rowlands that he believed the British had gone off course since January, when it had been agreed that “we would proceed in accordance with the UN resolution”.<sup>155</sup> He had understood this to mean that concurrently with the negotiations, arrangements would be made to provide for the security of an independent Belize. Belize had gone along with the British and agreed to several articles in the two-treaty package, and had allocated money for the BDF. On the British side, there was no news about support for the BDF; Britain had proposed a bilateral treaty and promised to include its provisions in the Belize constitution (which he declared to be “out of the question”).<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, the position on territorial integrity had been eroded, the JDC had become an executive body and the foreign policy provisions were unsatisfactory. To cap it all, Richards had indicated that Belize would have to make further concessions on defence arrangements with other parties.

Despite this impressive list of disagreements, Rowlands replied that he did not share Price’s view that the UK had gone off course; he felt that although some changes had been made to the treaty provisions, he did not believe these conflicted with the guidelines laid down in

<sup>153</sup> Richard to FCO, 16 June 1976, FCO 44/1363.

<sup>154</sup> McEntee to FCO, 16 July 1976, FCO 44/1364.

<sup>155</sup> Record of a meeting on 21 July 1976, 30 July 1976, FCO 44/1365.

<sup>156</sup> The placing of a bilateral treaty between two countries in the constitution of a third may indeed be without precedent in the annals of modern constitutional history.

January or with the terms of the UN resolution.<sup>157</sup> Price insisted that “certain basic and inviolable principles had been set aside” and that the failure to provide security arrangements could also be described as going off course.

At a later meeting with officials, Price, joined by Shoman and Rafael Fonseca, went through the British draft treaty and reached agreement after the British accepted several amendments which more clearly referred to the preservation of the territorial integrity of Belize, stripped the JDC of any executive function, and made it clear that Belize was to be in total control of its foreign policy.<sup>158</sup> Commenting on a British proposed article excluding Cuban troops from an independent Belize, Price said that Belize could not exclude the possibility of Belize seeking Cuban help if it proved necessary.<sup>159</sup>

Meeting with Rowlands the following day, Price set out three basic requirements for independence: no land cession; no diminution of sovereignty; and real security arrangements to guarantee its future existence, not just a treaty document.<sup>160</sup> Rowlands admitted that Belize's action in internationalising the problem had “galvanised the UK government to deal more seriously and urgently with it”. He insisted that Belizean sovereignty would not be eroded by the treaty, and declared that he had never said anything to undermine the territorial integrity of Belize; he had told Molina that he could make no proposals on territory.<sup>161</sup>

Price said that Belize was willing to accept the British draft treaty only on the understanding that some separate arrangements would be made for Belize's security and that no land would be ceded. He was, however, prepared to cede seaward areas and part of Belize's exclusive economic zone.<sup>162</sup> Taking a broad historical view of Price's

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<sup>157</sup> In fact, Rowlands had acted against the clear terms of the UN resolution, which demanded respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty.

<sup>158</sup> Record of meeting at 4:30 p.m. on 21 July 1976, FCO 44/1365.

<sup>159</sup> Record of meeting at 12 noon on 22 July 1976, FCO 44/1365.

<sup>160</sup> Record of meeting at 10:30 a.m. on 22 July 1976, FCO 44/1365.

<sup>161</sup> The record would seem to belie this.

<sup>162</sup> The readiness to consider “ceding” maritime areas was based on the fact that Britain had traditionally claimed only a three-mile territorial sea, so that the twelve-mile



position, it appears that these were the only real concessions he was ever prepared to make. Because of his concern for the security of Belizeans, he strung the British along for a long time, while the internationalisation process developed support for a secure, integral and unfettered Belize, by letting them hope he might make other concessions, although he never agreed to any.

In July 1976, British Ministers approved “the agreed settlement plus assistance to the BDF and a defence guarantee for up to one year after independence”.<sup>163</sup> It was very unlikely that Guatemala would accept the British draft treaty without land cession, and the defence guarantee was tied to such agreement, and thus meaningless.

Another meeting of officials was held in August in New York; both sides tabled new versions of the draft treaty.<sup>164</sup> A working group produced an amalgamated draft, although no agreement was possible on the defence provisions. British officials spent much time in the ensuing weeks working on the draft treaty,<sup>165</sup> apparently assuming that there was now a good chance of reaching a settlement with Guatemala. But the land factor was still lurking, although it had not been mentioned in the meeting of officials.

### The Panama Talks: a Charade, but Serious

Another major diplomatic triumph for Belize was achieved at the Non-Aligned Summit in Colombo, Sri Lanka, where Belize was represented by Price and Shoman. The NAM awarded Belize a “special status,” and declared:

The Conference welcomed the participation of Belize whose aspirations for independence continue to be frustrated by territorial claims. It expressed its unconditional support for the inalienable right of the people of Belize to self-determination, independence

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limit and the 200-mile exclusive economic zone that the UNCLOS had set was not a traditional part of Belize’s territory.

<sup>163</sup> Duff to McEntee, 30 July 1976, FCO 44/1371 and FCO 44/1359.

<sup>164</sup> Richard to FCO, 6 August 1976, FCO 44/1365.

<sup>165</sup> See, for example, “Commentary on revised draft treaty in light of discussions in New York 3-5 August 1976,” August 1976, FCO 44/1365.

and territorial integrity. In urging the strict implementation of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3432 (XXX), the Conference called upon the parties concerned to pursue the negotiations in conformity with the principles laid down therein.<sup>166</sup>

Omar Torrijos was also at Colombo garnering support for the Panama Canal to be returned to his country, and they discussed ways in which they could help each other. The next ministerial negotiating session was held in Panama, where Torrijos took the opportunity to present an interesting proposal to Rowlands.

In preparing for the Panama meeting, British Secretary of State Anthony Crosland (Callaghan had become Prime Minister on 5 April 1976 after the resignation of Harold Wilson) noted that “it is becoming increasingly clear that we shall be unable to offer territory as part of the price of a settlement”. He worried, however, that “the Americans seem likely to continue to urge cession of territory,” and wondered whether they could be assuaged by offering to hold a plebiscite in the area demanded by Guatemala. British officials pointed out, however, that such a concept would be unacceptable to Belize and to many members of the UN.<sup>167</sup> Rowlands admitted “that we should have to accept the unlikelihood of Belize agreement to cession of territory and work for a settlement on a different basis”.<sup>168</sup> Price, meanwhile, in his National Day address on 10 September, again publicly declared that Belize would not give up any territory or compromise on its sovereignty, and that the negotiations could not be drawn out indefinitely.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Cited in “Belize: The Address to the Fourth Committee of Deputy Premier Rogers in November 1976,” Belize, 1976.

<sup>167</sup> See, for example, Richard to FCO, 1 September 1976 and Willson to Stanley, 6 September 1976, FCO 44/1359.

<sup>168</sup> “Note of an office meeting held by Mr Rowlands on 26 August 1976,” WIAD, 2 September 1976, FCO 44/1359.

<sup>169</sup> McEntee to FCO, 11 September 1976, FCO 44/1359.

The ministerial meeting in Panama was a rather surreal affair: the large delegations<sup>170</sup> exchanged speeches and worked in great detail on articles of the draft treaty, but all this was rendered irrelevant by the fact that, at a private meeting before the talks, Molina told Rowlands that Guatemala was demanding an even larger territorial cession than before: the border would be below Dangriga. They agreed not to discuss territory in the plenary meetings, in order to avoid breakdown.<sup>171</sup> Rowlands said nothing to Price about the Guatemalan demand,<sup>172</sup> but Price must have suspected something, for he made a special declaration at the close of the plenary affirming that Belize would not accept any proposal involving the cession of land.<sup>173</sup>

In another private meeting after the talks, Molina handed Rowlands a map showing the Guatemalan claim to the rivers Riachuelo, Chiquibul and Sittee.<sup>174</sup> Rowlands told him that his proposal was quite impossible, and tabled the British proposal for a seabed concession, but “Molina was appalled at how little we were offering and said he would have expected at least the Sapodilla Cayes to be included”. Rowlands withheld from Price the enlarged Guatemalan demand for land. A copy of the map showing the Guatemalan demand was sent to Governor Peter McEntee, but with instructions not to show Price.<sup>175</sup>

Rowlands confessed to his Secretary of State that the talks were “frankly another charade, though this time with serious implications”. Both he and Molina “tacitly acknowledged that we were staring defeat in the face”. He considered that “there is no way we can negotiate the Guatemalans ‘down’ to the Moho in conventional talks,” but rather

<sup>170</sup> The UK delegation was led by Rowlands and had five other officials, with Price and his team adding another four, while the Guatemalan delegation led by Foreign Minister Molina numbered ten.

<sup>171</sup> John (UK Embassy, Panama) to FCO, 23 September 1976, FCO 44/1361.

<sup>172</sup> Rowlands claims he had to take stock and decide how to proceed; “I did not have the authority to pull the plug on the negotiations, so I had to stall.”: Interview with Rowlands.

<sup>173</sup> Record of meeting on 22 September at 3:30 p.m., FCO 44/1366.

<sup>174</sup> John to FCO, 23 September 1976, FCO 44/1361.

<sup>175</sup> Crosland to McEntee, 29 September 1976, FCO 44/1366. I have not been able to gain access to that map.

that the UK should put the proposal to Guatemala at a high level on a “take-it-or-leave-it” basis. Rowlands admitted that the chances of Price agreeing were very slim, but added that “if the territorial slice were the only thing between us and a settlement, I would wish to bring maximum pressure on Mr Price to accept”.<sup>176</sup> Not until 13 October did Rowlands inform Price about the Guatemalan demand, but asked him not to make it public.<sup>177</sup>

### British Delay Reinforcement

Meanwhile, the FCO and the MOD were engaged in a lively debate about the need to reinforce the Belize garrison in light of intelligence reports which suggested Guatemala's readiness to attack Belize. Laugerud had gone to the border with western Belize, and said that the Guatemalans are prepared to take what was rightly theirs. He urged the people to be ready to take over Belize.<sup>178</sup>

Rowlands asked that reinforcement be deferred until after the next Ministerial talks,<sup>179</sup> but the MOD noted that a study had concluded “that the force level in the colony can no longer meet our concept of defence”. Defence Secretary Mulley argued that if they failed to take the necessary military measures they would suffer a defeat, and “It would be a serious decision consciously to put British troops at risk in the manner Mr Rowlands was suggesting”.<sup>180</sup> Strong words indeed, but Rowlands remained undaunted and proceeded to bargain down the stated requirements of the Chiefs of Staff, although Prime Minister Callaghan inclined to the view expressed by Mulley.<sup>181</sup> The compromise, in which the FCO's views dominated, allowed only a small reinforcement of 25 gunners; all other moves would be held up until after the Rowlands/Molina meeting.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Rowlands to Belmopan, 13 October 1976, FCO 44/1360.

<sup>178</sup> FCO 44/1360, Transcript of Laugerud's speech, 30 September 1976.

<sup>179</sup> Rowlands to Mason, 12 July 1976, FCO 44/1360.

<sup>180</sup> Fred Mulley to Crosland, 19 November 1976, FCO 44/1362.

<sup>181</sup> Private Secretary to the PM to Dales, 30 December 1976, DEFE 24/1492.

<sup>182</sup> Crosland to Mulley, 7 January 1977, DEFE 24/1492.

### Belize's Efforts on Defence and the Torrijos Initiative

Throughout 1976, the question of finding a defence alternative was uppermost in Price's mind. He had discussed with his CARICOM colleagues the possibility of their joining a defence pact, but Rowlands described the idea as "a dangerous nonsense in terms of Belize/Latin American relations".<sup>183</sup> Rowlands took a different view, however, of the "Torrijos initiative".<sup>184</sup> Torrijos told Price that he had devised a plan with Oduber of Costa Rica and Venezuela's Carlos Andrés Pérez, in which the three countries, possibly with others, would make a public declaration for Belizean independence and send a composite military force there. He offered to send 1000 Panamanian troops, with Venezuelan and possibly Jamaican participation in order to defend Belize against external attack and to train her own troops.<sup>185</sup> Rowlands felt that the proposal should not be rejected out of hand. Jamaica's Manley gave his full support to the Torrijos initiative and stood ready to help in any way if the idea should develop.<sup>186</sup> The British gave an account of the Torrijos initiative to Washington and got conflicting reactions. One State Department official said that "the Torrijos Plan was an interesting and unexpected development. It was difficult to say how the Guatemalans would react if their Latin American support was seriously eroded".<sup>187</sup> But another called the Torrijos plan "a pipedream" and warned against expecting much from the Venezuelans, whose traditional policy and bias toward Guatemala was hardly likely to have changed.<sup>188</sup>

### Action at the UN in 1976

The UNGA season started soon after the talks in Panama. The UK Mission at the UN noted that "if Price and Shoman represented to

<sup>183</sup> Collins to Duff, 15 January 1976, FCO 7/3114, Duff to Posnett, 5 February 1976, FCO 7/3114.

<sup>184</sup> Record of the Rowlands-Torrijos conversation on 18 September 1976, 27 September 1976, FCO 44/1346.

<sup>185</sup> John to FCO, 21 September 1976, FCO 44/1361.

<sup>186</sup> McEntee to FCO, tel #67 of 30 September 1976, FCO 44/1346.

<sup>187</sup> Ramsbotham to FCO, 30 September 1976, FCO 44/1360.

<sup>188</sup> Ramsbotham to FCO, 20 October 1976, FCO 44/1360.

the Caribbeans and Africans that there was a risk that Belize's territorial integrity might be put in jeopardy they could, I think, expect a large measure of third-world support for a strong resolution". They warned that "we must clearly do all we can to avoid a situation in which future UN resolutions are directed as much against ourselves as against Guatemala," and concluded that "from the evidence we have, [Price] is playing for a breakdown and for a defence guarantee from HMG".<sup>189</sup>

Belize was able to strengthen the resolution by three elements: early independence, the call for States to refrain from any action that would threaten the territorial integrity of Belize and the request that Britain and Guatemala report at the next session of the General Assembly on such agreements as may have been reached in the negotiations. The second and third elements were aimed at Britain: it should not compromise Belize's territory, and there should be transparency as well as speed in the negotiations.

The debates in the Fourth Committee were less intense than the year before, with little new ground covered. The Caribbean draft resolution had 53 co-sponsors, and the vote in the Fourth Committee, taken on 17 November 1976, was 111 in favour, 9 against and 15 abstentions. The most important addition to the votes in favour was that of Panama. At the Plenary meeting of the General Assembly, the resolution was adopted by 115 votes to 8, with 15 abstentions.<sup>190</sup>

### British Continue Violating UN Resolutions

Molina met Rowlands in New York on 9 January 1977 and demanded cession up to the Monkey River, while Rowlands argued for a smaller slice of territory. Still, the British reported that the atmosphere at the meeting was good and that negotiations would continue.<sup>191</sup> The British were convinced that once Guatemala assumed that Belize would go to independence "unilaterally," an invasion of Belize would be almost

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<sup>189</sup> Richardson to Young, 30 September 1976, FCO 44/1360.

<sup>190</sup> UN General Assembly 31<sup>st</sup> Session Official Records, 85<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting, 1 December 1976.

<sup>191</sup> Crosland to Belmopan, 13 January 1977, DEFE 24/1492.

certain; hence the need to pretend that negotiations were fruitful and to agree on continuing them. The Belizeans, who had long ago concluded that no agreement could ever be reached with Guatemala, kept busy expanding the scope and size of their international support. The new Mexican President, López Portillo, was conspicuously taking a firm stand in favour of Belize. Price and other members of his team also kept up contacts with leaders in Africa and Asia. The lobbying efforts, especially in Central America, included political parties in and out of power, civil society, the press, trade unions and students.

In May 1977, the Government of Guatemala formally broke diplomatic ties with Panama, a belated response to Panama's vote in the UN and its very active support for the Belize cause. President Laugerud made very bitter and personal attacks against Torrijos, and accused him of being the bridge for Fidel Castro to have a foothold in Belize.<sup>192</sup> This occurred one day after the Mexican newspaper *El Universal* quoted Torrijos saying to a group of journalists: "Yes, I have stuck my hands into Belize and I'm not going to take them out . . . ever since Laugerud learned this he is angry with me. I am going to help George Price because he is a mystic and needs it and it doesn't matter to me that Kjell Laugerud is angry."<sup>193</sup>

### The US Handling of the Claim Under President Carter

US elections in 1976 led to the inauguration in January 1977 of President Jimmy Carter, who proclaimed a policy of making human rights important in foreign affairs and announced that the US government would submit to Congress a report on human rights in the countries proposed for security assistance. Forestalling this, the Guatemalan government informed the US that it chose to decline in advance any aid or sale of military equipment. Such aid had in any case already been compromised because of delays in certain military sales engendered by

<sup>192</sup> Infopress 243A, May 1977, cited in Roberto Carpio Nicolle, *Belice Punto y Aparte*, Guatemala, 1981.

<sup>193</sup> Quoted in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume XV, Central America (hereinafter cited as FRUS, 1977-1980), p. 31

the Belize issue.<sup>194</sup> The US Congress subsequently cancelled military aid to Guatemala, which relied increasingly on Israel for military supplies and advice. As a result, relations between Guatemala and the US were very strained throughout Carter's presidency, although his administration continued the policy of promoting a negotiated settlement and of urging Belize to agree to land cession and other concessions.

### Advances at OAS and CHOGM

The General Assembly of the OAS was held in Grenada in June 1977; Belizean representatives, including Minister Florencio Marin and Robert Leslie as well as Shoman, were present at the invitation of the government of Grenada. All the CARICOM members of the OAS spoke strongly against Guatemala. Panama, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago issued a Joint Communiqué in support of Belize's independence and territorial integrity, and expressed their "grave concern at the threat of aggression against Belize".<sup>195</sup> No country spoke out in favour of Guatemala's claim. US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance called for the elimination of Article 8 of the OAS Charter,<sup>196</sup> which excluded Belize by barring American States from joining the OAS if they had a border dispute with a current OAS member. He declared that "the question of Belize is of great importance and we observe it with great care. We have discussed it with our friends and colleagues during this Assembly".<sup>197</sup> There were indeed many private discussions in the corridors which advanced the cause of Belize.

At the CHOGM held in London in June 1977, Prime Minister Callaghan gave the assurance that there would be no settlement with Guatemala without the full consent of the government and people of Belize. To have wrested this promise from Callaghan in that forum was

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<sup>194</sup> Telegram Guatemalan MRE to State Department, National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, D770085-0230. In FRUS, 1977-1980, pp. 1-5.

<sup>195</sup> Cited in "The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute Working Paper prepared by the Commonwealth Secretariat," September 1977, CMCB/77/1, CSL.

<sup>196</sup> FRUS, 1977-1980, p. 13.

<sup>197</sup> Quoted in *Belize Punto y Aparte*, p. 22.



a major victory for Belize; British officials would often refer to it in future as a limiting factor. Most importantly, the meeting agreed to set up a Commonwealth Ministerial Committee on Belize (CMCB), comprised of Barbados, Canada, Guyana, India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Nigeria and Tanzania. The mandate of the Committee was to assist the parties concerned in finding early and effective arrangements for the independence of Belize on the basis of the views expressed at Meetings of the Commonwealth Heads of Government and in accordance with the Charter and relevant resolutions of the United Nations and to render all practicable assistance in achieving these objectives.<sup>198</sup>

### “The Colony Will Have Become Indefensible”

Even as the Commonwealth meeting was being held, there were reports of Guatemalan preparations to attack Belize. On 12 June 1977, the Guatemalan government issued a communiqué declaring that if Belize were to unilaterally proceed to independence, Guatemala would use its military to protect its rights over the territory. It charged that Price had subordinated himself to the expansionist interests of Cuba, whose intention was to establish a beachhead to intensify its communist subversion in Central America, and that he had also facilitated the opportunistic intervention of Omar Torrijos. The communiqué claimed that Britain, in complicity with Price and through him with Cuba and Panama, was plotting actions of subversion, terrorism and agitation in Guatemala City with a view to creating a public order crisis and obliging the government to displace troops and thereby weaken the offensive capacity of the army in areas bordering Belize. It went on to declare that all those who participated in activities that favoured treason against Guatemala would be proceeded against with all the vigour of the law, which declared such crimes to be punishable by death.<sup>199</sup>

On 30 June President Laugerud declared that “the armed forces are ready to prevent Great Britain from despoiling our country of the

<sup>198</sup> “The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute Working Paper prepared by the Commonwealth Secretariat,” September 1977, CMCB/77/1, File SG/CF/BEL, CSL.

<sup>199</sup> Cited in Carpio Nicolle, *Belize Punto y Aparte*, p. 19.

territory of Belize,<sup>200</sup> and on 2 July, in his annual report to Congress, he asked the population to be prepared to face sacrifices and hardships if the army had to act to recover Belize.<sup>201</sup> In late June the Barbados government seized an aircraft loaded with Israeli arms and ammunition that had stopped in Barbados on the way to Guatemala from Lisbon.<sup>202</sup> The British military warned of “the risk of a severe military reverse at Guatemalan hands if the talks break down by 7 or 8 July,”<sup>203</sup> and the Chief of the Defence Staff noted that US pressure on the UK not to reinforce before the talks had served to consolidate force ratios in favour of Guatemala.<sup>204</sup> Mulley wrote to Secretary of State David Owen<sup>205</sup> relaying these fears and requesting support for reinforcements, adding that “the situation is volatile . . . if the Guatemalans do attack, the colony will have become indefensible”.<sup>206</sup>

Owen refused, arguing that reinforcement would convince the Guatemalans that Britain intended to move Belize to independence, and this would increase the likelihood of a pre-emptive strike.<sup>207</sup> But Prime Minister Callaghan decided to impose his authority. On 4 July, despite a message from the US that they had conducted an all-sources intelligence check which revealed no indication of imminent military action by Guatemala,<sup>208</sup> the British Cabinet decided to immediately reinforce the garrison at Belize with Harriers, tactical headquarters and an additional company, and HMS Achilles.<sup>209</sup> Callaghan told his ministers that “it’s not the President of the United States’ head on the block if something happens. It’s mine—and yours”.

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<sup>200</sup> See newspaper *La Nación*, 30 June 1977; cited in Bardini, p. 122.

<sup>201</sup> Bardini, p. 122.

<sup>202</sup> Roberts to FCO, 28 June 1977; Owen to Belmopan, 28 June 1977; Roberts to FCO, 29 June 1977, all in DEFE 24/1300.

<sup>203</sup> Perkins to CDS, 29 June 1977, DEFE 24/1300.

<sup>204</sup> Chief of the Defence Staff to Mulley, 29 June 1977, DEFE 24/1300.

<sup>205</sup> Owen was appointed Minister of State at the Foreign Office in September 1976, and five months later when the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Crosland, died suddenly, Owen was appointed his successor.

<sup>206</sup> Mulley to Owen, 30 June 1977, DEFE 24/1300.

<sup>207</sup> Owen to Mulley, 1 July 1977, DEFE 24/1300.

<sup>208</sup> Moreton to FCO, 4 July 1977, DEFE 24/1300.

<sup>209</sup> Owen to Belmopan, 4 July 1977, DEFE 24/1300.

He went to elaborate lengths *not* to confide in the US until the stuff was well on the way.<sup>210</sup>

The talks began in Washington on 7 July. The British repeated their previous proposals, short of land cession,<sup>211</sup> and Rowlands took pains to assure Molina that there could be no question of a sudden or secret move to make Belize independent. Molina insisted that any agreement must include territorial cession; he again proposed cession of territory up to the Monkey River. Price declared that a settlement could not involve territorial cession. On the second day, Rowlands was summoned by Vance, who complained that “you went behind our backs and reinforced, and now the Guatemalans will be inflamed and the negotiations will break off”.<sup>212</sup> Rowlands assured him that his remit was to keep negotiations going. Back at the talks, he informed Molina about the ongoing reinforcements, and took advantage of Molina’s fear that the UK meant to make a pre-emptive strike against Guatemala to assure him otherwise. He proposed that they issue a communiqué announcing continuing negotiations. Both sides agreed to “take prompt and appropriate measures to decrease tension” and preserve peace in the area. It was also agreed that Rowlands would visit Guatemala to discuss “the next stages in the negotiations.”<sup>213</sup> When he did, Laugerud insisted that cession up to the Monkey River was essential.<sup>214</sup>

### Belize Consolidates Support

Belize, meanwhile, continued its efforts to increase support for its cause among the Latin American countries, and on 6 August 1977, at the conclusion of a Summit Meeting of Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Venezuela, Panama and Jamaica (a meeting engineered by Torrijos) the following Communiqué, known as the Bogotá Declaration, was issued:

<sup>210</sup> Interview with Rowlands. Emphasis in original.

<sup>211</sup> At least in the plenary sessions; see below.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with Rowlands.

<sup>213</sup> FRUS, 1977-1980, p. 20.

<sup>214</sup> Owen to Callaghan, 11 August 1977, DEFE 13/1131.

After listening to the statement of the Prime Minister of Jamaica on the question of Belize they agreed that a solution should be found by the peaceful methods consecrated in the Charter of the OAS and the UN and in accordance with respect for its territorial integrity and with the principle of the free self-determination of peoples.<sup>215</sup>

Price visited Mexico a few days later and asked Foreign Minister Santiago Roel to help further by participating in a proposed multi-national defence guarantee. Roel explained that “to join in a defence guarantee would bring about a war with Guatemala, which Mexico did not want”.<sup>216</sup> He instead offered Mexico as a signatory to a treaty guaranteeing the independence of Belize in which the other signatories would be the UK, Belize and Guatemala. In a paper entitled “Bases to resolve the question of Belize,” Roel set out “the essential clauses” of the treaty, including recognition of the independence of Belize within the boundaries defined in the Anglo-Guatemalan and Anglo-Mexican treaties, the neutrality of Belize, a guarantee of the territorial integrity of Belize, “special agreements between Belize and Guatemala,” free access for Mexico to the Bay of Chetumal, and “specific obligations of the United Kingdom”. Nothing ever came of this interesting initiative, wherein Mexico would have taken the unprecedented step of guaranteeing the territorial integrity of another country, no doubt because Guatemala refused to even consider it.<sup>217</sup>

Foreign Minister Roel, who was a close confidant and friend of President Lopez Portillo, was totally against land cession, believing that this would only encourage Guatemala to apply “salami tactics” and try to get more and more. He told Rowlands that Mexico would not formally renounce its dormant claim, because he saw its value as a

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<sup>215</sup> “An Information Paper on Belize submitted by the British Government” to the CMCB, September 1977, CMCB/77/2, CSL.

<sup>216</sup> Price to Ramphal, 23 August 1977, enclosing a memorandum of the meeting with Roel and a translation of the Mexican paper on a defence guarantee, File I 33-2/2 Part A, CMCB, CSL.

<sup>217</sup> Price to Ramphal, 23 August 1977, enclosing a memorandum of the meeting with Roel and a translation of the Mexican paper on a defence guarantee, File I 33-2/2 Part A, CMCB, CSL, McEntee to FCO, tel No 237 of 19 August 1977, “Following is Mexican Proposal”.

negotiating counter and also because Mexico did not know whether a settlement was acceptable to Belize, which was the essential key for Mexico. Rowlands had the temerity to suggest mediation, and that Dean Rusk be the mediator. Roel did not favour mediation at all, and as to Rusk, he commented that “the Americans were partial and Rusk as a former Secretary of State could hardly be objective”. He also told Rowlands that he regarded the Guatemalan regime as fascist.<sup>218</sup>

Roel believed that once the British left, Mexico would be the only country that could stop Guatemala, and a settlement involving land cession would almost inescapably result in the transference of the military burden for Belize’s defence from Britain to Mexico. In a reference to Cuba responding to the request by Angola to assist it militarily against forces supported by South Africa, Roel said that he feared the “Angolisation” of Central America, which could be triggered by a Guatemalan military adventure or a Guatemalan confrontation with Mexico. He therefore opposed any land cession, and urged the British to maintain its military presence in Belize.<sup>219</sup>

Unlike Luis Echeverría, who he succeeded, López Portillo was totally against the dictators of Guatemala and outspokenly in favour of Belize’s unfettered independence, and he was in office in the critical period 1976 to 1982. In 1977, he publicly took issue with the statement in support of Guatemala’s claim made by King Juan Carlos of Spain on a visit to Guatemala, and instructed his diplomats at the UN and elsewhere to help Belize. He supported the *Frente Sandinista por la Liberación Nacional* and had close friendly relations with Cuba. The Guatemalan Generals were most unhappy with him.

But Guatemala had more than Mexico to worry about. During a visit to Costa Rica in August, the US Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Andrew Young,<sup>220</sup> was quoted as saying that “the government of the United States supports the desires for independence of the people of Belize”. Although the US Government later issued

<sup>218</sup> Telegram no. 483 of 17 December 1977 from British Embassy Mexico City to FCO.

<sup>219</sup> Telegram no. 433 of 17 November 1977 from British Embassy, Mexico to FCO.

<sup>220</sup> Andrew Young had been active in the civil rights movement and close to Martin Luther King.

a clarification that it required a negotiated solution between Britain and Guatemala, the reality of Young's sentiments was not lost on Guatemala.<sup>221</sup>

Immediately after the Washington talks, the British and the Belizeans began to strategize for the UNGA sessions in September. The British complained that "Shoman's mind seems to be moving in the direction of a resolution which calls for Belize's early independence and which omits, or plays down, any reference to further negotiations". They worried about Price's reaction if he "gets wind of the ideas which are now in our minds".<sup>222</sup> Those ideas included getting Guatemalan acceptance for cession up to the Moho and then pressuring Belize to accept this or go to arbitration.<sup>223</sup> Owen informed Callaghan that he would be attending the meeting of the CMCB in September, and that he expected "to come under considerable pressure from the Committee to find some alternative means of achieving independence".<sup>224</sup>

## Commonwealth Pressure

Belize was very fortunate in that in the very year that it launched its internationalisation strategy, Shridath Ramphal became the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, a post he was to hold for fifteen years, during which there was a significant growth in Commonwealth concern with global issues of peace and security and of political, economic and social justice. His excellent diplomatic skills and his strong influence with the African and Asian countries were absolutely critical in getting the Commonwealth to assist Belize in very practical ways, not least in its relations with the UK and later in negotiations with Guatemala.

Indeed, an important part of Belize's strategy was that the CMCB be used to pressure Britain to agree to provide a defence guarantee.

<sup>221</sup> Articles in *La Nación* and *El Gráfico*, quoted in *Belize Punto y Aparte*, p. 30.

<sup>222</sup> Murray to FCO, 13 July 1977, DEFE 13/1131. Emphasis added.

<sup>223</sup> Vance message to Owen, 22 June 1977, in Owen to Callaghan, 30 June 1977, DEFE 24/1300.

<sup>224</sup> Owen to Callaghan, 11 August 1977, DEFE 13/1131.

The Committee met on 28 September 1977 at the UN, and Owen revealed that the US had constantly put pressure on Britain to discuss territorial adjustment, that if Britain was not willing to look at this possibility US support could not be attracted, and that the Committee should look open-mindedly at the issue. Owen insisted that Britain had never told Guatemala that the independence of Belize was subject to agreement with them, although he would soon do exactly that. Price said that, after Rowlands' visit in July, "there was growing evidence that the Guatemalan Government was somehow led to believe, or pretended to believe, that Belize could get its independence only through a bilateral settlement between the United Kingdom and Guatemala".<sup>225</sup>

Owen claimed that "even Premier Price had accepted that they might have to discuss [land cession], although he had raised all the objections that were bound to be raised on any cession of territory". That was too much for Price, who, overcoming his natural courteousness and his hesitation to openly defy Britain in public, took the floor to state that although he did not have the power to prevent Britain and Guatemala from discussing territorial cession, he had made it very clear that discussions of Belize's territorial integrity must be in accordance with UN resolutions. Owen then pledged that Britain would do nothing that Belize or the Committee were not aware of.

### US to Britain: Cede More Land

The US Under-Secretary, Philip Habib, had asked Owen to consider giving a bit more than the Moho to Guatemala, since this had been suggested at a meeting of President Carter with Laugerud.<sup>226</sup> Rowlands

<sup>225</sup> "Records of Meetings of the CMCB, 1977-1980," Commonwealth Secretariat, undated, CSL.

<sup>226</sup> However, Carter had earlier told the State Department "to press the Guatemalans to accept the British offer of a line at or near the Moho": FRUS, 1977-1980, p. 30. And the record of Carter's talk with Laugerud does not refer to any suggestion by Carter for more land cession beyond the Moho; Carter in fact pushed the idea of some sort of mediation: FRUS, 1977-1980, 31-37. So where did Habib get that from? Was it a ruse to himself try to push the British beyond Moho? It is sometimes difficult to separate facts from alternative facts!

was worried that the Carter/Laugerud talks would set back the progress he thought the UK had made in pushing the Guatemalans to a settlement on the British terms.<sup>227</sup> He lamented the fact that Britain had gone “as far as we have to meet the Americans merely to find that they are now asking for more”. He suggested that the only way they could bring the US around was to appear adamant, otherwise the US would “take comfort from our ambivalence, rather than applying pressure on the Guatemalans to accept the only solution possible for us”. Prime Minister Callaghan supported this line,<sup>228</sup> and Rowlands asked Owen to tell Habib to make clear to the Guatemalans that “if they do not [accept the Moho offer] I see no alternative to telling them that we must now start the process of unilateral independence”.<sup>229</sup> The British plan was that if Molina accepted these ideas in principle, Britain would do its best to keep the UN discussion low-key and go for a quick settlement which Owen would try to sell in Belize, with a view to a joint announcement at the UN before the end of the General Assembly.<sup>230</sup>

Owen met Vance in New York on 27 September, immediately after the meeting of the CMCB, and Vance later told Molina that he could not hope to get more than the Moho.<sup>231</sup> However, in a secret meeting with Molina the following day, Owen made an even more generous offer: cession of territory up to the Moho River, cession of some of the Cayes, an accommodating maritime frontier and a tri-partite development project in the area between the Moho and the Monkey Rivers.<sup>232</sup> He also offered to look at the possibility of consulting the people in the area between the two rivers over whether they wished to remain Belizean or come under Guatemalan control. Molina stuck to the claim for territory up to Monkey River. When Owen absolutely ruled this out, Molina reverted to a line based on Orange Point that

<sup>227</sup> Stanley to FCO, tel #263 of 15 September 1977, DEFE 13/1131.

<sup>228</sup> Private Secretary, Downing Street to Fergusson, FCO, 19 September 1977, DEFE 13/1131.

<sup>229</sup> Stanley to FCO, tel #263 and #264 of 15 September 1977, DEFE 13/1131.

<sup>230</sup> Stanley to FCO, tel #264 of 15 September 1977, DEFE 13/1131.

<sup>231</sup> Richard to FCO, tel #1440 of 28 September 1977, DEFE 13/1131.

<sup>232</sup> Richard to FCO, tel #1450 of 28 September 1977, DEFE 13/1131.



the British had put forward as a possibility at recent talks at officials' level in London.<sup>233</sup>

Owen did not inform the Belizeans nor the CMCB of this offer, but the Belizeans always suspected that the British were seeking to make deals behind their backs despite their protestations, and so Belize's delegate, Assad Shoman, told the CMCB that Belize

had not asked or authorised anyone to conduct negotiations or discussions on the basis of territorial cession, and that on all relevant occasions, they had made it clear that they were not prepared to consider territorial cession. They did not believe that in the present circumstances any discussion of land cession was a valid negotiating tactic, since it held out a hope to the other party which would inevitably be rejected when brought to Belize. Therefore, Belize must remain firm on the issue of territorial integrity. The position was final and irrevocable.<sup>234</sup>

The British delegate, Ivor Richard, made no reply. Various delegates informed the Committee of the steps they had taken to lobby the US government as well as some Latin American governments, and it was agreed that the Commonwealth Secretariat should act as a co-ordinating agency to collate and share the diplomatic approaches made by the members. It was also agreed to set up a contact group in New York of Permanent Representatives of the members of the Committee along with representatives of Britain and Belize.

The State Department reported that Molina and Rowlands "met secretly in Washington November 1 to 3. They reached an agreement on cession of the territory south of the Moho-Aguacate line, straightening the western boundary and cession of the cayes up to the Monkey River (Sapodilla and Ranguana). But the two sides are far apart on a development project.

<sup>233</sup> Owen had indeed mentioned this meeting of officials to the CMCB, without giving any details, saying he had talked to Mr Price about it, but that there was still a big gap between what was possible and what Guatemala had demanded. See "Records of Meetings of the CMCB, 1977-1980," Commonwealth Secretariat, undated, CSL.

<sup>234</sup> "Records of Meetings of the CMCB, 1977-1980," Commonwealth Secretariat, undated, CSL.

## Guatemala's Claim to Belize...

Guatemala asked the British to pave a road entirely inside Guatemala which would cost about \$70 million, considerably more than the British wish to spend”.<sup>235</sup>

British pressure on Price was unrelenting, and they kept the US closely informed, but the US records relate “facts” that are not at all consonant with the positions taken by Price in all forums, and in fact amount to “hearsay” evidence, relating what someone said Price said. A State Department telegram, for example, claims to recount the content of a Rowlands-Price meeting on 8 November 1977 where Price rejected Rowlands’ proposal of a negotiated settlement on the basis of the Moho, an adjustment in the western frontier and cession of the southern cayes, saying that he could not agree to the package since it included territorial cession. The telegram also states that Price suggested to Owen maintaining the *status quo* for three years, and then seeking a better deal from a new Guatemalan administration, and that he was prepared to wait but was not prepared to contemplate cession of territory. It goes on to say that Price said “he might be able to agree to some straightening of the western boundary and cession of the best cayes, but nothing more”.<sup>236</sup>

Such a position would contradict what the report itself indicated Price had just said about no territorial cession, does not appear in any British records, was certainly not ever hinted by Price to his Belizean team, goes against his actions throughout the process and is contradicted even by contemporary State Department files. Thus, a State Department telegram notes that after the British informed him of the agreement on territorial cession, Price met with Ambassador Andrew Young and Secretary Vance. In both conversations he opposed cession of territory and said he preferred the *status quo* to territorial cession.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> FRUS, 1977-1980, p. 47.

<sup>236</sup> FRUS, 1977-1980, p. 46.

<sup>237</sup> Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Guatemala, Washington, November 21, 1977, 2201Z, in FRUS, 1977-1980, p. 49. The meeting with Young is said to have taken place on 10 November.

## Four More Latins

Despite Britain's protestations, Belize and the Caribbean countries succeeded in getting a stronger resolution than the year before. It called on the UK and Guatemala to continue negotiations "in consultation as appropriate with specially interested States in the area," which was designed to get Mexico involved; and it stated that the negotiations should be carried out "with a view to concluding the negotiations before the next session of the General Assembly".<sup>238</sup>

Guatemala submitted a draft resolution co-sponsored by El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua calling on Britain and Guatemala to arrive at an early settlement of the dispute, and urging them to "take due account of the vital interests of the people of Belize."<sup>239</sup> An amended version three days later, urging that a settlement be reached before the opening of the next session of the General Assembly, attracted three more sponsors: Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Paraguay.<sup>240</sup>

Opening the debate in the Fourth Committee on 9 November 1977, Richard stated that negotiations had failed to produce a settlement and that the UK had been obliged to reinforce the British garrison in Belize for the security of the territory. He also reiterated Callaghan's commitment that any settlement must be acceptable to Belize.<sup>241</sup> On 11 November Price addressed the Committee,<sup>242</sup> informing that Belize had offered various proposals aimed at allaying the fears and concerns, and meeting the needs, expressed by Guatemala, but that Guatemala continued to demand land cession, which Belize could never agree to. He declared that Belize was prepared to assume independence without first reaching a settlement with Guatemala, as long as it had suitable security arrangements that would preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

<sup>238</sup> A/C.4/32/L.24, 11 November 1977, UN.

<sup>239</sup> A/C.4/32/L.23, 10 November 1977, UN.

<sup>240</sup> A/C.4/32/L.23, 10 November 1977, UN.

<sup>241</sup> A/C.4/32/SR.20, 9 November 1977, UN.

<sup>242</sup> A/C.4/32/SR.22, 11 November 1977, UN.

The Committee then heard statements from Belizeans from Toledo who were brought and paid for by the Guatemalans. In 1976, Guatemala had financed the creation of a new party, the Toledo Progressive Party (TPP), led by former PUP parliamentarian Alejandro Vernon. In statements made by Vernon, Martínez, and Cirilo Caliz in this and a meeting in October 1978 before the Fourth Committee, they alleged that the people of the border areas spoke the same language and had the same culture, and should not be separated. They criticised the Belize government for refusing to countenance the cession of land, and demanded that independence be postponed until the dispute was settled, the economy was in a better state, and they were sure that parliamentary democracy would be preserved.<sup>243</sup> These declarations had no effect whatsoever on the members of the Fourth Committee, since it had become widely known that Guatemala had sponsored their appearance at the United Nations. Indeed, on a visit to the Belize Office in the Guatemalan Foreign Ministry, Belizean journalists saw a secretary “busily running off copies of Alejandro’s United Nations speech”.<sup>244</sup>

The Mexican delegate referred to the Bogotá Declaration and announced that Mexico would vote in favour of the Caribbean draft, which the Committee adopted by a vote of 115 in favour, five against and 16 abstentions. The draft sponsored by Guatemala and others was then put to the vote, and was defeated by 91 votes to 18, with 26 abstentions.<sup>245</sup>

The General Assembly debates featured some of the sharpest attacks against the government of Guatemala. The Barbados delegate said that Belize was denied independence “because of the obduracy of a belligerent neighbour, Guatemala,” and in an obvious reference to Israel he declared that

it is criminal hypocrisy for nations to utter pieties about the right of all peoples to live in security and at the same time surreptitiously to provide weapons to aggressive countries for the purpose of extinguishing that same right. Barbados calls

<sup>243</sup> A/C.4/32/SR.22, 11 November 1977, A/C.4/33/SR.23, 2 November 1978.

<sup>244</sup> *Breakdown*, Issue #2, 1977.

<sup>245</sup> A/C.4/32/SR.25, 15 November 1977, UN.

upon all those countries which supply Guatemala with arms to desist from supporting it in its evil intention of invading Belize.”<sup>246</sup>

Cuba’s Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that Belize “does not accede to independence because the reactionary dictatorship which oppresses Guatemala is prepared to annex it by force”.<sup>247</sup> Guatemala’s Foreign Minister replied that Guatemala was not intimidated by Cuba’s veiled threats, despite Cuba’s flagrant interventions in Africa and in various countries of Latin America.<sup>248</sup>

The vote in the Assembly, on 28 November 1977, was: 126 in favour, four against and thirteen abstentions. The “yes” votes this time included **Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina and Peru**. The “no” votes were reduced to the core Central American countries except Guatemala, which did not participate in the voting. The Argentina vote was the most interesting; it exposed the falsity of Britain’s original assessment that Belize would be unable to attract Latin American votes because of Britain’s occupation of the Malvinas (Falkland Islands). When Dudley Thompson had predicted this years ago, he had been scoffed at by the British.

Torrijos, meanwhile, remained true to his word to do everything possible to support Belize. Until his death on 1 August 1981, he kept alive his offer to send 1000 men with the appropriate weapons to defend Belize. He was aware of the high value Price placed on maintaining British troops in Belize after independence, and in October 1977 when he called on Prime Minister Callaghan in London he brought up the question of Belize and said that it would be impossible to give Belize its independence without an assurance that it would not be invaded. He told Callaghan that he had visited the advance posts of the British army in Belize and knew that “they were posts of dignity and not of occupation”.<sup>249</sup>

<sup>246</sup> UNGA Plenary Sessions, 19<sup>th</sup> meeting, 5 October 1977, p. 385.

<sup>247</sup> UNGA Plenary Sessions, 19<sup>th</sup> meeting, 4 October 1977, p. 353.

<sup>248</sup> UNGA Plenary Sessions, 20<sup>th</sup> meeting, 5 October 1977, p. 400.

<sup>249</sup> Private Secretary, Downing Street, to Wall, FCO, 13 October 1977, DEFE 13/1131.

Torrijos promoted a special meeting in December in Jamaica, attended by Foreign Ministers and other representatives of Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Panama, Suriname and Venezuela, with a representative of Mexico as observer. The meeting issued a strong declaration of support for Belize's early and secure independence with territorial integrity, insisted that the Government of Belize must be fully involved in all consultations and negotiations aimed at achieving a solution (this was obviously aimed at Britain), and pledged continued support, by diplomatic and other methods as appropriate, to secure a solution.<sup>250</sup>

## The Story So Far: What Does It Mean?

After Guatemala's foiled invasion attempt in 1972, the British insisted on further negotiations, only to be tricked by Guatemala into wasting two years waiting for a proposal that never came. The Guatemalans continued to play the British after the openly fraudulent election in 1974 that installed General Kjell Laugerud, who planned two further invasions of Belize. In 1975, for the first time during the negotiations since 1962, the Guatemalans demanded a large part of Belize as the price for a settlement—and Britain was willing to entertain them.

By then, Belizean patience for doing things the British way had run out, and they decided to take charge of the process themselves and accomplish decolonisation by internationalisation.

The US government was very concerned in the 1970s, at the height of the Cold War and with guerrilla wars raging in Central America, with what it saw as a real danger from Cuba, and indeed this was the major prism through which it saw the Belize question. They regarded Guatemala as their bulwark against "communism" in Central America, and therefore tried very hard to pressure Belize into accommodating Guatemala. That country, for its part, was ever more torn by civil war as the decade progressed, and had become a cauldron of death for its poor and indigenous people.

<sup>250</sup> Declaration of the meeting, PF.

As the British sought to impose land cession, their hounding of Price in the 1950s, accusing him of selling out the country “lock, stock and barrel” and creating suspicions about his patriotism among a large and vocal Belizean minority, came back to haunt them. Governor Posnett commented in 1975 that

It is a sobering thought that 16 years ago the British Government sacked Price from the Executive and Legislative Councils for having the disloyal temerity to talk to the Guatemalans about a possible settlement, and not perhaps surprising if he takes it less than kindly when now pressed to expose himself to political risk by giving them a slice of his territory!<sup>251</sup>

The British feared that they would be given a pounding at the UN by the Latin Americans because of their occupation of the Falklands, as well as by the Africans, who had consistently denounced them for their racist policies and actions in Africa. They were wrong, and Price refused to be swayed by their arguments against going to the UN. Only when the British realised that it would look even worse if Belize went to the UN and lobbied against it as well as Guatemala did they reconsider and agree to support Belize’s strategy. When they did so, they did commit themselves fully, lobbying in several capitals for the Belize resolutions.

At the UN in 1975, defying all British predictions, Belize won overwhelming support for its independence and territorial integrity, and the resolution mandated Britain not to negotiate anything that would violate those principles. The one major shortcoming was the fact that, apart from Cuba, no Latin American country voted in favour of the Belize resolution, and winning that crucial support became the major focus of the BIS. With each passing year, the Belizeans achieved stronger resolutions and increased the number of countries voting in favour. Torrijos’ enthusiastic adherence to the cause was critical in winning Latin American votes. So too was the strong committed support provided by Mexican President López Portillo, who became extremely close to Belize and was instrumental in blunting

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<sup>251</sup> Posnett to Richard, 12 May 1975, FCO 7/2847. Price was removed from the Executive Council only.

the aggressive stance of Guatemala as well as tempering the intense pressure to cede land by the US government.

But the conduct of the negotiations by the British, and especially their privately haggling with Guatemala about how much territory should be the price for settlement, made it much harder for Belize to achieve its goals. British ministers encouraged the Guatemalans to ignore the provisions of the UN resolutions, gave them assurances that “there would be no UDI,” that the UK would not give Belize a defence guarantee and even that Belize would not go to independence without a settlement.<sup>252</sup>

Inside Belize, the issue of independence was polarizing the population. The UDP was against early independence, arguing that Belize was not economically ready, that without a settlement with Guatemala independence would be dangerous and that if Price led Belize to independence he would establish a one-party communist state. Like Guatemala, the UDP propagated the charge that Cuba and communism constituted a real threat to Belize and that there were influential communist elements within Price's government. In 1974, for example, the Belize government felt it necessary to repudiate allegations in the foreign press, attributed to UDP Leader Dean Lindo, that secret arrangements had been made with Cuba for the defence of Belize. The charges of communism would intensify in the period leading up to independence, thus playing into the hands of the military dictatorship of Guatemala. When told that he was singing the same song about fear of a communist take-over as the Guatemalan President, Lindo declared that he firmly believed that Price was in favour of a Cuban take-over of Belize.<sup>253</sup>

Within Guatemala, the insurgency was intensifying and the repression was getting worse, making it very difficult to conduct meaningful negotiations with the military government. That government insisted that an independent Belize without ties to Guatemala would welcome Cuba and communism, which was threatening to Guatemala's security.

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<sup>252</sup> “UDI” referred to the Unilateral Declaration of Independence issued by Ian Smith in Southern Rhodesia, a British colony, in order to maintain white supremacy over the African population. Britain's behaviour in this was less than exemplary. With the help of the Commonwealth, the new African country Zimbabwe achieved independence in 1980.

<sup>253</sup> *Breakdown* #9, 1978.



As 1977 came to an end, the Belizean government knew that it faced an uphill struggle, but it was making headway: the CMCB was playing a pivotal role, Latin American countries were increasingly adhering to the Belize cause, and the Carter administration's human rights policies held out the hope, despite the State Department's insistence on territorial cession, that the US would eventually support the secure independence of Belize with its territory intact in spite of Guatemalan objections.

