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CABINET

DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

ANGLO-Guatemalan NEGOTIATIONS OVER BELIZE

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR  
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Recent Negotiations

1. Mr Ridley accompanied by British officials, Premier Price and two of his Ministers, met a delegation led by the Guatemalan Foreign Minister in New York on 13 and 14 October.

2. The Guatemalans were again told that cession of Belizean territory could form no part of any settlement. Mr Ridley dwelt on the inevitability of progress towards independence, in view of pressure

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upon us from the UN, the Commonwealth and Belize, leading to a constitutional conference and legislation in the course of next year but urged the Guatemalans at the same time to continue negotiation in search of some acceptable settlement of the dispute.

3. The Guatemalans seem to have acknowledged this message though with some confusion and considerable unhappiness. It is clear that they do wish to go on talking. It is also clear that they saw little in the proposed timetable or in the package of peripheral benefits put to them by Mr Ridley (copy attached) which would help to placate public and military opinion in Guatemala. They restated their formal claim to Belize and said that the dispute could be settled only on terms which recognised that the matter at issue was territory. In practice a small slice of territory would settle the dispute. They nevertheless recognised that there was international momentum for early independence for Belize and acknowledged the pressure under which this placed us. They gave Mr Ridley assurances on several occasions (but outside the plenary session) that Guatemala would not resort to force.

4. The atmosphere was notably cordial. The Guatemalans sought further talks which we offered around the end of the year. Sr Castillo Valdes also sought a private meeting with Mr Ridley.

5. Mr Ridley briefed Permanent Representatives in New York of the Commonwealth Committee on Belize and has seen State Department officials and the Mexican Foreign Minister before returning to London. Mexico firmly supports independence for Belize at an early date. The United States Administration is uncertain but clearly wants to help, and may well support us for the first time.

6. We have thus reached a position in which the Guatemalan Government has been placed unequivocally on notice that Belize must now proceed soon to independence. There is very strong international support for this. We could not now resist this momentum unless the Belize Government themselves recoiled from early independence, of which so far there is no sign. Mr Price will, however, need to carry with him the opposition and Belize public opinion upon whose support the grant of independence will depend. We would prefer to proceed with full Guatemalan agreement. The odds are against our getting it but we will continue to try. To delay would be to risk trouble in Belize itself. /There is

There is clear advantage in British disengagement from a defence commitment in an area where the colonial relationship is increasingly inappropriate.

#### United Nations

7. Belize will be considered by the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly at the end of October or the beginning of November. There will be a vote on a resolution on Belize which will include a call for independence before the end of next year.

#### Security Arrangements

8. It remains our objective to bring Belize to early and secure independence. In the absence of agreement and in spite of present Guatemalan assurances about renunciation of force, there will be a delicate period during which there may be increasing tension with Guatemala. Reinforcement of the British garrison before independence could be necessary. Even if agreement is reached, we envisage that any British forces remaining in Belize after independence would stay only for a strictly limited period and on clearly defined terms. It may be possible to associate other countries with some form of United Nations guarantee for Belize, but the precise terms of post independence security arrangements and their duration cannot at this stage be decided.

#### Next Step

9. The constitutional procedures for independence should begin with the calling of a Constitutional Conference in London in early 1981. It will be necessary to make this public at least two months in advance of such a conference. This points to an announcement very early in December. It will be necessary to pass a bill through Parliament during the summer - but it is not likely to be controversial. The target date for independence would be September 1981, to coincide with the UN General Assembly and, we would hope, the admission of Belize to the UN.

10. The announcement will almost certainly provoke a Guatemalan reaction which would not necessarily be confined to public protest. Action might be taken against British commercial interests in Guatemala (roughly estimated at £20 million a year), against British



nationals or against our Consul and his staff. There is also a risk of a military move against Belize. But the Guatemalan Government would probably take such action only if it felt its domestic position in Guatemala to be seriously threatened. If we are to pursue our objective this risk has to be run and cannot be avoided. We would do everything possible to maintain the present good relations with the Guatemalan Government which they themselves appear to desire. We would aim to keep talks going throughout the run up to a Constitutional Conference, and for as long thereafter as there remained any prospect of agreement. We think that continuing talks might help the Guatemalans with their presentational problems at home.

Conclusion

11. The Committee are invited:-

- (a) to note the outcome of the recent negotiations with Guatemala;
- (b) to confirm that we should vote for a UN resolution calling for independence for Belize before the end of 1981;
- (c) to agree to the holding of a Constitutional Conference in London in 1981;
- (d) to note that some continuing security arrangements will be required for Belize in the post-independence period. Money will have to be found for this; as for an Independence settlement, but there will be considerable savings from eventual withdrawal of the garrison.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE  
20 October 1980

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16. Security. The Belize Government would be prepared to give a solemn undertaking that Belizean territory would not be used to support subversion in Guatemala. This would be written into any agreement and there could also be an appropriate provision in the Belizean constitution. The United Kingdom would be prepared in principle to offer advice, training and equipment in building up the Belize Defence Force. The Government of Belize would be prepared to co-operate in a practical way, for example through the exchange of information between police forces.

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