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OD(81)6

COPY NO 46

6 February 1981

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DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE— — — — —  
BELIZE  
DEFENCE ARRANGEMENTS POST INDEPENDENCEMEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR  
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS AND THE  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE

1. This paper is drafted on the assumption that we cannot secure a settlement with Guatemala but decide nevertheless to bring Belize to independence. If so we need now to make decisions about security arrangements for Belize post independence. These arrangements should be acceptable to the Belizeans, deter the Guatemalans from taking military action and persuade the international community that we are not leaving Belize in the lurch.
2. The British garrison in Belize would normally comprise five rifle companies, 4 RAF Harriers, Puma and Gazelle helicopters and a Rapier air defence detachment. (To relieve Army overstretch an infantry element was withdrawn in March last year and may have to be restored in the run-up to a Constitutional Conference). The garrison is supported by one regular company of the Belize Defence Force (BDF) which includes a few British Loan Service Personnel (LSP) in command appointments. A garrison of this size is judged capable of deterring Guatemalan attack or at least delaying one long enough to permit reinforcement through Belize airport. To withdraw the garrison from Belize would save £4.2m pa. to defence Votes. The FCO Votes contribute £0.45m to the cost of the BDF. In addition a Royal Navy frigate is retained within 7 days sailing of Belize.

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3. Belize is a poor country with a small population. It could not possibly find from its own resources a force to take the place of the British garrison. Nevertheless, as an independent country it should take responsibility for its defence and the BDF should therefore be expanded as far and as quickly as possible. A Ministry of Defence study suggests that a force of four infantry companies with some supporting arms might be developed by a crash programme. The Chiefs of Staff assess that such a force would be adequate to support the police on internal security but could only offer a limited capability for external defence. By itself it would not be sufficient to deter the Guatemalans.
4. The Force would need additional British LSP who might be hard to find. Equipping and training the Force over 18-24 months would cost between £7m and £10m. The subsequent annual cost might be about £4m. The Belizeans could not afford to pay for such a force themselves. A reasonable contribution by HMG would be £6-7m to the capital cost and the continuing cost of LSP of about £0.6m. The capital sum certainly cannot be found within existing programmes of our two Departments and would therefore entail, with the Chancellor's agreement, a call on the Contingency Reserve.
5. The deterrent effect of such a force could be enhanced by some continuing defence undertaking from us and others. A multilateral arrangement should include the United States as well as other regional states. Some of these might also share the burden of providing money and manpower to build up the BDF. The arrangement should not specifically commit us to military action in defence of Belize. It should be on the lines of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) and commit signatories as follows:
- In the event of any form of armed attack against Belize externally organised or supported, or the threat of such attack, they shall immediately consult together for the purpose of considering what measures should be taken in relation to such attack or threat.
6. We have told Premier Price that we could only contemplate leaving the garrison for months rather than years. The Belizeans are likely to press for its retention for a period of years. It would not be in our interests to leave a garrison in Belize after independence if we could avoid it. There is a real danger that such a commitment will become open ended and politically embarrassing and

servicemen would be put unnecessarily at risk, if the Belize Government behaved irresponsibly. Nevertheless retention of the garrison for a period after independence will be regarded by the Belizeans as an essential third element (with an enhanced BDF and a multilateral arrangement) in any security package and they would not accept independence without it. Moreover, there is a clear risk that the Guatemalans will invade if we withdraw the garrison on independence, before Belize has established herself as an independent state. Presentationally the timing of the garrison's withdrawal could be linked to the expansion of the BDF but we should not allow the rate of expansion to determine it.

7. We are, therefore, agreed that the garrison should be withdrawn as soon as possible. We believe, however, that to win Belizean acceptance of our security proposals we must present the three elements as a single package. We have considered carefully the length of time that the garrison might remain bearing in mind the timetable for expansion of the BDF and the likely date of independence. Defence considerations particularly argue for a very short period in order to minimise the risks and disadvantages referred to in paragraph 5. However if it proved necessary to win acceptance for our security proposals and for Belizean independence, we could contemplate leaving the garrison, on strictly defined terms, for a maximum of twelve months after independence.

#### Conclusions

8. We invite colleagues to agree that:

- a) £7m should be made available from the Contingency Reserve for the expansion of the Belize Defence Force;
- b) the Defence Secretary should develop detailed proposals for the expansion of the BDF which take account of the money and manpower likely to be available;
- c) we should be willing to enter into consultative defence arrangements for Belize post-independence and that we should seek to persuade the United States and other regional states to join in such arrangements and to contribute to the expansion of the BDF;
- d) the British garrison could remain in Belize after independence, on strictly defined terms, for no more than twelve months.

C. J.N.