

SECRET

OPS
MASTER
The White House
Washington

Subject: BELIZE,
Dispute with Guatemala
A. 3

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE

SERIAL No. T 116/55

August 4, 1983

Dear Margaret:

Both Secretary Shultz and I spoke to Foreign Secretary Howe during his recent visit about our increasing concern over Central America. Today I wish to write about a specific concern that the United States and the United Kingdom share: Belize.

Belize Prime Minister Price visited me at the White House in May. He impressed me as a sincere and dedicated leader, who is working diligently in the best interests of his country. Given the turbulence which characterizes so much of Central America, I am heartened by the peaceful, stable, democratic course he has set for his country. I know that Belize owes much of its present good fortune to British efforts, which guided this former colony to self-government and then to complete independence.

We understand that your government may soon face a decision to set a date for the withdrawal of the British military garrison which has guarded the sovereignty and ensured the stability of Belize. I wish to underline the importance we place on the continued presence of your military forces in Belize, particularly while the territorial dispute with Guatemala remains unresolved. We are especially concerned that a move to withdraw the British garrison from Belize could heighten insecurities in Belize and create a power vacuum in this strategic area with serious regional consequences. At the same time, we are sympathetic to your financial restraints and force limitations, and we certainly do not expect the United Kingdom to maintain an indefinite, open-ended commitment to keep its forces in Belize. For our part, we will make every effort to work with you, as well as with the governments of Guatemala and Belize, to find a peaceful settlement of the territorial question. Toward this end, I have asked Secretary Shultz to maintain especially close contact with Secretary Howe.

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On the broader question of regional peace and security, I greatly appreciate your recent remarks in Parliament and on television in support of our policies. We are determined to do a better job here of explaining our goals and objectives. It is particularly gratifying to know that you share our objectives and have joined us in the public campaign.

In closing, allow me to reiterate that I remain deeply concerned that the premature withdrawal of your forces from Belize in advance of a territorial settlement may affect efforts to secure a peaceful, negotiated solution. Moreover, the problems which plague the region may more directly threaten Belize if it loses the security that your military garrison represents. Together, I believe we can pursue a path that will resolve the territorial dispute and preserve stability, allowing for the orderly departure of British forces.

Sincerely,

/s/

Ron