



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Prime Minister

I have not been marking
 telegrams on this subject to you
 but thought you would wish to a
 summary of the present position.
 Dear Michael,

12 December 1979

Ph: 12/11

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Belize

I promised to send you a report on Belize following the recent election.

There has been some tension. A close fight had been expected, with few prepared to predict the outcome. In fact the incumbent PUP of Premier Price won an overall majority of 2,264 votes, which translated into a 13-5 seat majority in the national assembly.

The opposition are disconcerted and angry (their leader and deputy leader both lost their seats). After a run of success in local government elections, they expected to gain power for the first time. Predictably, they have accused the Government of electoral fraud. We have no evidence that this is so. Unwilling to accept electoral defeat, the Opposition have launched a series of protests and demonstrations and there have been some instances of violence.

The Governor believes that if this first delicate stage passes without major provocation or over-reaction, tempers will cool off and life return to normal.

Mr Price is likely to see his victory as a mandate to pursue his policy of early independence for Belize. There were some indications before the election that he was seeking support from radical governments in the area for his policy of independence backed by a multi-national defence guarantee.

Mr Price's aims and our own coincide to a very large degree. We both want early independence for Belize with withdrawal of our forces as soon as the situation is secure. The Guatemalans and the Americans prefer the status quo, with British troops on the eastern flank of Guatemala, in the currently volatile state of Central America as a whole. We have made clear to the Americans that this situation cannot go on for ever.

We think it important to keep the initiative on Belize in our own hands, in order to head off any disposition on Mr Price's part to intrigue behind our backs. We sought to arrange a meeting between him and Mr Ridley very shortly after the election, to learn of Mr Price's thinking and also to persuade him of the need first to try again for a negotiated settlement with Guatemala, which is something we have publicly committed ourselves to do. Mr Price has agreed in principle to a meeting but could not manage dates before Christmas; he wishes to come to London in January.



We cannot be very optimistic about the outcome of further negotiations; the Guatemalans are as politically committed to their demand for at least token territorial cession as the Belizeans are to resisting it. Given the great (and still growing) support they enjoyed in the United Nations, there is no reason why the Belizeans should feel any need to compromise on the issue. The Guatemalans' increasing isolation might bring them to a more realistic assessment of the situation, but one cannot guarantee that their military class will react rationally to matters involving national prestige.

We are therefore giving preliminary consideration to the feasibility of a multi-national defence guarantee which might enable us to give Belize independence without Guatemalan acquiescence. Multilateral arrangements should enable us to reduce and eventually remove our garrison. It would, of course, be essential that no hostile governments should take part in any such arrangements. Our way forward would be clearer if the Americans could be persuaded to espouse the cause of early independence for Belize and help to persuade Guatemala of its inevitability. The US do not appear to realise how much their neutral (in effect, pro-Guatemalan) stance damages their credibility in the eyes, for instance, of those moderate Caribbean governments (such as Barbados) which are staunch advocates of Belizean independence.

The Prime Minister's visit to Washington offers an opportunity to try to persuade the Americans to take a broader view of the Belize question. The briefing has been prepared accordingly.

*yours
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Private Secretary

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