No One Cared About British Honduras:
Cold War US Policy Toward Decolonization in
British Honduras and British Guiana

By Eric M. Rowe

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requirements for the degree of

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in

History

________________________________________
Dr. Steve Estes, Chair

________________________________________
Dr. Michelle Jolly

________________________________________
Dr. Robert McNamara

May 8, 2014
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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: British Honduras and British Guiana were two small British colonies seeking independence during the 1950s and 60s, at the height of the Cold War. Both colonies were geographically situated in Latin America, an area of great concern to the United States during this time of competition between the US and the Soviet Union for third-world political influence. During this same crucial time, the British were eager to relieve themselves of their colonial territories and the resulting fiscal responsibilities. The purpose of this project is to illuminate the differences between the US policies toward the decolonization processes in these two similar British colonies in Latin America.

Procedure: This study uses records from the US State Department, the Foreign Relations of the United States Collection, and consulate records from the US consulates in British Honduras and British Guiana. Many of these materials were obtained from the National Archives at College Park, Maryland. Additionally, much of the background material for both colonies was obtained from secondary sources in the fields of history, developmental economics, anthropology and political science.

Findings: There has been found to be a stark contrast between levels of US concern over the decolonization process in these two colonies. While the United States showed a clear and consistent desire to avoid involvement in the decolonization process in British Honduras, the US government took extreme measures at the highest levels of government to influence the outcome of British Guianese elections prior to independence.
Conclusions: The most decisive factor for US policy toward British Guiana and British Honduras was the actions and words of the colonial leadership within the two colonies. The United States desired a clear anti-communist stance from all small nations in Latin America, and British Guiana and British Honduras needed to exemplify this stance in order to win US support while seeking independence.

Chair: ____________ Signature

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Introduction

During decolonization, the future of British Honduras and British Guiana were influenced by the United States in different ways due to their history, political movements and the goals of the U.S. in the Western hemisphere. For these small, seemingly insignificant British colonies, world politics and fears of the spread of communism guided the response of the U.S. in contrasting ways influencing the independent countries that they would become – Belize and Guyana.

During the Cold War, the United States aimed to create a world that was sympathetic to US interests and free market capitalism. Combating the spread of communism across the globe became the stated policy after World War II, and nowhere did this policy become more important to the United States than in Latin America. Through the use of economic incentives, combined with direct, albeit covert, political and military intervention in Central and South American territories, the US sought to create economic and political stability in Latin America, free from communist influence.

The decolonization of the British Empire during the post-war decades complicated this policy. While the United States focused heavily on the containment of communism after 1947, Washington was also urging the United Kingdom to relinquish control of her colonial territories across the globe. The British in turn, being under extreme financial strain after the burden of World War
If, had a desire to dismantle their colonial fiscal commitments. The process of British decolonization resulted in the creation of a series of new and potentially unstable states. In some cases, these newly independent territories would create anxiety in the United States. In Latin America, the US sought to ensure that any newly independent British colonies would fit graciously into US strategic design for the region.

The two British colonies in Latin America were British Honduras, now the state of Belize, and British Guiana, now Guyana. Both of these colonies experienced political turmoil throughout the 1950s and early 60s, while trying to move toward independence from Great Britain. Both had serious economic difficulties, and both were relatively small in size and population. Additionally, both were in the region, which had since the Monroe Doctrine, been largely considered in the United States as equivalent to what the Soviets called “The Near Abroad” in Eastern Europe. While the US did not maintain direct control over Central and South America during the 19th and 20th centuries, many in the US government saw Latin America as within the United States’ sphere of influence.

During the Cold War period, the spread of communism in Latin America became a primary concern to the United States. US fears about the spread of leftist governments into Latin America were bolstered first through the ascension of the democratically elected, socialist President Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1951, and especially by the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. The US took steps to overthrow Arbenz through a CIA-backed coup in 1954, and Castro’s policies in Cuba contributed to an increased culture of paranoia in Washington
over the potential for copycat revolutions and nationalist movements in other Latin American nations. This paranoia was increasingly evident in the Kennedy Administration policies toward Latin America in the early 1960s.

In British Honduras and British Guiana, two very different strategies were advanced by the United States. Though similar cases, decolonizing at the same time, these two colonies elicited very different responses from the US during the Cold War. Decolonization in British Honduras was largely seen as a British issue, and the United States consistently kept a distance from the process, preferring only very limited input and involvement. Conversely, British Guiana became of great concern to the United States, and elicited US involvement at the highest levels of government. While the US repeatedly refused requests from the Guatemalan and British governments, as well as the colonial leadership in British Honduras, for greater American political and economic interest and investment in the British Honduran independence process, the US was actively and adamantly focused on directing the internal politics of British Guiana. The US policy toward these two similar British colonies could not have been more dissimilar. This distinction in US involvement is the focus of this thesis.

These differences in US policy toward the two colonial case studies were due to three key components. First of these was the different historical relationships that each of the colonies had with the United States. British Honduras had a close, long-standing economic and cultural relationship with the US. The British Honduran dollar had been linked to the US dollar for over fifty years by the end of World War II, and British Hondurans were accustomed to
getting most of their imports from the United States. With this commercial trade came cultural influence. British Honduras was heavily influenced by popular culture from the United States, rather than that emanating from Great Britain. Additionally, the British Honduran education system had been created and was being run by American-trained Jesuit Missionaries. British Guiana had no such historical relationship with the US, and had been largely ignored by the United States until the 1950s, excepting the mining industry, which had starting mining bauxite in British Guiana in 1914.

The second conflicting factor in US policy was that the two colonies were of unequal importance to US strategic interests at the time. British Honduras was of little strategic concern to the US. Conversely, British Guiana greatly concerned to the United States, especially after Castro had taken power in Cuba. British Honduras was essentially a colonial backwater, having poor roads and lacking a modern airfield. In British Guiana, however, the United States had built Atkinson Field, a modern airfield during World War II through the Destroyers for Bases exchange program with the British. ¹ While the airfield had been returned to British Guianese control after the war, the United States retained forty-eight-hour reactivation rights in times of emergency, making British Guiana of strategic importance. Additionally, the US had business interests in British Guiana in the mining of bauxite, a mineral used in making aluminum.

The third component affecting the difference in US policy was that the political leadership of the two colonies took decidedly different tacks while

dealing with the United States during the 1950s. In British Honduras, the Nationalist movement and the newly formed People's United Party took an adamant and vocal pro-United States and anti-communist stance toward global politics. Throughout the 1950s, British Honduran leader, George Price, courted the United States. This was mainly as a way to show that he believed the US (along with Central America) to be the natural political and economic orientation of the colony, rather than orienting the colony toward the other British colonies in the West Indies. Price's clear and consistent policy of anti-communism was probably the single most effective strategy a small colony could use to avoid US intervention during the Cold War. In contrast, British Guianese leader, Cheddi Jagan, had already once been removed from power by the British in 1953 due to fears about his support for international communism, and by 1960 Jagan and his wife, Janet, were lending vocal support to Castroism. Rather than clearly stating his anti-communist stance, Jagan surrounded himself with leftist political allies and vocally supported the movement in Cuba, while trying to take a non-aligned policy when dealing with the United States. For the Kennedy Administration, steadfastly wanting to avoid a replication of the Cuban Revolution in another Latin American country, it was paramount that leaders took a clear anti-communist stance. Jagan's unwillingness to sign on to the program that the US outlined for western hemispherical security would become his undoing and would give the US cause to unseat him and to install Forbes Burnham in his place.

British Honduras and British Guiana give us the only opportunities to view US policy toward British decolonization in Latin America. These case
studies reveal two very different US policies and a very different series of US actions during this era of heightened US involvement in Central and South America during the Cold War. This study offers the ability to tease out real US motivations when exercising hegemonic power in Latin America between 1950 and 1966 and provides an interesting contrast between two processes in British decolonization. Additionally, these two colonies are the only two Latin American territories that couple British decolonization with US Cold War policy during the height of the Cold War.

_After the War: US, Britain and Cuba_

British colonial policy and US foreign policy had become intertwined in the years following World War II. In the 1950s and early 1960s, no single issue concerned the United States foreign policy establishment more than the potential for the spread of communism. With the close proximity of unstable nations just to the south in Central America, the region became ever more important to the security of the continental United States. For the US, British colonial power acted as a stabilizing force in Central America and the Caribbean. The 1950s, however, saw a loosening of British control as Great Britain sought to lessen its economic responsibilities. This move by the British, combined with the rise of communism in China and the Soviet Union, led to reinvigorated US interest in Britain’s colonies in the western hemisphere.
Starting in 1946, the United States instituted a policy intended to prevent
the spread of communism. This policy of containment had its impetus in what
was to become known as "The Long Telegram." This telegram was sent by
George F. Kennan, the Deputy Chief of Mission of the United States to the USSR
in February of 1946 to the White House, in response to a State Department
inquiry into Soviet political behavior. The telegram was, in essence, Kennan’s
reading of the Russian character and of Soviet foreign policy objectives. Kennan
characterized the Russian leadership as inherently insecure and believed that the
natural state of Russian government was one in which the leaders feared direct
contact and competition with outside powers.\(^2\) Kennan also wrote that the Soviet
Union would use other communists as allies, whether they resided in communist
countries or not. A statement from US Central Intelligence illustrates US worries,
"The Soviet Government anticipates an inevitable conflict with the capitalist
world. It therefore seeks to increase its relative power by building up its own
strength and undermining that of its assumed antagonists."\(^3\) Due in large part to
this view of an aggressive and expansionist Soviet foreign policy, President
Truman instituted the Truman Doctrine in 1947, which argued that small nations
must be supported in any way possible in order to prevent their susceptibility to
communist influence.

This outlook from the United States gave the intelligence community
reason to affect political and economic changes both in Central America and the

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\(^2\) Kennan, George F., *The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State*, Feb. 22, 1946, *FRUS, United States Department of State / Foreign relations of the United States, 1946. Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union* (1946), University of Wisconsin.

\(^3\) Memo, Central Intelligence Group, July 23, 1946, Central Intelligence Agency Library.
Caribbean. In 1954 the CIA backed a coup in Guatemala, ousting the
democratically elected president, Jacobo Arbenz. Arbenz was not actually a
communist, but his fraternization with known communist sympathizers, and the
nationalization of Guatemalan land formerly controlled by the United Fruit
Company, made Arbenz a target of Cold War regime change. More importantly,
the US backed the business friendly Batista regime in Cuba throughout the 1950s.

By 1960, the US had become thoroughly concerned with Cuba. Between
mid-1953 and the end of 1958, a guerrilla force led by Fidel Castro fought against
the US-backed Cuban army and the Cuban government led by a notoriously
corrupt president, Fulgencio Batista. On January 1, 1959, the Batista government
fled Cuba under attack from Castro’s forces. This development resulted in the
creation of a socialist state within a stone’s throw of the continental United States.

Within the next four years, the US attempted an invasion of Cuba at the Bay of
Pigs, with the goal of assassinating Fidel Castro, and the world went to the brink
of nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Also during this period, Castro
positioned himself as a model for Latin American countries and territories. This
positioning stemming from Cuba had wider implications. Diplomatic historian
Michael Hunt has argued, “The Cuban Revolution was more than a standing
affront to US pretensions to hemispherical dominance. It was one part of a broad,
steadily intensifying third-world challenge to US global dominance every bit as
important to the US global order as the Soviet rivalry and the international market

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4 Schlesinger et al, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, (Harvard
University Press, 1982).
5 Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, April 10, 1962, National Archives at College Park
As the British were decolonizing much of their empire, these territories became increasingly important to the United States. The US could not let these territories fall to the communists. Cuba became an example of what the Kennedy Administration sought to avoid during the decolonization of British Honduras and British Guiana.

**British Honduras**

Between 1949 and 1981, British Honduras struggled to gain independence from British Colonial rule, during a time when the whole world sat on the verge of nuclear conflict. During this time, the United States sought to contain communism and control of satellite nations through overt and covert means while the British Empire dramatically altered its ties to its former colonies. While the great powers of the United States, the Soviet Union and Great Britain fought for ideological and economic supremacy, British Hondurans fought for the right to self-governance and for full control over their economy. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s the United States continued to view British Honduras as a British problem, preferring to take a hands-off approach to the decolonization process, rather than taking on more financial responsibility for the colony. Additionally, friendly leadership in British Honduras contributed greatly to the alleviating of any US fears of communist influence. The security provided by the continuing British control, due to the lack of British Honduran economic viability and the

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concern over the Anglo-Guatemalan territorial dispute, created a situation where the United States would not feel the need to expand its role in the decolonization process.

During the period between 1949 and 1964, British Honduras did experience significant political changes. The most significant of these was the granting of internal self-rule by the British Government in 1964. Through a strong and persistent independence movement during the 1950s and through back-channel maneuvering by Britain and the United States, self-rule signaled a new political status for the tiny colony, and a step toward the ultimate goal of full independence. Independence, however, would remain elusive for over seventeen more years.

Present-day Belize, British Honduras became a Crown Colony of the British Empire in 1862. In an 1859 treaty with Spain, Britain gained control of the colony, which had previously been a hideout for buccaneers as well as a source of timber for the Spanish and British Empires. Mahogany exports throughout the 19th and early-20th centuries created a mono-economic system within the colony, resulting in a lack of agricultural development. While there were low levels of agricultural production within British Honduras, mostly involving the cultivation of sugar and bananas, they never reached levels needed to sustain a diversified export economy. What economic strength the colony did have in the twentieth century was largely due to the linking of the British

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8 Ibid., 44.
Honduran currency to the US dollar and to the exportation of raw materials to the United States.

Beginning in the late-19th century, British Honduras became economically intertwined with the United States. In 1894 the colony's currency was set against the US dollar rather than the British pound, creating a favorable trade relationship with the US, due largely to geographic proximity. Additionally, in the late 19th century, the US steadily became a main trading partner for British Honduran mahogany and "chicle", a new agricultural export used to make gum. Although British Honduras remained part of the British Empire, the majority of British Honduran trading activity occurred with the United States. This fact would have huge ramifications when the British devalued the colony's currency in 1949, decreasing the value of the colonial dollar to seventy cents per US dollar. This move was destructive to an already weak British Honduran economy and a poor population that was already struggling to get basic necessities. Given that by 1949, the British Hondurans had a fifty-five year history of getting most of their imports from the US, currency devaluation made daily life drastically more expensive. The 1949 devaluation, more than any other factor, was most responsible for the rise of the nationalist movement in British Honduras.  

Beginning in 1949, a widespread and organized independence movement gained momentum in British Honduras for the first time. A new political consciousness had been bred within a group of British Hondurans educated at the colonial, St. John's College. This group of young professionals quickly formed

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 61.
the People’s Committee, a political entity that would start to lead the movement for independence. By 1950, the People’s Committee had dissolved and the People’s United Party (PUP) had been created, with the support of the largest workers’ union in the colony, the General Workers’ Union (GWU). With this newly found popularity within the working classes in British Honduras, the PUP decisively triumphed during the first election based on universal suffrage, in 1954.

During the next ten years, the main issue in British Honduras was independence from British colonial rule.\textsuperscript{11} This was the main plank in the platform of the PUP, and growing discontent from poor British Hondurans, combined with a newly found willingness by the British to dissolve their colonial network, made this goal look attainable for the first time. However, there was not yet universal agreement in British Honduran political circles. Throughout the 1950s, there was conflict between those who pressed for the goal of independence from Britain, and those who were loyal to Britain. In large part this was an argument about whether British Honduras should be aligned with other Central American states, and thus should be largely within the sphere of influence of the United States, or aligned with the other British colonial territories in the Caribbean, such as Jamaica and Trinidad.\textsuperscript{12}

During the late 1950s, the British sought to include British Honduras in the forming of a West Indies Federation. This federation was intended to be an


economic, as well as political entity, to foster trade between the British colonies of the Caribbean. The rationale for the federation, put forth by the British, was that this would be the quickest route to independence for the colonial population.\textsuperscript{13} Both British Honduras and British Guiana were against this proposal. British Hondurans were worried about competition for jobs within the colony from West Indian outsiders.\textsuperscript{14} Additionally, the idea would slow, if not entirely halt, the process of gaining full independence in the future, both from Great Britain and from the proposed West Indies Federation. Most importantly, British Hondurans, and especially the leadership of George Price and the PUP, saw Central America, and a pro-US stance, as the natural orientation for the colony, and for its future as a fully independent nation. The common ground was seen to be with Central American nations, not with other, soon to be former, colonies of Great Britain in the Caribbean. While the West Indies Federation went ahead without British Honduran membership in 1958, its lifespan was short lived. By 1962, the federation had been dissolved. British Honduras continued to push for complete independence through appeals to the United States, and through pro-US, and nationalist demonstrations.

\textit{British Honduran Progress}

At the time of Cuban Revolution in 1959, the British Honduran Independence movement was already ten years old. While the leadership in

\textsuperscript{13} Grant, \textit{The Making of Modern Belize}, 110.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 111.
British Honduras had appeared anti-communist, the United States was slightly nervous about decolonization. By 1961, the British were ready to grant independence to British Honduras, this after almost a decade of mostly peaceful protests to British rule in the colony. Combined with these protests, there were consistent pro-US marches by British Honduran protestors during the 1950s. Many of these marches included the singing of "God Bless America" and the carrying of the US flag, rather than the Union Jack. Not wanting to get between their British ally and one of her colonies, the US did not take an outward position on either independence or much of the protesting. This lack of a firm stance on the issue gave tacit support to British colonialism, preferring British control of the colony, rather than the possibility of communist infiltration of a newly independent government in British Honduras. The status quo would continue without US support for the nationalist movement in British Honduras.

Independence was not the only British Honduran issue on which the US would remain silent during this period.

*The Border Dispute*

By the late 1950s, there had been a disputed border with Guatemala for one hundred years. Guatemala claimed the territory of British Honduras by citing an 1859 treaty between Britain and Guatemala in which Guatemala had accepted the border resolution, contingent upon the building of a road by the British,

\[15\] Cerri, Dominic A. "Missionary Zeal: The Jesuits and United States-British Honduran Relations, 1894-1958" (PhD Diss, University of Michigan. Ann Arbor, 2008), 382
between Guatemala City and the city of Punta Gorda, in British Honduras. This road, and the fact that it was never built, would eventually become an ongoing issue in resolving of the dispute. This treaty was rarely mentioned by either the Guatemalans or the British for much of the next seventy-five years until 1940 when the Guatemalans declared the treaty void due to the fact that the British had never built the road. In 1945, Article One of the newly adopted Guatemalan constitution stated “any efforts taken toward obtaining Belize reinstatement to the Republic are of national interest.” Periodically throughout the next three decades, the Guatemalans would threaten to take the territory of British Honduras by force, only to back down each time through international negotiations, eventually mediated by the United States in the late 1960s. It was not until the 1970s that British Hondurans had a real voice in these negotiations, and this was only because they appealed to the international community, not because of the acquiescence of either the British or the Guatemalans. At no point during the period examined in this thesis were the British Hondurans themselves given a real voice in the resolution of this territorial dispute. While this dispute became a major hindrance to British Honduran independence, those most affected would be largely left out of the decision-making process. The Guatemalan claim on British Honduras was a central issue for the colony in the 1950s and early 60s. This issue, and the fear of a Guatemalan invasion, gave the United States even more reason to prefer the steady hand of British colonialism over the insecurity of a

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16 Young and Young, “The Impact of the Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute on the Internal Politics of Belize”, 11.
17 Ibid., 12.
18 Ibid., 8.
new, economically weak state in Central America. Eventually the US would play a role in the mediation of the dispute. The unsuccessful mediation attempt of the dispute by a US lawyer in the mid-1960s is outside the scope of this paper, but is an important step that took place during the long and drawn out independence process of British Honduras.

**Why British Honduras?**

British Honduras provides an opportunity for a special case study in Cold War politics. At the core of this section of my project is this investigation: As a British Colony in the western hemisphere, why was the US involvement in the decolonization process in British Honduras so limited in light of the success of the communist movement in Cuba between 1959 and 1964? What were the main concerns voiced by the United States in the decolonization process, did US political behavior toward British Honduras change due to the Cuban situation? How was the treatment of British Honduras by the US during this period similar to or different from British Guiana? And lastly, how did the history of US relations with these two colonies influence the decolonization process?

**British Honduras Historiography**

The nature of examining British Honduras requires interdisciplinary study. While much of the work on British Honduras to date has been in fields other than
history, some historical scholarship completed in recent years is particularly
important to my study. In addition to this work, I am building on work in other
fields such as anthropology, sociology and developmental economics. Many of
the leading books covering British Honduras during the last forty years take an
interdisciplinary approach to the subject, combining the studies of political
development, economic trends, and cultural construction. These sources are a
basis for background material, but do not contribute directly to my work. While
my work is focused on the US involvement in British Honduras, scholarship on
the internal political structure and development of the colony is pertinent to
understanding the historical record.

The most pertinent work is that of Dr. Dominic Cerri. Dr. Cerri’s
dissertation, titled Missionary Zeal: The Jesuits and United States-British
Honduran Relations, 1894-1958, is a combined study of the Jesuit educational
influence and the Cold War era US economic and political influence in British
Honduras. Cerri argues that US policy toward British Honduras in the 1950s took
a “middle course” between full support for, and opposition to British Honduran
independence.\(^\text{19}\) This middle course meant that the US gave “rhetorical support”
to nationalist movements in many colonial territories, including British Honduras,
while preferring a slow pace for colonial powers releasing control. Cerri points
out that during the 1950s, the US was increasingly apprehensive about the
political orientation of the PUP in British Honduras, even though British
assessments of the colony did not foresee any leftist agitation within the

\(^{19}\) Cerri, “Missionary Zeal”, 307.
movement. The United States was so concerned with suppressing communism that any hint of a nationalist movement made State Department officials nervous, even when US consulate officials in British Honduras were finding no evidence of any communist activity. As Cerri’s timeline ends in 1958, he is focused on what the US policy was prior to the outcome of the Cuban Revolution. My work answers similar questions about US involvement in British Honduras, but pursues these answers in a political environment, that included a socialist government in Cuba. Additionally, my work highlights the stark contrast between the British Honduran relationship with the United States after the Cuban Revolution, and that relationship between the US and British Guiana.

Much of the work on British Honduras was done in the 1970s and 1980s. Published in 1973, Norman Ashcraft’s book, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment: Processes of Political Economic Change in British Honduras*, traces the flow of British Honduran economic development, or lack thereof, up to 1965. His story of British Honduras is one of a political construction of the Western World, which is systematically taken advantage of by greater powers. Ashcraft highlights the important role that outside colonial powers played in constructing the British Honduran territory as a political unit. One aspect of Ashcraft’s argument that is striking is the dependence and interconnectedness of the British Honduran economy with that of stronger nations. Political forces are not Ashcraft’s main concern, but they may be equally interconnected with the colonial powers as are the economic forces Ashcraft is focused on in the book. Of the colony, Ashcraft writes, “Maybe it exists as an entity in some quasi-political sense, but it certainly

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30 Ibid.
does not economically, socially, or linguistically...the behavior of its nationals, their fortunes as well as the course of political developments, must be examined within this wider historical context, if any meaningful interpretation is to emerge." While Ashcraft does not specifically address the political developments, which are the focus of my study, this highlighted condition of dependence on international forces is precisely where I base my work. The influences of activities in Cuba, and the resulting actions taken (or lack thereof) by the United States, may have had decisive consequences for the political status of British Honduras. Additionally, the level of acceptance of the reality of these external influences by the British Honduran and British Guianese colonial leadership differed greatly and these differences would lead to serious consequences in British Guiana.

Shortly after the publishing of Ashcraft’s book, Cedric Hilburn (C.H.) Grant took a more comprehensive look at the political history of British Honduras. In his 1976 book, *The Making of Modern Belize*, Grant methodically traced the history of British political involvement in the colony, continuing to the nationalist movement of the 1950s and the process of decolonization during the 1960s and early 1970s. In part three of the book, Grant focused largely on internal politics within the colony, as well as the issue of the Guatemalan claim to British Honduran territory. The attention paid to US involvement is mainly economic in nature. Additionally, the US is not the main focus of Grant’s book. Grant does an admirable job of exploring the internal workings of British

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22 Grant, *The Making of Modern Belize*. 
Honduran politics during the period that I have studied (1950-1966), but there is little discussion of the US role in matters, and the book is not intended to be a analysis of US policy in the colony as it relates to Cold War political positioning and Cuba.

This time period in British Honduran development provides a new study of Cold War era political history. The combination of outside political influences over the tiny colony, as well as the interesting shape of the pro-US nationalist movement growing during the 1950s, allows for a study of the Cold War that has hitherto been left untouched. These factors - taken together with United States paranoia about the newly socialist government in Cuba, the dismantling of the British colonial empire, the Anglo-Guatemalan border dispute, and the British Honduran internal debate over Anglo vs. US loyalty - provides this project with an uncommon point of reference and makes this endeavor particularly compelling.

In my research, I had originally hoped to find evidence that would conclusively pinpoint US influence in the British Honduran independence process. In my research at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, I found no such evidence. There are however, many State Department documents relating to British Honduras during the time period that is the subject of this study that remain classified. As I did not have access to those documents, which may or may not shed new information of US policy toward British Honduras at the time, I chose to continue the project by incorporating British Guiana and comparing US public policy toward the independence processes of both colonies. It is possible
that in the future new evidence may be declassified that will show a different level of US involvement in British Honduran decolonization, but what follows is based on the current, available documentation.

*British Guiana Historiography*

In contrast to British Honduras, British Guiana had much less historical contact with the United States. In truth, prior to the Cold War period, the US had very little interest in British Guiana, except for two very important strategic assets: Atkinson Airfield and the mining of bauxite, a mineral used for making aluminum. While British Guiana did not benefit from a historically positive relationship with the United States, as did British Honduras, by the 1950s the US had maintained bauxite mining interests in the colony for over thirty-five years. Even more importantly, Atkinson Airfield, an airbase built during World War Two through an agreement with the British, was a modern airfield, capable of being used for large, military planes. The existence of Atkinson made British Guiana even more of a potential liability for the US, in a period where communist expansion and war with the Soviets was of the gravest concern.

British Guiana had a limited economic or political relationship with the United States. While the mining industries of both the US and Canada had interests in the colony, these interests were more limited than similar interests in neighboring Suriname (Dutch Guiana) and in other areas of the Caribbean and the southern United States. Economically and culturally, the colony had been tied to
the British Empire. Although Cheddi Jagan, the man with the greatest political
power in British Guiana in the 1950s, had been educated in the United States and
had married an American, the political persuasions of both Jagan and his
American wife negated any cultural affinity they may have shared with those in
the US. The fact that Janet Jagan was a US-born socialist and communist
sympathizer made the US government wary of her, as well as her potential
influence over her husband and British Guianese politics. Additionally, rather
than viewing his political life as in line with the United States, as Price and the
PUP had in British Honduras, Jagan attempted to carve his own political path.
This decision was made at a time when the United States desired convincing
statements from Latin American leaders on which side of the Cold War divide
they sat. The two scenarios that the US could not abide by were the creation of
additional leftist governments in Latin America, or the creation of governments,
which lacked political clarity. More than anything else, the US wanted to see
strong, anti-communist credentials.

The historical scholarship on British Guiana has been more extensive than
that on British Honduras. This is partially due to the history of racial politics in the
colony, and also partially to the history of US intervention that is a central focus
of this study. While British Honduras has had very limited scholarship from the
historical community, British Guiana has had the benefit of more widespread
interest from those in political and cultural history. Indeed, just the availability of
primary source material has surely affected the scholarship discrepancy between
the two former colonies. In my work, I try to highlight those scholars' works,
which focus on the issues I wish to cover, namely, US involvement and the motivations for that involvement. While there is significant scholarship on race relations in British Guiana, I do not dive deeply into this issue. However, I do discuss racial tensions as they pertain to the political structure of the colony.

A preeminent scholar, who has contributed to the body of work on British Guiana, is Stephan Rabe. Rabe’s 2005 work, *US Intervention in British Guiana: A Cold War Story*, exposes the intensity with which the United States sought to influence the political direction of British Guianese politics in the early-1960s. Rabe traces the history of US involvement in the decolonization process of British Guiana between 1953 and 1969. In doing so, Rabe shows the grip that Cold War paranoia had on those in the Kennedy Administration, as well as the process by which Cheddi Jagan would be unseated through covert US maneuverings.

A work that does an admirable job of explaining the process that led to US intervention is Joshua David Esposito’s, “The Cold War and Decolonization in British Guiana: The Anglo-American Intervention and Guianese Nationalist Politics.” In this thesis, Esposito explores and exposes the British Guianese decolonization process by looking at the Kennedy Administration’s Cold War policies, combined with the special Cold War relationship between the US and the United Kingdom. Of particular mention is the way that Esposito focuses on the effect that the policies and political maneuverings of the two British Guianese political leaders contributed to the unfolding of events during decolonization.

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Cheddi Jagan and the People’s Progressive Party would try to maintain power without taking distinct sides in the Cold War, while the leader of the opposition People’s National Congress, Forbes Burnham, would adroitly court the US and become outwardly, staunchly anti-communist in doing so. This becomes the crux of Esposito’s exploration, within the context of the balancing of American and British interests during the process. Esposito focuses on the behavior of both Jagan and Burnham in addition to examining the historical relationship between British Guiana and the United States.

Esposito’s focus on internal colonial politics becomes central to my thesis. While Esposito focuses only on British Guiana, I take his focus and expand it to the second colony of British Honduras to show that indeed, Cheddi Jagan’s political missteps contributed to the US intervention in British Guiana while George Price’s consistent anti-communism and pro-Americanism bolstered the American sense of security around the British Honduran independence process. Esposito’s impressive sequence of events plainly shows Jagan as someone who misunderstood his own political position and contrasts his actions with those of Forbes Burnham, whom the US supported as a replacement for Jagan in post-independence British Guiana after 1964. Most crucially, Esposito pinpoints the steps, which made it impossible for Jagan to repair his own damaged working relationship with the United States. In my work, I contrast this with George Price, and his consistently positive relationship with those in the US Government, while still leading a nationalist movement, which was not entirely free of US suspicion.
Much has been written on the US involvement in Latin America during the Cold War. While many scholars have focused on particular segments of US policy, such as interactions with Guatemala or Cuba, there are many works that have analyzed US policy in Latin America more generally and the ramifications of that policy. A work that is particularly pertinent to my thesis is Alan McPherson's *Intimate Ties, Bitter Struggles: The United States and Latin America Since 1945*. McPherson highlights the interconnected nature of the US-Latin American relationship and argues that not only has that relationship become more interconnected in post-Cold War society, but that during the Cold War, the US and Latin America became indispensable to one another. Of the issue of Latin American independence, McPherson writes that the sixty years following World War II "were about making the independence that already existed fairer, safer, more humane and more respectful." In the case of British Honduras and British Guiana, we saw two very different examples of Latin American independence, one fits McPherson's description and one does not.

Another important work is Stephen Rabe's book, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America*. While Rabe's focus is on US policy throughout much of Central and South America, one point that Rabe makes about US policy is especially important to this thesis. Rabe argues in the book that, although politics and economics are often intertwined, the United States'
Interventions in Latin America during the Cold War were focused on political control rather than business interests. This point is especially pertinent when looking at the difference in US policy found in British Honduras and British Guiana. This goal of political control emanating from the US would have been wasted on British Honduras, where US political and cultural influence was already strong. In British Guiana however, we see a case where US political influence was somewhat lacking, giving the US cause to take action.

Both of these works focus on US policy, but do not highlight British Honduras and British Guiana. Additionally, the focus of the majority of US-Latin American diplomatic scholarship has been on actions taken by the US against sovereign states such as Guatemala and Cuba. There is little attention paid in Latin American historical scholarship to British colonies and US policies toward them. Where this thesis takes hold, is in this gap. This thesis highlights the complexity of the US Cold War policy and how it was enacted in the United States’ “back yard”, while keeping the British concerns in mind.

Overview

This work focuses on the period between 1950 and 1966. Specifically, it investigates the role played by the United States in the process of decolonization in British Honduras and British Guiana during the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations. All of this investigation will be shaded by the Cold War political environment and by the containment policy of the United States, used to
prevent the spread of communism into non-communist nations. My main focus will be to show, during the years between 1959 and 1964, why the United States took very little interest in British Honduras, while becoming increasingly preoccupied with political events in British Guiana.

My thesis is divided into three chapters. The goal of these chapters will be to show a full and clear picture of the forces contributing to what were very different US policies toward British Honduras and British Guiana during decolonization. Chapter One highlights the US political and economic relationship with British Honduras up to 1959, including the background of the Anglo-Guatemalan border dispute, which became the major point of political contact between the US and British Honduras during the 1960s. Chapter Two outlines the colonial path of British Guiana that led up to the US intervention in colonial politics, just prior to independence. In both Chapters One and Two, I show the differing historical relationships between the US and each of the two colonies. Additionally, particular attention will be paid to the divergent strategic and political importance represented by each colony to Cold War US foreign policy, especially in light of the Cuban Revolution and its aftermath between 1959 and 1964. I purposely highlight US concerns about real and perceived Soviet and Cuban influence over political movements in the western hemisphere. Chapter three will show the differences in US policy and concern toward the two colonies at the crisis point of decolonization that occurred between 1962 and 1964. Each colony went through the process of decolonization at the same time, and I show that the US policy was decidedly different due to the strategic
importance of each colony, the historical relationships (or lack thereof) between each colony and the United States, and the political leanings and behavior of the colonial leaders themselves. Additionally, these differences contributed directly to the disparate levels of progress each colony made toward decolonization during the years between 1950 and 1966. While British Guiana gained independence in 1966, although not without the meddling of the United States, British Honduras would wait until 1981 to gain full independence from Great Britain. However, the British Guianese would pay a price for early independence. Instead of having full electoral control over who lead their newly independent nation, the British Guianese fell victim to the political whims of the United States during a time of particularly high tensions over the spread of international communism in the western hemisphere. Rather than ensuring wholly free elections prior to independence, the United States demanded that the British Guianese leader was anti-communist, rather than freely elected. British Honduras was not the victim of such US interference, but also did not benefit from US support, which could have hurried a British Honduran independence process. These two colonies represent decidedly different policies from the US: one of intense preoccupation, the other of consistent indifference. The importance here is how different the US policy was. Given that these two colonies have very similar histories, and are the only two British Colonies situated in Latin America, this study provides the first comparison of US involvement. Although some of the work highlighted above has focused on the US involvement in the decolonization of British Guiana, my work is the first that will compare US involvement in both colonies.
Chapter One: British Honduras

British Honduras encompassed the territory that is the present-day nation of Belize. Situated on the eastern coast of Central America, British Honduras was officially a colony of the British Empire from 1862 to 1981. Bordering Mexico to the north and Guatemala to the south and west, the eastern border was the Caribbean Sea. The geography of the coastline was a huge coral reef, which made it difficult to land large European ships. The colony had a history of first being controlled by Spain, and then, after the 1850s, by the British. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the British used British Honduras as a place to extract timber, but it was generally seen as a colonial backwater and a relatively unimportant portion of the British Empire.

The United States began to have strong economic ties with British Honduras in the late 19th century. The British Honduran dollar would be set against the US dollar starting in 1894, and for the next fifty-five years, the small British colony would be largely reliant on favorable trade relations with the United States to get the majority of its imported products. These products included a large percentage of the colony’s food supplies, principally due to the fact that the British colonial policies neglected to develop any large-scale agricultural development in British Honduras.

After World War II, as the British sought to dissolve their colonial empire, British Honduras developed a strong nationalist movement. With independence as its most vehement rallying cry, a new breed of British Honduran politicians
created the first real political party in the colony in the early 1950s, the People’s United Party (PUP). The PUP would protest British colonialism and court the United States throughout the 1950s and 60s. However, due to a territorial claim advanced by Guatemala and a lack of interest or concern from the United States for a quick independence process, British Honduras would remain in its colonial status for another two decades after much of the British Empire had been dissolved.

The United States, throughout this time, felt content with the retention of British control over British Honduras. During the 1950s, the United States held dual, and sometimes dueling, policy objectives. While pushing Britain to grant independence to all of her colonial territories in the name of freedom and self-government for all peoples, US Cold War security concerns over the spread of communism in the western hemisphere would be of paramount importance to Washington’s policy-makers. The western hemisphere especially would become of serious concern after the toppling of the Arbenz government in Guatemala in 1954 and even more so after the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. British Honduras, however, would escape a great deal of attention from the United States. While the US would take steps to undermine the freely elected government in the colony of British Guiana, British Honduras would remain relatively untouched and unimportant to US policy makers throughout the early Cold War period. The insignificance of British Honduras was largely due to the long history of a positive relationship with the United States as well as the colony’s small size and pro-US political stance. Additionally, the colony lacked real economic viability,
which was judged a necessary prerequisite for independence by the British, throughout the 1950s and 60s. The combination of US acquiescence to British control and adamant anti-communism emanating from the PUP would convince the United States that there was little to fear from British Honduras becoming a hotbed of communist activity in the western hemisphere. This standpoint taken by the US, while helping to prolong British Honduran status as a British colony, also meant that the internal political apparatus within the colony went largely unaffected by US interference. While the United States became increasingly suspicious of Latin American nationalist movements after the CIA Coup in Guatemala in 1954 and the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the British Honduran nationalist movement did not alarm Washington to a degree that would result in an intervention.

Lastly, US involvement in British Honduran political life during this period was chiefly limited to one issue: the Anglo-Guatemalan Border Dispute. Understanding this dispute is key to understanding the US position on British Honduras in the Cold War period. While US interest in the independence process of British Guiana was strong and multi-faceted, the United States would largely steer clear of any involvement in the British Honduran independence process, limiting US involvement to the border dispute between Britain and Guatemala until the second half of the 1960s. Without a serious communist threat, the main concern for the US was to avoid taking financial responsibility for the colony, after independence. Additionally, the US wanted to avoid any potential political instability that could arise from the assertion of the Guatemalan territorial claim
on the future state of Belize. Evading direct involvement in the Anglo-Guatemala border dispute, while tacitly encouraging the retention of British control over the colony, would support these two US goals.

This chapter illuminates the historical relationship between British Honduras and the United States. This relationship, and a keen understanding of the particulars of the history is important to understand why the United States was content to take a hands-off approach to the British Honduran independence process. British Honduras represents an important case study in US foreign relations and provides the opportunity to see US inaction as a tool of diplomacy. The relationship that is the focus of this chapter is central to this thesis, and the background is central to understanding that relationship. Additionally, this historical relationship informs both the colony's strategic importance to the US during the Cold War and the US concern over the behavior of the colonial leaders in the early 1960s.

The Nineteenth Century

During the nineteenth century, the United States and the British started to act as rivals in Central America. Both powers had maintained a colonial or an imperialist presence in the region for decades without incident. Prior to the 1840s, America had such a small interest in the neighboring southern territory that there was little concern about British colonial activity. However, following the Mexican-American War, this began to change. With the subsequent acquisition
of California, Arizona, and New Mexico, as well as the discovery of gold in California, the United States began to take a closer interest in British influence in the region.\(^{26}\) The Monroe Doctrine was still less than thirty years old, and the Americans had no desire to see the British gain a stronger foothold in Central America.

The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850 was designed to balance British and American power in Central America.\(^{27}\) The goal of this treaty was to give joint control of any canal that might be proposed to cut through Central America between the Caribbean and the Pacific to both Britain and the United States. The treaty also included the stipulation that neither Britain nor the United States should hold dominion over any of the territories in Central America.\(^{28}\) However, British Honduras was not considered to be part of Central America due to the colony's political status as part of the British Empire. Rather than a Central American colony, the British thought of British Honduras as an extension of the British West Indies. Due to this political status, British Honduras was explicitly excluded from the stipulation in the Dallas-Clarendon Treaty in 1856.\(^{29}\) Although the Dallas-Clarendon Treaty was never ratified, it did mark the first time that any legal language was used to give Britain an official right to sovereign control of British Honduras. After the failure of Dallas-Clarendon, Britain decided to settle the issue with the independent republics of Central America, rather than with the

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\(^{27}\) Ibid., 198.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 201.
United States. This resulted in the signing of the Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty, in 1859.

*The Border Treaty of 1859*

The Anglo-Guatemalan Border Treaty would long be a point of misunderstanding between England and Guatemala. The question arose from a difference of opinion over the purpose of the treaty. England consistently maintained that the purpose of the treaty was to define clear boundaries between British Honduras and the Guatemalan frontier, a piece of land that in 1859 was barely inhabited and had long been an area without clearly defined borders. The Guatemalans, however, claimed that it was an agreement by which Guatemala had agreed to relinquish a piece of land that had historically been part of Guatemala and thus also claimed that part of the agreement with England was the allotment of compensation for that land.\(^{30}\) This claim stems from the fact that only after 1821, did England negotiate with Spain for rights to the land encompassing British Honduras. Guatemala claimed that, upon its independence from Spain in 1821 Guatemala had inherited the territory from Spain, making any negotiations between Spain and Britain after 1821 invalid. The British had been logging in British Honduras with Spanish official acquiescence since 1783, but neither the Guatemalans nor the British had legal control of the land. Part of this dispute had to do with disagreements over the validity of previously signed

treaties, but the more substantial and long-standing quarrel arose from the language in the Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty itself.

Much of the treaty of 1859 was agreeable to both Guatemala and Great Britain. While articles one through six dealt with the boundary agreements and the marking of those boundaries, Article VII was the section causing the problems concerning the misunderstanding between the two nations.\(^{31}\) Article VII discussed the agreement that both Guatemala and Britain would help to build a road between the British Honduran Coast and the capital of Guatemala. The article reads as follows:

Article VII: With the object of practically carrying out the views set forth in the preamble of the present Convention, for improving and perpetuating the friendly relations which at present so happily exist between the two High Contracting Parties, they mutually agree conjointly to use their best efforts, by taking adequate means for establishing the easiest communication (either by cart-road, or employing the rivers, or both united, according to the opinion of the surveying engineers), between the fittest place on the Atlantic Coast, near the Settlement of Belize, and the capital of Guatemala; whereby the commerce of England on the one hand and the material prosperity of the Republic on the other, cannot fail to be sensibly increased, at the same time that the limits of the two countries being now clearly defined, all further encroachments by either party on the territory of the other will be effectually checked and prevented for the future.\(^{32}\)

Article VII was vague when outlining exactly how the road was to be built. The division of the burden between Britain and Guatemala would become a sticking point. The phrase “mutually agree conjointly to use their best efforts” would be the source of confusion and disagreement in the 1930s and beyond, as

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 34.
Twentieth Century Developments

In his 1948 article, *The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute*, Robert Arthur Humphreys clearly outlines the important concepts to be cognizant of when considering the backdrop of the Anglo-Guatemalan dispute in the twentieth century:

At the outset, four points must be borne in mind. First, British sovereignty over British Honduras had never been explicitly proclaimed, though it had long been exercised in practice. Secondly, the boundaries of the settlement had not been redefined, by treaty or agreement, since the Anglo-Spanish treaties of 1783 and 1786, though to the south and to the west of these boundaries had long been obsolete. Thirdly, under the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty Britain was precluded from extending her dominion in Central America. Finally, Guatemala had advanced a claim to sovereignty or territory, though this claim had never been admitted either by Britain or Spain (which did not recognize Guatemalan independence till 1863) and was, in any event, dubious. 36

These conditions remained throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and color completely the actions in the 1930s and beyond. Taken together, Humphreys' points illustrate the convoluted nature of the dispute. By the 1950s, the dispute was confused and multifaceted and had been so for almost a century. The most important of these themes, is point four. When the conflict flared up again in the mid-20th century, Britain continued to view the Guatemalan claim as suspect or without merit. The key fact remained that the legality of the claims of both Great Britain and Guatemala remained unclear during the British Honduran quest for independence that developed in the 1950s and 60s.

36 Humphreys, R.A. "The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute". *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Jul., 1948), 395-96.
As mentioned above, for the first three decades of the twentieth century, the British Honduran border dispute lay dormant. The borders remained defined as they had been, and Guatemala made no attempt to reopen the issue. However, between 1933 and 1940 Guatemala reinvigorated requests to satisfy the border dispute by trying to resolve the disagreement over the proposed road in Article VII of the treaty of 1859. The issue became one of the satisfaction of the 1859 treaty, either by jointly building the road stipulated in Article VII, or through alternate means of compensation given to Guatemalan Government by the British.

There was disagreement over what amount might need to be paid by each party in order to build the road, if it were to be built. Guatemala fully expected that Britain would pay a greater share of the cost, due to her ability to do so. Britain, by this time seeing no real advantage for the British government in having the road built, felt no legal obligation to do so. However, wishing to resolve the issue, in 1936 England offered to pay Guatemala the sum of £50,000 for use in the building of the road, or to offset Guatemalan costs from the building of rail infrastructure. 37 Guatemala rejected the British offer and in 1937 made a counter resolution requesting a payment of £400,000 from the British government. 38 The British rejected this offer, and the dispute remained unsettled. The financial discrepancies, combined with the British de facto control over British Honduras and the dubiousness of the Guatemalan claim, made resolution of the border dispute impossible.

37 Dobson, A History of Belize, 235.
38 Ibid.
In the first two years of the Second World War, Guatemala and Britain made attempts to get a mediating force involved in the dispute. Here again, there was a huge gulf between how each party viewed the dispute. In 1940, Britain made three suggestions on how the two countries might resolve this long-standing issue: firstly to refer the issue to the Hague Tribunal, secondly to create an ad hoc tribunal consisting of three international lawyers, which would be umpired by a party chosen by the President of the United States, or thirdly, refer the issue to an ad hoc tribunal of international lawyers “acting under the procedure of chapter 4 of the Hague Convention of 1907 for the Pacific settlement of disputes.” This move was in conjunction with the argument that the issue was not simply one of international law. Guatemala claimed that the dispute also had a moral component and should thus be resolved giving consideration to both legal and moral grounds. The Guatemalan argument that Britain had been morally in the wrong as an aggressive, colonizing power when the agreements with Spain had been signed in 1783 and 1786. This is also the start of decades of ongoing attempts to foster US involvement and mediation of the process. The US consistently tried to stay out of the conflict but continuously expressed hope for satisfactory resolution of the disagreement.

Responding to the Guatemalan suggestion for American mediation, the British suggested in 1940 that the case be referred to the international court in The Hague, claiming that only there could the matter be properly sorted out, if a mediating force was needed. Britain also restated its view that the source of the

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40 Dobson, A History of Belize, 237.
disagreement was Article VII of the 1859 treaty and that a tribunal was needed to find a way for the two countries to satisfactorily fulfill the provisions of Article VII. Guatemala rejected these proposals and, for the first time, formally stated that the 1859 treaty was void and that the issue was no longer the fulfillment of Article VII, but was now whether the British had any right to occupy British Honduras at all.

This was the last attempt at a resolution for the duration of the Second World War. In 1941, Guatemalan President Ubico announced that Guatemala would not press the issue for the remainder of World War II due to the importance of the British fight against Nazi Germany. However, almost immediately after the war Guatemala reopened the issue with vehemence. This fact is at least partially due to the fall of the Ubico government in 1944. The newly written Guatemalan Constitution of 1945 declared that Belize was indeed part of Guatemalan territory and that the policy of the new government should be to regain control of the territory from the British. Following this declaration, the British suggested in January of 1946 that the matter be taken to the United Nations International Court for arbitration. Guatemala again suggested her willingness to accept such a resolution of the problem, but only if the court would consider the case based on equality and fairness, and not solely on legal grounds. While Britain chose to view the issue purely as a legal one, Guatemala chose to highlight a moral component. The British, again due to their de-facto control of the territory, had

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41 Humphreys, “The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute”, 402.
42 Ibid., 403.
43 Young and Young, 12.
44 Grunewald, “The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute over British Honduras”, 40
45 Ibid.
no real motivation to move from their chosen position, and Guatemala, wanting to claim as much territory as possible, was looking for ways to successfully claim British Honduran territory.

Political Developments in British Honduras: 1949 – 1960

The genesis of modern politics in British Honduras can be pinpointed to one British reversal of monetary policy in 1949. During the late-1940s, the British government was desperately trying to recover economically from the ravages of World War Two. In addition to the massive expense of the war, Britain still had an extensive colonial empire to manage and pay for. Her Majesty’s government urgently wanted to lessen their economic responsibility for the colonies or at very least, find ways to increase income from the colonies if independence could not yet be granted.

The colonial dollar being set against the US dollar since 1894 made US goods more affordable for British Hondurans. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, British Hondurans relied on reasonable prices on US goods, while still officially being part of the British Empire. While the poor in British Honduras benefited from these close economic relationships with the US, the large plantation companies active in British Honduras still traded in British pounds. In September of 1949 the British government devalued the British Pound. Initially however, the British Honduran dollar was not devalued in recognition of the colony’s reliance on US goods for over seventy percent of
imported goods. Upon this announcement, the masses in British Honduras were repeatedly assured that the British Honduran dollar would not be devalued in order to keep the old exchange rate with the British Pound. However, on December 31st, 1949, the colonial governor used his reserve powers to do just that. This move not only made the cost of US goods skyrocket but also exposed the real power structure within the colony. The devaluation of the British Honduran dollar helped only the large, land-owning companies while putting even more financial strain on an already impoverished working class.

The British monetary policy decision contributed directly to the rise of the first organized political party in British Honduras. The devaluation, combined with the fact that the colonial government had previously claimed that the British Honduran dollar would remain in parity with the US dollar, soon became a pivotal factor in the growth of the People's United Party and the British Honduran independence movement. The action also protected the Belize Estate and Produce Company, which was the largest landowner in the colony and the greatest example of the inequity created by colonialism. O. Nigel Bolland writes in his book, *Colonialism and Resistance in Belize: Essays in Historical Sociology*, "Devaluation produced an immediate fall in the people's purchasing power and standard of living whilst protecting the interests of the Belize Estate and Produce Company and others who traded in the sterling area." The intensified call for independence gave a new class of British Honduran political leaders within the

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47 Ibid.
colony a cause that resonated with a greater segment of the population, making organized political mobilization possible for the first time.

Between 1947 and 1949, a group of students from St. John’s College in Belize City started to organize. Led by George Price, these students soon formed the People’s Committee (PC). The PC was formed by Price, serving as Secretary and John Smith, serving as Chairman and was the most vocal opponent of the devaluation during 1950. Lacking real political power, and also being fairly disorganized, the PC limited its goals to “restoration of the Belize dollar to parity with the US dollar, preventing the country from joining the proposed West Indies Federation, the attainment of self-government, and the improvement of social and economic conditions.” These may seem like ambitious goals for a newly formed political entity, but the timeline on which these goals were thought to be attainable was fairly slow. For example, the West Indies Federation did materialize, but both British Honduras and British Guiana declined membership. Although the committee only existed for nine months, its impact was great, as it soon transformed into the People’s United Party (PUP), which would adopt the PC’s anti-colonial and anti-British stance.

The PUP was the first real political party in British Honduras. Formed with the support of the most powerful workers union in the colony, the General Worker’s Union (GWU), the PUP created a platform that was staunchly anti-colonial, nationalistic, and pro-US. The PC had been able to solidify the support of the GWU during its short tenure, a development that significantly helped the

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50 Ibid., 125.
PUP in its first few years of existence. In addition to the goals of independence and self-determination for the colony, several of the leaders of the PUP, George Price among them, also believed that the natural political and economic orientation for British Honduras was well within the sphere of influence of the United States. Rather than viewing the interests of the colony as united with the West Indian British territories in the Caribbean, George Price and many of those supporting the PUP saw the historical economic relationship with the United States, and relationships within Latin America, as a model for the future. 51

Between 1950 and 1954, the PUP grew in size and strength. As the only political party of any merit in the colony, the PUP quickly enticed many poor workers to join. In 1951, a new constitution provided for universal suffrage in British Honduras. While only a small fraction of the population had been eligible to vote in previous elections, in 1954, British Honduras had its first election under the new constitution. George Price and the PUP won a landslide victory. For the first time, the official policy of those in charge of the colonial government was to gain complete independence for the colony as soon as possible.

British apprehensions regarding the decolonization process in British Honduras were twofold: first, in order to gain independence, a colony needed to prove its own economic viability. The importance of having a strong economy upon independence was a hindrance for British Honduras as the colony had been underdeveloped for decades and suffered from systematic underemployment. Second, the British were concerned about the Guatemalan claim to British Honduran territory. Even if the economic issues could be sorted out, the

51 Ibid., 132.
independence granted by the British would soon become meaningless if Guatemala invaded and took control of a newly independent Belize. Given that Guatemala had specified as state policy its intention of regaining the Belizean territory in the Guatemalan constitution of 1944, both the British, and Americans were concerned about what might transpire in the event of a British withdrawal. Even as late as 1960, the British were concerned about the two factors outlined above. In an August, 1960 report, a group of Commonwealth Officials grouped British Honduras in with those dependent territories that were likely to seek independence within the next decade.\(^52\)

\textit{US Policy toward British Honduras in the 1950s}

By the mid-1950s, the US had established dual policies toward British decolonization. Firstly, pressuring Britain to relinquish control of her colonial empire in the name of freedom of self-determination for all peoples, while their commitment to this principle was decidedly uneven in the 1950s/60s. Secondly demanding political stability within the western hemisphere as a combat against the spread of communism. The process of decolonization in British Honduras stood as one of few examples at the crossroads of these sometimes-conflicting US policies.

By the time a modern political structure was emerging in British Honduras, the United States was at the height of Cold War paranoia. The fear of

\(^{52}\) Memorandum, Constitutional Development of the Commonwealth, Norman Brook, August 11, 1960, UK National Archives.
the spread of communism had become the main force behind US foreign policy after the writing of the Long Telegram by George Kennan in 1946. After watching the Soviet Union detonate their first atomic bomb in 1949, and the rise of the People’s Republic of China that same year, it looked to US policy makers like international communism was on the march. McCarthyism was in full swing, and both the American public and those in the government were focused on the need to be vigilant in the fight against communist expansion. The small, unstable territories that Britain was trying to decolonize seemed potentially susceptible to communist influence in the early 1950s. However, while the US was keeping a watchful eye on the political awakening in British Honduras, it was clear to the US consulate in British Honduras by 1956 that communism had not gained a foothold in the colony. The US had not, up to that point, seen any substantial evidence of a leftist movement in the colony of any kind. Writing from Belize City, American Consul John A. Bywater stated, “In somewhat over two years in Belize, I have not been able to find that there is in British Honduras even one Communist, nor do I know of any possible Communist Sympathizers.” Bywater implied that communism was unlikely to spread because educated British Hondurans were influenced heavily by American attitudes through the American Jesuit-run British Honduran education system.

Starting in 1950, and throughout the decade, the PUP called for independence for British Honduras. George Price and the membership of the

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53 Foreign Service Dispatch, Belize Consulate to Department of State, Washington DC, July 17, 1956, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, MD.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
PUP were set on obtaining complete independence from Great Britain as soon as possible while staying within the British Commonwealth. The combination of a new political awareness in the colony, and the decidedly pro-US business stance of the political majority, fostered the idea of US help in the British Honduran independence movement, rather than a push for help from either the Soviet Union of Britain. As the United States had once freed herself from Great Britain by revolutionary means, many in British Honduran leadership may have been naive about what US influence might bring in the late 1950s.\(^{56}\) The close, long-term relationship which British Honduras enjoyed with the United States was a real asset, relieving US fears, and inspiring hope for the British Honduran pro-US independence agenda.

The United States however, had little interest in the independence movement. While the stated policy of the US at the time was to foster self-determination through democratic means of self-government, the friction of Cold War era containment theory and British decolonization, gave the US reason to remain neutral, so long as the British were in control.\(^{57}\) The US wished to avoid giving any indication that “we wish to supersede the British in their primary responsibility.”\(^{58}\) The politics of the situation did, however, make this somewhat difficult for the US. American support for British policy, while also focusing on containing threats from the rise of communism within a British colony, made the situation more delicate than those in independent states. The US, while having an

\(^{56}\) Cerri, *Missionary Zeal*, 301

\(^{57}\) Foreign Service Dispatch, Belize Consulate to Department of State, Washington DC, March 31, 1958, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.
interest in British Honduras, did not want to step on the toes of the British, nor did the US want to find itself responsible for a new territory, in the event of a British withdrawal. 59

The historically close relationship between the United States and Britain was to be tested during this decolonization process. The British Hondurans used their pro-US stance both to court United States’ dollars and mediation and also to shame Britain into expediting the independence process. However, the US continually took a hands-off approach to the issue and deferred to British control of the colony. The Anglo-American relationship was of highest importance, and the US government wanted to avoid the perception that it was meddling in British Honduran affairs. 60 When British Honduran protesters repeatedly marched in the streets waving the American flag and singing “God Bless America”, it was difficult for the United States to either ignore or explain the issue to Great Britain.

The United States had very few political concerns about British Honduras throughout the early Cold War period. While the US was understandably anxious about the potential for communist influence in the soon to be ex-British colonies in Latin America, the same problems that kept British Honduras a colony of Great Britain, also served to alleviate some of the potential for alarm from the United States. The small population and lack of real economic viability, combined with the pro-US rhetoric from the PUP, satisfied the United States by the mid-1950s, that there was little reason to worry about decolonization from a national security standpoint. The fact that the US policy was to let the British handle things in their

59 Ibid.
60 US Department of State to Belize Consulate, Sec. Dulles, November 25, 1958, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
own colony was largely due to the focus of the US on larger anxieties in Latin America.

Guatemala and Anti-Communism

While the US was pursuing a hands-off approach in British Honduras, the US policy toward Guatemala between 1952 and 1954 was quite different. The CIA organized and supported a coup in Guatemala in 1954 in order to depose the elected president, Jacobo Arbenz. Arbenz had been elected in a landslide victory during the 1950 election.61 Starting in 1952, Arbenz instituted a massive agrarian reform program in Guatemala.62 At the time, the United Fruit Company was the dominant landowner of arable land in Guatemala.63 Additionally, United Fruit's export of bananas from Guatemala amounted to forty-one percent of Guatemala's foreign exchange by 1948.64 With close ties to the Eisenhower administration through Alan and John Foster Dulles - whose law firm, Sullivan and Cromwell, had represented United Fruit - the company's interests in Guatemala gave direct financial motive to an expression of US fears of a communist-friendly leader in Guatemala. The issue of anti-communism and the fear of losing United Fruit's valuable investment in Guatemala led to the CIA's operation PBSUCCESS in June of 1954.

62 Ibid., 45.
63 Ibid.
As early as 1951 – well before an agrarian reform law could be written, much less passed – the Central Intelligence Agency was already drawing up a contingency plan (code-named PBFOette) to oust Arbenz. In the Agency’s view, Arbenz’s toleration for known Communists made him at best a “fellow traveler,” and at worst a Communist himself. The social unrest that accompanied the passage and implementation of the Agrarian Reform Law supplied critics in Guatemala and Washington with confirmation that a Communist beachhead had been established in the Americas. Agrarian reform was an economic issue. Communism was intolerable for the US ideologically and politically. The combination of these two issues drove the US action. Under orders from the State Department, PBFOette and related contingency planning were supplanted by PBSUCCESS, an active plot to oust Jacobo Arbenz and free the hemisphere from the perceived dangers of Soviet-inspired international communism.\(^{65}\) Through the use of psychological warfare tactics, the CIA hoped to give the Guatemalan population the impression that the government was increasingly unstable. Additionally, the use of multiple invasion points for the 480-soldier force employed by the CIA gave the Guatemalans the impression that the invading army was considerably larger than it actually was.

During this time, both the United States and Great Britain were observing the first major elections in British Honduras. As the new constitution provided for universal suffrage, the election would have substantially more participation from the working classes than ever before. The PUP won in a landslide victory that year, winning eight of nine seats on the colony’s Legislative Council. By the

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\(^{65}\) Introduction, Guatemala, FRUS 1952–1954.
late 1950s and early 1960s, George Price's leadership of the PUP had solidified. Additionally, the PUP had unchallenged political power in the colony after the 1961 elections. Consequently, the pro-US stance within the colony was only strengthened by political developments, and the absence of any real threat of communist influence also helped to alleviate many of the concerns the US government had about nationalist movements in Latin America.

*George Price on Jagan*

It is important to note that George Price had done much to assuage US concerns about his political intentions for British Honduras. Not only had Price and the PUP taken a firm pro-American stance from the party's inception, but also Price made clear his position on communism at several important junctures. One moment that was particularly important for maintaining an ongoing positive relationship with the United States occurred during 1953. Cheddi Jagan had come to power in British Guiana and was instituting policies that would result in his removal from power by the British and in the British taking control of British Guiana until 1957. The US State department, concerned about the economic and political ramifications of the People's Progressive Party victory and policies, encouraged assessment of the situation in other Latin American territories.66 Responding to the US Consul, Louis Mazzeo, Price's aversion to the policies of the PPP, and to communism in general, was clear in Mazzeo's response to the State Department inquiry:

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66 Cerri, "Missionary Zeal", 374.
While [Price] applauds Jagan’s anti-British policy, he deplores his communistic approach. Mr. Price has repeatedly stated, in private and in public, that colonialism and communism are equally evil; that if a colonial people seeking emancipation embrace communism they have gained nothing – they merely change one form of ‘tyranny’ for another. Communism, he maintains, is not the answer to British Honduras’ desire for political emancipation. He thoroughly disapproves of Jagan and his political philosophy, and has told me that in the past he has received two letters from Jagan (he did not state on what subject) but ignored both of them. I have no doubt that Mr. Price is sincerely opposed to any form of communism.  

Price accomplished two goals with this statement: firstly, he distanced himself from Jagan’s policies, and secondly, he reiterated his commitment to anti-communism, further quelling any US concerns. This helped to solidify the US-British Honduran relationship and added another example of Price’s political solidarity with the United States.

US Concerns about George Price and British Honduras

While Price was certainly doing his part to bolster his anti-communist credentials, he was not entirely free from US suspicion. During the late-1950s and early-1960s, the US watched the British Honduran political leadership closely. George Price was certainly thought to be pro-US, but nationalist movements in Latin America were of great concern to the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations, particularly in light of the disastrous developments in Guatemala, British Guiana and Cuba. Additionally, British Honduras was in dire economic straits and the need for aid dollars concerned not only Price and the

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67 Cerri, “Missionary Zeal” 375. Confidential dispatch 63, June 5, 1953, USNA 741d.00/6-533
PUP, but also the United States, as money coming from communist nations could potentially prove irresistible to the British Honduran colonial leadership. While this fear in the US may have been legitimate, it also was a valuable bargaining chip for Price. US Vice Consul, Richard D. Belt wrote from Belize to Washington in September of 1960 concerning a conversation he had with Price in which Price intimated that, while the UK and the US were certainly the first places where a newly independent British Honduras would seek the aid it so desperately needed, the PUP might need to get aid from wherever it was offered.\(^68\) This same Foreign Service communication in late 1960 however, reveals the difference between US concerns toward George Price versus concern over the leadership in British Guiana. While not ruling out the possibility of leftist influence in British Honduran politics in the future, the US Vice Consul in British Honduras, Richard D. Belt, wrote in September that “British Guiana has an influential group of leftists led by Dr. Cheddi Jagan. British Honduras, as yet, has no such group.”\(^69\) Belt does go on to mention an offer made to British Guiana, from Cuba for five million dollars of aid money while contrasting this with the fact that no such offer has been made to British Honduras.\(^70\) The US consistently kept track of the developments in British Honduras, but never with the obsessive fervor that was given to events in British Guiana.

Also in 1960, there was a clear indication of Price’s lack of interest in Cuba. The US Consul, Richard Deppert, wrote in December of an interview that

\(^{68}\) Foreign Service Dispatch, American Consulate, Belize, B.H., September 26, 1960, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

\(^{69}\) Ibid.

\(^{70}\) Ibid.
Price gave in Canada. The mere fact that Price had mentioned Cuba in the interview caused the US to take an interest; however, the text of the interview itself, as well as a conversation between Deppert and Price, quickly cleared the air. The text in question was Price’s statement that, “If we failed to develop our economy and raise the living standards of our people, these poor people might turn to Cuba.”71 Deppert wrote also in this dispatch of a follow-up conversation with Price in which Price indicated that he used such language to “remind the Canadians of their responsibility to help the underdeveloped countries in Latin America.”72 More importantly, Deppert went on to note that he believed that Price now believes that this “veiled blackmail” is not needed in the future.73 Finally, Deppert indicated his belief that there was, and would continue to be, a general lack of interest in British Honduras toward both general Cuban events and Castro’s land reform program, stemming from the lack of interest in agriculture in the colony and the high level of influence in British Honduras from US Catholic educators.74

_Price’s Employment Background_

It is important to note that a prominent businessman in British Honduras had employed George Price for several years. This not only contributed to Price’s pro-American political stance, but also gave Price first hand experience in the

71 Foreign Service Dispatch, American Consulate Belize to State Department Washington, December 8, 1960, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
benefits of the American economic system. After graduating from St. John’s College, Price was employed as the personal secretary for Robert Sydney Turton. Turton had become a major player in the chicle industry in British Honduras and had been working with American companies for many years as chicle, an agricultural product that grew in the colony, was used in the making of chewing gum. Not only was Turton Price’s employer but he also acted as Price’s political patron.⁷⁵ During the devaluation, Turton took a big hit, while the Belize Estate and Produce Company did not. Price did have a direct financial motive for opposing the devaluation, but this was much the same as the rest of the British Honduran population of two hundred thousand people. As most in the colony relied on products from the US, the fall in the British Honduran dollar to seventy cents per US dollar hurt an already poor population.

The Slow Pace Toward Independence

The two issues slowing independence were economic viability and the insecurity of the Guatemalan border issue. Economic viability was a requirement for independence that the British government imposed upon her colonies during decolonization. This was not simply for the good of the colony. Britain’s purpose for releasing control was largely to lessen the financial burden of maintaining so many colonies. If a colony could not support itself, and Her Majesty’s government ended up footing the bill, then the change in political status would be essentially academic. In the case of British Honduras, there had been

two centuries of the pillaging of natural resources through the logwood and mahogany trades, as well as a lack of emphasis on setting up any strong agricultural industry. With little left to export, and a lack of a mature industrial base, British Honduras was not in a place of fiscal security and viability.

The Anglo-Guatemalan Border dispute was an increasingly potent force behind the slowing of the independence process. The Guatemalan government consistently reasserted its claim on British Honduran territory between 1944 and 1964 and additionally, between 1960 and 1963, was asking the United States to act as an intermediary between the Guatemalan government and that of the United Kingdom. An informal request made by Guatemala for US mediation came in July of 1963, while the British were gearing up to grant internal self-rule to the colony. This “informal request” for US mediation was made on behalf of the Guatemalan government on July 1st, and on July 11th, Guatemala delivered a statement to the British, condemning the planned convening of constitutional talks with British Honduran representatives, without the consultation of Guatemala. This “sharp note” from Guatemala continued to state that, “if the UK persisted in creating a new state at the expense of Guatemalan territory then Guatemala reserved the right to take measures, also unilaterally, deemed appropriate to Guatemalan interests.” This was one of many threats made over the course of several decades by the Guatemalan government to do what was needed to retake the portion of British Honduras, which had been claimed by Guatemala. The United States would shy away from mediation, not wishing to have either direct

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76 Memorandum for Mr. McGeorge Bundy, The White House, July 31, 1963, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
77 Ibid.
political entanglement with a dispute between two US allies or to be placed in a position of future economic responsibility for British Honduras.
Chapter Two: British Guiana

The only British colony in South America, British Guiana had an alarming experience during decolonization. The colony became an area of growing concern to the United States during the post-World War II period. In contrast with British Honduras, between 1950 and 1966, British Guiana was one of the most important examples of the Containment Policy in action in the Western Hemisphere. While the British moved toward releasing control of the colony, the United States’ growing paranoia about the spread of international communism resulted in overt and covert meddling in British Guianese politics between 1961 and 1964. The complexity of the British-American relationship during decolonization and within the Cold War political environment made British Guiana a particularly contentious situation once the Cuban Revolution had been successful in 1959. Additionally, the policies of the ruling colonial political party in British Guiana in the early 1960s would contribute to a great degree of US concern and intervention in the decolonization process.

In this chapter, I provide a history of British Guiana and will endeavor to show the special intersection of geography, politics, and Cold War ideology that shaped British Guiana in the early 1960s. This chapter will not only to situate the reader into the history of British Guiana prior to 1950, but will also give a clear picture of the colony’s changing relationship with the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The historical and changing relationship that British Guiana had with the United States is essential for understanding US policy toward
the British Guianese independence process, which will be highlighted in the final chapter. In doing so, several themes will be useful. Among these are the roles of the political leaders in British Guiana at the time, the lack of a historically close relationship between the colony and the United States, the desires and ideologies of the leadership in both the United States and in Britain, and lastly, the willingness of those leaders to interfere within the political outcomes of elections in the colony.

In British Guiana, strategic location and pro-socialist leadership contributed to a much higher level of US interest than in British Honduras. Heightening US interest in British Guiana was the US economic interest in the mining of bauxite, a mineral used in the making of aluminum. Lastly, the existence of Atkinson Airfield, a US-built, modern airfield in British Guiana, gave the United States a much greater strategic incentive for interfering in British Guianese politics. Thus, rather than the hands-off approach that the US took toward the decolonization in British Honduras, the United States' policy toward British Guiana was of monumental importance to the colony's decolonization process. Additionally, this policy affected British Guianese politics for the ensuing two decades after independence.

This chapter explains the important factors in the British Guianese relationship with the United States. Highlighting these factors shows the blatant contrast between the historical relationship between British Guiana and the US, and that of British Honduras. Additionally, British Guiana was the only example of US policy interference in the internal politics of a British Colony on the South
American mainland. This chapter shows how the lack of a historically positive relationship with the United States drastically altered US policy toward the process. In British Guiana, this absence of a association with the US influenced the political outlook of the colonial leadership, which in turn influenced greatly the policy of the United States in the 1950s and 1960s.

Geography and Environment

Located on the northeastern coast of South America, British Guiana was the only British colony on the South American continent. The territory, which is the present day country of Guyana, is bordered by Venezuela to the west and Suriname to the east (previously called Dutch Guiana until 1975). Northern Brazil lies to the south of the territory, and the northern border consists of 285 miles of Atlantic coastline. The capital, Georgetown, is located on the northern coast, about forty miles southeast of the mouth of the Essequibo River. The Essequibo, the largest river within the territory, flows east from Northern Brazil and empties into the Atlantic Ocean.

The majority of British Guianese land was not suitable for agriculture. The two major impediments to large-scale agriculture were heavy forestation and yearly flooding. Heavily forested land makes agriculture difficult, requiring far too much work to create proper fields. The other major impediment to agricultural development was the abundance of water. The two wet seasons each year made it very difficult to maintain farmland in British Guiana. Each year
between May and August and again between November and February, much of the territory was drenched in rain, causing massive floods. The need to protect potential farmland from being flooded makes much of the territory of present-day Guyana unsuitable for long-term, large-scale agricultural production. Even today, less than two percent of the land in Guyana is designated for agriculture.\textsuperscript{78}

Additionally, during the colonial period, the majority of this productive farmland was controlled by outside business interests. Rather than developing food-based agriculture, these outside business interests focused on sugar cane as a cash crop, stunting the British Guianese farming community. The lack of a homegrown food source and the creation of a cash crop economy resulted in an impoverished lower class that lasted throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By the 1950's, much like British Honduras, British Guiana had a long history of a large population of poor, exploited workers, looking for a better life as an independent country.

\textit{Early Colonization}

British Guiana was under the control of the British Empire as early as the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Initial European contact came in the form of Dutch settlement in 1621.\textsuperscript{79} During the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century, control of the colony shifted between several European powers. The Dutch, French and British, starting with the Seven

\textsuperscript{78} CIA World Fact Book.

\textsuperscript{79} Joshua David Esposito, "The Cold War and Decolonization in British Guiana: The Anglo-American Intervention and Guianese Nationalist Politics" (MA thesis, West Virginia University, 2010), 27
Year's War, won and lost control of the territory that would eventually become British Guiana by the early-nineteenth century. In 1803, the British permanently established control over the territory and would not relinquish control again until 1966.\textsuperscript{80} Official British control solidified through the Treaty of Vienna in 1815, and by 1831 the British formally established the colony of British Guiana.\textsuperscript{81}

Between 1700 and 1800, the sugar industry steadily became the most important economic engine in the colony. For the first fifty to sixty years of British colonial control, British Guiana was totally dominated by slavery and indentured servitude due to the required labor supply for a viable sugar industry. While the Dutch had been the first to bring African slavery into the territory, the British kept the tradition of the use of slave labor until the late-1830s. By 1800, there were over 100,000 slaves in the area that would soon become British Guiana.\textsuperscript{82} This, after almost fifty years of British migration into the territory from the West Indian colonies in the Caribbean, continued to be the major labor force for another thirty-eight years. With the abolition of the slave trading industry within the British Empire in 1807, a gradual emancipation of British Guianese slaves commenced after 1834. By 1838, the use of slave labor within the colony had ended.

The need for labor in the second half of the nineteenth century was satisfied by indentured servitude. Initially, Chinese and Portuguese immigrants were brought into the colony to serve as labor on the sugar plantations. Both of these groups, consisting of around 25,000 people in total, hated the work. Many

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\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{82} Rabe, \textit{U.S. Intervention in British Guiana}, 16.
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returned to their home counties, or became part of the merchant class within the colony. With these first indentured servants moving to other forms of employment, there was still a need for a large, poor laboring class to work the plantations. Between the end of slavery in 1838 and the end of indentured servitude in 1917, two hundred and forty thousand Indian immigrants moved to British Guiana to fill this role. The colonial legacy of needing a large, cheap labor supply to work on the sugar plantations would eventually mean a divided British Guianese population based along racial lines by the middle of the 20th century.

Economic Changes After 1870

While the sugar industry dominated British Guianese economics throughout most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by the 1880s, this began to change. There began to be competition in the sugar industry from German beet sugar in the last few decades of the nineteenth century, causing the prices of British Guianese sugar to begin to fall. In 1894-95 there was a world sugar crisis, contributing to all sugar prices becoming depressed. This problem was further exacerbated by the US occupation of Cuba in 1898. When the US signed a Reciprocity Treaty with Cuba in 1903, giving the island nation special treatment in the US sugar market, prices for British Guianese sugar collapsed further, and the number of sugar producing companies within the colony

83 Ibid., 18.
84 Ibid.
85 Esposito, "The Cold War and Decolonization in British Guiana", 29.
plummeted. Between 1870 and 1900, the number of sugar plantations in British Guiana fell from one hundred and thirty-six to only fifty.\textsuperscript{86} Also in 1900, the two largest plantation companies combined their holdings to become the largest landholder and sugar producer in the colony. Booker Brothers McConnell and Company Limited would have a virtual monopoly on the industry for the remaining colonial era. Not only was the company dominant in the production and harvesting of sugar, but Booker Brothers was also diversified into all aspects of the business, including transport of sugar and all other commercial aspects of the trade.

With the collapse of the price of sugar and the consolidation of the sugar producing companies, the British Guianese economy shifted to other products. One major change was the start of rice production in 1891. With the abundance of water from various rivers in British Guiana, Indian immigrant farmers were able to farm rice on small plats of land. This meant that for the first time, rice became thought of as a viable agricultural product in the colony.\textsuperscript{87} The rice industry began to give large populations of ex-indentured servants a viable commodity to farm and sell that previously was unavailable to them. In addition to the fact that it was an actual foodstuff, rice also satisfied the need for a cash crop that could be exported from the colony. By 1905, the colony had become self-sufficient and a Rice Marketing Board was set up soon after in order to regulate exports from the colony.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
Starting in 1914, the mineral bauxite was extracted in relatively large quantities in British Guiana. Bauxite, an aluminum ore, began to attract foreign investment during in the 1910s and 20s. Both Canadian and American companies took a strong interest in the mining of bauxite as a source of aluminum. Also in 1914, the Demerara Bauxite Company was established through Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA). Demerara was established as a subsidiary of ALCOA’s Canadian company, Northern Aluminum. In the 1920’s ALCOA then created Aluminum Ltd., which would directly own all of ALCOA’s interests outside the US. By the 1950s, the Reynolds Metals Company also began to exploit the bauxite-rich areas in British Guiana. However, US investment in the colony remained relatively low. As late as 1960, US trade with the colony totaled only $30 million. Even though British Guianese bauxite amounted to about 25% of world supply, and the US considered bauxite a crucial natural resource, the US concluded that other supplies were available from US sources, as well as Jamaica and Surinam. This, however, would be of added concern to the US during the decolonization process.

90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 10.
93 Ibid.
During the first four decades of the twentieth century, political life in British Guiana started to enter the modern age for the first time. Due to severe property restrictions on suffrage, most colonists had been unable to vote or to have any real control over the colonial government. In 1915, due to the property restrictions required by law, only a tiny portion of the British Guianese population, all of 4,300 people, were actually allowed to vote. In addition to this small population of eligible voters, the property requirements also heavily favored those of British and African ancestry. Although the British adult population only made up about two per cent of the population, about forty-six percent of those were able to vote. This is compared with the East Indian population in the colony, of which only six per cent made it onto the voting registry, although the adult male population of the colony was over fifty percent East Indian men.

During the 1920s and 30s, sugar prices plummeted. As the entire world market for most commodities had become depressed, and as the United States had other, more advantageous markets for the trade of sugar, British Guiana again had increasing economic difficulty. Additionally, these struggles were not spread evenly among the population. Because of the multi-ethnic labor history of British Guiana, by the mid-twentieth century the population's occupational stations were largely split down ethnic lines. While the Chinese and Portuguese were residents of a small merchant and professional class within the colony, the Afro-Guianese

and Indo-Guianese populations were mainly split between an urban oriented African population and a more rural, farming oriented Indian population. The difference in experience that these two groups came to know was partially due to cultural adjustments. The descendants of African slaves had started to be educated in English schools fairly early on, after the ending of slavery. Additionally, through the European-style school system they experienced, many Afro-Guianese had become Europeanized. This meant that they had a cultural leaning that was more toward that of an industrial society, and less toward the rural farming society of earlier eras. Due partially to the education, and partially to the cultural changes that occurred during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, many Afro-Guianese had found positions of employment in the colonial government and the civil service.

In stark contrast, many of East Indian background were less willing to completely assimilate to British society. Not wanting to give up the freedom to live by their own cultural norms within the colonial structure, as was often required of those wanting to advance in the civil service and government positions, East Indians were less likely to find success and advancement through those means. In addition to the actual ethnic differences between the two segments of the British Guianese population, the lack of a common economic engine, and the perceived inequity of the chance for advancement would start to play out in domestic politics within the colony after World War II. Additionally, the racial schisms that developed in the first half of the twentieth century would become the source of a major political divide within colonial politics by the early

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95 Ibid., 12.
1960s. This divide would have an important impact on how the US would view the stability of the British Guianese government between 1961 and 1964, resulting in a greater degree of US concern over the decolonization of British Guiana when compared with that of British Honduras. Eventually the United States would take sides in racially divided British Guianese political turmoil. But this decision would be based on political ideology and not on race.

The Depression and World War II

As mentioned above, the British Guianese economy suffered terribly during the depression of the 1930s. World War I had brought a major rise in prices and incomes for both sugar and bauxite. However after the war was over, the bauxite prices returned to lower levels and in the 1920's the sugar market had crashed long before the actual onset of the world depression. In a small British colony like British Guiana, these trends resulted in massive unemployment for many segments of the population, as well as social and political unrest in those populations for the first time. While most of the population was still unable to vote directly, the left-leaning 1930s saw the rise of the power and acceptance of labor unions in many British colonies, including British Guiana. The colonial government listened, albeit only slightly, to groups of organized workers. While no direct political power was gained for another fifteen years, the late 1930s saw a more politically aware population in British Guianese poor labor circles,
becoming increasingly vocal about the perceived inequities and the very real poverty in colonial society.

The downtrodden population in British Guiana engaged in social unrest during the late 1930s. Violence, as well as workers strikes, erupted across the British possessions in the Western Hemisphere. In Trinidad, Jamaica, Barbados and British Guiana, colonists protested the conditions that they were forced to suffer under while under the British government. In British Guiana, between 1935 and 1938, the sugar plantation workers protested the living and working conditions in the industry. These protests resulted in the creation of the Moyne Commission. The commission, a panel assembled by the British Colonial Office in 1938, was put in place in order to study the conditions in British Guiana and to make recommendations. The findings of the Moyne commission would eventually be withheld until 1945 due to the outbreak of war and the focus of the British on defending the home territory.

*The Moyne Commission and The Taussig Report*

In 1938, the British Government created a commission for the study of the problems in all British West Indian Colonies. Headed by Lord Moyne, and officially named the *West India Royal Commission*, the Moyne Commission was tasked with the clarification of the major problems with economic underdevelopment, unemployment and low quality of life, which had given rise to

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97 Ibid.
riotng and unrest in several West Indian colonies between 1934 and 1938.98 Included in this unrest were repeated protests by British Guianese workers on sugar plantations between 1935 and 1938.99 Looking to investigate the possible reasons for the social unrest, the hope was also to identify potential weak points in the British Empire with the fear of war with Germany looming on the horizon.

While the Moyne Report recommendations were published in 1940, the release of the majority of the findings was delayed due to concerns that they would be seized upon by Axis propagandists as a way of highlighting the failure of the British Imperial system.100 The recommendations made by the Moyne Commission called for a long term development plan for the entire West Indian Region. The absence of social services and development throughout the West Indies would need at least a twenty-year commitment from the British government.101 In order to make these recommendations a reality, the report advised, “that a fund should be established, to be known as the West Indian Welfare Fund, and to be financed by an annual grant of £1,000,000 from the Imperial Exchequer.”102 The report went on to state that the purpose of this fund would be the “general improvement of social conditions.”103

With the war clouds looming, the United States felt the need to bolster its security. As a step in the process of brokering the “lend-lease” agreement with

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98 Spinner, Political and Social History of Guyana, 11.
100 Horne, Gerald C., Cold War in a Hot Zone: The United States Confronts labor and Independence Struggles in the British West Indies: Temple University Press. 2007. p. 9
101 West India Royal Commission Report, His Majesty’s Stationary Service, June 1945. p. 431
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
Britain, the US sent its own team to investigate the West Indian territories.\textsuperscript{104} Because lend-lease would give the United States the ability to build bases in various Caribbean territories, this program would be a step forward in the strengthening of US presence in the region. Sent by the White House, a team led by Charles Taussig would investigate the West Indies in 1940.\textsuperscript{105} The report that resulted from Taussig’s investigation would be focused largely on the issue of security and would affect US policy during the following three decades.\textsuperscript{106} The issue that rose out of both the findings of the Moyne Commission and of the Taussig Report was that the “soft underbelly” of United States’ southern security border had been allowed by centuries of British colonial mismanagement to turn into a “‘slum’ that had been allowed to fester in Washington’s neighborhood.”\textsuperscript{107} This assessment would largely go unnoticed by the US until the end of the 1950s. However, the progression of colonial politics in British Guiana combined with the British desire to grant independence and the revolution in Cuba would drastically invigorate US interest.

\textit{Beginnings of Modern British Guianese Politics}

Prior to the mid-1940s, there had never been a formalized political machine in British Guiana. Due to the voting restrictions within the colony, joined with the lack of any real political power held by the groups that were able to

\textsuperscript{104} Horne, \textit{Cold War in a Hot Zone}, 41
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 43.
organize, a modern political party had never directly developed, as there would have been no purpose for such a party given the electoral structure of the colony.

After World War II, the powers in British Guiana began to change. Where there had been only the pretense of any organized political activity within the colony in 1939, by 1946, there were the beginnings of a modernized political movement. Along with this new feeling within the colony came the first truly organized political bodies. Birthed from the left-leaning labor movements of the 1930s, the new political movements in British Guiana were decidedly anti-colonial, and certainly center-left in their ideological leanings. In order to understand the political situation in 1950s British Guiana, it is important to understand the leaders of the primary political party, the People’s Progressive Party (PPP).

The leader of the PPP through most of the 1950s and early 60s was Cheddi Jagan. Born in British Guiana in 1918, Jagan’s parents had emigrated from India with their families, both in 1901.108 His parents both worked in the fields on a sugar plantation. Jagan’s father eventually was promoted to the position of driver, or headman, which was the position of being the leader of a work gang in the plantation fields. While still backbreaking work, this was a position that put the Jagan family at the bottom level in the middle class of Indo-Guianese society.

Thomas Spinner writes of this singular position within colonial society in British Guiana, “His father’s position brought an element of ambiguity into Cheddi Jagan’s life. Although sympathizing with the exploited cutters, his father, a driver,
at the bottom of the middle ranks, was an agent of the oppressors — the manager and the overseers."109

After completing secondary school in Georgetown, Jagan moved to the United States to pursue a higher education. Jagan's father advocated a degree in law, but that would have meant that Jagan would need to go to England for legal training. Both father and son agreed that it would be easier for Cheddi to work his way through school in the United States, and as Jagan had several classmates who were going into dentistry, that became his chosen profession. He attended Howard University for his pre-dentistry work and then was accepted into the Northwestern School of Dentistry in Chicago.110

Becoming a dentist in the United States proved to be difficult because of Jagan's racial classification under US law. Because of his Indian heritage, he was classified as an oriental and was unable to become an American citizen. Without citizenship, Jagan was not be allowed to take the exams to become a certified dentist in the US. Due to these setbacks, Jagan returned to British Guiana in 1943, with his new wife soon following him.111 Jagan's wife, Janet, was from a well-to-do Jewish family from Chicago. She was already involved with leftist political movements in the United States when she and Jagan met and both Jagans would continue their political activity after arriving in British Guiana. The Jagans formed the Political Action Committee with a white Marxist, H.J.M. Hubbard in 1946, basing the committee on the ideas of scientific socialism.112 This precursor

109 Ibid., 18.
110 Ibid., 21.
111 Rabe, U.S. Intervention in British Guiana, 25
112 Ibid., 27.
to the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) found broad appeal from British Guiana’s working class. Cheddi won a seat on British Guiana’s Legislative council in 1947, and soon both of the Jagans gained even more public support due to their leading of a large funeral march, resulting from the killing of five sugar plantation workers during a protest over changes to work rules on the Enmore Sugar Estate.  

In 1949, Jagan became the head of a sawmill worker’s union. This is where he met Forbes Burnham, who would become a political ally in the forming of the PPP a year later. Formed on January 1st, 1950, the People’s Progressive Party was formed on the principles of “scientific socialism” with a platform of helping to advance progressive political and labor movements within British Guiana. The PPP would become the dominant political party in British Guiana for the next thirteen years. Like George Price in British Honduras, Jagan would enjoy unmatched popularity within his colony. While Jagan would not go uncontested like Price, the strength of the PPP among the masses in British Guiana was similar to the strength of the People’s United Party under Price’s leadership in British Honduras. However, the path of political development within the PPP, and of British involvement in British Guianese politics in the mid-1950s would take a turn that would make decolonization in British Guiana very different than that in British Honduras.

113 Ibid.
114 Esposito, “The Cold War and Decolonization in British Guiana”, 41
115 Rabe, U.S. Intervention in British Guiana, 27
The 1950s and Initial Self-Rule

After the election of the PPP in 1953, the British became alarmed by the policies that Cheddi and Janet Jagan were beginning to institute in British Guiana. Once the PPP had been resoundingly elected in April of 1953, Jagan not only put forth a fairly radical socialist agenda in the colony, but he also increased his leftist rhetoric. The British were taken by surprise at the strength of the PPP victory, and over the summer and autumn of 1953, decided to take action to remove Jagan from power. The leaders of the PPP possibly misjudged the extent of their power after the 1953 elections. Additionally, the leadership had not fully solidified in the hands of the Jagans. There was an ideological split in the leadership of the PPP, which would eventually result in a faction, led by Forbes Burnham, leaving the party in 1957. However, in 1953 the British were mainly concerned with what they saw as extremism emanating from the PPP as a whole and especially from what would become the faction led by the Jagans after 1955. In a report on British Guiana written in September of 1953, the colonial governor, Sir Alfred Savage, writes of the PPP leadership, “Every one of these men has a deep bitterness of feeling against Britain, the past administration and/or against society generally.”116 Additionally, on September 24, 1953, a telegram was sent from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor Savage giving this assessment of the political aims of the PPP:

116 Report on British Guiana by the Governor, Sir Alfred Savage, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD. (There is no date on document, but it was written in early September 1953.)
It has become increasingly clear to me from your recent reports including your letter to Lloyd of the 15th September that there was no prospect of Ministers acting responsibly and foregoing their extremist aims. It was clearly right on the introduction of the new Constitution to try to do all that tact, patience and tolerance could achieve to win them away from the extremists and to see whether the responsibilities of office would make them see reason. It is however clear that they have no intention of working the present Constitution in the interests of the people of British Guiana as a whole, but are seeking a one party totalitarian control of the country and a link-up with Russia which we obviously cannot contemplate.\textsuperscript{117}

This assessment helped convince the British to suspend the constitution and allowed the colonial governor to take control of the colony and to set up an interim government, which lasted until 1957. These events in 1953 contributed greatly to the US view that British Guiana lacked stability. Additionally, these events led to a real lack of trust on the part of both the British and US governments toward the PPP, and especially toward Cheddi and Janet Jagan. This distrust of the Jagans would, however, be strongest in the United States in the early 1960s. Britain advanced the aim of granting independence as soon as possible and remained convinced that Cheddi Jagan was the only leader in British Guiana with the political capital to guide the colony during and after independence. The United States was not convinced that this was the correct course of action and became increasingly apprehensive between 1961 and 1962.

\textsuperscript{117} Telegram (No. 21) From British Colonial Secretary to Governor of British Guiana (24 September 1953).
PPP Split and Cuba

Between 1955 and 1958, the PPP split into two factions. In 1955, at a party meeting, Forbes Burnham contested Jagan's leadership of the party. For the next three years there would be two, competing sides, both using the PPP name. One of these cliques would remain loyal to Cheddi Jagan; the other would follow Forbes Burnham. There were both political and racial differences dividing the two factions. Cheddi Jagan retained the support of those on the far left of the political spectrum, while Burnham appealed to the more moderate among the party members. Additionally, the Indo-Guianese population remained largely in support of Jagan and the PPP, while the Afro-Guianese population supported Forbes Burnham and the newly formed People's National Congress (PNC) after 1957. This split became increasingly important after the Cuban Revolution, as the PPP under Cheddi Jagan increasingly gained power in British Guiana. Burnham publically stated that his reasons for splitting with the Jagan faction within the PPP were that he was opposed communism and that Jagan was too internationalist in his focus. Additionally, by the end of the 1950s, there was a potent political split in the colony along racial lines, with the Indo-Guianese population remaining loyal to Jagan and the PPP and the Afro-Guianese population following Burnham and the PNC.

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118 Rabe, *U.S. Intervention in British Guiana*, 53
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
The PPP remained dominant in colonial elections in both 1957 and 1961. Jagan pursued more moderate policies after the election of 1957 and attempted to focus on economic progress by working with the United States and Great Britain. However, during 1959, Jagan also became increasingly supportive of Castro’s revolution and policies, to the alarm of the United States. Jagan and the PPP misinterpreted the strength and political consequences of the revolution in Cuba and both Cheddi and Janet Jagan traveled to Cuba in April of 1960, hoping to negotiate the sale of British Guianese rice to Cuba. Instead of viewing Cuba as an isolated incident that would draw the ire of the United States, Jagan saw the revolution as one step in the process of the spread of socialism in Latin America. Jagan viewed this as an indication of which direction the political tide was flowing, and believed that it was only a matter of time before other countries in the region would follow the Cuban model. Concurrently, while Jagan was continuing his move to praise Castro’s socialist policies, and failing to court the good graces of the United States during the early-1960s, Burnham became an increasingly viable alternative leader for British Guiana in the eyes of the US government.

Race

British Guiana was divided into two distinct racial groups. There were the descendants of the Indian immigrants who had come to British Guiana in the

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122 Esposito, “The Cold War and Decolonization in British Guiana”, 49
123 Ibid.
latter half of the 19th century to work on the sugar plantations, and there were those of African decent, descended from the slaves who had arrived in the colony prior to the end of slavery. These two groups were also divided by economics and vocation. Those of African descent had largely assimilated into British culture, were educated in British schools, and had dominated the jobs in the civil service and police force. This was in stark contrast to those of Indian descent who resisted assimilation, wishing instead to keep their traditions and also, consequently, to keep a largely agriculturally based lifestyle. This was not only a difference between two racial groups, but also it became a difference between levels of formal education and also socio-economic opportunity as the colony moved toward independence in the 1950s and 60s.

Racial strife became a common theme in British Guiana’s history. Periodically during the mid-twentieth century, racial violence broke out in the streets of Georgetown and elsewhere in the colony. The fact also that the two major political leaders, Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham, came from opposing sides of this racial divide, became an important factor in both the outcome of elections, and the US policy toward eventually steering the outcome of the final pre-independence election toward Burnham.

Forbes Burnham and the US/British View

Forbes Burnham became the chosen alternative to Cheddi Jagan during the US involvement in British Guianese decolonization. Born in British Guiana in
1923, Forbes Burnham was educated at Queens College in Georgetown and then completed his Bachelor of Arts at the University of London, where he graduated in 1944. He trained as a lawyer and returned to British Guiana in 1949. Burnham was one of the founders of the PPP with Cheddi and Janet Jagan in 1950, but always was more moderate politically than either of the Jagans. After splitting the PPP in 1955, and forming the PNC in 1957, Burnham and his newly formed party became the most powerful alternative to PPP rule in the colony.

The view of Forbes Burnham from both the US and from Great Britain was by no means positive. The British asserted in their communications with the United States that they believed Jagan to be an infinitely more qualified and preferable leader to hold power in British Guiana after independence was granted.\textsuperscript{124} Schlesinger quotes Iain Macloed, a high level colonial official in HMG as stating “Jagan is infinitely preferable to Burnham. If I had to make the choice between Jagan and Burnham as head of my country I would choose Jagan any day of the week.”\textsuperscript{125} The British did not trust Burnham and also thought him to be a racist who did not have the interests of the majority of British Guianese at heart. Josh Esposito writes, “The majority of British officials, specifically those in the Colonial Office, believed that the best scenario for an independent Guyana was a government under Cheddi Jagan.”\textsuperscript{126} Additionally, Jagan and the PPP maintained the majority of popular support of the colonial population in the elections of 1957 and 1961, whereas Burnham and the PNC garnered a much

\textsuperscript{124} Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Schlesinger) to the Ambassador to the United Kingdom (Bruce) February 27, 1962, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{126} Esposito, The Cold War and Decolonization in British Guiana, 133
smaller portion of the seats on parliament.

The US security interests and anti-communism ideology, however, took priority. Throughout 1961 and 1962, officials from Britain and the United States debated Jagan's leadership of a post-independence British Guiana. The British considered Burnham to be dangerous and unsuitable, and wished to release control and financial responsibility as soon as possible. The United States wished above all to avoid another situation similar to what had developed in Cuba in 1959 and 1960. Burnham proved to have a more US-focus view of his own political reality than would Jagan. The combination of Burnham's political astuteness, Jagan's lack of clarity of thought about his own political position and British acquiescence to the security demands of the United States, would result in the removal of Jagan, and almost twenty years of nearly dictatorial rule by Forbes Burnham in an independent Guyana.
Chapter Three: US Actions

The United States policies toward British Honduras and British Guiana between 1950 and 1966 could not have been more different. In British Honduras, the US maintained its stated "hands-off" approach to decolonization, letting the British take the course they saw fit, and generally trying to remain neutral on the issue of the Guatemalan territorial claim. Conversely, in British Guiana the United States actively and vehemently sought to influence British policy and displayed a heated commitment toward preventing the PPP, the democratically elected party with Communist leanings, from holding power after independence was granted. In British Honduras, the colonial government and population at large were actively engaged in an attempt to court attention from the United States government for over twenty years, while the US preferred to have little to say or do about the independence movement in the colony until the mid-1960s. Although the US government initially fostered a similar policy toward British Guiana, the 1950s and early 60s saw a drastic shift in the level of interest and involvement that the US had in the internal political and international security issues surrounding British Guianese decolonization. This stark contrast between the US involvement in British Guianese decolonization and the indifference that the United States displayed toward decolonization in British Honduras was due to the three factors outlined in this thesis: historical relationships between each of the colonies and the United States, the strategic importance of each colony to US
security, and the behavior of the colonial leaders. Additionally, these contrasting US policies highlight the true US motives for Latin America.

The Cold War policies of the United States had a great affect on both colonies between 1959 and 1964. The combination of the containment policy instituted by the United States in the late 1940s and the differing political behaviors of the leadership in British Guiana and British Honduras resulted in very different experiences during the 1960s. While George Price and the PUP in British Honduras were decidedly pro-US, and also uncontested for power within the colony, British Guianese political activity was not only more complex, but was also decidedly farther to the left in its ideology. With the Kennedy Administration completely preoccupied with the ramifications of the Cuban Revolution by 1962, the fate of both British Honduras and British Guiana was largely determined by how each colony developed acceptable relationships with the United States. The stance that the colonial leadership in each colony took toward Castro and communism could make or break the building of a friendly affiliation with the US. Particularly for the Kennedy Administration, Joshua Esposito’s words ring true, “The most important aspect of American preoccupation with British Guiana was the colony’s ideological significance. Policymakers in the United States feared that the perception of having lost a second Western Hemispheric nation to communism would severely damage the standing of the United States among other Latin America and Caribbean nations.” 127 What the United States valued above all was a clear anti-communist political orientation from both colonies.

127 Esposito, “The Cold War and Decolonization in British Guiana”, 71
As the previous two chapters indicate, British Honduras and British Guiana differed in a few very important ways: in their strategic importance to US political leadership; in their historical relationships with the United States; and in the behavior of their political leaders in the 1950s and early 1960s. British Guiana sat on the objectionable side of all three of these factors for US policy-makers, encouraging the US-driven destabilization of the PPP and the defeat of Cheddi Jagan in 1964. At the same time, the British Honduran government led by the anti-communist PUP under George Price, while unable to gain full independence until 1981 due to the Guatemalan territorial claim, was able to avoid direct US intervention in internal colonial politics. British Honduras was also able to achieve internal self-rule in 1964, and during the 1970s, to make progress toward gaining independence.

This final chapter shows what transpired in each colony during the crucial period between 1961 and 1964. The purpose here is to show the stark difference between the political behaviors of the colonial leadership during this important time. The influence of both the strategic significance of each colony and the historical relationships built with the United States by this time was fully formed. What made the real difference in the early 1960s was how the colonial leadership behaved and what steps they took to work within the US plan for hemispherical security. Had Cheddi Jagan renounced communism, or at very least behaved in a way that would convince the US that they could work with him, he might have been allowed to become Prime Minister of Guyana upon independence. Had George Price neglected to maintain a clear anti-communist stance during this
crucial period, the United States might have decided to interfere in British Honduran decolonization as well.

**US Cold War Policy**

It is important to reiterate the changes to foreign policy that took place at the end of World War II. Allies during the war, the Soviet Union and the United States returned to the historically adversarial relationship that the two countries had sustained since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Between 1945 and 1950, the Cold War mentality took a firm hold of Washington policy makers. The United States saw British decolonization taking place during the 1950s and 60s through the prism of Cold War strategic imperatives, and the US adjusted its policy toward decolonization depending on its perceived national security issues.

The Cold War model of international power had fairly specific roles for smaller states and territories to play. The competing superpowers set up systems by which smaller states were pressured to take sides. Nations that were close in proximity or within the sphere of influence of a superpower were often forced to join a bloc, or alliance, that maintained the influence of one side in the international conflict.\(^\text{128}\) In this relational capacity, these smaller nations also attempted, at times, to play the superpowers off against each other, using the

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bargaining chip of loyalty in the larger fight as a method of gaining concessions.129

By the early-1960s, several other occurrences affected the US view of Latin American decolonization and possible communist influence in the region. As previously mentioned, the US saw the dominos falling throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, which created alarm and paranoia within the Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations as well as within the ranks of the American public. In 1949, the Soviets detonated their first atomic weapon, and the People's Republic of China was founded. Then between 1950 and 1953, US forces fought on the Korean peninsula, and throughout the 1950s, Vietnam was engaged in civil war, as well as colonial conflict, as the Vietnamese sought to expel the French, while the US sent in "advisers" and eventually inherited the problem after the defeat of the French in 1954. Even more disconcerting to the United States were the occurrences in Guatemala and British Guiana in the early 1950s. As mentioned previously, the CIA backed a coup to remove Jacobo Arbenz from power in Guatemala in 1954, and the British had already once removed Cheddi Jagan from power in British Guiana after his surprising electoral win in 1953. By the late 1950s, the US was fairly convinced that communism was on the march and would spread into any weak state possible when given the chance.

129 Ibid.
A significant piece of the US-British Honduran relationship was added in the 1950s. The disinterested attitude of the PUP toward the first election of the PPP in British Guiana contributed greatly to future US attitudes toward the PUP, George Price and the pace of decolonization in British Honduras. Additionally, British Hondurans remained silent on the issue of the US interference in Guatemala in 1954. While the CIA was actively toppling the Arbenz government, the PUP in British Honduras made no statement and took no position on the action. Price knew when to keep silent and also knew when the right comment might help his standing with the United States.

In British Guiana, Jagan was democratically elected in 1953, surprising the British. Both the United States and the British found this electoral outcome alarming, and their fears were bolstered when Jagan and the PPP started instituting substantial leftist reforms. The colonial governor used his reserve powers to suspend the constitution and to take control of the colony. Cheddi and Janet Jagan were forced out of power and both spent time in prison during the ensuing four years while Britain maintained direct control over British Guiana. While Price did comment on the PPP in memos through the US Consulate, his words worked to reassure the US, confirming his anti-communist stance. Not only did Price condemn Jagan and the PPP, but he also went so far as to equate the evils of communism with those of colonialism. A memorandum of a
conversation between Price and US Consul Louis B. Mazzeo illuminates Price’s position on British Guiana:

While [Price} applauds Jagan’s anti-British policy, he deplores his communistic approach. Mr. Price has repeatedly stated, in private and in public, that colonialism and communism and equally evil; that if a colonial people seeking emancipation embrace communism they have gained nothing—they merely change one form of ‘tyranny’ for another. Communism, he maintains, is not the answer to British Honduras’ desire for political emancipation. He thoroughly disapproves of Jagan and his political philosophy, and has told me that in the past he has received two letters from Jagan (he did not state on what subject) but ignored both of them. I have no doubt that Mr. Price is sincerely opposed to any form of communism.130

Price showed a willingness to routinely express his animosity toward communism. This, combined with a willingness to stay silent at times on British Guiana and Guatemala, even when British Honduras was also trying to advance its own nationalist movement while removing the yoke of colonialism, showed an adept understanding of the reality of his political position. This displays a stark difference between Price and Jagan. While Jagan would, between 1961 and 1963, try to steer his own course without attaching the success or failure of the PPP to the dominant power in the region, Price learned this lesson in the early-1950s. Price knew that if he was actively throwing off the financial assistance of Great Britain, he would need to replace it with assistance from the United States, and he also understood that anti-communism was the paramount issue in that relationship. What Jagan apparently did not learn from his own experience in the 1950s was that the United States would not abide a communist state on the South American continent. The Cuban Revolution only exacerbated this reality.

130 Confidential dispatch 63, June 5, 1953, in Missionary Zeal: The Jesuits and United States-British Honduran Relations, 1894-1958, Dominic Cerri, 375.
Cuba Lens

The Cuban Revolution is a factor that cannot be overstated. The United States greatly feared another revolution like the one in Cuba in 1959 and 1960. This fear had considerable influence over how the United States dealt with the independence processes in both British Honduras and British Guiana. Not only was Cuba a socialist government in the Western Hemisphere, which was alarming to the United States, but it also gave other Latin American nations a new place to look for a model of political and economic development. That Cuba represented a challenge to the United States' traditional monopoly on how Latin Americans viewed their avenues for change, became of real concern for the US.¹³¹

The aftermath of the Cuban Revolution was a surprise to the United States. The Castro regime was, at first, seen as a reformist force that the United States could continue to work with. It took over a year before Eisenhower severed diplomatic relations with Castro. The shock that was created by the deterioration of US/Cuban relations made US policy makers significantly more worried about the possibility of another Latin American nation emulating the Cuban model of political change. In the case of British Guiana, the US fears of the Jagan government becoming a second loss to the communists after independence was prevalent during the discussions between the US and the British centered around the decolonization process in 1962.¹³² In a meeting

between British and American officials on March 17, 1962, Deputy Under Secretary of Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson made the US position clear:

Mr. Johnson said that the United States would like to feel more confident that the withdrawal of British troops and the granting of independence to British Guiana would not bring chaos and a communist controlled government. He reminded Mr. Fraser that we thought of this situation partly in terms of our Cuban experience. Castro had originally been presented as a reformer. We do not intend to be taken in twice. He felt it important that the United States and the United Kingdom work very closely at all levels on the problem of British Guiana in order to prevent catastrophe from taking place there. 133

In terms of policy reconciliation, the battling of international communism continued to trump the value of self-determination within Latin America. US policymakers believed that communism was an “external force” and as such had not risen naturally in the Americas. 134 This view led to US interference with British Guianese politics in the early 1960s. This view did not, however, cause the US to take similar action in British Honduras. Not only was the US neutral in the process of British Honduran decolonization, but also they were also specifically denying requests to become more involved in the early 1960s. US policy toward British Honduras was relegated to monitoring the Anglo-Guatemala Border Dispute, finally resulting in US mediation in 1966.

133 Ibid.
Jagan Fails the Test

In the case of British Honduras, the United States judged George Price to be someone who would continue to be anti-communist and pro-US, whereas in the case of British Guiana, the United States moved toward a position after 1961, which was steadfastly against having Jagan in power after independence.  

Secretary of State Rusk wrote on February 19, 1962:

I must tell you now that I have reached the conclusion that it is not possible for us to put up with an independent British Guiana under Jagan. We have had no real success in establishing a basis for understanding with him due in part to his grandiose expectations of economic aid. We have continued to receive disturbing reports of communist connections on the part of Jagan and persons closely associated with him.  

The importance of maintaining anti-communist leadership in Latin America in the 1950s and 60s was paramount. Unfortunately for Jagan, British Guiana was extremely worrisome to the United States and Jagan himself may have not been cognizant enough of his own position to pull back far enough from his vocalizing of his ideological positions until it was too late. The combination of Atkinson Airfield, US Bauxite mining interests and especially, Cheddi and Janet Jagan’s continued support for Castro’s revolution made the difference for the United States. In his study of American intervention in British Guiana, Joshua Esposito writes, “The determining factor in American opposition to the PPP was the Jagans’ vocal support of communism and their pursuit of a  

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136 Ibid.  
137 Esposito, “The Cold War and Decolonization in British Guiana”, 102
foreign policy which seemed to support their communist ideology."

Additionally, Cheddi Jagan was vocal in his support for the Cuban Revolution and in his anti-imperialist rhetoric, which was aimed at the US and Great Britain. In an article in the newspaper of the PPP, *Thunder*, Jagan praised Castro:

Imperialism is dying. It used force to overthrow several democratic regimes – the Callegos Betancourt Government in 1948, the Mosadeq Government in Iran in 1951, the PPP Government in 1953, the Arbenz Government in 1954. The turning point came in 1956. Then we saw the attack on Egypt fail. Fidel Castro is lucky. He has not only the people of Cuba on his side. History is on his side. 1961 is a world of difference from 1951. The reactionary imperialist forces will fight back. But the handwriting is on the wall. The death knell of imperialism is sounding on all fronts.139

Unfortunately for Jagan, the US ideologically opposed anything short of hearty rejection of communism, and Jagan’s position in 1961 was far from that. The fear in the US was that once British Guiana became independent, Jagan would move swiftly to establish stronger ties with both Cuba and the Soviet Union, strengthening the cause of the international communist conspiracy. Due to US concerns and his own political missteps, Jagan found himself, in 1962 and 1963, in a political position reminiscent of the Arbenz Government in Guatemala in 1954. The hopelessness of Jagan’s position becomes a result of Richard H. Immerman’s assessment of the “Cold War ethos” emanating from the United States at the time.140

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138 Ibid.
Immermann writes, "Nothing the Arbenz government could say or do could shake Washington's preexisting beliefs."\textsuperscript{141} The UK made the only attempt on Jagan's behalf to combat this US viewpoint. This was due to the British belief that there was no viable political alternative to Jagan and the PPP. Jagan himself did not even attempt to battle the "Cold War ethos" in the United States and was actually continually vague at best and unapologetic at worst, about his position on both communism and the feeling that British Guiana needed to be free of imperialist influence.

Also interesting is Jagan's apparent misunderstanding of his position and the direction of which political events would unfold in the western hemisphere. Jagan may have seen the Cuban revolution and other leftist movements in Latin America in terms of a powerful, united movement and as the political wave of the future for countries in his region. At the same time, he may have misjudged the power and influence that the US would wield in the Latin America, and how central to US policy was the support of anti-communist governments in the region. Paramount to the United States' policy on decolonization was the security that friendly governments would provide going forward. The real goal was to make sure that communist influence did not spread to any of the newly independent colonies. This policy was of utmost importance in both British Honduras and British Guiana in the early 1960s. The "fundamental" position for the US was that the British must not leave any new counties in the western

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
hemisphere under communist control after decolonization. It is clear from the documentation available that the PUP in British Honduras never truly threatened this goal, in the minds of US officials.

Historical Relationships

The longstanding economic and cultural relationship between British Honduras and the United States worked to the advantage of the Price government and the PUP. Economically, British Honduras had been largely reliant on US goods for over half a century before the PUP was formed. Additionally, the leadership of the PUP had traveled in the United States and had a view for the future of British Honduras that was oriented towards being a part of the Latin American sphere of US influence, rather than with the other ex-British colonies of the West Indies. This US-focused mentality advanced a plan for a pro-US policy, once independence was granted.

The anti-British protests during the 1950s were a result of a long history of colonization and underdevelopment. The PUP took a hard line against the continuation of British control and urged a speedy independence process. Unlike Jagan in British Guiana, Price and the PUP actively tried to court favor from the US. Consistently between 1954 and 1964, British Honduran protestors engaged in pro-US and anti-British demonstrations, using methods such as singing "God Bless America" and carrying the American flag while marching in protest of

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142 FRUS, Volume XII, American Republics Document 294, Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, Sec. of State Rusk, Washington, June 21, 1963.
British colonial control. The Anglo-American relationship was of utmost importance, and the US had no desire to take over control, either militarily or economically, if the British were to grant independence prematurely. The very real possibility of invasion by both Guatemala and Mexico in the event of an untimely British withdrawal was of concern to the US due to the potential for instability in British Honduras once independence was granted. However, the US concern was more limited, and certainly less dramatic when compared to the concern over communist influence and the potential direction of the Jagan government in British Guiana in the early 1960s.

**US Strategic Interests**

The United States continued a policy of limited interest in British Honduras in the 1960s. Time and again, the US made it clear to the British that British Honduras was to remain a British problem and that the US did not wish any increased involvement in either the political direction of or the economic responsibility for the colony. When British Honduras was hit by a disastrous hurricane in 1961, the British hoped to entice the United States to take on a more substantial financial role in the colony’s rehabilitation with the prospect of the construction of a US air base in the colony in the future. When responding to the British invitation, Under Secretary of State George Ball responded, “US appreciates importance of modernized airport to colony’s future but has no
military requirement for it now and none contemplated for future." Ball also made it clear that, although he believed it useful for the US to have revised talks with Great Britain around the issue of British Honduran rebuilding, the discussions “should not be interpreted to mean that US either now or in future [is] prepared [to] play more than a very modest role in rehabilitation program which is primary responsibility of the UK.”

What is most important and telling about the US policy toward British Honduras, is how it differed from that toward British Guiana. Dr. Dominic Cerri writes about the lack of open US support for the nationalism in 1950s British Honduras in his dissertation, Missionary Zeal, “They refused support not because the nationalist movement was radical or communist-influenced, as was the case half way across the world in contemporary Vietnam, but because the United States did not have to recognize the nationalist movement. There was an acceptable alternative – a cautious, slowly receding British Colonialism. Nationalism, no matter its source, was a potentially problematic force the United States preferred to contain. Above all else the United States desired stability and order within the world system.” The lack of a real necessity for involvement, either on the basis of international security, or for any other crisis-like issue, allowed the United States to avoid taking direct action in British Honduras. While, as Cerri states, circumstances were different in Vietnam, they were also different in British Guiana. The US saw in British

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143 George Ball, Telegram, Department of State, to American Embassy London, 12/11/1961, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
144 Ibid.
145 Cerri, “Missionary Zeal”, 443.
Honduras a colony that was too economically weak to be successful as an independent state. This view limited US concerns about potential instability. Added to this was a British Honduran nationalist movement that did not need to be supported for political purposes. In contrast, the United States took direct action to oust a democratically elected leader in British Guiana, replacing Cheddi Jagan and the PPP with Forbes Burnham, after being warned for years about the latter's unsuitability for the office by the British.

This is in stark contrast to the US interest in Atkinson Airfield in British Guiana. As the US had built Atkinson Field during World War II as part of the Bases for Destroyers agreement with the UK, the airport was of strategic interest to the US as it presented the potential for use by any communist subversives that might take action in British Guiana if independence was granted. In the early 1960s, the United States was significantly concerned about this possibility. Because Atkinson was the largest airstrip in British Guiana, both the British and the US understood that was it was of significant economic importance to the colony. Additionally, while the US had returned the airstrip to British Guianese control at the end of World War II, the US had also retained “48 hour reoccupation rights in the event of an emergency such as war.”¹⁴⁶ The concern from the US over the future political and economic orientation of the colony after independence contributed greatly to this sensitivity around Atkinson. A letter from Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, Fredrick G. Dutton

¹⁴⁶ Letter from Assistant Secretary Frederick G. Dutton to Vice-President Johnson in response to a forwarded letter from Mr. W. R. Deatherage of Dallas Texas, regarded concern pertaining to Atkinson Airfield, September 24, 1962, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
to Vice-President Johnson, written in September of 1962, shows that there was serious concern that “upon independence, British Guiana will swing into the military, economic and ideological orbits of the Sino-Soviet bloc.” These were not fears that were being expressed or implied by the US when it came to British Honduras. While the US was comforted by the fact that the British remained in control both politically and militarily, in both colonies, the United States was radically more anxious about the turn British Guiana might take after independence.

Minerals in British Guiana

As mentioned in chapter two, starting in 1914, US companies had maintained an interest in the mining of bauxite in British Guiana. While British Guiana was not the main source of US bauxite, which is used in the making of aluminum, the colony continued to be one of several Caribbean territories that constituted the bulk of US and Canadian bauxite resource areas during the Cold War. The dangers to the aluminum supply and the industry as a whole during the decolonization process included the possible expropriation of installations within British Guiana, and also “perhaps more likely onerous financial burdens and regulations” that might be imposed on the companies after independence.

While ideology and security issues contributed more heavily to the US

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147 Ibid.
148 Confidential Memo on British Guiana, December 28, 1960, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
149 Ibid.
involvement in British Guianese politics, the US aluminum industry and the government itself were certainly concerned once Castro took over Cuba and expelled other American companies, "The extreme precedent is Cuba where U.S. oil refineries were expropriated in 1960 for refusing to process Soviet Oil, and where other expropriations and burdens were imposed on U.S. enterprises." 150

The fear in both the aluminum industry and the US government was that the PPP might nationalize the bauxite installations in British Guiana if the party was allowed to stay in power after independence.

At a time when the United States was actively engaged in an arms race with the Soviet Union, metallurgical industries were of the utmost importance, and if the US aluminum industry was alarmed, it only added to the concern within the US government over the possibility of another Cuba-type scenario in British Guiana. In 1960, Samuel Moment an expert on aluminum industry development wrote an assessment of the situation in British Guiana as he saw it pertaining to the interests of ALCOA and the US Bauxite industry. Moment wrote in his summary that he was very concerned about the potential for political changes in British Guiana that would emulate those in Cuba. 151 Moment continued, "Such an outcome, possibly accompanied by parallel changes in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, could be disturbing to the U.S.A in general, and disturbing in particular to the North American aluminum industry which draws some 85 percent of its ore

150 Ibid.
151 Confidential Memo from Samuel Moment to Mr. Peyton K. Kerr, Director, Office of International Financial and Development Affairs, Department of State, Washington, D.C., December 30, 1960, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
needs from the Caribbean region."\textsuperscript{152} Not only was the US government concerned about maintaining influence in the bauxite mining industry within British Guiana, but the industry itself was actively pressuring the government to take the matter seriously in expressing concern about the PPP government.

The continuing importance of the mining of Bauxite was felt at the highest level of the US government. While the majority of the scholarship on US intervention in British Guiana focuses on the growing concerns over communist influence in the colony in the 1950s and 60s, there has been some attention given to the importance that the US placed on British Guianese Bauxite. Stephen Rabe, in his \textit{US Intervention in British Guiana} recounts an October 8th briefing given by CIA Director Dulles during the British-led removal of Jagan in 1953, in which Dulles reminded President Eisenhower of the importance of British Guiana as a major source of bauxite.\textsuperscript{153} Although this briefing took place over ten years prior to the US-led removal of Jagan from power in British Guiana, the concern about what Jagan might do as the leader of an independent Guyana continued throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

\textit{US toward British Honduras: 1960-1964}

The United States generally did not worry about communist influence in British Honduras during this period. With the solidifying of Price’s leadership in the late 1950s, the US continued to feel relatively secure about the anti-
communist credentials of the PUP. Price traveled to the US and Canada in 1960, looking to secure much needed aid from both countries. After Price's return to British Honduras, US Consul Richard Deppert sent his assessment of the colony's attitude toward Castroism: "Castroism has attracted very little interest here and has resulted in no observable positive response. This situation is likely to continue unless the country's economy should suddenly take a turn for the worse and a local leader with a large popular following sets out to incite the people. This is considered unlikely."\(^{154}\)

Throughout 1961 and 1962, this attitude continued. The US remained unconcerned by the prospects of communist influence in British Honduras and did not seek to pressure the British to delay the independence process for political reasons. Even in 1963, when Kennedy and members of his administration were meeting with Prime Minister Macmillan at Birch Grove to discuss the British Guiana problem, Duncan Sandys, Secretary of State for the Colonies, raised the topic of British Honduras. The subject elicited no political concern on the part of the United States. A telegram sent from the US embassy London on July 9, 1963, discussing "a meeting [at which] Duncan Sandys raised the question of British Honduras"\(^{155}\), clearly states the difference in US concern for the two colonies:

1. "Unlike British Guiana there is not present in British Honduras peculiar political elements which lead us to urge HMG course of

\(^{154}\) Foreign Service Dispatch, Amconsulate, Belize to Dep. Of State, December 8, 1960, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

\(^{155}\) Telegram, Secretary to Amembassy London, and Amembassy Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, July 9, 1963, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
action contrary to established British policy of moving forward to self-determination as rapidly as feasible.

2. I am puzzled however over how early independence in British Honduras might be accomplished quickly and at the same time smoothly in view of Guatemalan and Mexican political attitudes and British Honduras complete lack of economic viability. Will independence merely mean transfer from UK to US of economic liability?"\textsuperscript{156}

This viewpoint is from the very series of meetings in which the United States directly and forcefully pressured the British to take action to prevent an independent Guyana under the rule of Cheddi Jagan and the PPP. Eighteen days prior to this meeting, on June 21, 1963, Secretary of State Rusk sent this telegram to the American embassy in London for Ambassador Bruce:

\begin{quote}
President wants you to know high importance he and I attach to reaching understanding with UK on British Guiana. This is principal subject President intends raise with Macmillan at Birch Grove and is main reason for my talks in London with Home and Sandys. Our fundamental position is that the UK must not leave behind in the Western Hemisphere a country with a Communist government in control. Independence of British Guiana with government led by PPP is unacceptable to US. Our objective in London is to get HMG to take effective action to remove Jagan Government prior to independence.\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

The difference in policy here could not be plainer. Although obviously unconcerned at the prospects of political instability and communist influence in British Honduras, the US was also extending its "good offices" toward the eventual mediation and hopeful resolution of the Anglo-Guatemalan dispute over the colony. A confidential memorandum from November, 1963 details the US

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{157} FRUS, 1961-1961, American Republics, British Guiana, #294, Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, June 21, 1963.
view that the resolution of the dispute would give British Honduras a more viable economic future, would lessen the possibility of rash action by the Guatemalans, would increase political and social stability in the area and would have most likely result in lessening the need for future US economic assistance.\textsuperscript{158}

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw a slight change in US policy toward British Honduras. Although during those very same years the US went from disinterest to preoccupation with British Guiana, toward British Honduras, the United States shifted less drastically. Although the US policy of refusing to recognize the Nationalist Movement persisted in the interests of keeping the problem securely in the hands of the UK, the US by 1963 had accepted the fact that British Honduras would be granted internal self-government as of January 1, 1964.\textsuperscript{159} Additionally, the eventual offer on the part of the United States to play a role in the mediation of the Anglo-Guatemalan territorial dispute did not actually change US policy, as much as it simply was another action believed by the US to bolster Latin American security. The change for the US was the awareness that resolution of the dispute was in the security interests of the United States and would be good for all parties involved.

\textit{US Policy Toward the Anglo-Guatemalan Border Dispute}

For over fifty years by the 1960s, the United States left it to the British to decide when and how to deal with the Anglo-Guatemalan border dispute.

\textsuperscript{158} Confidential Memorandum, UK-Guatemala Dispute over British Honduras, November 1, 1963, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

\textsuperscript{159} Cerri, "Missionary Zeal", 443.
Guatemala remained silent on the issue for almost thirty years, desiring the friendship of the British more than a claim to Belizean territory. Britain saw the issue as settled or at least was clearly satisfied to maintain control over the colony, and the United States was unconcerned until the 1930s, and then only because Guatemala asked for US mediation of the border dispute.

By the 1950s the United States had continuously tried to keep a distance from the dispute. The Guatemalans had, on several occasions in the previous ten years, asked for support in their cause against the British position. The US position however, had not changed. As the US State Department described the situation:

Guatemala has an ancient though questionable claim to the colony of British Honduras. This claim has become a matter of national pride with the Guatemalans and it can be said to be probably the only issue on which they are all in agreement. We have always told the Guatemalans, who have frequently asked us to intervene on their behalf with the British, that this claim should be settled through diplomatic negotiations or by an international judicial body.¹⁶⁰

The United States clearly did not want any involvement in the resolution of the dispute. As the British were in control of the territory, the US had no immediate need to get involved as a mediator in the dispute. Additionally, having the British in control of the territory of British Honduras was likely preferable to the US.

¹⁶⁰ Department of State, Guatemala Files: Lot 60 D 647, Economics. Confidential, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
Between 1961 and 1963, US concern about British Guiana reached its zenith. Due to the socialist policies of Castro’s new government and the fear of the spread of international communism into the western hemisphere, the Kennedy administration became increasingly wary of Jagan and the PPP.\footnote{Various scholars have noted that the concern that the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations maintained regarding Jagan’s control in British Guiana was on the rise throughout 1960-62. See Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*, 82-83; Guthman and Shulman, *Kennedy*, 295; Esposito, 49, 71.} Moreover, members of the Kennedy Administration gradually became very concerned about the prospect of Jagan leading British Guiana after the British granted independence. The possibility of another new government in Latin America following the model put forth by Castro was unacceptable to the United States at that time. Between 1961 and 1962, the Kennedy Administration, including the president himself, attempted to ascertain what Jagan’s exact ideological leanings were. Although in early 1961 the US believed that the PPP was not a “Communist party per se”, they were however, increasingly worried that the leadership of the party had been indoctrinated by, or were members of, communists parties in the US and the United Kingdom.\footnote{Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, Volume XII, American Republics, Document 242, Special National Intelligence Estimate, March 21, 1961.} Additionally, an intelligence estimate from March of 1961 states, “Both Jagans have visited Cuba in the past year and have since chosen to identify the PPP with Castro's cause,” a development that increasingly alarmed the United States.\footnote{Ibid.} However, in an intelligence estimate in March of 1961, the US admitted that, “neither the
Communist Bloc nor Castro has made any vigorous effort to exploit the British Guiana situation."  

This was a precarious situation, as the Kennedy Administration had a growing interest in preventing a second Latin American nation from falling to communism. Throughout 1961, Kennedy was concerned about the impending British Guianese elections that were to take place in August and about the likelihood that Jagan would be victorious. While Kennedy urged conversations with the British regarding US concerns, the US recognized that it was too late to make a change prior to the 1961 elections.  

The Kennedy Administration was eager to make their concerns known to the British government. Additionally, it was important to those in the US that they not make a second mistake in being too trusting toward a Latin American government with leftist leanings, as they had been with Cuba. Secretary of State Dean Rusk wrote to embassy in the UK, “No doubt you would expect us to show considerable sensitivity about the prospect of Castroism in the Western Hemisphere and that we are not inclined to give people like Jagan the same benefit of the doubt which was given two or three years ago to Castro himself. However, we do believe that Jagan and his American wife are very far to the left indeed and that his accession to power in British Guiana would be a most troublesome setback in this Hemisphere.”  

The inability for the US and the British to come up with an alternative to Jagan, or to even agree on a course of action, was a serious concern for the Kennedy Administration.  

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164 Ibid.  
action prior to the August 1961 elections, prompted an attempt on the part of the
Kennedy administration to try to look as though they were willing to work with

The desire of the British Government to grant independence as quickly as
possible in British Guiana was largely responsible for the policy adopted by the
Kennedy Administration to work with Jagan and the PPP in late-1961. However,
simultaneously, using the avenues of the CIA and the AFL-CIO, Kennedy would
also start the process of destabilizing Jagan’s political power within the colony.
This two-track approach has been described as an effort to work with the British
on a cooperative position on the decolonization process, while still affecting a
policy that put US security interests in Latin America first. US concerns over the
rise of another communist nation in Latin America eventually overpowered the
British assertion that Jagan was the best candidate to lead an independent British
Guiana, and Britain eventually allowed changes to British Guianese voting
regulations which would be chiefly responsible for Jagan’s 1964 loss at the polls,
and the election of Jagan’s rival, Forbes Burnham. This development, however,
was not solely outside of Jagan’s control. On the contrary, a series of missteps by
Jagan himself contributed to the US decision to remove him from power. His
misunderstanding of his own political reality, along with a consistently anti-US
and pro-communist rhetoric between 1961 and 1963 ensured that the United
States would find it necessary to prevent the continuation of a Jagan-led
government after independence.
Between late-1961 and mid-1962, the Kennedy Administration tried to ascertain whether or not they could work with Cheddi Jagan. Both Cheddi and Janet Jagan had been subjects of concern to US and UK officials since the elections of 1953, when the British suspended the constitution and took control of British Guiana. By the August elections in 1961, the British were getting close to granting independence to the colony, while the United States was increasingly concerned with the political situation they would leave behind. The next job for the United States was to figure out exactly where Jagan stood on the political spectrum.

The consensus in 1960 from both the US and in Britain was that Jagan himself was not necessarily a communist, but that his wife Janet was certainly a communist and that many in the PPP leadership were as well.\(^{167}\) Additionally, while Jagan had not directly acknowledged himself to be a communist, the US was by this point, convinced of his indoctrination due to his "statements and actions".\(^{168}\) During August of 1961, the British were still of the opinion that Jagan was the only suitable leader for British Guiana after independence was granted and that he was "salvageable".\(^{169}\) Secretary of State Rusk wrote on August 5\(^{th}\) that it was too late for either the British or the United States to take any action that would remove Jagan prior to the August 21\(^{st}\) election, in which Jagan

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\(^{168}\) Ibid.

would most likely be victorious. Rusk continued, one week later to express his concerns to the embassy in the UK:

Although your and our information about Jagan seems to be much the same, as is to be expected from our close collaboration, I believe that our estimates may differ somewhat about the man himself and the implications of his future leadership in British Guiana. No doubt you would expect us to show considerable sensitivity about the prospect of Castroism in the Western Hemisphere and that we are not inclined to give people like Jagan the same benefit of the doubt which was given two or three years ago to Castro himself. However, we do believe that Jagan and his American wife are very far to the left indeed and that his accession to power in British Guiana would be a most troublesome setback in this Hemisphere.

Rusk continues to ask if there is anything that could be done in the short amount of time left, to stop Jagan from winning the election. Rusk however, was most certainly on the extreme end of the administration at this point, as many others in the administration, including the President had yet to come to such a firm conclusion on Jagan. The British on the other hand continued to believe Jagan to be the only viable leader in the colony. In response to Rusk’s letter of August 11, 1961, Foreign Secretary Home wrote that the British position was that there was nothing to be done about the 1961 election, and that there would not be enough time to make an effective change. Additionally, Home expressed the opinion that “since the restoration of the democratic process in 1957, the elected government has behaved reasonably well and we have had no grounds which
would justify a second attempt to take any action. While the United States was becoming increasingly worried about a Jagan-led British Guiana going the way of Castroist Cuba after the granting of independence, the British were still willing to give Jagan the benefit of the doubt. This was partially due to a discrepancy in the level of concern between the US and the UK, and also from the general belief in Great Britain and the United States that there was no viable leadership alternative to Jagan. The main goal for the British was to relieve themselves of the financial burden of their colonial empire, and part of their faith in Jagan as a post-independence leader in British Honduras may have been a knowledge that the US might take over fiscally if the British withdrew. Foreign Secretary Home had a much rosier outlook on the situation than did Dean Rusk in 1961. Home wrote, “It is true that he has during the election campaign made it clear that he expects to strengthen his relations with Cuba, and he has at times shown an interest in the possibilities of both trade and aid with the Soviet bloc. But he has also, during the election, promised to seek further aid from the United States; and, if we in the West show a real willingness to try to help, we think it by no means impossible that British Guiana may end up in a position not very different from that of India.”

Following independence, India remained within the Commonwealth of Nations and the UK maintained friendly relations with the Indian government. This suggestion that the same might occur between the US and an independent Guyana under the leadership of the PPP exemplifies the difference between the British and American positions.

173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
This statement would most likely have been unacceptable to the US in the long term if indeed true. In the Cold War mentality that had gripped Washington for over ten years by 1961, countries had to choose sides. There was no room for a small country in Latin America to advance a non-aligned foreign policy, certainly not with the US as its powerful neighbor to the north, increasingly traumatized by the “loss” of Cuba to communism. However, in August of 1961, Jagan was victorious in the British Guianese election, which was thought to be the last before independence would be granted. What followed was a dual track policy for the next several months put forth by the Kennedy Administration. On the one hand, the Kennedy Administration made an honest effort to work with Jagan, on the other hand, the administration also attempted to look for an alternative leader who could be installed to supplant Jagan. This was the point at which Jagan would fail to create a working relationship with the United States.

Through political missteps in late 1961 and early 1962, Jagan convinced the Kennedy Administration that it was time to find and install an alternative leader in British Guiana. Forbes Burnham became this leader before the final pre-independence colonial election in 1964. All that remained was to convince the British and to ascertain how it would be done.

In August of 1961 however, the Kennedy Administration was still implementing their two-pronged approach to Jagan and British Guiana. Special Assistant Schlesinger wrote to the President on August 30th, stating that he agreed with the State Department that the US had no real choice but to try to work with
Jagan at that point. As Jagan had just handily won the British Guianese election on August 21st, the US was, at the moment, trying to do “bring (keep?) him into the western camp.” To this end, Schlesinger recommended to Kennedy that the US offer technical and economic assistance to Jagan, pave the way for an independent British Guiana to join the Organization of American States and the Alliance for Progress, and lastly that Jagan have a friendly meeting with the President during his visit to the US during October of 1961. These recommendations however were followed by a decidedly more cautious recommendation from the State Department regarding the need to safeguard against the rise of communism in British Guiana prior to independence. The State Department suggested “a covert program to develop information about, expose and destroy Communists in British Guiana, including, if necessary, the possibility of finding a substitute for Jagan himself, who could command East Indian support.” This statement recognizes the need for political support from the East Indian community, and that population was the majority in the colony. However, there was simply no other Indo-Guianese leader who could’ve commanded an equivalent level of support.

Kennedy had largely made up his mind about the colonial leader’s politics and leadership suitability prior to their meeting on October 25, 1961. However it would be months before the final decision to get rid of Jagan would be made.

Many in the Kennedy administration, including the president, saw British Guiana

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175 Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XII, Document 249, Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Schlesinger) to President Kennedy, August 30, 1961.
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
as an issue wholly colored by the experience of Cuba. The administration’s paranoia around another Cuba in Latin America had become a driving force in policy toward the Western Hemisphere. Prior to Jagan’s reception at the White House in October, most of Kennedy’s closest advisers had, in the words of Stephen Rabe, already “persuaded themselves that the Jagans were wolves in sheep’s clothing who engaged in democratic politics as a means to an end. Once free of British colonial rule, they would openly embrace communism and ally with the Soviet Union.” This position, which had only grown in strength since the August election, would be exacerbated while Jagan was in the United States.

Jagan’s visit to the United States in October 1961, while cordial in tone, was a public relations disaster. Jagan’s meeting with Kennedy failed to alleviate the administration’s fears about Jagan’s political leanings. The meeting itself was disappointing to Jagan due to the insufficiency of US financial commitment he was able to procure from the meeting. Jagan asked for a dramatic aid package while in Washington. The colonial leader’s goal was to get a $40 million commitment from the United States for economic development. While Kennedy himself never discussed hard numbers with foreign leaders, what resulted from Jagan’s meeting with Kennedy and a further meeting with administrative officials was “only a vague promise of a $5 million aid package.” Jagan essentially failed to get the funding he had hoped to procure, and Kennedy had watched Jagan’s appearance on Meet the Press on October 15.

180 Ibid.
181 Ibid., 87.
182 Ibid.
which had bolstered the political pressure on the administration to find an alternative to Jagan. 183

Meet the Press

For Jagan, the televised interview on Meet the Press on October 15th, 1961 was a political disaster. The colonial leader’s performance on the American program was partially meant to sell Jagan to the American public. The Kennedy Administration realized that it would probably be easiest to work with Jagan if possible. However, the appearance on Meet the Press brought Jagan one giant step closer to US interference and his removal from power. After the interview, it became much harder for the Kennedy Administration to work with Jagan and to have that relationship maintain political support in the United States.

The interview was tainted by questioning from Lawrence E. Spivak and by Jagan’s seemingly evasive answers. At the very top of the program, Spivak, the show’s producer and a panel member, began questioning Jagan in a combative manner, starting by demanding whether Jagan was in fact a communist. 184 Jagan avoided the question by directing his answer toward the “great deal of confusion about this whole question of British Guiana.” 185 Jagan continued to speak on the various definitions of communism, socialism and Marxism without directly answering the question. Spivak then asked Jagan to clarify how his favored Marxism might be different than that in the Soviet Union and also whether Jagan

183 Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, 774-78.
185 Ibid.
felt that the Soviet Union was free. Jagan replied with less than concrete answers on both points. Spivak continuously pressed Jagan to be specific in his answers and asked Jagan, “Where do you stand on this fundamental division in the world today between Communism and western democracy?” 186 To the question of communism, Jagan drew distinctions between communism in politics and in economics: “In the political field, I am wedded to parliamentary democracy. In the economic field I do not believe in capitalism. I do not believe that free enterprise, which may have been very wonderful for, say, the United States of America, will in present day circumstances develop either my country on an underdeveloped country in the world generally.” 187

These answers were incredibly damaging to Jagan’s chances of working with the United States. There was little chance that the Kennedy administration would have worked with Jagan at this point anyway, but the Meet the Press interview gave “Kennedy an excuse for rejecting Jagan” 188 Stephen Rabe describes the effect of the Meet the Press debacle as making Jagan look “evasive and insecure” and mentions that Jagan’s answers seemed incoherent and vague. 189 Another effect of the interview was that it gave Kennedy a stronger political motivation for rejecting Jagan. Kennedy knew that the American public would not look fondly upon another Latin American leader with leftist leanings, and Jagan had been far too supportive of leftist ideas in the interview. Over the next

186 Ibid.
187 Ibid.
189 Ibid.
two years, the US would finally bring Britain along in the goal of ousting Jagan and supplanting him with Forbes Burnham.

1962

After Jagan's meeting with Kennedy and his disastrous appearance on Meet the Press in October of 1961, instead of trying to rebuild a relationship with the Kennedy Administration, Jagan continued to verbally antagonize the United States and made several political blunders, which made his removal even more certain. In 1962, several events severely damaged any chance Jagan had of maintaining his political position in British Guiana. On February 16th, rioting erupted in Georgetown as a result of both racial tensions and due to the near fifty present unemployment rate. Additionally, Jagan had proposed a budgetary measure that was a last attempt to raise much needing funds to combat the economic crisis in the colony. What first began as arson and riots against the terrible unemployment situation in the colony, "quickly took on an ugly racial tone in predominantly African Georgetown." During this crisis, Forbes Burnham and Peter D'Aguiar, leaders of Jagan's political opposition, were instrumental in encouraging the rioters and in making Jagan look as though he lacked control of the colony. As almost all of the police force was made up of Afro-Guianese, this population largely supported Burnham, as did the rioters. Jagan was made to look ineffective as a leader when the police force refused to

190 Ibid., 89
191 Melby to State Department, February 23, 1962, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
obey his orders to stop the rioting. \textsuperscript{192} Jagan was forced to ask the British to send in troops to protect the colony. This event marked the first time that the British considered the idea of a future independent Guyana under the leadership of someone other than Jagan. \textsuperscript{193}

Early in 1962, Hugh Fraser, the British Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Colonies traveled to British Guiana to assess the state of affairs during what had been a period of intense racial violence, mainly aimed at Indian business owners. \textsuperscript{194} The Kennedy Administration weighed the options of how to deal with the decolonization process at the time, and Kennedy explicitly decided to wait for Fraser’s recommendations before deciding how to proceed. \textsuperscript{195} Fraser met with US Department of State and White House personnel on his way back to Britain in March of 1962. While Fraser was mainly unworried about communism in British Guiana at that time, he “stated that the racial tension between Africans and East Indians in the colony was the central problem” \textsuperscript{196} and also the potential for future unrest if things were not handled properly by both Britain and the United States going forward. \textsuperscript{197} A memorandum of a conversation between US and British government officials highlights the opinion of Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, U. Alexis Johnson, as he emphasized the importance of Cuba in the thinking of the United States on British Guiana: “Mr. Johnson said that the

\textsuperscript{192} Rabe, \textit{U.S. intervention in British Guiana}, 90
\textsuperscript{193} Esposito, “The Cold War and Decolonization in British Guiana”, 126
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
United States would like to feel more confident that the withdrawal of British
troops and the granting of independence to British Guiana would not bring chaos
and a communist controlled government. He reminded Mr. Fraser that we thought
of this situation partly in terms of our Cuban experience. Castro had originally
been presented as a reformer. We do not intend to be taken in twice. He felt it
important that the United States and the United Kingdom work very closely at all
levels on the problem of British Guiana in order to prevent catastrophe from
taking place there.”198 While Forbes Burnham’s actions during the crisis made
the US feel like disaster could be avoided in the future, Jagan’s inability to control
the situation added to both American and British concerns.

Following the rioting in Georgetown in February, a public inquiry was
held. This inquiry would result in a statement made by Jagan that would signal
the absolute end of any hope of his working with the United States. Between June
22nd and 28th, Jagan was questioned by Lionel Luckhoo, an Indian Lawyer, in
much the same manner that Jagan was questioned during the Spivak interview on
Meet The Press in October 1961. After several indecisive answers Jagan
admitted, “I am a communist.”199 This was an admission that had long been
suspected by the Kennedy Administration, and the combination of Jagan’s
actions, words, apparent willingness to seek economic assistance from all parties
including those in the Soviet Bloc, convinced that US that there was no longer
any need to try to salvage the relationship. All that remained between the summer

198 Ibid.
199 Melby to Department of State, 29 June 1962, 741d.00/6-2962, Central Decimal Files Box 1668,
RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD. Transcript
of hearing from Daily Chronicle.
of 1962 and mid-1963 was to convince the British that Jagan must be replaced. As Esposito writes, “By mid-July 1962, United States officials had ceased discussing strategy in British Guiana and began discussing tactics, committing themselves completely to a covert program to overthrow Jagan. The determination that Jagan would be subverted was final, what remained was convincing Great Britain to go along with the American plan.” 200

Time was of the essence by early 1963. Prior to the meetings between Kennedy, MacMillan, and other high ranking officials from both governments outside of London in mid-1963, the idea that Jagan must be removed was firmly established for the US, and the methods for taking action had already taken shape. By March of 1963, the British and the Americans had already agreed that holding one more election prior to independence would be necessary to get Jagan out under the guise of a free and fair electoral process. 201 Additionally, the tactic that seemed to have the most probability of success was to change the electoral rules to proportional representation, thereby weakening the electoral power of the PPP and almost guaranteeing victory to a coalition of the PNC under Forbes Burnham and the United Front under Peter D’Aguñar. 202 The feeling in the US was that delaying the inevitable would only make the process of getting rid of Jagan more difficult in the future. The consul general wrote to the Department of State in on March 14, “The longer the delay in firm action which will remove Jagan, the greater must be the eventual U.S. efforts required to correct the damage. If undue

201 FRUS, Department of State, Central Files, POL BR GU. Secret; Limit Distribution; Noforn. Repeated to London. Drafted by Rosenthal.
202 Ibid.
delay results, at best it will be most difficult to unscramble and reassemble the Guianese egg; and at worst a communist state will be established." The United States wished to avoid any future issues that might arise in British Guiana.

The Result

By June of 1963 the Kennedy and MacMillan governments were meeting to create an independent British Guiana without the inclusion of Cheddi Jagan. When President Kennedy met with British officials at British Prime Minister MacMillan’s retreat at Birch Grove, outside of London on June 30, British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Duncan Sandys, outlined the possibilities:

He said he thought that, theoretically, there were four courses open: (1) To muddle on as we are now doing, which he thought should be rejected as a choice; (2) To move forward by granting British Guiana independence now (he said that although this would be a move forward it obviously presented grave problems); (3) To suspend the constitution and institute direct colonial rule (he said that this would be a move backward politically); (4) to establish a Burnham-D’Aguilar government and then grant British Guiana independence.204

During this same meeting, Kennedy expressed his concern over the probability that “It was obvious that if the UK were to get out of British Guiana

203 Ibid.
now it would become a Communist state."\textsuperscript{205} The concern for the president was both that the political consequence of such a development would be that the American people would never accept what looked like a Soviet advance into South American territory, and the resulting probability that a candidate who promised to take military action against Cuba would likely be ushered into office during the 1964 US presidential elections.\textsuperscript{206} The memorandum of the President's feelings continued: "The situation was inflammatory at this time. He thought that Latin America was the most dangerous area in the world. The effect of having a Communist state in British Guiana in addition to Cuba in 1964, would be to create irresistible pressures in the United States to strike militarily against Cuba."\textsuperscript{207} Duncan Sandys went on to say that "...he thought the best solution was that of a Burnham-D'Aguiar government to which the UK would grant independence."\textsuperscript{208} This argument would eventually satisfy the US and alleviate US concerns over the possibility of a communist British Guiana. This development, however, would largely be made possible by the political maneuvering of Forbes Burnham himself.


Jagan and the PPP continued to take actions that antagonized the US and the UK after the summer of 1962 and 1963. PPP members traveled to communist

\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid.
countries and tried to develop ties with Cuba. Additionally, the Jagans praised Castro, even after the Cuban Missile Crisis in October.\textsuperscript{209} The long history, by this point, of obvious, and vocal support for both Castro's revolution and his ensuing policies could not have been a worse policy for the Jagans and the PPP to adopt while trying to ask for aid money from the United States. By fall of 1963, Jagan's political position was much more tenuous and perhaps was more clear to him. Melby wrote to the State Department on September 5\textsuperscript{th} concerning a conversation that Jagan had requested, wishing to repair the damage to the British Guianese relationship with the US, "Jagan said he was much concerned about the rate this deterioration and unnecessarily harmful effects this was having on both countries. As far as developments in U.S. were concerned, he reluctantly had been forced to conclusion that administration had now adopted as its policy attitude of right extremists, namely, Jagan must go"\textsuperscript{210} That was exactly the policy that the US had been asking for from the British for the last year, and the activities of Forbes Burnham in 1962 and 1963 made it all the more possible and probable that it would come to fruition.

Burnham made several adroit political moves during this crucial time. Throughout 1962, Burnham made himself appear to be the better choice to lead British Guiana to independence by actively courting the United States in multiple ways. One of the most important steps taken by Burnham was how he handled the rioting in Georgetown in February of 1962. While Jagan had lost control of

\textsuperscript{209} Melby to Rusk, 20 January 1963, 741d.00, Central Decimal Files Box 1667, RG 59. Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD

\textsuperscript{210} FRUS, 1961–1963 Volume XII, American Republics, Document 297Telegram From the Consulate General in Georgetown to the Department of State, Department of State, September 5, 1963, Central Files, POL 1 BR GU-US. Secret; Limit Distribution. Repeated to London.
the police force, and was forced to eventually ask the British to send troops to quell the violence, Burnham went to the United States to ask for weapons from Atkinson Airbase to help combat the rioters. It is important to mention that by this time Burnham had been instrumental in riling up the mob mentality in Georgetown, and was being supported covertly by the CIA for the purpose of making Jagan's hold on power look weak. However, the US goal was served in two ways by Burnham's response to the riots. First, he showed himself to be a leader who could follow the program that the US designed. Second, Burnham's ability to control the police force and to act as an alternative to Jagan in a time of crisis, was an effective example to the British of another leadership possibility for an independent Guyana.

In contrast to Jagan's visit to the US in October of 1961, Burnham's US visit was a complete success. Jagan had been pressing for a visit to the United States during March and April of 1962. The United States was concerned that bringing Burnham to Washington would be frowned upon by the British, who were not yet ready to get rid of Jagan, and who had always been extremely wary of Burnham. Burnham arrived in Washington in May and completely bowled over Schlesinger. While Burnham was successfully courting the United States, Jagan visited the UN and neglected to meet with US representatives while seeking out those from the Soviet Union and Poland.

Lastly, Burnham actively sought to support the civil rights movement in

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211 Esposito, "The Cold War and Decolonization in British Guiana", 129
212 Ibid.
213 Stevenson to Rusk, 24 May 1962, 741d.00/5-2462, Central Decimal Files Box 1668, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
the United States. Understanding that making himself attractive to the American public would only help to bolster his image in the US, Burnham supported the mission of Martin Luther King Jr. While Jagan appears to have lacked cognizance of his political reality, and the importance of a healthy relationship with the United States, Burnham realized that his success was entirely dependent upon the building of just such a relationship. Esposito sums up the importance of this stark difference, “Most notably, Burnham understood the declining influence of Great Britain and the overwhelming significance of acknowledging the primacy of the United States in the Western Hemisphere. Slowly, Burnham’s political opportunism and Jagan’s struggle to keep to his ideals convinced the Kennedy Administration that Burnham was the necessary, if far from ideal, choice to lead British Guiana to independence.”  

1964

The turning of the tide in Burnham’s favor would occur in 1964. In late 1962, Colonial Secretary Duncan Sandys had ruled that British Guiana needed to have another election before Britain granted independence. In order to unseat Jagan, the plan advanced by both the US and Britain was to change the voting system to proportional representation, in order that the PNC and the United Front could together garner enough votes to defeat Jagan and the PPP. By November of 1963, Sandys, after holding a constitutional conference that fall, had achieved the

214 Esposito, “The Cold War and Decolonization in British Guiana“, 129
215 Rabe, U.S. Intervention in British Guiana, 106
agreement of Jagan and Burnham for proportional representation in the 1964
elections, while denying Jagans request to lower the voting age from twenty-one
to eighteen.

These maneuvers gave the United States everything it wanted in British
Guiana. Jagan would be made politically powerless, and Forbes Burnham would
be the man in Georgetown for the US. While Burnham was consolidating his
power in British Guiana in the aftermath of four years of intense US pressure
aimed at both British Guiana and the UK, the Johnson Administration would
finally start to take some interest in British Honduras, appointing someone to look
into the Anglo-Guatemalan border dispute. While British Guiana was one of the
most serious issues facing the Kennedy Administration, British Honduras was
kept safely in British hands where the US didn’t have to make any firm policy
decisions concerning either internal British Honduran politics or concerning the
independence process itself. The US would always be, in relation to British
Honduras, at most a coach, mediating an argument between two other actors.
Never was the US as emotionally of stringently troubled with in British Honduras
as with British Guiana. Both colonies would pay a price for this discrepancy in
US attention over the next decade.
Conclusion

Between 1966 and 1981, British Guiana and British Honduras again carved very distinctive political futures. While the people of British Honduras continued to struggle for full independence from Great Britain, those in British Guiana struggled under an oppressive regime headed by Forbes Burnham, which denied them free elections and ruled the independent state of Guiana for more than two decades. The divergent paths of these two colonies, which took place in the 1960s, had tremendous consequences during the following two decades.

In the case of British Honduras, the mid-1960s saw the United States finally playing a more substantial role in the mediation of the Anglo-Guatemalan border dispute. The Webster Proposals, named for American lawyer Bethuel M. Webster, became the first substantial US input given to try to resolve the dispute. These proposals were the work of a three-man tribunal tasked with coming to a conclusion that would be agreeable to Great Britain and Guatemala, as well as British Honduras. President Lyndon Johnson nominated Webster, an American lawyer from New York, as tribunal chairman in 1965. Between 1966 and 1968, Webster studied the problem and came up with recommendations in the shape of a draft treaty. The proposals envisioned that Belize would become independent in 1970 but that the independence would not be total and complete. While Article 1, paragraph 2 promised that by December 31, 1970, “the United Kingdom and

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216 Young and Young, “The Impact of the Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute on the Internal Politics of Belize”, 18
shall transfer to Belize supreme authority in respect of Belize. Thereafter sole responsibility and, the right to exercise, all and any powers, both internal and external of government, administration, legislation, and jurisdiction shall vest in Belize. This was not to be complete sovereignty for Belize. Article nine proposed a joint governmental body be established between Belize and Guatemala consisting of three members from each country, and a seventh person of "international prominence" to chair the committee. Their proposals also would have allowed for Guatemala's free access to all of the ports and water ways of Belize as well as require the government of Guatemala to be a channel through which Belize would conduct international relations. There was rioting in Belize when the proposals were made public in May of 1968, and the mediation failed after the governments of Great Britain and Guatemala, as well as the major political parties in Belize all rejected the proposals.

During the 1970s, the British Hondurans finally gained a real voice in the procedure by taking their plight to the international community and the UN. In 1974 and 1975, the British Honduran cause gained much wider attention, putting pressure on the British to speed up the process. The first UN resolution on Belize was overwhelmingly passed in 1975, with the support of many of the Caribbean community and the Commonwealth of Nations. However, none of the Spanish-
speaking countries of continental Central and South America voted in favor of Belize, and it became a top priority to win over these nations. International support solidified by 1980, and the United States voted for a 1980 UN resolution calling for Belizean independence.\footnote{Ibid., 21} Belize became independent on September 21, 1981, while the Anglo-Guatemalan border dispute remained unsettled, and Guatemala did not recognize Belizean sovereignty.

Importantly, and interestingly, there are still many documents on British Honduras from this period that remain classified. As I began my work at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, it soon became apparent to me that there was a shortage of documentation on the colony available to date. While there is no way of knowing what these documents hold, it is possible that upon declassification, they will reveal a much more significant level of interest and concern on the part of the US toward the decolonization process in British Honduras.

\textbf{British Guiana}

In British Guiana, Forbes Burnham won the 1964 elections, and the United States successfully removed Cheddi Jagan from leading British Guiana to independence. The change in the election system from the winner take all system to the use of proportional representation made it possible for the United Front and the PNC to combine forces and enabled Burnham to become prime minister. The
Johnson Administration whole-heartedly supported Burnham’s government, even as Burnham disobeyed the democratic ideals that the US had preached throughout the process of British decolonization in the 1950s and 60s. In 1968, while Burnham was steadily taking control of Guyana’s electoral processes, Lyndon Johnson was approving loans to be made to stimulate economic growth in the new country. Johnson approved a $2.5 million loan for supporting assistance and a $12.9 loan to modernize the rice industry and to hopefully bring the Indian population into line with the PNC. At the same time, Burnham was neglecting the rule of law, and disenfranchising the Indian population.

Throughout the next twenty years, Burnham rigged elections, and controlled all aspects of society. Burnham had expanded the security forces after 1964, and these turned into a force of 20,000 by 1980. These thugs were used to rob the population as a form of fundraising for the PNC. Stephen Rabe writes, “Such lawlessness characterized life in Burnham’s Guyana. By the 1980s, Guyana had the second highest crime rate in the world, exceeded only by the crime rate in war-torn Lebanon. Common criminals favored the technique known locally as ‘choke and rob’.” In addition, Burnham would give inducements for his supporters, spending up to fifty percent of the budget on salaries for the civil service, which he packed with the faithful among the population. This was the result after four years of US interference in the name of anti-communism. After Jagan was removed from power, President Johnson sent Burnham a letter of congratulation.

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224 Ibid., 163.
225 Ibid.
Final Thoughts

These two small British colonies shed light on US Cold War policy and its effects. The long-term effect of US intervention in British Guiana was decidedly negative for the majority of Guyana’s citizens. Although the US got the result it desired, an anti-communist leader in post-independence Guyana, the independence that both the people and the government of Guyana experienced was dependent upon US acquiescence. Although the colony of British Guiana became the independent nation of Guyana on May 26, 1966, Forbes Burnham was not entirely independent from a major world power. Without US support, British Guiana may have remained a British Colony many more years. Additionally, Forbes Burnham had the support of the US, at least initially, largely due to the fact that he was not Cheddi Jagan. As Burnham became a more and more viable alternative to Jagan leading up to the 1964 election, he also became the United States’ man in British Guiana, giving up the colonialism from Great Britain, and replacing it with the understanding that he would follow the US lead.

In British Honduras, US non-intervention had an interesting effect. Rather than spending the two decades after 1964 living under a US-supported dictator, British Hondurans needed to continue the fight for independence until 1981. Interestingly though, when independence finally did come to the country of Belize in 1981, it was a real independence, without many of the political strings that were seen in British Guiana. Although both British Guiana and British Honduras were too small and economically interconnected with other countries to ever
obtain the definition of independence that a large nation with a more diverse economy might attain, British Honduras was able to follow its own path and ended up with an independence that was quite close to the original goal of George Price and the PUP. While British Guiana’s independence was granted a full fifteen years prior to that of British Honduras, the PUP and the people of British Honduras might very well have rejected a British Guianese-style solution.

US policy had two overriding effects. Firstly, the result of US meddling was the complete reversal of the trajectory of colonial politics in British Guiana. Without those policies advanced by the US between 1961 and 1964, Cheddi Jagan would certainly have led the colony to independence. This would have created a free Guyana, which may have been far more liberated from US whims. Second, the US inaction on British Honduras probably shaped the independence process even more through its inaction that it would have if the US had giving strong support to the independence movement in the 1950s and 1960s. With the failure of the Webster Proposals, and the long history of US disinterest by the 1970s, British Hondurans had to find a more internationalist path toward independence.

What made each decolonization process so different was each colony’s relationship with the United States. While British Honduras had the benefit of a friendlier history with the US, British Guiana lacked that benefit. Slightly larger and more developed, British Guiana was viewed by the United States entirely through the lens of the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution after 1960. From the viewpoint of US strategy, neither colony could be lost to communism. However, British Honduras was never a threat. No one cared about British Honduras.
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