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MOSCOW EYES GUYANA

INTRODUCTION

The restoration of order and democracy to Grenada in October 1983 should not lull the United States into overlooking growing Soviet and Cuban influence in another strategic Caribbean nation. The Communist bloc's loss of Grenada has spurred Moscow and Havana to focus on Guyana. This English-speaking country on South America's northeastern shoulder is a strategic bridge between Latin America and the Caribbean.

Guyana's threat to the security of the U.S. and its Western Hemisphere neighbors may prove far greater than Grenada's. Guyana is a mainland country whose borders adjoin mineral rich Venezuela and Brazil, allowing easy infiltration for subversives and drug traffickers. Guyana forms the new third point of a "strategic triangle" with Cuba and Nicaragua. There, pro-Soviet tactical airpower could be based in time of crisis. Guyana also could provide the Soviet Union with a base for operations against U.S. strategic missile submarines and for interdicting the Mid- and South Atlantic sea lines of communication.

Because of Guyana's potential threat to U.S. security, Washington must make it clear to Soviet boss Mikhail Gorbachev and Cuban dictator Fidel Castro that it will not tolerate another Soviet/Cuban base in this hemisphere. At the same time, the U.S. must not condone the repression and socialist economic policies of Guyana's People's National Congress (PNC) government by renewing U.S. economic aid. The struggle for true democracy in Guyana should be encouraged by strong U.S. support for the moderate political opposition. A tough stance now on Guyana by Washington could preempt a new Grenada.

GUYANA'S CURRENT ECONOMIC PLIGHT

First sighted by Christopher Columbus in 1498, the territory comprising present-day Guyana alternated between Dutch, French, and British rule until 1831, when it became the colony of British Guiana until independence in 1966. Guyana's 83,000 square miles border Brazil, Venezuela, and Suriname. More than half of its population of nearly 800,000 is of East Indian descent with the remainder largely of African ancestry.

Under PNC rule since independence, Guyana has witnessed its economy go into a tailspin. Although the country is rich in gold, diamonds, hardwood, bauxite, and agricultural possibilities, the PNC's socialist mismanagement has resulted in a negative growth rate averaging 10 percent since 1982. Many domestic industries produce only intermittently or have ceased production altogether because of import restrictions and lack of foreign exchange. The decline in productive activity has created unemployment averaging about 35 percent. With unemployment has come growing social discontent, which the government addresses by intimidation and other repressive measures.

The U.S. has given Guyana more than \$150 million in bilateral and multilateral assistance in the past 30 years. Last June, however, the U.S. suspended aid to Guyana because the country was \$9 million in arrears in repaying development assistance loans to the U.S. Only one month earlier, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had declared Guyana ineligible for further loans, while the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) confirmed that it would continue its 1983 freeze on loans to Guyana. The World Bank Country Report called Guyana not worthy of credit, and said that its economic malaise derived from a lack of investment and a large and inefficient public sector.

GUYANA'S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Guyana's military capabilities have been upgraded by the Soviet bloc in recent years. The ground, air, and sea units of the Guyana Defense Force currently number 7,000 personnel.¹ Some 400 Cuban military advisors provide training and technical support to all branches of the Guyanese armed forces.² On February 12, 1983, two

1. The Military Balance 1985-1986 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1985), p. 150.

2. Spotlight, Georgetown, November 15, 1981.

ships, flying no national flags, unloaded artillery pieces and small arms at the Linden Alumina Plant wharf on Guyana's Demarara River. The unloading was at night by soldiers who comdoned off both sides of the river--a tactic similar to that employed to unload Soviet arms shipments to Grenada. One of the vessels, the Como VI, was of Cuban registry. The arms came from North Korea.³

The military hardware sent to Guyana has become increasingly sophisticated. In addition to Soviet artillery pieces, mortars, and SAM-7 anti-aircraft missiles, Guyana has received several armed North Korean patrol boats.⁴ In October 1985, three Soviet Mi-8 "Hip" helicopters were unloaded in the capital city of Georgetown for use by the Guyana Defense Force, making Guyana the fourth country in the Western Hemisphere to receive such aircraft, along with Cuba, Nicaragua, and Peru.⁵ Last year, too, Bucharest signed an agreement with Guyana to send Romanian air force personnel to Guyana to train "civilian as well as Army pilots."⁶ Guyana is reportedly negotiating with Moscow for MiG aircraft and with Brazil for Bandeirante patrol aircraft. The state-owned Guyana Airways Corporation is currently operating a Soviet-built Tupolev Tu-154B leased from Romania and has purchased three Tu-154s from the Soviet Union and Romania in exchange for bauxite.⁷ Such aircraft provide Guyana with a significant troop-carrying capability.

Recent aerial reconnaissance photographs reveal new airfields under construction in the Essequibo region of Guyana. Eleven all-weather fields have been identified, the shortest of which measures 2,000 meters. At several airfields, are towers designed for VOR and DME aircraft navigational equipment.⁸

This discovery raises the disturbing possibility that the "strategic triangle" formerly formed by Cuba, Nicaragua, and Grenada could become a reality with Guyana substituting for Grenada. Soviet MiGs and Backfire bombers operating from airfields in Guyana could

3. The Mirror, Georgetown, February 27, 1983, p. 1.

4. Gregory R. Copley, ed., Defense and Foreign Affairs Handbook 1985 (Washington, D.C.: Copley and Associates, 1985), p. 274.

5. CANA, October 19, 1985; FBIS Latin America, October 22, 1985, p. T1.

6. CANA, July 20, 1985; FBIS Latin America, July 23, 1985, p. V1.

7. Georgetown Catholic Standard, November 11, 1984, p. 1.

8. Informacion Area Del Territorio Venezolano En Reclamacion Miraflores Mayo 1982 (Caracas: 1982).

destroy vital oil refineries and supply routes in the southern Caribbean or harass Atlantic shipping.

A near-term scenario would see the use of Guyana's airfields as bases or refueling stops for Soviet anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and reconnaissance aircraft such as the Tu-142s and Tu-95s, now operating from Cuba. U.S. strategic ballistic missile submarines would be threatened by this deployment, as would vital sea lines of communication passing through the Mid- and South Atlantic Ocean.

Neighboring Venezuela, meanwhile, has already expressed concern about Guyanese espionage operations inside its territory.⁹ Guyana has close relations with Libya, Nicaragua, Cuba, Bulgaria, and other known supporters of international revolutionary and terrorist movements. Just as Nicaragua serves as a base for subversion and terrorism in Central America, so could Guyana serve in South America.

GUYANA'S MARXIST POLITICS

Guyana has had a Marxist-oriented political system for over three decades. The pro-Moscow People's Popular Party (PPP), formed in 1946 by Cheddi Jagan (party leader) and Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham (chairman), won control of what was then British Guiana's colonial legislature in the elections of 1953. A 1954 report of an investigation by the British Constitutional Commission concluded that Cheddi Jagan and other PPP members "accepted unreservedly the 'classical' doctrines of Marx and Lenin, were enthusiastic supporters of the policies and practices of modern communist movements, and were contemptuous of social democratic parties."¹⁰ The report placed Burnham and other party leaders in a more moderate category, classifying them as "socialists."¹¹

In 1955 the PPP split. The smaller faction, led by Burnham, formed a new party called the People's National Congress (PNC). With covert British and U.S. help, Burnham's PNC came to power in a coalition government with the more conservative United Front party following the 1964 elections. Believing that a communist regime had been preempted, Great Britain granted Guyana independence in 1966.

9. FBIS, Latin America, May 19, 1983, p. 21-22.

10. Kenneth M. Glazier, "Guyana," in Wilton S. Sworakowski, ed., World Communism: A Handbook, 1918-1965 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), p. 180.

11. Robert H. Manley, Guyana Emergent (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1979), p. 6.

As opposition leader, Jagan lost no time in fostering close relations with the Soviet Union. During the International Conference of Communist and Workers Parties held in Moscow in June 1969, he formally aligned the PPP with the USSR. The Kremlin, in turn, recognized the PPP as a bona fide communist party.¹² The following year, the PPP was reorganized on the pattern of the Soviet and East European communist parties.¹³

As the PNC's power grew through successive fraudulent elections,¹⁴ Burnham's Marxist leanings became more evident. In 1970, Guyana was proclaimed a "cooperative republic" based on socialist principles. Over the next six years, most major foreign economic holdings were nationalized, bringing more than 80 percent of Guyana's goods and services under government control. Burnham adopted a militant stance on Third World issues. This included funding SWAPO (Southwest Africa Peoples Organization) "freedom fighters" in southern Africa and providing military training and indoctrination to Southwest African youths in Guyana.¹⁵

RELATIONS WITH THE COMMUNIST WORLD

After 1970, the Burnham regime sought close relations with the Communist bloc. By 1979, Guyana had diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union, Cuba, the People's Republic of China, and six other communist countries. Burnham even applied for membership in COMECON--the Soviet bloc's economic community. And the PNC tried to forge formal association with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.¹⁶ Yet despite these overtures and his visits to Moscow, Burnham never seems to have been trusted by the Kremlin. He seemed to be viewed as an erratic opportunist who flirted with Beijing and the U.S.

12. Richard F. Staar, ed., Yearbook on International Communist Affairs 1971 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971), pp. 446-447.

13. Ibid.

14. Cedric Lynch, "Guyana Charged With Election Fraud by Neighbors," The Times of the Americas, January 22, 1986, p. 11.

15. CANA, September 14, 1984; FBIS, Latin America, September 17, 1984, p. V1.

16. Cole Blasier, The Giant's Rival: The USSR and Latin America (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh press, 1983), p. 48.

Cuban-Guyanese Ties

With one brief hiatus, Guyana has maintained close ties with Cuba since diplomatic relations between the two were established in 1972. Fidel Castro visited Georgetown the following year. After Burnham's first official visit to Havana in 1975, Guyana allowed Cuban aircraft transporting troops to Angola to refuel at Georgetown's Timehri airport; the Burnham government also gave strong diplomatic support at the United Nations and elsewhere to Castro's interventions in Africa.¹⁷

The PNC's relations with Cuba have been encouraged by the PPP. In 1976, Cheddi Jagan called upon the Burnham government to invite Cuban soldiers to Guyana to guard against "aggression" from Venezuela.¹⁸ Following the Kremlin's policy line, the PPP has been critical of Guyana's relations with Beijing. Burnham became the first elected chief of state from the Commonwealth Caribbean to visit China when he went there in 1975. He has received aid from Beijing throughout his administration. In 1981, the PNC's fourth party congress was attended by Zhu Liang, a high-ranking member of China's International Liaison Department.¹⁹ The meeting also was attended by a Soviet delegate.

By 1978, up to 200 Cuban technicians, advisors, and medical personnel were stationed in Guyana. In March, Cuban General Senen Casas Requeiro met with Brigadier Clarence Price, Chief of Staff of the Guyana Defense Force, to discuss military cooperation.²⁰ This was followed by a visit to Georgetown in March by Cuban Foreign Minister Isidoro Malmierca for a series of unpublished talks with Burnham and Guyanese Foreign Minister Rashleigh Jackson. Intelligence agents based in the Cuban embassy in Georgetown maintained contact with a variety of Guyanese opposition groups. In August 1978, five Cuban diplomats were expelled for involvement in "illegal activities." The Cuban agents had been recruiting Guyanans for guerrilla training in Cuba.

17. Ronald E. Jones, "Cuba and the English-speaking Caribbean," in Cole Blasier and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, eds., Cuba in the World (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), p. 23.

18. The Washington Post, March 13, 1976.

19. Staar, op. cit., p. 115.

20. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Cuban Chronology 1978-80 (Washington, D.C.: National Foreign Assessment Center, 1981), p. 109.

Cuba has attempted to unite the PNC and PPP into a single party, but with no success.²¹ Nonetheless, Cuba has trusted agents in every Guyanese political party, union, and key government ministry. Pedro Silvio Gonzalez Perez, a senior official in the Americas Department of the Cuban intelligence service, operates under the diplomatic cover of minister counselor at the Cuban embassy in Georgetown. He has increased Cuban influence in the Guyana Defense Force and other government bodies.²²

After the eighth meeting of the Guyana-Cuba Joint Commission in March 1983, the Cuban delegation was assured that "Guyana will continue on its present socialist policies."²³ The following month, the Guyana Teachers Association pledged "unqualified support for government efforts to develop a socialist society"--a task made easier by the growing number of Cuban teachers in Guyana.²⁴ In November 1984, Cuba and Guyana issued a joint communique stating agreement on all major foreign policy issues, including solidarity with Nicaragua, the guerrilla forces in El Salvador, and the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO).²⁵

Relations With Grenada

Following the rise to power in Grenada of the Marxist People's Revolutionary Government (PRG), Guyana became one of Grenada's closest Caribbean allies. Burnham was responsible for alerting Grenada's Revolutionary Military Council to the impending arrival of U.S. and Caribbean forces in October 1983. He had learned of the plans during a CARICOM (Caribbean Community) heads of government meeting in Trinidad,

21. Staar, op. cit., p. 97.

22. Jay Mallin, "Cuban Intelligence Elite Pushes Subversion in Americas," The Washington Times, August 25, 1983, p. 7A. Further information from Sridatt Lakhan and Mobarak Ali of the Conservative Liberal Party of Guyana.

23. Guyana Chronicle, Georgetown, March 22, 1983, p. 3.

24. Guyana Chronicle, Georgetown, April 7, 1983, p. 1.

25. Bohemia, Havana, No. 48, pp. 76-77.

and was also probably responsible for alerting Cuba and the Soviet Union.²⁶ Later, Guyana offered haven to several of Grenada's most militant Marxists.²⁷

The Soviet Presence

Increasingly ostracized by the English-speaking Caribbean after the Grenada rescue mission, Guyana has moved closer to the Soviet Union and its allies in the past three years. Cooperation with Nicaragua and Libya has grown, while various forms of military, technical, and educational assistance are now provided by the USSR, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Cuba, and North Korea.²⁸

As was its Marxist predecessor Grenada, Guyana is now served by the Soviet news agency Tass as well as the Iraq News Agency.²⁹ Also as with Grenada, Guyanese students are now being sent to the Soviet Union for "postgraduate training" while a number of "Soviet tutors"³⁰ are scheduled to begin teaching duties in Guyana this year.

GUYANA'S RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS

Guyana has had a serious territorial dispute with Venezuela since 1966. Venezuela claims all of Guyana west of the Essequibo River--a vast, oil-rich region comprising 62 percent of Guyana's total land area. This unresolved claim has blocked Guyana's application for membership in the Organization of American States and has strained its relations with most other Latin American nations except Brazil. The Soviet Union and Cuba support Guyana's claim to the territory as does Brazil, which has threatened to provide military assistance to Guyana should Venezuela occupy any Guyanese territory.

Guyana's relations with its English-speaking Caribbean neighbors have been strained by meddling in their internal affairs. Prior to Dominica's national elections last year, Guyana, Libya, North Korea,

26. Based on interviews with Prime Minister Eugenia Charles of Dominica, Ambassador Albert Xavier, and Grenada Advisory Council Chairman Nicholas Braithwaite.

27. Geoffrey Wagner, "Guyana: The Basket Case Economy," The Grenadian Voice, November 30, 1985, p. 13.

28. The New York Times, July 6, 1984, p. A5.

29. CANA, April 19, 1984; FBIS, Latin America, April 20, 1984, p. VI.

30. CANA, January 15, 1986; FBIS, Latin America, January 17, 1986, p. T1.

and Cuba were implicated in a plot to provide covert financial assistance to the Marxist Dominican Labour Party (DLP). Dominica Prime Minister Eugenia Charles has been joined by the leaders of Grenada, St. Lucia, and other Caribbean nations in calling for the Secretariat of the 13-member Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to be removed from Guyana because "its presence there was a handicap" to democratic Caribbean countries.³¹

GUYANA'S FUTURE

President Burnham died last August 6, while undergoing surgery by a team of Cuban doctors for a throat ailment.³² His successors, President Desmond Hoyte and Prime Minister Hamilton Green, continue Guyana's growing involvement with the Soviet bloc. Green has said that he would "continue working faithfully to maintain the fundamental policies and programs of our late, great comrade leader," adding that he was "personally a socialist" and would "work to advance the socialist objectives of our party and government."³³

The PNC's sixth party congress, held three weeks after Burnham's death, attracted considerable attention from Moscow. It was covered by Pravda and attended by an official Soviet Communist Party delegation. PNC General Secretary Chandisingh's keynote speech stressed the need to ensure "Guyana's continued progress along the road of socialist restructuring...and noted the importance of strengthening party ties between the PNC, the CPSU, and the Communist Parties of Cuba and the other socialist countries."³⁴ In February, the Soviet-trained Chandisingh, formerly the chief Marxist ideologue of the opposition in PPP, was named deputy prime minister as well as deputy leader of the PNC.

Guyana's moves toward a Soviet-style economic system parallel Nicaragua's. Cuban advisors share office space with Guyanese bureaucrats in the Ministries of Finance, Agriculture, Planning, Manpower, and Cooperatives. Cubans also helped establish a Soviet-style hard currency shop in Georgetown which is "run in a manner somewhat similar to foreign currency shops in a number of

31. CANA, July 11, 1985; FBIS, Latin America, July 12, 1985, p. S1.

32. Paris AFP, August 6, 1985; FBIS, Latin America, August 7, 1985, p. T1.

33. CANA, August 12, 1985; FBIS, Latin America, August 13, 1985, p. T1.

34. Pravda, August 27, 1985, p. 4; FBIS, Soviet Union, August 29, 1985, p. K1.

socialist countries," and which sells goods "obtained through an arrangement with a similar business in Cuba."³⁵

Through intimidation and fraud, the PNC again won control of the Guyanese government during the December 9, 1985, general elections. Once the PNC's continuing control of the Guyanese government was assured, Burnham's successors announced policies moving even closer to the Soviet bloc. Last December, Guyana's Foreign Minister Rashleigh Jackson announced that it was necessary for his country to expand and consolidate its relations with the Soviet Union. Jackson also announced Soviet plans to exploit Guyana's extensive bauxite, gold, and diamond reserves.³⁶ Given Guyana's willingness to open its doors to the Soviet bloc, there is a strong possibility that Moscow will choose to exploit what promises to be a major strategic foothold on the South American continent.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The growing militarization of Guyana, coupled with the Hoyte regime's open advocacy of closer ties with the Soviet bloc, indicates the potential for another major threat to U.S. security interests in the Caribbean region. To halt this process before Guyana develops into another Grenada or Nicaragua, the U.S. should adopt the following measures:

- o Warn Moscow that the U.S. will not tolerate the establishment of another potential Soviet/Cuban base in the Western Hemisphere. Ronald Reagan should place Guyana on the agenda for this year's summit with Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev to demonstrate to the Kremlin that the Monroe Doctrine still forms the cornerstone of U.S. policy in the Western Hemisphere.
- o Withhold economic assistance for development projects and financial support until substantive political and economic reforms are made by the Guyana government.
- o Support efforts by such Caribbean leaders as Prime Minister Eugenia Charles of Dominica to isolate Guyana from regional organizations such as CARICOM until Guyana moves away from the Soviet bloc and back toward the Western Hemisphere democracies.
- o Support the legitimate political opposition in Guyana. Aid to truly democratic political groups such as the Conservative Party,

35. Guyana Chronicle, December 5, 1984, pp. 1-8.

36. CANA, December 19, 1985; FBIS, Latin America, December 23, 1985, p. T1.

independent labor unions like the Democratic Labour Movement, and nongovernment news sources such as The Catholic Standard could maintain the fire of democracy among the Guyanese people.

- o Encourage international human rights organizations to investigate and report on abuses in Guyana. Documented and reliable reports should be publicized by international organizations to inform the world of Guyana's true social and political situation.

CONCLUSION

The lessons of Cuba, Grenada, and Nicaragua make it clear that the U.S. must never tolerate another Soviet client state in the Western Hemisphere. Guyana already has larger, Cuban-trained armed forces, and more sophisticated Soviet military hardware than Grenada did at the time of the 1983 rescue mission. Steps must be taken now to prevent the Soviet Empire from acquiring one more colony.

The people of Guyana deserve the opportunity to build democracy as much as do their neighbors in South America. Given U.S. help to set it on the road to personal freedom and unfettered economic development, Guyana, too, can join the growing family of democracies in the Western Hemisphere.

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