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Mandatory Review
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29 October 1965

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 25-65

SUBJECT: British Guiana Moves Toward Independence

SUMMARY

On 2 November, a constitutional conference in London will once again take up the question of independence for British Guiana. This time an affirmative decision seems likely, and British Guiana will probably become independent before mid-1966. An independent Guiana will turn increasingly to the US for economic aid and other support.

An independent Guiana will still be plagued by racial hostility. Although Cheddi Jagan, the leader of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), has a penchant for Marxist thinking, his political strength lies in his racial appeal to his fellow East Indians. These will soon constitute a clear majority of the country's population and they look to the PPP for protection against the Negroes. Unless Prime Minister Forbes Burnham is unexpectedly successful in reassuring the East Indians, renewed communal violence is likely.

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1. It now appears likely that the independence of British Guiana in mid-1966 will be agreed to at the 2 November Constitutional Congress in London. The governing coalition has settled on terms for a draft constitution, and the United Kingdom, [REDACTED]

1.5(c); 1.6(d)(1)
1.5(d); 3.4(b)(6)

[REDACTED] has been awaiting a time when it could leave with a reasonably stable, non-communist government in control. While Britain will continue to assist in the training and supervision of security forces and the proposed army, it has assumed that the United States would play a larger role in the overall development of the former colony.

2. The relative tranquillity of the past year could easily disappear with the stresses and strains of independence. The fundamental fact of Guianese political life is the racial animosity between the Negroes who support Prime Minister Forbes Burnham's People's National Congress (PNC) and the East Indians who constitute Cheddi Jagan's People's Progressive Party (PPP).*

* Guiana has a population of about 640,000, some 50 percent East Indian and 44 percent Negro and part Negro. The East Indians are Hindu or Moslem; they live largely in rural areas, except for a shopowner class in Georgetown, and work mainly in the rice and sugar fields. The Negroes are Christian; they live mainly in urban areas and work mainly in sugar factories, bauxite mines, and the civil service.

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Cheddi Jagan remains the champion of the rapidly growing Indian population primarily for racial reasons rather than for any widespread adherence to his Marxist ideology. Most East Indians distrust and fear Burnham and his Negro party, and some are sufficiently fearful to advocate a partition of Guiana after independence.

3. Partly because of the inactivity of the PFP, Burnham's government has managed to prevent the violent clashes which occurred frequently during Cheddi Jagan's most recent tenure of office (1961-1964). Burnham has made some concessions to the East Indians [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Burnham has been successful in the difficult task of holding together his coalition with the small, conservative United Force Party (UF) -- which is made up primarily of wealthy white businessmen, plantation owners, Amer-Indians, and other minority groups, including a few Negroes and East Indians. The PNC-UF coalition is held together mainly by mutual apprehension of Jagan's return to power.

1.5(c); 1.6(d)(1)
1.5(d); 3.4(b)(6)

4. Burnham has made substantial compromises with his coalition ally in order to obtain agreement on the conditions for independence. However, once independence is granted and the

need for a show of unity is gone, basic differences between the PNC and the UF will tend to reassert themselves. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

1.5(c); 1.6(d)(1)
1.5(d); 3.4(b)(6)

5. This distrust has been manifested in d'Aguiar's insistence that Guiana retain some aspects of a British constitutional monarchy system (similar to Canada) as opposed to a republic which Burnham has advocated. This issue has assumed symbolic overtones far greater than its actual effect on the Guianese political system. Burnham has made some concessions. The joint draft now provides that general elections be held not later than three and one-half years after independence; until then, British Guiana is to be a self-governing dominion with a Guianese governor general. Change to a republic could then be accomplished by an act of the assembly. The joint draft will come under criticism from various quarters at the conference but the coalition's general desire to avoid a split that could postpone independence will probably prevail.

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6. In the short run, the prospects for stability in an independent Guiana hinge on Burnham's ability to compromise with the fiscally conservative d'Aguiar, as well as his ability to appease the suspicious Indian majority. Often these two goals are conflicting. The Indians want developmental projects in their areas and subsidies for their unsold rice crops; d'Aguiar wants a balanced budget and protection for his wealthy businessmen backers. Furthermore, d'Aguiar realizes how dependent Burnham is on UF votes and is determined to squeeze out every advantage he can.* While frictions between the participants in the coalition will become more intense after independence, we believe it will hold together, at least for a while, since both parties realize that the alternative would almost certainly be Jagan's return to power.

7. Jagan and his PPP are in a difficult tactical position. After years of pressing for independence, Jagan, since his election defeat, has opposed independence so long as the Burnham government remained in power and the proportional

* Assembly Seats	
PPP	24
PNC	22
UF	7

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representation system remained in effect.* Nevertheless, a more radical faction within the PPP is clamoring for immediate independence in the belief that once the British had left, it could get control of the government one way or another. Moses Bhagwan, an East Indian extremist leader recently expelled from the PPP, has formed his own "Committee for National Reconstruction" and has indicated that he would be willing to go to London.

8. Although Jagan has stated that he would boycott the conference unless Burnham capitulated to his demands, he probably will attend after all. In the past he has taken similar firm stands only to back down later. His current outburst is probably an attempt to squeeze concessions out of Burnham or merely to harass him on the eve of the conference. Some Indian groups within the PPP are anxious that their party be represented in

* Proportional representation was introduced by the British in 1963 for the purpose of denying the PPP an absolute majority in the 1964 general election. Jagan has naturally opposed this and has also campaigned for the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18. Provisions retaining the proportional representation system and the present voting age have been written into the draft. Jagan will continue to campaign against these provisions but has recently been concentrating on pressing Burnham to lift the current state of emergency and to release prominent PPP leaders held in detention.

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London and have been urging Jagan to attend. The conference could serve as an excellent sounding board for Jagan to rally his somewhat demoralized party. However, if he stayed away, Jagan would risk weakening his party and give Burnham the opportunity to upstage him by taking along some members of the PPP who are willing to participate.

9. The British Colonial Office is optimistic over the prospects for a successful conference and is stepping up its efforts to train indigenous security forces. It feels that the UF and the PNC will agree on a viable constitution and that Cheddi Jagan will have no choice but to attend. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] we believe that it is largely justified and that independence will be granted.*

1.5(c); 1.6(d)(1)
1.5(d); 3.4(b)(6)

* A by-product of granting early independence would be to give the UK and British Guiana some psychological advantage in scheduled talks with Venezuela over the long-standing border disputes, which involves some two-thirds of Guianese territory.

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Longer Range Prospects

10. While Burnham can never secure the full confidence of the East Indians, he must at least gain a measure of acceptance from them if he is to stay in power for long. If he does not gain some acceptance, racial hostilities are sure to flare up again. Inter-racial hostility would probably take the form of sporadic but serious violence rather than civil war or sustained insurgency. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] the bulk of the East Indians have shown little inclination for organized violence, and Jagan has always been more ideologist than insurrectionist. Nevertheless, even sporadic violence could result in Burnham's having to call for help from the UK or US in order to keep the peace. There might be a flight of better educated and wealthy Guianese which would lead to a deterioration of economic conditions, which have been steadily improving since the inauguration of the coalition.

1.5(c); 1.6(d)(1)
1.5(d); 3.4(b)(6)

11. Ultimately, not even the artificial barrier of proportional representation can prevent the Indians from becoming the predominant political force. Their population is increasing

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at a more rapid rate than the Negro population. Almost all the East Indians remain thoroughly tied to the PPP and, in spite of a few dissident groups, accept Jagan as their leader. Were the UF-PNC coalition to fall apart, Cheddi Jagan would be back in power, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

1.5(c); 1.6(d)(1)
1.5(d); 3.4(b)(6)

[REDACTED] his real support is based on his racial appeal to fellow Indians. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

1.5(c); 1.6(d)(1)
1.5(d); 3.4(b)(6)

12. Burnham's best hope to win the acceptance of the East Indians is to back more developmental projects in their areas

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and to facilitate their integration into the civil service (especially into the police and the proposed defense force), now the almost exclusive bailiwick of the Negro. These development projects would require greater amounts of foreign aid, and for it, he will increasingly turn to the US as the main source. (He will also look to the UK and possibly Canada for some assistance.) In addition to these problems, Burnham must face the constant threat of renewed violence and cope with his strong willed coalition partner. To handle all of these conflicting problems at the same time, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and the coalition more cohesion than it presently enjoys.

1.5(c); 3.4(b)(1)
1.5(d); 3.4(b)(6)

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

Sherman Kent

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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