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Author(s): Festus Brotherson Jr.

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THE FOREIGN POLICY OF GUYANA, 1970-1985: FORBES BURNHAM'S SEARCH FOR LEGITIMACY

by FESTUS BROTHERSON, JR.

DURING THE RADICAL PERIOD of the Forbes Burnham era in Guyanese politics, from 1970 to 1985, the country appeared to have won respect for its foreign policy in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and in the British Commonwealth, as well as in the broader Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The general perception was that Guyana was one of a select few small Third World states with a coherent revolutionary foreign policy, for which it paid a high price through superpower retaliatory efforts to destabilize its society.

This image of Guyana, as a well-intentioned, principled loyalist of the NAM cause, made to suffer for its loyalty, is a flawed one. The country's foreign policy was not crafted over the years to serve the objective national interest. Rather, the overriding objective of Guyana's authoritarian leadership was to do abroad what it had failed to do at home: i.e., to establish legitimacy. With this approach, the late President Burnham sought to follow the strategy outlined by Niccolo Machiavelli, namely, to legitimize one's regime by means of glorious foreign adventure or diplomatic suc-

Dr. Brotherson is Assistant Professor of Latin American and Caribbean Politics at Baldwin-Wallace College (OH). He was associated with the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) government in Guyana from June 1977 to December 1979, during which time he held a number of senior positions, including Acting Executive Secretary (Minister of State) in the Departments of Planning and Research and of Foreign Affairs, Member of the Central Executive Committee, and Editor of *New Nation*.

cess, which would whip up nationalist fervor on the one hand and stifle domestic opposition on the other, wringing grudging support from the latter in the process.

Such distortion of the ends of foreign policy to serve personal political goals rendered a disservice to Guyana, and Desmond Hoyte has sought to alter this emphasis since his accession to the presidential office (Hoyte 1986, 1987). However, it is only by comprehending the strength of this desire — at the highest levels of government — to confer legitimacy on the regime that one can adequately grasp the design and implementation of the country's foreign policy during this period. Indeed, during Burnham's time the pursuit of legitimacy was so dominant that an inverse relationship developed between foreign policy and the national interest: rather than foreign policy reflecting, or complementing, the national interest, in the case of the Cooperative Republic, foreign policy determined the national interest.

That the government was mesmerized by a search for legitimacy should neither surprise nor dismay. Authoritarian regimes are often preoccupied with this issue, in part because they feel unusually vulnerable to its presence (or absence), fearing that the same extra-legal means by which they — usually — came to power might be used against them. Moreover, given the paradox of fragility and necessity which governs legitimacy, the longer it takes an authoritarian leadership to win support, the greater the effort engendered in its pursuit (Ferrero, 1972). This obsession with legitimacy by the People's National Congress (PNC) can be better understood in light of the widespread popular belief prevailing in Guyana at the time that every general election since 1968 had been rigged by that party. Compounding the problem was a corresponding decline in all indicators of development, plus the failure of government to arrest, much less reverse, this slide. Recent data reveal that, between 1980 and 1987, Guyana ranked fourth from the bottom of Third World countries suffering economic decline: Guyana's gross national product (GNP) declined by 6%, surpassed in severity by only three other countries — Libya dropped 6.6%, Mozambique dropped 7%, and Qatar dropped 9.2% (World Bank, 1988).

At one time or another, many Caribbean heads of government have opposed some particular aspect of US policy in the region. However, overall, most have viewed their respective national in-

terests as being better served by not challenging the regional superpower too openly,¹ seeking, instead, to increase their economic ties with that country. This perception was based in part on necessity and in part out of recognition of the deep socio-economic connections reflected, *ex magna parte*, by the significant number of their populations who had migrated to the United States.²

Not so Forbes Burnham. During his stewardship, Guyana fashioned a foreign policy of an uncompromising non-aligned nature, which ran counter both to Guyanese and to US interests in the Caribbean region, if not in the wider international arena. For example, Guyana established close reciprocal ties with Cuba (at both the government and ruling party levels) and supported the Sandinistas in Nicaragua as well as the Maurice Bishop regime in Grenada. Elsewhere, Guyana denounced Israel, backed the Arab oil embargo, and established not only warm relations with the then ultra-radical Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), but also strong ties with Libya.

During the 1970-1985 period, some of Burnham's ideas and actions were motivated by attempts at nation-building and founding a new viable state — difficult tasks for leaders in the immediate post-colonial times. The evidence is compelling, however, that such concerns became inextricably involved with the establishment and maintenance of Burnham's supreme political authority; as happened in other ex-British colonies including Ghana, Tanzania and Zambia. This explains, to some extent, Burnham's pre-occupation with legitimacy, and why it shaped most, if not all, of those policies of socialism and non-alignment which characterized his regime. Founding a new order and making rules for its sustenance could only succeed if the leaders were perceived to be legitimate, and the people made to feel a sense of efficacy in the political system. Knowing this, Burnham became obsessed with winning legitimacy. This article will assess the development and implementation of his policies for motive, consequences, and effectiveness in achieving their goal.³ In this effort, some background on the authoritarian politics of the country will be useful.

THE DOMESTIC SCENE: LEGITIMIZING AUTHORITARIANISM

FORBES BURNHAM CAME TO POWER in December 1964 in the wake of a protracted, divisive, and violent struggle for political leadership which was colored by strong racial overtones. He was aided in this effort by both the United States and Britain, and by his willingness to form a coalition government with the Right-wing United Force (UF). For all three of these actors (Britain, the US, and the UF), Burnham's principal appeal lay in the fact that he offered the only viable alternative to his — and their — nemesis, Dr. Cheddi Jagan. Jagan led a majority Marxist-Leninist party, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and had signaled his intention to move the not yet independent Guyana closer to the Soviet Union. For blacks, Burnham's appeal was rooted in race.

Indeed, while Jagan's party was backed almost exclusively by the majority East Indian population, Burnham's PNC drew near total support from blacks, the second largest racial group. The UF, on the other hand, attracted the Portuguese and other races as well as business interests. (Guyana was comprised of East Indians, blacks, Chinese, Portuguese and other Europeans, and native Amerindians). When Burnham assumed power in 1964, he owed political favors to an assortment of forces, both domestic and external, in a racially fragmented society: to his black constituency, to the United Force, and to the US-British alliance. How this came about is pivotal to understanding his strategy and tactics for development of the country and for the survival of his own leadership.

Both Burnham, a black lawyer, and Jagan, an East Indian dentist, had belonged to the PPP, founded by Jagan, in the early 1950s. Jagan was its leader and Burnham its chairman, and they both embraced the radical Marxist ideology. Upon winning the elections for local self-government sanctioned by the British colonial administration in 1953, the PPP alarmed both the US and Britain by its attempts to govern according to socialist guidelines. Britain suspended the colony's constitution and re-instated colonial rule. While the British action received widespread criticism, on nationalist grounds, in Guyana and the Caribbean, Jagan and

Burnham were criticized even more for provoking the action by introducing an alien ideology.

It is important to note that, in Guyana and throughout the British Caribbean, hostility to Marxist ideology has been — and still is — a constant feature of political life, even though the region has, at times, harbored a broad sympathy for the Left. While certain aspects of Marxist ideology are consonant with the sentiments and objectives of some groups and influential individuals (particularly those in the pre-independence ranks and the trade union movement), support for socialism has never been broad-based, and has always fallen short of popular endorsement as national policy. The 1953 victory of the PPP reflected the politics of race and the struggle for independence, not the people's belief in socialism. Jagan had attracted Indian voters and Burnham black voters under a united PPP banner.

Having clearly understood the lesson of 1953, i.e., that US and British resolve portended ill for local Marxist enthusiasts, Forbes Burnham, in an opportunistic move, broke with Jagan on the grounds that his partner's politics were too radical, would make a Soviet satellite of the country, and would compromise its struggle for independence. He formed the People's National Congress and abandoned socialist talk. However, since the politics of race was paramount, and East Indians were the majority ethnic group, Burnham's PNC was beaten by the Marxist PPP in both 1957 and 1961. This alarmed the United States. They pressured the British to change the electoral format from one of simple majority vote to proportional representation, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) destabilized Jagan's government by triggering heavy racial violence and a crippling general strike in 1963 (Barnet, 1972). Thus it was that, under proportional representation, although Jagan again won a majority of votes, Burnham was able to join with the UF to form a coalition which reflected more votes and more seats in the parliament.

Reasonably, Burnham's strategy in keeping the coalition together hinged on pleasing the British-US alliance, his black constituents, and the United Force. His government publicly condemned racial politics at the same time it conferred benefits upon blacks, pursued pro-capitalist policies, repeatedly denounced the Marxist philosophy of Jagan, and made some spirited attempts to

win over Indians. The strategy worked remarkably well, and the country won independence from Britain in 1966.

Forbes Burnham had a well-known proclivity for authoritarian rule which led him to seek absolute control of all the coercive and persuasive institutions in the country, regardless of cost. He dumped the UF, rigged the 1968 elections to ensure that his PNC secured a clear majority of popular votes and seats in the parliament, and revived socialism in a moderate unorthodox form called Cooperative Socialism. Relations with the US and Britain were not adversely affected in the short term because Burnham made socialist haste very slowly.

In response to a peculiar mix of domestic pressures, including, most importantly, failure to win legitimacy and the compulsive need of authoritarian leaders always to secure it, Burnham became increasingly bolder: socialism became more radicalized; the general elections of 1973 were more blatantly rigged; the constitution was repeatedly revised to introduce more effective political control; and all opposition groups were harshly suppressed.

Burnham's resurrection of radical socialism was inspired by the opportunity which that ideology afforded to gain near-total authoritarian charge of the society, and to out-radicalize his Marxist rivals in his pursuit of legitimacy. He wedded himself to the exercise of authoritarian measures which socialism justifies. Repeatedly portraying the domestic situation as one of "peaceful revolution," he explained away resort to coercion and arbitrary action as requisite "revolutionary tactics." Socialism had won Jagan great disfavor in the West. Burnham sought to avoid this pitfall by anchoring his socialism not in Moscow, but in the Non-Aligned Movement.

While this strategy ensured the supremacy of his authority in Guyana, it failed to win him the legitimacy he needed to maintain that authority in the racially divided, highly politically conscious, society. It produced thorny problems, one of which was that most people paid only lip service to the alien socialist ideology. Nevertheless, after "winning" a referendum on a new constitution in 1978 to further enhance his power, and ensure his "election" as president in 1980, Burnham remained obsessed with establishing the legitimacy of his regime. His difficulties were compounded by the tactics employed by opposition leaders, who used their frequent visits to socialist/communist countries as an opportunity to

expose the vacuousness of the official ideology. When those leaders were harassed and barred from travel, their supporters abroad continued to convey their message. Consequently, Burnham found himself forced more and more into a posture of out-radicalizing the radicals in order to retain his own socialist credentials in Third World circles. Failure to maintain his socialist credibility would undermine his strategy to win legitimacy at home by the magnificence of his prestige abroad, particularly within the NAM.⁴

As Burnham's increasing radicalism alienated Western diplomatic and economic support, the Guyanese leader was left with no alternative but to crusade in the communist world for economic aid and legitimacy. In the process, the pursuit of personal legitimacy became identified with that of the national interest, and thus the goals of foreign policy became more and more entwined with domestic goals of legitimizing the regime and determining policy emphases at home.

Initially, from 1964-1970, Burnham's prime consideration was maintenance of good relations with the US, Britain, and the West. However, after 1970 and throughout the radical period, his domestic focus was overwhelmingly political. It found expression in the creation, and consolidation, of all-powerful political institutions designed to maintain the power of the Guyanese chief executive. Under this set of priorities, the economy — which had originally drifted along fairly well, owing to a significant residue of healthy capitalist fat from more prosperous times — went downhill rapidly: by 1986, per capita income had shrunk to US\$470 and, by the end of 1987, declined even further to US\$380.

SEEKING LEGITIMACY ON THE CARIBBEAN AND WORLD STAGE

The Socialist Imperative

UNDER FORBES BURNHAM, Guyana's relations with the states in the English-speaking Caribbean were conditioned by belief in the intrinsic, practical utility of Caribbean unity, a unity which might even mature into eventual political union. Indeed, Burnham's commitment to Caribbean unity did also appear ener-

gised by visionary sincerity. However, given his linkage of socialism with his own personal legitimacy (and the high priority ascribed to the latter), Guyanese relations with its Anglophone neighbors were strongly colored by the commitment to socialism. As Rashleigh Jackson, Guyana's foreign minister, explained:

Objective conditions (read "problems with legitimacy") dictate for us...the pursuit of our national interests within the context of socialism in an international atmosphere which fosters and promotes peaceful coexistence and encourages respect for ideological pluralism (Jackson, 1981).

This position impacted significantly on Guyana's Caribbean relations.

In the pre-socialist era (1964-1970), the country played a leading role in promoting Caribbean co-operation in many areas, including the founding of the Caribbean Free Trade Area (CARIFTA) in 1967, which led to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in 1970. Within CARICOM, the Cooperative Republic assumed a leading role in the movement to devise a foreign policy for the Caribbean, such as advocating a collective approach to negotiations. This move has had some moderate successes, of which perhaps the best-known examples are the Lomé Convention agreements with the European Common Market (EEC). More recently, there have been agreements among member states for joint business ventures, as well as boycotts of sporting events in which South Africa participates. Guyana has consistently led the Caribbean in calling for condemnation of the South African regime and has actively supported revolutionary movements in that part of the world.

Nevertheless, socialist ideology was, and is, a major stumbling block to better relations between Guyana and her Caribbean neighbors. Ideologically, the people of Guyana and the wider Anglophone Caribbean have traditionally opposed socialism, beyond an ill-defined flirtation by a few leaders which fell very much short of adoption as national (or foreign) policy. Thus, although Guyana stood on strong ground in opposing the US invasion of Grenada in view of the implications of that action for the Guyana/Venezuela territorial dispute, only Trinidad and Tobago supported the Guyanese position — this in spite of the fact that the Caribbean states had repeatedly backed Guyana in the border row. The fact is that the members of the Organization of Eastern

Caribbean States (OECS) viewed socialist Grenada as a much more immediate threat to their security than "socialist" Guyana. In the past, the latter had had the advantage of belonging to the "big four" club of leaders who had set the pace for the struggle for independence in the region; consequently, opposition to Guyana's socialism was more restrained.⁵

However, on this occasion, the hostility to Guyana's vigorous opposition to the Grenada invasion was so intense that it gave rise to a proposal to remove the CARICOM headquarters from its Georgetown location as a punitive measure, a proposal that almost succeeded. Although these states have since closed ranks and now support ideological pluralism in the region, it is highly likely that, should they find their vital interests again compromised by any socialist territory, including that of Guyana, they would take the same stance as they did on Grenada (Grant, 1984). This conclusion is made the more probable given the fact that, at the time of the Grenada "rescue mission," the CARICOM charter—to which they all subscribed—already had strong provisions subscribing to the tenet of ideological pluralism.⁶

An international (and domestic) socialist posture was inimical to Guyana's interest on other grounds. It put Guyana in a state of near permanent tension with the United States which, as the dominant superpower in the Caribbean and Latin America, had time and again made it clear that it considered the propagation and/or adoption of this ideology within the Western Hemisphere as jeopardizing US national security. The US response to Chile, to the Dominican Republic, and to Guatemala in past decades testified to US resolve on this score. More recent examples of this posture were revealed by the US attitude toward Jamaica under Manley (1972-1980), toward Grenada under Bishop (1979-1983), and toward the ongoing events in Cuba and Nicaragua. Yet, tiny Guyana, without a violent revolutionary experience to rally its will, and without the wherewithal nor means to enlist Soviet backing, decided it could—unilaterally, and over the objections of the United States—hew to a socialist line at home and win friends and influence people overseas sufficiently to realize its socialist dream. This cavalier, and unrealistic, politicking by Forbes Burnham only served to highlight the fact that his obsession with shoring up his own power was so overwhelming that he was willing to subordinate the long-term security of his country to the only

benefit this pursuit of Leftist acclaim could bring: accolades sufficient to grant him personal legitimacy.

Nothing in Guyana's history could have commended Burnham's policy as congruent with the national interest, especially given the local traumas of 1953 and the early 1960s.⁷ Traditionally, the Soviet Union has respected the Caribbean as a US sphere of influence and has always been lukewarm to intervention in the region. Cuba was a very special case.

To a point, Burnham was correct in his calculation that the United States would be forced to accommodate his brand of socialism because the alternative was worse — Cheddi Jagan's Marxism-Leninism. But a tension-filled relationship, predicated upon the US capacity for tolerance, was not in Guyana's best interest. The US government placed limited, but significant, pressure on Guyana to ensure that the socialist experiment would fail while, at the same time, allowing the Burnham government to remain in office. The United States blocked Guyana's applications to the World Bank, and other Western aid agencies, for loans and credits. It ensured that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed stringent conditions in order for the country to qualify for assistance, conditions antithetical to socialist economic policies.⁸ The superpower also frustrated Guyana's efforts to sell, on the world market, products from US and Canadian bauxite companies nationalized by the Guyanese government. In addition, the US administration bent its own rules regarding the sale of advanced weaponry to Latin American countries in order to equip Venezuela with F-16 fighter aircraft, despite Guyana's objections that the US action would increase the likelihood of Venezuela pressing for a military solution to its territorial dispute with Guyana.

Some foreign policy observers commented on the coincidence that, whenever Guyana stepped up its socialist rhetoric and policies, Venezuela would step up its pressing of the territorial claim. It was suspected that the latter was the result of US influence.⁹ Given this situation, a wariness developed towards Guyana which discouraged potential investors with legitimate projects and encouraged, instead, the machinations of wealthy racketeers and con men who sought to exploit the country's economic vulnerability.

Not only did socialism anger and alienate the United States, but it failed to produce more than weak moral support from the Soviet

Union, who remained unimpressed by Burnham's cooperative socialism. They repeatedly refused to acknowledge that Guyana was a socialist country, or even that it was building a socialist society. The most they offered were platitudes and a qualified recognition of Guyana's international — anti-colonial and anti-imperialist — stance. In addition, in a strategy which effectively undercut Burnham's quest for socialist credentials to legitimize his regime, the USSR gave a high profile to its very public, very warm relations with Cheddi Jagan and his pro-Moscow PPP.

Throughout the period, Burnham's pro-Caribbean stance — with all the elements of idealist commitment, authoritarian self-interest, and the powerful undercurrent of a search for legitimacy — was illustrated by the kinds of reporting done in the Guyana media. For example, as early as 1971, the still-independent *Daily Chronicle* carried a story which was headlined: "Churchill's Europe, (and) Burnham's Caribbean," in which it praised the willingness of the Guyanese to welcome visitors "with open arms" to an Anglophone region of which Forbes Burnham was the undisputed leader (*Daily Chronicle*, 1971).

This was the period when Burnham championed many West Indian proposals designed to promote Caribbean unity, such as the Caribbean Festival of Creative Arts (CARIFESTA). One major proposal envisioned West Indian nationhood by 1973, the harbinger of which was supposed to be the ill-fated 1971 Declaration of Grenada. Burnham had written the first draft of the Declaration, which sought to link Guyana politically with the territories of Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent.

That Burnham sought, early on, to enhance his legitimacy at home by means of just such a Caribbean foreign policy vehicle was not lost on former premier Cheddi Jagan. In the same edition of the *Chronicle* cited above, the PPP leader opposed the Declaration by protesting "...the reduction of the small West Indian territories into mere pawns in Prime Minister Burnham's game of personal power politics." The Declaration was quietly dropped and forgotten.

It was common knowledge that, from childhood on, Forbes Burnham had nurtured a dream of becoming the first Caribbean prime minister. Given the normally contentious spirit and jealousies of regional politics, this was an ambitious goal.

Whatever slim chance Burnham might have had to realize this dream, it was certainly reduced even further by his embrace of socialism. It deepened tensions between himself and Prime Minister Eric Williams of Trinidad and Tobago, who was himself no socialist and whose stature in the Caribbean was much greater, tensions already present due to the contradictory insular mentality of Caribbean leaders who preached unity.

It was socialism also that, for a while, polarized jealousies raging between Burnham, Michael Manley (of Jamaica), and Maurice Bishop (of Grenada) in a contest in which each claimed to be the most radical socialist leader in the Anglophone Caribbean.¹⁰ Each sought to buttress his claim by expanding ties with the sole undisputed radical leader in the Caribbean: Fidel Castro (of Cuba). The squabbling left Burnham isolated, as both Manley and Bishop outmaneuvered him in their own quests for legitimacy in the Third World and for prestige as leaders within the NAM. Ironically, the decisive outcome to this rivalry took place in Havana at the 1979 Conference of NAM Heads of Government, hosted by Fidel Castro.¹¹

Earlier, in 1973, Guyana — together with Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago — successfully led a call to establish relations with Cuba. Forbes Burnham subsequently compromised this personal diplomatic coup when, to strengthen his Leftist credentials, he granted refueling facilities to Cuban military planes ferrying troops to Angola, thereby incurring the wrath not only of the United States but of the Caribbean as well. Guyana eventually had to back down and cancel the arrangement, all the while heatedly defending its right, as an independent state, to take unilateral action. While this heady rhetoric won plaudits in the Third World, it only served to alienate the country further from the United States.

The ties with Cuba were particularly disappointing. On the one hand, Guyana did gain from those ties in absolute terms: in scholarship agreements, and from the presence of Cuban doctors, dentists, coaches, sports teams, researchers, and so on. On the other hand, it paid a price in diplomatic terms, as the large-scale presence of communists in Guyana only added to its isolation from the West and appeared to justify US wariness. On one occasion, *circa* 1975-1976, Brazil accused Guyana of secretly harboring a large contingent of Cuban troops in the country, and the

US ordered reconnaissance overflights to check on this and related charges. In fact, Burnham himself grew weary of the doctrinaire Cubans. Although association with Castro did heighten his personal credibility in Left-wing circles, Burnham often expressed disappointment, if not exasperation, at Fidel's ideological rigidity.

How successful was Burnham in gaining his principal objective, i.e. enhancing personal legitimacy through socialism? In the short-run, results were mixed at best; in the long-run, success proved elusive.

As the United States persisted in its well-publicized efforts to isolate Guyana in retaliation for its socialist policies, Burnham's rivals at home, Leftist and otherwise, were coerced into support through the specter of a national emergency: e.g., the alleged threat to national sovereignty plus a threatened "destabilization" of Guyana. However, this support was both limited and qualified. Support from the Left was contingent upon Burnham taking ever more radical steps, which he was reluctant to do for fear of crossing the US' threshold of tolerance. Support from other domestic opponents originated from the tradition of rallying around the leader, whomever he happened to be, in times of externally-generated crisis.

Despite the strength of these factors, they were not always effective. A few years later, when the Burnham regime used the Venezuelan military threat as a ploy to rally patriotic feeling in its behalf, the effort failed in its ends. It backfired in the disputed Essequibo region. In a blatant rejection of government socialism, at meetings Guyanese used to shout: "Don't call me comrade, call me señor!" So, while the Burnham/Castro association redounded to the credit of the former in Leftist circles, for the most part, the people were lukewarm, or apathetic, to Guyana/Cuba relations. At best, then, Burnham survived; but Guyana suffered, and legitimacy for the regime remained out of reach.

Guyana was also a major borrower from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and obtained concessionary prices for fuel from Trinidad and Tobago, on whom it depended for almost 100% of its oil. However, when the bankrupt socialist economy forced the country to default on payments, Trinidad canceled the arrangement. Today, Guyana has great difficulty in paying off its huge debts to the CDB and Trinidad (the amount owed Trinidad

alone is US\$450-million.¹² Many factors are responsible for Guyana's inability to pay, but certainly one is the socialist economy which helped to bankrupt the country during the radical era of Forbes Burnham.

THE WIDER NON-ALIGNED STRATEGY

THE APPEAL OF THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT (NAM) is almost exclusively to impoverished states. Arguably, the NAM does not wield much clout in international relations except when the superpowers promote interaction in their own interests. Such was the case with the USSR's roundly rebuffed attempt to forge a special relationship with the Third World as "natural allies," and the US palliative of "North-South dialogue," a tactic of talking about issues with underdeveloped nations in perpetuity, with no timetable for productive results.

From its voting record and speeches at the United Nations, and from its participation in the NAM hierarchy, it is clear that the Burnham government wished to forge a major role for itself in the Third World. The tenets and principles of non-alignment seemed tailor-made for Burnham. The movement was a stage set which gave ear, voice, access, and potential leadership prominence to leaders of poor states, allowing them to speak to the world at large. Burnham could, and did, exploit this arrangement to win acclaim and status as an international leader. His hope was that, by such tactics, he could ensure legitimacy at home.

However, Burnham's rigid commitment to the NAM was not consonant with Guyana's national interest. Beyond sabre-rattling and diplomatic support, the NAM could not aid Guyana in critical areas — such as the territorial dispute with Venezuela, should a military resolution become necessary. In fact, Guyana's strident rhetoric in favor of NAM issues only antagonized the United States, inducing it to support Venezuela. The Soviets proved to be indifferent allies, who viewed with skepticism the reformist/socialist experiment which called itself the Cooperative Republic, a model ineligible for help under the famous international brotherhood clause of Soviet foreign policy. Not only did Cuba take a similarly orthodox position, but it was unable to help in the face of US intransigence toward Cuban military adventures. Britain, whose responsibility for setting the borders with Venezuela was undeni-

able, had relinquished its obligation at Guyana's request when the newly independent country was intoxicated by nationalism. For all of its radical bent, therefore, Burnham's non-aligned foreign policy clearly did not serve Guyana's national interest in the matter of Venezuela's large territorial claim.

Compounding the situation was Burnham's hard-line rhetoric ("not one square inch"), which only stiffened Venezuela's determination to press its claim. While Guyana did manage to win some diplomatic points — such as blocking Venezuela's application for membership in the NAM, and many resolutions in its favor in forums such as the Commonwealth — in the international arena, on the whole the operational code remains "might makes right." As its relations with Venezuela deteriorated, Guyana's "right," as expounded in prolix resolutions of solidarity, was worthless unsupported by the "might" of a credible backer.

The NAM is comprised of nations as poor as, if not poorer than, Guyana, and with severely limited military and economic capabilities. These nations welcomed Guyana as an advocate for their interests. So established was Guyana's reputation for boldly championing Third World causes that the NAM gladly accorded it center-stage when controversial issues arose on which other countries were reluctant to speak freely, given their own national interests. Guyana's role was to speak out and to give fiery support to a congeries of causes of only tangential relevance to its own critical needs.

This was certainly the case regarding Guyana's vote in the UN that equated zionism with racism, cutting diplomatic relations with Israel, and supporting the Arab oil embargo. Such a position was incalculably expensive. While Burnham basked in the non-aligned limelight, Guyana's ability to attract Western aid and investment declined more and more. Communist states continued to give rhetorical support which they failed to match with material aid but, rather, with books and literature on Marxism-Leninism. In the meantime, Guyana's Arab non-aligned "friends" used their new clout and wealth not to bankroll their principal vocal backers (like Guyana) in the Third World, but to reinvest in the (capitalist) United States and, except for a handful of their number, to expand their relations with the superpower.

Guyana freely expounded its views, invited and uninvited, on a wide range of Third World issues as well, including liberation

struggles — from POLISARIO (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguiaat al Hamra and Rio de Oro) in North Africa to the Basque Separatists in Spain — as well as positions on Vietnam, Kampuchea, the Law of the Sea, terrorism, the New International Economic Order (NIEO), the New Information Order (NIO), and so on. Burnham developed the practice of sending loquacious representatives to every major meeting of the NAM.¹³ The Cooperative Republic repeatedly sought, and won, election to a variety of chairmanships and vice-presidencies in the non-aligned body, besides being equally active in those of its agencies with a narrower focus, such as the International Bauxite Association (IBA) — a cartel of which Guyana was a founder member — and the Group of 77.

If Burnham had been more objective, he would have discovered that the most successful states in the NAM are those who not only are loud in their praise of non-alignment and Third World causes but who also safeguard their national interest through alignment with one or another of the superpowers. Cuba, Egypt, India and Yugoslavia fall into this category. Indeed, the latter three are all co-founders of the NAM, but none found it necessary to exhibit a Quixotic rigidity towards the non-aligned philosophy. Egypt is aligned with the US, both economically and militarily. India has strong military ties to the USSR. Yugoslavia has firm economic ties to the Soviets. Cuba is linked to the Soviet Union in every way: economically, militarily, and politically. On the other hand, largely to serve his own personal interests, Burnham never sought such linkages. Thus it was that Guyana became more non-aligned than the movement itself.

On only a few occasions can some of the Cooperative Republic's actions be considered to be in the national interest. Some examples are its opposition to the USSR invasion of Afghanistan and its condemnation of South Africa. During its period of heady radicalism, Guyana played host to so many Third World heads of state and prime ministers, as well as high-ranking delegations, that word spread about Guyana's "importance." Burnham appeared to have become so valuable an ally that no Third World leader could venture into the Caribbean region from afar without scheduling an obligatory visit to his country and paying homage to the non-aligned monument in the capital city.

These state visits were costly and Guyana could ill-afford them. In 1975 alone, the country was host to six foreign leaders. On one occasion in the early 1980s, an urgent confidential appeal was made to Guyanese living abroad to donate cutlery for one state dinner. Even the benefits of playing host were dubious. Usually, a number of bilateral agreements were signed to exchange technology, scientific research, culture, trade and aid. However, these were seldom helpful to either side since both parties were usually so poor technologically and economically that they lacked the capacity either to act upon, or sustain, them if implemented. Examples are agreements with Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia.

It had been the vision of Burnham that,

we (Third world) should emphasize more the need for us to develop ourselves as between ourselves. The resources are ours, the control of the resources can be ours, the exchange of ideas and technologies can be worked out. It is time we cease being pawns with some of us falling prey to the blandishments of our enemies masquerading as friends (Burnham, 1972).

In spite of Burnham's apparent logic, the fact remains that overly ambitious cooperative ventures with other Third World states only lead to frustration and negative results, bearing mute testimony to the need for small states to set more modest, but achievable, objectives for themselves and to be more selective in their foreign policy activities.

Again, with coups and the turnover in leadership so common in the Third World, there was no assurance that "understandings" and agreements reached with one head of government would be honored by another, as happened in the case of Prime Minister Henk Aaron of Suriname, and General Gowon of Nigeria. More to the point, it was doubtful that Guyanese felt more secure from nuclear war and its effects in learning that their president had discussed this subject, and world peace, with his counterparts from Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, and so forth.

During all of these goings-on, there was one increasingly negative development. In the wake of an informal, but effective, Western freeze on economic assistance to Guyana, trade and barter arrangements with communist nations increased significantly. Invariably, these countries took advantage of Guyana's need to dump their inferior goods and flawed technology on the

society, as in the case of a Chinese textile mill, Bulgarian telephones and radio communication equipment, Soviet cars, commercial aircraft and military helicopters, and Yugoslavian buses.

At international fora, Guyana was particularly strident in debate, sounding off like a loose cannon, oblivious to the consequences of its posturing. This kind of small-state aggressiveness was particularly apparent during the mid-1970s, the watershed years of Third World international radicalism. Witness the sweeping rebuke and idealism shown by Foreign Minister Fred Wills in a fiery no-nonsense address to the 30th Session of the United Nations (UN) in 1975, when he demanded that the UN convene a special world conference on disarmament since "this Organization can no longer leave discussions on disarmament to secluded forums." He also scolded,

It is well known that institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF)... have withheld assistance and imposed rules in the attempt to enforce acceptance of approaches to development which would secure the continued dominance of some states (Wills, 1975).

Waxing to a shrill apogee, he prophesied on the NAM's exploits and endeavors: "The final victory is in sight; but there will forever be pockets of resistance and laggards of repression which would seek to stem the onrushing tide" (Wills, 1975). Today, Guyana is caught in an onrushing tide of unprecedented poverty, and the World Bank and IMF have imposed draconian conditions for assistance.

Wills' remarks were not atypical. The gift of gab of Guyana's foreign policy spokesmen is well known. Excluding Burnham, who was really the mastermind behind all policy, the country has had only three foreign ministers since independence in 1966: Shridath Ramphal, Fred Wills, and Rashleigh Jackson. Interestingly, they were all classmates at the same elite high school in then British Guiana.¹⁴ It was under their high-profile forays that Guyana became the Third World's oratorical policeman, patrolling the political universe to denounce infringements, real or imaginary, of NAM principles, and to champion non-alignment. It was these combined elements of omniscience on all issues, involvement in all activities, and oratorical excursions, that nurtured

positive sentiments within the Caribbean and the larger NAM that Guyana's was a dynamic, coherent foreign policy.

This country has never formulated a foreign policy based on a detailed, objective appraisal of the nation's needs and a determination to go beyond the present, to forego the ideal, and to settle for the possible. Such rational-actor analysis has simply never taken place.¹⁵ The charge of expediency has often been leveled by opponents of the PNC government, both under the late Burnham and, now (less so), President Hoyte. As recently as 1986, the Guyana government made an attempt to rebut such accusations. But the effort had the opposite effect of corroborating the allegations when a spokesman, in all seriousness, noted in the *Daily Chronicle* of July 13, 1986: "It would be wrong for the impression to be given that Guyana's foreign policy was based on expediency. Far from it. It was, is, and will be based on morality and justice" (*Daily Chronicle*, 1986).

Rather than careful planning and analysis governing the development of Guyana's foreign policy, the strategy which emerged was an outgrowth of a series of opportunities, events and occurrences that resemble Lindblom's *ad hoc* decisionmaking model known as the science of muddling through (Lindblom, 1959). These concerned satisfying both Burnham's authoritarian instincts and his quest for legitimacy through foreign policy in the Third World arena via the socialist vehicle. Spokesmen seldom failed to seize the opportunity to project the legitimacy factor. Wills, for example, urged UN members to acknowledge and support "the legitimacy of the strategies and techniques of development" which governments such as Guyana's had deemed necessary.

At least one former senior foreign policy actor has denied that there was a strong link between Burnham's failure to win legitimacy at home and his search for it abroad.¹⁶ This denial may, however, be merely a comment on the late president's skill in manipulating ideology for his own purposes and coöpting talented persons in the service of his objectives. His strategy may have been at least partly vindicated to the extent that, at least during the mid-1970s, it produced one much-hoped-for fruit: it subdued his Left-wing opposition at home and secured their grudging support. The most significant development at the time was that the PPP and Dr. Jagan underwent a metamorphosis in

which they buried the hatchet with Burnham and offered "critical support" to the PNC regime.

Burnham's foreign policy adventures in the Third World, combined with radical moves at home (including nationalization), had won over many of his local Leftist opponents, including the leader of the Marxist opposition. However, domestic policy, such as nationalization of industry, while it may have contributed to the conversion of the opposition leader, was not alone responsible for the shift in attitude, because the PPP leader viewed such tactics as linked to the overall Burnham strategy of establishing his legitimacy abroad. The pivotal factor was that Jagan began to lose political ground to Burnham when Jagan's backers, in Moscow and Havana, urged him to seek accommodation with the PNC leader. Burnham was beginning to win some positive press in Third World and communist circles for his "strong progressive and anti-colonial policies." Increasingly uneasy at the tensions which their close ties to Jagan had caused in their relationship with Burnham (the PNC leader used to complain to Moscow and Havana that these ties implied that they thought Jagan, not Burnham, was the head of government), the foreign supporters of Jagan urged him to seek rapprochement with his foe. However, "critical support," as it was called, was short-lived, since Burnham's authoritarianism proved incompatible with the kind of limitations that would be required to sustain any long-term accommodation with Jagan.

There were many manifestations of the direct link between Burnham's continuing quest for legitimacy, both at home and abroad, and his attempts to transplant foreign measures to the domestic environment. The Guyanese leader was always on the alert to adopt projects which his counterparts abroad had used to their own advantage in their own countries in hopes such strategies would prove equally successful in garnering personal support for him in Guyana.

For example, following a state visit to Tanzania, Burnham announced the Declaration of Sophia, in which he introduced the controversial policy that the ruling party should be paramount over the government. This was no more than a thinly disguised version of Julius Nyerere's Arusha Declaration in that East African country. Initially, the tactic worked. The Guyanese media were particularly effusive, as one editorial noted at the time: "After

studying the address carefully, we term it a masterpiece of doctrinaire socialist statesmanship" (Guyana Graphic, 1975). Foreign policy spokesmen were also eloquent in its defense, allaying the fears of neighboring territories. The Tanzania trip also inspired Burnham to copy Tanzania's national service institution by creating the Guyana National Service.

Visits to Kim Il Sung's Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) proved to be another source of inspiration for such measures as the President's College (an elite high school of merit and excellence), mass games, and plans for a youth palace.

Some episodes had their humorous side. In 1984, US presidential candidate Jesse Jackson made news throughout the world as the first legitimate black American to seek the US presidency. In the process, he received exceptionally warm receptions in the non-aligned world. In the Caribbean Basin in particular, Jackson's visits to Cuba and Nicaragua had given those Third World activist regimes much positive press and boosted their stature in the NAM. Forbes Burnham wanted to be included. Feeling neglected by this omission, Burnham dispatched one of his senior government officials to the Democratic National Convention (being held in San Francisco) to persuade Jackson to include the Cooperative Republic in his itinerary — only to have Jackson decline on the grounds that visiting Guyana was of no benefit to his campaign.

Other instances abound. In 1978-79, former heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali had been persuaded to visit Guyana, a trip which provided a public relations coup for Burnham, both at home and in the Third World where Ali was enormously popular. Two years later, when Burnham's popularity was at a low ebb, Guyana's ambassador to Washington was instructed to deliver personally to the heavyweight champion a gift "from the people of Guyana" and to extend another invitation to visit. At the time, one of Guyana's best steelbands was on tour in Los Angeles, whereupon it was commandeered to visit Ali's home and entertain him personally. Before greeting them, Ali kept the band and the ambassador waiting outside for two hours, in sweltering 98+ degree heat, while he entertained other guests indoors. He did not accept the invitation to visit Guyana again.

All Burnham's attempts to exploit the Third World aura did not work. Many, such as the hoped-for exploitation of Jesse Jackson,

remained stillborn. And some of those which were brought to fruition were often at odds with the national interest of Guyana.

CONCLUSION

IT IS REASONABLE to accept that Guyana should have pursued a non-aligned foreign policy. The Third World movement stands for laudable principles and objectives with which small under-developed countries can readily identify. While the NAM may wield very limited clout in absolute terms, still it has often successfully influenced the agenda of international relations in an innovative way. Issues previously unaddressed are now discussed routinely, and a greater degree of understanding between the First, Second and Third Worlds has certainly emerged from some of the Movement's activities. In this sense, one cannot condemn Forbes Burnham's support of, and fidelity to, non-alignment.

However, by the same token, this does not mean that single-minded pursuit of socialism was in the best interests of Guyana. That pursuit was linked primarily to Burnham's problem of establishing his own legitimacy and right to rule in Guyana, through a strategy of coöpting his domestic opposition by attempting to out-radicalize political leaders of the Left, such as Jagan.

Even his campaign for his brand of socialism as one of moderation, anchoring it in non-alignment to avoid confrontation with the US, did not work. That confrontation came anyway and brought negative consequences for Guyana. Burnham's non-alignment was compromised by his socialism, and he further entwined the two in an obsessive search for legitimacy. Since most prominent NAM leaders were also radical Left-wing politicians, Burnham found himself having to be equally radical in order to stand out in that company.

Burnham was too astute a politician not to recognize that positions taken to reap rewards on the Third World stage were not always consonant with the national interest. The evidence suggests that, like most authoritarian leaders, his political actions were always inspired by a desire for attention and obedience, for which the national interest was always subordinated to the demands of personal interest (Brotherson, 1988).

Burnham viewed his mission as one that transcended the confines of tiny Guyana. He wanted to be the prime minister of the

Caribbean, not just of Guyana — and, like Fidel Castro, he wanted to be a world player. However, none of these goals could be attained without a secure domestic base, which, given his repeated resort to electoral fraud, he was repeatedly denied. To remedy this lack of legitimacy at home, he increasingly, and aggressively, pursued legitimacy abroad.

Forbes Burnham placed the apparatus and appurtenance of the state at his personal disposal frequently — and, in the end, unsuccessfully. When he died in 1985, whatever shred of legitimacy he had ever acquired died with him, evaporating along with the prosperity shattered during his long reign. Machiavelli, whom the late president was fond of quoting, was wrong on at least one point: the mere passage of time, coupled with glorious foreign adventure, is not always sufficient to confer legitimacy on some political leaders.

NOTES

1. Prime Minister Michael Manley of Jamaica, who won elections in February 1989, has acknowledged that he made mistakes in openly challenging the United States during his two-term stint as prime minister from 1972-1980. Polls showed that most Jamaicans blamed Manley for the economic pressures put on the island by the US and the hard times which followed. As a reformed political leader, Manley has now hired a Washington lobbying firm, Neil and Co., to promote US economic aid to Jamaica.

2. Those deep socio-economic ties are very rewarding for Guyanese today, in the wake of the economic collapse of the country. Every month, thousands of US-based relatives send large barrels of foodstuff, clothing, and other basic consumables to their needy families back home. These families also help sustain a vibrant black market on which a single US dollar can be exchanged for as much as G\$50.

3. Separating these two factors is somewhat problematic since socialism was the ideology which informed Guyana's non-alignment, and non-aligned events and connections were used to attempt to boost socialist efforts in Guyana. This lends itself to issues regarding Guyana's relations with Venezuela being discussed both under "Socialism" and "Non-Alignment." But the separateness is necessary on methodological grounds in order to explore how legitimacy concerns melded with the sweep of foreign policy actions, given Burnham's problems with achieving it domestically.

4. The four core "sinful isms" that non-alignment denounced — colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, and racialism — would

provide Burnham with ample opportunity for radical posturing. It was this strategy that prompted charges against him of opportunism and expediency in foreign policy. However, not being in control of the contrary tide of events in Guyana, he was later driven to radical socialist measures as well.

5. From the 1950s to the mid-1970s, media, and other, analysts classified Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago as belonging to the so-called "Big Four:" that group of states which set the pace for progressive change in the Caribbean.

6. Moreover, among Caribbean leaders there has been a groundswell of resentment over the consolidation of socialist authoritarianism in Guyana. This came to head after the December 1985 general elections, which were — once again — marked by widespread fraud. President Hoyte hastily called a summit meeting of the heads of government at which he was able to defuse the criticism by claiming personal ignorance of the fraud. He also pledged economic reform and has, indeed, abandoned socialist economic policies.

7. In both instances, Guyana's drift towards socialism was met by external action. In 1953, British troops intervened to suspend the Constitution and to outlaw the colonial socialist government. In the early 1960s, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) cooperated with the British in a covert action to oust the Marxist regime of Cheddi Jagan.

8. Under President Hoyte, Guyana has resumed negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Because the Guyanese economic situation has worsened considerably, the Fund's conditions for granting relief are now much more stringent than when negotiations were broken off by Forbes Burnham.

9. Former Ambassador to Venezuela and Permanent Secretary of the Guyana Ministry of Foreign Affairs Rudy Collins says that, while many in the foreign affairs establishment did hold this view, it is possible that the Venezuelans would have vigorously pressed the claim on their own accord. He cites as evidence the depth of passion which the territorial claim used to arouse — and still does. Collins is now the Director of General Services and Administration of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

10. In 1979, Burnham was so angered at criticism by, and competition from, both Michael Manley and Maurice Bishop that he considered a plan to reveal publicly confidential assistance his government had given many Caribbean governments in response to appeals from their leaders. He was especially miffed at Bishop, whom he had secretly helped and advised many times prior to the Grenada revolution. The plan was never implemented.

11. This occurred when both Bishop and Manley railed against the United States and were vehement in their denunciation. They received thunderous ovations from the non-aligned body and cemented their position, second only to Fidel Castro, as dominant Caribbean radicals. (At that meeting, the Nicaraguans remained cautious as their relations

with the Carter administration in the US were still fair.) As Manley addressed the grand NAM meeting, Burnham became furious, both because he was scheduled to speak much later, and because he felt Manley had stolen some of his (Burnham's) more radical ideas, expressed during a long informal chat the two men had held earlier.

12. "Latest available figures put the major part of Guyana's external debt at close to US\$938-million owed to bilateral sources. The total outstanding debt at the end of 1987, including multilateral sources such as the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), etc., was US\$1.75-billion. Over US\$450-million of the bilateral debt is owed to Trinidad and Tobago. Guyana also owes over US\$139-million to the collapsed CARICOM Multilateral Clearing Facility (CMCF), primarily to Jamaica and to Trinidad and Tobago... The debt to the IDB at the end of 1987 was just about US\$140-million and to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) just over US\$137-million. The World Bank debt is over US\$105-million, and the country also owes close to US\$50-million to the CDB. Guyana's debt to the United States at the end of 1987 stood at US\$81.6-million...." (Staroek News, 1989).

13. Under Burnham, Guyana hosted the 1972 foreign ministers' preparatory session for the radical 1973 meeting of the NAM in Algiers. Under Desmond Hoyte, the 1986 special session of the NAM was held in Georgetown.

14. This is recalled from a conversation, *circa* 1986, with Sir John Carter, former Ambassador of Guyana to the People's Republic of China (PRC). In earlier times, Carter had been a rival of Burnham; in later times, he was a confidante. He also attended the same then-elite high school, Queen's College.

15. Burnham used to organize an annual retreat in Guyana for his many diplomats and foreign service professionals. These conferences were meant to analyze trends and evaluate performance. Nevertheless, in the actual charting of foreign policy, it was always Burnham's views that prevailed.

16. The same interview with Rudy Collins. Collins' point was that in dealing with his Guyanese peers and with Burnham, as well as with foreign governments, he at no time got the impression that those with whom he dealt were concerned about whether the Guyana government was legitimate. It was a non-issue.

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