

Brazilian Presence in the Guianas: João VI to João Figueiredo, 1807-1985

Roland Ely

1. Brazil and the “Geopolitical Cyst”

1.1. Enemy Beachheads in the Colonial Period

Contrary to myths about Brazilian imperialism, the so-called Colossus of the South historically has tended to view the Caribbean as a source of danger, rather than a tempting area for further expansion. Indeed, as two Brazilian geographers have observed, “The colonization of Brazil came as an afterthought to the Portuguese rulers, due to Dutch, English, and French pressure on the territory, and following the loss of most of Portugal’s Asian and African trading posts to the Dutch.”¹ For almost two centuries (1530-1711), the enemies of Portugal, as well as those of Spain during the union of both crowns (1580-1640), attacked settlements and sometimes occupied strategic sites along the Brazilian coast.

The first blow fell in Pernambuco, where the Portuguese had placed a small garrison in 1521, only to have the post destroyed by the French nine years later. Down in Guanabara Bay, soon to become the site of Rio de Janeiro, Admiral Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon established “Antarctic France,” which the Portuguese could not dislodge for almost a decade (1555-1564). Expelled from southern Brazil, the French then seized but soon lost Recife, whence they moved north to Maranhão and built a fort named Saint Louis. They were not evicted from São Luis, as it was afterward known, until 1615. To protect northern Brazil and the Amazon estuary, the Portuguese founded Santa Maria de Belém on its eastern shore in 1616. Supposedly, they were “thus confining the French to the small enclave that is today French Guiana.”² In practice, however, that took practically another 300 years because France maintained a strong presence in the present state of Amapá until the 1890’s.³

¹Bertha K. Becker and Claudio A.G. Egler, *Brazil, a New Regional Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 12.

²Ronald M. Schneider, “*Order and Progress*”: *A Political History of Brazil* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 29-30.

³See below, sec. 4.2.

Much more serious was the Dutch West India Company's conquest (1630-1654) of an area extending north from the San Francisco River, in Pernambuco, into Maranhão and practically up to the mouth of the Amazon River. That was then the richest part of the Portuguese empire in Brazil. Failing to establish themselves in what is now the Federative Republic of Brazil, France and Holland ultimately succeeded in planting permanent colonies on its exposed northern flank. England occupied the Dutch enclave, which consisted of modern Guyana and Suriname, during the Napoleonic Wars but restored the latter to Holland at the Congress of Vienna (1814-1816).

1.2. Pax Britannica, 1815-1939

The Guianas thus became a "geopolitical cyst" of almost 500,000 km² in the Iberoamerican continent envisaged by the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), when it pretended to divide the New World between Spain and Portugal.⁴ Four-fifths of the "cyst" were benign. British (46%) and Dutch (35%) Guiana revolved securely, in tight orbits around their respective metropolitan centers. Only the French part of the tumor looked malignant because of clashes over conflicting claims to Amapá. The question of "union of the Guianas with Brazil, or at least the French..." colony, was raised during the presidency of dictatorial Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca (1889-1891), after he ousted Dom Pedro II and terminated the monarchy in Brazil. Apparently, his foreign minister was "inspired by the words of Monroe" in the latter's celebrated message to Congress of December 1823.⁵

Gold was discovered in the Essequibo region of British Guiana during the late 1850's. Production peaked at around two tons per year in the 1890's.⁶ The time had come to resolve the claims of Venezuela in the west and Brazil in the south. The empire was then at its zenith, and the English settled these controversies virtually on their own terms. Venezuela lost 159,000 km² west of the Essequibo River, or 94% of the area claimed by Caracas, in 1899. Next it was Brazil's turn. King Victor Emmanuel III ruled, in 1904, that two-thirds of the contested Amazon territory, most of it occupied by the Portuguese in the 18th century, belonged to Great Britain. The Italian monarch's award "opened a hatchway for England above the Amazon basin which," luckily, remarks a Brazilian author, "she never knew how to take advantage of." Recalling his country's experiences with France and Britain, he continues, "There never was a

⁴Terezinha de Castro, "Dinâmica territorial brasileira," *A Defesa Nacional (DN)* (Rio de Janeiro) 718 (March/April 1985): 101.

⁵Paulo Henrique da Rocha Correia, "O Brasil e as Guianas," *DN* 718 (March/April 1985): 114.

⁶Scott B. MacDonald, "Guyana: Historical Setting" in Tim Merrill (ed.), *Guyana and Belize: Country Studies*, 2nd edition (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, Dept. of the Army, 1993), 10, 91.

question of boundaries between Brazil and Suriname.”⁷ Rio de Janeiro (capital of Brazil, 1763-1960) and The Hague settled their differences through bilateral negotiations, a “tranquil affair,” and signed a Treaty of Limits in 1906.⁸

1.3. World War II and the Cold War

When German armies overran the Low Countries and occupied half of France in the spring of 1940, according to a veteran Brazilian diplomat, Franklin Roosevelt reportedly requested Brazilian forces to protect Suriname. But President Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945) demurred. That was the same year of course that Roosevelt and Winston Churchill arranged the lease of British bases in the Western Hemisphere to the United States, including St. Lucia, Trinidad, and British Guiana. To the south, however, students and professors of the Federal University of Pará (Belém), which bordered on British and Dutch Guiana, expressed strong reservations about American intentions in the Caribbean. They signed *Manifesto* warned that Washington might use the war in Europe as a pretext to “occupy the Guianas, with all the inconveniences of an Alaska or a Puerto Rico, [as] our neighbor, that is to say, an inadvisable North American presence in the Amazon.” There were two alternatives: “either independence for the Guianas, or their annexation to Brazil.”⁹ From a geopolitical viewpoint, the second option had much to recommend it. Two years afterward, for instance, a senator who enjoyed the confidence of Vargas wrote: “The Guianas complete, naturally and necessarily, the geographic, economic, and strategic configuration of northern Brazil.”¹⁰

Immediately after the war, Brazilian political geographers began to look more closely at the Guianas. The noted military strategist, Mario Travasos, in the 1947 edition of his *Projeção Continental do Brasil*, declared: “The intensification of legitimate commerce would be recommendable, such as the construction of roads that would link us to those colonies.”¹¹ From Brazil a torrent of contraband cacao, coffee, and gold gushed towards the Guianas. Southward for the black market in Brazil flowed an expensive stream of “luxury

⁷Teixeira Soares, *Historia da formação das fronteiras do Brasil*, 3rd edition (Rio de Janeiro: Conquista, 1975), 60.

⁸*Ibid.*, 69.

⁹Quoted from copy of *Manifesto* in his possession by Correia, “Brasil e Guianas,” 115, 118, n. 7.

¹⁰Atílio Vivacqua, *A nova política do subsolo e o regime legal das Minas* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Continental, 1942), n.p. Quoted by Correia, “Brasil e Guianas,” 115, 118, n. 8.

¹¹Mario Travasos, *Projeção Continental do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca do Exército Editora, 1947), n.p. Quoted by Correia, “Brasil e Guianas,” 115.

cars and fine beverages.”¹² One scenario to stanch the hemorrhage of illegal exports and foreign exchange seemed crafted for its appeal to Venezuelan nationalists, embittered by loss of the Essequibo to British Guiana half a century ago. “An agreement between Brazil and Venezuela would solve the question of the Guianas,” suggested the author of a book published by the Army in 1950. The two South American republics might just as well divide up these “overseas commercial establishments that, under the colonial regime in which they find themselves, will never achieve a national consciousness.”¹³

2. Brazil and Guyana, 1966-1985

2.1. Decolonization and Dependence

The independence of Guyana (1966) and Suriname (1975) transformed, once and for all, the political geography of the former European colonies for Brazil. Now, there was no guarantee against the seizure of power in Georgetown or Paramaribo by radical elements who might collaborate with enemies of the military government (1964-1985) in Brasilia, which became the nation’s capital in 1960. Strategists at the Superior War College (*Escola Superior de Guerra*) in Rio de Janeiro articulated the Doctrine of National Security, “a strategic planning technique initially designed for use in...times of war, but which was to be extended to all sectors of activity in the country.” Two Brazilian analysts also point out that “the doctrine gave a degree of legitimacy and intellectual and political structure to the military.”¹⁴

The Doctrine of National Security thus became the principal point of reference for Brazil’s domestic and foreign policies under the military regime. In practice this meant that a small neighbor could not be allowed to fall into hostile hands, let alone those of front men for international communism. An ample Brazilian presence—diplomatic, economic, technological, and cultural—would help stabilize governments worthy of trust in Guyana and Suriname, on an exposed flank in the north.¹⁵ Brazilian generals and technocrats displayed a sophisticated pragmatism in their efforts to avoid destabilization of Burnham’s government in Georgetown and communist penetration of Suriname.

In the ’sixties and ’seventies, Prime Minister Eric Williams (1962-1981) of Trinidad and Tobago periodically denounced “Venezuela’s ‘imperialist’ threat”

¹²Correia, “Brasil e Guianas,” 115. Correia mentions citing 70 different pieces of news in the national press about contraband trade with the Guianas in Chapter 9 of his book, *O Brasil e as Guianas* (Cantanduva, Estado São Paulo: IBEL, 1965).

¹³Osório Nunes, *Introdução ao Estudo da Amazônia* (Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca do Exército Editora, 1950). Quoted by Correia, “Brasil e Guianas,” 116.

¹⁴Becker and Egler, *Brazil*, 86.

¹⁵Roland Ely, “Guyana y Suriname frente al ‘Coloso del Sur’,”

in the Caribbean. Accordingly, certain “Brazilian links were seen as a convenient but nonetheless unpalatable alternative.”¹⁶ The authoritarian regime in Brasilia took a similar view of Guyana’s “Comrade Leader.” A brilliant opportunist, Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham was viewed as the lesser evil among Guyanese politicians. Those who counted occupied ideological positions to the left of center, from Burnham’s pseudosocialism to Cheddi Jagan’s unwavering support of Moscow’s orthodox Communist party line.

In the 1970’s, another undesirable element for Brasilia emerged in the charismatic person of Professor Walter Rodney, who was blown up by a bomb in 1980. His biracial, Marxist-oriented, Working People’s Alliance (WPA) represented a serious challenge to both the Indo-Guyanese PPP and the Afro-Guyanese PNC. From the Brazilian standpoint, perhaps the greatest threat to destabilize Burnham’s *de facto* lifetime dictatorship was Venezuela’s reclamation of the disputed Essequibo territory. Successive occupants of the presidential Palácio de Planalto thus backed up Burnham whenever relations between Georgetown and Caracas turned tense.

For the first three years of Guyana’s independence, Venezuela subjected the fledgling republic to a series of physical and psychological pressures. Venezuelan forces occupied the frontier island of Ankoko (1966), claimed by Guyana. Two years later, President Leoni sought to annex a strip, 15 km wide, of territorial waters along the coast of the country of Essequibo. Then, in January 1969, Caracas reputedly incited Guyanese cattle ranchers of the Rupununi, across the Tacutú River from Brazil, to revolt against Burnham’s uneasy coalition government in Georgetown.¹⁷ Diplomatic observers at the United Nations in New York later reported that “Venezuela contemplated a military move against Guyana but held back on the advice of Brazil.”¹⁸

During the latter half of the 1970’s, Guyana and Brazil had difficulties because of the close ties between Georgetown and Havana. After overthrowing the civilian government of João Goulart in March 1964, the Brazilian generals severed diplomatic contacts with communist Cuba. They did not appreciate Castro’s competition with traditional Brazilian interests in Angola, much less the use of Georgetown as a refueling stop on the aerial bridge transporting Cuban soldiers and Soviet arms to bolster the hard-pressed regime of Agostinho Neto in Luanda. Since then, Brasilia’s relations with Georgetown have been considerably more cordial.

¹⁶*Latin American Regional Reports* (London), Caribbean (RC) 84/01 (Jan. 20, 1984): 1.

¹⁷R. [Rudolph] Collins, “The Story of the Border,” in L. [Lloyd] Scarwar (ed.), *Cooperative Republic of Guyana 1970. A Study of Aspects of Our Way of Life* (Georgetown: Government of Guyana, Ministry of Education and Culture, 1970), 281.

¹⁸Louis Wiznitzer, *Christian Science Monitor* (CSM) (October 18, 1982).

Washington gladly gave its blessing to Brasilia in the unenviable task of countering the influence of Moscow and Havana in Georgetown. The urbane generals overlooked the unpredictable conduct and reckless rhetoric of the voluble strong man of the Essequibo in the last years of his dictatorship. During an official visit to Brazil in October 1982, for instance, Burnham proclaimed to the international press that “Venezuela wants to control the whole of the eastern Caribbean—they want to recolonize Guyana.”¹⁹ Two weeks later, the Rio de Janeiro correspondent of a leading London newspaper reported that “Brazil is discreetly entering into a new and closer relationship with its smaller northern neighbor Guyana. Behind the realignment apparently lies Brazil’s desire to prevent the long standing territorial dispute between Guyana and Venezuela flaring up into a new South American War.”²⁰

After the trauma caused by the Anglo-Argentine war in the South Atlantic, earlier in the same year, the Brazilian government was determined to avoid another armed conflict involving not one, but two neighboring states. On that occasion, as in the Rupununi rebellion more than a decade earlier, the generals in Brasilia reportedly “advised Venezuela not to move against Guyana now, either.”²¹ And then there was the spectre of Communist Cuba waiting for an opportunity to fish in troubled waters. It was reported at the time that “the Brazilian military is known to fear that an isolated and outgunned Guyana could turn to Cuba for troops.”²² If Fidel Castro had sent thousands of his soldiers to help socialist comrades in Angola and other parts of Africa, why not Guyana?

General João Baptista Figueiredo, the Brazilian president (1979-1985), made sure that Burnham’s journey to the Palácio de Planalto proved profitable. The Cooperative Republic of Guyana received a line of credit totaling US\$50 million: one-third for the purchase of “defensive military equipment,” the rest to begin construction of a road to connect Georgetown with Lethem, on the Guyanese side of the Tacutú River, opposite the Brazilian state of Roraima. The terms imposed by Burnham’s hosts were far from onerous: repayment in ten years with annual interest of only 2.5%. These credits were a continuation of others amounting to US\$40 million granted by the government of General Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979). Considering the fact that Brazil’s own foreign debt

¹⁹Quoted by James Brooke, *Miami Herald* (MH), October 5, 1982.

²⁰*Financial Times* (FT), October 19, 1982. For the complete text of the official welcome speech given by President Figueiredo (October 4, 1982), and of the Brazil-Guyana Joint Declaration (October 5, 1982), see *Resenha Exterior do Brasil* (Brasilia: Ministerio de Relações Exteriores), No. 5 (October, November and December 1982): 25-32.

²¹Wiznitzer, *CSM*, October 18, 1982.

²²Brooke, *MH*, October 5, 1982.

had already passed US\$90 billion,²³ the second credit represented a financial sacrifice for the Figueiredo government.

The warm hospitality shown Guyana's Comrade Leader did little for the international image of the military regime in Brasilia. It was observed at the time that "nobody else in the region would consider supporting the morally bankrupt Burnham regime."²⁴ Nor did such generosity seem justified in view of the official trade between the two neighbors. This fluctuated between US\$2.5 and US\$5 million annually in the 1970's. By 1981, it had only reached some US\$10 million, compared to US\$1.4 billion with Venezuela.²⁵ The visible exchange, however, accounted for but a tiny fraction of total trade between both countries.

2.2. Blackmarket Bonanza

Contrary to the situation in the 'fifties and 'sixties, the contraband trade between Guyana and Brazil proved extremely favorable for the latter in the 'eighties.²⁶ After their *coup d'état* of March 1964, the Brazilian military and their civilian allies undertook to endow the country with a modern industrial and agricultural infrastructure oriented toward exports, especially to the Third World.²⁷ From Boa Vista, Guyanese middlemen known as "hucksters" carried back a wide variety of purchases, from provisions whose importation Burnham had forbidden to save scarce foreign exchange (such as wheat flour and various types of canned foods) to medicines, spare parts for machinery and motor vehicles, electric appliances and luxury articles.

In payment, the merchants of Boa Vista freely accepted their neighbors' non-convertible paper money. "The Brazilian government is said to be allowing the sale of these commodities for Guyanese currency on humanitarian grounds," reported an independent source in Georgetown, "because of the dire need of the

²³*Latin America Weekly Report* (London) (WR) 82-42 (October 29, 1982): 6; WR 83-07 (February 12, 1983): 10; *El Nacional* (Caracas), February 14, 1983 (UPI).

²⁴WR-82-42 (October 29, 1982): 6. Don Bohning, of the *Miami Herald*, later recalled that under Burnham's authoritarian regime, "the country has become a virtual pariah in the Western Hemisphere." *MH*, November 21, 1985. A writer for the *Financial Times* of London corroborated Bohning: "Even Guyana's neighbors in the English-speaking Caribbean regard the country as a pariah towards which they can be no more than barely tolerant." Canute James, *FT*, December 10, 1985.

²⁵Rubens Ricúpero, "O Brasil e os países de Bacia Amazônica," *Segurança e Desenvolvimento* (Rio de Janeiro) XXXI:189 (1982): 74; *RC* 82-09 (November 5, 1982): 4; WR 82-42 (October 29, 1982): 6.

²⁶See above, sec. 1.3.

²⁷See, for example, Roland Ely, "El papel de la Ciencia y la Tecnología en la Doctrina brasileña de la Seguridad Nacional, 1964-1984," *Actas del 1er. Congreso de Ciencia y Sociedad* (Mérida, Venezuela: Universidad de Los Andes, 1985), 524-44.

Guyanese people.”²⁸ If their government lacked the foreign exchange to import necessities through conventional channels, what else could be done except to wink and look the other way? By the same token, travelers arriving on commercial flights from Georgetown did not need Brazilian visas. Until the end of 1985, they “were only required to show their passports or travel documents for the purposes of identification.”²⁹

Meanwhile, the same Guyanese dollars “were brought back by the Brazilians to purchase gold” in Guyana. “A Brazilian was known to have set up an office in a leading Georgetown hotel to purchase the precious metal, paying [Guyana] \$3,400: an oz [G\$118.47 per gram], more than double the price being offered by the Gold Board.” And, as if that were not enough to stimulate the contraband trade, the government’s Gold Board, the only legal market for the precious metal in Guyana, was charging a royalty of 5% on every transaction.³⁰

Interviewed during a summit meeting of leaders of the English-speaking Caribbean (CARICOM) in July 1984, Forbes Burnham complained that, “we lose about [US]\$10 million per month to Barbados [where gold sales were legal] and about [US] \$20 million to Brazil,” that is, between US\$350 and US\$400 million in gold lost every year. Indeed, Burnham confessed, that despite “steps being taken to curb” illegal sales of gold, “I would imagine it is impossible to end smuggling from the country.”³¹ Thus, with a black market bonanza of Guyanese gold amounting to more than US\$200 million annually, it is understandable that the Brazilians were anxious to keep Forbes Burnham afloat. Nor is it surprising that they were more than willing to spend around US\$1 million on the construction of a new embassy in Georgetown, importing the major part of the materials used from their own country.³²

²⁸*Sunday Chronicle* (Georgetown), December 8, 1985. After January 1986, visas from the Brazilian Embassy in Georgetown were required. These visas were valid for three months and renewable for three additional months. *Guyana Chronicle*, February 4, 1986. Officials from state enterprises competed with the professional “hucksters,” “carrying suitcases stacked with Guyanese dollars to make their purchases” in the two weekly flights of Guyana Airways, the state airline, to Boa Vista. *Catholic Standard* (Georgetown), April 1, 1985, 2.

²⁹*Catholic Standard*, February 13, 1983, 4. The same weekly newspaper states, “The parallel market has indeed provided a safety valve for the people who might otherwise have taken to the streets for being denied so many basic items. Unofficial trade with Brazil has been encouraged.” *Ibid.*, April 1, 1984, 2.

³⁰*Ibid.* and August 28, 1983, 1. In June 1984, G\$1.00 = US\$0.27, that is US\$1.00 = G\$4.00. *RC 84-05* (June 15, 1984), 8.

³¹Canute James, *Journal of Commerce* (New York), July 16, 1984. Cosmetic and well-publicized efforts at reform were “expected to produce few results as high-ranking government and military officials are said to be involved in smuggling,” frustrating any serious attempt to control it. *RC 84-05* (June 15, 1984), 8.

³²*Catholic Standard*, July 18, 1982, 1.

2.3. Amazon Geopolitics

The Charter of Belém (1980) formally implemented the Amazon Pact (1978), which was a predominantly Brazilian initiative. Gathering in Belém, capital of the state of Pará, representatives of the governments of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela signed the founding document, emphasizing the exchange of technical information and regional autonomy. This paved the way for the creation of a bilateral commission between Brazil and Guyana. One of the projects studied was construction of the Lethem-Kurupukari road to connect Georgetown with Boa Vista.³³ Kurupukari is located on the eastern bank of the Essequibo River, some 150 km to the northeast of Lethem, not quite halfway to Georgetown.

From both commercial and geopolitical standpoints, the road project was important to the military regime in Brasilia. As explained by a high-ranking official at Itamaraty, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Relations, “through construction of the bridge over the Tacutú River [separating Brazil and Guyana] and the Lethem-Georgetown road...Roraima would gain access to the markets of the Caribbean and the Northern Hemisphere by a much shorter line...”³⁴ The existing route was somewhat arduous: first via highway BR-174 (unpaved) from Boa Vista to Manaus on the Amazon, then down that river to Belém and the Atlantic Ocean. The same Brazilian diplomat explained that, with the proposed overland road linking Lethem to the coast, “the concretion of the Duty Free Zone offered [to Brazil] in Georgetown by Guyana would become feasible.”³⁵ In this way Brazil could enlarge its physical presence in Guyana through the Duty Free Zone, as well as by the construction and maintenance of the Lethem-Kurupukari road.

But what did the then 70,000-odd inhabitants of Roraima think about the proposed trans-Guyana road?³⁶ Mozarildo Cavalcanti, deputy from Roraima in the National Congress, summed up the consensus of his then frontier territory constituents in a speech that he gave for the record in Brasilia during 1983. In the first place, he declared in the Chamber of Deputies, “the potentialities for commercial exchange between the Territory of Roraima and the neighboring countries of Venezuela and the Cooperative Republic of Guyana are immense. Roraima can export [products] from timber to manufactures.” In a veiled reference to the flourishing black market across the Tacutú River, he observed

³³WR 80-49 (December 12, 1980), 9.

³⁴Ricúpero, “Brasil e Bacia Amazônica,” 74-75.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 75.

³⁶Census of 1980, *Almanaque Mundial 1986* (Panamá: Editorial América, 1985), 26. Ten years later, the population of Roraima reached some 120,000 inhabitants. “Distribución poblacional,” Brazilian Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela, 1990.

that “Guyana is an immense consumer market.”³⁷ Secondly, he emphasized the question of strategic security, reminding the chamber that “the actual isolation of Guyana has led that country’s government to draw closer each time to Cuba and the Soviet Union.” Faced with this challenge, “Brazil is obliged to renew negotiations for construction of the road joining Lethem, on the Roraima frontier, with Georgetown.”³⁸

General Figueiredo passed the presidential sash to a civilian politician, José Sarney, in March 1985. Forbes Burnham unexpectedly died during a supposedly routine throat operation in August. An unpaved road linking Georgetown to the Brazilian frontier was indeed finally finished in the early 1990’s. For lack of proper maintenance in the difficult interior of Guyana, however, it had become virtually impassable by 1995. Not that it mattered much by then. Manaus, capital of Amazonas state, was soon connected by an all-weather asphalt road to the extensive Venezuelan highway system through Boa Vista, capital of Roraima, and the frontier town of Santa Elena de Uairén in the state of Bolívar. “Relations with Venezuela’s south are important for Brazil’s northern states,” stressed the governor of Roraima, “because, for us, it represents a port of entrance to the Caribbean.”³⁹

3. Brazil and Suriname, 1975-1985

3.1. Precarious Democracy

Suriname was incorporated into the Kingdom of the Netherlands and granted internal autonomy in 1954. Perhaps because of Whitehall’s difficulties with Marxist Cheddi Jagan during the decolonization of British Guiana, followed by Surinamese clashes with the Burnham regime in the upper Corentyne, The Hague postponed lowering the Dutch flag in Paramaribo until November 1975.⁴⁰ Henck Arron’s moderate governments (1975-1977, 1977-1980) did not present problems of the Guyanese type, in which all three of the principal parties were “socialist” and a regional power next door claimed two-thirds of the new country. Ideologically, Arron also seemed safer than Burnham, who began making pilgrimages to the principal communist capitals of the world after 1970. From Brasília’s perspective he was certainly preferable to the Army sergeant who ousted him.

³⁷*Anais da Câmara dos Deputados* (Brasília) m v. 9, n. 13, la Sessão. 47a. Legislatura. 16-13 September 1983. Quarta-feira (Wednesday) 21.9504.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Quoted by Kent Rosenthal, *The Daily Journal* (Caracas) (DJ), June 27, 1995.

⁴⁰Edward Dew, *The Difficult Flowering of Surinam. Ethnicity and Politics in a Plural Society* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 99.

Led by Sergeant Major Desiré (Desi) Bouterse, a group of non-commissioned officers in the tiny Surinamese army overthrew Arron's government in February 1980. Five months later, a National Military Council was constituted, headed by now Lieutenant Colonel Bouterse. Suriname's military regime professed to espouse nonalignment with either East or West as the lodestar of its foreign policy. In practice however, Bouterse and his allies tilted conspicuously toward the communist bloc.⁴¹ On the other hand, their confused leftist nationalism was even more incoherent than Burnham's so-called "cooperative socialism"⁴²

These developments were viewed with growing mistrust by the Netherlands, whose subsidies to Suriname amounted to more than US\$200 million between 1947 and 1974. To cushion the impact of separation, the new republic received a "golden handshake" of US\$1.6 billion, spread over a period of ten to fifteen years.⁴³ Bouterse spun out of control in a ruthless purge of political opponents during December 1982. Fifteen were shot, allegedly while trying to escape, an undetermined number of moderates were imprisoned, and The Hague suspended all aid to Suriname. Radicals in Paramaribo sneered that, anyway, the now-paralyzed "golden handshake" could never fully compensate for centuries of colonial exploitation.⁴⁴

3.2. Blighted Cuban Courtship, 1981-1983

Colonel Bouterse's background as a physical education instructor hardly prepared him to take the helm of Suriname's crippled ship of state, as it drifted into the Marxist geopolitical arc formed by Nicaragua, Cuba, and Grenada in the Caribbean.⁴⁵ His role model was Maurice Bishop, charismatic leader of the left-wing New Jewel Movement (1979-1983), which had overthrown the corrupt government of Grenada by force. At the suggestion of his new friend and mentor, Bouterse established diplomatic relations with Cuba in March 1981 and the following year welcomed Oscar Oswaldo Cárdenas as Havana's first ambassador to Suriname.

Suriname was inundated by "a flood of delegations, projects and promises" during the Cuban courtship. Cárdenas "was described as the toast of Paramaribo," in the words of one foreign journalist. "In short order, he was involved in virtually every aspect of government business, according to government officials and outside observers."⁴⁶ Cubans trained the bearded ex-

⁴¹Bohning, *MH*, December 13, 1985.

⁴²James Le Moyne, *The New York Times (NYT)*, January 10, 1984; William B. Long, *Los Angeles Times (LAT)*, April 14, 1985; Robert Graham, *FT*, February 1, 1984.

⁴³Dew, *Surinam*, 185.

⁴⁴RC 85-04 (January 18, 1985), 7.

⁴⁵Long, *LAT*, February 26, 1985.

⁴⁶Le Moyne, *NYT*, January 10, 1984.

sergeant's bodyguards and on occasion served in that capacity themselves. Surinamese officials were sent to Cuba for technical and ideological instruction.⁴⁷ Notwithstanding his impressive image in the humid riparian capital, Cárdenas turned out to be a better showman than bilateral banker.

None of the financial aid promised in Havana's name reached Suriname. Even before the murder of Maurice Bishop, for which Bouterse held the Cubans indirectly responsible, and the subsequent American invasion of Grenada in October 1983, there were signs that the courtship was losing its ardor. It was said, for instance, that Bouterse "reportedly already feared the Cubans were undermining his personal authority, training a people's militia and giving headstrong army men and local leftist politicians too many ideas." A government spokesman described the Cubans as "pushy," and the ambassador's conduct "was seen by some Surinamese as more than a bit officious..." in their highly informal society.⁴⁸

At the Palácio de Itamaraty, Brazil's pragmatic diplomats followed a policy of restraint after the unwelcome coup of February 1980. To isolate Suriname would be unwise because it could then fall prey to subversive influences from abroad. In an address delivered at the *Escola Superior de Guerra*, a senior ambassador expressed satisfaction that "the Brazilian goal of incorporating Suriname more and more into the diplomatic sphere of the continent, made an important advance with the Prime Minister's second visit to sign, in July [1980, the Charter of Belém, implementing] the Amazon Treaty. To better balance bilateral trade between the two neighbors—at that time 3:1 in Brazil's favor—the government would try to increase imports from Suriname. Brasilia would also endeavor to establish periodic maritime service from Belém, so that the Amazon port could serve as "the key support base for economic relations with Suriname."⁴⁹

3.3 General Venturini's Mission to Paramaribo

When Ambassador Cárdenas and his compatriots commenced to exceed the limits of diplomatic prudence in Paramaribo, the military "openly overruled Itamaraty," reported an informed source the following year. "Invoking the need to prevent the 'Cubanization' of Suriname, the national security council pushed through a wide-ranging package of bilateral cooperation with that country. General Danilo Venturini, President Figueiredo's chief military advisor, arrived at Paramaribo in April 1993 with an ultimatum for Desi Bouterse and a deadline

⁴⁷Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, *Washington Post (WP)*, December 2, 1985.

⁴⁸Le Moyne, *NYT*, January 10, 1984.

⁴⁹Ricúpero, "Brasil e Bacia Amazônica," 76.

for drastically reducing the Cuban presence in Suriname.”⁵⁰ If the carrot of economic and military aid should not be sufficient to change his mind, there were also “well-timed reports of the formation of a 20,000-strong Brazilian task force ready to rush to the Guyanese and Surinamese borders in the event of undefined trouble.”⁵¹

Having but recently installed a relative moderate as prime minister, Bouterse was now compelled to oust the hardline, pro-Cuban minister of Culture and Popular Mobilization. In addition to his ideological liabilities, the latter had opposed a Brazilian offer of military assistance the year before.⁵² A month after General Venturini’s visit, the new prime minister, accompanied by the chief-of-staff of Suriname’s 3,000-man army and the minister of Energy and Natural Resources, flew to Brasilia. President Figueiredo and Foreign Minister Saraiva Guerreiro, according to one Latin American source, “obtained important victories in the diplomatic field” during the course of long conversations with Bouterse’s emissaries. Lured by a diversified package of bilateral aid—from arms and military equipment to the postal service, farming and hydroelectric projects, as well as a line of credit to pay for all this—the Surinamese leaders accepted the tutelage of their powerful neighbor. To cite one significant example, a British observer afterward confirmed that “Brasilia military advisers are now working with the small Surinamese army and navy.”⁵³

Desi Bouterse’s defense forces were also getting good equipment from his new patron. Brazil by that time had developed the world’s sixth largest military-industrial complex and was a favored purveyor of arms to developing countries like Libya.⁵⁴ Rudolphus (Ruud) Lubbers, the Dutch prime minister was duly impressed. So much that, even before departing on a trip to Brazil in June 1983, he warned the Figueiredo government “not to follow the example of other big powers by expanding its economic aid to the [Surinamese] military sphere.”⁵⁵ In case his startled hosts may have missed the point, when he arrived at the Brazilian capital, Lubbers advised them to be “prudent in selling arms to Suriname and, if possible to limit the quantities.” That was too much for General Waldir de Vasconcelos, chief of the Brazilian Armed Forces General Staff, who brusquely retorted that his government would accept “no limits whatsoever” on the sale of weapons to Suriname.⁵⁶

Without at least tacit American approval, it seems doubtful that General Figueiredo would have supplied Bouterse with arms and military equipment.

⁵⁰*Latin American Regional Reports* (London): Brazil (RB) 84-08 (September 14, 1984), 3.

⁵¹RC 83-04 (May 13, 1983), 5.

⁵²RC 83-05 (June 17, 1983), 2.

⁵³Andrew Whitely, *FT*, February 26, 1985.

⁵⁴Ely, “Ciencia y Tecnología,” 535.

⁵⁵RC 83-04 (May 13, 1983), 5.

⁵⁶WR 83-22 (June 10, 1983), 12.

Ronald Reagan had personally intervened with the international banking community to save Brazil from bankruptcy at the end of 1982. The Hague was one of Washington's staunchest allies in Europe, and Washington had already shown its solidarity in Suriname, by suspending the modest American aid program there. Now, it was Brasilia's turn to bring Bouterse back into line. Looking back upon the bizarre events in Suriname, a professor at the Brazilian Center of Strategic Studies puts an altruistic spin on the Venturini Mission's motives. The good neighbor rescued "Suriname in a difficult moment with financial aid, moral support and ample military collaboration..." he explained.⁵⁷

General Figueiredo was more direct. "The United States stopped aid. Holland also. If we don't help," he emphasized at the time, "they are going to look for support from the other side."⁵⁸ As Brazil's foreign minister pointed out, suspension of economic aid from The Hague and Washington "created the impression that Suriname could tilt toward the direction of Cuba."⁵⁹ The posting of Luiz Felipe Lamprea to Paramaribo suggested the geopolitical importance attached to Suriname by the Figueiredo government. Lamprea had attracted considerable attention as one of Itamaraty's most talented younger diplomats,⁶⁰ and he was eventually appointed minister of Foreign Relations by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-). Once again, as with the unsavory regime of Forbes Burnham in Guyana, Washington seemed content to watch Brazil play the role of a benign big brother to its smaller and occasionally wayward neighbors.

3.4. Bouterse's Would-be Bedouin Banker

The authoritarian regime in Brasilia managed to co-opt military assistance to Suriname from communist sources, but neither the generals nor leaders of the Soviet bloc could compensate Paramaribo for the withdrawal of its "golden handshake." Beyond the US\$15 million credit to purchase Brazilian weapons and equipment, in 1983, and certain others granted in 1984 and 1985, Desi Bouterse's expectations of more substantial support were not fulfilled during João Figueiredo's presidency.⁶¹ Washington gossips chuckled that Bouterse, "desperate for cash to keep his regime afloat, has turned to tainted sources for money: Libya's dictator and Colombia's drug-dealers." Concerning the latter, two syndicated columnists confided that "according to our CIA sources, the

⁵⁷Correia, "Brasil e Guianas," 117.

⁵⁸*Visión* (Mexico City), August 8, 1983, 26.

⁵⁹*Frontera* (Mérida, Venezuela), April 10, 1983 (UPI).

⁶⁰WR 83-22 (June 10, 1983), 12.

⁶¹Bohning, *MH*, December 13, 1985; WR 84-14 (April 6, 1984), 8; RC 85-04 (May 10, 1985), 6; Whitely, *FT*, February 26, 2985.

Surinamese dictator accepted the offer of a loan from Colombian marihuana and cocaine traffickers.”⁶²

Colombian “loans” to let clandestine flights refuel en route to the North American market, were doubtless welcomed by Bouterse and privileged members of his inner circle. But the colonel needed far larger sums “to keep his repressive regime afloat...” The other of his two “tainted sources for money” looked much more promising. To that end, in March 1985, the Surinamese muscle man and yet another puppet prime minister journeyed to Libya. In Tripoli, the mercurial Colonel Muammar al Gaddafi discussed a US\$100 million line of credit with them. A Libyan delegation arrived in Paramaribo two months later to put the finishing touches on the bilateral agreement. Among their basic conditions for purchasing Surinamese rice and timber, along with joint ventures in agriculture, mining and petroleum, the Libyans insisted on opening an embassy in Paramaribo.⁶³

Wild rumors floated about. For example: up to 200 Libyans had entered the country; some were already training terrorists; others were using Suriname to transship arms to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Gaddafi allegedly wanted Surinamese passports for his Death Squadrons, as well as his Palestinian terrorist friends. Informed local observers discounted such exaggerations, calling attention to the fact that there were less than a dozen Libyans in Suriname, including members of the new diplomatic mission and their families.⁶⁴ Furthermore, stories about Gaddafi’s supposed intrigues overlooked the Brazilians. They “have made it clear that they will not allow Suriname...to become a focus of East-West tensions or a base for the export of revolution,” wrote a correspondent for the *Miami Herald* in December 1985. He noted only “two constraints for Suriname’s military rulers when they chart this South American country’s often erratic foreign policy: the constraints imposed upon them by neighboring Brazil and their dislike of the Dutch.”⁶⁵

In the meantime, Bouterse courted, then expelled the Cubans, accepted a multimillion-dollar stadium from the People’s Republic of China, and made trade agreements with such varied partners as Taiwan and Iran, before “cozying up to the Libyans.” Because of the Brazilian presence in Suriname diplomatic sources doubted “that the developing Libyan relationship...” would “get out of hand.”⁶⁶ It didn’t, among other reasons because Bouterse’s Bedouin banker did not produce the promised US\$100 million, and the Cold War began to wind

⁶²Anderson and Van Atta, *WP*, December 2, 1985; Bohning, *MH*, December 13, 1985.

⁶³*RC* 85-04 (May 10, 1985), 6.

⁶⁴Anderson and Van Atta, *WP*, December 2, 1985; Bohning, *MH*, December 13, 1985.

⁶⁵Bohning, *Ibid.*

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

down after 1985. Happily, civilian rule has prevailed in Suriname since 1988, save for a brief aberration in 1990-1991.

4. Brazil and French Guiana (Guyane)

4.1 Luso-Brazilian Occupation of Guyane, 1809-1817

As far as France was concerned in the 17th century, the Guianas stretched all the way from the Orinoco River to the Amazon.⁶⁷ By Napoleon's time, the Dutch and the English (after 1814) controlled almost two thirds (163,000 km² and 215,000 km², respectively) of that large expanse (over 600,000 km² excluding Venezuela east of the Orinoco). The French were left with an area bounded by the Maroni River in the west and the Oiapoque (Oyapock)⁶⁸ in the east, which amounted to only 15% (90,000 km²) and is known as Guyane. Down to the end of the 19th century, however, France refused to abandon its claims to the remaining 23% (140,000 km²) lying between the Oiapoque and Amazon Rivers. This territory had been placed under provisional Brazilian control by the Franco-Portuguese Convention of Paris, in 1817, pending a definitive settlement between the two contending parties. The latter was easier said than done; France and Brazil did not sign the Treaty of Berne ending their controversy until 1900. The disputed region later became the Brazilian state of Amapá.

Well into the present century, for their part, nationalists in Brazil dreamt of once again annexing Guyane,⁶⁹ which Luso-Brazilian troops had occupied without bloodshed from 1809 to 1817. Their conduct appears to have been above reproach, if compared to that of the French forces who invaded Portugal in 1807. They allowed Governor Victor Hugues and the garrison at Cayenne to sail away for France, rather than pack them off to Brazil as prisoners of war.⁷⁰ During the eight-year occupation, a Portuguese intendant governed the conquered colony and, according to a French historian, "gave a good impetus to economic life. He was assisted by a secretary-general, and the military did not

⁶⁷Louis XIV granted the French West Indian Company (1664) a 40-year concession to exploit parts of Africa, North America and the Caribbean, as well as "Cayenne and the lands of South America, from the Orinoco to the Amazon." René Ricatte, "La Terre et les hommes de Guyane," in *Antilles Françaises, Guyane, Haïti* (Paris: Hachette Guides Bleus, 1986), 136.

⁶⁸The French spelling appears in parentheses after the Brazilian, the first time a geographical name is mentioned, save where a common English version exists, e.g. Amazon.

⁶⁹Hubert Herring, *A History of Latin America from the Beginnings to the Present*, 3rd edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 219.

⁷⁰Soares, *História das fronteiras*, 55.

concern themselves with civilian matters.”⁷¹ In a similar vein, another French source recounts that: “The occupying forces always showed themselves courteous and continued to make the region prosper.”⁷²

Meanwhile, they collected some interesting botanical trophies, including useful or ornamental plants such as the avocado and imperial palm. Quite profitable proved a new species of sugar cane, the famous caiana, a corruption of *Caiena* (Cayenne). “With less husk and more juice than the Cabo Verde cane, brought by the Portuguese [from the islands so named], and responsible, during two and a half centuries, for our production of sugar and rum,” related a Brazilian geographer-historian, “the variety coming from Guiana rapidly displaced the former.”⁷³ But João, the prince regent and later king (1816-1826) of Portugal, had not seized Guyane because of its superior sugar cane or exotic flora.

For one thing, he was anxious to avenge the rape of his country by Napoleon’s armies, forcing the royal family and most of Portugal’s court to seek refuge in Brazil. For another, it was said that he “aspired to be Emperor of the Occident, [and] intended to make the conquest of Cayenne permanent.” In addition to a thirst for revenge and imperial ambitions, João wanted “to clear the mouth of the Amazon from any foreign threat.”⁷⁴ Until such time as the French might renounce their territorial claims down to the Amazon, Guyane would continue to menace the strategic integrity of Brazil. Furthermore, according to one Brazilian historian, “certain rumors” reaching Rio de Janeiro convinced the prince regent and his advisers that the “had better occupy French Guyana before England should do it.” In the latter event, he continues, “Portugal would be stuck with an extremely dangerous neighbor at the mouth of the Amazon River.”⁷⁵

At the Congress of Vienna, the Portuguese had further reason for mistrusting Britain. To strengthen the shaky regime of Louis XVIII and the “principle of legitimacy” advanced by Talleyrand, the victorious Allies allowed France to retain her 1792 boundaries. Though they kept the former French sugar islands of St. Lucia, Tobago, and Mauritius for themselves, the English sided

⁷¹Leo Elisabeth, “La domination française, de la paix d’Amiens a 1870,” in Pierre Pluchon (ed.), *Histoire des Antilles et de la Guyane* (Toulouse: Privat, 1982), 387.

⁷²Ricatte, “Terre et hommes,” 138.

⁷³Correia, “Brasil e Guianas,” 114.

⁷⁴Lewis A. Tams, “Brazil, Venezuela and the Amazon Basin: A Historical and Geographical Survey” (Washington: The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, 1978). Unpublished MS, 3-4. While still in possession of Guyane, João sent troops to occupy Uruguay (1816-1820). He subsequently annexed the former Spanish province (until 1811) to Brazil as the Cisplatine Province (1821). Uruguay only regained its independence in 1828, as a buffer state between Brazil and Argentina, thanks to strong pressure from Great Britain on both governments.

⁷⁵Soares, *História das fronteiras*, 56.

with the slippery French statesman on the question of Guyane. João “was betrayed by his British ally,”⁷⁶ and Portugal “had to restore Guiana to her enemy.”⁷⁷

4.1 The Contest for Amapá, 1830-1900

João VI's son, Pedro, proclaimed the independence of Brazil in 1822, and declared himself its first emperor. Unhappily for relations between Brazil and Guyane, the Franco-Portuguese Convention of 1817 was vague on a most crucial point: the signatories merely pledged to reach a permanent agreement sometime in the future, whilst Brazil kept nominal custody of the disputed territory. When Pedro abdicated and returned to Portugal in 1831, the government of Louis Philippe (1830-1848) took advantage of revolts against the regency ruling the country during the minority of his Brazilian-born son. The French infiltrated Amapá to reconnoiter the terrain and “locate strategic points that could be rapidly occupied...in case of an armed conflict.”⁷⁸ Then they went further, notes a French source, and “established a post at Mapa [Brazilian Amapá, whence the name of both town and state today] in the middle of the contested territory.” Protests from Rio de Janeiro persuaded them to abandon the site in 1840.⁷⁹ Not by coincidence two years afterward, the new emperor, Pedro II (1840-1889) founded a military colony bearing his name on the Araguari (Arouary) River, some 100 km to the south of Amapá.⁸⁰

Actually, “neither France nor Brazil interested themselves very much in the question...,” comments a geologist in Guyane, until gold was discovered in the contested territory half a century later.⁸¹ Efforts to reach a compromise with Louis Napoleon in 1855-1856 and Jules Ferry, a principal architect of the new French colonial empire, in Africa and Asia, foundered on the insistence of Paris that Rio de Janeiro accept the Araguari River as Brazil's northern boundary with Guyane.⁸² That would have pushed the frontier south, to within 60 km of the Amazon estuary. To fill some of the power vacuum in Amapá, *ad hoc* “local arrangements” were made. These led to the creation of a “de facto autonomous government” in 1878, the self-styled “Republic of Counani,” which installed

⁷⁶Tambs, “Brazil, Venezuela and the Amazon Basin,” 16.

⁷⁷Soares, *História das fronteiras*, 58.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁷⁹Ricatte, “Terre et hommes,” 140.

⁸⁰Soares, *História das fronteiras*, 64.

⁸¹Jean Petot, *L'or de Guyane: son histoire, ses hommes* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1986), 123-24.

⁸²Soares, *História das fronteiras*, 64.

itself at a tiny port by that name, between Amapá and the Calçoene (Carsewène) River, about 50 km to the north.⁸³

When “an African, Tomba,” discovered exceedingly rich alluvial deposits of gold around the headwaters of this river in 1893, neither Paris nor Rio de Janeiro could afford to let the region remain a no-man’s land between Brazil and the French colony. Within a year, at least 10,000 persons poured into the “disputed and unmanageable territory” to reach “the new El Dorado.”⁸⁴ Brazilian and French sources present rather different perspectives of events thereafter. One of the latter points out that “Brazil made an astute move (1894), in proposing the liberation of its convicts, on condition that they install themselves between the Amazon and the Oyapock [Oiapoque].”⁸⁵ Inevitably, friction followed between French “settlers and prospectors” on the one hand, and as many as 6,000 Brazilians searching for gold on the other.⁸⁶

On 8 May 1895, matters came to a head, when the governor of Guyane was informed that “the representative of France at Counani had been carried away forcibly.” Cayenne then dispatched a gunboat to rescue him from his captors at Amapá. “The French soldiers who were on board disembarked, and Captain Lunier demanded that the chief of the Brazilian guerrillas return the hostage to him.” In response, continues the same French author, “the bandit felled the officer with one revolver shot.” Whereupon, a “violent and murderous engagement ensued, which left sixty dead among the Brazilian guerrillas, seven killed and twenty wounded on the French side, and the hostage was freed.”⁸⁷

According to a Brazilian account, “Antillians, French, North Americans and Hispano-Americans” overran the Calçoene gold fields. These “foreigners” were “persecuting the Indians, enslaving the women and terrorizing the rough prospectors.” The Brazilians elected a triumvirate to enforce order in December 1894. Whereupon “the Cayenne authorities...selected a...traitor called Trajano, a runaway black from Belém...[giving him] the title of captain-governor of Amapá.” Fighting soon broke out “between Brazilians and adventurers, which displeased the authorities at Cayenne.” They then sent a detachment of soldiers on a gunboat named the “Bengali,” and an armed clash took place “between Brazilians led by Veiga Cabral [of the triumvirate] and the French, commanded by Captain Lunier. The latter and various soldiers were killed in bold and open

⁸³Ricatte, “Terre et hommes,” 140; Louis Abénon, “De la colonie à la dépendance départementale, 1870-1914,” in Pluchon (ed.), *Histoire Antilles et Guyane*, 420.

⁸⁴Petot, *L’or de Guyane*, 124. An earlier estimate placed the influx of persons at 20,000. Arthur Henry, *La Guyane Française, son Histoire 1604-1946* (Cayenne: Ed. Paul Laporte, 1950), n.p., cited by Serge-Mam-Lam-Fouck, *Histoire de la société guyanaise. Les années cruciales: 1848-1946* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1987), 110.

⁸⁵Ricatte, “Terre et hommes,” 140.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*; Petot, *L’or de Guyane*, Table, “Population Minière de la Guyane,” [240].

⁸⁷Ricatte, “Terre et hommes,” 140.

combat.” The author relates that the shoot-out at Amapá “caused exasperation in Paris—and an immense sensation in Rio de Janeiro....”⁸⁸

Fortunately for Brazil, the Amapá affair occurred at a time when the French could not afford to get bogged down in the jungles of South America. With the exception of czarist Russia, France was virtually without friends in Europe by 1890, observes Paul Kennedy, “challenging Britain in Egypt and West Africa and...in a determined naval race with the Royal Navy, quarreling with Italy almost to the point of blows, and girding itself for *revanche* against Germany.” On the home front, Kennedy continues, *l'affaire Dreyfus* (1894-1906) was only the most serious of repeated confrontations between civil and military authorities. “Grave as these consequences were for the navy,” he explains, “they paled by comparison with the effect upon the army.”⁸⁹

Encouraged by Bismarck initially, France cobbled together the world’s second largest colonial empire between 1871 and the end of the century, approximately 9,000,000 km².⁹⁰ Amapá’s 140,000 km² thus amounted to a mere 1.6% of the new French territorial acquisitions in Africa and Asia. From a demographic standpoint, the 30,000 inhabitants of Guyane in 1895 were equal to less than 0.2% of neighboring Brazil’s 14,300,000 people in 1889. In addition to natural increase, during the 1890’s up to 200,000 or more immigrants were arriving there from Europe in a single year.⁹¹ Combining these factors, with their internal weaknesses and geopolitical isolation in Europe, it does not seem surprising that the French were finally ready to settle the long dispute over Amapá. “Feeling that the authorities in Cayenne had exceeded themselves, the government in Paris showed itself capable of understanding,” wrote a Brazilian historian. “The grave incident created a propitious atmosphere for international arbitration.”⁹² Both governments agreed to refer their controversy to the president of the Swiss Federation for arbitration. In 1900, or 83 years after the provisional Franco-Portuguese agreement, they signed the Treaty of Berne, which awarded the entire territory of Amapá to Brazil.

⁸⁸Soares, *História das fronteiras*, 64.

⁸⁹Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), 219-20.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 220. Jules Ferry, twice Premier of the Third French Republic (1880-1885) boasted that his party had “in less than ten years, given France four kingdoms in Asia and Africa...Tunisia, Indochina, Madagascar and the Congo...” Quoted in Louis L. Snyder (ed.), *The Imperialist Reader* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1962), 124.

⁹¹Mam-Lam-Fouck, *Société Guyanaise*, Table, “L’evolution démographique,” 167; Schneider, *Order and Progress*, 68-69.

⁹²Soares, *História das fronteiras*, 65.

4.2 Brazilians in Guyane, 1855-1985

Brazilian presence west of the Oiapoque after 1817 seems to have consisted mostly of half-caste Amerindians (*métis*), slipping back and forth from Amapá and Pará. Some settled down at Guisambourg, a small agricultural colony on the east bank of the Approuague River, between Cayenne and the Oiapoque. One of these Brazilians, named Manuel Vicente, heard rumors of gold in the river's upper reaches, but his plans to prospect for it came to naught. In Belém, he had recruited a *méti* called Paolino, who was a veteran of the gold fields in Minas Gerais. Thrown upon his own in Guisambourg, Paoline (as he was known to the French) posed as a fisherman while secretly searching for gold up river.⁹³

Word of his modest strike leaked out to Félix Coüy, the local commissioner-intendant and retired Marine captain turned planter. Through the good offices of Théodose, a Brazilian *méti* employed by Coüy, the French official persuaded Paoline to serve as guide and mining consultant for an expedition up the Approuague in August 1855. Coüy's subsequent success touched off half a century of gold rushes to Guyane. Given the fact that he owed his good fortune to Paoline, perhaps it was only an irony of fate that he should later have been murdered by a Brazilian, in October 1863. The assassin, one Paíva, ambushed the unfortunate Frenchman at his placer mine near a hill that Coüy had gallantly named after the Empress Eugenie.⁹⁴

Other than the gold fields of Guyane and the seemingly eternal controversy over Amapá, Brazilian interest in the French colony waned until World War II. The determination of Marshal Pétain's pro-Axis government at Vichy, to "keep the former French colonies at any cost," presented Brazil with unusual opportunities. When France's three Caribbean colonies were subjected to economic blockade by the Allies, French exports to Guyane fell from 50% of the prewar level in 1940, to 7% the following year, and then nothing. Cayenne's next door neighbor, Brazil, became the colony's most important trading partner for the years 1940-1942. Once Guyane joined the Free French cause in 1943, the blockade was lifted, and the United States replaced Brazil as its principal customer. But the latter remained Cayenne's chief source of imports until after the war.⁹⁵ Had it not been for Brazil, then, Guyane would have faced the same scarcity of food and other essentials that caused much hardship in Guadeloupe and Martinique during the Vichy years.

⁹³Petot, *L'or de Guyane*, 39-44.

⁹⁴Mam-Lam-Fouck, *Société Guyanaise*, 86-7; Petot, *L'or de Guyane*, 45-53, 74.

⁹⁵Mam-Lam-Fouck, *Société Guyanaise*, 158-9. For a brief review of the Vichy regime in the French Antilles and Guyane, see Abénon, "Colonie à la dépendance," 431-3.

Whatever the business opportunities in Cayenne during World War II, it was still a potential threat to Brazil's national security while controlled by the Pétain regime. When Brazil declared war on the Axis Powers (August 1942), a close adviser of President Getúlio Vargas later recalled that some enthusiastic members of the military establishment "were anxious to participate in the war..." and suggested to their American counterparts "an operation to land Brazilian troops in French Guiana."⁹⁶ Cayenne's defection to the Free French six months later obviated even a theoretical case for a replay of Prince João's 1809 scenario. Larger and certainly more dangerous missions awaited the military in Europe, where a Brazilian Expeditionary Force of more than 25,000 men fought skillfully and with valor against veteran German divisions in Italy.⁹⁷

In contrast to the unstable new republics of Guyana and Suriname, the generals in Brasilia had nothing to fear from French Guiana after the war. The former colony became the Overseas Department of Guyane in 1946, that is, an integral part of metropolitan France itself. Moreover, as long as Cayenne remained almost totally dependent upon subsidies from Paris, there was very little likelihood of Guyane going astray. Quite the opposite occurred, and Brazil appears to have again become a source of headaches for French Guiana, rather than the other way around.

The 1961 Census listed 3,664 "foreigners" in a population of 33,534: "more than 2000" of them from St. Lucia and only "some 80" from Brazil. By 1967, however, there were nearly 8,000 immigrants, "the majority composed of Brazilians," according to sources in Cayenne.⁹⁸ Large numbers of "emaciated Brazilian people" were crossing the Oiapoque, one of their compatriots observed in 1965, "being attracted to the territory of French Guiana to obtain better wages."⁹⁹ Construction of the Guianese Space Center (CSG) at Kourou, 56 km west of Cayenne, began in 1964 and continued until the end of the decade. While this work lasted, the pay and fringe benefits were generous by South American standards for unskilled labor. The trouble was that, when Kourou was completed, "only part of the labor force returned to their country of origin."¹⁰⁰ Apropos of French efforts to deport thousands of migrant workers back to Amapá and Pará, one of Brasilia's most able diplomats confessed that, no sooner were they expelled, than most of them sneaked back again into Guyane.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶Cleantho de Paiva Leite, "O Brasil e o Caribe," *Revista brasileira de política internacional* (Rio de Janeiro) XXI:81/84 (1978): 11.

⁹⁷Schneider, *Order and Progress*, 149.

⁹⁸Elie Castor and Georges Othily, *La Guyane, les grands problèmes, les solutions possibles* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1984), 67.

⁹⁹Soares, *História das fronteiras*, 68.

¹⁰⁰Jean-Claude Giocottino, *Les Guyanes (Guyana, Surinam, Guyane française)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), 60.

¹⁰¹Ricúpero, "Brasil e Bacia Amazônica," 72.

Twenty years later, the population had grown to 73,000, of whom 19,000 (26%) were foreigners. A discussion of the 1982 Census in the French National Assembly brought out the fact that some aliens had indeed entered Guyane legally, “but most, coming essentially from Haiti and Brazil are in an irregular situation.”¹⁰² The Haitians infiltrated from Suriname, which they reached on cheap charter flights. The Census listed 5,492 of them, as opposed to 3,358 Brazilians. Together, they accounted for almost half (46%) of the immigrant population. The squalid and unsanitary living conditions of their shanty-town ghettos in Cayenne—denounced as “veritable South American favelas” in the French National Assembly—were straining the Department of Guyane’s limited budgets for medical assistance and public health programs.¹⁰³

A backlash against these unwanted aliens in the early 1980’s provoked xenophobic cries of “genocide through substitution, elimination of the Guianese.”¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, during the 1990’s the most undesirable illegal immigrants were not to be found in the slums of Cayenne. They were roaming about the interior, where much of the prospecting for gold is “carried out by teams of Brazilian *garimpeiros*...causing ecological damage through the silting up of rivers and the indiscriminate use of mercury.”¹⁰⁵ Their methods have changed little from the times of Paoline and Félix Coüy. They have already wreaked havoc in the Amazon regions of Brazil and Venezuela, decimating defenseless Amerindian tribes in their obsessive quest for gold. And, in recent years, the *garimpeiros* have been penetrating southwestern Guyana from their staging ground in Boa Vista.¹⁰⁶

5. Epilogue

From colony to empire and republic, real or imagined threats have shaped Brazil’s perspectives of the “geopolitical cyst” on its northern flank. Occupation of Guyane and General Venturini’s mission to Paramaribo were examples of defensive strategies, rather than the reverse. José Sarney (1985-1990) became Brazil’s first civilian president in 21 years, but the generals still decided all

¹⁰²Text of intervention by François Massot, vice-president of a parliamentary committee studying the immigration problem in Guyane. 17/11/83, transcribed in Castor and Othily, *La Guyane*, 80-81.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 66-67, 81.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁰⁵Ben Box (ed.), *1994 South American Handbook* (Chicago, IL: Passport Books, 1993), 1386.

¹⁰⁶See, for example, Roland Ely, “Las implicaciones del Proyecto Calha Norte de Brasil para Guyana y Suriname,” *Geosur* (Asociación Sudamericana de Estudios Geopolíticos e Internacionales, Montevideo) XII:133-134 (May/June 1991): 33-46, passim; *Guyana Review* (Georgetown) 29 (June 1995): 12; *Guyana Chronicle*, 20/07/95; *Stabroek Review* (Georgetown), 19/07/95; *Stabroek News*, 20/07/95.

matters relating to national security. “Acting as a corporation,” two analysts pointed out in the early 1990’s, “the Armed Forces [of Brazil] control four ministries, the technical-scientific frontier, and the northern strip of the grand Amazonian frontier—the Calha Norte.”¹⁰⁷

Sarney enthusiastically rubber-stamped the overly ambitious *Projeto Calha Norte (PCN)* or Northern Channel Project, a few months after he became president. Its official goal was to integrate the vast region north of the Amazon and Solimões Rivers (1,220,000 km², or 14% of the national domain) with the rest of Brazil. The PNC’s most controversial aspect has been its stated intention to develop an enormous strip or band, 150 km in width, running for more than 6,000 km along the entire northern frontier. Military posts and air strips precede roads, civilian settlements and eventually hydro-electric projects (see Figure 6.3, from Becker 1990). Purportedly, the PNC would protect Brazil from threats to its national security in the north. That was back in 1985.

Today the Cold War is over. Without the former Soviet Union behind him, Castro no longer appears relevant. The Sandinistas seem to be a spent force in Nicaragua. Bishop and Burnham are dead. Bouterse no longer dictates the destiny of Suriname. France continues very much in control of Guyane. With the backing of Brazil itself, Venezuela hopes to become a member of MERCOSUR. That leaves only dysfunctional, strife-torn Colombia as a prime source of penetration by subversive elements, such as guerrilla bands, or cultivators and traffickers of drugs, with whom the former are often allied. The PCN may never reach completion because the costs would be astronomical. Meanwhile, the project represents a most convincing expression of ingrained Brazilian fears of danger from the north dating back to the colonial period.

¹⁰⁷Becker and Egler, *Brazil*, 158, Fig. 6.3.

Normal 0 21 false false false MicrosoftInternetExplorer4 As relações entre Brasil (Amapá) e Guiana Francesa caracterizaram-se, no decorrer do século XX, por aproximações e distanciamentos que, ainda hoje, não se estruturaram de forma clara. Por um lado, disputaram por muito tempo fronteiras em comum, implicando em conflitos armados, entreveros diplomáticos e desconfianças. Por outro, ambas entidades políticas intercambiaram imigrantes, atividades econômicas e comerciais. O primeiro lustro dos anos 1940 foi o período em que se estruturou o Território Federal do Amapá, hoje Estado, e a Guiana Francesa.

João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo, four-star general and president of Brazil from 1979 to 1985. One of the planners of the 1964 coup that established 21 years of military rule, Figueiredo was the last in the succession of five officers chosen by the armed forces to govern Brazil as president in that period. He was an instructor specializing in intelligence in the military's advanced training schools when the coup took place. One month, his handpicked successor, General João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo, won the indirect election for president. João Figueiredo (born 27 May 1918) is a Brazilian professional footballer who plays as a forward for Emirati club Al-Wasl. On 2 August 2019, Superleague club OFI officially announced the acquisition of Figueiredo on a three-year deal for a fee of €100,000. In 24 games in a remarkable 2019-20 season, the 23-year-old Brazilian attacker scored nine goals for OFI, with one of them being the winner against Lamia which secured their place in the championship playoffs. João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo (Portuguese: [ˈʒɐ̃ˈwɐ̃tʃɨˈbɐ̃tɨstɐ dɐ̃ˈoliˈvɐjɐ̃ˈʃɛjɐ̃ˈɐ̃dɐ]; January 15, 1918 – December 24, 1999) was a Brazilian military leader and politician. He was the 30th President of Brazil from 1979 to 1985. He was the last of the military regime that ruled the country following the 1964 coup d'état. João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo (Portuguese: [ˈʒɐ̃ˈwɐ̃tʃɨˈbɐ̃tɨstɐ dɐ̃ˈoliˈvɐjɐ̃ˈʃɛjɐ̃ˈɐ̃dɐ]; January 15, 1918 – December 24, 1999) was a Brazilian military leader and politician who was the 30th President of Brazil, the last of the military regime that ruled the country following the 1964 coup d'état. He was chief of the Secret Service (SNI) during the term of his predecessor, Ernesto Geisel, who appointed him to the presidency at the end of his own mandate. He took the oath of office on March 15