

Grand Anse beach – smashed up in the fighting during the airborne operation in 1983 – has also produced a handsome new hotel, aptly named the Ramada Renaissance. It is well up to international standards but is not, despite the name, American-financed. This act of faith was organized by an investment group in Trinidad. Likewise, the new direct airline service to New York, proudly named Grenada Airlines, has no American dollars behind it. The initiative was taken by a French-Lebanese consortium which intends to build another tourist hotel and link it with the Ramada in a package tour for Americans and Canadians.

In Belize, at the far western end of the Caribbean, I found a familiar schizophrenia about the value of a powerful American presence. The energetic young educationist who came to power at the head of a conservative regime in the recent election, Manuel Esquivel, is as firm a believer in “the magic of the marketplace” as is Mr. Reagan, but he does not want to be suffocated by an American bear-hug. He and his Foreign Minister, Dean Barrow, find it irritating that Washington has posted no less than 55 diplomats to their little capital, Belmopan.

As for the military embrace, the ambassador – a Reaganite hawk – keeps pressing for Belize to double the flow of young men into US Army training courses, although there are some 400 already in the pipeline.

By way of a counterbalance, Mr. Esquivel recently ordered the posting of six army officer cadets to Canadian training establishments, even though this cost the Belize exchequer hard currency. Another counterweight to the US embrace is a vigorous training programme for the new Belizean Defence Force, conducted by members of the 1500-strong British contingent.

(The British troops have been stationed there since colonial times because of Guatemalan territorial claims and threats of invasion.) What lurks in the back of Belizean minds is the thought that, should Washington under Reagan and Weinberger consider Guatemalan support vital in the battle against Marxism, Belize might be expendable.

In Jamaica I found the conservative administration of Edward Seaga privately bitter about US lack of support. The Prime Minister had publicly championed Thatcherite and Reaganite economics when coming to power five years ago and was rewarded with concessionary measures and aid worth \$ 680 million which has been tapering off ever since. Funds from the Caribbean Basin Initiative have failed to appear and the protectionist measures introduced by Washington last spring are hitting sugar, textiles and other vital Jamaican exports. During my visit there, Mr. Seaga gave a media briefing in sharply angry terms, then went off to Parliament and said most of it publicly.

It is against this background of disillusion, which I detected in all twelve Caribbean territories, that Mr. Reagan’s plan for military security must be assessed. His instinctive urge to enlist the support of these small island leaders for his anti-Marxist crusade is now seen by most West Indian prime ministers (although not Mr. Blaize in Grenada) as a potentially mortal hazard on the political minefield.

The first notable casualty was the moderately conservative leader, Bernard St. John of Barbados. He had inherited the mantle of the late Tom Adams and was, with him, intimately involved in the 1983 “sky-punch”, carried out by the American paratroops in Grenada. The Barbadian voters, in their first opportunity to register their view at the polls, swept away these mild conservatives in a landslide that cost Mr. St. John his own seat.

The wily (and conservative) Prime Minister of Trinidad, George Chambers, began his distancing tactics by avoiding the Grenada rally in February. This summer, when Washington called for troops from the islands to take part in “Operation Ocean Venture”, along with 300 men from the 82nd Airborne Division, Trinidad firmly declined.

So, surprisingly, did the free enterpriser and hotelier, James Mitchell, in St. Vincent. He is no longer a Reagan acolyte. His traumatic shock came when he was briefly away from home base and a spectacular offer was made to the acting prime minister by the disgraced ex-president of the Phillipines, Ferdinand Marcos: \$ 60 million for guaranteed safe sanctuary on one of the “out-islands” in the Grenadines. The offer was rebuffed.

I listened to Mr. Mitchell give a fascinating account of the plot, as he described it, over his own national network. The continuing entente between Mr. Reagan

and Mr. Marcos rang alarm bells in the West Indies. Political leaders, even those in small islands, do not relish being cast as puppets.

Small wonder that I found the former Jamaican prime minister, the socialist Michael Manley, in buoyant mood when I was staying in Kingston. The polls show his People’s National Party (PNP) running at 62 percent, as compared with 35 percent for the conservative Mr. Seaga. The latter, under some obligation because of the dribbles of aid he has received under the Basin plan, had decided that he must send a token contingent of Jamaican troops to the “Ocean Venture” sea-air exercise off Grenada. It may have been a politically fatal decision. The Carl Stone poll, which has a notable record for accuracy, showed support for Mr. Seaga going immediately into a steep decline.

Although the next election is not due for two years, Mr. Manley can scent victory. His major policy speech, coming on the heels of these events, dealt with the core issue of security:

“The biggest threat to our sovereignty comes from the neocolonialist political leaders of the Caribbean on the radical right who seem to have given up the thought that Caribbean independence is viable.

“This situation is even more dangerous because it coincides with a US administration that is unapologetically and aggressively hegemonic. It intends to assert US power in this region on the basis of fostering those political processes it favours.”

This is the ultimate irony: the Reagan strategy has boomeranged because the six million people of the anglophone Caribbean value their sovereignty, have local loyalties, and are prepared to plunge leftward if that seems to be the only way to preserve their national identity. □



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