

Small state security in the Caribbean

by Fauzya Moore

International crisis accompanied by diplomatic activity is almost always followed by a flurry of "policy relevant" academic analysis. The Grenada crisis of 1983 is no exception. And yet, four years after the event, it may be true that the immediate diplomatic and subsequent academic activity has produced little but a debate on the US intervention, and almost nothing in the way of constructive alternatives. One is left with the uncomfortable feeling that the small states of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS, composed of Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Christopher & Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent & The Grenadines), who simply rationalized the American presence as intervention by invitation (and explained that there are well established precedents amongst Caribbean states for minding each other's business) may well have been right.

And yet, the Grenada crisis may have long term, detrimental effects on the Caribbean region. It divided the states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM, composed of the seven in OECS plus The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago) amongst themselves. The support of the OECS, Barbados and Jamaica for the intervention provided a partial legitimacy to the principle of intervention in a hemisphere that has known too many. It widened for a while the existing diplomatic divisions between the English-speaking Caribbean and the Latin American littoral; and in the aftermath of the crisis the United States has increased its tendency to act as regional watchdog, in cooperation with many of the states of the Eastern Caribbean.

Commonwealth study

One important attempt to address the question of the options of small states in such circumstances is the Commonwealth report *Vulnerability, Small States in the Global Society*. It was commissioned at the 1983 Commonwealth summit in New Delhi as part of an ongoing concern for the security of small states, made more urgent by the need to reconcile the angry states of the Eastern Caribbean with the wider Commonwealth community. The report was presented to the Commonwealth summit in Nassau in 1985 and its implementation is being considered at the Vancouver summit in October.

The report is as thorough an exposition of the problems confronting very small states as may be found. Partly because of the way the study was put together it is more of a practitioners' manual than an academic text, and it reads not so much of academic rigor as of diplomatic compromise. The

recommendations of the study are divided into three areas, national, regional and international. They are by and large sensible if conservative. Small states are reminded that the "prudent management of statecraft" is the best way of avoiding hostile attention, that regional arrangements for a range of needs — economic, diplomatic and security-related — are often the most cost-effective way of deploying scarce manpower and technical skills. The international community is reminded — in very pragmatic ways — that "At the very least (it) has a moral obligation to provide effectively for their territorial integrity."

The process

The report was written by a group of experts, after they had attended a series of regional colloquia, convened by the Commonwealth Secretariat, at which a heterogeneous group of representatives (mostly diplomats, bureaucrats and academics) from the small states of the Caribbean, Indian Ocean/Southern African area, the Mediterranean, Asia and the South Pacific discussed their "special problems." The purpose of the working groups was to produce a report which both identified the special problems of small states, and appealed to the international community for assistance in resolving them. The group attempted to develop a category of issues peculiar to the small states of these regions, and to place their findings within a framework determined almost exclusively by the criterion of small size, and the attendant issue of "vulnerability." And therein lies the report's strength and weakness. While on the one hand it adequately documents the condition of small states, it also attempts to create a new concept based on small size without any acknowledgement of the theoretical debates that normally inform the study of the developing world.

There are important issues that remain unresolved as a result. For instance the role of political and commercial elites in perpetuating dependent relations with metropolitan centers, and in contributing to internal stability or instability, is never considered, presumably because of its political sensitivity (the report is after all a Commonwealth report), and possibly because in bringing together such mixed groups from the various regions, the question of the role of elites may not have been raised.

Problem of definition

Political compromise occasionally weakens the analysis. For example, the definition of a small state. The concept has occupied political theorists for some time — whether to classify a small state by territorial size, population, economic power, political influence or some other test. The group decided on a population measurement: a small state is one of

Fauzya Moore is a Grants Officer at the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security in Ottawa.