

## I.

### INTRODUCTION

Let us not delude ourselves. The Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on. If they weren't engaged in this game of dominoes, there wouldn't be any hot spots in the world.<sup>1</sup>

The current crisis in the Caribbean Basin (the island and littoral states of the Caribbean Sea) has thus far resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands caught in civil violence between left and right, the creation of an internal and cross border refugee problem affecting millions, and the crippling of the already weak economies of a number of states in the region. It has provoked a gradual but significant increase in United States military involvement in regional conflict and covert support for anti-Sandinista Nicaraguans. It raises the prospect of direct US military intervention (the deployment of regular combat units) either in support of the Salvadoran or against the Nicaraguan regime. The latter would entail substantial political problems within the United States and in US relations with its allies, including Canada. If the United States became bogged down in such a conflict, there would be considerable temptation, in Alexander Haig's words, "to go to the source", to attack Cuba. This in turn carries some risk of direct Soviet military involvement in the region or retaliation elsewhere, with attendant dangers of superpower confrontation and escalation. As such, the crisis demands the urgent attention not only of policy-makers and strategic analysts, but also of the informed public at large. It is a problem, moreover, of direct relevance not only to the nations of the region and the United States, but to the latter's allies as well.

This paper is an analysis of the nature and policy implications of Soviet involvement in the crisis in the Caribbean Basin. It is sometimes maintained that the Soviet Union, either directly or through "proxies" such as Cuba and Nicaragua, is the principal source of the region's instability and violence. According to this view, difficulties in the Caribbean Basin are one aspect of a global Soviet strategic threat to the United States and Western civilization, the states of the region being on a "hit list", as the Soviet Union's influence and power gradually close in on the US heartland. The region's conflicts are East-West rather than North-South, or, for

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Reagan, as cited in Arthur Schlesinger, "Foreign Policy and the American Character", *Foreign Affairs* 62 (Winter 1983), 3.