

# AFTER GRENADA:

*US Policy in the Caribbean. By Patrick Keatley*

■ **History teaches that leaders of governments have been notoriously fallible in judging where their own vital national interests lie and, therefore, where to apply geopolitical pressures.**

■ A circuit tour of the English-speaking democracies in the Caribbean, extending over several months, has left me with a strong impression that the strategy of the Reagan administration is culpable of this elementary fault.

It can be summed up in the phrase used by the Prime Minister of one of the smaller island territories. "President Reagan," he said to me, "is engaged in boomerang diplomacy. When the United States missions carry out the orders sent to them from Washington, time and again these initiatives turn out to be counter-productive. What went out as a diplomatic weapon, intended to block the advance of Marxism in the Caribbean Basin, actually comes back and hits us instead. If the aim is to shore up the stability of small, democratic territories and to prevent a slide to the left, as happened in Grenada, they are going the wrong way about it."

I have deliberately suppressed the identity of that island leader because, understandably, these prime ministers of the Commonwealth Caribbean have been reluctant until now to "go public" in their diplomatic tug-of-war with Washington. All of them – with the interesting exception of James Mitchell, the Canadian-educated Prime Minister of St. Vincent – submitted themselves to the supporting roles assigned to them

at the Roman triumph staged at Queen's Park in Grenada in February of this year. They courteously grouped themselves around Mr. Reagan for the predictable photograph. The Trinidadian leader, George Chambers, decided at the last minute to absent himself.

When my lecture tour brought me to Trinidad some weeks later, Mr. Chambers' no-show was explained to me by a distinguished West Indian editor who remarked drily: "George was unwilling to play Caractacus with an election coming."

The same motivation, it is thought, led the Vincentian leader, Mr. Mitchell, to find a suitable pretext for staying away from the Grenadian rally altogether. Politicians develop a kind of radar for these things, and the signal I picked up in my circuit of a dozen Caribbean capitals is that the Ronald Reagan 'Seal of Approval' is no longer an electoral asset. The Queen's Park rally is, in retrospect, proving an embarrassment for those who did turn out, because of the way the President chose to associate them publicly with his personal crusade against the Left in Central America.

Some 40,000 Grenadians swayed to calypso music in roasting sunshine at the dusty cricket field, awaiting the arrival of the man they cheered as "Uncle Reagan" and "our liberator." When he arrived, in the company of Messrs.

Shultz and Weinberger, the cheers were gratifyingly deafening. I do not doubt that Grenadians are still profoundly grateful for being delivered, by the US Army's Airborne Division, from the grip of an authoritarian, one-party state in October 1983. When the *deus ex machina* appeared in person, borne before them in a bullet-proof limousine, they cheered his every word.

But, for the West Indian leaders who shared the platform with the President, there were words which, like the souvenir photo, are already having a boomerang effect. Even the staunchly pro-Republican *Time* magazine was prepared to sound a cautionary note:

"The audience Reagan was really addressing was back home. His extravagant, minutely-orchestrated five-hour drop-in on Grenada became the centrepiece of a campaign to sell what has become known as the Reagan Doctrine: US support for 'freedom fighters' battling Soviet-backed governments around the world. Reagan's speech at Queen's Park went beyond praise of new-found freedom in Grenada to rail against the absence of it in Nicaragua."

The Washington correspondent of the *London Guardian* summed up thus:

"Despite an overweening display of loyalty to President Reagan led by the Grenadian prime minister, Herbert Blaize, leaders of the English-speaking Caribbean islands left the summit here all but empty-handed.

"They were required to listen to an impassioned plea by Mr. Reagan for aid to the contras in their fight against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua; a cause which clearly failed to ignite passion. The \$100 million which he is requesting from Congress for the

contras next year is more than all the economic assistance pumped into the Caribbean islands for the last two years."

The *Time* magazine report was equally critical on this score, referring to "the President's stand-tall rhetoric" and his rosy prediction of how "in the not-too-distant future I see US businessmen flocking to the Caribbean... it's encouraging to witness what can happen in an environment where free enterprise is allowed to flourish."

The magazine went on:

"The praise was premature. Despite the \$74 million in US aid over the past two years, the before-and-after picture of Grenada is pretty much the same. The problems that beset the island under Marxist rule persist: minimal foreign investment, primitive communications and electricity systems; unemployment is 30% and twice that among youth. Grenada was meant to be one of the beneficiaries of Reagan's 1983 Caribbean Basin Initiative... but last year Caribbean exports to the US dropped by 23%."

The *Washington Post* chose the week of Reagan's expedition to Grenada to assess the impact of the Basin plan, which it described as floundering. It noted that imports from the Caribbean had slipped while those arriving in the United States from other regions of the world had increased by 46 percent (Commerce Department official figures).

On my own visit to Grenada, an island I know well, I was disappointed to find no sign of the US investors and traders that Mr. Reagan had promised. The rescue job that has transformed two older hotels on the spectacular