

I.

THE GEO-POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The United States of America

The continued geo-strategic significance of the Caribbean Sea derives from the importance of its sea lanes for commercial and military purposes and its proximity to the United States, which identifies a secure and stable Caribbean as vital to the performance of its widespread global commitments. Thus despite their small size the Caribbean states are thrust into the front rank of US defence objectives.

Whether the roots of US concern be a perception of Cuba as a Soviet surrogate, the withdrawal of the British colonial presence, or the demonstrated interest of the Soviet Union in developing relationships with responsive regimes, the United States has redefined its geo-political space as the "Caribbean Basin". The concept links the Caribbean to Central America and imports into the region, thus redefined, a sense of endemic crisis which may be true of Central America but which is not characteristic of the English-speaking Caribbean. Caribbean policy-makers must cope, therefore, with the perception that vital United States interests are under threat in their area, whether or not they themselves believe this to be the case.

However, the limited diplomatic resources of small states are inadequate for the task of representation in Washington given the complex foreign policy and institutional structures of the United States. These structures were designed for strategic purposes and are not always suitable for dealing with areas such as the Caribbean with its developmental priorities.

The workshop also discussed other problems in the relationship between the small states and the United States. In keeping with the historic development of the Monroe Doctrine, the small states in the Caribbean do not have the option of maintaining close relations with countries looked on as enemies by the United States. While an improvement in relations between the superpowers, and more particularly a rapprochement between the United States and Cuba, would produce an easier political climate in the region, such an improvement would make little difference to constraints on the Caribbean countries' choice of politics and ideology.

Moreover, while the current global situation is still described in Cold War terms, there has been, with the emergence of Japan and the European Community, a fundamental change in the configuration of