Journal of Military and Strategic Studies, Fall and Winter 2008/9, Vol. 11, Issues 1 and 2.

GRENADA: PREEMPTIVE STRIKE

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The U.S. invasion of Grenada has been described variously as a violation of international law and American treaty commitments, a brazen Reagan demonstration of American military muscle against a small and defenseless country, and a spontaneous humanitarian mission to rescue students in distress. The record supports a different view, namely, that the invasion of Grenada was a preemptive strike, the last step in a year-and-a -half-long series of steps, to forestall a Soviet plan to deploy SS-20 missiles to the island.

The story begins with the Soviet attempt to develop a counter to the Carter administration's plan to deploy cruise missiles and the Pershing II intermediate-range missile to Western Europe. The U.S. plan was itself a response to the Soviet deployment of SS-20 missiles, a significant upgrade over the SS-4 and SS-5 missiles in place since the mid fifties, which threatened to enable the Soviet Union to dominate not only Western Europe, but also the entire Eurasian landmass.

The original U.S. plan to deploy the weapons package was coupled with an arms control proposal. If there was no arms control solution by 1983, then the United States would deploy its weapons to counterbalance Moscow's. Upon entering office, President Reagan embellished the U.S. position, adopting the zero option proposal of West Germany's Helmut Schmidt: The United States would cancel the Pershing/cruise deployment if the Soviet Union would dismantle its SS-20 program, leaving no missiles on either side.

Most scholarly attention focused on the U.S. offer, with little notice given to the Soviet counter offer. But it would be the Soviet counter offer that would drive events. Moscow offered to limit its SS-20 missile deployment in Europe to the combined total of British and French missiles, in their view some 162 missiles, if the United States canceled its plan. Washington and its partners promptly dismissed the Soviet offer out of hand. Britain and France declared that their weapons could not be counted in a U.S.-Soviet negotiation and West Germany pointed out that the Soviet plan would leave Bonn defenseless.

Soviet attention quickly focused on the Pershing II, a highly accurate missile that could be launched quickly and reach targets in the Soviet Union within ten minutes of launch. The Soviets claimed but Washington denied that the missile had the range to hit Moscow. As the negotiations stalemated, the Soviets raised the ante. On March 16, 1982, Leonid Brezhnev declared that if the United States deployed the Pershing II to West Germany, the Soviet Union would make an "analogous" deployment against United States' territory. The Soviets, Moscow promised, would make the same kind of threat against the United States that the United States would make against the Soviet Union.[1]

Moscow's Analogous Threat

Could the Soviets make good on such a threat? If so, how would they do it and where would they put it? American analysts quickly concluded that under the right circumstances Moscow could, just, make good on its threat. An analogous threat

[1] "Brezhnev Speech to the 17th Trade Union Conference," *FBIS-SU*, March 16, 1982, R 1-9.

meant deployment of a weapon similar to the Pershing II in range, accuracy, speed of launch, and time of flight. In late March 1982, they also concluded that there was only one weapon in Moscow's arsenal that approximated the required characteristics. This was the SS-20, a solid-fuel missile which was a reasonably accurate weapon with a range of 3,000 miles.

But where could Moscow deploy the SS-20? Aside from deploying it in the far Soviet northeast, where it could target Seattle, there were four more attractive possibilities, from which the Soviets could target most of the United States. These were: Cuba, Nicaragua, Grenada, and Suriname. Each, however, presented a specific problem. The Soviets could, of course, deploy SS-20s by sea to all four countries. But analysts gave a low probability to a slow-developing, sea-borne missile deployment like 1962, which, after all failed, and especially in view of the preponderance of power the United States could mobilize against it.

Moreover, under the Reagan administration's Maritime Strategy, the navy was increasing in size, power, and aggressiveness, sending carrier battle groups into Soviet waters to evaluate the capabilities of the Russian fleet. For Moscow, in other words, a slow-developing, sea-borne, missile deployment to the Caribbean would be a high-risk adventure. The United States would have to guard against this possibility, particularly as the Soviets stepped up shipping to both Cuba and Nicaragua in 1983, but the Soviets had decided on a different option.

The Soviets decided to utilize their recently developed large cargo jet, the Il-76 Candid to deploy the SS-20 by air. The Il-76 could carry outsize loads of 50 tons in an 80 foot-long compartment. The SS-20, including its self-contained transporter, erector,

launcher (TEL), weighed 37 tons and was 54 feet long. The limiting factors were that the Il-76 had a maximum range of roughly 3,000 miles and required a 10,000-foot runway.

Flying from West African airfields, the IL-76 could just reach Grenada and Suriname on a nonstop, direct flight, but not Cuba or Nicaragua, which were 1,500 miles further distant. From Grenada and/or Suriname, the SS-20 could target most of the United States. Indeed, from either of these two sites the Soviets could target more of the United States with SS-20s, than the United States could target of the Soviet Union with the Pershing II from West Germany. This would satisfy Moscow's "analogous" threat, and then some.

In March of 1982, however, the circumstances in Grenada and Suriname were almost diametrically opposite. In Grenada, Moscow appeared to have a solid ally in Maurice Bishop, leader of the New Jewel Party, who was broadly aping the communist form of government from party structure to revolutionary jargon. A modern airport, with a 10,000-foot runway was under construction, with Cuban and other bloc assistance. It was scheduled to open in time to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the Grenadian regime, March 13, 1984, but probably be useable some time before that.

In Suriname, on the other hand, Daniel Bouterse, who had led a coup that toppled the government in late 1980, was still in the process of consolidating his hold on power. However, there already existed a modern airport with a 10,000-foot runway in the capital of Paramaribo. Thus, in Grenada the political situation seemed to be stable, but the runway not yet completed, while in Suriname the reverse appeared to be true. Both situations were in flux, however, and would present Moscow with difficult

choices over the next year.

Early Caribbean Policy

From the perspective of the Reagan administration in late March 1982, it would be many months before either site would be ready to receive Soviet missiles, and therefore, enough lead-time for the administration to make the necessary adjustments to current policy and prepare the nation for any crisis that might come. The time frame for crisis was expected to be late in 1983, when the United States would deploy the Pershing II missile to West Germany and the Soviet Union would undertake to make good on its threat of an analogous deployment to the Caribbean.

Adjustments would be necessary, because early U.S. policy toward Grenada was based on the assumption that it would be a forward base for the export of subversion in the eastern Caribbean and, perhaps, on the South American mainland, not a missile base. The Senate Intelligence Committee's rejection of proposals to "destabilize" Grenada on grounds that the threat was "exaggerated," led the administration to focus on marginally strengthening the collective efforts of the states in the region.[2]

On June 18, 1981, with the quiet support of the United States, Canada, Venezuela, and Mexico, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, and Grenada, withdrew from the UK-sponsored West Indies States Association and established the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. Article 8 of the founding Basseterre Treaty charged its members

[2] Patrick Tyler, "U.S. Tracks Cuban Aid to Grenada," *New York Times*, February 27, 1983, p. 1.

with responsibility for collective defense and security against both external aggression and "the activities of mercenaries, operating with or without the support of internal or national elements." Collective action was to be based upon unanimous decisions of the member states.

In 1981, the U.S. Congress allotted the modest sum of $1 million in security assistance to OECS defense forces. In addition, the administration set up an FBI police school in Puerto Rico to train OECS police officers and the Puerto Rican National Guard set up a program to train paramilitary security units for Barbados, Dominica, and Jamaica. At the same time, the administration enlarged its own presence in the region. Between August and October, U.S. naval forces carried out one of its largest naval exercises since WWII, "Ocean Venture," on and around the Puerto Rican island of Vieques. And in December, the Department of Defense established the Caribbean Command at Key West, Florida.

In April of 1982 the administration made the first of several adjustments to policy, in light of the realization that Moscow had big plans for Grenada and/or Suriname. These adjustments, however, would be overshadowed by the outbreak of the Falkland Islands War on April 2. During what was termed a "working vacation" to Barbados, April 8-11, the president met with the leaders of four of the OECS states (Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts-Nevis, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines) and Barbados.[3]

The ostensible purpose of the trip was to discuss the Caribbean Basin Initiative he had just announced in February, but, in retrospect, it was to urge greater

[3] Lou Cannon, "Reagan Ties Aid Pledge To Warning," *Washington Post*, April 9, 1982, p. 3.

cooperation among Grenada's neighbors. Press accounts suggested that Reagan had simply wanted to visit with his former co-star Claudette Colbert, who lived on the island, but, in reality, the trip foreshadowed the future cooperation between Barbados, which was not a member of the OECS, and that organization. In public remarks, the president singled out Grenada, as bearing "the Soviet and Cuban trademark, which means that it will attempt to spread the virus among its neighbors."[4]

That October, under the auspices of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, Barbados and four members of the OECS (Dominica, St. Lucia, Antigua and Barbuda, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines) signed a memorandum of understanding establishing a Regional Security System. Their mandate was to prepare contingency plans against emerging security threats. The administration provided additional funding. For Fiscal Year 1983, U.S. security assistance to the nations near Grenada jumped. For example, military assistance to Dominica, where Prime Minister Eugenia Charles had beaten back an attempted coup the previous December, increased from $12,000 in 1981 to $317,000; to Barbados, from $61,000 to $170,000; and to St. Vincent & the Grenadines, from zero to $300,000.[5]

The Reagan Counteroffensive

On the broader international chessboard, by the turn of the year, President Reagan was preparing to commence his counteroffensive against the Soviet Union. He began it with the codification of his strategy in NSDD-75, the first systematic formulation of American strategy since NSC-68 of 1950. The administration also began

[4] "Text of President's Remarks," *New York Times*, April 9, 1983, p. 8.

to identify Grenada as the location of Moscow's "analogous" deployment. The first effort came in a speech by Nestor Sanchez, deputy assistant secretary of defense for inter-American affairs and a former CIA national intelligence officer for Latin America.

Charging that Grenada had become a "virtual surrogate" of Cuba, Sanchez said that from Grenada, Moscow "could literally place hostile forces and weapons systems capable of striking targets deep in the United States." The military facilities being constructed on the island "could provide air and naval bases…for the recovery of Soviet aircraft after strategic missions. It might also furnish missile sites for launching attacks against the United States with short- and intermediate-range missiles."[6]

A few days later, on March 10, President Reagan also focused on Grenada as a key element in Soviet and Cuban strategy. He ridiculed the views of some "experts" that construction of air and naval bases on Grenada and "facilities for the storage of munitions, barracks, and a training ground for the military….[was] simply to encourage the export of nutmeg." It wasn't nutmeg that was at stake here, he said, but U.S. national security.

> People who make these arguments haven't taken a good look at a map lately or followed the extraordinary buildup of Soviet and Cuban military power in the region or read the Soviets' discussions about why the region is important to them and how they intend to use it.[7]

Indeed, during the arms control negotiations, Soviet officials argued that the deployment of the Pershing II to West Germany would be a violation of the 1962 agreement on Cuba [!]. In the Soviet view, there had been a quid pro quo, the removal

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[5] "U.S. Has Quadrupled Latin Arms Aid," *Baltimore Sun*, December 2, 1982, p. 1.
[6] Patrick Tyler, "U.S. Tracks Cuban Aid to Grenada," *New York Times*, February 27, 1983, p. 1.

of U.S. missiles from Italy and Turkey in return for the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. If the United States deployed missiles to West Germany the Soviet Union would be justified in deploying missiles to "Cuba and other Central American countries." The Soviet negotiator, Vladimir Pavlichenko asked: "how would you like [us] to have missiles there?"[8]

Yuli Kvitsinsky, the head of the Soviet delegation explored the possibility of a trade of SS-20s for Pershing IIs on several occasions. He also asked "whether it would be possible for the U.S. to withdraw missiles from Western Europe once they had been positioned there, assuming an agreement was reached that required their removal."[9] The clear implication of these discussions was that the Soviet Union intended to establish the basis for a negotiated quid pro quo: if the United States deployed missiles to West Germany, then the Soviet Union would deploy missiles to the Caribbean.

In the meantime, President Reagan continued to feature Grenada in his speeches. On March 23, for example, while announcing the Strategic Defense Initiative, he warned of Soviet penetration into the Western Hemisphere. In addition to showing photos of military installations in Cuba and Nicaragua, he showed a photograph of the new airport being built in Grenada with its 10,000 foot runway. "The Soviet-Cuban militarization of Grenada," he said, "can only be seen as power projection into the region," where "more than half of all American oil imports now pass…"[10] The obvious purpose of these multiple references to Grenada was to warn

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[7] "Excerpts From President Reagan's Speech on His proposals for El Salvador," *New York Times*, March 11, 1983, p. 8. Weinberger

[8] Strobe Talbott, *Deadly Gambits*, (New York: Vintage, 1985), pp. 158-59.

[9] Ibid.

[10] "President's Speech on Military Spending and a New Defense," *New York Times*, March 24, 1983, p. 20.

Moscow that the United States was cognizant of the island's military possibilities and was prepared to take action against further inroads into the hemisphere.

Moscow's reaction, however, was to accelerate efforts to strengthen its positions in the region. Publicly, Moscow acted to build up the military strength of Cuba and Nicaragua, increasing shipments, while secretly rushing to complete preparations for the deployment of missiles to Grenada and Suriname. The Soviet plan for Grenada, in retrospect, appears to have involved four steps: secure the political allegiance of the Bishop regime; pre-position weapons on the island; send Cuban troops to provide security; and, deploy SS-20 missiles there once the airport was completed.

President Reagan was faced with a difficult challenge. He could not accuse the Russians of *planning* to put missiles into Grenada; they would simply deny it. And he could not afford to wait until *after* the fact; it would be too late. The Point Salinas airport would be completed late in the year, just as the United States was to deploy the Pershing II to West Germany, which was when it was thought the crisis would actually begin. The problem was, as the SS-20 required no permanent infrastructure, there would be little advance warning by way of the construction of missile sites on the island.

Aside from the superficial similarity with 1962--the surreptitious Soviet attempt to deploy intermediate-range missiles to a Caribbean base-- the current situation was unlike the Cuban missile crisis. In the Cuban case, Moscow had employed slow-moving ships, while in the Grenadian case the Soviets would be employing fast-flying aircraft. Then, the key component was a fixed concrete launcher complex for the SS-5, whose construction the administration monitored, while on this occasion the SS-20

contained its own mobile launcher, which did not require a fixed site. Finally, where the Kennedy administration had had more than adequate intelligence on Cuba, the Reagan administration had limited intelligence on Grenada.

An airborne insertion of missiles would involve rapid deployment once begun, making the situation extremely volatile because it would be risking war to interdict the aircraft. Thus, in Grenada, Moscow could move very quickly to present the United States with a fait accompli. The only way to prevent deployment was to deprive the Soviets of a place, or places, to deploy. The only ways to do that were either by dissuading the Grenadian and Surinamese leaderships from cooperating with Moscow's plans, or, failing that, by taking direct action. Reagan would do both.

Suriname

The president's first step was toward Suriname, a move that grew out of what, on the surface, appeared to be a botched Libyan attempt to deliver weapons to Nicaragua by air. In retrospect, however, the Libyan maneuver was a disguised Soviet test of an alternate airborne missile delivery route. In mid-April, a flight of four Libyan transport aircraft (one U.S.-manufactured C-130 and three Soviet Il-76Ts) en route to Nicaragua had requested a refueling stop in Venezuela. Caracas turned down the request, but Brasilia granted permission on the basis of the claim that the planes were transporting medical supplies.

The four planes landed at Recife, on the northeast coast of Brazil, but the C-130 experienced engine trouble and could not proceed. The three Il-76s, however, continued on to land at the inland city of Manaus. Based on a tip from the U.S.

Ambassador Tony Motley, that the aircraft were transporting arms, not medical supplies, as claimed on the flight manifest, Brazilian authorities detained the planes and sequestered the forty-man crew. Searching the planes, they discovered that the cargo included over one hundred tons of "heavy arms, missiles, Czechoslovak rifles, a dismantled Soviet training plane and at least five tons of bombs and grenades." Most of the crew were soldiers.[11]

> Brazilian technicians forced open the planes and removed the equipment….In Recife, the equipment, still in boxes, was placed in a tightly-guarded warehouse near the tarmac, while the cargo taken off the planes in Manaus was airlifted by military helicopters to an air force base 15 miles from the civilian airport.[12]

It seems that the Soviets were using Libya, which had over seventy Il-76 transports, to ship the weapons in a test of an air route Moscow could itself use later. But CIA director Bill Casey had obtained a copy of the flight manifest "from a human source in Libya."[13] U.S. authorities had not only provided the information upon which Brazil had acted, but undoubtedly obtained Venezuelan cooperation to deny the refueling request in the first place.

The episode gave President Reagan a chance to cooperate with America's Latin neighbors on another project, when a crisis broke with Brazil's neighbor, the former Dutch colony of Suriname.[14] In February 1980, Sgt. Desi Bouterse had overthrown the democratically elected government and imposed a rigid dictatorship, driving "at least 80,000 of the country's 350,000 people into exile."[15] Both the Soviet Union and Cuba

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[11] Warren Hoge, "Old U.S. Weapons Among Arms Found On a Libyan Plane," *New York Times*, April 25, 1983, p. 1.
[12] "Brazil Stops Libyan Arms For Nicaragua," *Washington Post*, April 20, 1983, p. 26.
[13] Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1987), p. 256.
[14] Michael Gettler, "Grounding of Libyan Planes In Brazil a 'Tremendous Gift,'" *Washington Post*, April 28, 1983, p. 14.
[15] "The CIA and Suriname," *Wall Street Journal*, June 3, 1983, p. 17.

had set up large embassies in Paramaribo and Cuban "advisers" had taken over key elements of the economy, including communications and airport facilities. Reportedly, there was a "secret deal" between Moscow and Suriname worth over $70 million, which would involve an enlarged Soviet presence, Cuban troops, and Libyan support.[16]

If successful, the Soviet-Suriname deal would give Moscow and Havana their first base on the South American mainland and unfettered use of Paramaribo's first-class airport. The crisis broke in early December 1982, when Bouterse, seeking to clear the way for a move into the Soviet-Cuban camp, began eliminating those who were objecting to his plans. He sent troops to shut down opposition newspapers and radio stations, rounded up several dozen prominent labor, academic, and community leaders at Fort Zeelandia in the capital, and murdered fifteen of the most obstreperous who refused to go along with him.[17]

American intelligence had learned of the Soviet-Suriname deal and the crisis gave the president an opportunity to block it. Reagan went first to the Dutch, as Suriname was a self-governing territory of the Netherlands, but they would do nothing. Casey then proposed a covert action to overthrow Bouterse,

believing his regime to be extremely fragile. His plan was to stage a South Korean commando force out of Venezuela, backed by U.S. naval power. But the House Intelligence Committee's Democratic leadership "objected that Suriname wasn't important enough and Cuban involvement not clear enough to justify such 'extreme' action."[18] Secretary of State Shultz, too, thought Casey's plan was "crazy."[19]

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[16] Thomas C. Reed, *At The Abyss: An Insider's History of the Cold War* (New York: Presidio, 2004), p. 271.
[17] Jay Mallin, "Pent-up Pressures in Suriname Raise Fears of Another Grenada," *Washington Times*, January 17, 1984, p. 5.
[18] "The CIA and Suriname."
[19] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph (*New York: Charles Scribner's,1993), pp. 296-97.

Rebuffed, but undeterred, Casey devised another approach which obviated any need to consult the intelligence committee, or Shultz. He suggested to the president that he simply "brief" his plan to the leaders of Brazil and Venezuela. He calculated that the threat of U.S. action would prod both countries to take action on their own to prevent a lodgment of a Soviet-Cuban presence on their respective doorsteps, rather than be complicit in the use of American military power in the hemisphere.

The president "loved the plan," sending NSC adviser Bill Clark and a small group of NSC and CIA aides secretly to Brasilia and Caracas at the end of April. As expected, Brazilian and Venezuelan leaders expressed deep concern, especially about the impact of U.S. action on their own countries. Rather than be faced with either an expanded Soviet presence, or a unilateral demonstration of American power, they volunteered to solve the Bouterse problem themselves. "Clark respectfully deferred to their wishes," reportedly arranging for them to offer Bouterse a $300 million economic and military aid package.[20]

Bouterse was persuaded and he put the Moscow scheme on hold through the summer. When the United States invaded Grenada later in October, he realized that Reagan's threats were credible and immediately broke with Cuba, expelling its ambassador and downgraded relations to the level of charge d'affairs. The Soviet-Cuban scheme for a base in Suriname was quietly quashed.

The Approach to Grenada

[20] Reed, *At The Abyss*, 272 and Mallin, "Pent-up Pressure in Suriname," and Jack Anderson, "Suriname Ruler Is Chastened by Grenada Assault," *Washington Post*, November 5, 1983, p. C12.

During this same time-frame, President Reagan tried to approach Maurice Bishop, who was beginning to have misgivings about his ties to the Soviets.[21] Bishop began to realize that without normal relations with the United States, Grenada stood little chance of becoming economically solvent. Tourist wealth was the lifeblood of the economy, generating upward of 80 percent of GNP, and most tourists came from the United States. Therefore, continued antagonism toward the United States was self-defeating, modern airport or not.

There thus began to emerge a growing conflict of interests between Moscow and Bishop. Grenada's now critical importance to Moscow's missile scheme made the Soviets extremely sensitive to any possible vacillation on the part of Bishop and they were prepared to secure their interests. The Russians had dealt with the problem of vacillating leaderships many times over the years, from the imposition and manipulation of Soviet regimes in Eastern Europe in the forties and fifties, to the most recent instances in South Yemen and Afghanistan in 1978, so they were more than ready to deal with Bishop.[22]

Standard Soviet practice was to build a loyal pro-Soviet faction within a bourgeois-nationalist leadership. In the Grenadian case, the immensely popular Bishop had been their vehicle to power, but their staunchly pro-Soviet ally was Bernard Coard. They had quietly cultivated Coard from the beginning, calling him to Moscow frequently after the New Jewel Movement had come to power. Indeed, as Clark described it:

> A semisecret factional grouping or clique around Bernard Coard had managed, especially since mid-1982, to strengthen its influence and

[21] Anthony Payne, Paul Sutton, and Tony Thorndike, *Grenada: Revolution and Invasion*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), pp. 114-15.
[22] See the author's *The Carter Years: Toward a New Global Order* (New York: Paragon, 1991). For the Soviet response in Afghanistan, pp. 186-90, and in South Yemen, pp. 200-03.

> control inside the government apparatus, the officer corps of the army, and in the New Jewel Movement. It functioned more and more as a party within the party.[23]

In the fall of 1982, fearful of Bishop's misgivings, Moscow instructed Bernard Coard to strengthen his position within the leadership. No doubt, newly appointed Ambassador, Gennadi Sazhenev, who had been assigned to Grenada earlier in April, guided him through the process. Sazhenev had been a key Kremlin operative in Latin America since the Cuban missile crisis and his appointment "sent shock waves through the CIA and the White House and signaled the strategic importance the Kremlin was placing on Grenada."[24]

Coard's first step was to gain control of the Central Committee, which he accomplished in October. He changed the voting balance in the committee from an eight-to-seven Bishop majority into a ten-to-six Coard majority, mainly by forcing two key Bishop supporters off the committee for "right opportunism," and adding three of his own supporters. Gaining a voting majority, Coard's supporters turned on Bishop, stripping control of the People's Militia from him and assigning a political watchdog as his personal assistant.

Even though their man was now in a controlling position, the Soviets faced a delicate problem. Like all Soviet client regimes, Grenada was built upon the charismatic appeal of an individual leader, in this case Maurice Bishop, who personified the revolution in Grenada. To remove him would remove the sole source of the regime's

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[23] Steve Clark, "Grenada's Workers' and Farmers' Government: Its Achievements and Its Overthrow," in Bruce Marcus and Michael Taber, eds., *Maurice Bishop Speaks: The Grenada Revolution, 1979-1983*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1983), p. xxix.

[24] Niles Lathem, "Top Red General Directed Isle Coup," *New York Post*, October 27, 1983, p. 3.

revolutionary "legitimacy." It would take time to substitute the party over the individual as the source of political legitimacy. So, in the meantime, Bishop was necessary.

American analysts would have been attentive to events in Grenada under ordinary circumstances as a standard approach of keeping track of country developments. Under the circumstances described in this paper they were especially attentive to the growing conflict within the leadership. Perhaps seeking to probe the possibility for improving relations, the administration gave Bishop an opening.

In December, Vice President Bush attended a conference in Miami reviewing business opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean. In his remarks, the vice president described Grenada as an "economically weak," "repressive" regime, wholly "dependent" upon Cuba and the Soviet Union. The Grenadian government immediately issued a low-key, diplomatically worded reply, rebutting the criticism and offered to send a high-level emissary to the United States to brief American leaders on the true state of affairs.[25]

After a discreet interval, in February, Secretary of State Shultz replied to the Grenadian note with a conciliatory message to Bishop, the department's first communication with the regime since shortly after it had taken power. The state department's note was carried to Grenada by Congressman Mervyn Dymally, a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, who was visiting the island. The ostensible purpose of the note was to inform the Grenadian government that all U.S. embassy personnel in Barbados, except Ambassador Milan Bish, were to be accredited to St. George's. But Dymally also carried Shultz's invitation for Bishop to

[25] Payne, et al., *Grenada*, p. 115.

visit Washington. Bishop promptly responded in the affirmative, arranging for Transafrica, a black American political organization closely tied to the Congressional Black Caucus, to sponsor his visit.[26]

Meanwhile, in March, a Soviet survey team visited the tiny, eleven-square-mile Grenadian dependency of Carriacou, home to some 7,000 fishermen and farmers. They decided to build an airfield, naval port, cement plant, and electric power generating plant on the island. The port at Tyrrell Bay had been a sheltered anchorage used by the British fleet in the 18th century. Moscow offered a gift of 2,000 tons of steel as part of the developmental package. The Soviet bloc's pervasive presence, including personnel from the Soviet Union, Cuba, East Germany, Libya, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and North Korea, were stifling any pretense of Grenadian independence.[27]

It was under growing bloc pressure that Bishop made his visit to Washington, May 31 to June 10. Bishop anticipated that he would meet with

President Reagan and Secretary Shultz, but, when he arrived, both declined. Instead, a lower profile meeting was arranged with Judge Clark and Kenneth Dam, Shultz's deputy, on June 7. Clark welcomed Bishop's proposal to "discuss differences," as well as to "discuss cooperation." He felt that the United States and Grenada had "common strands of history" and hoped that their meeting would "lead to greater progress."[28]

Bishop, even while deploring Reagan's attacks, wanted to reach an accommodation with the United States. He "agreed to moderate his shrill anti-American rhetoric—and even his Marxist policies—in return for improved relations with

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[26] Ibid., and Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Grenada's Marxist Chiefs Had Friends in Congress," *New York Post*, November 21, 1983, p. 39.
[27] Timothy Ashby, "Grenada: Soviet Stepping Stone," *U.S.Naval Proceedings* (December 1983), p. 33.

Washington." Clark said the administration "held out hope" that Grenada would abandon the communist model and return to a constitutional form of government.[29] Bishop was "encouraged…that they are willing to accept talks on the normalization of relations."[30] The upshot was that Bishop believed that he had reached an "understanding" with the Reagan administration and had "struck a deal." Both sides agreed, however, that "the content of their meeting should 'remain secret.'"[31]

Factional Strife Intensifies

When Bishop returned to Grenada, he attempted to fulfill his commitment to the United States, but only succeeded in intensifying the ongoing power struggle with Coard. The Central Committee reluctantly agreed to Bishop's instruction to maintain the moratorium on anti-American rhetoric begun before his trip. But concern was expressed that Bishop had exceeded his instructions by holding "unscheduled" and "sensitive" discussions with Clark and Dam "without prior reference and without guidance." Concern deepened when it was learned that Bishop was planning to reinstitute free elections.[32]

Alarmed at Bishop's trip to Washington, the Russians demanded to know what had transpired. But all that Grenadian ambassador Richard Jacobs could tell Vladimir Kazimirov, Director of the First Latin America Department, was that "the results were

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[28] Oswald Johnston and Robert Toth, "Notes on Bishop-U.S. Talks Show Willingness for Ties," *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1983, p. 1.
[29] Jack Anderson, "Behind the Purge of Bishop," *Washington Post*, October 30, 1983, p. C7.
[30] Johnston and Toth, "Notes on Bishop-U.S. Talks…"
[31] Jiri and Virginia Valenta, "Leninism in Grenada," in Jiri Valenta and Herbert Elison, eds., *Grenada and Soviet/Cuban Policy: Internal Crisis and U.S./OECS Intervention*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), p. 26.
[32] Payne, et al., *Grenada*, p. 116.

confidential."[33] For the ever-suspicious Russians, this was the "turning point" in their relationship with Bishop. Jiri and Virginia Valenta thought that "given the traditional Soviet paranoia about the loyalty and orthodoxy of its socialist allies, the Soviet leadership had sufficient reason to lose confidence in Bishop."[34] Traditional Soviet paranoia played its part, but the issue was far more important. Having made the decision to use Grenada in its missile scheme and invested heavily in preparing the grounds for it, they were not about to let it all slip away because Maurice Bishop had suddenly gotten cold feet.

The Soviets suspected that Bishop had struck a deal with Washington, which left them with no choice but to accelerate Coard's takeover timetable of the leadership. Responding to Moscow's decision, Coard convened the Central Committee for its "first full-scale wholistic plenary," a marathon, six-and-a-half-day meeting, lasting from July 13 to 19. The results of the meeting, called the July Resolutions, were that the party had failed "to transform itself ideologically and organizationally and to exercise firm leadership along a Leninist path."[35]

Coard and his followers dominated the proceedings, but Bishop had managed to insert language into the resolutions that the party's "line of march" was essentially correct.[36] Coard and his allies, no doubt under Moscow's prodding, strongly objected to the conclusion that the party's line was correct and demanded an emergency meeting, which convened on August 26. The heart of the problem was seen to be the party's failure to criticize itself, including its highest leaders, which could lead to the party's

[33] "Document No. 6," in Valenta and Elison, eds., *Grenada in Soviet/Cuba Policy*, p. 309.
[34] Ibid., pp. 26-27.
[35] Ibid., p. 153

disintegration. So it was decided to hold a full Central Committee plenum in mid-September to rectify the party's failings.

Indicators of Crisis

When, in late May, an SR-71 overflying Cuba photographed troops practicing "sophisticated amphibious landings," on the beaches near Mariel harbor, the president and his close aides realized they were entering the outer edge of the crisis they were expecting. Analysts speculated as to the purpose of the amphibious training. Some thought that "the Cuban maneuvers [were] preparation for an invasion of some small Caribbean island." Others were not so sure. Combined with the earlier Soviet dispatch to Cuba of two amphibious assault ships, the maneuvers lent credibility to assumptions that Cuba was preparing to insert forces rapidly onto a neighboring island, presumably Grenada, in the not to distant future.[37]

At about this time, a second prime intelligence indicator triggered alarm bells. When Reagan decided that Moscow's analogous deployment would be SS-20 missiles to Grenada, analysts were tasked with carefully scrutinizing the key indicators which would tell when the Soviets were preparing to move. The more obvious of these were the state of airfield construction on the island, the presence of Soviet rocket specialists on the island, the movement of Il-76 cargo jets, the movement of Cuban forces to the island, and the missiles themselves.

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[36] Kai Schoenhals and Richard Melanson, *Revolution and Intervention in Grenada: The New Jewel Movement, the United States, and the Caribbean*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), p. 64.

[37] "Military Moves by Soviet, Cuba Said to Spur Reagan Action," *Baltimore Sun*, July 29, 1983, p. 1 and George de Lama, "U.S. Fears Soviets Creating a Southern Front in Caribbean," *Chicago Tribune*, April 5, 1983, p. 5.

U.S. intelligence, as a matter central to the arms control negotiations, kept track of the construction, deployment, and movement of SS-20 missiles, which were "clearly identifiable in their shelters from spy-satellite pictures that regularly photograph them." Suddenly, however, at mid-year, U.S. intelligence "lost" three entire regiments of SS-20 missiles. Each regiment had nine launchers, each missile had three warheads; three regiments meant that eighty-one missiles were missing. The sudden disappearance of such a large number of missiles was alarming. Moreover, when queried, the Soviets refused "to identify the precise location of the missing regiments."[38]

The president called for contingency plans. Using as a rationale the increase in Soviet shipping to Nicaragua, from the middle of July, the president authorized the conduct of naval exercises not only off the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of Nicaragua, but also in the Western Atlantic and the Caribbean Basin.

These exercises, designated *Readex-2-83* were to "commence as soon as possible" and to continue for "four to six months."[39] In an unprecedented move, Reagan deployed four carriers (the *Independence, John F. Kennedy, Coral Sea, and Ranger*) in three carrier battle groups, a massive display of firepower, which would rotate through the region to be in position during the time when the United States would deploy the Pershing II into West Germany and also when Moscow would be expected to attempt to make its analogous deployment into the Caribbean.

Perhaps unwittingly, Soviet defense minister Dmitri Ustinov chose this moment to declare that the Soviet Union was "determined" to counter any U.S. deployment of Pershing II missiles to West Germany.

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[38] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "'Lost' Red Missiles," *New York Post*, June 9, 1983, p. 43.

> We will take such countermeasures that will make the military threat to the territory of the United States and the countries on whose territories American missiles will be deployed the same as the one the United States is trying to create for the Soviet Union and our allies.[40]

To American officials there was no room for obfuscation, or delay. Making the same threat to the United States that Washington would make to Moscow meant missiles, SS-20 missiles, in the Caribbean.

To conduct a personal assessment, Bill Casey embarked upon a secret trip to Africa and the Middle East at the beginning of August. He stopped first in West Africa talking to the leaders of Senegal, the Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Zaire, Zambia, and South Africa—all nations whose airfields were possible transshipping points to Grenada. There were doubtless many items on Casey's agenda, but one of the most important had to be a survey of air service arrangements currently available to Moscow. He would also want to explore the kind of cooperation the United States could expect to receive from these countries.[41]

But the event that, more than anything else, focused attention on the growing U.S.-Soviet confrontation was the destruction of the Korean airliner on September 1. The crisis disguised a shift in Soviet policy, which resulted in an acceleration of events in Grenada. Throughout the arms control negotiations from the spring of 1982, the Soviet threat had been: "if the U.S. deployed, then the Soviet Union would deploy." The KAL crisis produced a shift in that position reflected in the disappearance of Andropov and the ascendancy of the Chernenko/Ogarkov faction. Ogarkov had argued that

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[39] NSDD-100, "Enhanced U.S. Military Activity and Assistance for the Central American Region," July 28, 1983, in Christopher Simpson, *National Security Directives of the Reagan & Bush Administrations*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 313-14.
[40] Dusko Doder, "Defense Minister Says Moscow Will Move to Counter Deployment of U.S. Missiles," *Washington Post*, July 31, 1983, p. 21.

unless the Soviet Union deployed first, Moscow would have no leverage against the Pershing II. It was this shift at the top, combined with the suspicion that Bishop was turning away from the Soviets that resulted in the intensification of the political struggle in Grenada as Moscow pressed the Coard faction to consolidate control.

In the struggle, Coard, with majority control in the Central Committee, pressed for the adoption of joint leadership at the September Central Committee plenum. The joint leadership scheme would place him in control of Grenadian policy, while elevating Bishop into a figurehead role. The objective was to gain control of Bishop, not to eliminate him, because of his immense popularity with the people. There was insufficient time to develop the legitimacy of the party over the charisma of the individual. Thus, the decision was made to opt for joint leadership.

Bishop, however, countered with a proposal to establish collective leadership, with himself at the head. Thus, over the following month and a half, the struggle between Bishop and Coard centered on the nature of the leadership system Grenada would adopt. In this struggle, Coard controlled the Central Committee, had the allegiance of the Grenadian army and security forces, and had Moscow's backing. Bishop, on the other hand, maintained his popularity with the masses, had the support of the People's Militias, and the support of Fidel Castro.

Although Moscow and Havana were on opposite sides in the struggle between Coard and Bishop, they sought the same objective, a secure Communist base. Moscow, however, through its ambassador Sazhenev, was in control. The truth was

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[41] Woodward, *Veil*, pp. 267-68.

that both were heavily involved in Grenada. And the reason was straightforward: the stakes were of the highest magnitude and time was running out.

Meanwhile, American (and British) intelligence was watching intently for any sign that the Soviet Union was about to move missiles into Grenada. If Bishop succeeded in winning his struggle with Coard, of course, and took Grenada out of the Soviet orbit, or even suspended relations the way Bouterse had, the United States would have to do nothing. But, if he failed, the United States would have to move first to preempt the Soviets.

The decisive phase began with Bishop's return from a trip to Eastern Europe. On his way back to Grenada, he made an unscheduled two-day stopover in Cuba, October 6-8, to visit with Castro. Castro attempted to forge unity of the two factions in the way he had earlier with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, supporting Bishop and his proposal for collective leadership. But the Russians were in a hurry and Coard rejected the collective leadership scheme, placing Bishop under house arrest, with the intent of coercing him into accepting the joint leadership plan.

With the gloves off, Bishop's allies mobilized the masses and the militia, freeing him from house arrest on the morning of October 19. For a brief moment, it seemed that Bishop had won. But Coard, directed by Sazhenev, carried out a savage massacre of Bishop and his supporters at Fort Frederick where he had sequestered himself.[42] Bishop, it seems, was not only counting on the masses and the militia, but also on the support of Fidel Castro, whose forces could have been decisive. He would be disappointed. Castro refused to provide any support for Bishop because he realized

[42] Niles Lathem, "Top Red General Directed Isle Coup," *New York Post*, October 27, 1983, p. 3.

that it was no longer a matter of forging leadership unity, but now of determining Grenada's geopolitical orientation—and Bishop was not on Castro's side.

Early Preparations

While it was literally true that planning for the invasion of Grenada began in earnest only with the murder of Bishop on the 19th, as noted, the United States had been watching and undertaking preliminary preparations since at least early October. Even before Bishop returned from his trip to Eastern Europe, on October 4, President Reagan issued the "get ready" order, NSDD-105, "Eastern Caribbean Regional Security Policy."[43] Singling out Grenada, the directive called for the immediate development of contingency plans by the middle of the month to insure the emergence of "independent democratic governments friendly to the United States and free of Cuban and Soviet influence."

American intelligence focused on several key indicators. Regarding the Soviet Union and Cuba, radio intercepts and satellite observation of missile and aircraft movement, troop movement, and a command decision to deploy, would be crucial. In Grenada, employing technical as well as human assets, the key indicators were the progress of construction on the Point Salinas airfield, the presence of Soviet rocket specialists, and of course the evolution of the decisive factional struggle between Bishop and Coard.

It cannot be overemphasized that Grenada was significantly different from Cuba twenty one years earlier. Unlike 1962, when the United States held strategic weapons

[43] Simpson, *National Security Directives*, pp. 332-34.

superiority and could afford to wait until it had caught the Soviet Union red-handed with missiles deployed before forcing their removal, in 1983 the strategic situation was reversed. If Moscow succeeded in deploying missiles to Grenada before Reagan could stop them, the United States could not threaten war to force them out because the Soviet Union held the strategic weapons advantage. That is why it was absolutely imperative that the United States act before missiles were deployed, even though that would make later explanations of American action difficult.

By the second week in October, multiple indicators signaled that the crisis had arrived. On the 10th, the State Department held an interagency meeting "to evaluate developments."[44] Both state and defense began preliminary planning in great secrecy. Deception at all levels would be the hallmark of U.S. preparations. For example, the department of defense assigned the planning for *Urgent Fury* to the Atlantic Command at Norfolk, instead of to Key West, as contingency plan #2360 for Grenada dictated.[45] This bit of deception may have been less effective than expected because of the operation of the Walker spy ring out of Norfolk.

Bishop's apparent defeat when placed under house arrest on October 13 prompted immediate calls to determine "what military resources could be mustered on short notice" for Grenada. The rationales for action being discussed were the possible rescue of Bishop, or the "peaceful" evacuation of the eight hundred American students attending St. George's medical school on the island. In fact, these were pretexts. The United States was preparing to preempt any Soviet move.[46]

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[44] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p. 326.
[45] Mark Adkin, *Urgent Fury:The Battle for Grenada* (New York: Lexington Books, 1989), p. 131.
[46] Ronald Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury: Grenada*, Joint History Office, Chairman of the JCS, (Washington, D.C., 1997), pp. 10-11.

Within days, radio intercepts and spy photographs strongly suggested that the Soviet Union was about to make its move. A spy relayed photographs of "four thick-walled structures under construction about 800 feet from the new airport runway at Point Salinas." The structures were identical to those built in Eastern Europe and Cuba. When members of the Joint Chiefs saw them, they were convinced that they were "missile-storage facilities." Had the United States allowed completion of the bunkers, the chiefs feared, "it would have been quite easy for the Soviets to offload some missile batteries from an aircraft and get them into the bunkers before our reconnaissance could get a look."[47]

Confirming these fears were "intercepts of communications from the Soviet Embassy in St. George's in which Soviet Rocket Forces advisers discussed their military construction project at the airfield." (Although the day after the invasion Congressional intelligence sources briefed key congressmen that "Soviet missile experts" were included among the 49 Soviets on the island, none were later identified as being among those repatriated. Nor were thick walled bunkers ever found.) Finally, reflecting communications intercepts from the Soviet high command, "analysts were telling generals before the invasion that the Soviets might be getting ready to put missiles on Grenada."[48]

Outmaneuvering the Communists

On the assumption that deployment of Cuban troops would accompany if not precede the deployment of SS-20s to Grenada, it was crucial to be able to preempt or

[47] Frank Greve, "Spy's Photos Key to Invasion Decision," *Miami Herald*, October 28, 1983, p. 1.

deter a Cuban move. Thus, on October 17, the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Independence,* loaded with 90 planes and accompanied by 15 ships, departed Norfolk, headed, it was announced, for the Mediterranean. The next day, the helicopter carrier *U.S.S. Guam*, carrying a self-contained assault force, the 22nd Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU), with 1,900 Marines, a squadron of helicopters, landing craft, and five accompanying ships, departed Morehead City, N.C., also bound for the Mediterranean to replace the Marine contingent in Lebanon "sometime next month."[49] Both units would eventually fulfill these missions, but not until after they had performed another, more pressing task.

Given the need to get forces to Grenada on short notice, the story that the *Independence* and the *Guam* were intended to go directly to the Mediterranean was a clever bit of misdirection. Both ship moves were designed to put U.S. forces within striking distance of Grenada before either Castro or the Soviets could respond, and they succeeded. On the 20th, the day after Bishop was murdered, and when invasion planning went into high gear, the JCS directed the *Guam* to the vicinity of Vieques off Puerto Rico and the *Independence* to the vicinity of Dominica, news which leaked immediately to the press.[50]

The rapid approach of American power precluded any Cuban attempt to send troops to the island and threatened to ruin the Soviet plan. Their only hope lay in dissuading President Reagan from invading. In this their response was threefold: to portray Grenada as a non-threatening, if repugnant, regime from which even fellow communists had drawn apart; present no hostage threat and offer to assist in the

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[48] Kent Bernhard, "U.S. Sought Missile Link on Grenada," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 24, 1983, p. 24A.
[49] Fred Hiatt, "U.S. Flotilla Stays Near Grenada In Wake of Lebanon Bombings," *Washington Post*, October 25, 1983, p. 4.
[50] Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury,* p. 18.

evacuation of the medical students; and create a diversion to focus American power elsewhere. Castro would attend to the first two of these; Moscow the third.

It would be Castro's task to attempt to deter an American invasion by suasion and keep Grenada in the communist camp. Thus, Castro publicly distanced himself from the Revolutionary Military Committee (RMC) that had taken power, disclaimed any intention to interfere in the island's internal affairs,

yet simultaneously gave them advice on how to avoid intervention, and offered to cooperate with the United States in the matter of evacuating the students. Castro was also at pains to avoid giving the United States any pretext for invading Cuba.

On October 20, while issuing a decree proclaiming three days of mourning for Bishop, Castro sent a message to the RMC denying as totally unjustified "such brutal procedures as the physical elimination of Bishop and the prominent group of honest and worthy leaders who died yesterday." He sought punishment for the perpetrators. "The death of Bishop and his comrades must be clarified; and had they been executed in cold blood, those responsible for it deserve exemplary punishment."[51]

Despite the decision to subject political relations with the new regime to a "serious and profound analysis," Castro declared that "we shall strictly abide by the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Grenada." In the interests of the Grenadian people," however, we will continue "economic and technical cooperation, where it is possible." Alluding to the approach of American naval forces, Castro warned that "imperialism will now try to profit from this tragedy."

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[51] Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, p. 90.

Two days later, with the *Guam* visible off the Grenadian coast, Castro and the RMC panicked. In response to frantic pleas for Cuban military support, Castro refused. He justified his decision on the grounds that the "approaching" U.S. naval forces could herald a "large-scale Yankee aggression," against not only Grenada, Nicaragua, Angola, but also "right here in Cuba." It there was an attack on Grenada, it will have been because of the "gross mistakes made on the Grenadian side." Therefore, Castro concluded: "it is not of the new Government of Grenada we must think now, but of Cuba."[52]

Castro's advice was to "try to avoid pretexts for intervention." The RMC must offer privately and publicly "basic guarantees and total facilities for evacuation of personnel from the United States, from England, and so forth." If this did not work and "should the invasion take place anyway, their duty is to die fighting." Castro acknowledged that the political situation was grave, but that "the sending of reinforcements is impossible and unthinkable."

Following receipt of Castro's October 22 message, a member of the RMC, Christopher Stroude, immediately went to the studio of Radio Free Grenada to announce the regime's new policy. After having stonewalled state department officials who had been sent to Grenada the day before, Stroude now declared that "efforts made recently to better relations with the United States government would continue." He announced that a civilian government would be established within two weeks which would represent "all social classes and interests." Private investment would be

[52] "Fidel Castro's Press Conference on Grenada," *FBIS-Cuba*, October 26, 1983.

welcomed, especially to build up the tourist industry. However, Stroude made no mention of an offer to assist in the evacuation of the medical students.[53]

That same evening, apparently to remedy Stroude's omission, Castro made a direct appeal to the United States. It was a desperate attempt to convince the Reagan administration that the students were in no danger and military action was unnecessary.

> The U.S. side is aware of the developments in Grenada, that it is also aware of our position on these developments and of our determination of not interfering in the internal affairs of that country. That we are aware of their concern for the many U.S. residents there. We are also concerned about the hundreds of Cuban collaborators who are working on various projects and about the reports that U.S. naval forces are approaching Grenada. According to our reports, no U.S. or foreign citizen has run into any problems, nor has our personnel met with problems.[54]

Castro then pledged to "maintain contacts" and offered to "cooperate" if any type of difficulty arose so that "any measure regarding the security of these persons can be resolved favorably, without violence and without any type of interference in the country." Finally, belatedly heeding Castro's advice, on Monday, the 24th, the RMC sent a note to the U.S. embassy in Barbados saying that "Americans on the island were in no danger and would be permitted to leave if they wished."[55] Washington ignored both messages and began flying conspicuous reconnaissance missions between Cuba and Grenada.

Castro, of course, was playing the weakest of hands. As he admitted during his press conference, "we were willing to cooperate in any way to safeguard the citizens'

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[53] Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, p. 85.
[54] "Fidel Castro's Press Conference on Grenada."
[55] Ed Magnuson, "D-Day in Grenada," *Time*, November 7, 1983, p. 28.

security, without resorting to violence or intervention." With a straight face, he continued, saying:

> I believe that we were doing the United States a service. We were trying to make them understand that this action was unnecessary, because we…were willing to cooperate in the search for a nonviolent solution, without resorting to intervention, thus guaranteeing the safety of the U.S. citizens in Grenada.[56]

Castro's desperate attempt to deter the United States was too little, too late. American forces were in place in sufficient strength to defeat any surreptitious Cuban attempt to reinforce Grenada and to remove the already disintegrating communist regime on Grenada. There would be no opportunity for Castro to send troops at the eleventh hour to save the RMC the way he had done in Angola to save Augostino Neto in November of 1975.[57] Indeed, one of the rescued students claimed that "had the U.S. Army not intervened when they did, the rumor was that the Cubans would have. Their plan was perhaps a day or a day-and-a-half behind."[58]

Grenada and Lebanon

By the time the Soviets and Castro realized that their only hope lay in persuading Reagan there was no need to intervene, the president had already decided to act. Although the approach of American naval forces was impossible to conceal, the administration was successful in dissembling as to the exact timing of any action.

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[56] "Fidel Castro's Press Conference on Grenada."

[57] See the author's *Nixon-Kissinger Years: The Reshaping of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Paragon, 2001), passim chapter 10.

Displaying no hint of crisis, the president maintained his daily routine, leaving on Friday afternoon, October 21, on a previously scheduled golf outing to Georgia, accompanied by Secretary of State Shultz and NSC chief Robert McFarlane.

While the president gave no hint of the momentous decision that was approaching, his national security team was meeting in intense secrecy. Sensitive to Soviet surveillance efforts, as Menges notes, "cabinet members

would arrive at the White House complex using different entrances. And none would use the entrance most visible to the White House press corps." Moreover, key meetings were held in the newly refurbished room 208 in the Old Executive Office Building adjacent to the White House, instead of the "more visible" Situation Room.[59]

The president made the decision to invade early in the morning of October 22, while he was in Atlanta, shortly after receiving word that the OECS, joined by Jamaica and Barbados, had voted to request U.S. assistance. With a request for assistance in hand, the NSPG now "jettisoned the idea of a peaceful evacuation" of medical students in favor of "a military expedition to seize Grenada from local military forces." The mission statement was accordingly expanded beyond the evacuation of American citizens, to the restoration of democratic government on Grenada and the deterrence of a Cuban attempt at intervention.[60]

Just as plans were being finalized, however, news came of a devastating blow to the United States in Lebanon. Early Sunday morning, October 23, in Beirut, two truck bombs, one driven into the U.S. Marine barracks and the other into the French military compound, exploded and killed 241 Marines and 56 French soldiers. For the

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[58] Ward Sinclair, "Student Evacuees Return, Praising U.S. Rescue Effort," *Washington Post*, October 27, 1983, p. 1.
[59] Constantine Menges, *Inside the National Security Council* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1988), p. 73.

Marines, it was one of the worst, if not the worst, single event losses in the history of the corps. Were the events in Lebanon linked in some way to Grenada? Could Moscow been behind the bomb attack in Lebanon, hoping that it would deter the president from going forward in Grenada? However suggesting the linkage, and even though the president himself would posit such a link (see below), it was impossible to prove.

Nevertheless, upon being awakened with the news of the bombing, the president returned immediately to Washington to face the inevitable question of whether the events in Beirut should affect the decision to intervene in Grenada? In fact, the president hesitated, but then said: "if this was right yesterday, it's right today, and we shouldn't let the act of a couple of terrorists dissuade us from going ahead."[61] That evening, the president signed the final copy of the NSDD authorizing action in Grenada and the initial, pre-invasion troop insertion operations began.

The Invasion of Grenada

The invasion of Grenada succeeded thanks to the command decision to apply overwhelming force against a strategically isolated target. Within that context, the quick-thinking of on-scene commanders, their ability to improvise as the action unfolded, and the ingenuity and mobility of the troops on the ground, were the key factors accounting for success. At the same time, the need to put forces into Grenada as quickly as possible explained the greater-than-normal flaws in both planning and execution, which, at times, conveyed the impression of a Keystone Kops routine.[62]

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[60] Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, pp. 22-23.
[61] Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, p. 121.
[62] Fred Hiatt, "Accidents, 'Friendly Fire' Blamed For Many U.S. Casualties in Grenada," *Washington Post*, November 1, 1983, p. 1.

Problems arose even before the first shot was fired. Intended to be a surprise, night-time invasion, air control and reconnaissance teams failed to make a pre-invasion landing, causing delays and the loss of the advantage of

darkness. Surprise, of course, had been lost days earlier, as an attack was expected. Nevertheless, at daybreak on October 25, 800 Army and 400 Marine troops seized the island's two airports, Pearls in the northeast and Point Salinas in the southwest. The Marines, in a heli-borne assault quickly took control of Pearls, but Point Salinas was a different story.

Army Rangers, originally intending to land in fixed-wing aircraft, on approaching the runway found it blocked with construction equipment and other obstacles. Improvising, the Rangers parachuted in, but encountered stiff resistance from Cuban troops dug in at several strong points around the airport and elsewhere in the area between the airport and the capital at St. Georges. Despite Castro's claim that the Cubans "were not the first to fire," the Rangers "jumped into a hail of red and green enemy tracers that cut through the air all around them[63]

The Cubans were outnumbered, but prepared. The day before the invasion, Castro had secretly flown in a small military advisory group led by Pedro Tortolo, who had recently headed Cuba's military mission to Grenada. Tortolo organized several defensive positions at Point Salinas, Grand Mal, Grand Anse, Frequente, Fort Frederick, and Camp Calivigny. But the Cubans would fight only to defend themselves, not to support the regime. Obviously overmatched, Castro did not want to give any

[63] "Fidel Castro's Press Conference on Grenada," and Adkin, *Urgent Fury*, p. 205.

pretext for an attack against Cuba. The Cuban force was a combination of combat troops (some 240 had arrived aboard the *Vietnam Heroica* on October 6) and construction workers (about 500 workers were building the airport). Including embassy personnel, there was a total of 784 Cubans on the island.[64]

Improvising while under intense fire from Cuban forces dug in north of the airport, the Rangers hot-wired a bulldozer and other vehicles to clear the runway and permit the remainder of the 1,900-man invasion force to land by aircraft. Over the next several hours fierce fighting ensued, but, when ammunition stocks were exhausted, 250 Cuban and Grenadian troops surrendered.

A crucial objective was to insure the safety of the Governor-General, Paul Scoon, who was under house arrest. Scoon, the Queen's representative, was considered to be the remaining source of political legitimacy on the island. A dozen special forces troops parachuted into his residential compound, but, once inside, found themselves surrounded by Grenadian troops and forced to spend a harrowing night defending the residence and its valuable occupants.

The next morning, in another improvisation, two companies of the Marine assault force from Pearls, augmented with five tanks and a dozen amphibious vehicles, were transported around the island to Grand Mal Bay, just north of St. Georges, where they made an amphibious landing. Their mission was to rescue the governor-general, and secure the capital. The noise from their tracked vehicles as they approached was enough to convince the Grenadian troops surrounding the governor-general's residence to beat a hasty retreat after firing a few rounds.

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[64] Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury*, p. 19.

Meanwhile, paralleling these developments, within two hours of the initial air drop, the Rangers secured the True Blue campus of the medical school, which was located just off the eastern end of the Point Salinas runway. To their relief, no one had been harmed, or taken hostage. However, relief turned quickly to chagrin when they discovered that True Blue contained fewer than half of the students. The others, they were told, were at a second campus, at Grand Anse, a mile north on the coastal road to St. Georges.

On the way to Grand Anse, the Rangers encountered the Cuban strongpoint at Frequente, causing further delay, but producing another improvisation. Instructed to avoid civilian casualties to the extent possible, commanders decided to go around the Cuban strongpoint and advance to Grand Anse by sea. Late the next afternoon, October 26, a combined Marine and Ranger force mounted a heli-borne landing on the beach at Grand Anse, reached the school and safely transported over two hundred students to the *Guam*.

In the process of evacuating these students, however, U.S. troops learned of yet a third group of several hundred students scattered in off-campus housing on the Lance aux Epines peninsula southwest of the True Blue campus. These would not be evacuated, or many even located, until after the main combat operations had ended on the 28th. As it was, many students never left Grenada. All told, U.S. forces evacuated 599 American citizens of a reported 1,100 on the island and 121 foreigners. U.S. casualties were light for the operation: 19 killed and 116 wounded. For Cuba, there were 25 killed, 59 wounded and for Grenada, 45 killed, and 358 wounded.[65]

[65] Ibid, p. 62.

Denying Moscow the 'Analogous' Option

The Reagan administration would struggle to justify the invasion against its critics, sliding from the president's initial statement to "protect innocent lives," "forestall further chaos," and to restore "democratic institutions," to a "rescue mission" after discovery of a purported Cuban plot to take over the island and hold the students hostage.[66] The most persuasive argument, however, was the reaction of the students who were evacuated. On October 27, when the first of the evacuees, Jeff Geller, landed at Charleston, South Carolina, he "dropped to his knees and kissed the runway," cheered the United States, and "thanked the U.S. military for rescuing them from a chaotic and dangerous situation."[67]

The actual reason for the invasion—to preempt a Soviet attempt to deploy SS-20 missiles-- was never stated. Indeed, the president and his secretary of state differed publicly over their respective treatment of the Soviet role in Grenada. Secretary Shultz declared that the invasion was not intended to "send a message" to the Soviets or Cubans.[68] He insisted that this was "not an East-West confrontation," by which he meant to emphasize that it was not a U.S.-Soviet confrontation.[69]

That, however, was not how the president saw it. In his address on October 27th, Reagan explicitly saw Moscow behind not only the events in Grenada, but also those in Lebanon, and he saw them as "closely related."

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[66] Patrick Tyler and David Hoffman, "U.S. Says Aim Is To Restore Order," *Washington Post*, October 26, 1983, p. 1 and Phillip Taubman, "U.S. Reports Evidence Of Island Hostage Plan," *New York Times*, October 28, 1983, p. 14.
[67] Ward Sinclair, "Student Evacuees Return, Praising U.S. Rescue Effort," *Washington Post*, October 27, 1983, p. 1.
[68] Jim Hoagland, "Marines Invade Grenada, Fight Cubans; Reagan Cites Protection of U.S. Citizens," *Washington Post*, October 26, 1983, p. 1.
[69] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p. 335.

> The events in Lebanon and Grenada, though oceans apart, are closely related. Not only has Moscow assisted and encouraged the violence in both countries, but it provides direct support through a network of surrogates and terrorists. It is no coincidence that when the thugs tried to wrest control of Grenada, there were 30 Soviet advisers and hundreds of Cuban military and paramilitary forces on the island.[70]

The president's conclusion that "we got there just in time," was, however, as close as anyone in the administration would come to describing the Grenada invasion as a race to see who would get there first. Indeed, from the first, the administration imposed a veil of secrecy over the invasion. Except for the information released by the government itself, the general public received no independent information and knew nothing of the tense and extremely significant drama played to a conclusion on the island.

The administration excluded the press completely for the first two days. Those who managed to make their way onto the island were promptly escorted off. Even the FCC prohibited the lone Ham radio operator on the island, one of the students, from sending information out. Only after two days was a press pool limited to 15 reporters at a time permitted to move about the island on "guided afternoon tours."[71]

Press censorship was nearly total. The single exception was Knight-Ridder reporter, Frank Greve, who, in an article appearing in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, on October 28, detailed the missile issue. Quoting Pentagon and congressional intelligence committee sources, Greve revealed that there had been pre-invasion photographic evidence of "missile bunkers." He also revealed the existence of radio

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[70] "Transcript of Address by President," *New York Times* October 28, 1983, p. 9.
[71] William Farrell, "U.S. Allows 15 Reporters To Go to Grenada for Day," *New York Times*, October 28, 1983, p. 13.

intercepts in which "Soviet rocket-force advisers discussed their military construction project at the airfield."[72]

It would be nearly two months before another article pierced the veil of censorship about missiles and Grenada. Kent Bernhard noted the pre-invasion "concern in some quarters of the government that facilities which could be used for missiles were being prepared." Also reviewing the photographic and radio intercept data, he asked: "Did the United States expect to find the beginning of Soviet missile installations on the tiny east Caribbean island?"[73] It was a question that would be left unanswered. The official explanation remained that the United States invaded to rescue the students and prevent Cuba and the Soviet Union from turning Grenada into a base for the export of terrorism.

Why not tell the truth? The reason for the subterfuge lay in politics, particularly the leaders around Secretary of State Shultz, who were determined to erase all evidence that would undercut a move toward détente with the Soviet Union. Exposing the actual Soviet role would foreclose indefinitely any détente possibility. It would be the Cuban missile crisis all over again and reveal Moscow's utter disdain for détente and its determination to achieve a zero-sum victory over the United States.

For the same reason, the administration would make no reference to the presumed 1962 "understanding" after the Cuban missile crisis. Shultz, in particular, wanted no suggestion that Grenada bore any resemblance to the missile crisis of twenty-one years before. As Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, who raised the issue of the 1962 understandings observed, "the State Department, struggling to keep

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[72] Frank Greve, "Missile Sites Were Suspected," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 28, 1983, p. 1.
[73] Kent Bernhard, "U.S. Sought Missile Link on Grenada," *Philadelphia Inauirer*, November 24, 1983, p. 24A

Washington-Moscow channels open amid renewed Cold War, objects to accusing the Soviets of treaty-breaking on the Caribbean, just as it does on arms control."[74]

The invasion of Grenada was one of the most important victories of the Cold War, but, with its significance subsumed in the quixotic quest for détente, the public would never know it.

[74] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Why Use Makeshift Rationales?," *Washington Post*, October 31, 1983, p. 13.