

The American presence

In the modern world power means responsibility more than privilege. For the United States in recent weeks the exercise of its responsibilities as defender of the West and of the democracies has become more than usually burdensome and thankless. In Europe American cruise and Pershing II missiles were being deployed to try to preserve a balance of nuclear deterrence, and though the missiles had been requested by European governments their imminent arrival prompted massive organized protests. In the Middle East more than 230 US Marines were slaughtered when a truckload of explosives was driven into their barracks in Beirut, rekindling concern and criticism about the nature and purpose of American involvement in Lebanon. In the Caribbean US forces landed in Grenada to protect 1,000 Americans (including 700 medical students), restore order and prevent a left-wing Cuban-sponsored group from seizing power following the overthrow of the elected government and murder of the Prime Minister.

The invasion of Grenada took place in the early hours of October 25 when US Marines and Army Rangers landed at three points on the island. The American forces, which were later joined by troops from some neighbouring Caribbean countries, met unexpectedly strong resistance from some 700 well-armed Cubans who had been working on the construction of a new airport, and it was a week before the island was securely under control. The US government's concern about developments in Grenada dated back to 1979, when Maurice Bishop seized power from Eric Gairy, who had been Prime Minister since the island became an independent member of the Commonwealth in 1974. Bishop established close relations with Cuba and with the Soviet Union, and it was he who invited the Cubans in to build an airport with a runway capable of taking jumbo jets (and, as the Americans feared, long-range military and reconnaissance aircraft). In the summer of this year Bishop visited the US and began to talk of trying to improve relations with Washington. In October he was put under house arrest by more extreme left-wing elements in his party and, after being rescued from his house by his supporters, was shot by troops commanded by General Hudson Austin, who declared he had taken charge of the island at the head of a military government.

The decision to invade was made after the leaders of the six nations in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (Antigua, Dominica, St Lucia, St Kitts-Nevis, Montserrat and St Vincent) had met and appealed for American help having had a similar appeal from the Governor-General of Grenada, Sir Paul Scoon. Two other Caribbean countries, Barbados and

Jamaica (not members of the OECS), joined in the appeal for American help.

The invasion thus had the support of most neighbouring countries and, as was quickly seen once it had taken place, was welcomed by many Grenadians. It was nevertheless of dubious legality, and was condemned by the United Nations and, with less vehemence, by some of America's European allies, including Britain, who felt that it negated criticisms of Soviet actions in Afghanistan and elsewhere. In Britain the Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, expressed strong reservations about the American move, having advised President Reagan against it during a telephone conversation shortly before the invasion took place. There was a general rule, she said, that you don't cross into an independent sovereign country—it was not an inviolable rule, but it was a very good one.

President Reagan broke the rule but undoubtedly believed that he was justified in doing so in order to demonstrate his country's commitment both to the support of democratic systems in need of help and to the prevention of the further incursion of Communist control in sensitive areas of the Western hemisphere. After the initial rhetorical bluster the calm reaction of the Soviet and Cuban governments to the demonstration of American power in Grenada seemed to indicate that the message had been clearly received and understood.

The messages were much more garbled in Lebanon. The American Marines there form part of an international presence designed originally to act as a buffer between the Israeli army and the city of Beirut. The withdrawal of the Israelis changed the nature of this peacekeeping force, which is made up of French, Italian and British units as well as American, and it now finds itself being dragged into the lethal quagmire of Lebanese politics. Its role in recent weeks has been little more than that of propping up the Gemayel government. But beyond that lie the bigger issues of the Middle East—the protection of the State of Israel, and the maintenance of the supplies of oil from the Gulf. Both of these are vital interests for the West. It was not known for certain, when we went to press, who was responsible for the attack on the Marine compound in Beirut, and for a similar suicide mission which killed 58 French soldiers at almost the same time, but the presumption that they had Iranian or Syrian connexions suggested that their motive went beyond the confines of Lebanese politics.

The key to American concern over Lebanon, and the reason why President Reagan is keeping Marines in Beirut and adding another aircraft carrier off shore, is the attitude of Syria. President Assad's forces are armed by Russia,

and though it can be doubted that he would want, or allow, his country to become a Soviet satellite, it is through Syria that the Soviet Union now hopes to exert influence in the Middle East. Syria is actively involved in Lebanon and clearly seeks to control that country, either to protect its borders or to use it as a base for future attacks on Israel. Whatever Syria's intentions in Lebanon a continuing American presence will be necessary while the current uncertainty and confusion remain. This is not to say that the US, or the West as a whole, can expect to dictate the outcome; to try to ensure that would mean an escalation of operations to a Vietnam scale, with no guarantee of ultimate success. But the presence of the international force can give Lebanese politicians more time to resolve their difficulties, and deter others from interfering too forcibly.

In Europe the deterrence policy is of an even more dangerous kind, and it is not surprising that the introduction of cruise and Pershing II missiles has met with strong public protests in a number of European countries.

The need for additional nuclear arsenals in Europe was first identified by European leaders concerned at the deployment of Russian SS20 missiles, each carrying three nuclear warheads and capable of reaching any city in western Europe (though not the United States). European leaders believed that this created an alarming gap in Nato's defences, giving the Soviet Union the capacity to use nuclear weapons against Europe without necessarily provoking a nuclear response from America. Faced with this threat Europe asked the US for a new generation of nuclear weapons for Nato deployment in Europe, and agreed at the same time that talks should proceed with the Soviet Union to try to reduce the total of nuclear missiles in Europe, using the proposed cruise and Pershing deployments as counters against the SS20s. There is no doubt that the prospect of these new weapons in western Europe has led to some hard bargaining in the arms talks, but no agreement has yet been struck. Probably by the end of the year the American presence in Europe will have been increased.

By its readiness to respond to the European request for more American missiles, as well as its determination to hold the line in Lebanon and to move swiftly into Grenada, the US government has been seeking to exercise its responsibility as the most powerful nation in the western alliance. It has had to make real sacrifices in doing so, but it is also having to take substantial risks. The power of America is obvious, but the true test of its effective presence in the world is not whether it has the will to use that power, but whether it has the skill and wisdom to avoid having to use it.



Intervention in Grenada: A force of 6,000 US and 300 Caribbean troops was sent to Grenada to restore order after the *coup* of October 19. President Reagan had wanted to ensure the safety of the 1,000 US citizens there and had been alarmed by the presence of Cuban "construction workers" aiding the 1,200 Grenadian forces. Fighting ceased after nine days. 20 US troops were killed, 39 wounded.



REUTERS



The first objective, Pearls airport, above, was captured by US Marines after only two hours. Top left, US Marines landing at Grand Mal near the capital of St George's, where they rescued Governor-General Sir Paul Scoon and captured the two last Cuban strongholds. Top right, some of the 6,000 US troops on the island.

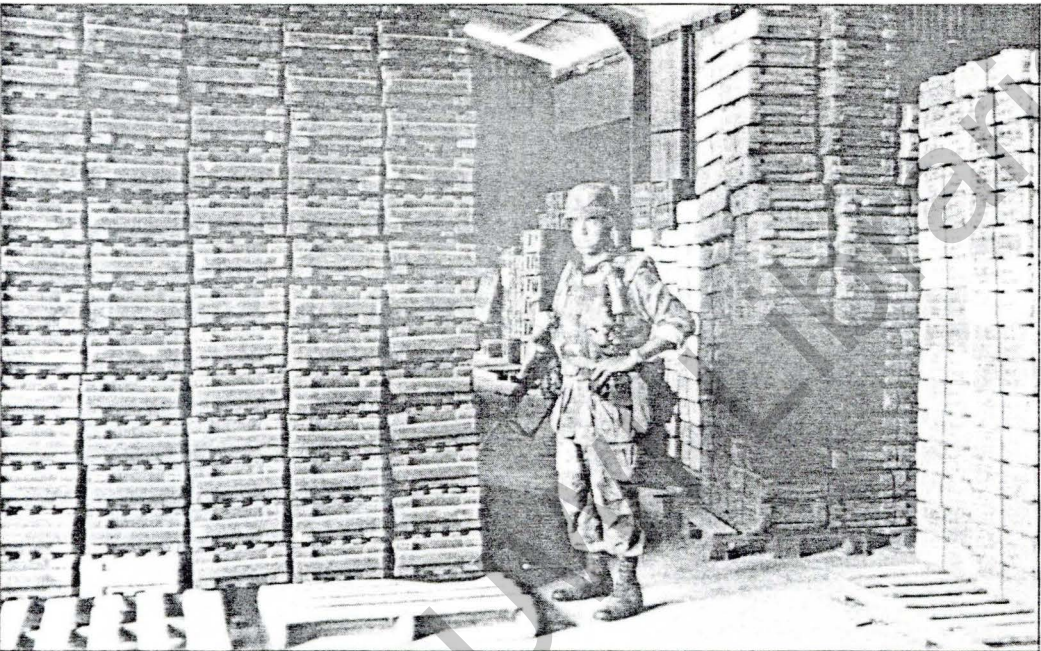
The Illustrated London News, Dec. 1983



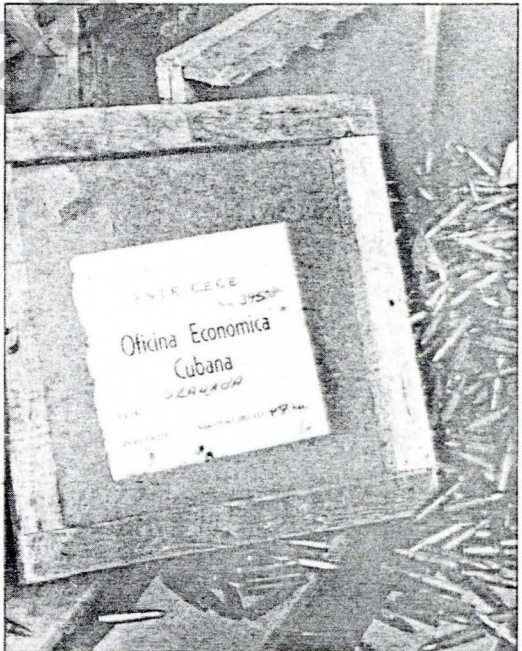
American troops fire field artillery to flush out snipers in the Grenada hills.



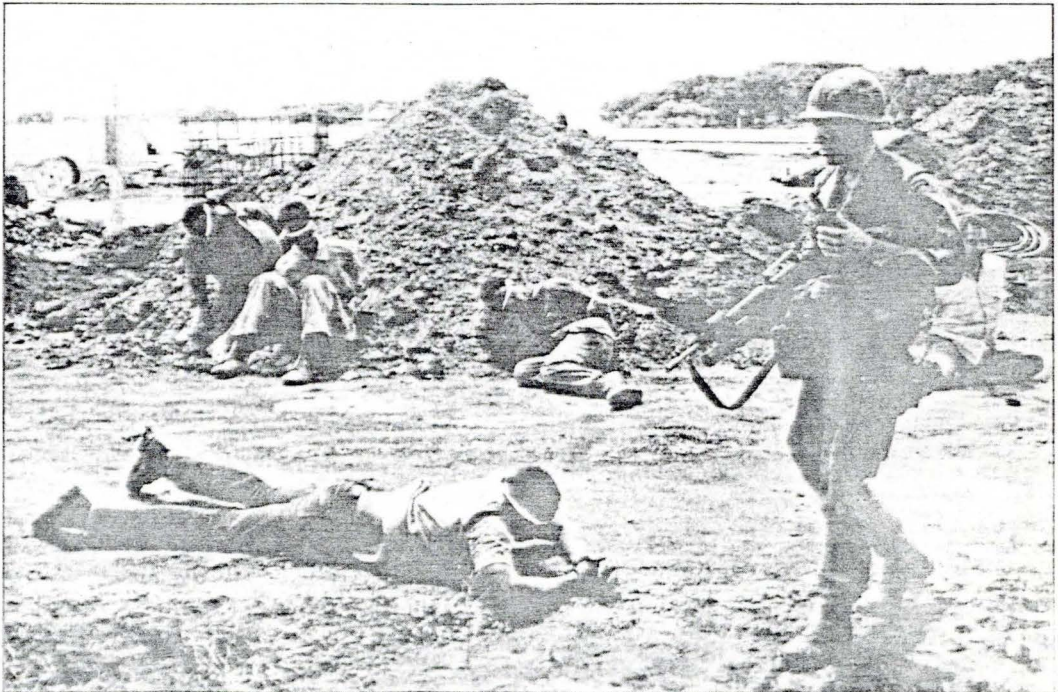
The ruins of the mental hospital near Fort Frederick, destroyed in the fighting.



At Point Salines airport an American soldier stands guard over a military base crammed with weapons and communications equipment of obviously Cuban origin.



General Hudson Austin, one of the leaders of the coup which triggered American intervention, was among those captured. Right, other prisoners taken at Point Salines are held at gunpoint.





REN FEATURES

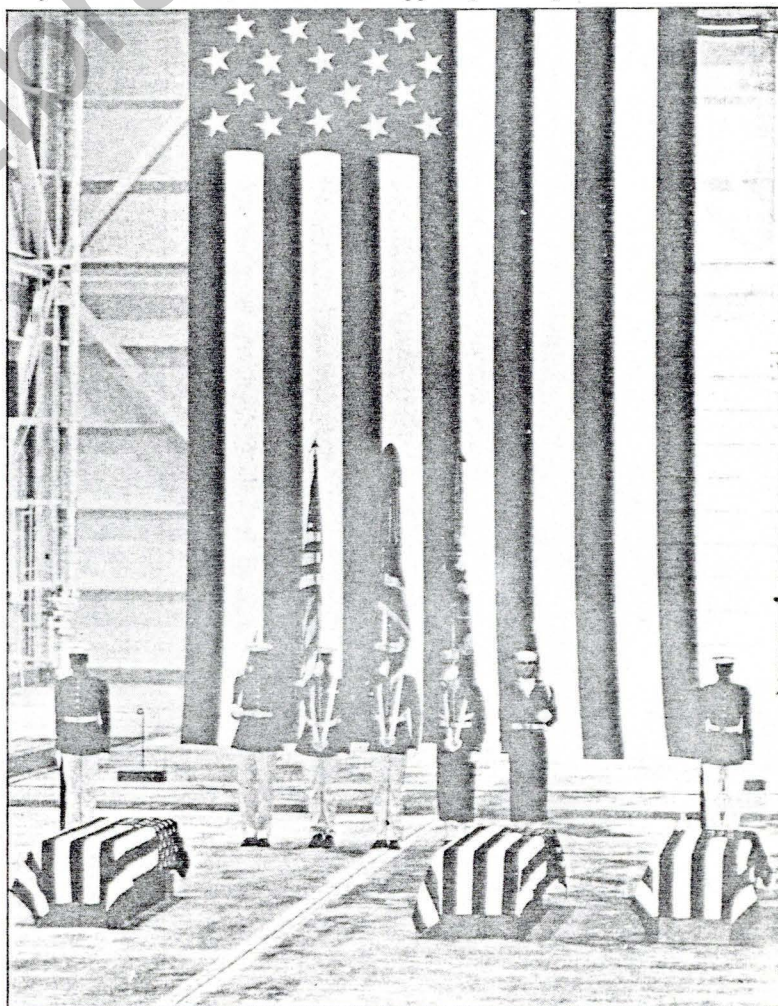
A major object of the invasion was the rescue of over 1,000 American citizens, mostly students like these, who had been trapped by the *coup* in Grenada.



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REN FEATURES



Left centre, a freed student expresses his pleasure at returning to America. Left, wounded Marines arrive at Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina. Above, the dead also return and are honoured at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware.