

ABSTRACT

The undoubted reality in the British, French and Dutch territories in the Caribbean in World War II was the pre-eminent rôle played by the United States in their defence against the Axis and in the shaping of the post-war settlement.

The wartime United States rôle was consonant with a definition of strategic preponderance developed after World War I. This arose from the revolution in strategy and warfare introduced by the aircraft and the submarine. As a result, the existing "American-Lake" strategic concept which embraced the Caribbean and the Pacific partially, was redrawn to become, by the inter-war period, the "Quarter-sphere". This took in an area from Alaska to the Galapagos, thence to Brazil's bulge and to Newfoundland. The carry-forward of this process into World War II was the full "Hemisphere" strategic concept.

This reformulation gave a high strategic ranking to all the circum-Caribbean territories, including those owned by European Powers. The latter's ranking went up when some emerged, by 1939, as globally-important suppliers of petroleum, petroleum derivatives and bauxite, vital to the operationalization of the "new warfare".

In World War II, the United States' strategic ranking of the European Caribbean is shown by the agreements, concluded with Britain before and after the outbreak of war against Germany, for the use of bases in the British Caribbean: by the sending of forces into the Dutch Caribbean in



1941-1942 to protect the important oil and bauxite resources; and by the establishment of a virtual Protectorate over the French Caribbean, "enemy-occupied" by Vichy France between mid-1940 and mid-1943. World War II, therefore, presented the United States with the opportunity to achieve a long-sought strategic goal of meshing the European Caribbean into her defined hemispheric security system.

The ultimately successful attainment of this goal by the United States was contested by Britain, Free France (Gaullist and Giraudist) and The Netherlands, partners in the Grand Coalition against the Axis. Friction characterized the politics of coalition warfare in the Caribbean, as elsewhere. Indeed, the European Caribbean theatre in World War II affords a laboratory in which to analyze microscopically the dimensions of the global conflict.