CARIBBEAN IN CONFLICT

Storm Clouds over Paradise

by Horace Sutton

AT FIRST GLANCE, Key West, the southernmost part of the United States, seems a frivolous island. Where else would the postman arrive in standard government uniform wearing a green stone in his pierced ear? Where else might a cobbler's shop called Shoe Fly sell boots made of python at $175 a pair? Where else would the premier department store be called Fast Buck Freddie's, or the bookstore display in its front window *The Complete Travel Guide to Cuba?*

On the surface Key West is the Capital of Camp, yet only a few blocks from the swirl of shops and bars, at a disused corner of an obsolete naval base, in a building called the Truman Annex, Rear Admiral Thomas Replogle commands the no-nonsense staff of 70 officers and men of the Caribbean Contingency Joint Task Force. They are there because hurricanes of conflict are roiling the Caribbean Sea, stirring violence, revolution, and terrorism on islands that are strung out from the American keys clear to South America, as well as in the Central American republics that form the southwestern curve of the Caribbean basin. It is an area that the United States has written off as an American playland. But while Washington has been preoccupied with the problems of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, an ominous change has taken place agitated by underdevelopment, overpopulation, failing economics, and Cuban resurgence.

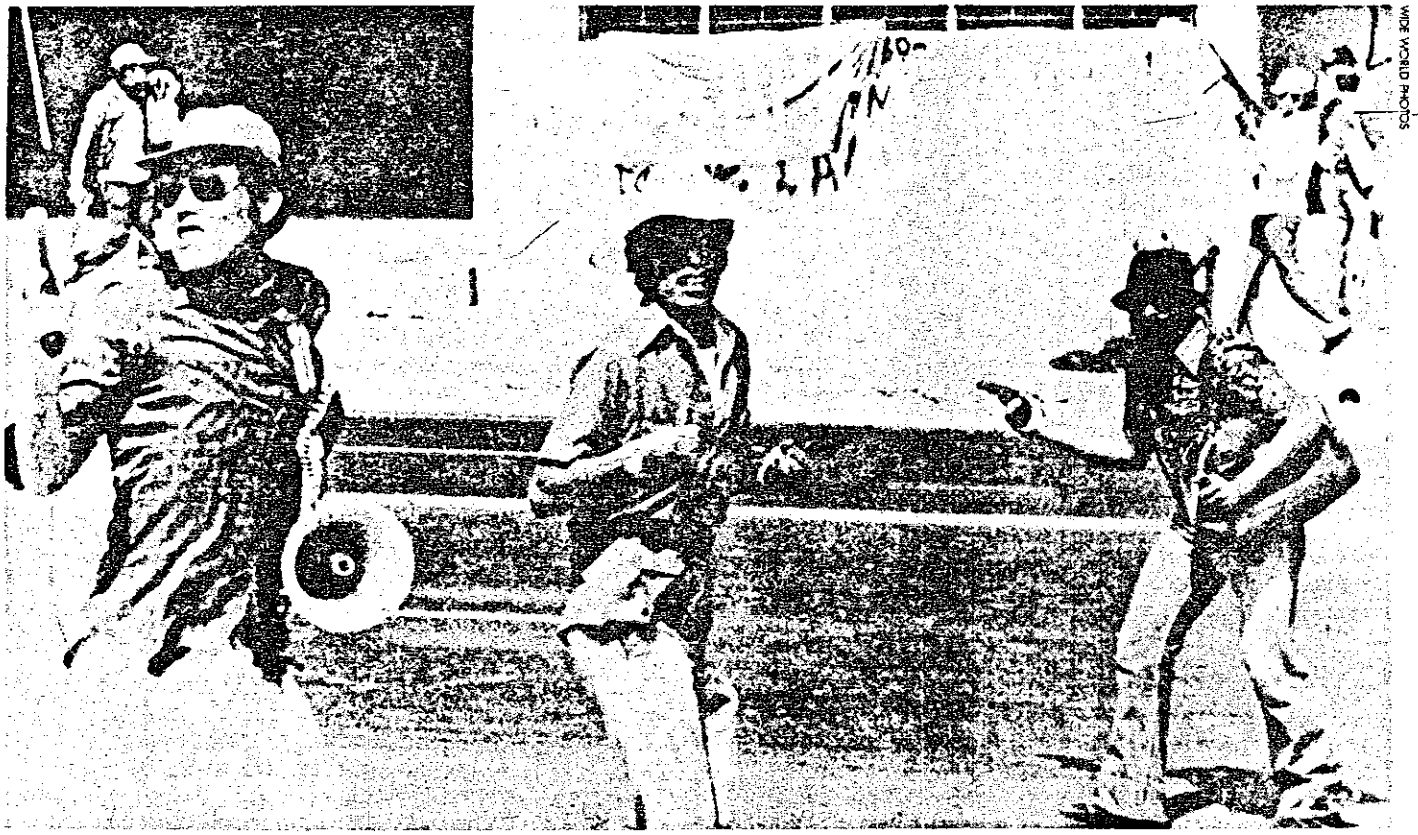
Replogle's prime function, therefore, is to keep binoculars trained on Cuba, 90 miles away and the home of a Soviet brigade. His mission: to call, if necessary, upon airborne troops, naval strike units, the marines, or whatever forces are deemed necessary by him and confirmed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to contain the Caribbean. The job is a critical one, for the United States has vital interests in the area—in order of their importance, oil, aluminum, and access to the Panama Canal. Fifty-two percent of all oil imported by the U.S. flows through the Caribbean Sea. Tankers sail through the deep-water channel alongside the island of Grenada, where the Cubans are building an airfield, on their way to refineries in Houston and New Orleans. There are no other deep-water ports in the south or on the eastern coast of the United States capable of taking supertankers that displace 100,000 tons and have a draft of 90 feet, larger than an aircraft carrier. The closest harbor is Portland, Maine, which can handle a tanker of 70,000 deadweight tons.

Tankers from the Persian Gulf, Nigeria, Venezuela, and other petroleum exporters deliver oil to refineries in the Bahamas, Trinidad, Aruba, and Curaçao. But even after the oil is transshipped to smaller tankers on those Caribbean islands, it must pass through this newly charged area en route to the East Coast of the United States. And if Moscow's aggression in Afghanistan "is a stepping-stone to possible control over much of the world's oil supplies," as President Carter stated in his speech of January 4, the Soviet-Cuban posture in the West Indies is fraught with even more significance. In addition, the United States is dependent upon Caribbean aluminum, the metal of the space age, half of which is provided by Jamaica, an island considered the ripest of those that could fall in the Communist basket. Finally, there is our access to the Panama Canal in case of war, which is no longer assured under the new treaty.

SO FAR THE Cuban-Soviet alliance has been content to push American patience as far as it will go, and at the same time to stir sensitive areas. Objectives are not lacking. In the outer rim tensions run high. Guatemala seethes with political murder. A dozen years ago, John G. Mein became the first United States ambassador ever to be assassinated, killed by Cuban-style rural guerrillas. Two years ago, a new terrorist group kidnapped the Guatemalan foreign minister and four weeks later murdered the Nicaraguan ambassador. President Kjell Laugerud claimed the terrorists got their support and their instructions from Cuba, an allegation that the CIA corroborates. In El Salvador, one weekend last September, 11 people were killed in skirmishes between left and right. Earlier that week leftists had killed the brother of President Carlos Humberto Romero. A banner of the Sandinistas was among the flags left beside the corpse.

Five months after the summer revolution, which at last disposed of the 45-year despotic rule of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the political flavor of the Nicaraguan junta is still hard to define. Of the top nine Sandinista guerrillas, all young, some well-born, four and perhaps six were primed in Cuba, one in Moscow. Another chose exile in Chile during the reign of Salvador Allende, the late Marxist president. The only Sandinista on the executive junta that governs the nation is Daniel Ortega, a 33-year-old tough-talking revolutionary who spouts anti-imperialist rhetoric. Communes have sprouted on the expropriated Somoza land. "Counterrevolutionary" has become a pejorative label, and certification that one is clear of such taint comes from neighborhood committees that were the underground cells during the revolution. Some of these groups are fiercely militant. A handbill distributed in one district not long ago urged the formation of "strict vigilance committees" whose duty it would be to "watch who enters and leaves the houses of your friends." It urged such suspicious people to be followed, for "they may be counterrevolutionaries." Although no *caudillo*, no strongman has appeared—Ortega is one candidate—and there is no clear determination of the political complexion of what will emerge in Nicaragua, one junta member has said, "We are clearly headed toward some kind of socialist system."

Whatever Castro's hand in Nicaragua may have been or may still be, it is at least equally involved in Puerto Rico, the American commonwealth that leans now toward statehood. Although the State Department denied that any deal was struck, Castro had publicly stated that he would free the last



WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

Street battle in San Salvador— "An ominous change has taken place, agitated by failing economics, overpopulation, and Cuban resurgence."

four American prisoners held on political charges in Cuban jails if the United States would free the four Puerto Rican nationalists who had been convicted of violent terrorist activity in the U.S. Three had gained access to the spectator's gallery of the House of Representatives in 1954 and, opening fire, had wounded five congressmen. One had tried to assassinate President Truman at Blair House in 1950. They were released on September 10 last year, and a week later Castro commuted the sentences of his American prisoners.

Even though the New Progressive party, advocating statehood and led by San Juan Mayor Hernan Padilla and Governor Carlos Romero Barceló, polled 49 percent of the vote in 1976 (while the Independistas, Marxists included, polled 6 percent), the released nationalist terrorists were unrepentant and vowed to keep up the fight. "We are stronger than ever, more committed than ever," said newly freed Lolita Lebron. "I hate bombs, but we might have to use them," she declared.

Less than three months later, terrorists in Puerto Rico ambushed a bus filled with navy men and women, killing two and wounding 10. "We are in a state of war," roared the head of the Communist party. "The war" broke out when a group of independence advocates, seeking to create an incident, trespassed on posted federal land on the island of Vieques, east of Puerto Rico, where the U.S. Navy was holding maneuvers. Arrested, the demonstrators refused bail and were arraigned before a federal judge, a Puerto Rican. He offered them dismissal of sentence in return for a promise not to demonstrate again on Vieques. The offer was spurned, and Angel Rodriguez Cristobal was enjoined by the other demonstrators not to offer a defense. Instead the band challenged the jurisdiction of the federal courts to operate in Puerto Rico. They were given six months in jail, fined $1,000, and remanded to a federal penitentiary. Since there are none on the island they were flown to mainland prisons. Rodriguez landed in the Federal Correctional Institution at Tallahassee. There, he was a recalcitrant prisoner and tried repeatedly to wound himself by cracking his head against the bars of his cell. Placed in solitary, he hung himself. Whether this tragic turn was an act of martyrdom to incite further unrest, whether it came as the result of instability of the inmate, or whether he had met with foul play became an immediate subject of wild speculation in Puerto Rico among all classes.

The Independista movement, backed by Marxist elements and possessed of a bottomless treasury, went on the radio crying "assassination." The message was repeated over and over until it was believed in circles not at all in sympathy with the movement. As sophisticated a Puerto Rican as Ricardo Alegria, long the head of the Puerto Rican Institute of Culture and responsible for the island's magnificent plan for colonial restoration, told me quite soberly that Angel Rodriguez Cristobal had been sent off the island, which meant double punishment, and that when the prison guards cut him down he had a large gash on his face. There was no doubt in Alegria's mind that he had been killed by sinister forces. A mild-mannered middle executive for an American company who lives in Ponce and is not given to polemics told me matter-of-factly that it was the work of the CIA. To what end, to serve what means, he didn't seem to know. He had heard the radio say "assassination" enough times to believe it.

Yet records of Angel Rodriguez Cristobal show he was separated from government military service for 100 percent neuropsychiatric disability. He had been undergoing treatment as an out-patient for a condition diagnosed as schizophrenia of the undifferentiated type. His medical history shows he had previously tried to destroy himself. With that background he could have had the charges dropped for mental instability, but was otherwise persuaded. Rodriguez's disordered mental condition was vaguely hinted at when the news of his hanging first broke, but although detailed information was offered to *El Mundo*, the oldest San Juan daily, the full story was never printed and the accusation of foul play continues to be widely believed to this day.

So determined is the leftist block to thwart full Puerto Rican entry into the United States that Cuba and Iraq pushed a proposal through the United Nations calling for hearings on the internal matter of the independence of Puerto Rico.

DOWN THE ISLAND CHAIN, Prime Minister Eric Gairy, the dictatorial leader of Grenada, was deposed last March and replaced by Maurice Bishop, an opposition leader. A new airport is being built by the Cubans. And the *Torchlight*, which supported Bishop when he was in opposition to Gairy, and which now questioned Bishop's new-found friendship with Cubans and Russians, was shut down.

When Prime Minister Milton Cato of St. Vincent won a landslide victory over Marxists and other opponents in December, armed terrorists seized the five-square-mile island of Union midway between St. Vincent and Grenada. Cato had promised to help stem the tide of leftist government sweeping the Caribbean. This seemed to be Grenada's response—democratic process challenged by terrorist revolt.

The most enigmatic character in the Caribbean, and prime minister of Jamaica, the sea's most questionable country, is Michael Manley, the light-skinned charismatic leader who is the son of an English actress and of Norman Manley, the island's first prime minister, still highly esteemed.

In 1978 Jamaica received $22 million in U.S. aid. It exports bauxite and bananas, and before its recent travail, fraught not only with hostile politics but outrageous crime, had been a tourist favorite for Hilton- and Inter-Continental-style holiday seekers, as well as for wealthy Americans and Britons, many of whom maintained winter villas there. Since 1972 when he first took office (and soon declared American ambassador Vincent de Roulet persona non grata), Manley has swung his government closer and closer to Cuba. His son studies in Havana. Cubans by the hundreds are in Jamaica for the avowed purpose of working in schools and hospitals. The Jamaican police force, which is larger than the Jamaican army, is Cuban trained. Those constables who found Castro's control personally unacceptable have, like many of Jamaica's professional people, emigrated to the United States.

Traveling in the Jamaican boondocks, Manley affects Jamaica pidgin. But for a speech in Miami at the Conference on Caribbean Trade Investment and Development, last November, he was all Western businessman.

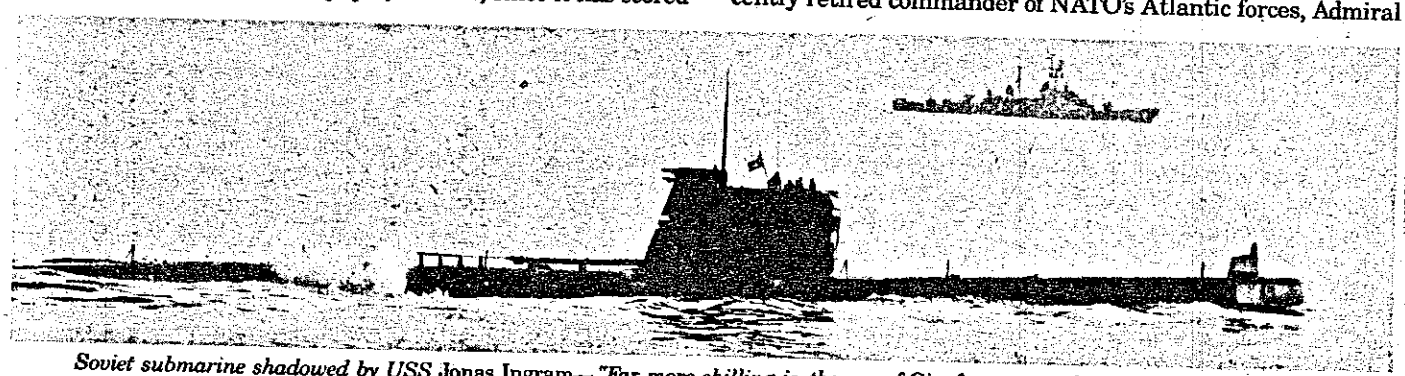
It had been alleged, he said, that the government of Jamaica is anti-West and anti-American. "This is absolutely untrue," he offered in rebuttal. I have the profoundest admiration for both the people and the achievements of the great Western democracies. The gifts to civilization of this group of nations beggar description in terms of technology, material standards, artistic and cultural accomplishments, respect for personal liberties, and evolution of highly advanced and sophisticated political systems and processes."

While Manley was effectively blowing smoke in the hall in Miami, Jamaicans violently opposed to the direction in which he is leading the country were demonstrating noisily across the street. They shouted imprecations through bullhorns, carried signs reading "Manley Does What Fidel Says" and "Manley Is a Communist Dictator," all in loud objection to his presence and his policies. Manley has been in a running battle with the *Gleaner*, a 145-year-old independently owned daily newspaper published in Kingston. Though he once called it "truly a great newspaper," he has, since it has scored him for his clubby relationship with the Cuban ambassador, taken to calling it "the North St. whorehouse."

The *Gleaner* claimed that the envoy, Ulises Estrada-Lescalles, had issued threatening statements and it asked for him to be withdrawn. Indeed, Western intelligence identifies Estrada-Lescalles as an agent of DGI, the Cuban intelligence apparatus. Manley has vaguely threatened the *Gleaner* with extinction. To turn the screw, government ministers accused members of the *Gleaner*'s board of lying, breaking the law, and publishing partisan articles.

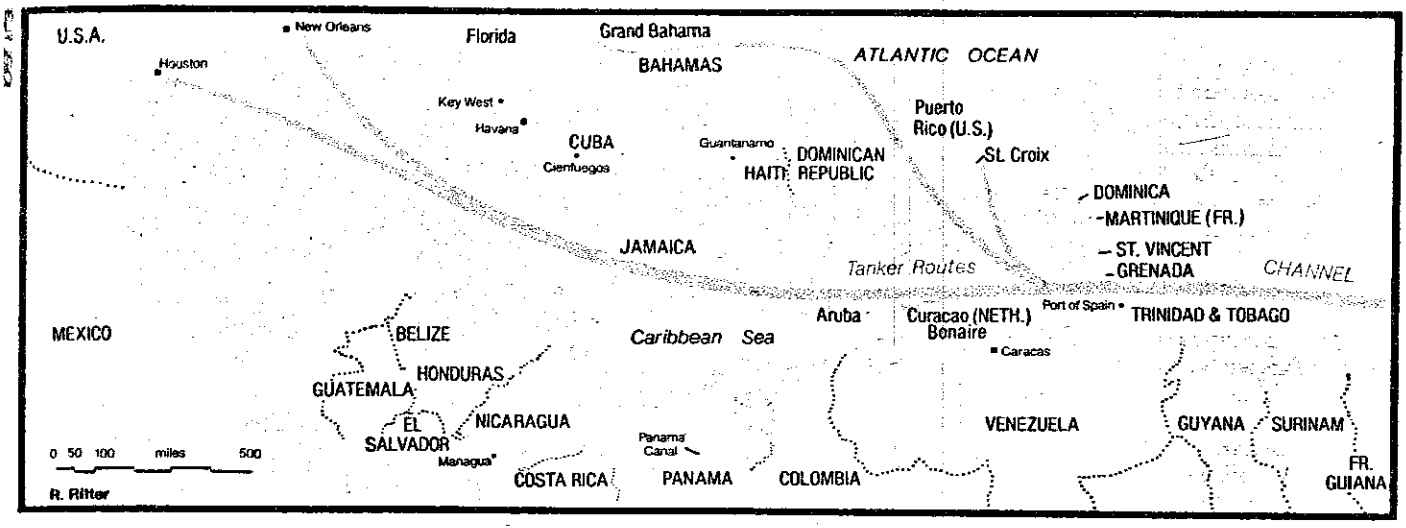
Manley's speech at the Miami Conference, where he sought international trade, investment, and development, was in marked contrast to a lengthy peroration he delivered only two months earlier at the Non-Aligned Nations Conference in Havana. There he was the perfect parrot for the Kremlin line. Seventeen times, as he threaded his way along the party pathway, he referred to Fidel Castro as "Comrade President." Manley ran through a litany of leaders whom he called "catalyst and rock." Among them: Marcus Garvey, the Harlem black who advocated a back-to-Africa movement; Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana; Lenin; and of course, Castro himself. He wrung his hands over "the forces of progress extinguished in Guatemala and snuffed out like a candle in the Dominican Republic." As for Cuba, he said of a nation that is supported by $2 billion in Soviet grants, buys its oil from Moscow at $14 a barrel, gets 95 percent of its steel and all of its sheet metal from Russia, and accepts military equipment for its overseas adventures and its home defense, "We are absolutely satisfied that Cuba is a nonaligned country." He condemned "those who malign you and your country as a surrogate acting on foreign orders." Manley lauded Grenada's turn to the left, rejoiced in the Sandinista success, called for the "support of those who struggle for Puerto Rican independence regardless of whether they are in the minority at this time." He demanded the return of Guantanamo Bay, asked for the recognition of the PLO as the "sole representative of the Palestine peoples."

THAT SPEECH SET off warning bells in the State Department whose measured assistant secretaries don't flap easily. Taken together with the Cuban specter to the north, the threats seemed very real indeed to the Pentagon and especially to NATO far across another sea. The presence in Cuba of the 3,000-man Soviet brigade and untold MIG-23s was one thing. The Soviets' agile deployment of troops—as evidenced by the fast action in the Afghanistan invasion (compared with the seemingly sluggish movement of U.S. Marines in an excursion to bolster Guantanamo last fall)—was sobering. Far more chilling is the potential use of Cienfuegos, on the southern coast of Cuba, dead north of Grand Cayman, as a Soviet submarine base in time of war. Work has been proceeding at the base all through the Seventies, and as of now it will accommodate two submarines as well as their tenders and crews. Cuba operates one submarine of the Foxtrot class given them by the Soviet navy, but this month a second one, also donated by Moscow, is being towed across the Atlantic, doubling the Cuban undersea capability. The recently retired commander of NATO's Atlantic forces, Admiral



OFFICIAL U.S. NAVY PHOTOGRAPH

Soviet submarine shadowed by USS Jonas Ingram*—"Far more chilling is the use of Cienfuegos as a Soviet base in time of war."*



America's oil flow, Central America, and the Caribbean—"An escalation of terrorism and guerrilla warfare is the grim future."

Isaac Kidd, has said that any increased Moscow presence or Moscow-allied presence in West Indian waters could, in case of war, severely harry an American supply line reinforcing Europe.

According to the naval scenario, the northern route to Europe by way of Greenland, Iceland, and on to the British Isles would be threatened by Soviet submarines and by Backfire bombers, both based in Murmansk. Were the Russians to move forward to airfields in Norway, the Soviet bombers could attack ships in the south Atlantic, forming an effective pincers with submarines operating from Cienfuegos.

American diplomatic sources familiar with the island nations see no real Cuban-Soviet master plan for domination of the Caribbean. "Everything is going well for them," one official says, "they can sit back and choose targets of opportunity." Ambassador Lawrence Pezullo, the American envoy in Managua, thinks the concept of a red star shining over the Caribbean is "too dramatic." Yet if our geopolitical generals and admirals are writing "what-if" scenarios, it is not an extreme stretch of the imagination to assume that Kremlin war-room planners are making their own sketches, too. Had the Pearl Harbor attack been proposed as a possibility in 1940 it would have been dismissed as fanciful and dramatic.

Manley, left, and Romero—"Warning bells at State."

The Heritage Foundation, a Washington-based think-tank generally viewed as conservative, recently published a carefully documented paper in which it concluded that the Sandinista victory is part of a long term, carefully planned campaign to reduce the influence of the United States in Latin America. The report termed the outbreaks of violence and revolt around the Caribbean rim far more than merely "indigenous protests or spontaneous rebellions against oppressive regimes." Rather, the report says, "They are part of an internationally orchestrated campaign of subversion and terrorism. Almost every significant Latin American terrorist group of left-wing orientation has had or has today links with Cuba or the Soviet Union or both."

The Soviets have effectively controlled the Cuban DGI (Direccion General de Intelligencia) since 1970. Largely responsible for Cuban support of Latin American terrorists, DGI has been under the direct control of the KGB for almost all of Castro's years. All anti-Soviet personnel were removed from the DGI by Raul Castro in 1970. Supervising the DGI in Havana is Vassily Petrovich Semenov, a KGB general who resides with his staff in the Cuban capital.

An escalation of terrorism and guerrilla warfare in Latin America, with U.S. businessmen and diplomats its targets, is part of the grim prediction for the future. Concomitantly, the Soviets and the Cubans will attempt to destabilize and overthrow pro-American governments to reduce further U.S. political and economic influence in Latin America.

Warships of the Soviet fleet are frequently deployed in the Caribbean and cruise on sea lanes that are vital to the United States. Reconnaissance aircraft fly the ocean. Soviet intelligence-gathering vessels run along the East Coast. The Kremlin presence in Cuba now numbers between 4,000-6,000 civilian advisers, and 2,000 premanently assigned military personnel, in addition to the 3,000-man brigade. This challenge to the southern security of the United States will be augmented when Cuban troops, some 37,000 of them, return home from their global adventures in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Guinea, Libya, and elsewhere, and begin to look for something to do.

HOW DID WE GET in such a fix in the Caribbean that most Americans have thought of only as a balmy retreat for winter pleasure? Very possibly, says one State Department analyst, because we thought of this benevolent sea in the cushy terms of Sunday-supplement travel sections. We have failed to see the needs and the suffering of those who live there. The million-dollar villas built by Americans in Jamaica are in shocking contrast to the pathetic street signs chalked on Kingston walls that say, "The poor can't take no more."

As Oliver Serephine, prime minister of tiny Dominica pointed out at the recent Miami Conference on Caribbean Trade Investment and Development, the per capita GNP in 1977 ranged from $230 in Haiti to $2,380 in Trinidad and Tobago. The average per capita GNP of the least-developed Caribbean common market nations was $600 compared to a per capita GNP in the United States in 1977 of $8,520. "The deep deprivation of our people in the basic necessities of life—food, clothing, housing, education, and medicare," Serephine

said, "is heightened by our proximity and constant exposure to North American living standards."

He called for a major attack on Caribbean poverty, to be implemented by investments and joint ventures in agro-industries, fruit processing, furniture manufacturing, production of building materials using indigenous raw materials, garment manufacture, and tourism. Raw materials, "vast pools of labor," and a "determination to develop industrially" are what island nations have to offer the larger nations.

Both Prime Minister Serephine and Jacobo Majluta, vice president of the Dominican Republic, have scored protective tariffs which invoke "competitive need criteria" that keep Caribbean goods out of the United States market. Serephine acknowledged that pressure groups in the U.S. would fight for limited market access, but it must be realized that "developing countries will quickly spend their export receipts on imports of manufactured goods and services that developed countries supply."

A trenchant political note was added to those basic economics by Vice President Majluta. "It is utterly incompatible with leading nations, supporters of a democratic style of life, to exercise such restrictive policies over the free enterprise only to protect inefficient areas of their economies, in detriment to those small nations whom they call their allies with whom they share noble ideals of justice, liberty, and progress." The Miami hall, filled with delegates, stood up at that and awarded the Dominican delegate an ovation.

Young Caribbean leaders turn to the Cuban role model because it appears to offer instant results. And they need an instant turn-around to hold their constituency, one of the youngest in the world. The Caribbean median age is 16 compared to 29 in the United States. But the unemployment index varies between 15 and 35 percent, compared to 5.9 percent in the U.S. For the new, young leaders Castro is a romantic figure who, in the words of one State Department official, "kicked Uncle Sam in the pants for years and got away with it." The alternatives of emulating the economic and political patterns of European democracies from which they have only recently been freed, or those of the United States, which has neglected them and/or used them, emerge as unattractive. Says Ambassador Pezullo, "When they talk about a democratic or capitalistic model, it has been implemented so badly and so oppressively and so corruptly that it doesn't show well, and part of that is what brings about radical change. Bad businessmen and corrupt leaders are not good examples of either capitalism or democracy."

THE OTHER WINTER'S NIGHT, with balmy winds blowing across the Condado lagoon in San Juan, I stood with hundreds of Puerto Ricans on the ramparts of a colonial fort that helped repel an invasion led by Sir Francis Drake in 1595. Huge bursts of fireworks exploded in the sky above the Caribe Hilton in celebration of that hotel's 30th anniversary. It was also the anniversary of Operation Bootstrap, designed by Puerto Ricans and financed by mainland Americans to lift that island out of the economic pits. Two years before that, in 1947, on my first visit to the island, I had viewed shanty towns with open sewers that in their squalor were worse than any I had ever encountered.

Now Puerto Rico, despite a food-stamp program larger than any of the 50 states, has the highest standard of living south of the Rio Grande. It has pulled itself up with the help of jobs and investment provided by such American companies as General Electric, Westinghouse, Star-Kist Tuna, Union Carbide, Pfizer, Eli Lilly, and Searle. Operation Bootstrap is one of the most successful economic schemes in the world.

"We are bullish on Puerto Rico where we have had a presence for 25 years because the track record there has been good for decades," says Charles Ramos, a vice-president of Merrill Lynch. "When Puerto Rico wishes to sell its bonds it clears them through a management group that includes First National Bank of Boston, Solomon Brothers, Blyth, Banco Popular, Weidman, and Merrill Lynch. We sold a $100 million bond issue for the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority. It was oversubscribed. We had orders for $148 million. The demand was staggering. It proved the faith of mainland U.S. institutions in Puerto Rico even though the island sits in the center of the Caribbean."

Governor Carlos Romero Barceló says flatly, "We haven't had an effective Latin American or Caribbean policy, so what can be expected of these countries? Who is there to listen to them and to lead them? Has there been a commitment from government to support a Caribbean policy? Has someone been specifically designated? If someone has been given that responsibility, who knows about it? Is he visible?"

Although Puerto Rico should stand as effective a role model for Caribbean governments *in extremis* as does Cuba, it seems difficult for us, Romero says, "to export our success the way Cubans export revolution, socialism, and communism."

Romero is never consulted on Caribbean matters. A Washington diplomat deeply involved with the Caribbean waves off Puerto Rico as an area outside his responsibility because it is an American territory. Says Romero, "I haven't even been asked about decisions on the Caribbean even though I have a feeling for this region that perhaps transcends the knowledge of those who have studied the islands more than I."

In arguing the case against Cuban influence and for democratic advancement and free enterprise in the Caribbean, Ambassador Philip Habib, President Carter's special representative for Latin America, says plainly, "We oppose Cuba's adventurism in this hemisphere as elsewhere and we will continue to do so. One-quarter of Cuba's gross national product is accounted for by its relationship to the Soviet Union, yet Cuba still has not escaped economic underdevelopment. In fact, Cuba is trapped in a new and unprecedented dependency.... No other country votes as systematically with the Soviet Union in the United Nations.... No Caribbean nation need barter its independence for security. Our companies do not seek to dictate national policies, concludes Habib.

But more than rhetoric is needed. Comprehensive aid visibly stamped "URGENT" will be a basic requirement to return stability to the Caribbean and restore it to democratic process. As Dominica's Serephine put it, "When Hurricane David devastated my country a few months ago, the response from your government was quick and substantial. The world responds to crisis brought about by natural disaster with sympathy and immediate action. The economics of the Caribbean states is in grave crisis as we move into the 1980s. It is my fervent hope that the same spirit of cooperation for development will influence the response of your country to the needs of the region in this crisis." The hurricane has hit. The time for rescue is now. Poverty is the scourge and humanitarianism the motive. To fail is not only to be callous, is not only to be immoral, it is also to court a real threat to the veritable security of the nation and ultimately its commitment to its allies abroad. ◉

WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

Admiral Replogle with Secretary Harold Brown— "No nonsense."