

1983: The Invasion of Grenada

Context

For decades, Eric Gairy dominated the tiny British colony of Grenada. Gairy “a vicious dictator...[was] the only Caribbean leader to maintain diplomatic relations with Pinochet’s Chile.” When his “notorious security forces” returned from training in Chile “‘disappearances’ became frequent.”⁷⁹ ‘Gairyism’ was so bad that when Britain offered independence, Grenadians united to “shut down the country... prior to Independence Day, February 7, 1974.”⁸⁰

The New Jewel Movement (NJM) led a successful uprising on March 13, 1979. The NJM “organized agrarian reform..., expanded trade union rights, advanced women’s equality..., established literacy programs and instituted free medical care.”⁸¹

The CIA “relentlessly used every trick in its dirty bag” including “an unending campaign of economic, psychological and openly violent destabilization.” Reagan met Caribbean leaders, the U.S. urged “regional governments to consider military action” and CIA chief, William Casey, met Senate Intelligence Committee members “to discuss CIA involvement.” Gairy began “recruiting mercenaries from...the Cuban exile community in Miami.”⁸²

In October 1981, a U.S. military exercise simulated an invasion of Grenada ostensibly to rescue Americans and “install a regime favorable to the way of life we espouse.”⁸³

In March 1983, Reagan exclaimed on TV that Grenada’s tourist airport threatened U.S. oil supply routes.⁸⁴

On October 19, 1983, Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, and other popular NJM leaders, were put under house arrest during a coup led by Deputy PM Bernard Coard. Oddly, they were freed by a “well organized crowd... including counter-revolutionary elements... with anti-communist banners.... [led by] well known businessmen.... Who organized this rally, planned so well, and in advance?” Bishop and the other freed NJM leaders were whisked away and as a “crowd gathered...the soldiers, apparently panicked by explosions, opened fire.... something provoked them, leading to a massacre” of dozens of unarmed civilians. Six NJM leaders, including Bishop, the surrendered to the soldiers and were soon executed.⁸⁵

Significantly, “Pentagon officials informed Members of Congress that they had known of the impending coup...two weeks in advance.”⁸⁶

The coup plotters were charged with the murders but their lawyer, former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clarke believe them innocent of the murders.⁸⁷ It seems

the coup was hijacked by U.S. interests to kill some NJM leaders, jail the rest and set the stage for an invasion.

Pretext Incident

In his Naval Science course, Captain M.T.Carson lists the invasion’s “stated reasons” as “protect Americans, eliminate hostage potential; restore order; requested by OECS [Organization of Eastern Caribbean States].”⁸⁸

The U.S. helped form the OECS, and then got it, and Grenada’s governor, to “request” an invasion. Under “potential problem,” Carson notes “Act fast with surprise and present world with *fait accompli*. If not, world opinion of U.S. invasion of tiny country will be critical. So:

- Get OECS to request action.
- Get Governor Scoon to request action.
- Emphasize students-in-danger aspect”⁸⁹

The threat to U.S. medical students was a total fabrication. Even Carson quotes a “medical school official”: “Our safety was never in danger. We were used as an excuse by this government to invade.... They needed a reason...and we were it.” Most students “insisted” that they were “not...in any danger before the U.S. invasion; only afterwards.”⁹⁰

Follow Up

On October 22, 1983, “Operation Urgent Fury” was ordered.⁹¹ Three days later, 7,000 troops, 11 warships and dozens of warplanes hit the tiniest nation in the Western Hemisphere like a cyclone. A hospital for the mentally handicapped was bombed to rubble, killing at least 46. The Organization of American States “deeply deplored” the invasion and the UN Security Council voted 11-1 against it.⁹²

Real Reasons

Grenada threatened the U.S. by providing a powerful example of viable alternative ways to organize social, political and economic structures.

Carson lists the following reasons for the invasion:

- “Chance to eliminate Communist regime and replace with pro-U.S. government.”
- “Demonstrate U.S. military capabilities.”
- After the invasion of Grenada “President Reagan commented that U.S. military forces were back on their feet and standing tall.”⁹³ (U.S. military morale had been damaged two days before the invasion when 241 Marines were killed in Lebanon.)⁹⁴

The *Wall Street Journal* said the invasion made Grenada a “haven for offshore banks.”⁹⁵

Footnotes:

79. Ellen Ray and Bill Schaap, “U.S. Crushes Caribbean Jewel.” *Covert Action Information Bulletin (CAIB)*, winter 1984, p.8

80. Jeff Hackett, “Burying ‘Gairyism.’” *Bibliographies*.

81. Preface to Maurice Bishop speech “In Nobody’s Backyard,” April 13, 1979, *The Militant*, Mar.15 1999.

82. Ray and Schaap, pp.3-5

83. Ray and Schaap, p.6

84. Clarence Lusane, “Grenada, Airport ’83: Reagan’s Big Lie,” *CAIB*, Spring-Summer 1983, p.29.

85. Ray and Schaap, pp.10-11

86. Ray and Schaap, p.5

87. Alan Scott, “The Last Prisoners of the Cold War Are Black,” letter, *The Voice* (Grenada), April 20, 2001.

88. Capt. M.T.Carson, U.S.MC, (Marine Officer Instructor), “Grenada October 1983,” *History of Amphibious Warfare* (Naval Science 293), Naval Reserves

Officer Training Corps, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.

89. Carson.

90. Ray and Schaap, p.8.

91. Carson.

92. “Failures of U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Alternativeinsight*, Sept.1, 2001.

93. Carson.

94. *Alternativeinsight*, Sept.1, 2001.

95. Anthony Arno and Alan Maass, “Washington’s war crimes,” *Socialist Worker*, Nov.16, 2001.

Military Exercise Practised the Invasion and Pretext

By Jorge Luna, author, *Grenada, the New Jewel of the Caribbean* (1982).

The U.S. invasion of Grenada was organized and rehearsed on Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, in 1981 under the code name “Ambar and the Ambarines.”

The landing of U.S. Marines in Grenada was not an improvised action taking advantage of confusion resulting from Maurice Bishop’s death. It was a premeditated attack.

In August 1981, when the Grenadan revolution had been in existence for two and a half years, the U.S. carried out the “Ocean Venture 81” military maneuvers. The Caribbean part of the maneuvers was held off Vieques island, in an area fixed up to resemble southern Grenada where there is a small town called Amber. That part of the maneuvers was called “Ambar and the Ambarines,” in a clear allusion to Grenada and the Grenadines [a series of small islands just north of Grenada]. Some cays off Vieques were made to resemble the Grenadian islands of Carriacou and Petit Martinique.

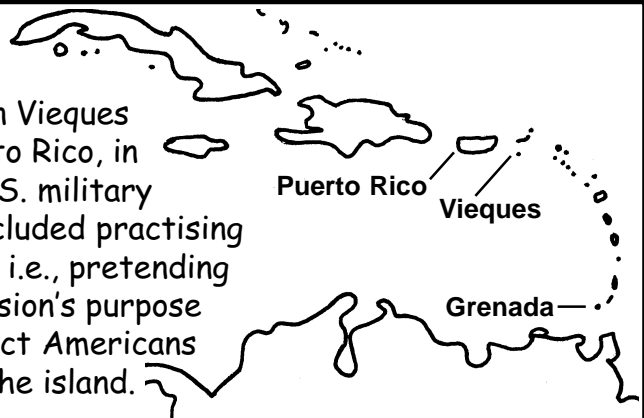
The political-military plan was described by Rear Admiral Robert McKenzie, who used the pretext that U.S. citizens had been kidnapped. This is the same pretext used [in 1983] when Washington mentioned U.S. medical students in Grenada whose security had been guaranteed. McKenzie claimed that authorities in “Ambar” had put the lives of the U.S. citizens in danger and therefore a military invasion was entirely justifiable.

The political purpose of the invasion was very simple: occupy the island, particularly the airport, overthrow the government, set up a “friendly regime” and call for new elections.

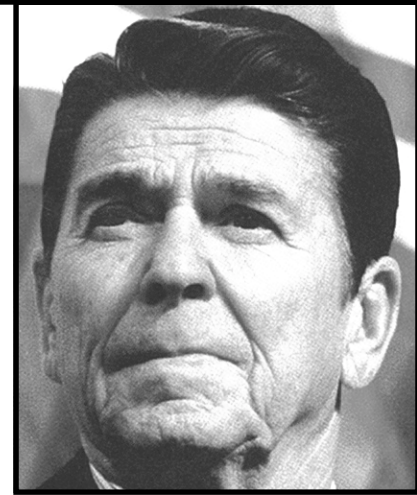
McKenzie asserted that once elections were held under U.S. military control, U.S. troops would be withdrawn. Caribbean observers following the maneuvers were prompt to denounce the fact that they were a cover-up for an action designed to establish new U.S. military bases in the area.

Source: “U.S. invasion of Grenada was planned and rehearsed 2 years ago,” *Grenada: The World Against the Crime*, 1983.

The 1983 invasion was rehearsed on Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, in 1981. The U.S. military rehearsal included practising the pretext, i.e., pretending that the mission’s purpose was to protect Americans trapped on the island.



Grenadan Prime Minister Maurice Bishop (1979-1983)



U.S. President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989)

“Pretext Hostages” Denied they were in Danger

Dr. Geoffrey Bourne, [St. George’s University Chancellor in Grenada] told Washington that the “Americans in Grenada were not in danger.” According to his son, “I received a call from a member of the board of trustees of the medical school... who said that the State Department was pressuring school officials in New York to say publicly that the students on Grenada were in danger so that Washington would have a pretext to invade the island.” The students’ parents were so fearful that Reagan would use the students as “pretext hostages” that they sent a telegram, signed by over 500 parents, to the President asking him politely “not to move too quickly or to take any precipitous and provocative actions at this time.” The Chancellor even made a tape saying that the students were completely safe, and it was broadcast over Grenadan radio every 15 minutes to assure that the students’

safety would not be used as a pretext for invasion.

Source: Lloyd deMause, Excerpt, *Reagan’s America* (1984).

Same Old Recycled Pretext

The U.S. government’s argument that the invasion was ordered to safeguard the lives of U.S. citizens in Grenada has no basis in reality. Latin American peoples are only too familiar with that argument and know how it works. Dozens of times, dating back to the last century, U.S. administrations, always using the same deceitful pretext, have spilled Latin American blood and have militarily intervened in Our America – not to protect the lives of U.S. citizens, but rather to safeguard imperialism’s economic and political interests.

Source: Héctor Hernandez Pardo, “Humanity will judge this ‘epic’ invasion,” *Granma*, October 28, 1983.