

The Quest For Security in the Caribbean: Problems and Promises in Subordinate States

Peter M. Sanchez

Volume 15, numéro 1, spring 1995

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs15_01br04

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)

1715-5673 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Sanchez, P. M. (1995). The Quest For Security in the Caribbean:: Problems and Promises in Subordinate States. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 15(1), 142–143.

Griffith, Ivelaw L. *The Quest For Security in the Caribbean: Problems and Promises in Subordinate States*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993.

Those who expect to find in-depth information and analysis on Cuba, Haiti, Panama or Central America in this book will be disappointed. *The Quest For Security in the Caribbean* is a thorough analysis of the security dilemmas faced by the small, Commonwealth Caribbean states. Of course, a focus on the former British colonies has good historical and theoretical value. The Commonwealth Caribbean, though close to the United States, has been spared extensive US intervention (at least until Grenada in 1983), because of its special relationship with Britain. Additionally, the countries under study represent similar cases in terms of culture, institutional development, and colonial history.

It is obvious at the outset that Griffith is employing the realist paradigm in his analysis. He uses the term security to refer to anything that affects national survival and power, the "high politics" of international relations. Consequently, focusing on the tiny states of the Caribbean provides an excellent demonstration of the frustrations that weak states experience in the international system, especially those that are in proximity to a superpower. Griffith clearly points out that the principal security concerns faced by these small states are vulnerability, internal stability, intervention, and militarization. Owing to lack of capabilities, it is very difficult for these small states to deal with these problems on an individual basis. As a result, they must turn to collective measures in order to at least partly compensate for their weak status in the region. As the author points out, however, these collective security measures, like the Zone of Peace Treaty Proposal and the Regional Security System, have been minimally successful.

Griffith, nevertheless, understands the limitations of the realist paradigm and thus incorporates perception into his analysis. Because security decisions in the Commonwealth Caribbean involve "Predominant Leaders operating within Single Group frameworks," (p. 21) the perceptions (and misperceptions) of key decision-makers are especially important. The author adds ideology, as well, to the framework. He attempts to show that the decisions that are made are constrained or bounded by political and economic models. More specifically, the Cold War period created a situation where security and ideology were inextricably tied. Thus, states that attempted to establish socialist models, like Jamaica, Guyana, and Grenada, met staunch resistance from the United States and other states with a Western orientation. In many ways, this is the most obvious and important finding: that small states close to a hegemon have very little chance for self-determination.

While the reader is able to determine from detailed examples that the United States will not allow these small states much leeway, the author has produced a safe book in that he does not indict the United States as the principal threat to the security of the Commonwealth Caribbean. For example, Griffith is fully aware that US power and action places serious limits on the autonomy and sovereignty of these states. He repeatedly mentions US destabilization efforts in Jamaica, Guyana, and

of course Grenada, and admits that "... the United States has rewarded governments sharing its orientation and has leveled sanctions against those to the left." (p. 238) Nevertheless, Griffith never identifies the United States as the greatest source of vulnerability, instability, intervention and militarization for these states.

The 1983 Grenada invasion is an excellent illustration of the central problems and issues that this book addresses. Small states that experience instability are very vulnerable to external intervention. Cuba developed ties with the New Jewel Movement in hopes of increasing its influence in the region. The United States immediately saw this as a threat to its interests and hegemony in the region. Militarization of the small island was almost a foregone conclusion. Thus, Grenada became a pawn to be moved by external players. The Grenada example is fascinating in that it was the first time that the United States invaded a former British colony. It would be quite interesting to read the classified negotiations between the British and the United States on this invasion. Of course, the final result was that the island was brought back into the US fold, as also happened in Jamaica.

Griffith devotes an entire chapter to the drug problem. Because of its strategic location, the Commonwealth Caribbean has, as with most countries in the region, become extensively incorporated into the illegal narcotics trade. While marijuana is cultivated in some countries like Jamaica and Belize, the principal security problems involve transshipment and its attendant corruption of officials. While certainly a problem for these nations, the illicit drug trade is a greater concern for the United States. As such, the US government has taken significant steps to get the Commonwealth Caribbean nations to do more and more to combat drugs. As a result, militarization has increased. Again, we see that these nations are far from being masters of their own destiny.

Despite safe conclusions, Griffith has written a good and useful book that takes a serious look at the security problems of small states in an important regional environment. The book lays out in detail the history, force structure and leadership of the security forces in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The book also helps explain how these small states have been able to cope, at least marginally, with their security dilemmas. Anyone interested in the Caribbean region should take a look at this book.

Peter M. Sanchez
Loyola University Chicago