CHAPTER - VI

THE CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN - AN "AIRCRAFT-CARRIER" OF THE UNITED STATES

The Central American and the Caribbean has been traditionally a region of inter-imperialist rivalry. The term 'Central America and the Caribbean', which is a sub-region of Latin America, is commonly applied to the group of nations of Western Hemisphere immediately south of the United States. Specifically, the term 'Central America' refers to Mexico and the Central American isthmus, i.e. Guatemala, El Salvador Belize, 1 Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, often referred to as the Banana Republics. The Caribbean includes the islands in the Caribbean Sea. The greatest length of Central America is 1,300 miles. Central America is one of the narrowest crossways between east and west like the Suez Canal and the Bosporus and Dardallas.

1. After nearly 120 years as a British colony, the little Central American State of Belize, a nation of 150,000 people, became independent on September, 21, 1981. However, Guatemala which has a long-standing territorial dispute with the former colony, has refused to accept Belize's independence. Belize is the second smallest country after El Salvador, on the American continent.
The United States always felt invincible necessity that it was her 'manifest destiny' to occupy commanding position over the region, and to exercise restraint or direction, over the destinies of the Central American States. From the very beginning of the century, the stability and security of the Central America and the Caribbean for the U.S. was to be seen as a condition of U.S. global capabilities. The United States, with the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary, has long heeded it as its natural and legitimate 'sphere of influence' referring to it as 'our lake', "our backyard", and "third border". This ambitious attitude of the United States towards Latin America as a whole led to interventions and invasions on several occasions and thus, created distrust toward the "Colossus of the North" in Latin America.

The countries of central America and the Caribbean region, despite their heterogeneity, share certain basic peculiarities. Most of them belong to the Western Hemisphere alliance system, which also includes the United States. Their

geographical position is far from the main theatres of military conflicts in the world. This, together with the predominance of a common Iberian ancestry, especially on the Central American isthmus, has contributed to a strong regional consciousness. However, the presence of the United States in the area creates a situation in which a group of weak States is associated in an alliance system with a major power that is viewed by its weaker allies as both a protector and a threat.  

U.S. ROUGH BREATHING ON CENTRAL AMERICA:

The first alienation with the pattern of pro-US rule in the region was the Cuban revolution in 1959. However, the United States successfully contained this challenge. For instance, left wing's increasing popularity in the Dominican Republic was crushed by U.S. marines in 1965. Besides, left wing forces in Dominican Republic which seemed able to win or retain power through the ballot box, as in Guatemala in 1954, were also thwarted. CIA provided large funds to the opposition in Guyana in 1964, encouraged a military coup in Chile in 1973, supported the right wing opposition in Jamaica and El Salvador, and began manoeuvring against Marxist-oriented Nicaraguan regime in 1979.

Thus the Central American State have long experience of U.S. involvement in their internal affairs. The U.S. marines, for instance, had occupied Nicaragua on two occasions in this century. U.S. forces have been in Panama for nearly a century, until 1980, based largely in the former Panama Canal Zone which surrounded the Panama Canal.

COLD WAR IMPACTS ON U.S. POLICY:

In fact, since the onset of the first cold war and the policy of containment, U.S. policy makers have viewed the complex processes of post war decolonisation and development through an anti-Soviet prism. Movements for reforms and wars of national liberation were not looked at with reference to their historical origins and legitimacy. By aligning themselves with right wing elements and authoritarian and repressive regimes, successive U.S. administrations have been providing opportunities to the Soviet Union to side with liberation struggles and popular movements. The U.S. administrations have been playing the role they have been assigned in the leftist perception. Thus, while a reject government in El Salvador is being propped up, a revolutionary government in Nicaragua is sought to be toppled.

Significantly, from President Theodore Roosevelt's second term to President, Ronald Reagan, the U.S. administrations have always tried to convince Central Americans that the United States has not been slightly interested in any territorial expansion and wished the friendship of the other nation of this region. It has been continuously stated by Washington that their policy was to deal justly with them and to promote constitutional and democratic liberty in the region.

CASTO'S CUBA - A THREAT:

Nevertheless, the Americans believe that Governments in Central America with ideological and political loyalties to Cuba and the Soviet Union pose a direct challenge to which they must respond. The U.S., in fact, has hysterical convulsions in deeming that there is a marginal diminution in American security created by the existence of hostile regime of Cuba, that may encourages sabotage and other anti-American activities elsewhere in Latin America. The U.S. policy makers have been obsessed with the fear that Cuba's style of revolution might spread. Obviously, any drift to the left was assumed an indication of the emergence of second Cuba. The major concern of the U.S., therefore, is to prevent Soviet Union and Cuba from gaining foothold in the Western Hemisphere. The history of the U.S. policy in Latin America shows that the U.S. can take any action to stem hostile influence which may, of course, involve
the greatest risks. The U.S., in response, always sought pro-Washington governments in central America and the Caribbean. Obviously, for establishing such government she may behave in extravagant manner. In brief, United States regards Central America and the Caribbean as her 'aircraft-carrier'.

STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE:

Central America and the Caribbean is the region of vital concern to the United States. This is because of the fact of geographical proximity. Viewed in geographical terms, Central America today is "the soft underbelly" of the United States. Strategic importance of the Caribbean and growing unrest in central America has placed the whole region in the forefront of political and strategic concerns of the United states. So much of the U.S. imported oil passes through the Caribbean. The region has large volume of oil refined particularly in Trinidad, Puerto Rico and the Dutch colony of Curacao: In addition, the loss of US control over Panama Canal by the signing treaty with Panama in August 10, 1977, which was

5. This phrase, Churchill referred to Italy in Second World War as "the soft underbelly of the Axis."

expected to provide for a gradual transfer of the Canal to Panama by the end of the century, created alarm in Washington, just like the panic which was created in Britain and France by the loss of the Suez canal in 1956.

Thus, Central America has a widely recognised strategic significance, not only for the protection of US mainland, but also for the projection of U.S. power. The gradual consolidation

7. The treaty, reached after 13 years of negotiations, will replace the one signed by the two countries in 1903 which provided the US control of the canal and the bordering zone forever.

The canal's history is as old as Panama's nationhood. In a pre-C.I.A. operation, President Theodore Roosevelt despatched the U.S. marines, recognised what was then a minor northern province of Columbia as the new state of Panama, and proceeded to dig an enormous ditch through the narrow neck of the centre of the Western Hemisphere which would connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and save an 8,000 mile, 30 day trip around the cape of Good Hope.

It took 11 years from 1903 to 1914 to overcome malaria, yellow fever, jungles, swamps, and intervening mountains. The result was a 50.4 mile passage which includes six sets of 1000 foot locks to each ships through the 85 foot difference in level between the Atlantic and the Pacific. The engineering feat also includes a huge man-made lake and an eight mile channel. Transit time varies from 8 to 14 hours and an average of 32 ships pass through every day at an average toll of $7.175.

Under the terms tentatively worked out the US gradually will yield control of the canal and zone to Panama by 2000, but retain the right to defend the area indefinitely so as to make sure it remains an international waterway which could not be closed by any potentially peevish Panamanian regime.

of US dominance in the region through the decades of intervention and dollar diplomacy had exposed three long standing policy thrusts\(^9\) of the United States in the region -

- the US would not like to allow any other global power to create a significant presence in the region.
- the US would like to have no local threat to the basis of US power projection, whether to shipping and naval power or to the inter-American system; and
- the US would also be anxious to dilute local instabilities by even military means if necessary, which might attract other global powers.

Central America, therefore, has achieved a high priority in U.S. policy. The US hegemony in the region was presumed legitimate. That's why the region was considered a part of the US historical", even "natural" sphere of influence.

---

THE U.S.' OBJECTIVE INTERESTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA:

The region's significance for US national interests derived almost exclusively from its relations to broader concerns. However, the US has no strategic installation in the region but massive U.S. investment in Central America, an area bordering the Caribbean Sea, and inside the US sphere and inter-American system heightened U.S. policy concerns in the region. Moreover, the small and weak nations of Central America are threatened by their own instability and, in fact, can not be themselves seriously threaten US national interests. The United States, however, tended to be given primarily in terms of possible threats to those broader concern, necessarily by unfriendly outside powers. International reliability, which included the capacity to maintain internal stability, tended to be the ultimate criterion in perceptions of local actors. The Cold War and the Cuban Revolution only strengthened this tendency to react to internal threats to stability in terms of external threats to security. 10

In addition, central America has a special importance, since it dominates the land, sea and aerial electronic lines of communication between North and South America, and permits access by relatively much secured routes to the raw materials.

of South America. The administrations believe that a communist/Marxist-dominated regime in Central America would threaten not only these communication links but would encourage its ideology in the region with obvious threats to the Panama Canal and its operations.

THE PANAMA CANAL:

The Panama Canal was still important, but rather less so both economically and strategically. It retained considerable logistic importance for most conventional war contingencies, as illustrated by the quadrupling of transmit by US public vessels during the Vietnam war, but it could'n't handle aircraft carriers and thus, would be of reduced significance in the case of global nuclear war. It's direct economic importance to the US had been falling since at least the 1940s and it could'n't handle the supertankers which were beginning to carry much of the world's oil, whereas the security of other trade routes and sea lines of communication had the same or increased importance as before.

11. A substantial portion of world seaborne commerce passes through the Caribbean, some of it through the Panama Canal. Almost 40 percent of the total amount of petroleum imported by the U.S. Comes from that region (from Venezuela, Mexico, the Bahamas, which is a petroleum Netherlands Antilles, and Trinidad and Tobago). Half of the US import of bauxite and aluminium comes from the Caribbean, especially from Jamaica and Surinam. Significantly the US imports about 90 percent of its industrial requirements of these materials.

Access to most of the various strategic minerals imported from Caribbean countries, although still not critical except in the event of major global conflict, continued to offer "the cumulative "Conveniences" of ready availability and long-standing commercial relations."^13

**OIL:**

However, in the case of oil, the region's significance was increasing. The Basin has become a major refining centre in the 1950s. By the end of the 1970s, refineries located in the Caribbean were supplying 50 percent of US petroleum products derived from Middle Eastern and African crude. The region's own known oil resources were dramatically increased by the discovery of massive, new fields in Mexico and their potential importance to the US was to rise with new concern about the security of supply from the Middle East.

In addition to above US strategic considerations, the present situation in Central America is much the result of the slow disintegration of outdated social and political systems. Almost all internal conflicts are between groups seeking to change the status-quo while the other groups, fighting to keep

---

their position of affairs in these banana republics.

The emphasis on international reliability, and the practical tendency for maintenance of stability to imply defence of a status-que, led the US visibly to approve or support the continuation of dictatorial and repressive regimes\(^{14}\), and outmoded and inequitable socio-economic structures.

The origins of the present crisis in Central America, therefore, should also be found in the social and economic condition in the region. The study of the internal dimensions of the crisis in general, and social and economic condition in particular can lead to a better understanding of prevailing Central American turmoil.

THE CRISIS IN CENTRAL AMERICA: ECONOMIC ROOTS AND HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS\(^{15}\)

The cause of the crisis that are boiling over in much of Central America can be traced as far back as the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in the 16th century. One of Hernan Cortes commanders from Guatemala in 1524 wrote, "We are in the


\(^{15}\) The main source of this particular discussion is V. Bulmer-Thomas, The Crisis in Central America: Economic Roots and Historical Dimensions, The World Today, September 1983, pp. 328-335.
widest country and among the wildest people we have ever seen." The conquistador subdued the people and established a feudal social order, in which native Indians and mixed-blood poems were no more than chattel of the colonial Laciendas. After the Central American republics gained independence from Spain in 1921, the pace of exploitation of the peasantry accelerated. By the late 19th century, the demand for export crops like coffee and, later, cotton and bananas expanded the size of farms, increasing the division between rich and poor.

Since 1945, the Central American exports have increased very rapidly. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP), in spite of the highest population growth, has significantly risen. GDP per head from the early 1940s to its peak in the 1977 to 1980 period more than doubled in all central American countries except Honduras, where the increase was 40 percent and trebled in the case of Nicaragua. 16

The Central Americans, in addition have introduced new export crops, i.e. cotton, sugar, beef, together with intensification of traditional production of coffee and banana, since the second cold war. This export specialisation and diversification have been so successful that export agriculture has steadily increased its share of total agricultural output at the expense

of agriculture for the home market.\textsuperscript{17} This transformation, obviously, brought the destruction of small holding agriculture. In other words, land devoted to raising crops for the home market switched to raising crops for exports. Consequently, small formers either became landless or have had to migrate in search of addition work.

Moreover, the rapid population growth\textsuperscript{18} aggravated the situation. In 1970's, 38 percent of the rural labour force in El Salvador was estimated to be landless, while the figure is believed to have been even higher in pre-revolutionary Nicaragua.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{EXPORT-LED MODEL OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS:}

It is argued that a switch of employment from low productivity activities in agriculture for domestic use of relatively high productivity activities in export agriculture could result in an increase in real wages and living standards. Unfortunately, this has , in general, not happened in central America. Instead, a growing proportion of the rural labour

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} V. Bulmer Thomas, ......op. cit, p. 330.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Central America is a market of more than 20 million people.
\end{itemize}
force has had to trade relatively secure self-employment for insecure, seasonal wage employment in export agriculture.\textsuperscript{20}

In other words, the migration during the harvest season in search of wage employment detached male members from their families for long periods and it has been a source of great social instability. El Salvador is the prime example of it. In addition, a price taker on world market remains ambitious for keeping down the wage costs. That's why, a high proportion of the labour force in export agriculture is seasonal.\textsuperscript{21}

In fact, export agriculture is the most dynamic sector of the economy and contributed to a rise in GDP but could'nt satisfy the demand at requirements of real wages and living standards. Thus, economic growth in central America has been brought at the expense of a worsening of the distribution of income.

**PRICE RISES AND THE OIL CRISIS:**

However, export led model, in the 1950s and 1960s worked so well that there was virtually no inflation in Central American. The annual average rate of change of prices between 1950 and 1970 was below 2 percent in El Salvador.\textsuperscript{22} In the early 1970s, notably, world prices started to rise rapidly and Central

\textsuperscript{20} It is only a slight exaggeration to state that export agriculture is large-scale, mechanised, land-extensive making use of hired labour, while agriculture for the home market is small-scale, non-mechanised, land intensive using family labour.

\textsuperscript{21} See, V. Bulmer-Thomas,\ldots op. cit., pp. 330-331.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, p. 332.
America began to be seriously affected by 1973. The rise in inflation reached in double figures especially after the first oil crisis. Inflation threat redistributed income away from the weaker elements in society towards the stronger. Inevitably, most of the workers outside the public sector suffered a decline in living standards. It also, resulted in a very sharp fall in real wages. It, obviously, frustrated Nicaraguan society which later led to the revolution.

The price rises in the 1970s proved responsible for public expenditure to increase mainly for two reasons, first, wages and salaries in the public sector had to be increased in line with inflation, secondly, transfers to autonomous public agencies or private firms rose sharply as central American governments tried to operate a measure of price control.

IMPACT OF PUBLIC SECTOR DEFICITS AND EXTERNAL INDEBTEDNESS:

In the second half of the 1970s, public sector deficits began to explode as a result of a combination of expenditure driven up by inflation and stagnant or declining government

---


24. V. Bulmer-Thomas, ......op. cit., p. 333.
revenue. However, in mid 70s, the public sector deficits were manageable. A large part of the deficit was at first financed by external borrowing, pushing up the public external debt from very modest levels in 1970 to massive levels in 1980. Thus, by the end of the 1970s, Central America found itself with large public sector deficits and high levels of external indebtedness. At this point, however, the world went into recession and central America experienced the effects in a classic way - lower prices for traditional exports, a decline in export earnings and a decline in government revenue. Unable to meet their external obligations, each republic was forced to one by one to resort to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Although, Nicaragua has formally defaulted, IMF support was essential for all because it is a precondition for further lending by other institutions.25

Thus, the social and economic scenario further exposes the key factors which have also exacerbated the Central American crisis. In the early 1970s, the pressures from fundamental inequities and political exclusion began to rise and the economic model available in Central America remained not only incapable of meeting basic internal demands but exposed vulnerable to the international economic ups and downs of the 1970s. It gradually brought a new, level and type of political violence in Central

America. The Cuban Resolution on the one hand and political liberalisation on the other brought an increasing element of socially-based ideological polarisation which made Central American crisis more intractable.

CUBAN FACTOR IN U.S. POLICY:

The US seemed to believe that the basic problems behind regional instability were the growing demand of individuals around the world for the fulfilment of their political, social, and economic rights. The US policy-makers were of the view that the US should act forcefully when the vital interests of the US, its allies, its friends are threatened and assist nations threatened by external force to defend themselves. The U.S. policy-makers seen, therefore, seemed conscious to the fact that U.S. longer-range interests would be harmed by continuing indifference to the mounting desire in Central America for greater social justice and national dignity, as American indifference will only make it easier for Castro's Cuba to exploit their desire.

Thus, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 increased Washington's sensitivity to the region's internal problems. It also increased

the immediacy of the response to external threat. The White House increasingly stressed that it recognised the area's extreme strategic importance and that the U.S. did n't intend to abandon the vital central American region to Cuba and its radical Marxist allies.27

U.S. RECOGNITION TO THE ROLE OF ARMY IN POLITICS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS:

The U.S. policy, in response, was concerned to avert immediate external destabilisation by strengthening the internal security of reliable regimes in the area. It could n't prefer to achieve long term stability through promoting social reform and overall development of Central American States28.

The US. policy, in fact, emphasised on security and recognised the role of army in State politics. It seemed to believe that the armed forces are not only "the sole force of stabilisation but..... also promote democratic institutions and progressive changes of a socio-economic nature."29 Consequently, the military establishments were strengthened which, obviously, did n't prove

to be interested in democratic institutions.

In fact, the Central American region has flourished revolutions, and brutal and stifling dictatorships. Mostly, each dictatorship happens to be completely personalitic. It has no ideological base in real sense. It rests on military force. The constitution, interestingly, describes the government as "civil, republic, democratic, and representative", but actually it violates all these principles. Elections are peaceful affairs for there is only one party and only one candidate. Opponents of the regime are usually labelled "communists", Incarnation, assassination, or exile are the rewards for active opposition.30

In this regard, the main difference between Nicaragua and El Salvador was that the Nicaraguan regimes were exclusively personal and family estates. They used their monopoly of the means of violence to promote the interests of their family. While, the regime in El Salvador happened to be soldier's republia, with nearly exclusive military control of political processes.

Obviously, the wherent and persistent instability of most countries in the region, has prompted the establishment and constant increase of armed and paramilitary forces to enable

their regimes to hold on to power and to defend themselves against the competing forces within the country. Perceptions of actual civil war at home and greater threats from abroad lead to an ever increasing share of national budgets to be spent on armaments. This fact entails an increased economic burden, and aggravates the political consequences of internal upheavals.31

Significantly, the greater the threats to security which originate domestically, the greater are the external threats faced by that country. Sources of domestic unstability are political, economic, social, and even cultural and ideological in nature. The realm of security in the region, therefore, involves a wide spectrum of issues and is not solely a military matter in the conventional sense. Moreover, the US administration's deep involvement in internal affairs in the region has led to an actual political sclerosis and uneven economic development. Direct involvement such as the provision of military assistance and advisers to Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and indirect involvement such as the US policy of aggressive destabilisation in Nicaragua, the constant threat of US invasion against Cuba or economic sanctions against Cuba and Nicaragua,

31. Victor Millan,...... op. cit., p. 44.
and their exclusion from the Caribbean Basin Initiative of the Reagan administration, announced on February 24, 1982, have contributed to the fact that the region is now convulsed by revolution, civil war, border skirmishes or ever clashes, economic disruption, refugee camps and clandestine arms networks. In short, the internal conflicts have become increasingly internationalised where no external actor has been more prominent than the United States itself.  

The United States policy gradually came into clash with the pressures which were building in Central America for deep internal changes. There were also changes in the geo-strategic profile of the region. However, in the mid-1970s, there was global 'detente' and little apparent prospect of further Cubas or unmanageable, a growing number of regional governments were restoring relations with cuba, and many were expanding, diplomatic and commercial contacts with the Soviet Bloc. While, the US administration has always been especially concerned with the states which have left wing regimes, particularly to Cuba.

U.S. MILITARISATION POLICY AND CUBAN RESPONSE:

During the late 1970s, the United States had stepped up the military, political, and psychological struggle following the discovery of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba in August-

32. Ibid.
October 1979. President Carter issued Presidential Directive 52, following the reports, ordering the state Department to consult with the CIA, DOD, and AID to devise new strategies to curb "Cuban interventionism" and to undermine Havana's influence in the Third World. The Directive called for increased economic aid and the sale of military equipment to Central American and Caribbean governments.

Later, the Reagan administration authorised the creation of a Caribbean joint task force, the increased surveillance of Cuba by SR-71 spy aircraft and other devices and the holding of military manoeuvres at Guantanamo naval base as well as in the Caribbean Sea. Between 30 October and 7 December 1981, forty one US Navy ships, including two aircraft carriers, took part in manoeuvres in the Caribbean code named - "Redisx 81", with participation of some NATO members. About 40 ships and 200 aircraft participated in the exercises. At the beginning of March 1982, six NATO nations, including the United States, participated in a marine exercise, "Safe Pass 82", held in the Gulf of Mexico. During the 10 day manoeuvres, nearly 30 ships, about 80 aircraft and nearly 10,000 men carried out operations concerned with maintaining control of the sea lanes of communications and ensuring safe passage of alliance shipping through the mid Atlantic.

In addition in a more to reinforce U.S. military power near Cuba and the rest of the Caribbean, the US Navy announced its intention to re-open the former naval station in Key West,
Florida. It was believed that the base would support naval operations and exercises in the Florida straits between the United States and Cuba, and improve the Navy's response to possible contingencies in the Caribbean area.

The U.S. under the Reagan administration is also seeking air and ground facilities in Columbia and Haiti. Honduras also provided base facilities to the US armed forces through an agreement on May 7, 1982. Honduran bases at Puerto Lempira, Comayagua and La Ceiba were provided to the United States. The U.S. also has air, ground, and naval facilities in Antigua, the Bahamas, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba (Guantanamo Bay), Puerto Rico, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the Virgin Islands.

Cuba, in response, has allowed the Soviet Union naval facilities at Cienfuegos, for Soviet submarines and surface warships, an air base at San Antonio de los Banes for reconnaissance aircraft, and an electronic surveillance

33. Ibid, p. 49.
36. The tiny dot in the Caribbean, Antigua gained its independence from British colony on November 1, 1981, which ended nearly 350 years of British rule. Since 1974, the Britishers withdrew from many mini-states, i.e. Grenada, St. Lucia, Dominica, and St. Vincent all islands of 1,20,000 people or fewer.
installation south of Havana near Lourdes. On the northern coast of Cuba, the Soviet Union operates a string of early warning radars that can detect aircraft as far away as 300 miles. The Soviet Union already set up a satellite tracking station in Jaruco, Havana province in 1973, for reception and transmission of signals in the Intersputnik system.37

In fact, Cuba perceived constant threat of US invasion and, therefore, justified its militarisation policy. Cuban Vice President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez declared at the second special session of the United Nations devoted to disarmament, that the country nearly doubled its military capability in 1981 because the Reagan Administration refused to rule out the possibility of a military attack on Cuba. Cuba complained that from 1959 to 1975 the US, using the Guantanamo base, has been responsible for 12,668 provocations and incidents.38 Furthermore, Cuba presumes that it has an internationalist duty to help liberation movements all over the world, as well as, to defend, the security of certain states. Cuban troops, therefore, are present in Angola and Ethiopia.39 In Central America and the Caribbean, Cuba's influence exist with certain confinements. Cuba has categorically stated that it is providing

38. Ibid.
assistance to guerrillas in El Salvador at a modest level. Cuban involvement in Central American affairs, therefore, is perceived a threat by the United States. Obviously, the US has an important security interest in ensuring that Cuba does'nt pose a security threat in the region.

MEXICO'S ATTEMPTS OF PEACE:

Notably, following Reagan Administration's move towards a harder line against Cuba in 1981, Mexico has served as a bridge and communicator between the US and Cuba, encouraging meetings in Mexico city (1981) and Havana (1982). Mexico has traditionally shown good will toward movements for social change in Latin America. It maintained bilateral links with Havana in various fields.

In fact, after the trauma of Vietnam, the humiliation of US interests in Iran, the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan, the American self-image was at its nadir. President


41. Mexico was the only country in Latin America that opposed sanctions and a diplomatic break with Cuba in the early 1960s, and refused to support the OAS on sanctions against Cuba. It has maintained both economic and political relations with Cuba.

Reagan assured that America would be stronger again, stronger than anyone else, as it once was. Obviously, his administration followed hardline strategy in Central America and the Caribbean.

UNITED STATES HARDLINE STRATEGY IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:

The Central American and the Caribbean problems were as important and difficult for the Reagan Administration as any problem it had to deal with. There was enormous domestic sensibility to the whole problem among Americans.

The US Republican Platform for the 1980s adopted on July 15, 1980 at the party's national convention in Detroit, underlines the premises of the "new" policy of the Reagan Administration. "We will return to the fundamental principles of treating a friend as a friend and self proclaimed enemies as enemies, without apology. We will make it clear to the Soviet Union and Cuba that their subversion and their build up of offensive military forces is unacceptable." 43

Significantly, the Reagan Administration's policy toward the Caribbean Basin didn't want any more regional regimes regarding which it would have to have any understanding.

Figure 5.1 GROWTH TREND OF POPULATION AND MILITARY MANPOWER (1960-1980) (Semi-Log)

1 CENTRAL AMERICA
2 CUBA
3 MEXICO

with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{44} The Reagan Administration was deeply sensitive to the strategic significance of the Caribbean and claimed that in early 1942, a handful of Hitler's submarines sank more tonnage there than in all of the Atlantic Ocean. They did this without a single naval base anywhere in the area. Today, Cuba is host to a Soviet Combat brigade, a submarine base capable of servicing Soviet submarines and military air bases invited regularly by Soviet military aircraft.\textsuperscript{45}

It was believed in Washington, therefore, if another regime with Cuban style non-alignment was consolidated in Nicaragua there would be a potentially hostile exis spanning the Caribbean from West to East with access to the Pacific. It was therefore, determined not to let the guerrillas even negotiate their way into power in El Salvador.\textsuperscript{46}

Senator Christopher Dodd, tried to expose Reagan's policy in following words:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{45} President Reagan Address to a joint session of Congress, 27 April, 1983.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Edward Best, \ldots\ldots op. cit., p. 34.
\end{itemize}
"Instead of trying to do something about the factors which breed revolution this Administration has turned to massive military build up at a cost of hundreds of million of dollars. It's policy is ever increasing military assistance, endless military training, even hiring own para-military guerrillas. This is a formula for failure and it is a proven prescription for picking a loser. The American people know that we have been down this road before and that it only leads to a dark tunnel of endless intervention." \(^{47}\)

The Reagan Administration couldn't make any progress towards the goals it had set, namely to destabilise the situation in Nicaragua by destroying the revolutionary gains of the people of Sandino, defeat the insurgents in El Salvador and neutralise the Cuban influence in Central America and in the adjoining Caribbean area. \(^{48}\)

In fact, throughout the isthmus, a fight for power evolved between extremists on the far right and on the far left. For the Reagan Administration, the whirlwind of revolt and repression posed special and hazardous problems as it tried to find ways of helping the moderates and of bringing stability to a region that was in Americas backyard. \(^{49}\)

---

47. Quoted in H.M.C.Beri, ....... op. cit, p. 136.
SPREADING POLITICAL TURMOIL IN CENTRAL AMERICA:

Political unrest continued to number elsewhere in Central America. Many Central American nations were facing a rising rebellion of dedicated guerrillas. The Guatemala came under political turmoil after opposition charge of fraud in March 1982 presidential elections. In Nicaragua, the sandinista guerrillas took power in 1979, and despite their early vows to encourage "pluralism", had been moving zealously leftward ever since. In Nicaragua, the leftist Sandinista regime declared a state of emergency to counter what it called "aggressor directed against our country "by the United States". Honduras had a moderate government but was fearful that it will catch the virus of rebellion from its neighbours. Washington increase the number of its military trainers in Honduras from 25 to as many as 100 in response to the military build-up in neighbouring Nicaragua. Even Costa Rica, a stable democracy did fear that its economic problems will cause social unrest that could lead to trouble. While in El Salvador the crisis was the most acute and US policy was under the most tension. Guerrillas were increasingly challenging the civilian military government headed by President

51. *Time*, March 29, 1982, p. 28
52. Ibid. Detailed discussion in this regard in Chapter 7.
Jose Napoleon Duarte. That was the time when the US and much of the world was focusing its attention on the perilous situation in El Salvador. The Reagan Administration, in fact, viewed the intricate relationships of power among Central American nations as a kind of Kaleidoscope that could be jarred into a new pattern by any major event.  

CONCLUSION:

The ideological confrontation between widely differing political value systems are the types of conflict which are particularly evident in Central America and the Caribbean. During the past two decades, the predominant forms of conflict in the region have been border and territorial, while in the present situation the dominant scenario lie in ideological, resource and influence forms of conflicts. The Central American and the Caribbean conflict, therefore, in the short and mid-term, seem to be more severe and long-lasting, and less susceptible to traditional methods of mediation and conciliation.  

In fact, the Reagan Administration had two seemingly contradictory views of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the Americans argued that the Soviet Union was an inefficient and over stressed society and economy, so that increased international tension, economic boycott, and an accelerated arms

53. Time March 22, 1982, p. 16. Detailed discussion is in the next Chapter.

race might make it nap because of its internal weaknesses. On the other hand, the administration held that the Soviet Union had outstripped the United States in military power and was active and successful worldwide in subverting the west, making endless trouble, its hand in every crisis. The Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on, the Americans visualised. Obviously, this conception of the world implied confrontation with the Soviet Union. Every dispute or disorder was interpreted in terms of Soviet manipulations Nicaragua was not allowed the dignity of its own revolution. In Reagan Administration's eyes, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the Guerrillas in El Salvador all merely were figures at the end of strings leading to Moscow. This unsustainable reductionism is the reason that the United States is now in El Salvador. These are accessible to American power and not to the Soviet Union.

The US, therefore, is assuming a bellicose approach to foreign problems. In Latin America, this attitude has produced the British-Argentina war over the Malvinas or Falkland Islands. While in Central America, the U.S. policy consists of two goals - (a) El Salvador must be saved at any cost, and (b) the Sandinistas government in Nicaragua shouldn't be allowed to exist at any cost.
The U.S. moderate diplomacy seemed to come out for a peaceful settlement" but in reality its 'big-stick' methods and 'gunboat-diplomacy' only blocked and torpedoed the search for a political solution to the Central American Conflicts. A growing number of US military advisers are settling in Honduras and El Salvador, weapons are poured into these countries from the US, and the CIA and the Pentagon are turning the States bordering on Nicaragua into spring boards of aggression. Thus, the US presumption that it can impose political stability through use of force appears disastrous. No power can promise democracy or peace at the but of a boyonet.

However, the post-Vietnam foreign policy of the United State under carter Administration achieved success in Latin America which led to the Panama Canal treaty, the promotion of human rights, support for democracy as the antidote to communism and a lessening of the intolerable paternalism that has traditionally marked America's dealings with its neighbours but all these successes were short-lived. Later, the Iranian hostage crisis, the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, and the civil war in Nicaragua and El Salvador had reverted to the ill fated US attitudes of the Vietnam period. President Reagan, however, came to office determined to overcome the Vietnam syndrome - an unwillingness by the United States to use its military power. But gradually, it seems that the U.S. lost the lessons of Vietnam.
Thus, the US support for undemocratic allies and repressive regimes in Central America i.e. in El Salvador, in fact, has damaged both the prestige and because of their inherent instability, the long-term interest of the United States. The result is that El Salvador lives under an unbearable dictatorial oligarchy which is extremely frightening from the standpoint of the democratic process in the country.