

## ERIC MARGOLIS



# An about-face

While everyone was busy watching the drama in Grenada, some fascinating events were occurring 600 miles away in Surinam that absolutely confirmed the wisdom of America's swift military action.

Surinam, a former Dutch colony located between Brazil and Guyana, had, until 1980, been quietly emerging into full independence under a pro-Western government. Then, in February of that year, Desi Bouterse, an army sergeant, seized power in a particularly savage coup. Many of Surinam's former leaders were arrested, tortured and murdered.

A reign of terror engulfed the quaint Dutch-colonial capital, Paramaribo. Surinam's economic benefactors, Holland and the United States, reacted with outrage by cutting off most aid programs. Bouterse, who promoted himself to lieutenant-colonel, swiftly turned to Russia and Cuba for arms and economic support.

Surinam's turn to the left came as a welcome surprise to Moscow and Havana who were both hard at work establishing control over neighboring Guyana and Grenada. Moscow set about creating a little Marxist entente in the lower Caribbean, using the now familiar vehicle of Cuban "assistance" programs.

How this was done is most illuminating. At Cuba's behest, Surinam signed a number of cultural, commercial and educational agreements with Havana. Considerable numbers of Cubans began to arrive in Surinam, financed by the economic power of the Soviet Union.

### Infiltration campaign

But, to the surprise of the Surinamese, the supposed folk-dancers and ceramics teachers from Cuba soon embarked on a campaign of infiltrating the university, the government, trade unions and the police. Such activity was not improvised: It followed the standard operating procedure for subversion developed by Russia and East Germany in their successful takeover of South Yemen.

The Russians, acting through their Cuban surrogates, were ensuring that they would dominate the means of state control, regardless of who headed the government. Unfortunately for the Russians and Cubans, the murder by Havana-trained thugs of Grenada's prime minister, Maurice Bishop, ruined their scenario for the absorption of Surinam.

Lt.-Col. Bouterse, already uncomfortably aware that his new Cuban "friends" were quickly becoming the real power in Paramaribo, saw what had happened to Bishop and took fright. One week before U.S. troops intervened in Grenada, Bouterse ordered the powerful Cuban ambassador expelled and diplomatic relations downgraded to the level of legations.

Then, as American troops were mopping up in Grenada, Bouterse expelled over 100 Cuban "educators" and "technicians." Surinamese officials give the lame excuse that "we could not adequately control the activities of the Cubans." But the real reason for this expulsion was the fear of a communist coup and Bouterse's apprehension that the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division might be dropped in his lap.

### Strategy collapses

In one short week, Russia and Cuba saw their little Caribbean entente collapse. Only Marxist Guyana now remains and few doubt that it will maintain a very low profile in the near future. America's swift, surgical strike into Grenada set back Moscow's Caribbean strategy by many years.

Most of the world's press completely missed this intriguing episode. However, in spite of the international howls of anguish over the Grenada invasion, the people who really counted got both messages, loud and clear.

The communists, who had been eating away like termites at the vulnerable West Indies, were stopped in their tracks. The Central American Marxists were told by their mentor, Fidel Castro, to pull in their horns since he could do nothing to help.

Back in Moscow and Havana, the proponents of inevitable worldwide revolution must be attempting to figure out what went wrong as they count the pile of now worthless IOUs from their former client states.

What went wrong was simply that the United States finally refused to abide by the rules of "detente" which held that the communists could subvert but that America could not respond.

The U.S. finally acted like a mature, great power and all of the West Indies breathed a mighty sigh of relief. There will be no more Cuban "cultural" festivals in Surinam for some time to come.

*(Eric Margolis is a member of the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies)*