

The American invasion of Grenada: a note on false prophecy

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the reasons, especially the assertions about the future, given by the US administration under President Reagan, to justify the decision to attack and invade the Caribbean island of Grenada.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The methodology is analysis of existing records and reports on the assertions, events, and decisions leading to the invasion.*

Findings – *The Reagan administration gave three main reasons for the invasion. They claimed that Americans on Grenada, particularly the students attending the St George's University Medical School, would be harmed from continuing social disruption on Grenada; that the militarization of Grenada was intended as a means for the future export of terrorism or revolution to its Caribbean neighbors; and that the planned international airport at Point Salines was intended to be a future Soviet-Cuban military base. Each was false.*

Research limitations/implications – *Decision making includes assumptions about the future and invites the use of foresight. Such foresight, of course, can be presumptively true and, thus, useful. But also it can be wrong, sometimes deliberately manipulated, leading to wrongheaded actions and devastating consequences.*

Practical implications – *An analysis of the 1983 American invasion of Grenada illustrates the power of authority to distort the truth and corrupt morality, processes that re-occurred 20 years later with much greater consequences in the case of the 2003 American-led invasion of Iraq.*

Originality/value – *The case study of the American invasion of Grenada can be used by decision makers and others to improve future decision-making situations. Before doing violence to other people, we need to ask what violence we are doing to truth.*

Keywords *Conflict, Decision making, Ethics, Forward planning, Information management, Politics*

Paper type *Viewpoint*

Introduction

Looking back on 1984, future historians may note that it was a good year for George Orwell. His dystopian novel, written in 1948, popped up on the best-seller lists; lectures and colloquia were held to honor his memory; meetings of professional societies, inspired by his prophecies, were devoted to the theme of the future; assessments of the accuracy of his gloomy predictions were on national television; his concepts of big brother, the two minutes hate, and thought crime had entered the popular consciousness; and the principles of newspeak and doublethink were part of everyday language. Everyone knew what was intended, for example, when the National Council of Teachers of English gave its "Doublespeak Award" to then-President Ronald Reagan for naming the MX missile the "Peacekeeper."

The key element in Orwell's chilling vision, though, is the ability of a group in power to shape their own and others' views of reality to fit some ideological or instrumental objective. Thus, looking back, future historians may find one of the most telling examples of this kind of

This is a revised version of an essay that was first published in *The Yale Review*, Vol. 75 No. 4 (1986), pp. 564-86. The author would like to thank *The Yale Review* for permission to publish it here. Also, the author thanks Professor Percy C. Hintzen, University of California, Berkeley for sharing an early piece he wrote on Grenada from which the author has drawn, and Yale colleague, Professor Kai T. Erikson, and former Yale colleagues, the late Michael G. Cook and M.G. Smith, for their comments on a draft of this paper.

shaping, of Orwellian fiction becoming reality, not in 1984 itself but – as if it were a kind of rehearsal – in the last days of 1983: the case of the American invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada.

I am not referring to simple cases of double talk (although many examples can be found, such as the Pentagon's description of the American invasion as a predawn, vertical insertion – a phrase we might have expected to read in *Playboy* in our innocent days before we understood the pornography of violence). Rather, I am referring to the ways in which the range of consciousness shrinks, systematic efforts are made to extinguish thought, and the idea begins to grow that the external world exists largely – if not entirely – in the mind.

The key is contained in what Winston Smith's inquisitor O'Brien tells him in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "Whatever the Party holds to be truth is truth." It is implied in the Party slogan, "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell, 1949). It is further revealed in the idea, now going beyond Orwell, that who controls images of the future may control reality itself. By that I mean those who can invent plausible prophecies and who have the power to act as if they are true can so change reality by their actions that it is difficult – if not impossible – to know whether the prophecies would have turned out to be true or false if no such action had taken place. Yet if leaders are to be held accountable, some effort must be made to assess the evidence to see if the action-justifying prophecy was presumptively true or false at the time it was made.

Although the invasion of tiny Grenada probably will not go down in history as one of the more earthshaking incidents of our troubled age, it is nonetheless significant as a near-perfect illustration of the use of prophecy to justify present action. The Reagan administration gave the American people – and the people of the world – three principal reasons for action, all of them in the form of contingent statements about the future, that is, what would have happened if there had been no invasion. First, American citizens would have been taken hostage or possibly killed. Second, a Soviet-Cuban military bastion would have been established for the export of communism throughout the region, especially the eastern Caribbean. And third, a modern military airport would have been completed at Point Salines that would have become a threat to the vital interests and the national security of the USA. Although we cannot tell now who among American leaders – including the president himself – believed these prophecies at the moment of crisis, we suspect that none of the three was credible. That is my subject in this essay. Before proceeding further, however, I want to summarize the events of the invasion, since so many of the details have faded from memory.

Operation urgent fury

The US invasion of Grenada, code-named Operation Urgent Fury, began in the early morning hours of Tuesday, 25 October 1983, not with the roar of violence that would soon follow but with the quiet stealth of a small group of navy "Seals" who landed north of St George's. Their mission was to reach Sir Paul Scoon, Governor-General of Grenada. Their purpose was to legitimate the invasion that was about to begin. They probably carried with them for his signature a batch of identical letters, ostensibly from Scoon but written by someone else, addressed to each of the invading countries and dated 24 October, requesting military intervention. According to Payne *et al.* (1984), the invading forces carried two batches of such letters, one by American troops and the other by a Caribbean unit. It was threadbare legitimacy at best, since the Governor-Generalship was a figurehead, a ceremonial position representing the Crown and thus serving as a symbolic link to the British colonial past and the present British Commonwealth. Yet Scoon certainly could claim more legitimacy than General Hudson Austin and the other members of the Revolutionary Military Council who had come to power as a result of the murder of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop.

It is doubtful that many of the more than 6,000 American marines and soldiers who actually landed on Grenada as part of the invasion, or the additional 9,000 or so on the warships or in Barbados, knew very much about the people and history of Grenada. Most of them were aware of being in the Caribbean, we may hope, which was more than Russian newsmen knew, for it was reported on Soviet television that American troops were invading Spain. There are worse things than ignorance, although that is bad enough.

Grenada entered European consciousness in 1498 when Christopher Columbus sighted it during his third voyage to the New World. It had been the home of the Ciboney Indians, then the Arawaks, and at the end of the fifteenth century, the Caribs. Although Spanish explorers laid claim to it in 1592, the Carib Indians continued to control Grenada until 1650, having defeated some Englishmen who tried to colonize the island in 1608.

The French began their colonization in 1650, lost Grenada to the British with the Treaty of Paris in 1763, recaptured it in 1779, and lost it again to the British in 1783 with the Treaty of Versailles. By then, most of the Caribs had been killed off and many of the people were immigrants of a special kind – displaced Africans who had been brought there as slaves to work on the sugarcane plantations – and their descendants. From 1783, Grenada was ruled by the British, mostly as part of the Windward Islands Administration.

Then, after the end of second world war, Grenada became part of the wave of nationalism that swept over Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. It was one of the most significant periods of our time, the transition of more than 100 territories from the dependent political status of colony to the independent political status of autonomous nation-state. In Grenada, the road to nationhood led through several constitutional changes, beginning with limited internal self-government and universal adult suffrage in 1951 and culminating in full political independence from Britain in 1974, when it became the smallest independent nation in the western hemisphere. It had a population of about 100,000 and is 21 miles long and 12 miles wide at its maximum, an area of 120 square miles (including its other island, Carriacou, a total of 133 square miles).

The island's leading politician was Eric Gairy, a labor leader who became independent Grenada's first prime minister. It was bad luck for Grenada, because he turned out to be ruthless in the treatment of his opponents, corrupt, sometimes bizarre, and – so it was claimed by some responsible people – certifiably mad. Thus, when Maurice Bishop and members of the New Jewel Movement (Joint Endeavor for Welfare, Education, and Liberation) carried out a bloodless coup on 13 March 1979, suspended the constitution, and told Gairy (who was off the island addressing the United Nations about the danger of unidentified flying objects, among other things) not to come back, most Grenadians and West Indians rejoiced.

Although Bishop remained popular with Grenadians until his death, he lost some supporters and attracted some critics. The promised elections did not come. Freedom of the press was curtailed. Some political opponents were imprisoned. The ruling Central Committee became autocratic and isolated from the people, and began to lose its legitimacy. Cuban aid had been increasing since Bishop came into power; it became more visible with the presence of Cuban doctors, nurses, teachers, military advisers, and especially construction workers, who were building a new international airport at Point Salines. There were many signs of progress and some improvement in the lives of the people, especially in the areas of health, welfare, education, and employment. Yet the members of the Central Committee knew by 1983 that the economy was in serious trouble.

Then came the falling out among the Central Committee members themselves over the economic failures of the immediate past, the control of the future, and the direction of the revolution. By September 1983, the revolution had begun to devour its children. The ultra leftist Leninists in meetings of the Central Committee began openly criticizing Bishop. Though shamed and humiliated, Bishop aimed for compromise and eventually agreed to joint leadership with Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard. But quarreling continued and mistrust grew. On 13 October Bishop was placed under house arrest. On the next day, Coard had to publicly deny that there was any plot to assassinate Bishop.

The crisis reached a peak when a few Grenadian soldiers massacred over 100 people on 19 October 1983. About 15,000 people had gathered earlier in St George's, about 3,000 of whom, including a large number of schoolchildren, went off and freed Bishop from house arrest. Then they marched to Fort Rupert, disarming the soldiers there. Sometime later, when the armed troops of the People's Revolutionary Army arrived, someone began shooting. By the time it was over, Bishop, three cabinet members, two labor leaders, and many members

of the crowd had been killed. Bishop and most of the other leaders were in fact executed after being captured.

The next day General Austin took over, forming the 16-person Revolutionary Military Council to govern Grenada. Grenadians understandably were shocked and angered as they learned of Bishop's murder and the other deaths. Whatever legitimacy the People's Revolutionary Government had had was largely the result of Bishop's popularity. The majority of the people, including members of the militia, by now had become a threat to Coard and the other Leninists as well as to the Council. Austin ordered a four-day curfew to end at 6 a.m. the following Monday, 24 October, when, he said, the Pearls airport would be reopened and foreign nationals could leave.

Indeed, according to Payne *et al.* (1984), when Monday came, shops and offices did reopen. After some confusion, the airport also opened. Armed patrols withdrew to less visible and fewer locations. Although schools were still closed, near-normality appeared to have been restored. That night, the curfew was again in effect, but only until 5 a.m. the next day.

Before the end of that curfew, the Seals had landed and were "securing" Sir Paul Scoon. About 20 minutes after the curfew ended, Operation Urgent Fury was earning its name. Super-modern, postindustrial technowar exploded over Grenada. It brought not only the USS Independence and its aircraft, but helicopter carriers, support ships of various kinds, a troopship, transport planes, a marine battalion, two ranger paratroop battalions, two brigades of the 82nd Airborne Division, small artillery pieces, jeep-mounted missiles, tanks, armored personnel carriers, and tons of additional support material. Hugh O'Shaughnessy (1984, pp. 7-8), an eyewitness, describes one of these stupefying death machines: coordinated banks of machine guns carried by the C-130 Hercules "which were able to pour fire onto an area the size of a football field from a height of several thousand feet." Then, too, there were 300 soldiers and policemen, mostly the latter, from six Caribbean countries, although they did not actually participate in the fighting (there would have been seven Caribbean countries represented, but two of the five policemen sent from St Kitts-Nevis, in what future calypso writers are sure to regard as one of the few sensible decisions made that day, refused to leave Barbados for Grenada once they learned the real purpose of the trip).

About 400 members of the 22nd Marine Amphibious Unit, transported by helicopters, attacked Pearls airport about 5:30 a.m. on 25 October. They encountered little resistance and captured it easily. Part of the marine force then returned to the helicopter carrier, the USS Guam, and sailed to the other side of the island. That night they landed and engaged Grenadian troops protecting St George's, which earlier had been hit by thundering air strikes. A second wave of the invasion hit Point Salines about 6 a.m., where about 800 Army Rangers were dropped by parachute. We do not know who fired first, although we do know that the Cubans had been ordered not to fight the Americans unless they were attacked. Members of the Grenadian army were under no such orders and probably fired on the parachuting Rangers, although some reporters say that only two Grenadian soldiers armed with rifles were actually defending the Point Salines airport at the time (Payne *et al.*, 1984). Nonetheless, after the Rangers had landed and regrouped, savage fighting did take place. The Cubans, mostly middle-aged construction workers, resisted energetically. Within a few hours, fighting at Point Salines ended and about 600 Cubans were captured. Clearing the runway at Point Salines, the Rangers were reinforced by about 5,000 men of the 82nd Airborne Division.

The medical students at the True Blue campus of the medical school were soon reached. Most of the students, however, were not there. They were at the Grand Anse campus about two miles away. For some unknown reason, they were not reached by American troops until about 4 p.m. on 26 October, a day and a half after the invasion began – plenty of time for them to have been murdered several times over if that had been the intention of the Grenadians or of the Cubans still at large.

By Friday, 28 October, the battle was over except for a few isolated pockets of resistance. Although only a few days long, the operation was not without its blunders and tragic

accidents. Robert A. Pastor (1983), former senior staff member of the United States National Security Council responsible for Latin American and Caribbean affairs, later reminded members of Congress in his testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs of some of them: four members of the Navy Seals drowned before the invasion started; one American unit called for an air strike on another, wounding over a dozen American soldiers; American Rangers were killed and wounded when two helicopters collided; and United States Cobra helicopters, mistaking the former Fort Matthew, then a mental hospital, for Fort Frederick, destroyed it, killing between 18 and 30 inmates (official American sources admit to eighteen). Furthermore, attacking the Cubans at Point Salines instead of moving directly to defend the medical students may have been a blunder, if it is true that the Cubans only fired to defend themselves.

Although different sources give somewhat different numbers, my best estimates of the casualties are: 19 Americans killed and 115 wounded; 24 Cubans killed and 57 wounded; 16 Grenadan soldiers and 34 civilians killed and 357 civilians wounded. A total of 60 of the Grenadian wounded eventually received treatment in American military hospitals in Bethesda, Maryland, or Puerto Rico. Among them was seventeen-year-old Michael Baptiste, who is paralyzed from the waist down and had a bullet lodged near his spine, and six-year-old Foster Bartholomew, who lost his right eye and had severe damage to his mouth, kidneys, and liver (*The New York Times*, 1984a, p. A6).

Were US citizens in danger?

An early justification given by spokesmen for the Reagan administration for the invasion of Grenada was a concern for the welfare of American citizens in Grenada, especially the students attending the St George's University Medical School. Secretary of State George Schultz, for example, in a special national television broadcast during the afternoon of 25 October said that the USA had decided to act before the Americans were hurt or taken hostage. Watching national television two days later, many of us witnessed President Reagan reiterating that the Americans might have been harmed or taken hostage. He said that his "overriding" and "paramount" concern had been "to protect innocent lives, including up to 1,000 Americans" (Pastor, 1988, p. 89), linking his decision to invade to "the nightmare of our hostages in Iran."

Here we have both a prophecy – originally made, we were told, before the invasion – that the Americans might be harmed or taken hostage in the future; and we also have an appeal to a lesson from the recent past, an analogy designed to transform hindsight into foresight, that the situation of the Americans in Grenada before the invasion was similar to that of the Americans in Iran in the past, before they were taken hostage. Both the prophecy and the history lesson were used to justify the American decision to invade.

We will never know for certain what would have happened to the medical students if the invasion had not taken place, because the invasion intervened in the course of history. But we can ask ourselves: was it a reasonable prophecy? And we can ask, was the analogy with Iran an appropriate image of the past? The answers to both questions must be no.

General Hudson Austin, Barbara Crossette (1984, p. 66) claims, "sought desperately to negotiate with Washington in the days between Mr Bishop's death and the American-led invasion." During the curfew on Grenada, Robert Pastor (1983, pp. 5-7) confirms, "General Austin himself called Geoffrey Bourne, Vice Chancellor of the Medical School, offering jeeps and transportation and arranging to have the supermarket open just for the students. He also sent one of his officers to check that everything was OK and gave Bourne his home phone number if there were any problems." Both Bourne and another administrator of the Medical School, Gary Solin, believed "at the time and in retrospect" that the medical students were "never in danger." Furthermore, Austin guaranteed the safety of American citizens in Grenada and promised the safe evacuation of any of them who wanted to leave. Cuba also sent urgent messages to Washington to this effect and joined Grenada in urging that the invasion not take place (*New York Times*, 1983a, p. 20). These messages were disregarded.

Reacting to the assurances given by Grenada that the USA could evacuate the Americans on the island, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, then prime minister of Canada, was widely reported as saying, "Obviously, if they [the Americans] had the authority to do that, I cannot see any reason for invading to protect your nationals" (*The New Haven Register*, 1983, p. A2).

There is no indication that the Reagan administration made any effort to evacuate the Americans peacefully. At first the White House contended that Pearls airport at Grenada was closed that Monday, 24 October. Later, American officials admitted that at least four charter planes had left that day (O'Shaughnessy, 1984, p. 207; *New York Times*, 1983a, p. A20).

Furthermore, as Percy Hintzen (1983, p. 8) said:

A Canadian plane sent by the Canadian government to get out its own citizens was granted permission to land in Grenada, only to be refused permission to take off from Barbados by that government and the government of the US. This was two days before the invasion. The reason why no commercial flights were operating in and out of Grenada was because of a ban on air traffic to that country imposed by Caribbean states, and a decision by LIAT [Leeward Islands Air Transport], the only commercial airline serving that country, not to fly there. It had nothing to do with any decision by the Grenadian government.

Moreover, as Pastor (1983, p. 5) testified, "two US diplomats flew in and out during the weekend" before the invasion on Tuesday. Why did the USA not simply arrange to evacuate the Americans on Grenada who wanted to leave?

Even the students' parents, some of whom had been in touch with their children by telephone, did not believe that an invasion was necessary. One group of parents learned on Sunday that in a meeting held earlier that day, only 10 percent of the students had expressed a desire to leave Grenada. The parents met that Sunday evening while the president was on television expressing his concern about the safety of Americans on Grenada, and "sent a cable to President Reagan," according to Pastor (1983, p. 5), "informing him that their children were safe and asking him 'not to move too quickly or to take any precipitous actions at this time.'"

Rather than ensuring their safety, the invasion endangered it. The *force majeure* used by the American military was frightening – more frightening than the Grenadian situation itself. No doubt, it produced the emotional displays of the Americans eventually evacuated from the island. Explosions, bullets whistling by, the roar of jet engines and the beat of the helicopters, shouts of "Friend or foe?" – the general confusion and disorientation created by the invasion – had some students hiding under their beds, and others, understandably, believing that death was imminent.

Also, we can ask, "Was the invasion carried out in such a way that the safety of the Americans on Grenada was clearly its aim?" The answer again is no. As Michael Manley (1983, p. 46) of Jamaica said, "If an invasion had to take place, just put the marines around the students and say, 'Look, nobody touch these people here or feel the might of our power.'" And as he also said, the military intervention was not restricted to securing the safety of the Americans but was intended "to establish complete control of the island." This may explain why the American troops did not reach the students until a day and a half after the invasion began (Time, 1983, p. 17).

The analogy with the hostages in Iran is equally questionable. The two countries' location, size, religion, political structure, language, and culture are wholly different, and so too was the nature of the threat each nation posed to resident Americans. Santayana's famous aphorism, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," does not always speak to the point. It would be far more appropriate to say of the Grenada case, "Those who only remember the past cannot respond effectively to new and different situations." In its assessment of the safety of Americans in Grenada, the Reagan administration picked an irrelevant model of the past to follow.

The coming Soviet-Cuban “military bastion” on Grenada

On 25 October, the Reagan administration justified the invasion by other arguments besides that of rescuing the medical students. They were to establish law and order and to restore democratic institutions. Neither of these arguments was credible to knowledgeable persons from the start. Before the New Jewel Movement removed him, Gairy increasingly had interfered with free and fair elections, intimidated opposition leaders, and engaged in other corruptions of the democratic process. More important, General Austin had restored order in Grenada before the invasion. Furthermore, repeated contacts and negotiations had taken place between members of Austin’s ruling council and American officials on the one hand and between the Governor-General and representatives of Barbados and Trinidad on the other. Also, the US’s tolerance of undemocratic regimes – Haiti under “Baby Doc,” for example – mocked the statements about restoring democracy. Both arguments quickly faded away.

In their place, by 27 October the US administration claimed that Grenada was to have been the target of a Soviet-backed “complete takeover by Cuba” and afterward a base for terrorist activity throughout the eastern Caribbean. Then followed the familiar ideological arguments about the East-West conflict, the Cold War, and the containment of communism. The specter of a “Soviet-Cuban colony being readied as a major military bastion” was cast before the American people by the president. He and other administration spokesmen pointed to the presence “of heavily armed Cuban troops on the island, as well as advisers from the Soviet Union, East Germany, Bulgaria, and North Korea and the discovery of large arm caches.” “We got there,” President Reagan said, “just in time” (*New York Times*, 1983a, p. A20). Although it was only introduced in the media after the invasion, the prophecy of the threatening spread of communism had figured in the events leading to it.

At the time few western scholars, myself certainly included, had any doubts left about the Soviet willingness to exploit any opportunity to embarrass, compromise, or undermine the USA and to support anti-American regimes. Yet the official American image of a future Soviet-Cuban takeover and military bastion on Grenada, as it was pictured to the world in the days following the invasion, has to be questioned.

Where were the 1,100 “well-trained professional” Cuban soldiers that Admiral McDonald had claimed were on Grenada “impersonating construction workers”? The State Department later acknowledged the accuracy of the detailed roster of the 784 Cubans on Grenada released by Havana which listed only 43 members of the armed forces, plus Colonel Pedro Tortolo, chief of the Cuban construction personnel, and 12 members of the crew of the aircraft that brought him to Grenada (Pastor, 1988; *New York Times*, 1983b). Although most Cubans receive some military training and thus know the rudiments of using weapons, most of the Cubans in Grenada were construction workers; others were working in public health, education, fishing, transport, trade, culture, and communications.

The Soviet presence on Grenada was limited to the usual diplomatic, advisory, and intelligence mix associated with a Soviet embassy, and little more was heard of the handful of East Germans, Bulgarians, and North Koreans who had been said to be on Grenada. Moreover, the number of Americans on the island, even during the Bishop period, was always far larger than the Cuban, Soviet, and Eastern European contingent.

What about the weapons that were found? According to a preliminary count submitted to Congress by General George Crist of the Marine Corps, the small arms found on Grenada included 158 submachine guns, 68 grenade launchers, 1,241 AK47 rifles, 1,330 model 52 rifles, 1,035 Mosin-Nagant carbines, 506 old Enfield rifles, 87 miscellaneous small-bore rifles/carbines, 8 gas riot guns, 48 pistols, 304 shotguns, 15 air rifles, and 5 flare pistols. Other weapons included 5 12.7 quad machine guns, 3 PKT tank machine guns, 23 model PLK heavy machine guns, 16 23 mm antiaircraft guns, 20 82 mm mortars, 7 RPG 7 grenade launchers, and 9 75 mm recoilless rifles. Nine armored amphibious vehicles were also found there. Thus, there were about 5,000 individual infantry weapons on the island, along with some crew-operated weapons and ammunition sufficient to last two battalions no more than 45 days (Subcommittee on International Security and Scientific Affairs and on Western

Hemisphere Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 1984, pp. 17-18).

Separate agreements that Grenada had made with both the Soviet Union and North Korea also came to light. These promised the delivery of several thousand more weapons in the future and the provision of uniforms and various kinds of equipment, including bulldozers (Sanchez, 1983). All in all, between what was actually on Grenada and what was scheduled to arrive according to the agreements, there were to be between 8,000 and 12,000 individual infantry weapons and enough uniforms to outfit almost 11,000 people (assuming two uniforms per person).

This certainly constitutes a buildup of arms and a militarization of Grenada compared with the other states of the eastern Caribbean. That is not in doubt. But did it mean that there was a Soviet-Cuban military bastion aimed at the export of terrorism or at armed intervention in other Caribbean states? On several grounds I believe that the answer once more is no.

First, the military arms and equipment found and planned for Grenada appear to be about the amount needed to provision Grenada's army of roughly 1,100 and the People's Militia, which was being enlarged to a force of 10,000, about a third of whose members were to be women. The People's Militia, like the National Guard in the USA, was composed of part-time volunteers who also held full-time jobs (EPICA, 1982, p. 92). This militarization of Grenada was primarily intended to organize the people and to motivate and coordinate the effort to develop the nation. It was an important part of making the revolution. As Pastor (1983, p. 16) said:

The armed forces in Grenada – as in Cuba, Nicaragua, and other Marxist or quasi-Marxist states – is one of the principal instruments for political mobilization – for educating and convincing the youth of the legitimacy of the revolution. Its second purpose is internal political coercion. To the extent that these regimes have a credible, hostile threat, they can more easily justify the size of their armies. But whether there is a threat or not, the regimes will build up their armies to make their revolutions and to preclude any political alternative in the country.

Second, Grenada did have "a credible, hostile threat." There was one prophecy made prior to the American invasion that turned out to be true. In a speech given on 3 November 1981 Bishop (1982, p. 241) said, "In the last two months alone there have been two major maneuvers carried out upon Caribbean land and sea by the warlords of the north; 'Ocean Venture '81,' 'Operation Amber and the Amberdines,' and 'Red X 183' had been shameless rehearsals for eventual invasions of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Grenada and/or preparation for an armed entry into El Salvador on the side of the fascist junta!"

These are strong words that cover a lot of territory, but an American invasion of Grenada had also been predicted by others well before the event occurred. For example, the Ecumenical Program for Interamerican Communication and Action Task Force (EPICA, 1982, pp. 122-24) gave a "scenario for US intervention" in Grenada. The scenario also referred to Ocean Venture '81, during which the US staged a mock invasion at Vieques Island, off Puerto Rico, between 1 August and 15 October 1981:

The focus of the Caribbean phase of the maneuvers was Cuba – code-named "Red" – and the fictitious island of "Amber and the Amberdines," labeled "our enemy in the Eastern Caribbean." This barely-disguised reference to Grenada and the Grenadines shocked and angered Grenadians, especially since the war game scenario called for "Amber" to "seize American hostages" and be invaded by the United States after "negotiations with the Amber government break down" (p. 122; the quotes within the quotation were taken from an Associated Press release, 11 August 1981).

The Task Force goes on to say:

The hostage scenario represented an ominous turn in US strategy against Grenada. A seizure of American hostages is probably the one event which would be guaranteed to raise emotions high enough in the United States for the US government to justify to the American people an overt military invasion of Grenada The Reagan Administration's willingness to use force to overthrow the PRG had become very clear, despite denials of such intentions by Secretary of State Alexander Haig (EPICA, 1982, p. 122).

Whether or not Bishop and other Grenadian leaders truly believed the prediction of a coming American invasion of Grenada is not clear. Certainly, we can distinguish between hopes for the future on the one hand – which explain Bishop’s repeated attempts to reach some kind of understanding with the Reagan administration, which continued as late as the summer of 1983 – and fears for the future on the other hand – which explain the arms and ammunition buildup and the People’s Militia as part of an honest effort to defend Grenadian shores. Bishop most probably thought that world opinion would prevent the Marines from landing, but he also thought, as he made clear in a speech he gave on 23 July 1981, that the USA would continue to use propaganda, economic aggression, political and industrial destabilization, and possibly a mercenary army against Grenada (Bishop, 1982, p. 214).

Yet the militarization of Grenada probably would have taken place even if the USA had not been seen as threatening the island because its leaders believed that putting people in uniform was both a symbol and a manifestation of the mass mobilization required to fulfill the Grenadian revolution. In their view, it was not much different from their other organizing efforts, such as promoting the National Women’s Organization, the National Youth Organization, and the Workers’ Parish Councils.

Ironically, before the American invasion, General Hudson Austin had already neutralized much of Grenada’s potential military strength by ordering the disarming of the militia. He was fearful that militia members, angered by Bishop’s murder, might take up arms against his ruling council. Some of the “Cuban” arms stockpiled at the airport may in fact have been weapons taken from the militia (EPICA, 1984, p. 17; O’Shaughnessy, 1984, p. 222).

The airport at Point Salines

No single symbol of the threat posed by the supposed Soviet-Cuban militarization of Grenada seemed as important to the Reagan administration as the 9,800-foot international airport nearing completion at Point Salines. In March 1983, as part of his “Star Wars” television announcements, President Reagan displayed aerial reconnaissance photographs of it – as if to say, “Look at this threat to us we’ve found in the Caribbean from our spy-plane surveillance” (Pastor, 1983, p. 12). A spy plane, however, was hardly necessary, as Chris Searle (1984, p. 1-2) has pointed out, since workers from a Miami dredging firm were working on the airport, Grenadians were having weekend picnics and flying kites there, tourists were taking snapshots of it, and the students from the American medical school were regularly using it as a jogging track. But the president proceeded to share with the American people his “foresight”: the Point Salines airport, he said, was being built for future military purposes. Was this also false?

Here are the facts. First, the tourist industry has been an important part of the Grenadian economy since the latter part of the 1950s (Singham, 1968, p. 59). It has accounted for up to four-fifths of Grenada’s earned foreign exchange from commodity exports (Ryan, 1984, p. 12). After first rejecting tourism because it was not a dignified economic activity – “national-cultural prostitution,” it was called – the government took a new initiative in tourism and made the new airport the “centerpiece of the nation’s development plan” (Maingot, 1983, p. 27).

Since coming to power, Bishop had repeatedly said that the international airport was the single most important infrastructural project Grenada had ever undertaken. Certainly, the Reagan administration could not help but know that Grenada was actively developing the tourist industry, promoting tourism in Grenada throughout Western Europe, planning to build more hotels, negotiating with international air carriers to make Grenada a part of their scheduled routes when the international airport was complete, and even trying to create an Air Grenada to bring in more tourists.

Second, there was an obvious need for such an airport if tourism in Grenada was ever to grow significantly. It was simply not possible to bring in large numbers of tourists with the small-capacity planes that could land on the short strip at Pearls airport. Modern jets – especially wide-body jets – were needed. Anyone who has taken the shuttle planes flown by LIAT from Barbados or Trinidad into Grenada knows what a bottleneck it is. The new

international airport would accommodate planes carrying hundreds of passengers each, and its navigational aids and modern electronic landing equipment would allow landings at any time of the day or night and in all but the worst kinds of weather.

Third, the idea for the international airport did not originate with Bishop's government. It seems to have been proposed as early as the mid-1950s and to have been endorsed by international organizations as an answer to Grenada's problems of poverty and underdevelopment (EPICA, 1984, p. 16).

Fourth, the new airport in Grenada is not unusual in the area, and its length is comparable to other neighboring airports, such as those of Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, St Lucia, Guadeloupe, Aruba, and Antigua. It is shorter than some, in fact.

Fifth, the international airport was not funded solely by Cuba. Grenada had requested help from the US, but after it had been denied, Grenada looked elsewhere. Aid was forthcoming not only from Cuba, but also from as many as 15 countries, including Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, several Western European countries, and some multilateral agencies such as the Organization of American States (Hintzen, 1983, p. 6).

Sixth, observers saw no evidence that the airport was being readied as a military base (EPICA, 1984, p. 16). Canada, for example, planned to build a \$16 million hotel near it. More important, a British firm, Plessey, pointed out that a military air base would have a long list of features that the Point Salines international airport did not have, such as protected fuel tanks, anti-aircraft defenses, hardened aircraft shelters for protection against bomb blasts, a parallel taxiway, a system of dispersed aircraft parking, underground weapons storage, perimeter security, an operational readiness platform with rapid access, and aircraft engineering workshops.

Seventh, the argument that, though the airport was to be used for tourism, it could also serve military purposes seems a slender thread on which to hang the justification for the American invasion. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that the airport would have been so used. In his statement before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Pastor (1983, p. 13) described a conversation that he had had with Maurice Bishop in 1982:

I asked him whether the Grenadian government would permit Soviet or Cuban military planes to land on the airfield, whether it would be used for transit of Cubans to Africa, or to bring in military equipment. He said that it wouldn't be used for any of those purposes, because to do so would jeopardize it for tourism. I communicated these points to the State Department when I returned, and noted that whether he was telling the truth or not, it would make sense for our diplomats to confirm those points privately and then try to elicit a public statement to that effect . . . I do not know whether the State Department followed up my conversation. What should one conclude from the fact that the Administration made no attempt to pursue this serious security concern by conversations or negotiations?

So what has become of the airport at Point Salines that the Reagan administration claimed was to be used for military purposes and to export terrorism? One of the first acts of the Interim Governing Council in Grenada, the ruling body installed after the American invasion, was to decide to complete the airport in the interest of the country's economic development. The council said, that the completion of the project "would give Grenada large jet capability and night landing facilities for the first time, which is considered vital to developing tourism here" (*The Jamaican Weekly Gleaner*, 1983, p. 9).

Guess who paid for it? In April 1984 the Reagan administration announced that it was seeking \$40 million in new aid for Grenada, the largest single item being \$19 million for Grenada's international airport – over three-quarters of the sum needed to complete it! (*The Jamaican Weekly Gleaner*, 1984, p. 17; *The New York Times*, 1984b, p. A11). President Reagan himself, in a four-and-a-half-hour visit to the island on 20 February 1986, dedicated a plaque for the newly completed Point Salines airport (*The New Haven Register*, 1986, p. A17).

Also, we must note that if the Soviet Union and Cuba had been intent on attempting coups in the other islands, there is very little that could not have been done directly in and from Cuba.

In other words, a staging area in Grenada was unnecessary. Revolutionaries from various islands could have been trained and equipped in Cuba and returned to their home islands in Cuban ships. Moreover, despite the close ties that had developed after Bishop and his government came to power, there is no evidence that Cuba had anything to do with the 1979 coup carried out by the New Jewel Movement in Grenada.

Additionally, Castro took an anti-Soviet position and loudly condemned the ultraleftists in Grenada and the “brutal assassination” of Bishop and others. Referring to Bishop’s murderers as “hyenas” and Coard’s group as the “Pol Pot group,” Castro accused them of destroying the Grenadian Revolution. He called them “conspirators” and denounced their short-lived government as “morally indefensible” (O’Shaughnessy, 1984, pp. 229-245).

How did it happen?

How was the decision to invade made? Was the invasion simply an opportunity to drive the Cubans and Marxists off the island, or at least out of power? No doubt there is some truth in that. On many fronts and in many ways, the USA had been trying to destroy Grenada’s economy in a series of acts beginning shortly after Bishop’s coup in 1979 (Bishop, 1982, p. 50-213; Percy, 1982, p. 10). The invasion was in part a continuation of a war already under way, a logical progression from economic to military battle. A military rehearsal had even been staged at Vieques Island.

Was it also to show that the USA is no helpless giant, but that it can and will take effective military action? Was it to build worldwide credibility by demonstrating America’s firm control of “its own backyard” and, thus, its freedom of maneuver wherever it deems necessary? Was it simply a therapeutic and cathartic act born of the general frustration with the “Vietnam syndrome” that had led many Americans to believe that using force leads to failure, not success? (*Newsweek*, 1983, p. 42). All of the above may have entered into the picture – hundreds of decisions and interpretations of reality generated over several years (some stretching back for generations) leading tragically toward a particular end, encouraged by the distorted images of reality and false images of the future given to us by our leaders and conveyed to us through the national news media.

There is little doubt that a precipitating factor was the tragic news that 241 US Marines had been killed in the barracks bombing in Lebanon on 23 October 1983. What bad timing for Grenada! That news reached the administration during the final stages of decision-making about the possibility of invading Grenada. A US task force in the Atlantic on its way to Lebanon to relieve American forces had been diverted to Grenada after Bishop’s murder as a precautionary measure. Having joined up with additional naval units, it was now pointed at Grenada like a loaded gun.

Without the precipitating event of the bombing in Lebanon, the US invasion of Grenada might not have occurred. Yet tensions between the USA and Grenada, beginning with Bishop’s rise to power in 1979, were the underlying causes of the action.

These tensions, however, cannot be laid solely at the door of the Americans. Bishop and his fellow leaders of the People’s Revolutionary Government must shoulder some of the responsibility for their own destruction (O’Shaughnessy, 1984, p. 26). Their own revolutionary utopianism led to actions based on dogmatic ideology rather than pragmatic realism: “The voice of the people must be heard,” the Marxist-Leninists said, as they removed the popular Bishop in the name of an abstraction, knowing that the real, live, breathing Grenadian people out there on the street admired Bishop and would disapprove of their action (Minutes, 1983).

Since 1979, Bishop and the PRG had led Grenada down a path of development with a socialist tendency. But they pursued pragmatic social reforms that could have been achieved under a democratic system, encouraged a mixed economy, cooperated with the local bourgeoisie, and made important gains, especially in education and literacy – internal policies with which the USA easily could have lived (Ryan, 1984; Thorndike, 1984). In fact, leftist critics accused Bishop of being a petit bourgeois and not getting on with the true socialist revolution (Ambursley, 1983; Watson, 1984).

But no elections were held, freedom of the press was abrogated, political prisoners were taken and civil rights were violated. Even so, the USA has tolerated worse violations by its presumed friends, in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, for example, not to mention El Salvador.

What fueled the hostility of the USA was the inflammatory radical rhetoric and anti-imperialist foreign policy of the PRG, particularly the attacks, sometimes unfair, on the USA (Subcommittee on International Security and Scientific Affairs and on Western Hemisphere Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 1984, p. 57). Bishop's speeches and actions show that he was committed to the public welfare of Grenadians, to social justice, and to economic betterment, yet they also show that he frequently yielded to demagoguery, to the temptation to overdramatize and exaggerate, and to engage in overblown empty rhetoric.

While his radical rhetoric was a cause of concern in the USA, it was also more extreme and radical than his own policies in Grenada. It was partly self-indulgent posturing. At a June 1983 meeting in Washington with Judge Clark and Deputy Secretary of State Dam in the latter's office, Bishop "expressed an interest in better relations with the USA." Bishop was told that "we hoped he could demonstrate his true desire for better relations by lowering the level of rhetorical attacks on the USA; and if he was prepared to do that, we were prepared to entertain some of the specific suggestion he had as to intermediate ways to get back to a regular relationship" (Subcommittee on International Security and Scientific Affairs and on Western Hemisphere Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 1984, p. 23). But by then it was too late. The Marxist-Leninists of the PRG acted on a different image of the future.

Conclusion: foresight and truth

In this essay I have used Grenada as a case study. I suspect, of course, that a careful analysis of other similar incidents will reveal parallel distortions. Consider the thought mechanisms, for example, that led to the Reagan administration's support of the Contras in Nicaragua, and to the official betrayals of truth and trust during the Vietnam War (Gibson, 1986). Or consider, on the domestic front, David Stockman's revelation of how the Reagan administration deliberately used false economic forecasts to justify tax and spending policies. Reagan promised "as it were, to alter the laws of arithmetic" (*The New York Times*, 1984c, pp. A1-36).

At the time they are made, of course, assertions about the future may be sincerely believed to be true or they may be disbelieved, even by their makers. In either case they can be used to rationalize present behavior and to control the course of future history.

Whether believed or not, assertions about the future cannot be proven absolutely to be true or false at the time they are made. They concern the future, and by its very nature the future remains uncertain until it becomes the present. There are no memories of the future and no future facts, only future possibilities and probabilities (Bell, 2003a). This makes it especially difficult to deal with official pronouncements about the future. Officials claim not only the power to decide and to act but also special or secret knowledge that are used to select among competing predictions. Even when the future has become the present, it is difficult to argue that predictions were correct or incorrect in that the predictions themselves may be self-altering, helping to bring some futures into being and excluding others.

Recognizing these limitations, however, I have tried to show that three of the major assertions about the future made by the Reagan administration to justify its invasion of Grenada were false:

1. Americans on Grenada were not in any real danger, except from the American invaders and the fighting that the invasion precipitated.
2. The militarization of Grenada was not intended as a means to export terrorism or revolution to its Caribbean neighbors, but was primarily an effort to mobilize Grenadians as part of a domestic program of revolutionary change.

3. And the international airport at Point Salines was not intended to be a Soviet-Cuban military base, but was planned to be a major facility in Grenada's economic development.

Furthermore, the administration's use of the past to justify present action was as faulty as its use of the future. The analogy between the hostages in Iran and the medical students on Grenada was too tenuous to be a good guide to action. And only national moods and the thread of time connected the bombing in Lebanon and events in Grenada. Yet both added to the erroneous conceptions of reality that brought death, mayhem, and destruction to Grenada.

Is it too much to hope that next time around before we start doing violence to people, we can ask what violence we are doing to truth? Can't we protest when our leaders distort objective realities and send the truth down the memory hole? If not, we might as well join Orwell's defeated character, Winston Smith, drinking Victory Gin at the Chestnut Tree Cafe and writing in the dust on the table, " $2 + 2 = 5$."

Epilogue 2008

Nearly 20 years later, the world witnessed an Orwellian nightmare becoming reality on a much larger and more tragic scale than in the case of tiny Grenada. It occurred as President George W. Bush and members of his administration reacted to the attack on America of September 11, 2001. It was not simply their moves toward a total surveillance society, their violations of civil liberties in the name of national security (Bell, 2003b), their methods of prisoner detention, including rendition and torture, and their fanning the public's fear of "the terrorists," which were reminiscent of Orwell's "vast shadowy army, an underground network of conspirators." Rather, it was their systematic assault on truth that prepared the way for the attack on Iraq of March 19, 2003.

Officials of the Bush administration made Saddam Hussein the target of national hate by accusing him of having links to Al Qaeda and of conspiring in the 9/11 attacks on America. Also, they depicted Saddam as a future threat to America by claiming Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, chemical and even nuclear, and by creating images of future mushroom clouds rising over America. Conspiring to repeat the same slogans, they whipped up many Americans into a fanatical readiness to attack Iraq and to destroy the evil Saddam.

I faced the frenzy personally on March 9, 2003, when I gave a talk at a public program of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, DC in connection with their exhibit, "September 11: Bearing Witness to History." Among members of the large audience were some survivors and their family members from the attack on the Pentagon and at least one New York police officer who had worked in the rubble of the destroyed Twin Towers.

As I prepared my talk during the weeks before March 9, members of the Bush administration were beating the drums of war. Thus, I wanted to include in my talk an assessment of their claims against Iraq. It took only a few days of my looking at available reports, media accounts, books, and internet information for me to learn that the Bush officials' justifications for their coming attack on Iraq were false – and I said so in my talk at the Smithsonian to an agitated audience that was vehemently split on whether or not the USA ought to attack Iraq (Bell, 2003b).

When we panelists finished speaking, the audience was invited to ask questions and make comments. Long lines quickly formed behind the two microphones provided in the aisles and people gave their opinions. Finally, the police officer from New York reached the microphone and, supporting an attack on Iraq, emotionally described the destruction of the World Trade Center and ended with a crescendo of condemnation against the "perpetrators" and a final, nearly screaming, "We've got to blast them!"

Before I or other panel members could answer, a loud voice from the audience shouted, "Who's the 'them'?" That anonymous voice, of course, had it right. Our anger was misplaced; Iraq was the wrong target.

Ten days later the Americans and their coalition partners launched their attack on Iraq. Without a doubt, the preemptive war with Iraq has been a terrible tragedy, an immoral and horrible mistake. Although we can never adequately atone for the suffering we have caused – the destruction, the deaths, the lost limbs, the damaged brains, and the grieving among Iraqis, Americans, and others, there is, perhaps, one slim ray of hope that objective reality, at least, will not be denied and that our independent thoughts and understandings will not be sucked down the memory hole and lost forever.

The Center for Public Integrity (2008) has released its detailed analysis of the statements of eight top Bush administration officials over a two-year period leading up to the invasion of Iraq. The officials are President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, and White House press secretaries Ari Fleisher and Scott McClellan.

During that time, these officials misled the American people and the world by making 935 false statements on at least 532 separate occasions in which they linked Iraq to Al Qaeda and the attack on America or in which they claimed that Iraq was a viable threat because it possessed weapons of mass destruction (and who knows how many millions of times their lies were repeated by the media and by ordinary people in homes and offices, in other private conversations, and on the internet around the world). The official lies increased at two points, in August 2002 prior to congressional deliberation on a war resolution and in early 2003 during the final preparation for the attack on Iraq.

The Center's staff has juxtaposed the Bush officials' statements with what was in fact known at the time from their research into public sources, major news organizations, government reports, books, articles, speeches, and interviews. The conclusion is inescapable. The Bush "administration's top officials methodically propagated erroneous information over the two years beginning on September 11, 2001." It was "an orchestrated campaign that effectively galvanized public opinion and, in the process, led the nation to war under decidedly false pretenses" (Lewis and Reading-Smith, 2008).

The truth is that Iraq had nothing to do with the attack on America of 9/11. None of the 19 hijackers was Iraqi, Osama bin Laden viewed Saddam Hussein as an enemy of Islam, and Iraq did not cooperate with the terrorists of 9/11 (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2003). Also, it "is now beyond dispute that Iraq did not possess any weapons of mass destruction." The "Duelfer Report" of the Multinational Iraq Survey group has now established that "Saddam Hussein had terminated Iraq's nuclear program in 1991 and made little effort to restart it" (Lewis and Reading-Smith, 2008). Moreover, anyone paying attention to the evidence should have known before the attack on Iraq in 2003 that it was doubtful that Iraq had any such weapons, as I discovered in my preparation for my Smithsonian talk. Considerable evidence was readily available at the time.

Yes, at last, there is one slim ray of hope, the truth.

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