The United States and Jamaica: 
Playing the American Card

by 
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It is commonly assumed that Jamaica under the Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) government of Edward Seaga subordinated its foreign policies to the United States in return for economic aid and assistance. For example, Carl Stone (1985b: 292) argues that Jamaica under Seaga was a “surrogate” of the United States in the Caribbean. Similarly, Evelyne Stephens and John Stephens (1986: 253) suggest that Seaga’s foreign policy toward Cuba was designed to win favor with the Reagan administration.

In contrast, Anthony Maingot (1985: 315) argues that the leaders of Caribbean states have their own reasons for maintaining good relations with Washington which are not necessarily in conflict with U.S. interests. Indeed, this raises the question of the “paradox of weak state power.” This is the paradox of a relatively resourceless, small state exercising significant influence in international affairs. William Fox (1959: 2) notes in this regard that in the realm of diplomacy, representatives of great powers have more than once been outmatched by small states.¹

In this article I argue that under the Seaga administration Jamaica, a small state, exercised significant influence with a great power. Moreover, Jamaica’s foreign policy during this period was not simply intended to curry favor with the United States; it was primarily designed with Jamaica’s domestic politics in mind.

Seaga’s skillful manipulation of Jamaica’s relationship with the United States succeeded in gaining advantages for Jamaica which far exceeded the country’s historic importance to the United States. It is arguable, in fact, that the economic support which Seaga obtained from the Reagan administration

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was in conflict with the declared objectives of U.S. foreign policy toward Third World countries. Jamaica's success in influencing U.S. policy was largely attributable to the prime minister's diplomacy.

CONSENSUS OF SCHOLARLY OPINION

Recent scholarship has focused upon the failure of the People's National Party (PNP) government of Michael Manley (1972-1980) to carry out its "experiment" with democratic socialism. Levitt (1984: 4) argues, for example, that the primary responsibility for the failure of the PNP government lies with the leader of the party—Manley. He is criticized for a lack of realism and a failure to mobilize domestic support for the party's economic policies. Stephens and Stephens (1986) also blame Manley for the PNP government's failure to capitalize upon the most propitious opportunity to carry out its "socialist transformation" shortly after the imposition of the bauxite levy in 1974. His failure to act at that time is regarded as a critical mistake. The reason is that not only did the levy result in a windfall of government revenue but also world economic conditions were still favorable for Jamaica. After 1975, however, the world economic downturn practically ruled out the kind of sweeping social and economic change required to implement the PNP's socialist program. This was due to the fragile multiclass character of support for the PNP government which requires vast economic patronage to remain in power.

Stephens and Stephens also criticize Manley for unnecessarily antagonizing the United States by using the rhetoric of anti-imperialism and by making a public display of diplomatic support for Fidel Castro. In other words, Manley's government has been criticized for inept leadership, including diplomacy, particularly in its dealings with the United States.

Most discussions of Seaga's foreign policy have tended to focus upon the so-called special relationship between Seaga and President Reagan. However, there is little analysis of this relationship other than to note the existence of a personal friendship between the two leaders and the similarities in their political ideology. Stephens and Stephens (1986: 251) have observed that after 1980 Seaga effectively played the "American card" of emphasizing the role of the private sector in the JLP government's development plan for Jamaica. They also note that this was "worth quite a bit" to Jamaica. Exactly how the diplomatic card was played and what its significance to Jamaica was, however, is not explained. In fact, Seaga's diplomatic successes are downplayed by the authors. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that in their view
Seaga’s economic policies “returned” Jamaica to a “dependent capitalist” path of development which they regard as retrograde and self-defeating.

However, this view is myopic. As they themselves note, no democratically elected government of a “peripheral capitalist” country has yet made the transformation to “democratic socialism.” In the case of Jamaica, at least, even the most optimistic scenario would have allowed the PNP government a bare two years from 1974 to 1976 to mobilize public support for the party’s socialist program.

Furthermore, both the PNP and JLP governments have failed to implement their policies of structurally transforming Jamaica. The programs of both governments were undermined by world economic trends which were largely outside of their control. Therefore, the real difference between the PNP and JLP governments does not lie in their economic programs or policies but in the realm of political policy and foreign policy.

Given the criticism of Manley’s leadership of the PNP government, it is ironic that Seaga’s successful diplomatic relationship with Washington is discounted. In fact, an examination of Seaga’s foreign policy successes, particularly with the United States, should provide important insights into effective leadership for future governments of Jamaica.

EMERGENCE OF THE JLP GOVERNMENT

The JLP government of Edward Seaga emerged from the October 1980 general election. The party won the election with 59 percent of the vote and 51 of the 60 parliamentary seats. The turnout was a record high of 77 percent of all eligible voters. The JLP received strong electoral support from all classes and groups in Jamaican society as shown in an election study of 944 voters by Carl Stone (1985a): The urban unemployed cast 60 percent of their votes for the JLP; skilled workers, 52 percent; white collar workers, 63 percent; business and managerial class, 86 percent; farm labor, 58 percent; and small peasants, 65 percent.

Stone’s (1981, 1982) election studies show that the swing away from the PNP to the JLP in 1980 was uniform throughout the society. A majority of all major groups polled, for example, indicated their voting preference for the JLP. The polling results showed that by a wide margin the most important election issue was the condition of the national economy. For example, in a September 1980 poll Stone (1981: 11) found that economic issues (especially unemployment, shortages of goods, and economic recovery) were most important to 51 percent of respondents in the major urban areas, to 66 percent of those in smaller towns, and to 61 percent of respondents in rural areas.
Stone concludes that the massive swing away from the PNP government was due largely to the adverse impact of the depressed economy which was perceived to be the result of the government’s economic “mismanagement,” growing unemployment, decline in real wages, the business community’s fear of the “left-wing” of the PNP, as well as dwindling resources for party patronage. These combined to shatter the PNP’s fragile cross-class coalition of political support.

The economic issue was a particularly telling factor in the election because of the multiclass nature of party politics in Jamaica. Both major political parties are supported by groups with widely different social and economic interests. The PNP and the JLP are led by middle-class elites, both have labor wings and representatives in the business community, both use armed urban gangs to control political unrest among the poor, and both tend to be nonideological (the exception perhaps being the PNP government from 1972 to 1980).  

This tends to make the parties highly dependent upon economic revenues and largess to reward the disparate class interests that support their electoral organizations. Therefore, it is almost axiomatic that a severe downturn in the Jamaican economy alienates substantial segments of a ruling party’s political alliance. Therefore, when government patronage in the form of jobs, construction contracts, and other personal benefits begins to dry up, the party in power begins to lose its political constituency. Stephens and Stephens (1986: 320-345) criticize Michael Manley’s program of social democracy on the grounds that it failed to transcend the cross-class social base of the PNP government’s support by building a mass-based socialist movement emphasizing programs and ideology rather than patronage.

U.S. PERSPECTIVE ON JAMAICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In order to appreciate Seaga’s diplomatic strategy toward the United States under the Reagan administration, it is first necessary to understand Washington’s Caribbean policy. From the perspective of the U.S. government, Jamaica under Seaga was one of its most important political allies in the Caribbean and perhaps in Latin American in general. It was also regarded as one of the most consistent supporters of U.S. policies toward Third World countries. I argue that Seaga’s skillful diplomacy is largely responsible for this perception.

The traditional American definition of the Caribbean (called the Caribbean Basin under the Reagan administration) includes the Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth territories of the Caribbean as well as Central
America. Given this conception, the incoming Reagan administration perceived a series of breakdowns in the traditional order of the region. For example, the Somoza regime in Nicaragua was overthrown by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front, FSLN) in 1979; there was a civil war in El Salvador and growing guerrilla activity in Honduras and Guatemala. There were also violent independentista protests against the United States in Puerto Rico; there was a left-wing coup in Suriname, outbreaks of nationalist violence in the French colonial territories of Guadeloupe and Martinique, and a left-wing coup in Grenada in 1979.

Consistent with the administration’s preoccupation with the Soviet Union’s “aggressive (expansionist) empire” and with Cuba’s role as a policy instrument for the assault against American security in the Western Hemisphere (Sanchez, 1983: 44), the falling dominoes in the Caribbean were attributed to Soviet-Cuban expansionism. From the point of view of the “new right” in the Reagan administration, these falling or fallen dominoes had to be stopped or reversed or American credibility as a global power would be in question. Reagan’s 1980 election campaign had scored effectively in attacking President Carter’s failure to project the image of a strong America abroad. Hence, one of the cardinal tenets of the new Reagan administration’s foreign policy was to regain respect for the United States as a world power. The logical place to rebuild its tarnished image was in its own “backyard.” Therefore, the Caribbean Basin became a testing ground for rebuilding America’s prestige as a global power.

In this regard, Grenada was of special importance soon after the Reagan administration took office. For almost twenty years there were no new regimes in the Caribbean patterned after the Cuban Revolution. The bloodless coup of March 1979 which brought the Marxist-Leninist-inspired People’s Revolutionary Government (PRG), led by Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement (NJM), to power in Grenada changed that. Bishop was an enthusiastic exponent of the Cuban model of development. Speaking at the sixth summit conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1979, for example, he said that “It [Cuba] is now the best example in the world of what a small country under socialism can achieve” (Bishop, 1982: 94). Bishop’s statements such as “Cuba laid the basis for Grenada and Nicaragua” and “If there had been no Cuban Revolution in 1959 there could have been no Grenadian revolution in 1979” (1982: 114) encouraged Washington’s splashing domino rationale.

The symbolic importance of the leftist coup in tiny Grenada with its 133 square miles and population of 92,000 to the Reagan administration cannot be exaggerated. For example, during his visit to the Caribbean in 1982,
Reagan stated: “All of us are concerned with the overturn of Westminster parliamentary democracy in Grenada. That country now bears the Soviet and Cuban trademark, which means that it will attempt to spread the virus among its neighbours” (Caribbean Contact, May 1982).

THE ALIGNMENT OF JAMAICA'S FOREIGN POLICY WITH THE UNITED STATES

The Seaga administration had a twofold significance in U.S. foreign policy. First, Seaga defended America's Caribbean policy, and second, he portrayed Jamaica as the preferred U.S. development role model for Third World countries. In return for performing these two roles, Seaga secured political concessions from the Reagan administration. We shall examine how Seaga, as the representative of a small state, gained influence with a dominant power.

Seaga's principal modus operandi was to establish his unrivaled political leadership of Jamaica. To this end, he set out to repudiate the foreign and domestic policies of his predecessor, Michael Manley. Ironically, however, Seaga adopted some of Manley's own leadership strategies in order to repudiate him. For example, Seaga broke with the JLP's traditional isolationist foreign policy and adopted a high-profile diplomatic posture. In departing from the JLP's diplomatic tradition, Seaga was undoubtedly impressed by Manley's highly publicized diplomatic initiatives in support of the Non-Aligned Movement and the New International Economic Order (NIEO). However, instead of using Jamaica's foreign policy to align the country with Third World countries, Seaga used it to gain influence with the United States. In the process of rejecting Manley's Third World diplomacy, Seaga aligned Jamaica's foreign policy with the United States.

Seaga gained influence with the U.S. government by defending its Caribbean policy. He did this through diplomatic initiatives in two areas of importance to Washington — Cuba and Grenada. Seaga broke off Jamaica's diplomatic relations with Cuba, arguing that this was necessary to contain the spread of Cuban communist influence in the Caribbean. His government defended the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983 on the same grounds — containing communist influence in the Caribbean. While there is no question that Seaga personally abhorred Castro's Cuba, his actions served domestic political purposes. Not only was this a device for repudiating Manley's leadership but it also presented to the Reagan administration the image of a Caribbean country that was a stalwart supporter of the United States. Seaga shrewdly
cultivated this image among American policymakers, in part to extract political concessions. An indication of the success of this strategy is that his government received unprecedented levels of foreign aid and assistance.

CONTAINING CUBAN INFLUENCE

Seaga severed diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1982 ostensibly because Cuba was interfering in Jamaica’s internal affairs. This action had a highly symbolic significance, however, in terms of Jamaican politics. It involved, among other things, the expulsion of the Cuban ambassador, Señor Estrada. His visibility in the company of Michael Manley and his verbal attacks on the JLP made his continued presence in Jamaica after Seaga came to power politically untenable.

The fear of a Cuban-Jamaican axis in the Caribbean was a matter of concern to Washington even before the Reagan administration took office. Cooperation between the PNP and the Cuban Communist Party was, for example, worrisome to the Carter administration when National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski emerged as Carter’s chief foreign policy advisor in 1979. They were particularly concerned about the so-called Brigadista program of interparty exchanges involving the training of between 300 and 400 Jamaicans in Cuba and the presence of about 200 Cubans in Jamaica between 1975 and 1980 (interview with D.K. Duncan, November 5, 1985). Stephens and Stephens (1986: 108) estimate there were 1,400 participants in the Brigadista program.

The formation of the Jamaica Home Guard as a local community adjunct to the police in combating growing incidents of criminal violence, patterned after the Cuban model, also concerned Washington. The fear was that Cuban influence would radicalize the PNP and encourage a left-wing coup in Jamaica comparable with the NJM coup led by Bishop in Grenada. Stephens and Stephens (1986: 189-191) point out that Seaga encouraged this fear in policymakers in Washington. In fact, he planted the seed of a fear in Washington of a left-wing political coup within the PNP government as early as 1977. For example, in a speech in Washington in October 1977, Seaga expressed his alarm that Cuban influence was growing in Jamaica, Grenada, Guyana, and Trinidad. In subsequent statements, Seaga claimed that left-wing radicals had subverted the PNP government, and this threatened democracy in Jamaica.

By repudiating Cuban influence in the PNP government, Seaga was also repudiating what appeared to Washington to be the potential reemergence of Cuban communist influence in Jamaica. This was evident during President
Reagan’s 1982 “working holiday” in the Commonwealth Caribbean. During his visit to Jamaica, Reagan declared that Seaga had “rescued” Jamaica from a government that was “virtually under communist control” (*Caribbean Contact*, May 1982).

A recent example of Seaga’s manipulation of Washington’s fear of communist influence within the PNP was put forth in the aftermath of the disastrous municipal elections of July 1986 in which the opposition PNP received 58 percent of the popular vote and won 12 out of the 13 parish elections; Seaga threatened to resign as the leader of the ruling JLP.

On October 12, 1986, Seaga announced that he would not seek reelection as leader of the party and that he intended to resign his prime ministry on August 12, 1987. The effect of this action was to silence (at least temporarily) his critics within the party and thereby enable him to reshuffle his cabinet to reassert control of the party. It also had the effect of shocking Washington into making political concessions by urging the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to relax its stringent conditions for financial assistance to Jamaica.

Following the pattern set during the second Manley government (1976-1980), an acrimonious conflict broke out between the Seaga government and officials from the IMF, World Bank, and USAID just prior to the announcement of the 1986-1987 budget in May 1986.\(^6\)

Seaga refused to accept their conditions for assistance such as devaluing the Jamaican dollar, making additional budget cuts, and announcing price controls for a long list of consumer commodities, claiming that it was a prescription for “no growth.” After three successive years of “austerity,” including a severe decline in GDP of 4 percent in 1985, it was necessary, according to Seaga, to “shift to the next phase of meaningful growth.” The timing of Seaga’s action was undoubtedly related to the forthcoming local governmental elections held in July 1986.

Seaga’s threat to resign appears to have jolted Washington into action. Their lingering fear of a resurrected left-wing-oriented PNP government of Jamaica under the influence of Cuba and following a Third World diplomatic strategy apparently persuaded the Reagan administration to press for a relaxation of the conditions set by the IMF and aid agencies for Jamaica. The success of Seaga’s strategy was announced in January 1987. The IMF agreed to a standby credit of U.S.$132.8 million without the previously stated conditions.

Manley sought to exercise similar influence with Jamaica’s major creditor countries—Britain, the United States, and Canada—in 1977 to persuade the IMF to soften its conditions for a loan. While he succeeded, there are two important differences between the strategies adopted by Manley and Seaga. First, Manley’s government was only able to secure a two-year standby for
U.S.$74 million which was 120 percent of Jamaica’s quota — wholly inadequate for Jamaica’s needs at the time. By contrast, the standby loan that Seaga received from the IMF in January 1987 raised the Fund’s lending to Jamaica to 450 percent of its quota — the maximum permitted — and the conditions for it were far more lenient that those given to Manley.

Second, and more important than the amount of financial assistance or even the conditions for it, was Washington’s reason for intervening on Jamaica’s behalf. Manley’s appeals to Washington for help in persuading the IMF and aid agencies to soften their conditions for economic assistance were based upon human rights or the basic human needs of the Jamaican people. However, after the Carter administration shifted its primary interest in the region away from human rights toward national security considerations, Manley’s appeals did not carry much weight. Seaga, in contrast, appealed to Washington for assistance on the basis of U.S. national interests in the Caribbean. In other words, Seaga capitalized upon Washington’s perception (which he helped to shape and reinforce) that it was in the U.S. national interest to support his government.

In fact, Seaga’s diplomatic successes with Washington were a principal source of demoralization within the PNP. While Manley and the PNP leadership recognize that the continued decline of Jamaica’s economy is a serious handicap for any incoming government, a more serious problem facing them is the task of persuading Washington that a PNP government does not pose a threat to the United States and therefore deserves economic assistance comparable to that received by Seaga’s government. Manley has made strenuous efforts in speaking engagements in the United States for the past several years to counteract Washington’s perception of the PNP as a communist threat. This is partial testimony to Seaga’s success in cultivating that image of the PNP in Washington. It also helps explain Manley’s purge of the PNP “left-wing” and the fact that he now blames them for the party’s resounding election defeat in 1980.

OVERTHROWING “MARXISM” IN GRENADA

Close interparty relations between the PNP in Jamaica and the NJM in Grenada even before Bishop came to power in 1979 contributed to Washington’s fear of Cuba’s spreading influence in the Caribbean. The close relationship between the two parties was evident, for example, in the fact that the PNP adopted the NJM as a “fraternal socialist party” despite the tension this created between the PNP government of Jamaica and the Grenadian government of Eric Gairy.
After the 1979 coup in Grenada and the NJM’s seizure of power, the PNP played an instrumental role in persuading the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to accept the participation of Grenada under the Bishop government despite grave misgivings on the part of several Caribbean governments. Manley himself maintained a close personal relationship with Bishop and in 1979 he sponsored Bishop’s new government for recognition at the meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Havana (interview with P.J. Patterson, December 4, 1984). In fact, it was Manley’s speech before the NAM meeting in which he embraced the fraternal party relations among the Cuban Communist Party, the PNP, and the NJM that set off signals of alarm in Washington.

When Seaga was elected to office in October 1980 by the largest popular majority ever, he set out to repudiate Manley’s leadership of Jamaica. This extended to Jamaica’s relationship with Grenada under the PNP government. From Seaga’s point of view, it was largely fortuitous that the condemnation of Manley’s support for the Bishop government was seen by Washington to be an attack on the expansion of Soviet-backed Cuban influence in the Caribbean. Therefore, while Seaga’s policy toward Grenada had the effect of aligning Jamaica’s foreign policy with U.S. Caribbean policy, his principal motivation was to assert his own foreign policy by rejecting Manley’s policies.

Seaga played an active role in reversing Manley’s efforts to legitimate the new government of Grenada. For example, at the September 1981 Commonwealth Caribbean foreign ministers’ meeting, Seaga said that he supported the U.S. government’s exclusion of Grenada from the recently proposed Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) since, according to him, Cuba and other countries (i.e., socialist bloc) would take care of Grenada’s needs (Latin American Regional Reports [LARR], August 20, 1982). At the first CARICOM Heads of Government Conference held in 1982 after the PRG came to power in Grenada, Seaga supported a resolution by the Barbadian Prime Minister, Tom Adams, which was designed to isolate Grenada. The resolution recommended changing the CARICOM treaty to exclude countries which deviated from the norms of parliamentary democracy—an action clearly designed to isolate Grenada.

Seaga also played a role in mobilizing Commonwealth Caribbean support for the U.S. invasion of Grenada. For example, Seaga attended an extraordinary meeting of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) comprised of Antigua, Dominica, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada (which was absent for obvious reasons.). Tom Adams, the Barbadian Prime Minister, was the only other non-OECS representative besides Seaga at the meeting.
The meeting was held two days after “bloody Wednesday” in which Maurice Bishop, three cabinet members, and two labor leaders were killed in Grenada and four days before the U.S. invasion of Grenada on October 25, 1983. The leaders “voted” (by some accounts endorsed a U.S. request) for American assistance to invade Grenada to disband the new military government called the Revolutionary Military Council (RMC) led by General Hudson Austin.

The declared purpose of the “request” was to remove the military junta, set up an interim civilian government in its place leading to elections, and restore Westminster democracy in Grenada. However, the real impetus behind the Eastern Caribbean states’ support for this action was their fear that the Grenadian coup would encourage revolutionary political activity in their own countries.

Bishop’s political statements after taking power in 1979 were used by Seaga and others to substantiate Grenada’s alleged threat to OECS member states. For example, in a speech to the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana in September 1979, Bishop said that “the balance of forces in the world” was changing and there was “being built a new Caribbean—Jamaica, Guyana, a new Grenada, Dominica, St. Lucia” (Bishop, 1982: 97). The October 1983 military coup in Grenada which was allegedly inspired by the left wing’s dissatisfaction with Bishop’s “petty-bourgeois” inclinations and his refusal to share power with Bernard Coard, the military leader who led the coup, gave Seaga and the Barbadian Prime Minister, Tom Adams, the opportunity to mobilize the leaders of the Eastern Caribbean islands against Grenada on the basis of their fear of an even more radical regime led by Coard (see Payne et al., 1984: 150-151).

After the U.S. invasion, Seaga continued to pursue a foreign policy that reversed Manley’s policy and also had the effect of aligning Jamaica with the United States. For example, Jamaica contributed about 300 of the roughly 400 combined token peace-keeping force of the six Eastern Caribbean countries involved in the Grenadian invasion (Daily Gleaner, January 6, 1985). Jamaica also participated in U.S. military maneuvers in 1986 called Ocean Venture 86. The maneuvers were held in Grenada and the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, involving 20,000 soldiers from the United States, Venezuela, Jamaica, Barbados, and Antigua and Barbuda as well as the Puerto Rican national guard.  

Seaga was also one of the most outspoken and articulate defenders of the Grenadian invasion. The United States relied upon Seaga and Adams, in particular, to justify their action. For example, in United Nations debates on the Grenadian issue, Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick relied upon statements by Seaga in responding to criticism. She pointed out that Jamaica and
Barbados were "the key states in the region" and that they fully supported the invasion (Washington Times, October 30, 1983: 43). Seaga's importance to Washington was related to the almost universal condemnation of the invasion. Only Jamaica, Barbados, and the OECS states supported the U.S. action.

Seaga also played a role in fostering the formation of a pro-American government of Grenada. For example, in August 1983, Seaga helped to merge three conservative Grenadian parties into one major party—the New National Party (NNP) led by Herbert Blaize. The outcome of the December 1984 election in Grenada in which the NNP won 14 of the 15 parliamentary seats was a source of relief both in Washington and Kingston.

Seaga's support of the NNP was not simply a strategy to cement relations with the United States. It was a logical extension of the JLP's efforts to repudiate the PNP and to capitalize on a popular issue at home. Lingering public fear of the PNP's pro-Cuban, socialist sympathies was then and has remained the PNP's most troublesome election issue.

Seaga's political acumen in this regard was evident in his decision to call general elections shortly after the Grenadian invasion and two years before they were constitutionally required. The Jamaican voter interpreted Jamaica's involvement in the invasion of Grenada as a defeat for Cuba and the Soviet Union.

The timing of the general elections in December 1983 and the PNP's refusal to contest the election on what many saw as disingenuous grounds (a "gentleman's agreement" not to hold general elections until a new voter's list was compiled) resulted in the JLP's winning 54 of the 60 parliamentary seats by default. Seaga's emphasis upon removing Cuban "subversion" in Grenada, therefore, was not simply a matter of pandering to Washington's cold war fears. Rather it was based upon a careful reading of Jamaican public opinion and a shrewd sense of political timing.

JAMAICA AS A DEVELOPMENT ROLE MODEL

The second way in which Jamaica's foreign policy was aligned with U.S. policy was through Seaga's developmental model for Third World countries. Seaga elaborated a twofold developmental doctrine which was designed to align Jamaica's developmental policy with U.S. policy and to rationalize large inflows of American foreign aid. While these policies appeared to be contradictory, they were, in fact, part of a single diplomatic strategy by Seaga to discredit Manley and the PNP and at the same time gain maximum influence with Washington.
The only contradiction was in Washington's support for the dual strategy proposed by Seaga. The large aid flow to Jamaica under the Reagan administration was in conflict with the administration's emphasis upon private sector-led growth in Third World countries. In order to understand the purpose of Seaga's alignment of Jamaica's development policy with that of the United States, it is necessary to briefly examine each.

**REAGAN'S THIRD WORLD DEVELOPMENT POLICY**

Early in his first administration, President Reagan adopted a high profile hard-line approach to Third World aid and debt problems. In a blunt speech to the 1981 annual meeting of the IMF and World Bank, Reagan said that the United States would oppose efforts for substantial increases in IMF/World Bank lending to bail out Third World countries that were swamped with rising debts and huge oil bills. He called for an end to squabbling between rich and poor countries and said that "unless a nation puts its own financial and economic house in order, no amount of aid will produce progress."

At the meeting, the United States forged a common front among the industrial powers and successfully rebuffed almost every demand from Third World countries for more aid on softer terms. Reagan's solution for all but the poorest of the poor (i.e., Sub-Saharan Africa) was a growing, prosperous U.S. economy. The implications for developing Third World countries were clear. In order for them to take advantage of the spread effects of a growing U.S. economy they would have to follow free-market policies which would remove barriers to U.S. trade and investment.

Within this framework, the Reagan administration adopted an economic policy toward the Caribbean that distinguished it from previous administrations. The centerpiece of the policy was the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) which went into effect in early 1984. Its stated purpose was to help remove U.S. trade barriers which blocked potential exports of Caribbean Basin countries (20 countries were eligible in December 1984). The declared purpose of the plan was to give these countries a competitive edge over other Third World countries (although not over producers in the United States, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico) by granting twelve-year duty-free entry into the U.S. market for certain categories of exports.

Secretary of State George Shultz explained the innovation of U.S. economic policy toward the region at the eighth annual conference on Trade, Investment, and Development in the Caribbean Basin in Miami in December
1984. He said that U.S. foreign assistance would not play the dominant role it once did.

Official foreign assistance accounted for 40 percent of net capital inflows to Latin American and Caribbean countries during the 1960s with another 40 percent coming from foreign direct investment. During the 1970s, external commercial bank financing became the major source of capital for these countries. One major consequence of this was a burgeoning external debt which grew from approximately $75 billion in 1974 to $336 billion in 1983. External debt was thus growing at about 20 percent per year. Shultz predicted that at current rates of external borrowing the region’s external debt would rise to a staggering $620 billion by the end of 1989. This is well beyond their capacity to repay even the interest on the loans.

Shultz argued that not only are there insufficient sources of external lending to continue this level of external borrowing, but also U.S. foreign assistance would not be forthcoming to fill the gap. The secretary underscored the Reagan strategy of removing trade and investment restrictions between the United States and regional states as the chief prescription to reverse their economic stagnation and decline. The Reagan position was that trade protectionism made these small economies dependent upon restricted, unprofitable markets and inefficient state enterprises which diverted scarce resources away from more productive economic activity.

SEAGA’S DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Seaga’s twofold development policy aligned Jamaica with U.S. policy toward Third World countries and at the same time enabled Seaga to extract large aid flows from Washington. The first policy strategy, the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), meshed with Washington’s policy of emphasizing private sector-led growth in Third World countries. The second policy strategy was designed to appeal to U.S. national security concerns in the Caribbean and was predicated upon large amounts of economic assistance to the Caribbean. However, once again, Seaga’s strategy was not simply designed to curry favor with Washington. His policies were primarily intended to assert Seaga’s political leadership by repudiating Manley’s economic policies. We shall briefly examine Seaga’s strategies to understand how he has used them to gain political influence with Washington.

By endorsing the U.S. Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), Seaga was not merely aping Washington’s line. In fact, he can claim, with some justification, authorship of the philosophy underlying CBI. Seaga laid out the rationale for
The CBI in October 1979 while he was the leader of the opposition JLP. In a campaign speech to the diplomatic corps in Kingston in October 1980 (before the general election in Jamaica and also before the U.S. presidential election), Seaga contrasted the JLP's position with that of the PNP government.

In the speech, Seaga said that Jamaica's foreign policy under a JLP government would be compatible with Jamaica's domestic policy. Failure to synchronize the two under the Manley government was, in Seaga's opinion, the reason it had failed. According to Seaga, Manley conducted Jamaica's foreign economic policy as if the country were a less developed country (LDC) whereas, in truth, Jamaica was a middle-level country or a more developed country (MDC). Seaga said that Jamaica was more properly described as being "highly placed" in the comparative social and economic pecking order of the Third World (Sunday Gleaner, October 14, 1979).

The significance of this distinction in Seaga's logic is crucial for understanding his foreign economic policy. The basic characteristic of a middle-level country according to Seaga was that it was typically a market economy with an active and large-scale private sector. By contrast, a less developed country was characterized by a centrally planned economy, and had high levels of state control and a large public sector which dominated the economy. Following this line of thinking, Seaga concluded that because of the different structural characteristics of LDCs and MDCs, their needs were different. For example, because of the important role of the private sector in MDCs, their economies were allegedly more receptive to trade than aid. By contrast, the dominance of the public sector in LDCs was said to make their economies more responsive to aid than trade.

Given this logic, Seaga concluded that the structure of Jamaica's economy required a foreign economic policy which would increase trade and investment flows to its private sector. He declared, therefore, that a JLP government would place great emphasis upon negotiating international market preferences for Jamaica's exports and would institute investment incentives to stimulate the growth of the country's private sector.

Seaga attacked Manley's preoccupation with establishing a New International Economic Order (NIEO) on grounds that he misunderstood the structure of Jamaica's economy. Seaga argued that Manley's pursuit of the NIEO in the Non-Aligned Movement mistakenly associated Jamaica with LDCs. The dominance of the state sector in these countries led them to advocate policies which discouraged private sector growth. However, since Jamaica's economy depended upon private sector growth, the LDC policy prescription was detrimental to Jamaica's growth.

Seaga underscored the contradiction between Jamaica's domestic economy and its foreign economic policy under the PNP government by pointing
to the flawed logic of its support for a NIEO. He explained that countries such as Jamaica which required markets and increased private investment and trade for their economic growth would benefit the least from the achievement of NIEO objectives.8

The NIEO agenda was geared primarily to increase aid flows or to relieve debt burdens of state-dominated LDCs with their “nonproductive” sectors. Hence, the identification of Jamaica’s interests with the NIEO was misplaced. Seaga also attacked the Manley government’s high-profile support for their world pressure politics directed primarily at the United States on the grounds that it alienated Jamaica’s chief trading partner.

Seaga argued for this position at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in Melbourne in 1981. In a major address on the world economy, Seaga admonished heads of Third World governments to cease looking to aid as compensation for their declining terms of trade. Instead, he stressed that the only real solution to their economic difficulties was the production of internationally competitive goods and services for the world market (Daily Gleaner, September 8, 1981).

The second developmental strategy employed by Seaga was a campaign designed to secure large U.S. economic assistance in order to counter the threat of Soviet-backed Cuban influence in the Caribbean. To that end, Seaga appealed for a “Marshall Plan type operation” for the Caribbean and Central America which would double the level of official American aid to U.S. $3 billion per year. Seaga sought to justify this unprecedented level of U.S. assistance in terms of East-West conflict by claiming that the Caribbean Basin was the next “hot spot” of the world (Sunday Gleaner, October 14, 1979).

Seaga argued that all efforts to date at regional and subregional cooperation such as the Central American Common Market, CARICOM, and the Caribbean Development Bank had failed to address the pressing problems of the regional states stemming from inadequate capital to finance development, energy, food, trade, and to cope with unemployment and poverty. He asserted that the recent “Cuban thrust” into the region was designed to exploit these problems.

Seaga said that faced with economic crisis, these countries were forced to make a choice of development strategies. As of 1979, there were only two models available to them. One was the model pioneered by Puerto Rico in the 1950s called “Operation Bootstrap” and the other model was the Cuban one of a Marxist-Leninist state with imperialist ambitions that was supported by the Soviet Union. Neither model was appropriate to the needs of Caribbean states. The Puerto Rican model was unique by virtue of its political status with the United States, and the Cuban model was a threat to parliamentary democracy.
According to Seaga, the crisis in the Caribbean called for regional solidarity in order to focus upon the developmental needs of these states. In taking this position, Seaga openly challenged the South-South strategy of the Manley government. Instead, Seaga called for a combined U.S.-Caribbean strategy to combat the threat of Cuban communism. Seaga repeatedly stressed this theme at meetings of the OAS, CARICOM, the Commonwealth Heads of Government, and in public and private gatherings in the United States.

**POLITICAL CONCESSIONS FROM THE UNITED STATES**

By aligning Jamaica’s foreign policy with the United States, Seaga was able to secure large-scale U.S. economic assistance plus support for loans from international agencies. Seaga’s ability to secure foreign assistance was in itself a repudiation of Michael Manley, whose government was denied similar assistance. In fact, Seaga openly boasted that unlike Manley, he was able to secure international financial support for Jamaica. He has specifically pointed out that his government has been able to “pass the IMF test” for further lending. Hence, Seaga used his ability to obtain foreign assistance to reinforce his popular image as a man of action and a “financial wizard.”

The political significance of U.S. aid to Jamaica under the Reagan administration was that it enabled Seaga to fulfill a major campaign promise. The JLP’s 1980 campaign was based largely upon a program to restore the country’s economic growth. The new government’s first order of business in this regard was to refinance Jamaica’s external debt. Table 1 shows that Seaga was, indeed, successful in this regard.

Table 1 presents data on the sectoral composition of Jamaica’s foreign debt between 1980 and 1984. Jamaica’s external debt increased from U.S.$865.1 million in December 1980 to U.S.$1,695.8 million in July 1984. The data indicate a significant shift in the nature and source of Jamaica’s foreign loans. The shift was from high-interest, short-term commercial loans on which the Manley government was forced to rely, to long-term, low-interest official loans primarily from USAID and the World Bank. This trend continued in 1985 with Jamaica receiving U.S.$88.6 million in total assistance from international agencies. In 1986, however, the figure declined to only U.S.$4.7 million, undoubtedly reflecting the country’s virtually unmanageable debt situation which has tended to discourage further substantial lending to Jamaica. Table 2 shows the total U.S. assistance to Jamaica from 1972 to 1988.
TABLE 1
Refinancing Jamaica’s External Debt
(U.S.$ millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Loans</th>
<th>December 1980</th>
<th>July 1984</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loan %</td>
<td>Loan %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
<td>97.8 11.3</td>
<td>325.8 19.2</td>
<td>+ 232.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-American</td>
<td>48.2 5.6</td>
<td>105.0 6.2</td>
<td>+ 117.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Bank</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>46.1 5.3</td>
<td>387.1 22.8</td>
<td>+ 739.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Banks</td>
<td>351.1 40.6</td>
<td>512.3 30.2</td>
<td>+ 45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>321.9 37.2</td>
<td>365.6 21.6</td>
<td>+ 13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$865.1 100.0</td>
<td>$1,695.8 100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The data in Table 2 indicate the high levels of U.S. foreign assistance received by Jamaica during the Seaga administration. Aid increased from only U.S.$14.6 million in 1980 to U.S.$140.7 million in 1982, Seaga’s second year in office. During Seaga’s seven years in office, Jamaica was among the top 20 U.S. aid recipients out of roughly 115 recipient countries. Jamaica ranked within the top 10 U.S. aid recipients if the figures are calculated on a per capita basis. For example, in 1985 Jamaica ranked number 15 out of 116 recipients or number 5 on a per capita basis. This high level of U.S. economic assistance continued. For example, during fiscal year 1987, estimated U.S. assistance to Jamaica of U.S.$86.5 million placed it number 17 out of 115 aid recipients and the congressionally requested figure for 1988 of U.S.$107.8 would place Jamaica 16 out of 116 recipients.

Jamaica also received special treatment by the Reagan administration in its 1989 budget proposal. For example, aid cuts to Jamaica and balance of payments assistance, suspended in 1988, were restored (LARR, March 31, 1988: 7). Therefore, despite the overall decline in U.S. development assistance for the 1980-1988 period, U.S. economic assistance to Jamaica continued at a high level (see Sewell and Contee, 1987: 1022).

THE LIMITATIONS OF SMALL POWER INFLUENCE

Seaga’s skillful diplomacy toward the United States netted Jamaica substantial foreign economic assistance. This success is particularly noteworthy in light of the U.S. government’s declared policy of refusing to “fill in the
TABLE 2
Total U.S. Assistance to Jamaica, 1972-1988
(U.S.$ millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Total Assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>107.8a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>86.5b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>122.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>163.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>114.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>107.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>140.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


a. Requested.
b. Estimated.

(investment) gap” in capital resources required for the economic growth of Third World countries. Despite Secretary Shultz’s statements to that effect, Jamaica under Seaga was a major exception to that policy. It received substantial long-term, low-interest official loans in place of the short-term, commercially oriented loans on which his predecessor was forced to rely.

Nevertheless, this political concession from Washington was not sufficient to reverse or even arrest the long-term weakness of Jamaica’s traditional export industries — bauxite/alumina and sugar. In essence, Seaga’s ability to secure large foreign loans enabled his government to finance imports and gave him time to try to correct the structural weakness in the country’s international trading relationships.

However, a structural adjustment of Jamaica’s economy has not occurred. For example, the CBI was inaugurated in 1983 and yet Jamaica’s nontraditional exports (primarily garment exports and winter vegetables) have failed to offset the huge losses to the economy due to the fall in international demand for bauxite/alumina. Table 3 shows the decline in Jamaica’s bauxite/ alumina earnings and the country’s trade balance for the years 1984 through 1986.
Jamaica, in fact, ran a large negative trade balance during Seaga’s entire term of office largely because of the decline of the bauxite/alumina industry. This resulted in a huge external debt of about U.S.$3.7 billion in 1986. Even more alarming is the fact that the debt service ratio (interest payments as a proportion of principal payments) had risen to a staggering 81.1 percent and Jamaica’s debt service ratio as a percent of total exports was about 42 percent. For a small, resource-poor country like Jamaica, this is a virtually unpayable foreign debt.

Table 4 shows the overall decline in Jamaica’s economy during 1985. The only bright spot in Jamaica’s economy was in the tourist industry which has now become the single largest source of foreign exchange earnings (U.S.$442 million projected in 1986) and garment exports to the United States. Garment exports to the United States were an estimated U.S.$56 million and foodstuffs were U.S.$29 million in 1985. Ironically, however, neither of these growth areas was due to the CBI. For example, garment
exports to the United States were stimulated by a bilateral Caribbean Basin Textile Product Program ("super 807") that guarantees duty-free access for apparel made from fabric woven and cut in the United States and sewn in Jamaica.

The political consequences of the decline of Jamaica's economy have been devastating. The cross-class support that brought Seaga into power in 1980 was undermined. All major classes—including trade unions, agricultural associations, civil service, teacher and student associations, and business groups except the very rich—protested the effects of the country's severe economic deterioration. Recent opinion polls revealed the depth of hostility to Seaga's economic policies which were blamed for Jamaica's severe economic decline. For example, the Stone polls conducted in December 1988 just before the February 9, 1989, general elections, which brought Manley's PNP government back to power for a third term, showed the extent of the popular disillusionment with Seaga's leadership. The Stone survey revealed that the JLP trailed the PNP among white-collar workers and lower-income professionals by 55 percent to 45 percent. Similarly, the PNP led the JLP among manual workers by a margin of 62 percent to 24 percent (LARR, February 23, 1989: 2). The PNP won the general election by 57 percent of the popular vote and secured at least 44 of the 60 seats in the House of Representatives. Manley won by a landslide equal to Seaga's election victory over the PNP in 1980.

CONCLUSION

Seaga's skillful diplomacy toward the United States produced unprecedented levels of American economic aid which helped to support his government. However, Seaga's principal domestic and foreign policy objectives were not exclusively nor primarily designed to serve U.S. policy objectives. Rather, Seaga's policies were designed primarily to assert the preeminence of his political leadership of Jamaica.

To the extent that Seaga's repudiation of Manley's policies aligned Jamaican foreign policy with the United States, it served Seaga's interests. However, this is not to say that U.S. interests were necessarily advanced to the same degree. In fact, Seaga's successful diplomacy toward Washington resulted in a contravention of Washington's own policy toward Third World countries, emphasizing their reliance upon the private sector instead of large flows of U.S. aid. This contradiction is all the more apparent given that Jamaica, unlike El Salvador and Honduras, did not receive large-scale U.S. military assistance.
Nevertheless, Seaga’s success in securing political concessions from Washington was not sufficient to spare his government the political consequences of prolonged economic decline. The fragile multiclass nature of Seaga’s ruling JLP as well as the rival PNP will make any government vulnerable to the effects of prolonged and severe economic decline. However, almost any government of Jamaica (including the PNP) will undoubtedly be obliged to exercise effective diplomatic strategies for securing the kind of political concessions which Seaga gained from the United States. In the absence of alternative major new sources of economic assistance, Jamaica’s debt burden and the continued shortage of foreign exchange will almost certainly make the country’s relationship with the United States critical. Therefore, if nothing else, Seaga’s diplomatic strategy toward the United States should provide useful insights for the current and future governments of Jamaica as well as other small states in their dealings with great powers.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of the paradox of weak state power in international relations see Lindell and Persson (1986), Handel (1981), Singer (1972), and Sveics (1970).

2. Stephens and Stephens (1986: 189) argue that the JLP also played the American card even before coming to power in 1980. For example, in 1977 the JLP conducted a Human Rights Campaign (a major theme of the Carter administration’s foreign policy especially before Andrew Young’s departure from the administration in 1979). The campaign was designed to discredit the PNP government in the eyes of the United States on the grounds that Manley’s government massively violated the human rights of JLP supporters.

3. This is not to deny, however, that economic policies followed by both the Manley and Seaga governments did not contribute to Jamaica’s economic decline. For example, expansionary budget policies followed by the Manley government despite the downturn in the country’s export earnings and the Seaga administration’s deregulation policies leading to increased consumer imports undoubtedly compounded the country’s serious external economic difficulties. For a discussion of the domestic sources of Jamaica’s economic decline under the Manley and Seaga regimes see Boyd (1986) and Sharpley (1984).

4. Stephens and Stephens (1986: 83, 244-245, 398) argue that a class realignment which occurred in the 1976 general election won by the PNP was not reversed in the 1980 election despite a swing away from the PNP. However, evidence to support this assertion is at least premature. The basis for their claim are polls conducted by Stone (1981: 37) which show that the unemployed and unskilled category of voters declined from 60 percent voting for the PNP in the 1976 general election to 40 percent voting for them. The basis of their argument appears to be that the unemployed and unskilled group included a high proportion of youths who were formerly excluded from the political community. Part of the appeal of Manley’s socialist ideology was designed to mobilize the “black masses” in support of the PNP’s “socialist movement.” However, as the authors themselves note, when the economic hardships of the depressed economy and the insecurity brought on by gun violence, particularly in the urban areas,
increased, their "weak," "partisan attachment" to the PNP broke down and they easily defected (1986: 245). Therefore, it remains to be seen whether the partisan loyalties of this group transcend narrow considerations of patronage.

5. This is not to suggest the absence of differences in the social makeup and leadership style of party elites, however. For a discussion of these differences see Robertson (1972) and Stone (1980).

6. The tendency in the literature is to focus upon the IMF as the principal source of Jamaica’s economic austerity under the second Manley government. The IMF has been blamed for disarray within the PNP over whether to accept the Fund’s austerity policy and for popular disaffection from the PNP government resulting from the economy’s decline. See, for example, Girvan, Bernal, and Hughes (1980). While the IMF personified the external nature of Jamaica’s forced austerity and for that reason symbolized the political dilemma facing the PNP, the real source of the austerity was the failure of the country’s traditional export industries—bauxite/alumina and sugar. Both industries have been in serious decline since 1975, necessitating massive foreign borrowing to sustain high levels of importation. Both the Manley and Seaga governments have been forced to deal with an adverse economic situation largely outside of Jamaica’s control. A major difference between the two is that Seaga has been far more successful in obtaining foreign loans and credits, primarily from the United States, in coping with this situation of forced austerity.

7. The U.S. proposal of 1982 to form a Caribbean regional army has been shelved by Washington. The reason for this was the death, in 1985, of the principal supporter of the plan in the Caribbean—Tom Adams. His successor, Errol Barrow, opposed the plan, and other leaders of Eastern Caribbean states who formerly expressed support have either been voted out of office or they have reconsidered their position. A more likely reason for the change of heart by Caribbean leaders is the fact that opposition parties in several states where governments had expressed support are gaining in strength and opposition to U.S. military influence in the region is growing. (See LARR, May 10, 1985: 1; October 2, 1986: 5; May 14, 1987: 3.)

8. Seaga’s criticism of Jamaica’s support of the NIEO under Manley’s leadership is paradoxical. The reason is that Seaga’s principal claim to political success was his ability to secure high levels of foreign aid and concessionary loans—principal planks of the NIEO agenda. Furthermore, his government has acknowledged that the major barriers impeding investment are of the government’s own making. Decision-making is slow, too many bureaucratic approvals are required, and procedures are too complex.

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