

## Remapping the Americas: US Hegemony and New Actors in the Caribbean Basin

February 2004: The physical presence of a South African military jet filled with arms headed toward Haiti, but grounded in Jamaica because its intended recipient, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was no longer there, provided an ironic symbol of how much things have changed in the Caribbean. Thirty years before, heading from the Caribbean towards Southern Africa were Cuban military forces and equipment, that not only reached their intended destination but enjoyed surprising success as they turned the Angolan civil war around, defeating US-backed mercenaries and South African elite troops, and ensuring the victory of the MPLA.

That unusual twist of historical precedence was followed by other intriguing developments in the changing diplomatic and political arena in which Caribbean now finds itself. First the purported role of France in Aristide's leaving Haiti, representing what appears to be the first time France has played an active political role in the independent Caribbean since its failure to quell the Haitian revolution 200 years ago. Second, the fact that the U.N. peacekeeping forces in Haiti are led by Brazilian troops, making for the first time that there is a significant Latin American military or political presence in the circum-Caribbean region. Third, the on going China-Taiwan rivalry that is playing itself out in the Caribbean Basin was also very present, with China deploying its first troops overseas ever (not including the Korean War) in one of Taiwan's few remaining allies.

The question is: has the role of the U.S. changed in the region? While, for the moment, the U.S. continues to play an overarching role in the external and internal lives of Caribbean nations, just as it did during the Cold War, the implications of the incidents recounted above do merit closer examination, to the extent that one might proffer the suggestion that U.S. hegemony in the region is weakening, and there is room for new actors to assert themselves.

In this paper I explore the abovementioned events, and their implications for a changing international political environment in the Caribbean Basin, and offer suggestions as to how Caribbean states can understand these changes with regard to national and regional diplomatic strategies and initiatives.

Diana Thorburn  
Lecturer, Department of Government  
University of the West Indies  
Mona, Jamaica

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