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US Intervention in Grenada: Reactions and
Future Implications

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Summary

Initial reaction among Washington's major European allies to the landing in Grenada was generally hostile, but information released since the fighting ended has produced more understanding for US motivations, especially in the United Kingdom and West Germany. The Grenada episode nonetheless will probably have a longer-term effect of reinforcing a predisposition on the part of leftwing political parties to think that the Reagan Administration is too quick to use military force. Conservative governments usually sympathetic to US policies, especially those of Prime Minister Thatcher and Chancellor Kohl, will also have to deal with increased skepticism concerning Washington's willingness in a crisis to consult adequately with its allies. Thatcher, in particular, will in our view remember for a considerable time the political embarrassment Grenada caused her. In order to forestall criticism that they are too closely aligned to Washington, both Thatcher and Kohl will probably try to find new opportunities to demonstrate that their foreign policies are distinct from Washington's and that the US Administration attaches importance to their views.

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British Reactions: The Limits of a "Special Relationship"

British reaction to US landings in Grenada was more intense than that of other European allies because the island is a member of the Commonwealth (although under Maurice Bishop, not a member in good standing) and because of public perceptions of a Reagan-Thatcher split over the invasion. The Labor Party opposition used Grenada, and especially what most British politicians saw as only pro forma consultation and disregard for Thatcher's objections, to cast doubt on US trustworthiness and particularly on whether Thatcher's strong support of US policies gave her sufficient influence in Washington. [redacted]

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Opposition leaders also used the invasion to revive interest in "dual key" controls for INF, an issue the government thought it had defused, and the US Embassy reported polls showing sharply increased distrust of US leadership. Such reactions on the part of the opposition were, in our view, predictable. Of more fundamental concern is the possibility that a new wave of anti-American rhetoric following on the open disagreement between London and Washington will undercut efforts by Labor moderates in any future Labor government to preserve the "special relationship" with the United States on the same basis as in the past. [redacted]

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Similar doubts about US intentions will, we believe, also continue to beset the Tories. The Embassy reports that about one-third of Conservative MPs supported the US action, and in our view an even larger number believe Britain should have joined the intervention. Nevertheless, a future Conservative Prime Minister is likely to see Grenada cited to prove that Washington takes its British ally for granted; rightwingers, regardless of their opposition to Communist regimes, will we think also be more suspicious that the US is willing to intervene unilaterally, even in areas of traditional British primacy. [redacted]

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Prime Minister Thatcher, after expressing her disapproval of US actions in a typically forthright manner, has attempted to repair relations with Washington and cooperate with efforts designed to facilitate the withdrawal of US forces. Although the Prime Minister remains a steadfast advocate of the "special relationship," the Grenada affair has caused political embarrassment that, in our view, she will long remember; one cabinet member has even speculated to US officials that Foreign Secretary Howe's status has been permanently weakened. In addition to incurring charges from the opposition that she was unable to influence US actions, Thatcher's image as a strong leader who has revived Britain's activism in world affairs was damaged by her refusal to join the Caribbean Commonwealth members

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and the United States in the intervention. A number of rightwing Tories, normally Thatcher's base of support, have continued to criticize the Prime Minister's decision not to participate. London's efforts to take a lead in reconstruction on Grenada are in part designed to disarm these critics. [redacted]

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We believe the "Grenada effect" will continue to be seen in greater efforts by Thatcher to play up issues where London's policy is distinct from Washington's and to demonstrate that her government does not blindly follow the US lead. She may also become less willing to defend US policies, particularly in Central America, where British interests are limited and where defense of Washington wins few friends among the British electorate. We think such considerations are already apparent in increased British skepticism about US Middle East policy and in Thatcher's announced intention to increase contacts with the Soviet bloc. At the same time, the Prime Minister will demand more extensive consultations in the future and will not hesitate to remind US officials of the damage Grenada-like incidents can do to the "special relationship." [redacted]

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Commonwealth Reactions: Much Ado, Little Action

The Grenada affair displayed once again the Commonwealth's inability to deal with contentious issues that pit some members against others. In the organization's meeting last month, those Caribbean states who joined the US in the intervention argued strongly against proposals for condemnation presented by Asian and African members, who professed to see an increased US willingness to intervene in their affairs. British officials have told US counterparts that Thatcher was pleased that she avoided any outright condemnation and persuaded her colleagues to deal with the future of Grenada and not the past in their communique. Thatcher apparently induced the Commonwealth members to limit themselves to studying ways in which the smaller members can fend off intervention by larger powers. The Commonwealth states also agreed to help restore self-government to Grenada, although some members were reluctant, in the words of one diplomat, to "let the US off the hook." [redacted]

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West German Reaction: A Stick for the Opposition

West German reaction was similar to the British, although less intense because Grenada does not have the historical connotations for Bonn that it does for London. Nevertheless, the affair did provoke some political problems for Kohl. A number of Social Democrats, anxious to find ammunition for the Bundestag debate on INF, used the invasion to place Washington on the same moral plane as Moscow. In our view, the invasion has added to a general concern among Social Democrats -- and among many other

West Germans -- that the administration is, as some SPD leftist charged, "trigger happy." [redacted]

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The Grenada affair also embarrassed the Kohl government by revealing a source of disunity within the coalition. Foreign Minister and Free Democratic Party leader Genscher maintained publicly that he had not been consulted about US actions and that if he had been asked, he would have advised against the invasion. Kohl endorsed his Foreign Minister's stand, but Genscher and Kohl both were sharply rebuked by Christian Social Union leader Strauss for failing to support the United States. Since the landing, additional information from the Caribbean has induced more public support for US actions on the part of Christian Democrats and Kohl has successfully played down the matter. Because West German interests were not directly involved, the issue of prior consultations did not have the same resonance in Bonn that it did in London, although the Anglo-American rift was commented on extensively in West Germany. [redacted]

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Like Thatcher, Kohl has stressed throughout his tenure the close relationship between his government and the US administration. He has used West German-American consultations on arms control and other critical matters to combat Social Democratic charges that he has no influence on US policy and thus should follow a more independent foreign policy line. We believe Grenada has heightened Kohl's determination to show that Washington takes Bonn's opinions seriously on issues of concern to West Germany and that the US government will undertake no Grenada-like actions (particularly in the field of East-West economic relations) that will embarrass his administration. [redacted]

French Reactions: Public Anger, Private Cynicism

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President Mitterrand's public reactions to Grenada -- describing US action as a violation of international law -- came more quickly and were more blunt than those of other Allied leaders. In our view, however, the Grenada affair will have few long-term effects in France. French governments of various political complexions have often intervened in Third World countries with little or no consultations, and France has for years followed an independent line in foreign and defense policy. At most, US actions have reinforced preconceived French notions that US policy has become more blatantly interventionist. [redacted]

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Italian Reactions: Between Realism and Concern

Prime Minister Craxi played down Grenada, and the invasion had no discernible impact on the INF debate in the Italian Parliament. As in other Allied nations, Grenada served to

"prove" to leftists that the Reagan administration is too quick to use force to solve political dilemmas. Most Italian politicians, however, appear to regard the Caribbean as a US sphere of influence and Grenada as an American problem; in our view, many were, in fact, relieved that they were not consulted in advance. Nevertheless, Grenada probably has increased worry that untoward US actions against Libya or in Lebanon will threaten Italian interests. Like the other Allies, Italian officials are concerned that Grenada not become a precedent for unilateral US actions in regions where their interests are more directly engaged.

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