

Anguilla: Crisis in the Caribbean

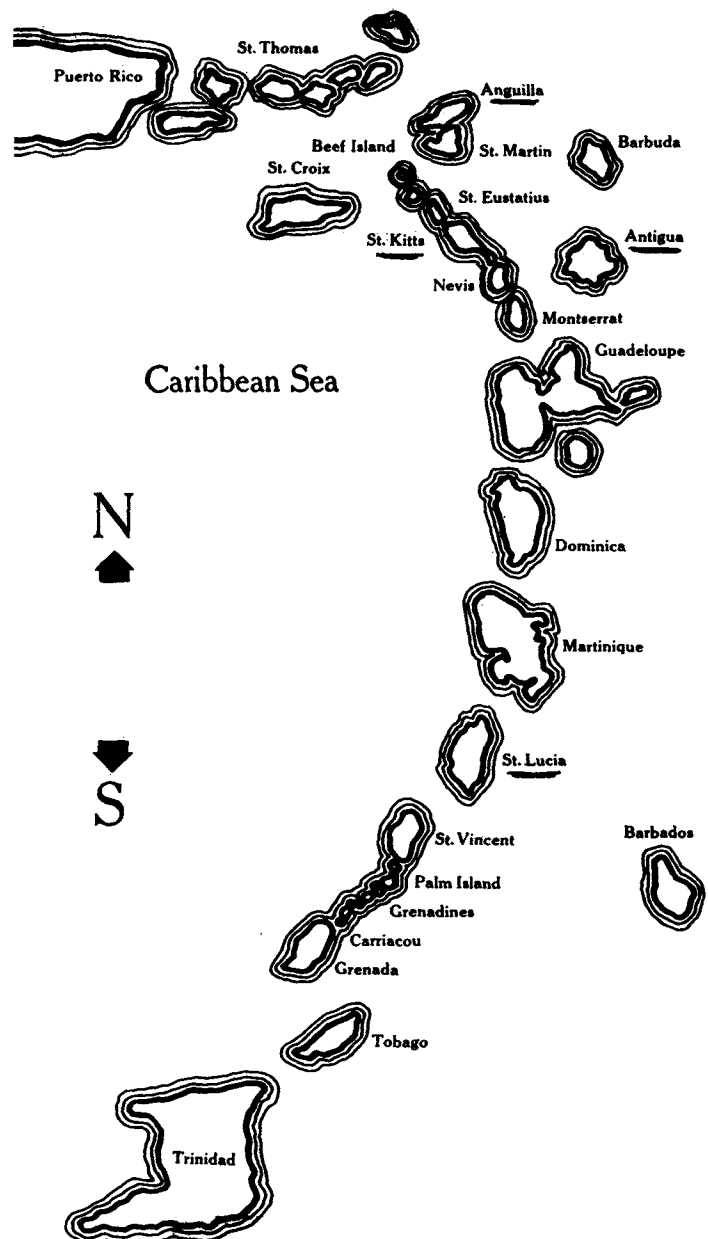
Antigua, W. I.
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NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Last night 100 British paratroopers left England for the Caribbean and are due to land at the Antigua airport early this morning. Another 40 British Marines are stationed 120 miles north of Antigua on two British warships, the frigates *Minerva* and *Rhyl*. In reserve to these forces are 250 men of the British Army now stationed in British Honduras. All this force is set to invade the tiny (35 square miles) 'rebel' island of Anguilla, a self-proclaimed Republic which last month declared its independence from Great Britain, the British Commonwealth (see FJM-5) as well as reaffirming its two-year secession from St. Kitts-Nevis (see FJM 1-2-3-4).





Above: Members of the British delegation headed by (extreme left) Mr. William Whitlock, M.P. Next to Mr. Whitlock in background is Mr. Desmond Kerr, Assistant British Representative to the Associated States. On the extreme right, Mr. Stuart Roberts, Representative for HMG to the Associated States who is based on St. Lucia. To the left of Mr. Roberts is Premier John Compton who is the Head of Government of St. Lucia. Photo taken during recent discussions Mr. Whitlock had on St. Lucia about Anguilla settlement proposals.

Events leading up to the deployment of these troops have been shaped largely by Mr. Ronald Webster, the President of the tiny Republic. During the past month, Webster has become more and more demagogic, more and more intransigent in his actions and policies.

Following the withdrawal of British Senior Official, Tony Lee, Webster has worked with the more extremist elements on the island. He has also come to rely on the advice of an American 'businessman' (read speculator) from Florida, Mr. Jack Holcomb-- a man who mixes a great deal of politics with his commercial interests. (FJM-5)

As a result, Her Majesty's Government has been alarmed at what it considers 'gangster elements' using Webster and his clique in order to take over the island. Other Caribbean heads of Government are also alarmed and have been pushing Britain to "put a stop to the Anguilla rebellion".

However, none of this would have brought 100 paratroopers to the Caribbean had it not been for last week's incredible confrontation between Webster and Mr. William Whitlock, British Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. Whitlock, heading a six-man delegation in an effort to solve the Anguilla problem, visited Premier Bradshaw on St. Kitts and then headed for Anguilla where he put forth his Government's proposals for a settlement.

Mr. Whitlock arrived at Anguilla's airport just before noon on Wednesday, March 12. Along with the Under-Secretary, the delegation included Mr. Stuart Roberts, British Representative to the Associated States in the Caribbean, Mr. Tony Lee, former Senior British Official on Anguilla and several other London based officials. Disembarking from the small aircraft which had transported them from Antigua, the delegation was met by Mr. Webster, other members of the Anguilla Government and roughly 500 other Anguillians who had turned out to welcome the British. Mr. Webster greeted Whitlock and introduced him to the Anguillians saying that Whitlock "was free to move about the island, talk to Anguillians and see for himself just how Anguillians felt". Following Webster's speech, the Anguillians sang "God Save the Queen", waved British flags and, according to Mr. Stuart Roberts, gave the delegation "a very warm reception".

William Whitlock then read out a prepared statement (a copy of this statement is given below) which was also distributed to each of the Anguillians at the airport. It was greeted with enthusiasm by those who read it and Whitlock arranged to tour the island in the afternoon with a meeting of the civil service set for four o'clock. The delegation then retired to a Col. Henry Howard's home some miles from the airport for lunch. Aside from a brief excursion from the house by Mr. Roberts and Mr. Lee, the delegation remained at Howard's home during the lunch break. (Roberts and Lee went down the road to see Mr. Atlin Harrigan, then Editor of The Beacon, Anguilla's weekly news-sheet and voice of what could be called 'moderate opinion'). Following lunch, the delegation began to depart Howard's residence with the intention of touring the island. At the same time, several groups of armed Anguillians appeared on the hills surrounding the property and a barricade was placed at its gates. Demanding that they be allowed to pass, the British were told that they would "have to remain until Mr. Webster had returned".

**A message to the people of Anguilla from
Mr. William Whitlock, M.P., British Parliamentary
Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs**

The British Government have been following the affairs of Anguilla very closely and the reason for my visit is to explain to you the action which the British Government would now think right to take in the interests of the people of Anguilla.

Our wish is to ensure that you should be administered in a way acceptable to you.

The proposal which I am authorised to make to you is that Her Majesty's Government should establish in Anguilla a Commissioner appointed by Her Majesty The Queen on the advice of the Rt. Hon. Michael Stewart, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The man we have in mind is Mr. Tony Lee whom you already know well and who understands your problems and aspirations.

It would be our intention that Her Majesty's Commissioner should deal direct with the people of Anguilla and remain on the island so long as the present difficult situation continues. We realise this may be some years. He would consult with you about the appointment of an Advisory Committee to assist him in his capacity as Her Majesty's Commissioner.

In order to enable the Commissioner to carry out his important task the British Government would take steps to endow him with the necessary legal authority under the West Indies Act 1967.

The Supreme Court of the West Indies Associated States has jurisdiction in Anguilla and there should be a Magistrate for Anguilla. The British Government would arrange for the appointment of a Magistrate who would be a man you could trust.

We know how much the people of Anguilla wish to see development taking place in the island for the benefit of the whole population. The British Government would see that plans were made for development projects, and the Commissioner would consult you fully about these.

The British Government know that you would continue to pay your existing taxes, and we would provide money to help bridge the gap between the income from taxation and necessary expenditure.

We know how much importance you attach to the establishment of a Land Registry and to the issue of titles of land. Her Majesty's Commissioner's responsibilities would cover this matter.

You would not need to fear prosecution for political activities during the past twenty-one months. It has been agreed that no such prosecutions would be brought.

I am sure that the measures proposed by Her Majesty's Government will commend themselves to you all and would enable Anguilla to make real and substantial progress in the future. All would be equal before the law and would have equal opportunities to benefit from this progress. There would be peace, certainty and stability in Anguilla which would give both you and those who wish Anguilla well in other countries grounds for real confidence about the future. The British Government wish to see you and your children looking to the future in the confident hope of a tranquil and prosperous way of life upon Anguilla.

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Shortly thereafter, Webster arrived and told the Under-Secretary that his proposals would not be acceptable and that such proposals were an obvious trick to return the island to St. Kitts. Whitlock protested but Webster was adamant and finally told the delegation that they "had thirty minutes to leave Anguilla". Whitlock objected, pointed out that he had been given freedom to see the islanders himself and that such actions on Webster's part were an insult to the Crown. Webster ignored him and refused to discuss his position further and left the Howard property.

Following this, a message was sent to the delegation that they would have to go. Police Sergeant Thomas Ryan then arrived and told the British that taxis were waiting to take them to the airport. Whitlock protested again and asked to see Webster, who at this time was standing on the porch of his Administration Building on top of a hill overlooking the Howard House. Sergeant Ryan shouted up to Webster that Mr. Whitlock wanted to see him--to which Webster responded that Whitlock could walk up the hill to talk if he wanted. Whitlock, by this time "furious and a bit alarmed", refused. Webster's reply to this was a burst of four or five shots from rifles on the hill.

The delegation, knowing that bloodshed could be the result and realizing that once nightfall came the house could be burned down, then decided to leave the island. They left Howard's home in taxis, headed for the airport (followed by "jeering" carloads of Webster's gang shouting and holding rifles) and left on the two Valley Air Service planes made available to them.

Interviewed on Thursday, Mr. Whitlock carefully outlined his reasons for going to Anguilla, described his proposals and then commented on his confrontation with Webster:

"I will say right away there is no point in asking me what happens now. I will go no farther than to say that H.M.G. is now considering the situation and will be in the next day or so, in consultation with the Governments of the Caribbean, and that the Anguillian people, who I believe are completely dominated by gangster-type elements, will not be forgotten.

"Now, as to what took place during my visit. There are the Associated States, which have internal self-government. For external affairs and defence, we are responsible. This has been operating for two years now, so it was decided that I should go and have discussions with each of the states involved.

"In going round, and during my visit, I was very much impressed by their concern at the increasing activities in the Caribbean of subversive elements from outside. Increasingly these elements were at work at the various islands. They pointed out the fact that Anguilla had been in rebellion and that the whole jumping-off point for these people might be Anguilla.

"As the result of these discussions, I formulated certain proposals for Anguilla, which I am quite confident had the support of Governments in the Caribbean. They were put up to H.M.G. There was approval that I should go ahead to try to sell them to the Anguillians.

"One of the proposals was that we should put a commissioner on the island and should administer it for some time. On all sides there was acceptance of the evidence of the strength of feeling that the Government on St. Kitts had neglected Anguillians. This feeling was there, rightly or wrongly."



Above: Official photo of Mr. William Whitlock, M.P.
The Under-Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
who was recently expelled from Anguilla. Courtesy
British Information Service, Trinidad.

"So we would have to have a period of administration by a commissioner while the whole future was sorted out with the Anguillians themselves, and so I should go on the island on an exercise of persuasion, to put the proposals and explain them . . .

"We had known for some time that there were arms on the island. We had known for some time that they had machine carbines, rifles and revolvers.

"It has been very obvious to me that there is this handful of gangster-like characters who are holding the Anguillians in complete subjection and my fear is that some of those people at the airport who demonstrated in favour of our proposals, some of the people who were seen to be friendly to us, had a pretty rough time since then."

Q. Was Webster really in command or do you think he was a tool of these elements?

A. "It's my impression that these elements there have played on Webster's ego, so that initially he felt himself the father of his people but that now he is completely controlled by these people, he feels a very frightened man."

Q. Are you absolutely satisfied that the welcoming crowd would have been as friendly if they had seen your speech first? How many times did you mention St. Kitts? Did you make clear what the relationship would be with St. Kitts?

A. "What I made quite clear in the speech was that they would be administered under the terms of the West Indies Act of 1967 which set up the Associated States and that for some time - maybe several years - they would be administered by Her Majesty's Commissioner - who would be put on the island, and that in that period they would be consulted about their future. Now those proposals were received, as I said, with enthusiasm at the start, and at various points in the speech which I made and that enthusiasm was shown again at the end of my speech, again showing enthusiasm and support for the proposals. There was clapping, cheering and shouting and several times they insisted on singing "God Save the Queen". And at the end I was trying to quiet them in order that I might tell them, as I eventually did, that I would stay there for a day or two, as I was going round the island to talk to them about the proposals in further detail. They then had copies of the leaflet handed round and had a chance to read it before I left the airport. They were still wildly enthusiastic about the whole thing."

Q. How far in fact would St. Kitts have power to run the island if your proposals had been accepted?

A. "The St. Kitts Government would not have run Anguilla, as I said I had the concurrence of all Governments in the area to the proposals I put forward and it was recognised by the St. Kitts Government that there is such a strength of feeling on Anguilla about St. Kitts rightly or wrongly, long before they became an Associated State. It was there in the days when St. Kitts-Nevis and Anguilla was administered as a colony. Anguilla has long felt that the administrative centre in St. Kitts had neglected (them) and that feeling has been there for many many years. Now there is a recognition in the area that while that feeling may be wrong it is there, and that feeling must be taken account of in any future for the island."



Left: Anguillan, John Hodge from the West End. A member of the original Island Council set up after secession in 1967

Below: Two Anguilla-watchers discussing recent event on Anguilla. Mr. Karl T. Hudson-Phillips, M.P. from Trinidad (left) with the writer. Mr. Hudson-Phillips served as an advisor to Mr. Webster in October of last year when talks were held with H.M.G. in London. The photo, courtesy of Trinidad's Guardian, reflects our gloom as we awaited the imminent invasion of Anguilla.



Q. Would Webster be out if the Commissioner took over?

A. "The Commissioner would administer the island with the consent of the Anguillans and would in due course appoint an advisory committee in process towards the period when they could have their own elections and elect their own council."

Q. In the proposal, did you say what would happen to Mr. Webster, or not?

A. "What we said in the proposals was that what had happened in the last twenty-one months would be forgotten, complete amnesty, and no one would be questioned about anything that had happened up to that point."

Q. How do you see the future? What do you think the Government can do about it now?

A. "I've already said to you that that question I didn't intend to answer beyond saying that H.M.G. is considering this matter, will discuss it with Governments in the Caribbean until we reach a decision; beyond saying that we have the interest of the Anguillians in mind. They are not forgotten. I don't propose to go any further."

Over the weekend (March 14-16), reaction from the Caribbean states has been strongly against Webster's actions. In Georgetown, Guyana, the Sunday Graphic in an editorial echoed Whitlock's conviction that there are foreign mobsters in control of Anguilla and called on H.M.G. to send in a gun-boat to "Blast the villains off the island for good". The writer, Editor Carl Blackman, pointed out that this would show the world, particularly the underworld, "that the Caribbean is not up for grabs". Blackman continued, saying that Britain indeed faced a dilemma and could be accused of picking on little Anguilla when it had not stopped Ian Smith "from getting away with murder in Rhodesia". Admitting that "there is an unfortunate parallel" between the two, Blackman contended that "two wrongs do not make a right."

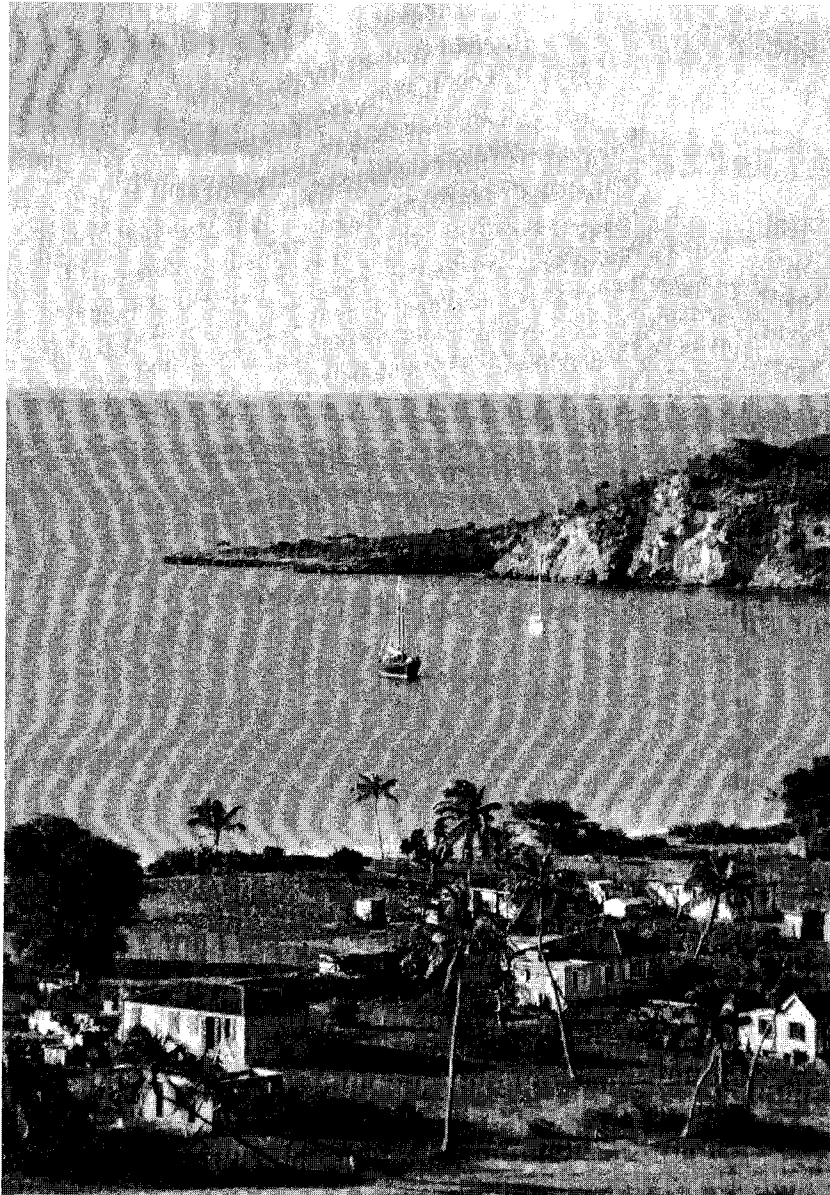
In Trinidad, the Guardian editorialized its reactions:

"A Mockery of Independence."

"What started off as a comedy two years ago, is now assuming the ominous proportions of a dangerous farce. Six thousand Anguillans have made a unilateral declaration of independence, expelled a British Minister and seem prepared to defy the world."

While the obnoxious element of race is not present in this miniature parody of Rhodesia, it does seem to contain the much more volatile element of backing by questionable interests. Caribbean Governments cannot afford to miss the implications.

It would be comfortable to claim that this is the British Government's responsibility and to sit back and wait on Westminster for a solution. But for Caribbean Governments, there is the immediate question of security within the region and the probable ill-effects that organised crime rings and gambling syndicates operating on the island could have on the rest of the territories.



Above: Where the Marines will land. Road Bay, Anguilla, the main port on Anguilla near the central part of the island. The Marines will be transported by the frigates Rhyl and Minerva armed with 4.5 inch guns. Minerva also will transport over 100 British paratroopers, referred to as 'the Army's elite'.

"The days of gunboat diplomacy may be over, but the Anguillians have guns and heavily armed patrol boats, and there is ample evidence that the vested interests would be prepared to fight to protect what is their private real estate."

"Mr. Bradshaw has admitted his helplessness in the situation. But a joint approach by the British and Caribbean Governments should help him to bring the situation well in hand."

In St. Lucia, Premier John Compton simply said that "we don't want the mafia in the Caribbean". Headlines in the region echo Whitlock's cry of "mafia and gangsterism" and it is clear that if the troops do land, invasion will be justified on these grounds.

On Anguilla itself, "Webster and Co." have taken further steps to quiet opposition on the island. On Thursday, Atlin Harrigan's press (on which The Beacon was printed) was seized and then returned in damaged condition so that the small weekly is silenced. All British citizens living on the island were deported over the weekend (Webster said that he will not give Britain the excuse to invade on the pretext of protecting British subjects); four civil servants were fired, two left the island of their own accord and the manager of the Bank of America has been asked to leave the island.

Commenting on these actions, Webster defended himself and accused Mr. Whitlock of lying. "After Whitlock's behaviour and false reports we can expect anything from the British". In rejecting Whitlock's allegation that gangsters were in control of the island, Webster contended that such charges were "absurd" and that he was duly elected President of the island in last month's uncontested elections. (Webster was unopposed as President and he appointed his associate, Mr. Campbell Fleming as Vice-President.)

Meanwhile, Mr. Jere Gumbs, an Anguillian born American citizen (owner of the only functioning hotel on the island) is at the United Nations lobbying for Anguilla in an attempt to forestall the possible British invasion of the island. Gumbs is well in with Webster and a strong force on the island himself.

As illustrated in FJM-5, the actual condition of the island is on the one hand less dramatic than Mr. Whitlock has made it out to be (mafia dominated Government) while nevertheless very serious. It is true that individuals such as Jack Holcomb have played on Ronald Webster's ego to gain a foothold on the island, probably for their own aims. In Webster's mind, I am certain that there is the notion that he is using these people for his own ends. The situation is one in which both groups are convinced that their goals may be achieved by working with the other. Webster doesn't want a Commissioner administering the island because his power would be greatly curtailed and in his case, "power is very heady stuff". On the other side, Holcomb and his un-named associates (Holcomb refuses to reveal his sources of funding) are afraid of British return because they would obviously be out of Anguilla within a week.

The charge that Holcomb and Gumbs and other less than forthright individuals are working with or dominating President Webster is, for the most part, true. Holcomb, a former Florida policeman, with no training in law whatsoever, has been admitted to the Anguillian bar by Webster's order. Consequently, Holcomb is in position to write and clear contracts requiring legal counsel. In addition, there is clear indication that any proposal that Minister Whitlock had proposed, short of complete independence, would have been rejected as a result of Holcomb's advice. For example, a formal statement, printed in the U.S. Virgin Island, was handed to the British delegation just before they were told to leave. This statement, prepared before Webster even heard the British proposals, demanded complete independence and was, in the opinion of British officials, written by an American, probably Holcomb.

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Jere Gumbs is not to be underestimated as a power on the island. The spokesman for Anguilla at the United Nations (self-appointed or not) claims that what Whitlock said on his return to England was false. Gumbs has a history of putting his own point of view (or objectives) across as the complete truth or the complete good; and often he tends to confuse his own interests for those of the island. Gumbs is no doubt working closely with Holcomb.

There are other Americans on the island who have reason to fear the return of British rule. Lewis Haskins, Boston born, patriot (American or Anguillian makes little difference) is the arsenal for the islanders. He and his two sons have provided the island's Defence Force with homemade cannon and are the source for other weapons on the island. It can almost be rightly assumed that it was the Haskins who fired off a few rounds while the British were on the island.

Another American 'rebel' is Minister Freeman Goodge: red hair, Kentucky born, Baptist preacher, Goodge is always at the front of any demonstration.

These men, and a few others, dominate the Anguilla movement. The members of the civil service and others in the Government, while opposed to a return to St. Kitts, are more moderate in their aims, and generally are honest, quiet, hard-working people. The moderates, headed by Beacon Editor, Atlin Harrigan, have been afraid to actually organize themselves against the Webster-Holcomb-Gumbs group for fear of splitting the island and harming the cause of secession from Bradshaw's Government in St. Kitts.

Anguilla, therefore, is a difficult problem for those who might sympathize with its desire to determine its own future vis-à-vis St. Kitts or Great Britain. Anguilla, in fact, sparked a great deal of sympathy from Caribbean Anguilla-watchers and at one time it seemed that their movement was a sound one. Since Webster has dominated the island, however, the island has not made sound progress; and with recent developments the case for Anguilla's independence has been aborted.

In one sense, the Anguilla problem is a classic case in international politics: international law, fragmentation, regional cooperation, questions of alien domination or exploitation of small states, military intervention all form a facet of the Anguilla movement. If British Marines do land on the beaches of Anguilla this week, some of these problems may be solved; but nevertheless, it will be a sad climax to what was once a proud adventure on the part of brave and independent people, who, with one or two different decisions would have provided the world with a tiny yet successful instance of nation building.

Frank M. Donald

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