

Section I Panama (1959)

The success of Fidel Castro's revolutionary movement in Cuba in January 1959 resulted in many dissident Central American and Caribbean exiles flocking to Cuba. One such from Panama persuaded about 100 Cubans to try to overthrow the Panamanian regime. Their arrival threw the Government into a panic, and it appealed to the OAS. With the United States in support of OAS action, and Cuba disowning the rebel band, an Investigating Committee was quickly appointed. At the same time, member states were asked to supply the Committee with ships and planes for observation and patrol. The United States quickly obliged, Colombia and Ecuador also supplying ships and Costa Rica and Guatemala aircraft. No further invading parties were detected; the rebels were induced to surrender; and the patrols were called off – although not before they had been authorized to stop and investigate any suspicious craft approaching the Panamanian coast.

This speedy and potentially tough response was a reflection of the United States' concern about the extreme left-wing regime which had appeared in her back yard. What actually happened can be seen as a useful defusing exercise of a peacekeeping kind. Had, however, the threat been more substantial, and met by force, the peacekeeping credentials of such action would have been in doubt. For although it would have been taken in support of the maintenance of law and order in a state whose government enjoyed internal legitimacy, it would also have amounted to action against an external predator. Forceful measures of that nature should not be confused with peacekeeping.

For a map, see Map 7 above.

FURTHER READING

See the Further Reading for Section G.