

Caribbean Security in 2005 Fact or Fiction?

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It is becoming increasingly apparent that no single state, large or small, can in isolation ensure its own security from subversion or external threat. In this era of...the globalization of activities relating to almost every sphere of life, economic, politic, cultural and criminal... the preservation of national security can no longer be seen purely in national terms.

Ivelaw Griffith

In a post 9/11 world all major global issues are related to security, with terrorism as the all-pervasive world threat. However, at this time it is perceived that the English-speaking Caribbean states are unable militarily and economically to respond alone to terrorist threats. To solve this problem a regional plan of action needs to be implemented by the Caribbean states in order to improve the region's overall security infrastructure and to reduce its military and economic security dependence on the international community. This plan of action would involve the expansion of the existing Regional Security System, in order to provide the infrastructure and interoperability necessary in the region's fight against the terrorist threats of the twenty first century.

### **NARCO TERRORISM**

The main security challenges to the region are "the twin problems of drug trafficking and money laundering which have become subsumed under the label narco-terrorism."<sup>1</sup> Relevant to any discussion of present day challenges is an analysis of the development of this

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<sup>1</sup>.Emilio Garcia and Thomas Klak, Globalization and Economic Vulnerability: The Caribbean and the 'Post-9/11 Shift', Caribbean Security in the Age of Terror, Challenge and Change, ed. Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith (Miami, Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 177.

security threat as past developments have a direct present day impact.

The English speaking territories<sup>2</sup> of the Caribbean are bound together by a common colonial past, language, predominantly Afro-centric population, present-day economic and security challenges, and resources. At the height of the Cold War in the 1960s and 70s, most of these states achieved their independence from the United Kingdom and subsequently joined the British Commonwealth of nations. Mindful of the unique geographical and strategic position of the region, Cold War superpowers jostled for dominance. In return for economic, social, and security based support these states retained their Western influence.

Throughout the 70s and early 80s in order to gain and ultimately retain power, political representatives and aspirants in some of these island states maintained street criminals and gangs. As a result of this relationship weapons and tactics of terror were imported by regional political factions and taught to local criminals who later evolved into independent operators. Coincidentally, this process occurred during the crack-cocaine surge, when Colombian drug cartels started to expand their distribution

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<sup>2</sup> These include the islands of Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and The Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago

networks aggressively in order to keep up with the ever-increasing demand from North America<sup>3</sup> and Europe. These networks were expanded via the Caribbean gangs that forged links with the Colombians and as a result these local gangs now had global connections and income from the drug trade's massive<sup>4</sup> illicit revenue flows.

In the 1980's, the Caribbean states made a major push to shift from a primarily agrarian economy to offshore manufacturing, banking, mining and tourism, among others. However, unstable regional economies, high levels of corruption, and the first after-shocks of globalization combined to stymie state and regional development. These events, mixed with the drastic down-turn in foreign assistance, the expansion of the criminal networks and as regional correspondent Ricky Singh contends, "the continued dumping on the region's doorstep of thousands of criminal deportees -at least some 11,000 in recent years, "<sup>5</sup> from first world countries, evolved into an explosion of

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<sup>3</sup> "The number of illegal drug users in the continental United States as of 1985 was 22.3 million, with an average of a half a million new users per year from 1979-1985." The Office of National Drug Control Policy, Executive Office of the President, "Cause for Guarded Concern," The National Drug Control Strategy: 1996. July 1996, <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itgic/0796/ijge/ejinfol.htm> (28 January 2006).

<sup>4</sup> "The United Nations Office for Drug and Crime Prevention (UNDCP) estimated that US\$50 billion of drug money was being laundered across the region, which is well in excess of the combined GDPs of all 17 borrowing members of the Caribbean Development Bank." Trevor Munroe, The Menace of Drugs, Caribbean Security in the Age of Terror, Challenge and Change, ed. Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith (Miami, Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 165.

<sup>5</sup> Ricky Singh, "Promising anti-crime moves," The Jamaica Observer 30 October 2005, sec. A

criminal activity in the region. These criminal activities far outpaced the region's ability to address them effectively, as efforts by regional governments and international partners did nothing to quell the flame of violence that began to engulf the Caribbean nation states. These criminal organizations steadily gained notoriety until, alarmingly, they seemed able to defy regional and international borders to smuggle drugs, weapons and even people at will. Cope and Hulse, noted regional academics articulate that:

Terrorists were inextricably linked, often for convenience, to other illegal groups-mostly drug networks-for funding that makes their activities possible... such was the case when police arrested a cousin of the extremist Assad Ahmad Barakat, head of Hezbollah in the Tri-Border Area (South America). He was in possession of more than two kilos of cocaine that he intended to sell in Syria to support Hezbollah...<sup>6</sup>

It therefore was becoming increasingly evident to law enforcement agencies that the traditional Caribbean drug and gang situation had morphed into an even more challenging problem than they had at first realized.

## **REGIONAL SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESPONSE**

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<sup>6</sup>.John Cope and Jane Hulse, *Hemispheric Response to Terrorism: A Call for Action, Caribbean Security in the Age of Terror, Challenge and Change*, ed. Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith (Miami, Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 417.

In the wake of the New York, Madrid, London, and Bali bombings and the recent Trinidad and Tobago attacks, it is evident that terror is multi-dimensional and will be a deep international concern for a long time to come. Regional security analysts Bishop and Khan point out that:

It is clear (in this new environment) that the Caribbean may not provide high payoff targets for a terrorist organization seeking an international audience; however the region's economic well-being requires that its security processes and critical physical infrastructure be given prompt attention.<sup>7</sup>

However, this 'prompt attention' has not been forthcoming, as with socio-economic concerns increasing the security apparatus is often an afterthought, with meager budget allocations to the region's police forces and militaries. As a result, most of these forces are ill equipped, under strength and without the technical expertise needed to combat the "three central characteristics of fourth generation warfare,"<sup>8</sup> which has been identified as the emerging environment of the twenty first century where threats such as narco terrorism are fostered and developed.

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<sup>7</sup> .Colvin Bishop and Oral Khan, *The Anti terrorism Capacity of Caribbean Security Forces, Caribbean Security in the Age of Terror, Challenge and Change*, ed. Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith (Miami, Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 397.

<sup>8</sup> The three central characteristics are identified as the state's loss of monopoly on war and the primary loyalty of its citizens, this loyalty now being given to non-state entities gangs, religions etc. a return to cultures not merely states in conflict and the ultimate decline of the state. William Lind, "Strategic Defense Initiative: Distance from disorder the key to winning the terror war," *The American Conservative*, November 2004, 9.



The oft-quoted stumbling block to greater regional action is that of scarce resources, as the region's economy relies heavily on tourism. This should be positive news now that more visitors are unwilling to travel to the Middle East or Asia and the Americas (of which the Caribbean is a part) and Europe benefiting by becoming the preferred global holiday destinations.<sup>9</sup> However, regional governments' lack of a collective security plan places current and projected tourism revenues that is critical to the region's overall development in jeopardy. Collective regional action in order to pool resources, intellect and expertise against the threat is crucial. The region must be poised to undertake cohesive and defined security actions to safeguard its very existence, possibly in order to prevent a worst case scenario of a regional failed state. However, in place of a push for regional interaction and despite the fact that international powerbrokers will act in their own national interests, there exists amongst various regional interest groups the misplaced belief that diplomatic agreements and treaties to ensure international reaction to a crises are of far greater importance. Regional interoperability,

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<sup>9</sup> "The Americas as at 2005 had 25% global tourism market share with Europe at 48%." "Tourism 2020 Vision," World Tourism Organization Online. 2005. <http://www.world-tourism.org/facts/eng/vision.htm> (28 January 2006).

cooperation and a practiced plan of action are the only solutions to this issue not the continued isolated ratification of diplomatic treaties. The expertise of international partners that have committed via existing treaties to provide legislative and socio-economic assistance should only be called upon when necessary to enhance or provide expertise not available regionally.

A possible framework for the response to these identified threats is the expansion of the Regional Security System (RSS). Para-military in structure, it was established by a Memorandum of Understanding in 1982 by the islands of Antigua& Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, and St Vincent and The Grenadines to:

Address the traditional security concerns of the smaller Eastern Caribbean islands, but non-traditional issues were also within its purview... therefore if a member state deemed its security threatened it has the right to request assistance from any or all of the member states.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> . Edmund Dillon, *Regional Security Cooperation: Traditional and Non-traditional Areas, Caribbean Security in the Age of Terror, Challenge and Change*, ed. Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith (Miami, Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 469.

The RSS was designed to provide a rapid response capability for its member states.<sup>11</sup> The MOU of 1982 was updated in 1992 and subsequently:

Upgraded to treaty status in 1996...with the purpose and function to promote cooperation with member states in the prevention and interdiction of traffic in illegal narcotic drugs, in national emergencies, search and rescue, immigration control, fisheries protection, customs and excise control, maritime policing duties, natural and other disasters, pollution control, the prevention of smuggling, the protection of offshore installations and exclusive economic zones and combating threats to national security.<sup>12</sup>

The RSS has been deployed recently to Grenada (post Hurricane Ivan 2004) and Barbados (2005) in the aftermath of extensive prison riots. In the past its deployments go back to 1983 with its involvement in Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada and seven other deployments up to 2003.<sup>13</sup>

The RSS however is presently at a crossroads. Heavily financed by the United States, projected budget cuts are already being phased in with member states unable to absorb

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<sup>11</sup> It is a hybrid organization where contributed forces remain under the command of their respective chiefs. Key components of the RSS are the Coast Guards and Special Service Units (police paramilitary units) and militaries of the member states. A ministerial appointed Regional Security Coordinator coordinates the system that heads up a Central Liaison Office, which acts as the system's secretariat.

<sup>12</sup> . Edmund Dillon, *Regional Security Cooperation: Traditional and Non-traditional Areas, Caribbean Security in the Age of Terror, Challenge and Change*, ed. Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith (Miami, Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 469.

<sup>13</sup> RSS Operations - 1989 -Hurricane Hugo relief in St Kitts and Nevis and Montserrat, 1990-Aftermath of attempted coup in Trinidad and Tobago, 1994- St Kitts and Nevis prison uprising, 1995-Hurricane Luis relief in Antigua and St Kitts and Nevis, 1998- Hurricane Georges relief in St Kitts and Nevis and Operation WEEDEATER (cannabis eradication) in St Vincent and the Grenadines, 2003- Operation BORDELAIS (prisoner transfer) in St Lucia.

the slack.<sup>14</sup> If adopted regionally and expanded, the RSS would facilitate the necessary adjustments to a system already in place vice creating a new one. Once organized and interoperable, it could respond collectively not only to regional security issues, but also to taskings across the spectrum to include natural disasters.

This transformation would not require nation states to abandon their unique security concerns and requirements; rather it would complement moves already underway by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)<sup>15</sup> to further integrate the region economically via the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME).<sup>16</sup> Whilst not an instantaneous solution the seeds of cooperation have already been sown with prior regional peacekeeping operations (Urgent Fury-Grenada 1983, Restore Hope -Haiti 1994) and annual joint security and

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<sup>14</sup>“As a sample cost, as of July 2005 the cost for operating the RSS Airwing (two Fairchild C-26A maritime surveillance aircraft based in Barbados) was US\$23 million, funding for the airwing by the US government was suspended on 21 December 2005.” “U.S. pulls support for Caribbean Air Wing.” Foreign Report, 20 July 2005. [http://www.janes.com/security/law\\_enforcement/news/fr/fr050720\\_1\\_n.shtml](http://www.janes.com/security/law_enforcement/news/fr/fr050720_1_n.shtml). 28 January 2006.

<sup>15</sup> In 1972, Commonwealth Caribbean leaders at the Seventh Heads of Government Conference decided to transform the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) into a Common Market and establish the Caribbean Community, of which the Common Market would be an integral part. The signing of the Treaty establishing the Caribbean Community, Chaguaramas, 4th July 1973, was a defining moment in the history of the Commonwealth Caribbean. Although a free-trade area had been established, CARIFTA did not provide for the free movement of labor and capital, or the coordination of agricultural, industrial and foreign policies.

<sup>16</sup> CSME set for start up in January 2006 targets the free movement of skilled labor, goods and services across the Caribbean. Aimed at enhancing the region’s economic systems thus allowing it to successfully compete with other global trading blocks.

disaster management exercises facilitated by various regional and international partners.<sup>17</sup>

The region is still categorized as the third border of the United States and thus still receives considerable aid.<sup>18</sup> This is the apparent crux of the argument for the isolationists, why commit scarce resources to support a seemingly unachievable task? In fact it has been stated that existing militaries should be disbanded. "It seems ultimately that parochial concerns have always overshadowed regional interests,"<sup>19</sup> but, Isacson notes, "in its world wide search for terrorists and other new transnational threats, Washington is once again encouraging Latin America and the Caribbean to arm, enlarge and reorient security forces to combat internal enemies."<sup>20</sup> The rest of the international community stands ready to aid in the region's collective defense, but none of these powers are willing to

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<sup>17</sup> The most prominent annual exercise is Exercise Tradewinds coordinated by US SOUTHCOM and involves the security infrastructure of the region working alongside American Forces on various exercise scenarios that test readiness, training standards and interoperability. The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) that was established in 1991 by the CARICOM heads of government coordinates disaster management exercises and response.

<sup>18</sup> Over US\$300 million was provided to the Caribbean region (not including Jamaica) over a two year period 2003-04 (figure includes counter narcotics, foreign military assistance, foreign military sales, training and other security costs). "Just the Facts: A civilian's guide to U.S. defense and security assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean." Center for International Policy Online. 12 December 2005. <http://www.ciponline.org/facts/ea.htm>. 28 January 2006.

<sup>19</sup> .Appendix C, "Islands of the Commonwealth Caribbean," Library of Congress online, Federal Research Division/Country studies/ Area handbook series 14 December 2005

<sup>20</sup> .Adam Isacson, "Closing the Seams: U.S. Security Policy in the Americas," NACLA Report on the Americas 38 (2005):13.

bear total responsibility for protecting the English-speaking Caribbean.

Funding for the proposed modernization and expansion of the Caribbean security infrastructure is daunting, but the costs of recovering from a terrorist attack are far greater. According to the Minister of National Security in Jamaica:

We will have to combine regional efforts to lobby multilateral lending agencies to take new approaches to funding security. In addition to technical assistance programs, we strongly believe that these agencies should now commit to making investments to support the construction and maintenance of modern security equipment, infrastructure and modern technologies . . . as these are essential for regional development and global security.<sup>21</sup>

The costs therefore would not have to be borne solely by the respective governments as with the myriad of multinational corporations now plying their trade in the Caribbean, it would be in their own best interests to advance the cause of improved security, voluntarily or otherwise. By participating in this enhancement process, they would benefit from decreased security costs and increased revenue from the inflow of business, particularly from tourism. It is perceived that with this private investment, regional governments would be precluded from

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<sup>21</sup> Dr. Peter Philips, "Global security requires new approaches and investments," The Jamaica Observer 07 December 2005, sec. A

accumulating an excessive debt portfolio thereby allowing the other aspect of the threat solution, social programs and wide scale employment to be implemented.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is crucial that the region's security infrastructure be improved in order to tackle the problem of Narco-terrorism. At present and for the foreseeable future, the major world powers are involved in a wide range of global conflicts and crises. Coupled with those involvements are socio-economic pressures and the cost of relief in response to catastrophic natural disasters. As a result, the Caribbean can expect cutbacks in aid and increasing reluctance on the part of the U.S. and other countries to aid in future regional crises. With the expansion of the RSS the region will be able to effectively coordinate the security effort via a system that has been tried and proven, as it is evident that only collective regional action will be a successful counter to the threat that is Narco terrorism. (1,995 words)

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