

THREE REALITIES OF THE CARIBBEAN SECURITY LANDSCAPE

by

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Introduction

We are at the dawn of a new century and on the eve of a new Millennium. This is a time when statesmen, diplomats, and scholars are contemplating new policies, initiatives, and directions for their political, diplomatic, or scholarly constituencies. But as we contemplate new policies and initiatives we should be mindful to review past practice and take stock of current scenarios.

In this respect I am reminded of a statement made a little over six decades ago by British statesman, Sir Anthony Eden: "There is nothing more dangerous than a foreign policy based on unreality." Eden was underscoring the importance of undertaking reality checks in foreign policy when new policies are being contemplated. Needless to say, his statement holds true for security policy and, indeed, any policy area—health, education, environmental, etc. Moreover, its applicability is not geographically circumscribed; it is as relevant to the Southern Cone as it is to Southeast Asia; to the Baltic as it is to the Balkans; to the Caspian Basin as it to the Caribbean Basin.

I devote attention here to the Caribbean. I suggest that an attempt at stock taking regarding security in that region obliges us to focus on at least three realities: content, context, and countermeasures. It is important to appreciate that these three realities do not operate in vacuums; content and context elements are mutually reinforcing; and it is the combined impact of content and context that influence the nature and scope of countermeasures adopted by actors in the region. Space limitations preclude extensive treatment of any one of these realities. Hence, the elements of the three realities examined here do not necessarily represent their sum total. Moreover, the three realities discussed here are not the only ones that could be analyzed. Understandably, then, attention will not be paid to specific countries, although many of them—Cuba, Haiti, Guyana, among others—deserve such attention..

Content Reality

As we move further into this new era--the 21st Century--I find myself casting my mind back to previous eras, especially the Enlightenment period. One of my favorite Enlightenment scholars, Voltaire--French philosopher, poet, and playwright--liked to admonish people to define their terms before engaging in any intellectual interchange. Bearing in mind Voltaire's admonition to "define your terms" before engaging in debate or analysis, it is important to offer some clarification regarding the notion of security.

Scholars and statesmen around the world are progressively replacing the traditional realist conceptual lenses used to examine security with other, non-conventional, ones. Yet, for scholars of the Caribbean, non-conventionality itself has long been the convention. Security in the Caribbean has not been viewed merely as protection from military threats. It is not just military hardware, although it involves this; not just military force, although it could involve it; and not simply conventional military activity, although it certainly encompasses it.

Thus, security may be defined as protection and preservation of a people's freedom from external military attack and coercion, from internal subversion, and from the erosion of cherished political, economic, and social values. I view security as being multidimensional, with military, political, economic, and environmental dimensions. Moreover, it is not concerned only with protection from actual and potential external threats; the internal arena is very much part of the security purview. Further, the state cannot be the only unit of analysis. Non-state actors are equally important. Indeed, some non-state actors own or can mobilize more economic and military assets than some states in the Caribbean.

One leading scholar of the Hemisphere underscored the long standing importance of non-state actors in the security and other affairs of Caribbean States. Writing in the 1998 book From Pirates to Drug Lords: The Post-Cold War Caribbean Security Environment, Jorge Domínguez asserted, and quite correctly

The international relations of the American Mediterranean have never been limited just to relations among states. Since the sixteenth century, the powers and the pirates have helped shape the international environment of the lands and peoples around the contours of the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. In so doing, they have interacted with each other and with "local" actors in and around the American Mediterranean. These local actors have been quite varied as well, ranging from states to individuals. The issues over which there has been contestation cover the agenda of international relations, including power and territory, wealth and status, and individual hopes and fears.

With security viewed in this way, the nature of the Caribbean security landscape would be seen as reflective of both traditional and non-traditional concerns. Territorial claims and disputes--notably Venezuela-Guyana, Guatemala-Belize, Suriname-Guyana, Venezuela-Colombia, France-Suriname, Venezuela-Trinidad and Tobago--and geopolitics are the core traditional concerns. Drugs, political instability, migration, and environmental degradation are the chief non-traditional ones. There is no uniformity in the importance states ascribe to these concerns, but a comparison of the two categories--traditional and non-traditional--would reveal that more countries place a higher premium on the non-traditional area. Of course, some states, such as those in the Eastern Caribbean, have no traditional security concerns; some also have no overt

external threat from other states.

Undoubtedly, the foremost non-traditional threat pertains to drugs. What is generally called “the drug problem” is really a multidimensional dilemma with four problem areas: drug production, consumption and abuse, trafficking, and money laundering. However, the drug phenomenon does not constitute a security matter simply because of these four problem areas. It does so essentially because:

- these operations have multiple consequences and implications--such as marked increases in crime, systemic and institutionalized corruption, and arms trafficking, among other things;
- the operations and their consequences have increased in scope and gravity over the last decade and a half;
- they have dramatic impact on agents and agencies of national security and good governance, in military, political, and economic ways; and
- the sovereignty of many countries is subject to infringement, by both state and non-state actors, because of drugs.

A few vignettes will suffice to give a sense of the drama of drugs:

- Cocaine seizures in 1993 for just five Caribbean countries--the Bahamas, Belize, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Jamaica--totaled about 3,300 kilos. The 1997 seizures for those same nations amounted to 9,135 kilos--an increase of 177 percent.
- Operation Dinero, an international money laundering sting operation conducted out of tiny Anguilla--91 km²-- from January 1992 to December 1994 led to the seizure of nine tons of cocaine and US\$90 million worth of assets, including expensive paintings, Pablo Picasso's *Head of a Beggar* among them.
- In June 1993, there was a strange shower over the Demerara river in Guyana: 364

kilos of cocaine and US\$24, 000. The shower came from a plane making an airdrop, part of a Colombia-Venezuela-Guyana-United States drug network.

- Between 1993 and 1997, close to 7,000 Jamaican deportees were returned to the island, most of them for drug-related crimes committed in the United States, Canada, and Britain. In 1993 the number was 923; in 1996 it was 1,158; in 1997 it was 1,647.
- In February 1997 the Dutch ambassador in Suriname told Suriname's Foreign Minister that 195 drug couriers from Suriname had been arrested during 1996 at the Schipol international airport near Amsterdam, compared to 51 in 1995. Indeed, Holland has convicted former Suriname leader, Desi Bouterse, one time political adviser to President Jules Wijdenbosch, for trafficking and other offences.
- On July 21, 1997, 4,175 kilos of pure cocaine was retrieved from the *Rickey II*, a Colombian cargo ship that had stopped in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela to take on cargo destined for Trinidad and Tobago.
- During October-November 1997, Operation Rain, which targeted drug traffickers, weapons smugglers, and money launderers in the U.S. Virgin Islands, resulted in the arrest of 19 people, including members of the business and social elite there, and the confiscation of \$240,000, vehicles and speed boats, businesses, and bank accounts.
- In February 1998 eleven people in Martinique were sent to prison for smuggling 1,980 pounds of cocaine between 1995 and 1997. The leader of the trafficking group, a St. Lucian, received the highest sentence--12 years.
- On February 28, 1998 US and Caribbean officials seized 3,780 kilos of cocaine, worth US\$266.4 million, from a 183-foot freighter--*Nicole*--in the Turks and Caicos Islands. The ship was flying a Honduran flag, had originated in Colombia, and was bound for Miami.

- In August 1998 Deochan Ramnarine, a drug convict serving a life sentence in Trinidad and Tobago, was allowed to escape from a magistrate court during a trial on another drug offense, following the payment of a TT\$ 1 million (US\$166,666) bribe to court and police officers. (He was later apprehended with the help of U. S. law enforcement officials.)
- In September 1998, a Trinidadian magistrate, Jai Naraine, and his family had to be placed under special police protection following the receipt of credible murder and kidnapping threats. At the time the magistrate was presiding over a drug trial.
- In October 1998, the U.S. Coast Guard and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) helped Guyanese law enforcement authorities to seize 3,154 kilos of cocaine aboard a St. Vincent-registered vessel—*M.V. Danielsen*. The 260-foot ship had docked in port Georgetown, in transit from Panama, to take on rice consigned to buyers in Rotterdam, Holland. The rice was to be the trafficking cover.
- In November 1998, a US-owned apparel company, Cupid Foundations, announced the closure of operations in Jamaica after 22 years. Cupid could no longer afford the losses incurred with the seizure by U.S. Customs of its merchandise because of attempts to smuggle drugs into the United States among its clothing. Moreover, Jamaican law enforcement authorities could not provide assurance of drug-free shipping. The closure of the factory placed 550 people out of work
- On December 7, 1998 police in Jamaica seized 597 kilos of cocaine and 454 kilos of marijuana in St. James, on Jamaica's northwest coast. It was the single largest seizure in Jamaica during 1998—valued at J\$ 100 million (\$US7 million)—and was alleged to have been masterminded by Colombian traffickers
- The same month Regional Security System (RSS) troops, U.S. Marines, and DEA officers joined the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Special Service Unit (SSU) in

conducting Operation Weedeater. The operation, which ran from December 7 through 15, destroyed 1,162,496 marijuana plants in 314 marijuana fields visited. Destroyed also were 1,400 pounds of cured marijuana and 151 huts used to cure marijuana. Officials also seized one 22-caliber rifle, 20 rounds of A-K47 ammunition, and shotgun shells.

- Dillon Chambers, a 25-year-old Jamaican “drug mule” collapsed and died in the Bahamas on February 3, 1999 after arriving from Jamaica with 129 packets of cocaine, weighing more than one kilo, in his stomach. Several of the packets burst, killing him.
- A 61-year-old Guyanese man, Llewellyn Gray, began serving a four-year prison term in Trinidad and Tobago on February 9, 1999. Gray had been arrested at the Piarco International Airport in July 1998 while attempting to smuggle 2.8 kilos of cocaine from Guyana to Canada, through Trinidad. The drugs were found strapped to his stomach and legs.
- Operation Columbus, a multi faceted counter drug operation involving the U.S. and 15 Caribbean Basin and South American countries, conducted from September 29 to October 10, 1999 resulted in the seizure of 2,892 kilos of cocaine and 897 kilos of marijuana, and the arrest of 99 people **in Trinidad and Tobago alone**.
- U.S. Customs in Miami found 7,086 pounds of marijuana among a shipment of yams when *Seaboard Enterprises* arrived in Miami on November 5, 1999 from Jamaica.
- On November 24, 1999 two cargo freighters, *Biak and Sylvina Express II*, were seized in Miami on arrival from Cap Hatien, Haiti with a combined total of 1,488 pounds of cocaine among their freight.
- Also on November 24, 1999 U.S. and Jamaican authorities pursued and intercepted

a boat with 2,324 pounds of cocaine just off the Jamaican coast; it had been tracked by U.S. intelligence upon departure from Colombia earlier that month.

Thus, there are two aspects of the content reality of the Caribbean security landscape; one related to traditional security issues, and the other to non-traditional matters. Yet, there is an over-arching dilemma: the vulnerability of the states in the region. A former Caribbean leader, Erskine Sandiford of Barbados, captured the essence of this dilemma in a speech to the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) Summit shortly after the July 1990 coup attempt in Trinidad: "Our vulnerability is manifold. Physically, we are subject to hurricanes and earthquakes; economically, to market decisions taken elsewhere; socially, to cultural penetration; and [now] politically, to the machinations of terrorists, mercenaries, and criminals."

There is, of course, a subjective aspect of vulnerability, which involves the perception by others that a particular state or set of states is potentially easy prey for invasion, destabilization, or other forms of aggression. But there is also an objective aspect; it relates to military, geographic, economic, and organizational difficulties, such as populations and militaries too small to meet security needs, fragile economies, manpower deficiencies, and corrupt political systems. In the case of the Caribbean, both subjective and objective factors contribute to the region's vulnerability. When one considers the political and social penetrability of most Caribbean societies and their economic and military capability limitations, it is not difficult understand how the governability and sovereignty of states there can be subverted--not merely by other states, but also by non-state actors--drug barons and their accomplices and multinational corporations. The role of Chiquita Brands International in the US-EU-

Caribbean “banana war” is a poignant example in this regard.

Context Reality

The content reality portrayed above, one with traditional and non-traditional threats and apprehensions, exists within, and in many respects has been influenced by, a larger geopolitical and geoeconomic panorama; the context reality. It is important to examine context reality because context factors influence the nature of the security landscape--the content reality--as well as what can be done about that landscape--the countermeasures reality. While time precludes extensive commentary on the wider geopolitical-geoeconomic panorama, some aspects must be mentioned.

Part of the panorama is the dramatic change and turbulence which the world has witnessed as the 1980s gave way to the 1990s. The collapse of world communism and the concomitant end of the Cold War has seen the bipolar character of global military-political power replaced by the reemergence of a multipolar global system. This post-Cold War structural-operational transformation at the global level has had at least two major implications for the Caribbean, both of which pertain to the realities of U.S. geographic proximity, economic and military power, and foreign policy and security interests.

The first is that U.S. policy and action toward the Caribbean is now shorn of the previous East-West ideological cloud, thereby altering the character, if not the scope, of United States-Caribbean relations. The previous East-West military-political fixation of the U.S. not only colored its relations with Caribbean countries on a bilateral basis, it influenced multilateral relations as well.

The second implication is related to the U.S. military presence in the region. The nature and scope of U.S. military deployment and posture in the Caribbean, part

of its geopolitical game-plan for countering the former USSR, have already begun to change. This is contributing to a lesser U.S. military presence, reduced IMET (International Military Education and Training Program) assistance, and reduced arms supplies and sales to countries that were either U.S. allies in the East-West conflict, or considered otherwise important to U.S. national interests. The transfer of responsibility for the Caribbean from the US Atlantic Command (USACOM) to the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) on June 1, 1997 is further evidence of change. This move is a reflection of U.S. budgetary pressures, policy rethinking about matters geopolitical, and cost-efficiency calculations about fighting drugs, which is also a non-traditional threat to the United States.

Allied to the post-Cold War military-political changes are alterations in the structure and operation of economic power relationships. The formation of economic blocs around the world is one important manifestation of global economic power alteration. One appreciable consequence of this megabloc phenomenon for the Caribbean is the potential reduction or even loss of economic assistance, foreign investment, and preferential trading arrangements. Concerning NAFTA, for example, since 1994 concern has been voiced that the anticipated increase in trade resulting from the removal of trade barriers in Mexico will help displace U.S. trade with Caribbean countries and reduce the benefits of tariff preferences under schemes like the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI).

The experience of Jamaica and some Eastern Caribbean countries regarding the garment industry since 1995 suggests that the fears were justified. Indeed, in his March 23, 1999 testimony before the Subcommittee on Trade of the House Committee on Ways and Means on hearings on the "Caribbean and Central American Relief and Economic Stabilization Act," Stephen Lamar, Director of Governmental Relations

of the American Apparel Manufacturers Association, stated the following: "The effects of NAFTA on the CBI region have become apparent. Since NAFTA went into effect on January 1, 1994, apparel imports from Mexico have increased 611 percent. While starting from a larger base, imports from the CBI have increased at one-third that rate. Now, for the first time, the CBI region is losing share of the import market."

In addition to the post-Cold War military-political changes and the megabloc phenomenon, another context factor is the policy reevaluation by nations that once considered the Caribbean to be important to them. In tangible terms, reevaluation has meant reduced aid, aid reallocation, preferential trade readjustment, reduced foreign investment guarantees, and diplomatic downgrading of some Caribbean countries. In sum, the Caribbean has witnessed a diminution in relative importance in so far as most "important" countries are concerns. Curiously enough, the only redeeming factor in so far as many countries are concerned is the very preeminent threat that the region faces: drugs. The only "card" the region now has to play is the drugs card. It is precisely the combined effect of this diminished geopolitical and geoeconomic importance and the advocacy of neo-liberal international economics--a reflection of changing economic power relationships--that precipitated the action against Caribbean countries in the World Trade Organization (WTO) by the United States and several other countries in the Americas over the EU banana regime. I referred to this above as the US-EU-Caribbean "banana war."

US-Caribbean Summit

The "banana war" notwithstanding, for several reasons, the posture and action of the United States remain an important part of the context reality of the Caribbean's security, not the least because the United States is a critical actor in both the content

and countermeasures realities of the region; the United States is both part of the problem--whether for bananas or for drugs--and part of the solution--whether in giving trade access or in boosting the counternarcotics capability of countries in the region. And in the context of US-Caribbean relations, the May 10, 1997 summit in Bridgetown, Barbados deserves to be seen for what it was: a landmark that can set the stage for both the attenuation of problems and the acceleration of assistance.

Some observers, both inside and outside the Caribbean, wonder whether the summit was merely posturing by Bill Clinton, Owen Arthur, P.J. Patterson, and the other leaders. Was it merely about symbolism, or was there substance? Summits, even ones involving states with dramatic power disparities as those represented in Bridgetown, are never about either symbolism or substance. They are always about symbolism and substance, both of which are important in the conduct of foreign and security policy, irrespective of the size of the nations involved. Of course, there are summits where, sometimes by design and often by default, there is so little substance that symbolism is made to become the substance. Thus, the real question about the Barbados summit is, How much of it was symbolism, and how much was substance?

In terms of symbolism, the meeting was significant just in being held: it was the first time that a US president traveled officially to the Caribbean to meet with regional leaders. And Clinton did so despite having to move around on crutches, confounding observers who expected him to postpone that leg of his "trip down South." To the credit of Clinton and his advisers, the summit involved the leader of all the independent nations in the area, Cuba excepted, of course, and not merely with a "representative group," as was done in 1995 in Washington, which generated considerable resentment within the region--both towards President Clinton and the leaders with whom he had met.

The summit was itself a reality check for Washington, helping it to learn, rethink and unlearn in its efforts to resolve what appears to be a dilemma that results from the combined consciousness of the importance of hemispheric partnerships and confusion about desired postures towards some states in the hemisphere. But the reality check extended beyond the US learning curve. Part of its substance value was its facilitation of an appreciation of the various existing definitions of regional economic, political, and security realities, thereby aiding the learning curves of both Caribbean and United States statesmen and diplomats.

For some Caribbean leaders, however, there was an additional reality check, one directly connected with possible tangible outcomes of the talks. Many Caribbean leaders learned that "checks and balances" in the US political context operate in ways that often affect the President's ability to offer the kind of assurances and guarantees often thought to lie within his power; that Congress, especially one not dominated by the President's party, is a powerful foreign policy actor, although sometimes a confused one, which is all the more reason that presidents often have to sound and act tentative, as Clinton did in Barbados.

But the substance of the US-Caribbean summit goes beyond this--to its two main products: the Bridgetown Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action. The Plan of Action is the more substantive of the two. It deals with two cluster of issues: trade, development, finance, and the environment, and justice and security. Some things in the 30-page Plan of Action hinge on US Congressional action, but there is also considerable scope for the Executive branch to initiate and to deliver on its own and thereby testify that substance--and not merely symbolism--was involved. Some of this has been done, through the (US) Eastern Caribbean Working Group and the (US-Caribbean) Joint Committee on Justice and Security, which held its second meeting

on September 8, 1999 in Washington, DC.

Both in symbolic and substantive terms, and for both the US and the Caribbean, the Barbados summit pointed to the utility of multilateralism, and to the necessity for nations in the hemisphere to act collectively to deal with common problems and challenges. It also signaled a new phase in US-Caribbean relations. Pragmatism should be a core element of the new US-Caribbean matrix, though. For not only can unrealistic expectations of the fruits of multilateralism be dashed--and for a variety of reasons--but it would be foolhardy for Caribbean leaders to think that this "new" multilateralism will witness an abandonment by the US of unilateral or bilateral action in region, or in the hemisphere, for that matter. United States national interests do not permit such. Moreover, Caribbean leaders should be mindful that people who make and execute US foreign and security policy heed the words of General George Washington, uttered in 1778: "It is a maxim, founded on the universal experience of mankind, that no nation is to be trusted farther than it is bound by its interests, and no prudent statesman or politician will venture to depart from it."

It remains, then, for us to examine some aspects of the countermeasures reality.

Countermeasures Reality

Given the nature of the region's security landscape and the hemispheric and global context in which it exists, the countermeasures reality is one in which countermeasures have to be multidimensional, multilevel, and multiactor.

In relation to drugs, for example, they need to be multidimensional because drug operations and their impact are multidimensional. They also need to be multilevel--national, regional, and international--as drug operations and many of the

problems they precipitate are both national and transnational. Moreover, countermeasures have to be on a multiactor basis, for the two above reasons plus the fact that Caribbean (and other) states lack the necessary individual capabilities to meet the threats and challenges facing them. Hence countermeasures need to see the reaction and proaction not only of governments, but also of corporate entities, non-governmental organizations, and international governmental organizations, such as the Regional Security System (RSS), the OAS, and the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP).

In so far as regional and international cooperation are concerned there are some sub-text realities that warrant consideration. Caribbean leaders should recognize that the adoption of multilateral security measures does not preclude the adoption of bilateral measures. Indeed, bilateral measures may very well be more desirable from the stand point of political expediency, given that generally they can be designed and implemented more quickly, which means that policy makers can showcase their efforts to "solve" problems and "get results." Moreover, from a bureaucratic stand-point, there may be budgetary imperatives to act quickly; "if you don't use it, you'll use it," as is said in the public policy world.

However, this very reality requires Caribbean policy makers to:

- (a) determine what combination of measures best suit their national interests, bearing in mind the nature and salience of the threats/issues, their capabilities, the efficacy of proceeding individually or collectively, and the time factor;
- (b) pursue bilateral measures that do not contradict or undermine multilateral efforts initiated earlier; (of course, there is the right to revisit multilateral game-plans);
- (c) be cognizant of the institutional capacity requirements of initiating numerous bilateral mechanisms or several combinations of bilateral and multilateral ones,

considering that bilateral and multilateral initiatives outside the security area will also have been initiated and be in need of implementation.

It should also be remembered that the necessity for cooperation should not mask the reality that cooperation often carries the germ of conflict; conflict in relation to capability and sovereignty, among other things. The capability challenge does not arise merely because of the actual money, equipment, and other constraints. It does so also because inherent in the capability disparities of cooperating states is the need for those with less limitations to give relatively more to the cooperative effort. This is not always achievable. Sometimes political leaders in the relatively better-off states in the partnerships are unwilling to commit to collective efforts because they are unsure that there will be commensurate national interest returns. Often, domestic factors, such as political leadership changes and public opinion, make it difficult for states to honor pledges, or to make new commitments.

As regards sovereignty, the capability disparities among countries in any group themselves are a reflection of power asymmetries within the group. Sovereignty tends to be more closely guarded by the smallest and least powerful states in a group, for understandable reasons. This is despite the fact that, as James Rosenau stated in a 1995 Inter-American Dialogue Occasional Paper called Multilateral Governance and the Nation-State System: A Post-Cold War Assessment: "Most countries have moved too far down the interdependence road to reinstate effective border controls over the movement of people, goods, ideas, and currencies without incurring costs deemed too high to bear." This is all the more reason for the larger partners in any security partnership to be mindful of sovereignty sensibilities in dealing with the group, in relation to both policy design and project implementation.

Conclusion

This, then, is my assessment of the realities of the Caribbean security landscape as we enter this new era. The landscape is one of changed and changing circumstances. Michael Desch captures this change well in From Pirates to Drug Lords, when he says

In spite of the end of the Cold War, the Caribbean security environment will remain challenging. Drug lords have replaced pirates and guerrillas as the main security problem in the region, but the American Mediterranean continues to be plagued not only by natural but also such man-made calamities as economic dislocation, environmental degradation, social instability, and political conflict. The Caribbean was a major locus of security competition during the Cold War ... and it will remain turbulent in the post-Cold War era.

For all this, though, there is a supreme challenge facing the Caribbean as the nations and peoples of the region move further into the new century. It pertains to the survival of some states as political and economic entities with more than just a mere modicum of sovereignty; as more than security basket cases. In July 1984, Shridat Ramphal, former Guyana Foreign Minister and Commonwealth Secretary General, now Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, made an observation that still so aptly highlights a reality in the Caribbean: "Sometimes it seems as if small states were like small boats pushed out into a turbulent sea, free in one sense to traverse it; but, without oars or provisions, without compass or sails, free also to perish. Or perhaps, to be rescued and taken aboard a larger vessel." For some Caribbean nations a critical question in this new century will be: What will be that larger vessel?

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