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REORGANISATION AND REDIRECTION OF THE DEFENCE FORCE – TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Sqn Ldr Kemba Hannays

JCSP 43 DL

Exercise Solo Flight

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 43 DL – PCEMI 43 AD

2016 – 2018

EXERCISE SOLO FLIGHT – EXERCICE SOLO FLIGHT

**REORGANISATION AND REDIRECTION OF THE DEFENCE FORCE –
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

By Squadron Leader K. Hannays

Par le Squadron Leader K. Hannays

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Introduction

Trinidad and Tobago is a twin island state, once colonized by Great Britain, gaining its independence in 1962. They are the southernmost islands in the West Indian chain of islands, lying some four miles off the coast of South America (specifically, Venezuela), at the closest point. Within the last two decades, this state has seen a significant increase in gang related criminal activity within and around its borders. The limited comparative academic research on crime and criminality in the developing countries has produced some core findings; first of which suggest a rise in crime incidents is generally associated with socio-economic development, more specifically, urbanization and industrialization¹. While this is also true for Trinidad and Tobago, more recently, the decline in the economy due to the global decline in the price of oil and gas (its main source of revenue) and its associated reduction in available public funding has been a contributing factor.

A state's inability to protect itself from potential harm is a direct threat to its citizens' welfare. Lesser-developed nations' dependency on foreign more powerful allies to step in where necessary often result in their own military capabilities being taken for granted or undervalued. Trinidad and Tobago is no exception: with negligent availability of aerial surveillance along its territorial borders, weak points of entry where there is a tendency for corruption to occur and a less than adequately equipped Coast Guard. Given the current economic environment Trinidad and Tobago finds itself, the military has little option but to accept what must be done with a view to secure the easily penetrable borders more effectively. This paper will argue that with a reorganization of the Defence Force and the use of its available resources as well as a shift in its approach to fulfilling

¹ De Albuquerque, Klaus. "A Comparative Analysis of Violent Crime in the Caribbean". Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, University of the West Indies. September 1984. Last Accessed 31 May 2018. 94

its mandate (a shift from traditional defence strategies to a Human Security approach) the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force will have a greater impact on the epidemic of gang violence with which the country is now faced.

Effective Use of Resources

Since the early 2000's, members of the Defence Force have been engaged in joint patrols, in keeping with their aid to civil power mandate. The sight of a soldier fully dressed in combat gear (helmet, bulletproof vest, etc.) is a common sight on the city streets. This has resulted from pressure citizens have placed on the government to maintain this stance as the population has lost trust in the Police Service and their ability to control the crime problem at hand. Boots on the ground as a deterrent though, has become part of a cycle of reactive behavior, as the illicit items at the center of the gang related trade are not manufactured or produced within the country. The criminal element have capitalized on the weaknesses within the security system greatly. Their empire has been allowed to expand as they have had the wherewithal to change their tactics, operating in those areas where security presence is minimal. The security forces, however, has not changed their approach so lags behind significantly.

Even with the decline in the oil and gas industry, up to fiscal year 2016/2017, the Ministry of National Security (under whose purview the Defence Force falls) continued to be allocated significant funding and registered an increase in expenditure with each year. The value of expenditure for the Defence Force increased from USD\$199M in 2014 to USD\$237M in 2016². Contrary to the government's intent behind throwing money at the problem, this increase in National Security expenditure, instead of causing the security agencies to become able to curb the

² Statista. "Annual Value of Military Expenditure in Trinidad and Tobago from 2013 to 2016 (in million U.S. dollars)" Last accessed 31 May 2018

crime splurge, was accompanied by an increase in serious crime; the murder rate alone, despite the seizure of over seven hundred firearms in 2016, steadily increased from 403 in 2014 to 420 in 2015 and then 462 in 2016³.

It is evident by the statistics that the utilization of the Force, and the remainder of the national security network is inadequate. Without the implementation of precise measures to secure the nation's borders, the influx of drugs and arms from South America will continue to go unchecked, fueling the cycle of crime that is currently challenging the security agencies within the country's borders. The government's recognition of the lack of cause and effect between the increased allocations the crime rate, as well as the lack of available funding as the country continues to suffer from limited public funds, has led to severe budget cuts in the 2017/2018 fiscal year. Only halfway through the period and the allocation as a percentage of the national budget has been cut 0.6% from the last fiscal year to the current⁴. This should have significant meaning for military leadership; greater than, how to stretch the little resources left to complete the daunting task they face supporting the civil power on a daily basis. The focus now must be on reorganizing said limited resources, along with effective use of available technology to have a measurable impact on crime.

Border control and efforts to restrict access to one's territory is the core activity of any state. Traditionally an activity which facilitated military defence and economic regulation, the degradation of border control to facilitate globalization has been reconfigured to prioritize

³ OSAC. United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security. "Trinidad and Tobago 2017 Crime & Safety Report". Last accessed 31 May 2018

⁴ Parliament Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. "Head 22: Ministry of National Security. A Summary of the Ministry's Expenditure, Divisions and Projects. Financial Scrutiny Unit of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. 22

policing⁵. While there is a system of free trade movement throughout the member nations of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), there is still a requirement by the states to have systems in place for the management of ‘clandestine transnational actors’⁶, who operate across borders in violation of state law (including drug traffickers, migrant smugglers and terrorists). The activities and illicit items that ail Trinidad and Tobago are all foreign to the state. Instead of the endless effort to fight from the inside, which has proven time and again to be ineffective, the security agenda requires a shift its focus to the security (policing) of the borders.

The land forces of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force have traditionally been the largest, and significantly so, compared to the air and maritime elements of the Force. On an island with many unofficial ports of entry, this may not necessarily be the best use of manpower, arguably the most important of all resources in any. In the past, when funding was not an issue, the solution to increase the manpower at sea, was simply to recruit more sailors. A lack of funding would certainly curtail this practice; this is an opportunity to reallocate not just fiscal resources, but human resources as well, focusing the main effort on building a strong Coast Guard, while balancing the need for an appropriately sized land. Furthermore, the transfer of funds from recruitment of persons to an increased utilization of technology is a consideration that has not yet been thoroughly explored. Some scholars suggest that globalization requires ‘debordering the world states’⁷. The idea of enforcing stricter security at one’s borders may seem a backward step in this regard. This may be supported by economic theories; however, from a security perspective, particularly in this case of Trinidad and Tobago, military involvement in stricter border security is paramount.

⁵ Andreas, P. ‘Redrawing the Line: Borders and Security in the Twenty-First Century’. International Security. Fall, 2003. 78

⁶ Andreas, P. :Redrawing the Line: Borders and Security in the Twenty-First Century”. 78

⁷ Ibid, 83

Human Security Shift in Paradigm

Representing a departure from orthodox security studies, whereby the security of the state is priority, a human security approach to national and international security puts emphasis on human beings. In a broad sense, the United Nations describes this concept as ‘people’s freedom from fear and freedom from want’⁸. The 1994 Human Development Report (HDR), in which human security was introduced, listed seven essential dimensions of human security: economic, health, personal, political, food, environmental and community⁹. The Trinidad and Tobago Force has responsibilities for all dimensions covered by the human security concept and its mandate includes defence of sovereignty, disaster relief, ceremonial duties, search and rescue services and the now high-priority assistance to the civil power¹⁰. This mandate need not change, but what does require a break in tradition is the application of the Force in dealing with security matters. The current national security paradigm speaks to military action, whilst multi-track efforts including government and community efforts are more suited to a human security approach. It is clear the traditional approach has not had a thorough effect. Billions of dollars invested and the statistics have moved only in a direction that reflects the modus operandi requires a new angle of approach. Making human beings secure requires more than protecting them from armed conflict and alleviating suffering¹¹. This approach may appear contradictory to the first argument to reorganize

⁸ Gomez O.A, Gasper D. United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report Office. Human Security; A Thematic Guidance Note for Regional and National Human Development Report Teams. Last accessed 21 May 2018, 1

⁹ Ibid, 2

¹⁰ Ministry of National Security. Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. “Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force (TTDF)”. Last accessed 01 June 18

¹¹ Mingst, Karen A., and Margaret P. Karns. “Human Security: The Environment and Health.” In *The United Nations in the 21st Century*, 4th ed. Philadelphia: Westview Press, 2012. 247

military resources to focus on physical protection of the state's borders. However, if properly applied and managed, they can both be implemented and will be complementary to each other. Human security will force a change in the way the government and, by extension, the military looks at the security problem. This approach conceptualizes various threats that affect the state, not just the obvious aggression of the so-called criminal element, but those threats that go beyond physical violence and affect vulnerable groups such as women and children¹². As a responsible member of the region, the protection of all women and children, and not just those that are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago can be taken into consideration under this approach.

Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago's closest non-Caribbean Community neighbor, has made global headlines within recent times due to public frustrations over the shortage of basic amenities and a general lack of confidence in the current administration. The physical/traditional threat for Trinidad and Tobago here lies in its inability to control the influx and movement of Venezuelan citizens (attempting to take up residence as well as conduct illicit activity within its borders) and the political fallout from measures that may be necessary to reverse this pattern. In April 2018, in an apparent joint agreement with the current Venezuelan administration, Trinidad and Tobago elected to conduct a mass deportation exercise of eighty-two Venezuelan citizens back to their home country. The military as well as other national security elements were utilized to spearhead the exercise, which was attempted to be kept covert and out of the public domain. Details of the ordeal of course surfaced and resulted national as well as national backlash for the state. Some of deportee were reportedly seeking asylum in this country. This move was publicly criticized by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) who claimed to have not been given access to the

¹² Mingst, Karen A., and Margaret P. Karns. "Human Security: The Environment and Health." In *The United Nations in the 21st Century*, 4th ed. Philadelphia: Westview Press, 2012, 248.

asylum seekers and have since 2014 had been encouraging other nations to give access to Venezuelans seeking asylum after a marked 2000 percent increase in this statistic¹³.

The statements by the UN have far-reaching implications for a small nation like Trinidad and Tobago. The government stood by and defended its actions, adamantly claiming each deportees left of their own volition. Like many other issues of this nature, other more current issues have masked the after effects of this decision. The government to date has supported its National Security division on their approach to this matter, as clearly the concept of human security is yet to be embraced. Besides the physical threat of illegal immigrants, there was a failure to see the potential fallout from a conflict with the UN for the citizens of this country, effects that are yet to be fully realized.

The debate over human security remains dynamics situations arise. At a minimum, it requires basic needs are met, economic development sustained and the rule of law and good governance maintained. Utilization of the military to ensure sustainable development and social equity inside and along the borders of Trinidad and Tobago are as important as to peace as the control of arms. As a matter of fact, lasting stability cannot be achieved until human security is guaranteed¹⁴.

Conclusion

Increased expenditure on militaries as a percentage of GDP in the developing world has been linked to economic growth, possibly as a result of foreign aid for this expenditure. This argument is countered by the negative effects of increased national security budgets, apart from foreign aid,

¹³ Reuters. U.N. says Trinidad forcibly deported Venezuelan refugees. Last modified 23 April 2018

¹⁴ Nelles, W. "Canada's Human Security Agenda in Kosovo and Beyond: Military Intervention versus Conflict Prevention". International Journal, Summer, 2002. 461

resulting in less investment available for other critical public sectors.¹⁵ A well-trained and developed military also provides productive citizens upon the discharge of their personnel whose development was well invested in. Military infrastructure, roadways and other by-products of the military all arguably contribute to the development of a nation. To some extent, this has been true for Trinidad and Tobago's society as well. The training and development of the pilots and other aircrew of the recently grounded aviation unit was the highest in industry standard and has created a pool of well-trained citizens who will, upon discharge contribute positively to society. This, however, is not enough to justify continued spending after units that stand to benefit more from a change in their mode of operation.

All the mandates bestowed upon the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force can be categorized as by internal security needs and assistance to other states in the region. Trinidad and Tobago has been relatively peaceful, but did experience violence that required a traditional military response after a bombing of the Trinidad Embassy in Venezuela in 1963¹⁶, and the attempted coup d'état in 1990. It would be unreasonable to suggest that the traditional response is no longer required and that all efforts should be placed on human security factors, as any sovereign nation finds comfort in their ability to defend themselves in this manner when the need arises. However, the strategies utilized by the government in its approach to the security problem, the application of the Defence Force and other elements of national security, would produce much more effective outcomes with a realignment to human security measures.

¹⁵ Dommen, E and Maizels, A. "The Military Burden in Developing Countries". *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 378.

¹⁶ Phillips, D. "The Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force: Origin, Structure, Training, Security and Other Roles". *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol 43. September 1997

Gangs, gang members and gang related activity has become a prevalent world issue and especially so in the Caribbean. It can actually be aligned to a major health problem (one of the dimensions of Human Security), with developed nations such as Canada and United States investing substantial resources into prevention of this activity¹⁷. Now that Trinidad and Tobago has to face this reality, in a time where fiscal restrictions preclude such investments, a paradigm shift is the only solution available. The responsible thing for the government and the military to do is to craft strategies that will allow the best use of what is already available. This can be done, albeit not easily so, by reorganizing, as well as the need for a change in the way we protect our interests.

¹⁷ Katz, C.M, Fox, A.M. "Risk and Protective Factors with Gang-Involved Youth in Trinidad and Tobago. *Revista Panamericana de Salud Publica*. Last Accessed 2 June 2018

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