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CHALLENGES OF BELIZE'S SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE

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Exercise Solo Flight

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INTRODUCTION

Belize is in an exceptional location as the nexus between Central America and the Caribbean due its strategic location as well as its past and current connections to both regions. Belize is an active member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Central America Integrated System (SICA).¹ It's near unspoiled ecosystem and unwavering democracy are examples to both regions, while increased population growth has led to unexpected challenges only a few years ago. The lack of national and zonal strategies to address current and developing concerns intensifies these problems. However, the international political system must be clearly understood, since it provides the context within which Belize must design and implement its security strategy.² For Belize, the modern system presents particular challenges that escape the unilateral and traditional application of state power. Belize's limited size, population and its demand for resources allows Belize to address problems cooperatively with external actors. This remains true for the majority of challenges facing Belize, including maintaining the country's territorial integrity, confronting criminal activity, increasing economic activity, addressing health related threats and protecting the environment. These issues will influence the future of Belize. The security infrastructure clarifies the institutional framework within which security forces and civilian institutions of Belize will coordinate their activities to create integrated and cohesive security network to safeguard Belize's

¹ "National Security Strategy of Belize- Organization Of America States", <http://www.oas.org/csh/spanish/documentos/bze%20nat'l%20security%20strategy.pdf>. p. 37; accessed April 10, 2014.

² *Ibid*, p 6

national interest. These national security concerns if not adequately addressed could lead to economic, political and social instability and loss of public confidence.³

BACKGROUND

The Belize Defence Force (BDF) was officially formed in 1978 and was based on a combination of the existing Police Special Force and the Belize Volunteer Guard under the advice of the ruling British Government.⁴ Belize was still a colony of the British Empire but there were strong indications that the country's independence was forthcoming. Belize achieved its independence on the 21st September 1981 and the government endorsed the requirement for a defence force. There are four identifiable security requirements demanded by all countries and Belize is no exception. They are the need to counter economic subversion, which cannot be met by military action, to provide external defence to ensure internal control and to guard against revolutionary takeover. One of the BDF's established roles is the perseverance of Belize's sovereignty and territorial integrity. To address this primary task several key questions must be address. First and foremost, what are the security threats, whether perceived or real facing Belize? Secondly, how are they being met and thirdly, what are the political consequences of a security policy? In broad terms, the BDF should be large enough to prevent a regional

³ "National Security Strategy of Belize- Organization Of America States", <http://www.oas.org/csh/spanish/documentos/bze%20nat'%20security%20strategy.pdf>. p. 37; accessed April 10, 2014.

⁴ Phillips, Dion E, "The Military of Belize", <http://www.open.uwi.edu/sites/default/files/bnccde/belize/conference/papers/phillips.html>, p 26, accessed April 15, 2014

security vacuum and small enough to avoid alarming its neighbors. It is therefore in Belize's interest to ensure that the BDF is of an appropriate size relative to its neighbors and is properly equipped to fulfill its mission to ensure the physical integrity of the nation. Without the security forces or the security infrastructure, there is no stability or prosperity and therefore it is tantamount for the Government of Belize to continue to invest in security.

METHODOLOGY

To conceptualize the challenges of Belize Security Infrastructure, the second security requirement of external defence which is no doubt the most orthodox is also the BDF primary task. Ironically, unresolved border disputes between Belize and Guatemala has obliged Britain to break its rule of withdrawing military from any colony following independence.⁵ While the BDF is being reconstructed and reorganized, it must be admitted that the population of 350,000, can neither financially nor in terms of manpower support a credible force. Since the Belizean Government is most anxious to keep the country out of the continuing border disputes, strict limitations have been placed on the type and scale of United States military aid. Notwithstanding that, Guatemala is a close ally of Washington and it is difficult to see United States mounting a counter-offensive should parts of Belize be effectively occupied by Guatemalan Armed Forces. This paper will discuss the organization of the BDF, Guatemala Territorial Claim and the challenges

⁵ Phillips, Dion E, "The Military of Belize", <http://www.open.uwi.edu/sites/default/files/bnccde/belize/conference/papers/phillips.html>, p 26, accessed April 15, 2014.

and major threats associated with maintaining Belize's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

ORGANISATION

The BDF is organized into the following principal units: Headquarters Company, Service and Support Battalion, two regular battalions, one reserve battalion, an air wing, a special boat unit, a cadet corps and a band. Force Headquarters, located at Price Barracks (Airport Camp), Ladyville, ten and a half miles northwest of Belize City, is responsible for the command, operation and training of BDF personnel.⁶ Unlike the defence forces of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados, the BDF has never had a Defense Advisor stationed overseas. Today those countries possess the largest military forces in the Commonwealth Caribbean, each with infantry divisions, artillery battery and air defence. Also in each country the Coastguard commander answers to the Chief of Defence Staff and their vessels are considered to be integral to the defence force's capacity. This is not the case for the Belize National Coast Guard (BNCG); they have a Commandant and they fall under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The BDF Air Wing and Maritime Wing are based adjacent to the Phillip Goldson International Airport with a complement of 2 aircraft and several vessels used for riverine operations and drug interdiction. A 767260 Slingsby Firefly and the Defender (Cessna) are used to screen

⁶Phillips, Dion E, "The Military of Belize", <http://www.open.uwi.edu/sites/default/files/bnccde/belize/conference/papers/phillips.html>, p 26, accessed April 15, 2014.

potential pilots and for basic flight training prior to sending students for formal military pilot training in Jamaica or the USA.⁷

Through the ministry responsible for national security, the Commissions Board advises the Governor-General on appointments to commissions and promotion up to the rank of Major/Lieutenant Commander. The ministry of national security, after consultation with the Prime Commissions Board has five permanent members: The Commander BDF the chair of the Public Service Commission, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of National Security, the Commanding Officer of the 1st Infantry Battalion, and the Force Adjutant (SO2F1). The remaining three, the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Infantry Battalion, the Commanding Officer of the Maritime Wing/Air Wing serve as a necessary to represent the land, air and sea elements. The Chairman of the Commissions Board is the Commander BDF and the Adjutant is its secretary.⁸

The Support Company commands the specialist platoons of the force. They are the Reconnaissance Platoon, Mortar Platoon and Machine Gun Platoon however Support Company makes up one of the company in the Volunteers Battalion since majority of our indirect asset has become defunct. The Combat Engineer Platoon formerly referred to as the Assault Pioneers or the Light Engineer Company has heavy equipment at its disposal and is trained to renovate and erect buildings as well as engaged in construction. Part of

⁷ Phillips, Dion E, "The Military of Belize", <http://www.open.uwi.edu/sites/default/files/bnccde/belize/conference/papers/phillips.html>, p 26, accessed April 15, 2014.

⁸ Ibid, p 8

the engineer unit is an Explosive Ordinance Device Team. Their roles are to defuse or destroy bombs and outdated ammunition and engaged in demolition work.⁹

The 1st Battalion is commanded by a Lt. Colonel has a headquarters company and three rifle companies. The 2nd Battalion of the BDF, a second regular infantry unit formed in 1994 is too made up of the three rifle companies and is headed by a Lt.Colonel. These two battalions rotate between the camps on an eight-month cycle and are involved in training, guard duties and defence. This later element makes frequent jungle patrols along Belize southern and western borders with Guatemala. The 3rd or Volunteer Battalion is organized as an integral part of the BDF under the organizational command of the Commander BDF. It is commanded by a commanding officer with the rank of Lt. Colonel and consists of a headquarters company at Milita Hall in Belize City, three rifle companies and two detachment platoons. The BDF has three outer command posts. There are Camp Belizario in the Center (west of Belmopan and formerly Holdfast Camp), Eyles Camp (formerly Orange Walk Drill Hall) in Orange Walk District and Fairweather Camp (formerly Rideau Camp) in Punta Gorda near the coast of southern Belize. There were plans to progressively increase the BDF's strength to about 3000 regulars and reserves combined, however, its size has been cut by half.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid, p 8

¹⁰ Phillips, Dion E, "The Military of Belize", <http://www.open.uwi.edu/sites/default/files/bnccde/belize/conference/papers/phillips.html>, p 26, accessed April 15, 2014.

GUATEMALAN CLAIM

Territorial disputes are one of the major legacies of colonialism. In the quest for sovereignty, colonial powers often erected artificial boundaries; frequently these boundaries were carelessly and arbitrarily defined. Guatemala unilaterally claims half of Belize's territory south of the Sibun River based on an unfulfilled 1859 treaty. A referendum based on Organization of American States (OAS) negotiation in 2002 which created an adjustment at Mexico tri-point was not brought to a vote in Guatemala and postponed in Belize.¹¹ Colonial powers often settle competing claims by arbitration but settlements were sometimes politically rather than legally formulated. Thus, Belize emerged to independence; one of the formidable tasks facing Belize was the need to clearly define the borders. The territorial disputes were further aggravated by the concerns of power, prestige, political mileage and in many cases economic gain for Guatemala. Although there may be some positive movement on the diplomatic fronts between Belize and Guatemala, the military threat from Guatemala is still viewed as very real by many Belizeans. With an aggressor that is so different in terms of size, ethnic composition and its economy, it is perhaps incomprehensible why the Government of Belize refuse to build the BDF to a level that would deter any external aggressor. Belize is a sovereign and independent nation and will earnestly defend its territorial integrity in the face of external aggression. The outstanding Territorial Referendum with Guatemala has moved away from being resolve using armed force in favor of bilateral negotiations

¹¹ Pollard Jr, Nick , "The Belize Guatemala Conundrum" <http://belizeguatemala.blogspot.ca>; accessed April 15, 2014.

under the OAS.¹² This is now passing into history and if referendums in each country are in agreement, the matter will be placed before the International Court of Justice or an international tribunal. A special agreement signed by the foreign ministers of Belize and Guatemala on the 8th December 2008 was an attempt to resolve longstanding claim to Belize territory. These agreement set out the issue to be examined by the ICJ and the questions given to the people of both countries through a national referendum on what the ICJ should make judgement. United Nations is aware of the territorial dispute and of the boundary treaty. The United Nations General Assembly of 1980 reaffirmed the right of the people to self-determination, dependence, territorial integrity. It was not until 1991 ten years after Belize attained Independence that Guatemala officially recognized Belize's Independence. Guatemala frequent and violent incursions into Belize for the purpose of plundering and even settling in Belizean territory clearly show that Guatemala has no respect for Belize's border which was agreed on by both countries treaty of 1859 and 1931.¹³ Guatemalans has blatantly disrespected Belize's border on several occasions when they cross into the country to harvest hardwood, xate, and pan for gold and poach illegally. This has led for example to the deforestation in the Chiquibul Forest Reserve, the exploitation of our natural resources and the increased violent encounters with armed peasants from Guatemala.

In order for Belize to guarantee its territorial integrity, it must continuously engage the international community at the diplomatic level and establish security

¹² Ibid, p 10

¹³ Pollard Jr, Nick , "The Belize Guatemala Conundrum" <http://belizeguatemala.blogspot.ca>; accessed April 15, 2014.

cooperation with its regional neighbours and other friendly nations. In respect of the border dispute with Guatemala, the confidence building measures presently in place require expansion to include cultural and academic level exchanges.¹⁴ The mixed commission should be a vehicle for further cooperation with Guatemala. There should be continued efforts to comply with international treaties and agreements which aim to enhance peace and security such as arms control, counter-terrorism, extradition and mutual legal assistance treaties to enhance regional stability and facilitate law enforcement efforts. The adaptation and implementation of laws to illicit activities over Belize's land, air and maritime spaces need strengthening. Belize must maintain absolute administrative control of the common borders with Mexico and Guatemala.¹⁵ To support this initiative there is a need to maintain modern, professional, balanced security forces that are properly equipped, proficient and technologically prepared to cooperate and contribute to national and regional security. Belize should strive to influence regional and international policies on Belize and continue to be a regional example of effective governance. Security cooperation and political agreements within the Caribbean and Central America should be made to actively promote peace and regional stability.¹⁶

¹⁴ "National Security Strategy of Belize- Organization Of America States", <http://www.oas.org/csh/spanish/documentos/bze%20nat%20security%20strategy.pdf>. p. 37; accessed April 10, 2014.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p 15

DRUG PHENOMENON

It is unwise to define Belize's security solely in terms of sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is a broad concept that encompasses all possible threats to the Belizean way of life, including threats to public safety, governance, economic wellbeing, social welfare and the environment. Belize's security issues have local, regional and international dimensions and greatly affect the nation's chances of achieving all of its social and economic goals. National security requires proactive management by the country through its agents and institutions.¹⁷ The illegal drug trade remains of particular concern as this has a direct influence on criminal activity involving drug use, gangs, small arms trafficking, violent crime, money laundering and the corruption of the criminal justice system. This combined with the general breakdown of the value of human life, particularly among the youth.¹⁸ Other threats to Belize include all those relating to natural and manmade disaster, external challenges of Belize's economic stability and the sustainable loss of natural resources. Transnational threats coupled with increasingly complex internal security environment has resulted in the blurring of traditional agency boundaries with various entities now recognizing that they have a role to play in promoting national security. There remains a need to enhance coordination and cooperation among the different ministries and security forces. There is also the need to break down barriers to building a long-term security picture, including the sharing of

¹⁷ "National Security Strategy of Belize- Organization Of America States", <http://www.oas.org/csh/spanish/documentos/bze%20nat'l%20security%20strategy.pdf>. p. 37; accessed April 10, 2014.

¹⁸ Ibid, p 15

information across databases because of our limited resources in acquiring strategic intelligence.¹⁹ Criminal activities undermine the social and economic well-being of Belize. In order for Belize to bring crime under control and dismantle criminal networks, it needs to improve its intelligence capabilities with improved manning, logistical support, and information sharing with other countries in the region. It also requires better coordination of the intelligence gathering arms of the Security Forces in disseminating their intelligence to the Joint Intelligence Coordination Center to ensure a progressive flow of information. Addressing social issues as poverty, unemployment, education and housing will provide viable alternatives to illegal activities. Actions that target criminals and their activities will have serious effect on criminal activity and revitalize the rule of law. Drug trafficking represent the greatest threat from serious and organized criminal networks because drugs offer sufficient profit at each stage of the trade. To counter the prevalence of drugs, Belize promote demand reduction by sensitizing youths to the evils of drugs, eradicate local marijuana production, interdict drug smugglers who use Belize as a transshipment point, go after the ill-gotten gains of those involved in illegal activity and offer meaningful rehabilitation to those who abuse drugs.²⁰ There are four dimensions in the drug phenomenon: production, consumption, trafficking and money laundering.²¹ These activities threatened the security of Belize and around the world.

¹⁹ Ibid, p 18

²⁰ "National Security Strategy of Belize- Organization Of America States", <http://www.oas.org/csh/spanish/documentos/bze%20nat!%20security%20strategy.pdf>. p. 37; accessed April 10, 2014.

²¹ Griffith, Ivelaw L "U.S Strategic Interest In Caribbean Security", *Joint Force Quarterly, Autumn 2000*. p 64-69.

Narcotics operations and capital ventures which they spawn precipitate both conflict and cooperation among Belize and non-state actors in the international system. Belize's geographical position next to Mexico on the Yucatan peninsula offers drug smugglers an attractive corridor for moving drugs into Mexico and on to the United States. Traffickers have used Belize territory in previous years, when enforcement activities elsewhere enhanced the value of this route. The country's 370 miles coastline and over 180 islands provide drug traffickers over 100 unmonitored landing strips and two deep water container ports. Belize provides easy access to drug traffickers moving cocaine north from Latin America.²²

Traffickers in Belize have often owned larger and more sophisticated military resources than the police or the military. Also in Belize they relied on a sophisticated communications within their organizations to monitor law enforcement countermeasures. Moreover, not only are submersibles now used to make maritime deliverables, but by connecting to global-positioning systems satellites, pilots are able to locate drop sites accurately.²³ Efforts to deal with drug operations especially production and trafficking have taxed police forces outside their capability, compelling the Ministry of National Security to dedicate and others to envisage utilising military forces in anti-drug procedures. Such measures are fraught with problems, including jurisdictional conflicts between military and police forces, resource allocation, potential corruption of military

²² "CIA- The World Factbook--- Belize"

<http://www.umsl.edu/services/govdocs/wofact2001/geos/bh.html>; accessed April 05, 2014.

²³ Major Garcia, B.N, *Efficacy Of United States Foreign Policy On Counter Drug Operations in Central America* (Canadian Forces College, 2014), p. 14.

personnel, training and technology adaptations and the potential for remilitarization.²⁴ In places where the military have never exercised direct political power, as in the Anglophone Caribbean, some leaders have worried that successful and prolonged use of the military in anti-drug campaigns risk catapulting them into countries' political power centers, with the potential for the development of a guardian mentality. If the military are seen or worse, if they see themselves as indispensable in this critical area, there is little to prevent them from intruding into the political arena, whether subtly or forcibly. Adequate resources are one of the prerequisite to effectively enforce drug control programs. These resources or the lack thereof have allowed the drug lords to surpass enforcement institutions by purchasing contemporary firepower, aircraft, submersibles and boats, informants, government officials and intelligence networks.²⁵ Furthermore, the nature for mutual relations is reliant on the portion of the U.S illegal drug market satiated by the country, the greater the enforcement obligations for a nation as Belize, the greater Washington's pressure and confrontational bilateral relations. One major United States tactical option is to finance mobilization of Belize's drug-fighting capabilities. While the United States support Belize with millions necessitated to corroborate successful hegemony over counter-drug operations, however, there is still a huge capability gap that security forces cannot operate beyond the barrier reef.²⁶ This option in practice would demand additional intelligence support, communication requirements, firepower and

²⁴ Ibid, p 5

²⁵ Major Garcia, B.N, *Efficacy Of United States Foreign Policy On Counter Drug Operations in Central America* (Canadian Forces College, 2012), p. 14.

²⁶ Ibid, p 6

helicopters for rapid insertion. In addition, Belize could be given more contemporary technologies for tackling the narcotics industries via strengthen bilateral and multilateral programs for example: radar systems to follow progress of drug smugglers' aircraft, contemporary anti-aircraft weapons, and surveillance devices to wiretap and detect smugglers' communications.²⁷

CONCLUSION

Belize is the result of a specific set of historical, geographical and geopolitical conditions that have merged to construct a vibrant and liberal nation. However, because of the multifaceted character of the international system in which Belize is involved, Belize confronts a number of challenges that resist its sovereignty and the way of the life that the Belizean people desire. Some of the challenges present themselves in conventional forms easily identifiable by the government. However, the modern, reliant international system also offers a multitude of complicated and eccentric challenges that demand not only unified interagency cooperation but also a high degree of coordination and cooperation with other countries.

²⁷ Ibid, p 9

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