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TRINIDAD & TOBAGO: COMBATTING THE DRUG TRADE TOWARD GREATER RELEVANCE IN CARICOM

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Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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INTRODUCTION

The security issues facing Trinidad and Tobago are similar to that of other island nations of the Caribbean. Crime, murder, and drug transshipment are just some of the more prominent ones. Also, problems that affect any one of these nations will impact on the others due to proximity and shared geopolitical concerns such as trade, environmental issues, or disasters due to hurricanes or earthquakes. Thus, Caribbean states have similar security priorities. According to the Joint Statement on the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative that came out of the Second Caribbean-United States (US) Security Cooperation Dialogue, the need for greater regional coordination was recognized to gain traction to address common security objectives¹. Moreover, Caribbean states have established various forums and initiatives such as the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (CARICOM IMPACS), the Caribbean Regional Maritime Agreement, and the Caribbean Maritime and Airspace Security Cooperation Agreement to support operational enterprises for drug interdiction. These do not represent all the initiatives but serve to highlight that Caribbean states are concerned about security and are persevering to find a sustainable solution for common security problems. Trinidad and Tobago is partner to only a few of the Caribbean initiatives, and in regard to those, it does not hold any significant position beyond simply having membership and supplying a handful of staff for administrative duties. Not only is this a discredit to a country that has the largest GDP among the English speaking Caribbean, it would intimate a lack of material concern for the Caribbean security. Thus, this paper will demonstrate that Trinidad and Tobago can be more relevant within

¹ <http://www.anguillanews.com/enews/index.php/permalink/4102.html>

the Caribbean Community bloc (CARICOM) as a regional power, particularly with regard to the battle against the drug trade in the Caribbean.

In presenting the argument, three key ideas will be explored. Firstly, an examination will be made of how the location of Trinidad and Tobago within the Caribbean, while presenting concerns in regard to security, also advances the opportunity for stronger multinational military posture. Then, the development of military capacity will be discussed as a necessity to win the battle against drug trade, and thus demonstrate greater relevance of Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean. Finally, it will be posited that strategies to improve the diplomatic and economic outlook of Trinidad and Tobago should include targeting the complicit involvement of businesses, government officials and agents of the state's security apparatus in the drug trade. While persistence is not a theme directly discussed in this paper, it is emphasized repeatedly throughout because it has been a reasoned assessment that no recommendations made would bring good success without diligence.

LOCATION

The geographic location of Trinidad and Tobago, while a concern for security issues, also presents an opportunity to enable a stronger multinational military posture. The Venezuelan mainland lies 9 miles to the west² of Trinidad and this is a stark reminder that the twin islands are literally at ground zero in the drug trade. The three most abundant supplies of cocaine in the Western Hemisphere are Peru, Colombia and Bolivia³. The location of Trinidad and Tobago unfortunately lies along the very flight paths and sea lanes that connect the supply of drugs to

² *Limits in the Seas. No. 11. Continental Shelf Boundary: Trinidad and Tobago-Venezuela.* March 6, 1970. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/62002.pdf>

³ Joint Publication 3-07.4: Joint Counterdrug Ops. pg 30. <http://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3-07-4.pdf>

markets in North America and Europe⁴. Drugs pass through with the help of businessmen, politicians and government agents in various sectors such as Customs, law enforcement and the military, carrying with it violence, illegal weapons and gang activities⁵. The unfortunate involvement of these agencies compromises their purpose to protect public interest and safety and erodes the credibility and trust in law enforcement⁶.

Any strategy to combat the drug trade has to take into consideration the supply routes through Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean islands. Take the United States of America (USA) for instance. As part of its strategy to protect its own interest it assists Trinidad and Tobago to fight illegal drug transshipping activities through the region by intelligence cooperation⁷ and sharing of resources and knowledge. One forum through which it does this is the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) used to build capacity in law enforcement, the military and youth development programs. The attention these two islands receive from the USA is due to the fact that they sit at the southern limit of what may be regarded as the North American Regional Security Complex, and the vulnerability they possess due to their proximity to the largest sources of cocaine in the western hemisphere. Thus, the location of Trinidad and Tobago in the southern end of the Caribbean Sea, while exposing it to drug traffickers, also makes it a focal point for integrated operations with USA, emergent from initiatives such as the

⁴ Braveboy-Wagner, Jacqueline Anne. *The Caribbean in World Affairs: The Foreign Policies of the English-speaking States*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1989. quoting Pindling, pg29

⁵ Miller, Joel and Nicole J. Hendricks. "Applying the Problem-Solving Model to a Developing World Context: The Case of Murder in Trinidad and Tobago." *Crime Prevention and Community Safety* 9, no. 4 (10, 2007): 275-290. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cpcs.8150052>. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/232112798?accountid=9867>. quoting Shelley, 2005; Van Schendel and Abraham, 2006

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ 2013 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) linked to: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/191500.pdf>

CBSI and others, namely the Maritime Counter-Narcotic Cooperation Agreement, referred to as the ship-rider agreement⁸.

The TTDF has the potential to assist its Caribbean neighbors to have a more robust multinational counter-narcotic strategy. The Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard (TTCG) commissioned three newly acquired vessels on 21 August 2015⁹. These ships have been installed with improved radars for better surveillance¹⁰. There also exists other land based radars positioned around the island and also in Tobago. Moreover, the air traffic control radars located in Trinidad have coverage over the entire Caribbean and as far east as 37° West Longitude, which effectively means the middle of the Atlantic Sea. They assist with control of air traffic as far north as Saint Lucia, east as far as Barbados¹¹. They would similarly have the potential to observe traffic from Latin America, which is the key point about the potential for the country to have an enormous impact in the fight against the drug trade. Once there is sufficient political resolve, it is possible for the twin island republic to become an important resource for providing operational intelligence in real time for both maritime and air operations. Thus, Trinidad and Tobago has an opportunity to capitalize on its location to coordinate effective drug interdiction operations in the Caribbean.

⁸ U.S. Department of State 96/03/01 Statement: Extradition/Maritime Treaties, Trinidad/Tobago Office of the Spokesman. *TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO SIGNING OF EXTRADITION AND MUTUAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE TREATIES MARITIME COUNTER-DRUG COOPERATION AGREEMENT*.
<http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/bureaus/lat/1996/960301BurnsTrinidad1.html>

⁹ <http://www.newsday.co.tt/news/0,216200.html>

¹⁰ <https://navaltoday.com/2016/02/01/trinidad-and-tobago-navy-patrol-vessels-get-new-radars/>

¹¹ <http://www.glivingstone.com/index11.html>

DEVELOPMENT OF MILITARY CAPACITY

War is going to be won or lost on Morale.

– General Ronald Adam, Adjutant General, British Army,
February 1942¹²

The morale of military and law enforcement personnel is a key element to build military capacity for winning the battle against the drug trade and demonstrating greater relevance of Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean. “Morale is a reflection of the attitude or mental condition of an individual or team.”¹³ Accusations of incompetence and complacency against members of TTDF and law enforcement officers lead to undue stress making it difficult for them to operate professionally¹⁴. Not unexpectedly, that negatively affects morale. However, the provision of better equipment and training to do drug interdiction operations, and further to that better living and operating conditions, would impact positively on the success of personnel in their missions. The quality of any military would ultimately be decided by the health and fitness, mental as well as physical, of its troops. Improvements along those lines will enhance the morale of men and women who are put in harm’s way everyday as part of their duty. This aspect of having better equipment, tools and operating conditions, namely a national policy that spells out a definitive strategic direction, warrants some closer attention.

There has not been any significant acquisition of assets in a long time. The Trinidad and Tobago Government first began the process to acquire three Offshore Patrol Vessels in 2005, but

¹² Fennell, Jonathan. 2011. *Combat and Morale in the North African Campaign : The Eighth Army and the Path to El Alamein*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed May 10, 2016). Quoting: NA WO 259/62 Note by AG for consideration by the Executive Committee of the Army Council (ECAC) at their forty-eighth meeting to be held on 27 February 1942

¹³ Center for Creative Leadership "What Are Morale, Pride, and Spirit?." *In Building Your Team's Morale, Pride & Spirit*, 1993. 7-8. n.p.:1993. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed May 10, 2016). Pg 1

¹⁴ Sutton, Paul K., and Anthony Payne. *Size and Survival: The Politics of Security in the Caribbean and the Pacific*. London, England: F. Cass, 1993. Quoting: *Drugs and Security in the Caribbean*. Ivelaw Griffith. Pg 87

this fell through when another government came into power in 2008¹⁵. After scrapping that contract, the new government began afresh to acquire 12 new vessels¹⁶ for the TTCG. Fortunately, there has finally been some progress with this contract and, as was mentioned earlier, three vessels were recently commissioned. The last occasion that any significant assets were acquired was 1996-97, and it was not accomplished by procurement but rather by donations through US cooperation initiatives¹⁷. However, vessels are not enough for a successful projection of military power. For instance, there has been no articulation by any government of Trinidad and Tobago, past or present, of a proper strategic plan. As a matter of fact, no national or foreign policy has ever been enunciated in any form. It is suggested that this be the first step. Next, there needs to be a framework for a re-organized military structure, heavily favoring naval power, to fit this policy that includes such aspects as command, administration and ministerial liaisons. This leads to the next expected requirement, endorsed at ministry level, which spells out expectations for maintenance of readiness capability to guide better administration, training, logistics and local and multinational operations. If this sort of approach were applied, there would be a plan to develop shipyards and jetties for the newly acquired ships. At present, there are no facilities to cater to the recently commissioned ones, far less for those expected in due course. Needless to say, the acquisition of the ships should not be stopped. The vessels would provide the capacity to project military power beyond the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Moreover, newer and better ship radars should be acquired that possess integration with other military assets. Ground radars should likewise be upgraded to integrate in a similar manner. Better aircraft are also needed with longer flight time and equipment fitted for better

¹⁵ *Trinidad and Tobago Politics: Violent Crime Continues to Rise*. New York: The Economist Intelligence Unit N.A., Incorporated, 2005. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/366515185?accountid=9867>.

¹⁶ Grace, Jean. "Trinidad and Tobago Orders 12 Damen Coastguard Vessels." *Jane's Navy International* 120, no. 5 (Jun 01, 2015). <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1680649648?accountid=9867>.

¹⁷ <http://druglibrary.net/schaffer/GovPubs/ncsr/trinidad.htm>

surveillance. Better shipment scanners would augment efforts of TTCG officers who work alongside Customs and Excise agents at the ports. More bilateral cooperation is needed to facilitate more inter-island training exercises and intelligence sharing. Better integrated think tanks, emergent from Caribbean initiatives already established, can provide better quality analysis. Such initiatives cover intelligence sharing agreements, committees for administrative and policy oversight, regional agencies for collection, analysis and production of intelligence, and liaison officers for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) states involved¹⁸. The TTDF, though not adequately prepared at present, can become a vital strategic asset once it is provided with better tools, more training with other militaries in the Caribbean, and more robust cooperative agreements for integrated regional action.

IMPROVING DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC STANDING

If a successful strategy is implemented to fight the drug trade, then there will be a positive reflection in the diplomatic and economic outlook of Trinidad and Tobago. Likewise, if there is inadequate resolve to combat it, the twin island state will lose its diplomatic prestige among Caribbean states, and its economy will equally be affected. To elaborate on this, first it must be pointed out that the drug trade encourages corruption, not only in governments, but also in various agencies. Corruption compromises the effectiveness of governments to seek the public interests of the people. The extended effects of this would include society becoming desensitized by ever-increasing news reports of corruption, especially from higher offices of government. This could lead down a slippery slope of corruption showing up in all sectors of

¹⁸ Millington, Major C.S. *The Efficacy of CARICOM's Intelligence Management Framework and its Ability to Support the Management of the Crime and Security Across the Caribbean*. Exercise Solo Flight (2014). <http://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/259/290/301/305/Millington.pdf>

society¹⁹. In Trinidad and Tobago for instance, the suspicion of corruption has extended to law enforcement and Coast Guard²⁰. In 1983, in the Bahamas, a Bahamian Commission of Inquiry into allegations of corruption involving the Prime Minister and other government officials reported that, "...the whole nation must accept some responsibility. Apathy and a weak public opinion have led to the....state of affairs in the nation."²¹ Essentially, there is no formal criminal corporation, or entity, that is responsible for the apparent criminal cohesiveness among government officials, businessmen, persons from other governmental departments and others who engages in, and support, the drug trade. The question then arises as to how is it that there is, ostensibly, a united and widespread vulgar conspiracy, suggesting an organized crime movement. The following discussion explores possible reasons for this.

With success in the battle against the drug trade, Trinidad and Tobago develops its diplomatic prestige and economic influence in the Caribbean. One key element to achieve this is by halting and reversing the systemic breakdown of values and poor regard for upright legal conduct in business and duties in service of public interest. Avariciousness is that common thread that drives the seemingly coordinated actions that gives the appearance of a complex criminal machine in operation. This is structural, not agency driven, which is why the fight must include discourse about values that define the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Deep involvement with drugs occurs because otherwise honest businessmen or government agents are not content with their lot. This unfortunately swells to become a conditioned behavior and recovery back to a more honorable life is very difficult. Politicians, law enforcement officers or personnel from

¹⁹ Transparency International. Corruption Measurement Tools. Trinidad and Tobago. <https://www.transparency.org/country#TTO>

²⁰ U.S. Department of State. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. Trinidad and Tobago. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. 2002. March 31, 2003. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18346.htm>

²¹ Sutton, Paul K., and Anthony Payne. *Size and Survival: The Politics of Security in the Caribbean and the Pacific*. London, England: F. Cass, 1993. Quoting: *Drugs and Security in the Caribbean*. Ivelaw Griffith. Pg 84, 85

the military become seduced by craving for more money until it becomes nigh impossible to stop²². This is substantiated by reports from The Centre of Geopolitical Drug Studies and Transparency International that publishes an annual Corruption Perception Index²³ that show the relationship between businesses, public servants, security personnel and the drug trade. It is not difficult to see that the effort to combat the drugs and its peripheral effects demand ever more of the state's resources over time and thus would put a strain on the economy. Trinidad and Tobago has had some impetus from USA and Canada to establish initiatives for cooperation²⁴ and to set up financial task forces as well as of training and intelligence sharing and integrated operations²⁵. Yet this is not enough, because reports still emerge of significant drug busts on land and sea. Needless to say, "where there is smoke, there is fire"²⁶. Values constitute soft power. Thus, if the values of the nation shine through, it will reflect in the successes against drug trafficking, and thus achieve diplomatic respect and prestige from other states in the Caribbean.

CONCLUSION

In order to be more relevant in CARICOM and indeed the Caribbean and Latin America, Trinidad and Tobago needs to step up and accept greater responsibility with regard to security in the Caribbean and especially the drug trade. It also has to undertake more substantial roles for its military, which has not yet been clearly articulated by its government. An analysis was done of how the location of Trinidad and Tobago within the Caribbean enables it, in no small way, to have greater opportunities for stronger multinational military posture. An instance cited was that

²² Ibid. pg 90

²³ Miller, Joel and Nicole J. Hendricks. "Applying the Problem-Solving Model to a Developing World Context: The Case of Murder in Trinidad and Tobago." *Crime Prevention and Community Safety* 9, no. 4 (10, 2007): 275-290. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cpcs.8150052>.
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/232112798?accountid=9867>.

²⁴ Cooper, Andrew Fenton, and Timothy M. Shaw. *The Diplomacies of Small States: Between Vulnerability and Resilience*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Pg 165

²⁵ <http://druglibrary.net/schaffer/GovPubs/ncsr/trinidad.htm>

²⁶ *Cambridge Dictionary of American Idioms*. S.v. "where there's smoke, there's fire." Retrieved May 10 2016 from <http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/where+there%27s+smoke%2c+there%27s+fire>

while close proximity to major sources of cocaine in South America subjects Trinidad and Tobago to all aspects that menacing trade, it also makes the two-island state a focal point for integrated operations with USA emergent from initiatives such as the Maritime Counter-Narcotic Cooperation Agreement.

Then, it was demonstrated that improved military capacity is key to support success against the drug trade and promote a national image through a better, professional and courageous military, resolute in its fight against drugs. It was made evident that this is a realistic expectation, but for better attention to the cries for superior tools, training and conditions to improve morale and effectiveness on the job. The TTDF has to continue to develop its naval capacity to project its military power in the Caribbean. Also, the country needs to produce a more relevant foreign and defence policy that would promote better security for the Caribbean, and create better climate for tourism and trade. It also has to continue developing even better partnerships with developed nations such as USA and Canada to enhance greater coverage of Caribbean waters. In time, better response mechanisms would evolve so that information from the various means such as those mentioned herein could drive rapid and effective deployment of assets as required. Trinidad and Tobago can have greater diplomatic and economic power in the Caribbean. Persistence will make a significant dent in the drug trade and improve its outlook. It may not be able directly to deal with the source of drugs, but it can focus resources on transshipment through its littorals and in the Caribbean Sea.

Finally, it was advanced that by directing attention to deal with dishonest practices of businesses, politicians, government officials and agents in the security sector would boost the diplomatic and economic position of Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean. It is imperative for

Trinidad and Tobago to develop and implement more robust practices to resist the degrading effect of the drug business on trade and commerce. It was highlighted that there are already set up, financial task forces and other apparatus to help with training, intelligence sharing and integrated operations²⁷. However, the point was stressed that this is not enough. If Trinidad and Tobago is to realistically further its position of relevance in CARICOM and beyond, it has to develop the will and tenacity to make it possible.

²⁷ <http://druglibrary.net/schaffer/GovPubs/ncsr/trinidad.htm>

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