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HOW CAN THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO REGIMENT (TTR) BE BETTER EMPLOYED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO?

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JCSP 43

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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How can the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment (TTR) be better employed in the fight against crime and violence in Trinidad and Tobago?

Introduction

Over the last fifteen years Trinidad and Tobago has experienced a phenomenal increase in serious crime especially murders. In opening the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago in September 2005, President George Maxwell Richards said that the country was in crisis due to the escalating crime rate.¹ Eleven years on, the Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley reiterated in an address to the nation in September 2016 that the twin island republic is grappling with an increase in crime.² The homicide statistics from 1994 to 2016 in Figure 1 illuminate the gravity of the problem.³ During the period 1994 to 2001 the number of murders ranged between 143 and 151. By 2008 the number of murders almost quadrupled reaching 550. Although this figure has not been surpassed, the murder rate has not decreased significantly. The lowest number of murders recorded since was 354 in 2011 and this can be attributed to a state of emergency (SOE) that was in effect for three months during that year. Comparatively, Trinidad and Tobago has one of the highest homicide rates per capita among its Caribbean and Latin American neighbours which are ranked amongst the highest in the world. In 2012, Trinidad and Tobago out of 25 countries ranked 13th in the world ahead of countries like Mexico, Dominican Republic and Nigeria.⁴

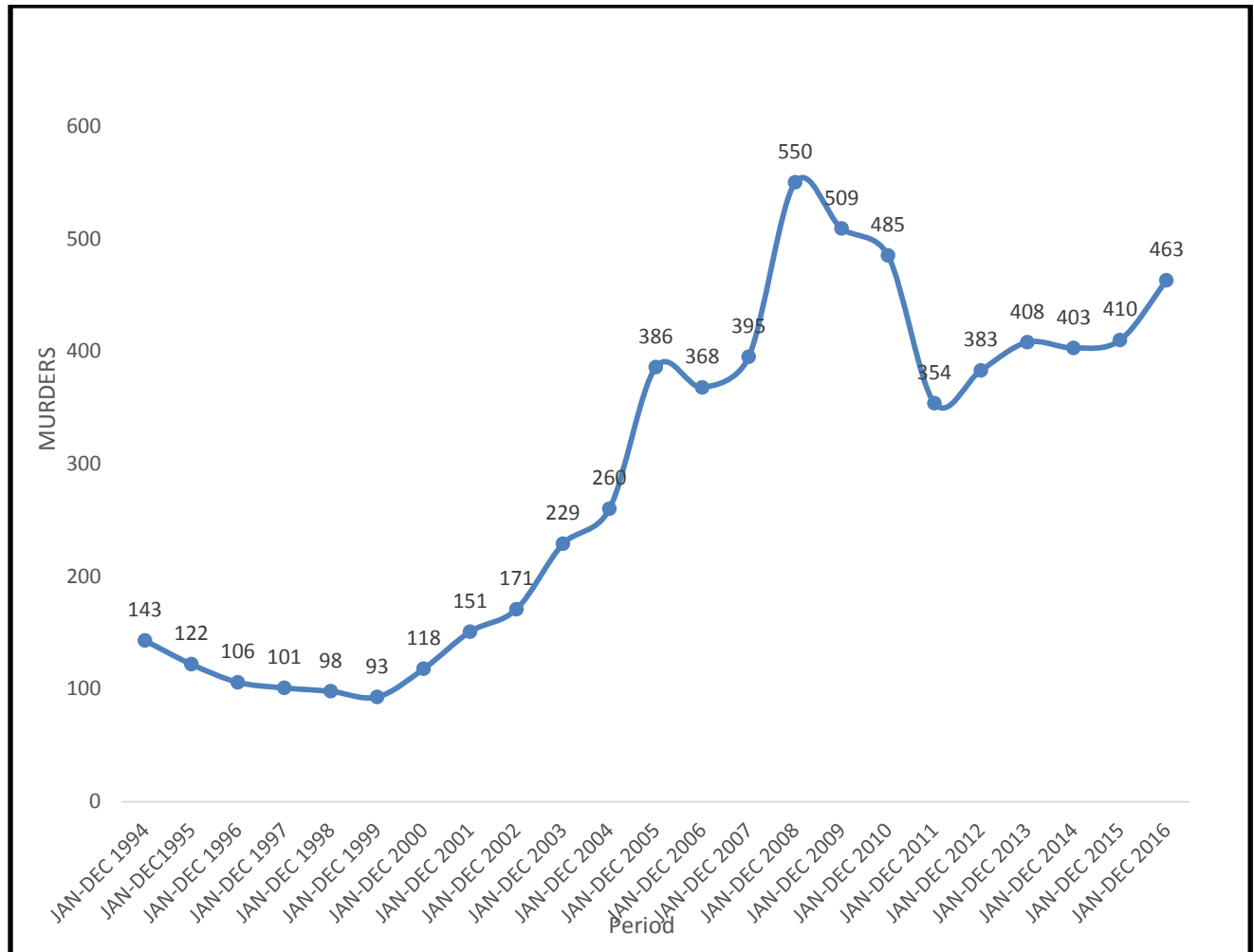
¹ A Joint Report by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank "Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean" March 2007

² Jamaica Observer "Trinidad & Tobago Government rolls out new crime-fighting plan" 13 September 2016

³ Trinidad and Tobago Crime Statistics <http://www.ttcrime.com/stats.php>

⁴ Geography and Travel 25 Countries With the Highest Murder Rates in the World <http://list25.com/25-countries-with-the-highest-murder-rates-in-the-world/>

Figure 1 - Number of Murders for the Period 1994 - 2016



Source: Trinidad and Tobago Crime Statistics

Over the years, there have been a number of efforts aimed at addressing the increasing crime rate. While not exhaustive the following are some of the initiatives that have been implemented. Internationally, since 2003 US agencies have assisted the region and individual countries like Trinidad and Tobago with programmes focused on intelligence gathering,

maritime and land-based operations and criminal prosecution.⁵ Regionally, Caribbean states have established various forums and initiatives such as the Caricom IMPACS, the Caribbean Regional Maritime Agreement and the Caribbean Maritime and Airspace Security Cooperation Agreement to support drug interdiction operations. Domestically, recognizing the complexity of the problem there has been a multi-sectoral approach with efforts focused on legislature, social programmes and law enforcement.

In 2008 the Bail Act was signed into law which denied bail to repeat offenders of specified and violent crimes. This was augmented by anti-gang legislation and the Evidence Amendment Bill which sought to provide increased protection to witnesses. In 2009 a memorandum of understanding was signed with the US allowing T&T to use e-Trace, an electronic system used to trace illegal firearms. Additionally, there have been a number of social programmes such as the Citizen Security Programme directed at high risk youths. As one of the more extreme measures, in 2011 a state of emergency was declared for three months in order to arrest the escalating crime situation.

In 2005 the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT), a CIA styled unit, was formed to investigate serious crime. This unit was disbanded in 2010 with a change in government. Within the TTPS, special units such as the Criminal Gang Intelligence Unit, Organised Crime and Narcotics Unit, Transnational Organised Crime Unit and Financial Intelligence Unit were formed to specifically address the crime problem.

Within the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force the TTR contribute soldiers to the Inter Agency Task Force, to support the TTPS with operations in crime hotspots. The Trinidad and

⁵ United States Government Accountability Office Report to Congressional Requesters “Drug control cooperation with many major drug transit countries has improved, but better performance reporting and sustainability plans are needed” July 2008

Tobago Coastal Radar Centre was established to enhance the TTCG efforts with the interdiction of illegal drug shipments via go fast boats with its augmented fleet from Damen Shipyards.⁶ The TTCG Air Wing was upgraded to the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard in 2005 and outfitted with four AgustaWestland AW 139 helicopters complete with night vision and FLIR capability to assist with drug interdiction operations among other tasks.⁷

Despite these efforts there has not been a significant dent in crime especially homicides. This paper proposes that the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment could be more effectively employed in a border security role as opposed to an internal security role as one of the ways of attacking this complex problem. Using an evidence-based approach a deeper analysis of the homicide problem and the attractiveness of Trinidad and Tobago as a transshipment point will be done. This will be followed by an examination of the current employment of the TTR in the fight against crime to establish where a gap exists. A view on how the TTR could be more effectively employed to close this gap will then be advanced. This study is deemed important in order to fulfil a mandate by the GORTT to decrease crime, and improve the public safety of citizens as well as the international perception of Trinidad and Tobago (strategic end state).

Understanding one of the security variables in the Homicide Equation

The manifesto by the current government highlighted the proliferation of illegal guns and drugs as a primary driver of crime in Trinidad and Tobago.⁸ Likewise the Caricom Crime and Security Strategy also recognizes the mutually reinforcing relationship among illegal guns, drugs

⁶ Damen “Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard contracts Damen for fleet of coastal patrol craft” 15 May 2015 http://www.damen.com/en/news/2015/05/trinidad_and_tobago_coast_guard_contracts_damen_for_fleet_of_coastal_patrol_craft

⁷ Government of Trinidad and Tobago “Ministry of National Security Combats Transnational Organised Crime” 30 April 2014 http://www.news.gov.tt/content/ministry-national-security-combats-transnational-organized-crime#.WKO3NGfD_IU

⁸ People’s National Movement 2015 Manifesto Page 24

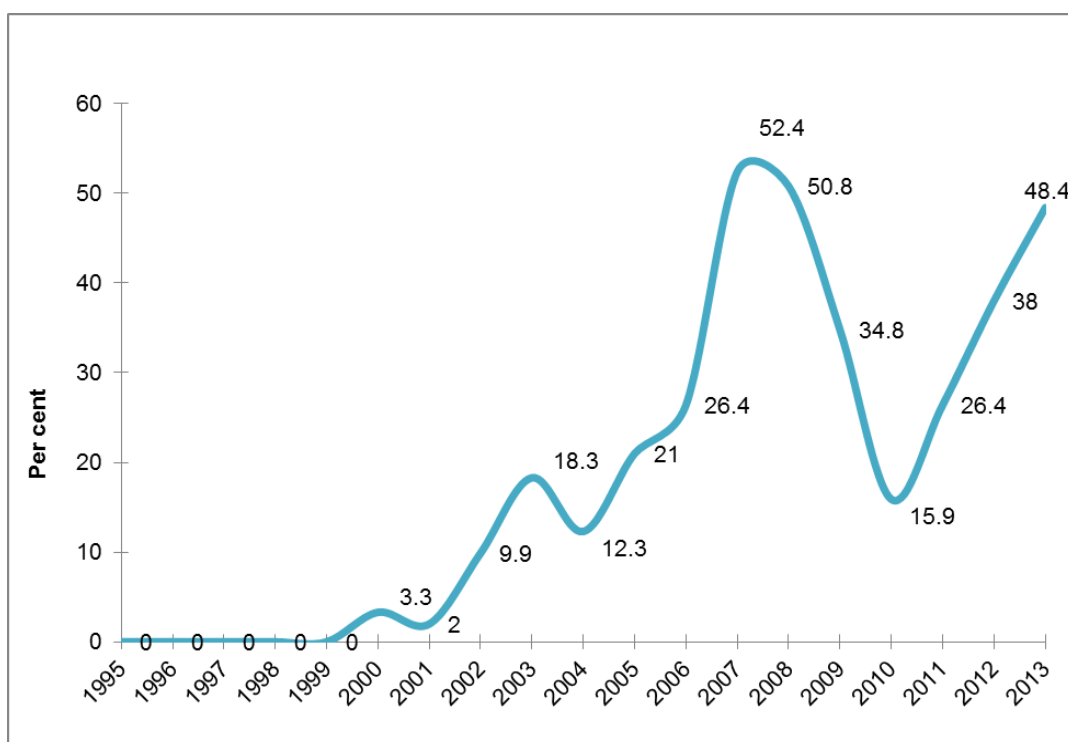
and gangs as a major cause of criminality in the region.⁹ Similarly, a Joint Report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank also indicated that the strongest explanation for the relatively high rates of crime and violence in the region and their apparent rise in recent years is narcotics trafficking.¹⁰ A deeper analysis of homicides in Trinidad and Tobago highlights that most of the murders are linked to gang activity as they fight to maintain or gain drug turf, which is their main source of income. Figure 2 shows the percentage of murders attributed to gangs over the period 1995 to 2013.¹¹ The percentage of murders being committed by gang members have increased significantly over the period. It rose drastically from 3.3 % in 2002 to 52.4% in 2008. Although there was a significant decrease in 2011 to 15.9% due to the SOE, by 2013 it was back up to 48.4%.

⁹ Caribbean Community Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (Caricom IMPACS) “Caricom Crime and Security Strategy 2013 Securing the Region” Adopted at the Twenty-Fourth Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of Caricom, 18 – 19 February 2013, Port-Au-Prince, Republic of Haiti Page 5

¹⁰ A Joint Report by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank “Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean” March 2007

¹¹ Randy Seepersad “Crime and Violence in Trinidad and Tobago” Inter-American Series on Crime and Violence in the Caribbean June 2016 Page 43

Figure 2 - Percentage of Gang Related Murders 1995 - 2013



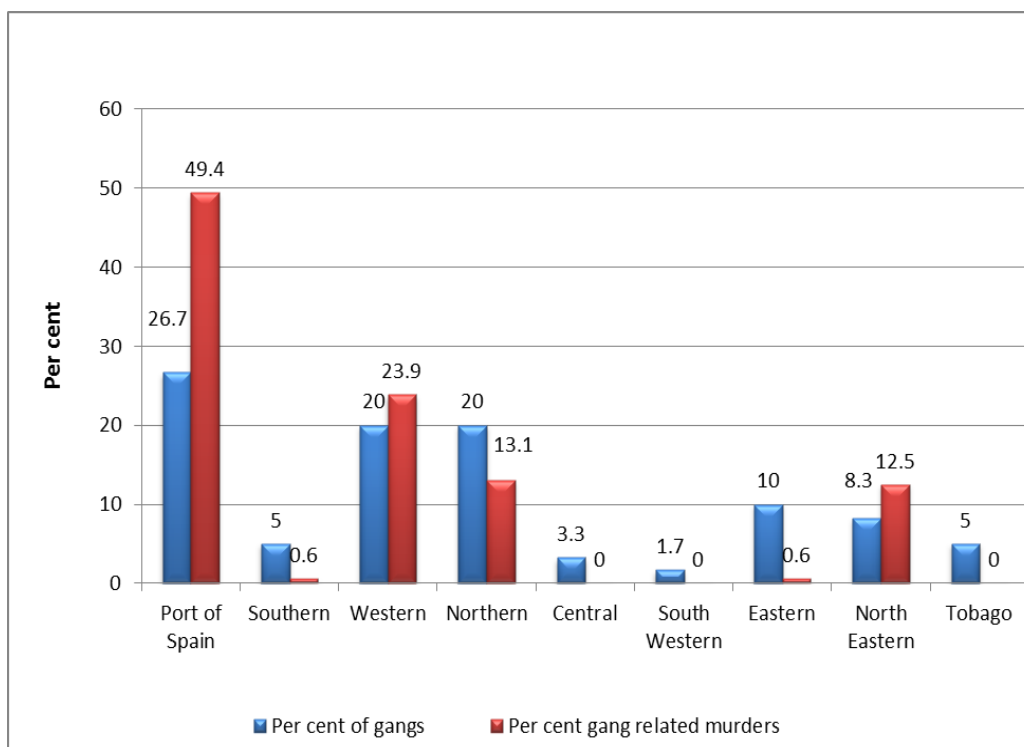
Source: Crime and Problem Analysis Branch of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service

Further analysis in Figure 3 shows that the majority of gangs and gang related murders are located and occur in the Port-of-Spain district which is the capital of Trinidad and Tobago, with limited spill over in the other TTPS districts.¹² According to the Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2013 report approximately 100 criminal gangs were identified from a total population of just over 1,300,000.¹³ One of the larger gangs, Jamaat al Muslimeen, is comprised of 600 members. This group was also behind a failed attempted coup to overthrow the government in 1990.

¹² Randy Seepersad "Crime and Violence in Trinidad and Tobago" Inter-American Series on Crime and Violence in the Caribbean June 2016 Page 92

¹³ Council on Hemispheric Affairs "Gangs are the New Law in Urban Trinidad and Tobago" 11 October 2013

Figure 3 - Gang Locations and Gang Related Murders (2012)



Source: Crime and Problem Analysis Branch of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service

A more in-depth analysis in Figure 4 below reveals that for the same period, over 50% of murders were committed using firearms. Additionally, firearms were also seen to feature in the commission of other serious crimes such as robberies.¹⁴ Although in 2005 one of the Jamaat members was convicted of trying to ship 60 AK 47s, 10 Mac 10 guns and 10 silencers from Fort Lauderdale to Trinidad and Tobago, the availability of firearms is primarily facilitated by the illegal drug trade.¹⁵ Although the TTPS has been able to remove 585 guns in 2014 and 691 at the end of 2015 this has done little to stem the availability of illegal firearms.¹⁶ At the end of 2016 the TTPS removed 765 firearms, the highest number in the country's history, prompting the

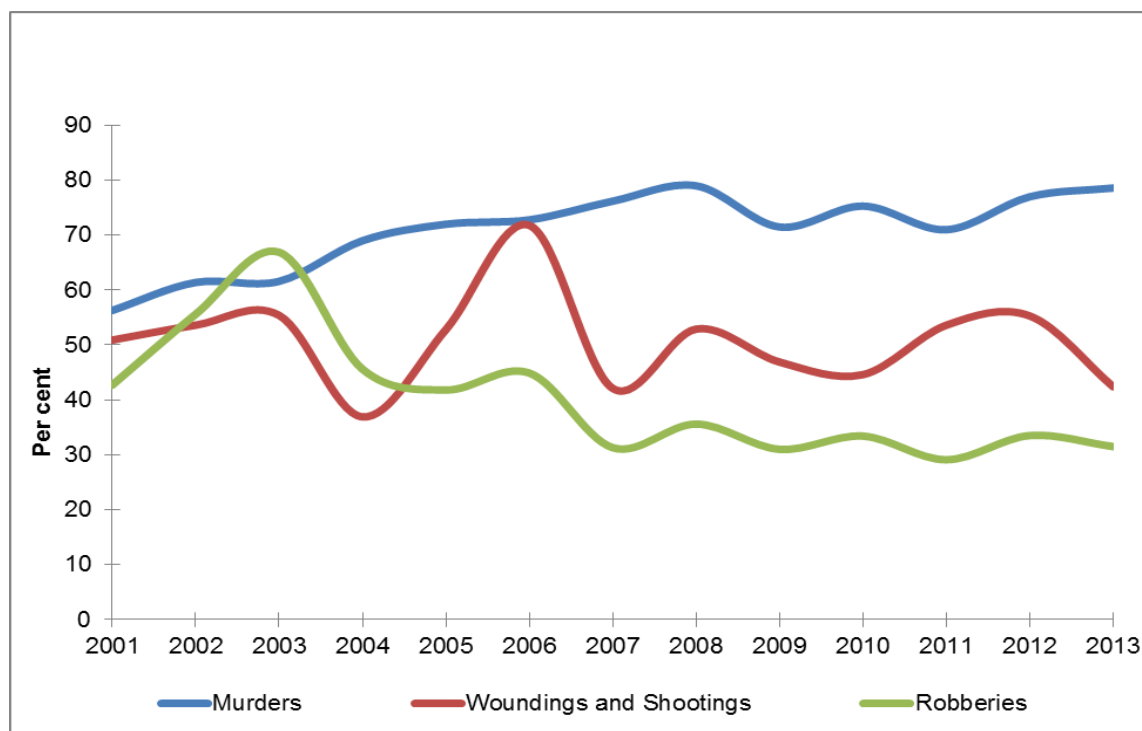
¹⁴ Randy Seepersad "Crime and Violence in Trinidad and Tobago" Inter-American Series on Crime and Violence in the Caribbean June 2016 Page 99

¹⁵ Dorn Townsend "No Other Life: Gangs, Guns and Governance in Trinidad and Tobago" Small Arms Survey Working Paper 8 Page 34

¹⁶ Press Conference by Senior Superintendent Radcliff Boxill, Officer in charge of the Criminal Investigation Department and Criminal Records Office of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service
<http://www.tv6tnt.com/home/rotator/Police-Say-Gun-Seizures-Increasing--383167051.html?m=y&smobile=y>

Commissioner of Police, Mr Stephen Williams to state that too many guns are illegally entering the country.¹⁷

Figure 4 - % of Murders, Wounding and Shootings, and Robberies Committed with Firearms 2001 - 2013



Source: Crime and Problem Analysis Branch of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service

¹⁷ Ria Taitt "GUNS GALORE" Trinidad and Tobago Express 20 February 2017 <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/20170220/news/huge-rise-in-guns-entering-country>

The attractiveness of Trinidad and Tobago as a drug transshipment point

The US Department of State has stated that Trinidad and Tobago is an attractive transshipment point for illegal drugs destined to Europe and the USA because of geography and the successes of drug interdiction efforts in Colombia.¹⁸ U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration concurs that Trinidad and Tobago has become a major transshipment point for illegal substances heading north from South America.¹⁹ At the closest point, Venezuela is just about ten kilometres from Trinidad. Traffickers send cocaine and small arms from Venezuela via go fast boats. The drugs are then shipped out on container ships, planes, and private yachts. The scale of this illegal trade can be gleaned from the seizures over the years. According to the TTPS Public Affairs Unit there has been a 131% increase in cocaine seizures with 193 kilogrammes being recovered in 2015 as compared to 83 kilogrammes in 2014. Marijuana seizures increased more significantly than did cocaine. Anti-drug operations netted 1,239 kilogrammes in 2015 as compared to 471 kilogrammes in 2014 representing a 163% increase.²⁰ While this may seem reassuring, according to the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) it only represents a fraction of the 2000kg that is believed to transit through the island on a monthly basis.²¹ Evidence of this was illuminated in 2005 when 1.75 tonnes of pure cocaine was seized, representing the largest drug bust to date.²²

¹⁸ Report on the Caribbean by the US Department of State
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/100898.pdf>

¹⁹ US Department of State Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)

²⁰ Trinidad and Tobago Guardian Report “Drug seizures double over past year—TTPS” 13 August 2015

²¹ Tom J Farer “Transnational Crime in the Americas” Psychology Press Page 153

²² Colin Frederick the Caribbean is the Fragile Third Border of Drug Trafficking” Council on Hemispheric Affairs 26 July 2010

Figure 5 – Proximity between Trinidad and Venezuela



Source: Constructed by the author

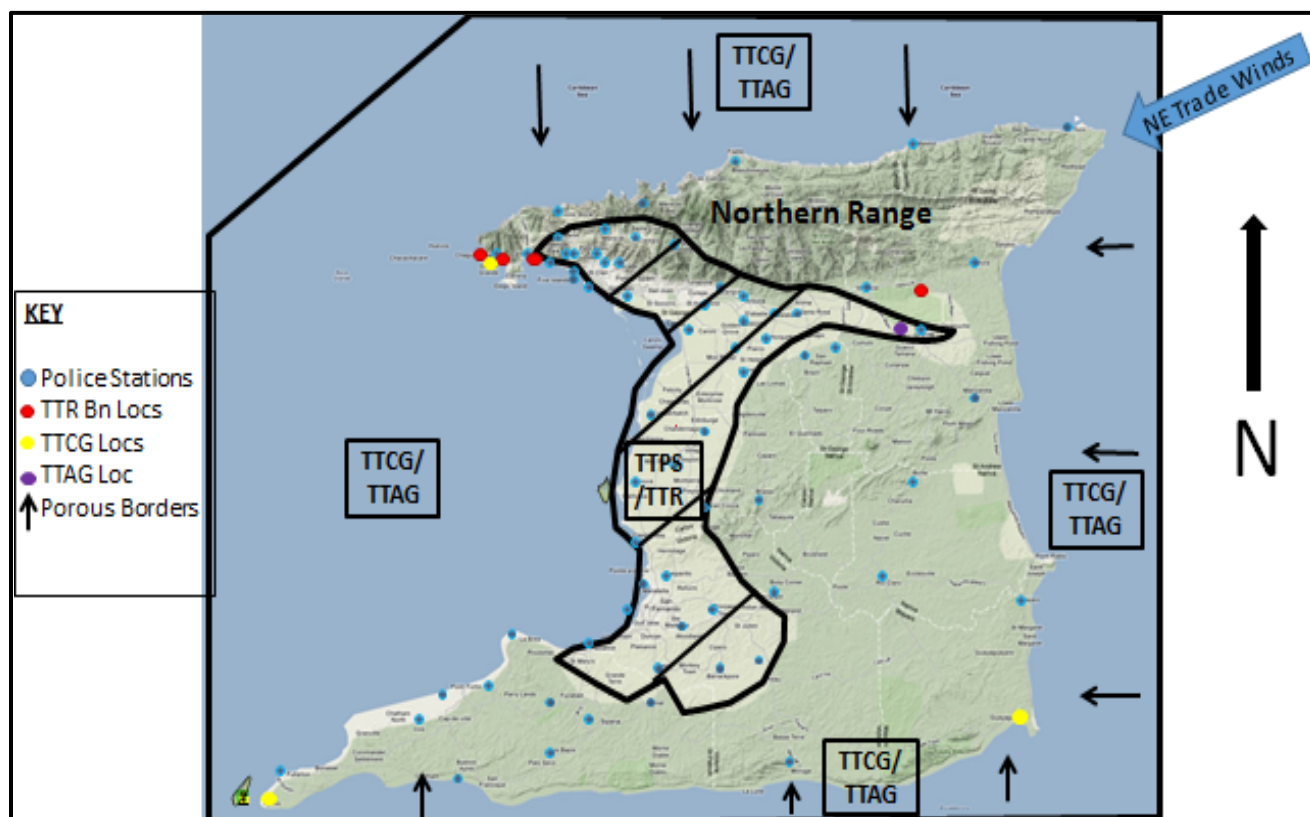
The 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) also cited the porous borders of Trinidad and Tobago as contributing to its attractiveness as a transshipment point for illegal drugs.²³ This is primarily facilitated by the disposition, focus and high level of corruption among some law enforcement agencies. The map of Trinidad in Figure 5 below depicts the disposition and focus of the TTPS and the military. It is evident that the majority of law enforcement and military bases as well as their efforts are concentrated along the North/South

²³ US Department of State Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)

and East/West corridors (shaded area) of the country which naturally correlates to the major population centres. This leaves the north, south and east coasts porous to go fast boats that transport illegal drugs which were previously established as the main source of illegal guns entering the country. Further geospatial analysis will show that of these three coasts, the southern one is the most attractive as it is sheltered from the NE trade winds and the terrain is generally flat and easily accessible throughout. This is in contrast to the northern coast which is only accessible in some areas due to the mountainous terrain. Although the eastern coastline is easily accessible throughout, the distance from the Venezuelan mainland is the limiting factor for its use. Additionally, like the northern coastline, it is exposed to the NE Trade Winds which makes sea conditions less favourable and so too its use as a landing point. The multitude of fishing communities in these areas also provides an excellent opportunity to mask their illegal activity. In the report titled Gangs, Guns and Governance in Trinidad and Tobago the corruption in the TTPS was highlighted as playing a leading role in the illegal drug trade.²⁴ Within recent times the TTCG has also joined those ranks.

²⁴Dorn Townsend “No Other Life: Gangs, Guns and Governance in Trinidad and Tobago” Small Arms Survey Working Paper 8 Page 35

Figure 6 - Present Disposition of Key Law Enforcement Agencies



Source: Constructed by the author

The current employment of the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment

The TTR is the main land force element of the TTDF which also consists of the TTCG, TTAG and TTDFR. It was the first formation to be established in 1962 as one of the prerequisites for Trinidad and Tobago to gain its Independence from Britain. It is a light infantry brigade consisting of two (02) infantry battalions, one (01) engineer battalion, one (01) logistic battalion and a Special Forces detachment. The TTR has four routine roles. The most important of these is maintaining internal security of Trinidad and Tobago by assisting the TTPS. In this regard since 2004 the TTR has been supporting the TTPS with operations in Port-of-Spain which based on Figure 3 is designated a crime hotspot because of the number of gangs and gang related murders. These operations and ceremonial duties which is another role that involves President

and Prime Minister official residence guard duties rotate between the two infantry battalions on a 12 – 18 month basis.

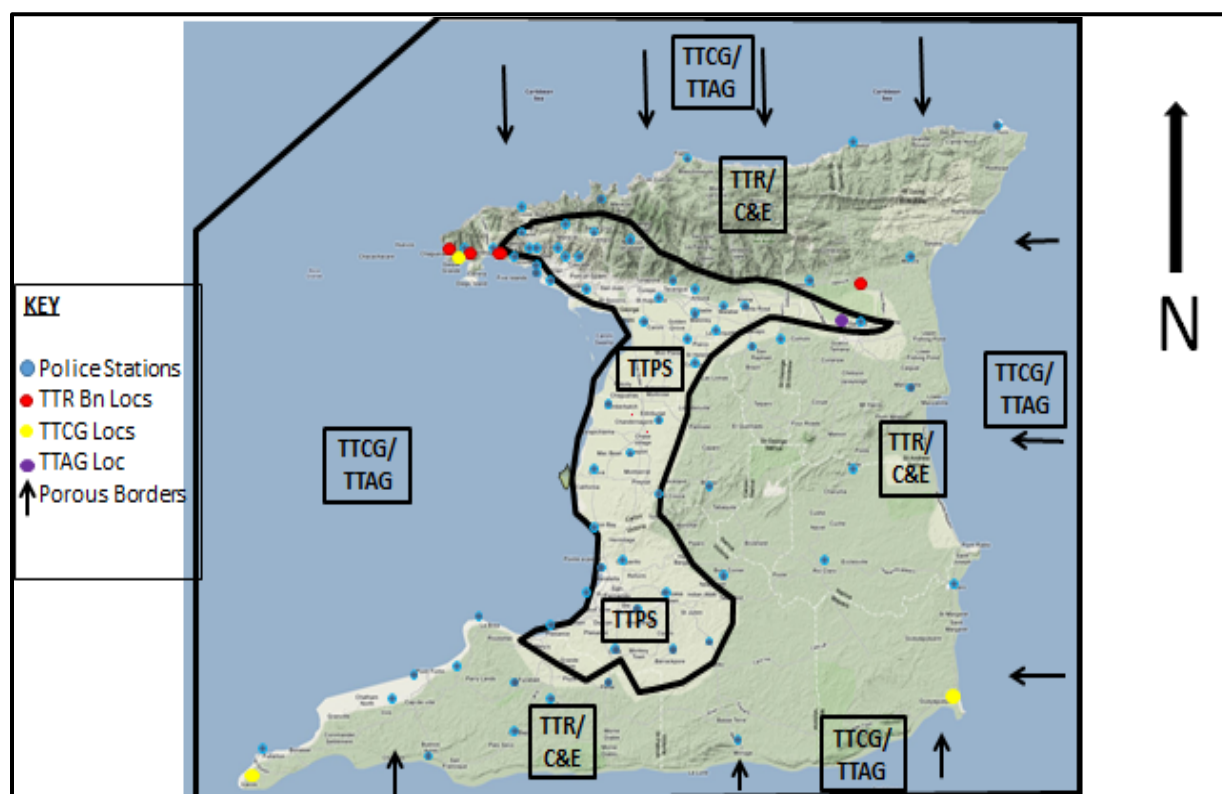
The third role involves humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) locally and regionally. This is the main effort of the engineer battalion however the other battalions support as required. This battalion is usually at high readiness during the period June to December which is the rainy season. Locally this is done in conjunction with the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM) and the Regional Corporations. The fourth role is national development. To this end the TTR is the main effort in the leadership and administration of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Military-Led Academic Training (MILAT) which are programmes focused on high risk youths. Lastly, the TTR takes the leading role with major event security when they occur. The Special Forces detachment is primarily involved in counter-terrorism and personal protection duties.

Closing the Gap

The security apparatus to interdict illegal drug shipments starts with trends and intelligence from International and Caribbean partners. This is then used by the radar centre to vector assets from the TTCG to intercept these vessels and confirm their cargo. In many instances because of the crowded environment (legitimate fishing vessels), short distance in both time and space, extensive possibilities available as landing points and corruption within the TTPS and TTCG it is difficult to intercept the majority of these vessels. Once this occurs, because the majority of land based security elements are focused in the urban areas there is limited capability to effect an interdiction on land in a timely manner. Owing to this mismatch of resources the criminal elements enjoy freedom of movement (centre of gravity) which allows illegal drugs and guns to enter the country and ultimately the hands of the gangs.

In order to close this gap, this paper proposes that the TTR can be more effectively employed if they are redirected from their internal security role and made to focus on border security, a role that they are better trained and equipped to perform. In so doing, there would be a persistent presence at the more vulnerable points along the coast as well as the adjoining forested areas where the arms are cached before they are transported to the urban areas via roadway, thus increasing the chances of influence, interruption and interdiction. Consequentially, the strategic end state which was stated earlier would be achieved. Figure 7 below depicts this new security posture that consists of three zones as opposed to the two that existed before in Figure 6.

Figure 7 – Proposed Disposition of Key Law Enforcement Agencies



Source: Constructed by the author

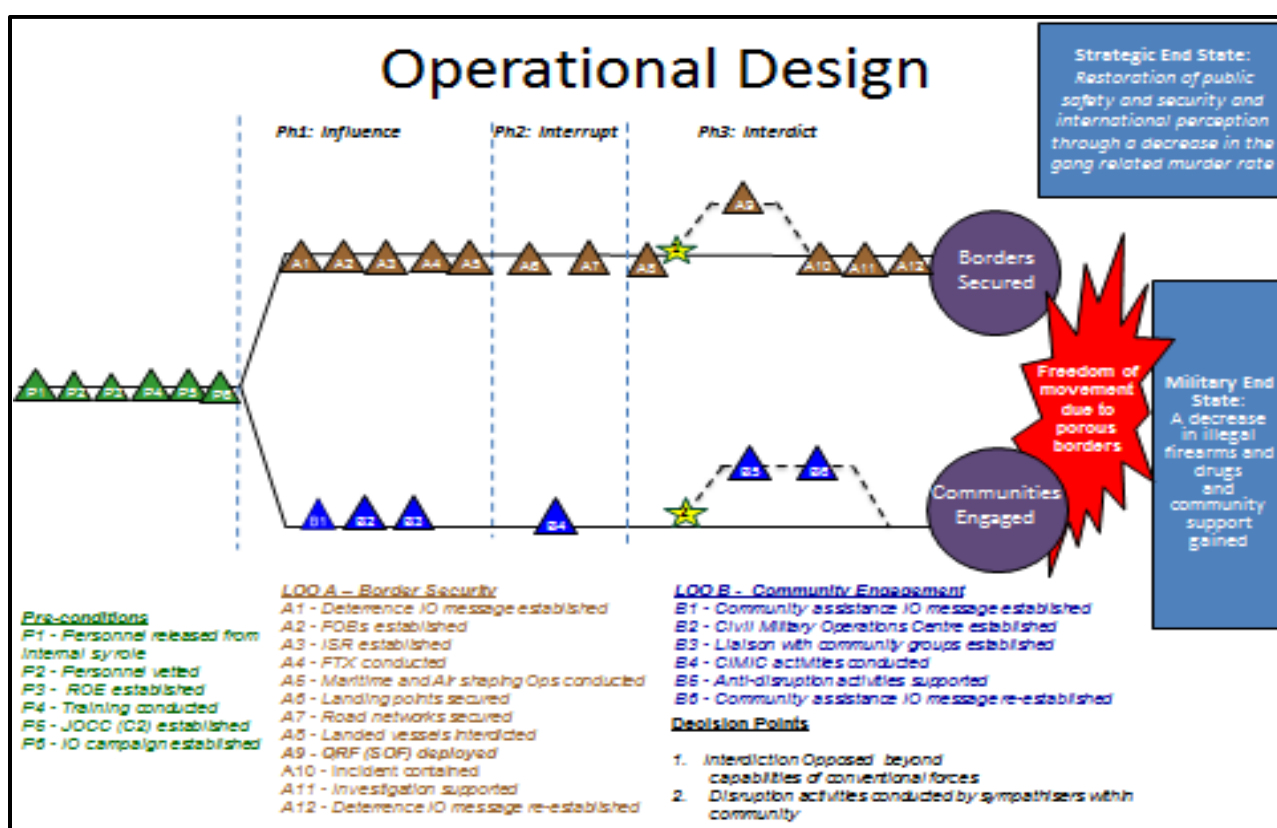
With the increases in the regular police service over the years, the absorption of 2000 Special Reserve Police Officers into regular service and reconstitution thereafter, it is felt that the TTPS is more than capable of filling the void in the crime hotspots once the TTR battalion is withdrawn.²⁵ As a critical capability, the joint operations centre would have to be strengthened in order to enhance interoperability and command and control. Similarly, ISR, riverine, information operations and sustainment (operating away from traditional lines of communication) capabilities would also be critical. Similarly, due to the vastness of the coast line and limited resources the TTCG and TTAG could conduct shaping operations to influence the use of the north coast where the landing points are fewer and the forested terrain is more conducive for light infantry operations. This would improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of the TTR to dominate the land domain. Equally important would be the civil military engagement within the rural communities to build support and cooperation. This would also assist with human intelligence (HUMINT) and influence activities among sympathizers and benefactors of the criminality that reside in those areas.

Regarding the Special Forces Detachment, the personal protection duties could be farmed out to the regular infantry or the Regimental Police. In light of this, it takes about one year to train a member of the SF compared to the two to three months that it would take to train a personal protection specialist. This therefore represents another mismatch in resources. The greater challenge however would be to create an appetite among the various principals to make the switch. The SF personnel could then be used to provide observation posts and quick reaction forces using TTAG helicopter assets for more high risk and contested environments. Since the TTR does not have powers of arrest and there are concerns with the corruption among elements

²⁵ Geisha Kowlessar "Police Service will absorb 2000 SRPs" Trinidad and Tobago Guardian 11 March 2016 <http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/2016-03-11/police-service-will-absorb-2000-srps>

in the TTPS, these operations could be done in conjunction with the Customs and Excise (C&E) who have jurisdiction in these areas. The Interdiction Unit of the C&E are paramilitary trained and would be best suited for this interagency role. As a pre-condition, training and vetting would need to occur. This should also occur periodically during the operation. A proposed operational design is shown at Figure 8.

Figure 8 - Proposed Operational Design



Source: Constructed by the author

Owing to how manpower intensive this border security role would be, it also presents a good opportunity for an expansion of the TTR. Based on the troops to task assessment, it is envisaged that another infantry battalion would be required. One battalion would focus on

ceremonial duties, one on border security and the third on training and administration. In this way, operational commitments would be met while addressing issues such as skill fade, readiness and work/life balance. Further it would ensure that the TTR is domestically responsive to other threats while retaining the flexibility to be regionally engaged. In this way they can do sustained, simultaneous operations while retaining the ability to surge if required. While the cost associated with standing up of another infantry battalion might be prohibitive due to the current economic stagnation, a cheaper and more palatable option in the short-run might be to recruit the numbers and absorb them into the existing infantry battalions where there is available space.

Table 1 below gives a ‘wave top’ time and cost comparison of both options.²⁶

²⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Gomez, telephone conversation with author, 5 May 2017.

Table 1 – Time and Cost Comparison of Options for a Battalion Strength Increase

Options	Time	Infrastructure Costs	Recurrent Costs	Total Costs
1. Stand-up a new battalion				
A. Purpose built camp	5 – 7 years	US\$10M	US\$10M	US\$20M
B. Pre-fab structures	1 – 2 years	US\$3M	US\$8M	US\$11M
C. Modified Pre-existing state-owned structure	6 months – 1 year	US\$1M	US\$7M	US\$8M
2. Recruit and absorb into existing infantry battalions	12 months - 4mths recruitment and selection - 4 mths training of first batch 250 pax - 4 mths training second batch 250 pax *Could be done in 8mths if batches trained simultaneously	US\$1.5M	US\$6M	US\$6.5M

Exchange Rate – US\$1 = TT\$7

**Source: Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Gomez Assistant Chief Staff Officer
Sustainment Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force**

Conclusion

This paper has looked at how the TTR could be more effectively employed in order to address the rising crime rate. It was established from the onset that the increasing homicide rate was one of the major areas of concern that needed to be addressed. Although it was acknowledged that a multi-sectoral approach was required, the scope of the paper only focused on one of the roles of the TTR as part of that approach.

Through a series of analyses a number of facts were established. Firstly, gang-related violence was responsible for the majority of homicides. Secondly, illegal guns were the weapon of choice in the committal of these homicides and they were made widely available due to the illegal drug trade. Thirdly, Trinidad and Tobago was attractive as a transshipment point for illegal drugs due to a combination of factors that included the success of interdiction activities in other countries such as Colombia and Central America, its proximity to Venezuela and porosity of its borders. Fourthly, the borders were porous due to a lack of presence of LEA, corruption and ability of boats to disguise themselves among legitimate fishing vessels within the various coastal communities. The combination of these factors made it easier for vessels carrying contraband to elude the TTCG and make it to land without being detected presenting a security gap.

The current roles of the TTR were then examined and it was proposed that if the TTR Bn that was employed doing internal security operations with the TTPS and the Special Forces personnel who were performing personal protection duties were redirected to perform border security the chances of deterrence, detection and interdiction would increase. In turn the availability of drugs and guns that fuel the gang-related crime and violence would be decreased along with the murders. In order to satisfy the issue of jurisdiction, it was proposed that these operations could be done in conjunction with the C&E and not the TTPS due to the concerns of corruption. In the short term, although the TTR was better trained and equipped to perform this role, it was emphasized that command and control was paramount along with the development of ISR, riverine, information operations and sustainment capabilities to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness going into the future. In addition to this, initial training to reorient soldiers and vetting would be important. Further, the establishment of a third infantry battalion was noted as

critical in order to facilitate training, readiness, and moral welfare and recreation concerns. While not the focus of this paper, all these areas are worthy of further analysis.

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