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THE BELIZE DEFENCE FORCE: ALIGNING CAPABILITIES WITH EXPECTATIONS

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Solo Flight

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By Major Eric Neal

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INTRODUCTION

Belize's complex security environment is further exacerbated because while its security forces must contend with traditional security threats, which originate from Guatemalan state and non-state actors, and Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs), they must now struggle with significant spikes in crime and violence, and assist health officials in addressing the Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic. As the Government of Belize attempts to formulate a comprehensive response mechanism to address both outbreaks, the role of the Belize Defence Force (BDF) within the process becomes pronounced.¹ *The Defence Act Chapter 135 of the Laws of Belize*,² delineates the BDF's mandate which entails, "the defence of Belize, the support of the civil authorities in the maintenance of order in Belize; and such other duties as may from time to time be defined by the Governor-General."³ The shift in the nature and gravity of the threats, however, compels the Government to alter its employment of the BDF. The quandary surfaces because the Government, on one hand, establishes its unwillingness to divert resources from its social protectionist position; but on the other, via the *National Security Strategy (NSS)* and the *Strategic Defence Review (SDR)*, delineates the defence priorities the BDF must achieve and provides strategic guidance for attaining those priorities over ten years.⁴ To accomplish defence priorities, as defined, the BDF requires significant increases in its annual budget, which at the time of the SDR was BZ \$41.7 M.⁵

¹ From this point forward I will refer to the Government of Belize as Government.

² From this point forward I will refer to this document as The Defence Act

³ Government of Belize. *Defence Act Chapter 135 Revised Edition 2011*, (Belmopan, 2011), 16

⁴ Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review*, 1

⁵ *Ibid.*, 22

Consequently, this paper will analyze the BDF's projections for the increase in its annual budget to devise an option that would adequately satisfy the Government's social protectionist platform, and enhance the BDF's capacity to readily fulfill the defence priorities.

SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Within the already complex security environment, the Government tries to effectively use its meagre security resources to address conventional security threats emanating from Guatemalan state actors, and those unconventional security threats deriving from the illicit activities of Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs), agrarian encroachments from Guatemalan non-state actors, gang violence, civil unrest, natural disasters, and pandemic and epidemic outbreaks.⁶ Moreover, the recent rise in violent crimes within Belize City compels the Government to declare a State of Emergency for the Southside of Belize City (SOE) for a period of thirty days. Accordingly, on the 18th March 2020, officials from the Ministry of National Security (MNS) explained that the SOE is a response mechanism "to 48 hours of violence which saw six people, including two five-year-old children, murdered and eight others shot."⁷ Consequently, the MNS deployed 250 police officers and soldiers, within designated areas of Belize City, to suppress criminal activity and arrest those responsible.

Recent developments serve to further underscore the evolving nature of Belize's security environment and the characteristics of the threats faced. While the BDF must maintain its readiness to effectively repel established threats, as outlined in its primary

⁶ Eric Neal. "Increase Defence Spending: There Is No Price for Peace and Stability." (Joint Command and Staff Course Paper, Canadian Forces College, 2020), 2.

⁷ *7NewsBelize.com*, "City Lockdown: Southside State of Emergency," accessed 02 April 2020, <https://7nesbelize.com/sstroy.php?nid=52433&frmsrch=1>

function, it must also be flexible enough to concurrently satisfy the conditions within its secondary and tertiary functions. The BDF, therefore, finds itself in a difficult situation because, whereas it must continue to provide manpower for routine standing, roving, and foot patrols across the country, it must also provide personnel to assist the BPD in repressing crime and violence in Southside Belize City.

The advent of COVID-19 has further complicated Belize's security environment, requiring the Government to take drastic measures, including closing all ports of entry.⁸ On Wednesday 1st April 2020, the Prime Minister of Belize announced that he would advise the Governor-General, to declare a thirty-day nationwide State of Emergency, effective midnight of the same date, inclusive of a curfew from 8:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. each day.⁹ The Government's response to COVID-19 rests on its ability to appropriately employ its resources to eliminate all threats and reassure the Belizean people that all is under control. The Government's efforts are a reflection of its understanding of two conditions: 1) the expansion of the definition of security from act(s) that eliminate danger(s) to include an act(s) of assurance(s),¹⁰ and 2) the reconceptualization of the concept of threats from those against the state, to include threats against the security of a region, the globe, and a particular population's way of life.¹¹ The broadening and reconceptualization of security and security threats are encapsulated in the NSS in which

⁸ *7NewsBelize.com*, "COVID-19 Shutdown, Belize Moves to Close Borders And Airport," accessed 2 April 2020, <https://7newsbelize.com/sstrotty.php?nid=52474&frmsrch=1>

⁹ *Amandala Newspaper*, "Prime Minister Dean Barrow announces nationwide State of Emergency," accessed 2 April 2020, <https://amandala.com.bz/prime-minister-dean-barrow-announces-countrywide-state-of-emergency/>

¹⁰ Hans G. Brauch. "Concepts of Security Threats, Challenges, Vulnerabilities and Risks." *Coping with Environmental Changes, Disasters and Security*, ed. J. Birkmann, B. Chourou, P. Dunay, P. Kameri-Mbote, C. Mesjasz, (Oswald Spring U., 2011), 61-106.

¹¹ Eric Neal. "Indigenous Peoples in Belize: Guaranteeing Rights and Security for All." (master's thesis, College of International Security Affairs, National Defence University, 2017), 7

the Government outlines its goals of guaranteeing the safety of its citizens and the protection of its national values and way of life. The Government, therefore, comprehends that internal challenges are the primary threats developing states, like Belize, continually face,¹² and it is only prudent that it employs its security forces, in this case, the BDF, in achieving its security goals.

The rise in crime and violence and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic illuminate the evolving nature of security threats Belize faces, and underscore the importance of providing or obtaining the required resources to facilitate the BDF's receipt of adequate capabilities to concurrently and effectively satisfy the demands of the three roles within its mandate. The employment of the BDF, in support of the civil authorities to repel the spike in crime and violence and to control the spread of COVID-19, indicates the severity of the threat domestic factors pose to Belize's national security. Moreover, some experts underscore that using the military in domestic affairs, in this case, to repel crime and violence, is not usually a sign of order but an indication that the military is being used as an instrument of political violence.¹³ While the use of the military as an instrument of political violence may be true in many Latin American nations, history has proven that Belize and Costa Rica are the only two countries in the region that are yet to experience any coup d'état¹⁴ or civil wars.

The unique 'Centralized Command and Centralized Control' relationship between the BDF and the MNS, the close relationship between the public and Government

¹² Alexander Barnett and Michael N. Wendt, "Dependent State Formation and Third World Mobilization," *Review of International Studies* Vol. 19 (1993): 329

¹³ Steven R David 1991, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics*. Vol.43, No. 2 (1991): 233-256.

¹⁴ Fabrice Lehoucq and Anibal Perez-Linan, "Regimes, Competition, and Military Coups in Latin America," *Comparative Political Studies*, 4 accessed 22 February 2020, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228256258/>

Officials, and the overall peaceful nature of Belizeans negate the immediate possibility of the BDF being used as an instrument of political violence. Additionally, these conditions provide the Government with ample justification for its prioritization of investments in the BDF because the Government opines that it does not rely on the BDF to guarantee Belize's peace and security but rather "on diplomacy and diplomatic engagements."¹⁵ The Government's reliance on diplomacy becomes pronounced and sheds light on the need to review the BDF's projections, for an increase in its annual budget, to prevent any possible competition for finite resources between acquiring capabilities to accomplish defence priorities, and other social programs. Therefore, the Government's Social protectionist platform must be fully comprehended to appreciate the need to conduct a review of the two options for an increase in the BDF's annual budget as outlined in the SDR.

GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL PROTECTIONIST PLATFORM

The current United Democratic Party (UDP) administration, led by the Right Honorable (Rt. Hon.) Dean O. Barrow, Prime Minister of Belize, was elected into office in March 2008 on the premise that it would foster social and moral renewal built on lowering taxes, reducing the cost of living, widening the social safety net, and improving the quality of and accessibility to education and health care.¹⁶ This premise, therefore, initiates and continues to inform the Government's current social protectionist platform whose pillars are promoting social equity (pro-poor initiatives), providing quality education, and creating viable employment opportunities.¹⁷ This section will underscore

¹⁵ Ministry of Defence, *National Security Strategy*, 14

¹⁶ United Democratic Party, "Imagine the Possibilities." (Manifesto 2008), 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-13

the significance the Government's social equity and education initiatives play in promoting its social protectionist platform.

The Government's social equity agenda entails numerous programs; however, this paper will highlight the important role BOOST and Food Pantry programs play in facilitating the Government's social objectives. BOOST is the acronym for "Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation" which was implemented in Belize in 2010 as a mechanism to address the nation's worsening poverty situation and to promote the development of children by breaking the cycle of family poverty.¹⁸ The program's target group entails five particular vulnerable populations: pregnant women, children ages four and under, school-aged children (ages five to sixteen), elderly persons ages sixty and above, and persons with disabilities.¹⁹ The program is administered through the provision of conditional cash transfers to poor households to ensure greater school attendance and to promote higher rates of pre-natal check-ups for pregnant women and immunization for children ages four and under.²⁰ The Government has received great praises from the World Bank due to its successful implementation of the BOOST program and the tangible results inline with the program's objective of raising school attendance and the rates of prenatal check-ups and child immunization. Sara Berger, a World Bank Social Protectionist Specialist, noted that Belize is ahead of its contemporary nations because it is advancing the dialogue from a pragmatic perspective to the realization of a systemic one.²¹ Accordingly, the program has been able to accommodate approximately 8,200

¹⁸ The Consultancy Group, *Impact of Belize's Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (BOOST)*, 2

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4

²⁰ United Nations, "Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation, BOOST," *Non-contributory Social Protection Programs Database*, accessed 17 April 2020. <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/cct>

²¹ *Guardian*, "Belize has the Best Pro-Poor Program in the Hemisphere," accessed 19 April 2020. <https://www.gaurdian.bz/belize-has-the-best-pro-poor-program-in-the-hemisphere/>

persons or 3,200 households with a maximum monthly disbursement of BZ \$492.00 per beneficiary household.²²

Officials from the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation, and Poverty Alleviation, the Ministry that administers the BOOST Program, further underscore the successes and importance of the program by highlighting the Government's focus on improving the quality of life for Belize's poor. They report that before the UDP Administration took office in 2008, Government's annual investment in social programs was BZ \$500,000.00; however, since the implementation of BOOST, the Government has increased its investment in the program to BZ \$5.2 M annually.²³ The significant increase in the annual investment indicates the Government's commitment to social programs in achieving its social campaign and egalitarian mandate.

While BOOST is widely proclaimed as the social program for the poor, Food Pantry also serves to further facilitate the Government's social protectionist platform. The Food Pantry program, however, does not provide financial incentives but offers food items, to qualified persons, at a significant discount. This program was initiated in 2012 as a mechanism to fight against malnutrition by providing basic food baskets. The program is tailored to vulnerable populations in Belize, Cayo, and Toledo Districts, accommodating approximately 17,000 eligible individuals and offers them weekly opportunities to purchase food baskets, valued at US \$25.00, for less than half the price.²⁴ Food Pantry Program is also a success; consequently, the Government intends to expand

²² The Consultancy Group, *Impact of Belize's Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (BOOST)*, 26 & 32

²³ *Guardian*, "Belize has the Best Pro-Poor Program in the Hemisphere," accessed 19 April 2020. <https://www.gaurdian.bz/belize-has-the-best-pro-poor-program-in-the-hemisphere/>

²⁴ Food and Nutrition Security Platform (FNS), "Food Pantry Program," accessed 19 April 2020. <https://platformacelac.org/en/programa/325>

the program, valued at BZ \$2.5 M, to benefit more communities across the nation.²⁵ The Government's investment in these two programs alone is estimated at BZ \$7.7 M annually and caters to the basic needs of approximately 25,200 poor Belizeans. This enormous effect must be considered when examining the feasibility of the BDF's options for increases in its annual budget.

While BOOST and the Food Pantry programs are central to the Government's social equity agenda, providing access to quality education is equally important. In 2009 the Minister of Education, Hon. Patrick Faber, explained the Government's position on the importance of providing vulnerable populations' access to secondary education. In so doing he expressed that the UDP Administration would provide all students from the southern districts of Stann Creek and Toledo, a BZ \$300.00 subsidy to attend high school, while those from the remaining districts of Belize, Cayo, Corozal, and Orange Walk would receive such based on certain criteria. Accordingly, approximately 4,000 students would be eligible for the subsidy which would cost the Government BZ \$1M annually.²⁶ This investment reflects the Government's focused efforts at trying to effect change in the negative educational projections for the country.

In their report, "Challenges and Opportunities in the Belize Education Sector," Haydèe Alonzo, Dougal Martin and Emma Naslund-Hadley highlight the troubling situation within Belize's education system between 1999 and 2009, where a large section of youth are outside the school system and are exposed to gang activities.²⁷ Alonzo,

²⁵ *Guardian*, "Belize has the Best Pro-Poor Program in the Hemisphere," accessed 19 April 2020. <https://www.gaurdian.bz/belize-has-the-best-pro-poor-program-in-the-hemisphere/>

²⁶ *Amandala Newspaper*, "Southern primary schoolers to get \$300 subsidy vouchers at graduation," accessed 19 April 2020. <https://amandala.com.bz/news/southern-primary-schoolers-to-get-300-subsidy-vouchers-at-graduation/>

²⁷ Haydèe Alonzo, Dougal Martin, and Emma Naslund-Hadley, "Challenges and Opportunities in the Belize Education Sector," (Inter-American Development Bank, 2013), 3.

Martin and Naslund-Hadley indicate that while urban children are more likely to attend school than rural children, children from wealthy families are far more likely to be enrolled in secondary schools.²⁸ This economic disparity presents a significant justification for the type of investment the Government has and continues to make in Belize's education sector. Records indicate that since assuming office, the UDP Administration has increased the annual education budget from BZ \$169.5 M in 2008/09 Fiscal Year²⁹ to BZ \$288.3 M in 2020/21 Fiscal Year.³⁰ The current figures translate to a BZ \$118.5 M growth in spending over the last twelve years which is also an approximate 70% rate of increase. This increase, therefore, has facilitated the Government's countrywide expansion of the school subsidy program guaranteeing that all students from rural areas would receive the BZ \$300.00 subsidy voucher.³¹ The UDP Administration indicates that up to 2015 it has increased access to pre-school education by 6%, achieved a 95% rate of enrollment for children in primary schools, and it has increased the gross secondary school enrolment by 13%. Lastly, the Administration underscores its successes in creating educational opportunities for over 1000 students in vocational training institutes.³²

The Government's estimated increase investments in social and educational programs, between 2009 and 2020, are significant, amounting to approximately BZ \$210.9 M and directly affecting over 40,000 Belizeans. However, recent developments

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6

²⁹ Ministry of Finance, *Approved Estimates for Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal year 2009-2010*, (Belmopan: Approved by the House of Representative and the Senate, March 2009), 221

³⁰ Ministry of Finance, *Approved Estimates for Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal year 2020-2021*, (Belmopan: Approved by the House of Representative and the Senate, March 2020), 121

³¹ *Channl5Belize.com*, "M.O.E Begins Handouts of School Subsidy Countrywide," accessed 19 April 2020, <https://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/16689>

³² United Democratic Party, "The Best is Yet to Come," (Manifesto 2015), 36

due to COVID 19 further underscore the importance of the Government's social protectionist platform. Although schools are closed and the possibility that the academic year will end prematurely, the social equity agenda, inclusive of BOOST and Food Pantry Programs, is in overdrive. The Prime Minister, in his COVID-19 update, presented the efforts his administration is taking to effectively address the medical and socioeconomic concerns of the nation. In so doing, he highlighted the Government's intent on investing BZ \$12 M in the Food Pantry program which would cater to almost 17,000 Belizeans. Moreover, he explained the Government's determination to spend BZ \$100 M in BOOST to accommodate current beneficiaries and the enrollment of all those who are currently beneficiaries of the Food Pantry program. Accordingly, this transition will allow all vulnerable citizens to receive longer and more reliable social benefits.³³

The BZ \$210.9 M investment in social equity and educational programs over the last twelve years and the proposed BZ \$112 M in urgent COVID-19 social relief speak volumes of the Government's commitment to its social protectionist platform. However, the complexity arises because both of the BDF's options for increases in its annual budget present a significant competition for those scarce resources usually reserved for social programs.³⁴ The Government remains adamant that its pro-poor programs are non-negotiable; moreover, it will not divert any resources from its social protectionist platform.³⁵ The Government's position is clear, therefore, the BDF must do one of two things. The BDF must either convince the Government, especially within the current

³³ Belize Press Office, "Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Dean Barrow Updates Nation on COVID-19 Response April 16, 2020," accessed 18 April 2020. <https://www.belize.gov.bz/>

³⁴ *Military Cost-Benefit Analysis*, ed. François Melese, Anke Richter, and Binyam Solomon (Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2016) 36

³⁵ *The San Pedro Sun*, Prime Minister Dean Barrow presents 1.2 Billion Budget for 2019/20." Accessed 20 February 2020. <https://www.sanpedrosun.com/government/2019/03/22/prime-minister-dean-barrow-presents-1-2-billion-budget-for-2019-2020/>

security environment, of the importance of investing in its defence capabilities to facilitate its effective fulfilment of the defence priorities and the execution of the three functions within its mandate, or it must reassess its current projections to reflect the current fiscal reality. The latter option sounds most reasonable.

REVIEW OF OPTIONS

Having evaluated the Government's Social Protectionist Platform, understood its pillars, and appreciated the effects COVID-19 has on the Government's capacity, it is evident that the Government is severely restricted. The Government has to prioritize how it employs its security resources to adequately address its routine conventional and unconventional security threats while concurrently supporting the medical personnel who are dealing with the direct effects of COVID-19, and to impose the nationwide SOE. These demands indicate the need to promote the flexibility of securing forces so they can promptly address the changing threats Belize faces. *The Defence Act* positions the BDF as the prime entity which, to an extent, can satisfy the Government's security requirements, within a wicked environment. For the BDF to meet those demands, especially the defence priorities, the Government must consider investing in its capabilities. The *SDR* presents two options for an increase in defence spending through which the Government can improve the BDF's capacity, permitting it to effectively satisfy the defence priorities, and stabilize the nation's security environment. It is under this premise, enhancing the BDF's capacity to readily achieve defence priorities and stabilize Belize's security environment, that the review of the BDF's options, as presented in the *SDR*, will be conducted.

Belize's security environment continues to evolve, however, the pillars of national security and defence, which guide the BDF, remain. The BDF endeavours to maintain the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belize; reduce local and transnational crime, and provide the necessary environment for a prosperous and stable Belize.³⁶ These pillars are accommodated

³⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review*,7

within the BDF's mandates, as outlined in *The Defence Act*, but the problem arises when the capacity to effectively and simultaneously satisfy the pillars and mandates surface. If the provision of the necessary environment for a prosperous and stable Belize is paramount, the Government needs to comprehend there will be some measure of competition between defence spending and social programs; moreover, and most importantly, the outcome of effective defence spending is peace, which is the greatest public good.³⁷ While peace is the desired outcome, and the pillars and mandates are at the forefront, the leadership of the BDF must be mindful that the most significant threats to Belize's national security do not necessarily emanate from those for which a defence force primarily exists. Moreover, the leadership of the BDF must remember that the Government relies heavily on diplomacy as its primary means of guaranteeing Belize's national security; consequently, it has to ensure its options for the increase in defence spending can accommodate the enhancement of the Force's capacity and do not create any competition with the social sector for scarce resources.

The BDF's assessment of its capability gaps focuses on numerous factors; however, this analysis will present the annual estimates for the current budget, and Options 1 and 2. Moreover, the analysis will present the costs associated with four line items: human resources, equipment, infrastructure, and training and readiness respectively. Figure 1 presents three budgets and provides a visual of the increases requested in comparison to the current budget.

³⁷ Melese, Francois, Anke Richter and Binyam Solomon. *Military Cost-Benefit Analysis, Theory and Practice*, (Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2016) 36,37

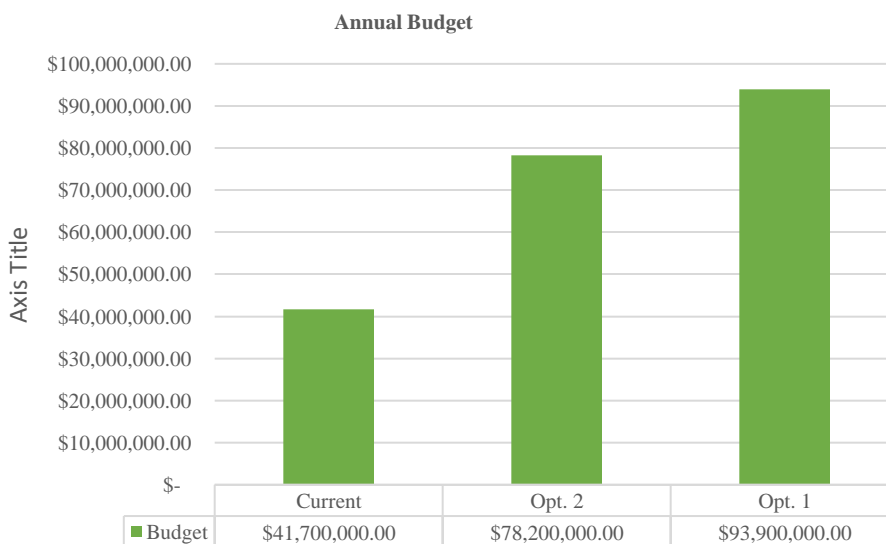


Figure 1 – The Increase in Annual Budgets
Source: Ministry of Defence, SDR,

As presented, Opt. 2 is BZ \$36.5 M more than the current budget, reflecting an 88% rate of increase per annum over ten-years while Opt. 1 is BZ \$52.2 M more, indicating a 125% rate of increase per annum for the same period. In both instances, the requested increases are enormous and show potential growth in ratio to GDP from 1.2% to 2.3% and 2.7%.³⁸ These rates of increase may be counterproductive because they will create a competition for scarce resources, particularly given Belize’s current socio-economic situation. However, to greater appreciate the BDF’s options for increased defence spending, the line items in the budget will be further reviewed.

Figure 2 presents the spending for each line item within each budget period, and this analysis will continue by focusing on human resources, and training and readiness because these two line items will be the foundation for the development of the recommendation.

³⁸ Ministry of Defence. *Strategic Defence Review*

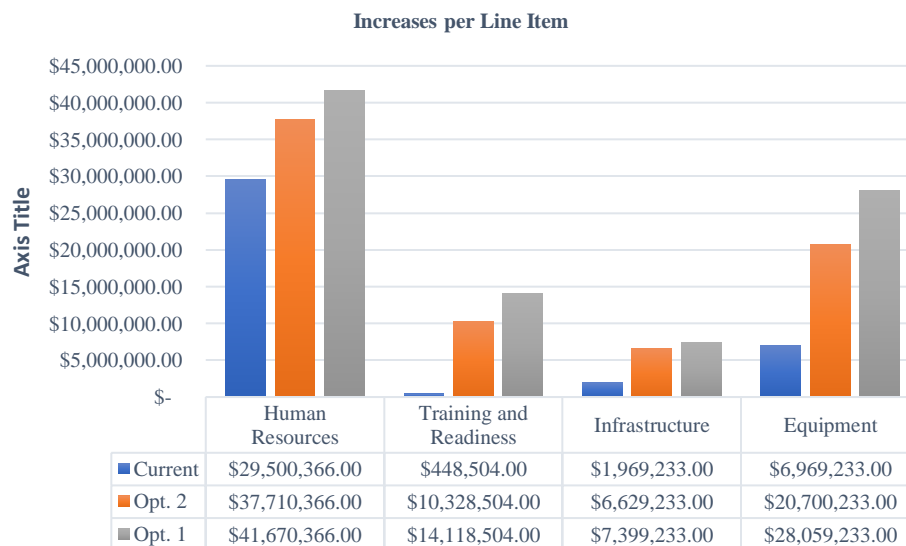


Figure 2 – Increase per Line Item
Source: Ministry of National Security, *SDR, pages*

In all three instances, human resource is the largest section of the budget, absorbing 71%, 48%, and 44.4% respectively. Further analysis reveals that the increase between the current budget and Opt. 2 is BZ \$ 8.21M or 28%, while for Opt. 1 it is BZ \$12.17M or 41.3% rate of increase. Looking at the numbers, the increase in Opt. 2 translates to the BDF hiring 412 persons over ten years, or an average of forty-one persons per year.³⁹ However, further review of the information presents an anomaly. Opt. 2 calls for a BZ \$8.21M increase to hire forty-one soldiers per year, projecting the annual salary of each soldier to be \$200,243.90.⁴⁰ Using the BDF's current Payscale, an entry-level private soldier receives a Daily Rate Of Pay (DROP) of BZ \$36.54 or BZ \$13,337.10 annually.⁴¹ When calculated, the BDF would be able to hire an average of sixteen private soldiers for the salary of each of the estimated forty-one soldiers as projected under Opt. 2. Moreover, the BDF would be able to hire approximately 656 soldiers, within its first

³⁹ Ibid., 33

⁴⁰ This projection is based on the calculation BZ \$8.21 M/41 = \$200,243.90

⁴¹ Ministry of Finance, *BDF Payscale*

projected year, which would result in a savings of BZ \$73.89 M within option over ten years. Additionally, Opt. 1 projects to hire 610 persons for BZ \$121.7 M over ten years or sixty-one soldiers for BZ \$12.17 M per year, which equates to each soldier receiving a yearly salary of BZ \$199,508.20. Using the same DROP as above, the BDF would be able to hire fifteen soldiers for each of the sixty-one as projected; moreover, with the BZ \$12.17M budget for human resources, the BDF would be able to hire 915 soldiers within the first year, 305 more than this option's initial projection which may result in a huge savings of BZ \$109.53 M within option over ten years.

While the projected increases for spending on human resources reflect a somewhat gradual annual increase, the same cannot be said for training and readiness (T&R). Figure 2 presents the current annual budget for T&R as BZ \$ 448,504.00. Opt. 2 requests BZ \$10.33M which is an estimated annual increase of BZ \$ 9.98 M or 2,203 %. Opt. 1 requests for BZ \$14.12M which is an estimated annual increase of BZ \$13.7M or 3,048% rate of increase. To advance a balanced analysis of the requested increases in T&R as presented in Opt. 1 and 2, this paper will focus on five activities: Standard Local Courses, Company on Training, Helicopter Air Crews, Light Fixed Wing Transport Crew, and In-shore Maritime Patrol Vessel Crew. For Opt. 2, these activities account for BZ \$53.7M over ten years, or approximately BZ \$5.37 M per year; and for Opt. 1 the aforementioned activities account for BZ \$75.8 M or BZ \$7.58 M yearly. These activities, within option, would require increases of 1,197.3% and 1,690% respectively.

The significance of the individual increases and the gravity of these potential savings, under human resources, must be observed within the context of Belize's current socio-economic environment as affected by COVID-19 and influenced by the

Government's social protectionist platform. The question must be asked, does the BDF truly require the increases as reflected or can it achieve the defence priorities within the confines of the current budget? Evidently, asking for 88% or 125% increases in the annual budget will present a competition with the Government's social protectionist platform, and they might not actually enhance the BDF's versatility. Therefore, having analyzed the projections for human resources and T&R, and appreciated respective gravity, this paper serves to formulate a recommendation that would theoretically promote the BDF's versatility and should be acceptable to the Government.

RECOMMENDATION

Having understood the Government's Social Protectionist Platform and the main areas for the projected increases in spending, it is evident that both options as presented by the BDF require substantial increases, creating direct competition for the scarce financial resources. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government allocated approximately BZ \$328.19 M of its BZ \$1.24 B budget to the Ministries of Education and Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation. This allocation equates to 26.5% of the nation's budget which further underscores the Government's dedication to its social protectionist platform.⁴² Furthermore, the Government has indicated that it plans to invest BZ \$112 M to provide social assistance through the BOOST and Food Pantry Programs. Moreover, due to the rise in unemployment, the Government also has to provide relief to over 23,000 affected Belizeans with BZ \$300.00 monthly.⁴³ Accordingly, the Government has borrowed BZ \$75 M from the Central Bank as a mechanism to assist those who are unemployed due to COVID-19. The first tranche of

⁴² Ministry of Finance, *Approved Estimates for Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal year 2020-2021*, (Belmopan: Approved by the House of Representative and the Senate, March 2020), 19

⁴³ *Amandala*, "Government's assistance to persons unemployed due to COVID-19 crisis begins this week," accessed 20 April 2020. <https://amandala.com.bz/news/governments-assistance-to-persons-unemployed-due-to-covid-19-crisis-begins-this-week/>

unemployment relief has cost the Government approximately BZ\$12M.⁴⁴ Financial experts have projected that the cost of the unemployment relief efforts will double [cost BZ \$150M] over the next seven months.⁴⁵ The Government is projected to spend BZ \$262 M on social programs and unemployment relief, associated with COVID-19, over the next seven months, and if the relief efforts are projected over ten years, it would cost the Government BZ \$2.62 B, which dwarfs both options as projected by the BDF. Therefore, the BDF must demonstrate its capacity to efficiently use current resources and partnerships to enhance its capabilities and achieve defence priorities.

COVID-19 has demonstrated that militaries, in this case the BDF, can no longer develop its capabilities which are solely to repel established security threats; moreover, the BDF has to comprehend its unique role where it is frequently called upon to support the civil authorities as opposed to thwarting an invasion from state actors. For the BDF to effectively enhance its capabilities, given the new reality, it has to reassess its current budget and practices. It must be able to properly use its human resources in defending, stabilizing, and assisting within Belize. Adapting to the future [Belizean] security environment through the proper management of human resources is imperative, and the [BDF] must formulate a mechanism to enhance the skills and readiness of its membership to accommodate the changing demands of the operational environment.⁴⁶ In the BDF, matters associated with human resources consume 71% of the annual budget, demonstrating the importance of strategically managing human resources to enhance capabilities and achieve defence priorities.

The BDF's working allocation for salaries and personal emoluments, and training and readiness, as reflected in the *SDR*, is approximately BZ \$30 M, which accommodates paying and

⁴⁴ Humes, Aaron (March 2020), "\$75 Million package for unemployed, breakingbelizenews.com/2020/03/25/75-million-package-for-unemployed/

⁴⁵ *Amandala*, "Government's assistance to persons unemployed due to COVID-19 crisis begins this week, accessed 20 April 2020. <https://amandala.com.bz/news/governments-assistance-to-persons-unemployed-due-to-covid-19-crisis-begins-this-week/>

⁴⁶ Ross Fetterly, "The Importance of People in Defence," Canadian Global Affairs Institute. May 2018, 1-4

training 1385 active members and approximately 450 Volunteers (Reserves).⁴⁷ While it is understandable that the Force would need to upgrade its primary arms (rifles and machine guns), acquire more troop carrying vehicles, and improve its flight capabilities, given the current socio-economic projections it does not require all those as outlined in the *SDR* to accomplish its goals. The BDF can find a way to incorporate the Volunteers into its routine operations such as guard duties, cooks, clerks, and drivers, providing the Force greater flexibility to support the Ministry of Health in its anti-COVID-19 efforts, help the police implement the conditions of the SOE, and continue providing resources for routine operations. The incorporation of the Volunteers will be a cost saving mechanism because unlike the active duty members, the members of the Volunteers are paid based on days worked; moreover, a significant majority are students who use the finances gained to pay for their education. This incorporation further relates to the Government's efforts to make education more accessible and promote technical vocational training, and can be a significant partnership the BDF can enter to enhance its technical capacity while promoting the Government's social protectionist platform.

Evidently, the BDF has the human resources to accomplish the defence priorities; the problem it faces is strategically managing of all its resources. The BDF must reevaluate its training cycle against its structure and projections to identify course that do not need to be conducted yearly but probably once every three years. In 2019 the BDF's training calendar forecasted 151 activities within the calendar year thirty-three of which are not required to be conducted annually, because there is no immediate need for the skill, many persons are still awaiting promotion, and the skills acquired are not maximized for the development of the Force.⁴⁸ Spreading courses out, incorporating better promotional and job placement policies will serve to allow the leadership of the Force to identify areas that require investment, post soldiers in areas they are skilled, save a lot of money from repetition, and turn the BDF into a cost effective entity.

⁴⁷ Ministry of National Security, *FHQ Paper, Belize Defence Force*

⁴⁸ Ministry of National Security, *Forecast of Events 2019, Belize Defence Force*

Tough times call for tough measures and the BDF must follow the lead of the Ministry of Finance, which has implemented a cost-saving mechanism to support the Government's COVID-19 relief efforts. In so doing, the Ministry as initiated a 3-5% cut of current expenditure, within three major activities, which equates to approximately BZ \$62M.⁴⁹ If the BDF conducts a strategic review of the problematic areas of its budget, which contain all discretionary spending (material and supplies, operating and maintenance costs, and public utilities) totalling approximately BZ \$11.04 M, it can save upwards of 15% or BZ \$1.7 M. It can use those projected savings to incrementally increase the Force's armory and equip soldiers so they can provide greater security assistance.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has complicated Belize's security environment and illuminates the importance of strategic management of scarce resources. While the *SDR's* projections did not consider the crippling effects a pandemic would have on Belize, the BDF has been provided with ample reasons for the judicious use of resources to support its main objectives. Government does not have the capacity to facilitate the increase, if but just a percent, in defence spending at this moment or the foreseeable future. Evidently, the BDF will have to make better use of its current budget and human resources in defending, stabilizing, and assisting within Belize. Consequently, the BDF has to grasp that though its primary mandate is the defence of Belize, its routine employment reflects its secondary and tertiary mandate, indicating it does not require significant investments in its defence capabilities because the Government has indicated that it relies on diplomacy and diplomatic efforts to guarantee Belize's national security.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Finance, *Cost-Saving Measures Re: COVID-19 Pandemic*.

The effects of COVID-19 on Belize are real and require the Government to take drastic measures, inclusive of cost-savings. The BDF projections for increases in defence spending, on the other hand, are desirable and do not reflect the Belizean reality. Current times call for the leadership of the BDF to conduct another strategic review, in this case of its current capacity and policies, to ensure that the BDF can use current resources to effectively, defence Belize, assist the civil powers in the maintenance of law and order, and to continue supporting NGOs.

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