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## **IRON BLOCK: A WHOLE-OF-NATION APPROACH TO NATIONAL SECURITY**

**MAJOR ERIC R. NEAL**

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NATIONAL SECURITY**

**Major Eric R. Neal**

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# IRON BLOCK: A WHOLE-OF-NATION APPROACH TO NATIONAL SECURITY

## AIM

1. The Government of Belize struggles to employ its meagre security resources to readily address multiple conventional and unconventional threats to its national security. The departments under the Ministry of National Security namely: Belize Defence Force (BDF), Belize Coast Guard (BCG), and Belize Police Departments (BPD) were overwhelmed with the security environment, highlighting the need for urgent reorganization and reprioritization. The Government of Belize, through the National Security Council and the Ministry of National Security, implemented strategies to address the threats gang violence and Transnational Criminal Organizations pose while using diplomacy to appositely combat aggression from the Guatemalan Armed Forces (GAF). The Government of Belize, however, is experiencing significant difficulty in effectively repelling the illicit activities of Guatemalan non-state actors (Campesinos), in the Chiquibul National Park (Chiquibul), and in addressing the grievances of its Indigenous Peoples. These two problems are inherently related because both groups are indigenous and Belize's Indigenous Peoples account for a significant majority of Belize's security forces. This service paper serves to analyze the driving influences behind the persistence in Campesinos actions and the grievances of Indigenous Peoples to provide recommendations for a multifaceted strategy, incorporating a Whole-of-Nation Approach, to foster a greater sense of national security for Belize.

## INTRODUCTION

2. **Campesinos:** Within the last twenty years, Belize has experienced an increase in illicit Campesinos activities within the Chiquibul, which forms an estimated forty-four kilometres of Belize's remote and uninhabited shared western border with Guatemala. Approximately 53,000 Campesinos live adjacent to the Chiquibul which encompasses almost 437,000 acres and represents 7.7% of Belize's landmass. According to Friends for Conservation and Development (FCD), the national park's co-manager, the Chiquibul has an estimated value of over \$3.43 Billion BZ or US \$1.72 Billion.<sup>1</sup> The prolonged absence of Belizean security forces, from the Chiquibul, fosters the Campesinos' belief that the Chiquibul is an extension of Guatemalan territory. Consequently, the nature of the Campesino threat compelled a prompt response and between 1999 and 2007 the Government of Belize militarized the Chiquibul. The response resulted in a sharp increase in violent confrontations and forced the Government of Belize to partner with FCD and implement a civil-military strategy which saw the increase in the amount of observation and conservation posts in the Chiquibul, FCD taking the lead to patrol the area with BDF relegated to a support role, and soldiers trained in the proportional use of

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<sup>1</sup> Friends for Conservation and Development. *State of the Chiquibul Forest*. 2016, p.1

force and non-lethal weapons on patrols. FCD further reported that Campesino illicit activities between 2012 and 2015 resulted in almost BZD 62 Million in damages in the Chiquibul; moreover, trends indicated a continuous increase in activities because the economic value of the operations far outweighed the security risks.<sup>2</sup> The new civil-military temporarily halted in April 2016 with the shooting death of a Campesino teenaged boy well inside the Chiquibul at the hands of Belizean authorities.<sup>3</sup> The persistence in violence becomes the basis for the urgency in implementing a Whole-of-Nation Approach, incorporating efforts from the Organizations of American States (OAS), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), local NGOs and indigenous leaders, to satisfy the Human Security needs of Campesinos, reducing tensions and fostering Belize's national security.

3. **Indigenous Peoples:** The Government of Belize and its Indigenous Peoples are in a bitter dispute over the latter's assertion of its right to ownership of ancestral lands. These lands, for the most part, encompass a majority of Belize's ungoverned spaces and form a significant portion of the shared western and southern border with Guatemala. While the Government of Belize employs its security forces to guard strategic outposts, tries to effectively repel Campesino activities, and combat crime and violence in Belize City, it is further confronted with the significant role Indigenous Peoples play in Belize's national security. Accordingly, the Indigenous Peoples account for almost forty per cent of Belize's security forces, further complicating the security environment.<sup>4</sup> The Indigenous Peoples in Belize and the Campesinos share one common heritage and recent activities have indicated there is a consorted effort, by indigenous leaders along the Belize-Guatemala border, to forge cross-border unification of grievances.<sup>5</sup> Noting the complex role Indigenous Peoples play within Belize's security environment a multifaceted strategy is required to effectively address indigenous grievances, while blocking the potential for the evolution of cross-border unification. Furthermore, the strategy must centre on a Whole-of-Nation Approach promoting the incorporation of indigenous rights to ownership of ancestral lands within the Constitution of Belize by harnessing efforts from selected Ministries of Government while integrating efforts from some International Organizations, indigenous leaders, and local NGOs.

## DISCUSSION

4. This paper will firstly discuss the underlying influence (s) behind Campesinos activities within the Chiquibul and provide possible solutions. Subsequently, the paper

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 2

<sup>3</sup> Walker, Margath. "Belize-Guatemala Border Tensions put needed Cooperation at Risk". World Politics Review. 19 May, 2016. Accessed 21 October, 2019. <https://worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/18835/belize-guatemala-border-tensions-put-needed-cooperation-at-risk>

<sup>4</sup> Eric Neal. "Indigenous Peoples in Belize: Guaranteeing Rights and Security for All." (master's thesis, College of International Security Affairs, National Defence University, 2017), 1

<sup>5</sup> "Indigenous People Leaders from Belize and Guatemala meet." Guardian Newspaper. March 26, 2015. accessed 21 October 2019. [http://guardian.bz/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9282%3Aindigenous-people-leaders-from-belize-and-guatemala-meet&Itemid=91](http://guardian.bz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9282%3Aindigenous-people-leaders-from-belize-and-guatemala-meet&Itemid=91)

will discuss the foundation of the grievances of Belize's Indigenous Peoples, the Government's response, and outline the importance of using unconventional security methods in addressing those grievances.

### **Campesinos issues:**

5. The BDF was the primary agency employed to repress Campesino activities in the Chiquibul. Reports indicated that since the militarization of the Chiquibul, Belizean authorities were directly responsible for ten Campesino deaths while no Belizeans were killed by Guatemalan authorities.<sup>6</sup> The resulting increase in Campesino deaths exacerbated the brittle relationship between Belize and Guatemala and prompted the Government of Belize, through the Ministry of Defence (now Ministry of National Security), to partner with FCD and formulate a civil-military strategy to effectively address the problems Campesinos pose to Belize's national security and to present a benevolent image to the international community. However, the Guatemalan response to the teenager's death exemplified the complex security environment Belize finds itself. Guatemala deployed 3,000 soldiers to military camps along the shared western border as a signal of dissatisfaction and Guatemala's explicit intent to use force to protect its citizens.<sup>7</sup> The potential for the escalation of state to state tensions highlights the need for a more comprehensive strategy incorporating non-military organizations.

6. The persistence in Campesino activities highlights the complexity of the situation. Maureen Taft-Morales in her report "Guatemala: Political, Security, and Socio-Economic Conditions and U.S. Relations," emphasized the gap between Guatemala's rich and poor populations, underscoring that a significant majority of Guatemala's poor live in rural areas. Moreover, Taft-Morales accentuated that Guatemala's Indigenous Peoples predominantly live in rural areas and comprised the majority of the nation's population that live in abject poverty.<sup>8</sup> The content of Taft-Morales' report presented the role poverty plays as the driving influence behind the Campesinos' illicit activities in the Chiquibul. To complement Taft-Morales' revelations, FCD reported that between 2012 and 2015 the damages caused as a consequence of Campesino illicit activities, in the Chiquibul, was approximately BZD 62 Million and trends indicated a continuous increase because the economic value of the operations far outweighed the security risks. Additionally, it was projected that there would be a 2.2% annual population growth within Campesino communities.<sup>9</sup> The economic benefits of the illicit activities within the Chiquibul and the projected increases in Campesino communities provide the urgency for the formulation of a multifaceted strategy to address some of the human security requirements of the Campesinos.

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<sup>6</sup> Allan Hernandez. "Guatemala Sends 3,000 Soldiers to Its Border with Belize." Vice News. April 22, 2016. accessed 17 October, 2019. <https://news.vice.com>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Maureen Taft-Morales. "Guatemala: Political, Security, and Socio-Economic Conditions and U.S. Relations." Congressional Research Service. August 7, 2014. accessed 21 October, 2019. <https://www.fas.org>.

<sup>9</sup> Friends for Conservation and Development. *State of the Chiquibul Forest*. 2016, p.2

## **Indigenous Issues:**

7. While the Government of Belize tries to comprehend and adequately address Campesino activities in the Chiquibul, it must also contend with its Indigenous Peoples. The Indigenous Peoples of Belize continue to assert their right to ownership of the ancestral lands they occupy; however, the Government of Belize does not respect their ancestral claims and ignores their assertions. These assertions have been supported by the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples where Article 26 denotes “Indigenous Peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.”<sup>10</sup> The Convention further directs states to give legal recognition to those territories.<sup>11</sup> The Government refutes the declaration noting that it was not legally binding. Consequently, the Indigenous Peoples took legal action against the Government of Belize and in 2009 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) concluded that the Indigenous Communities in the Toledo District of Belize proved their communal property rights over the lands they occupy.<sup>12</sup> The Government of Belize still refused to adhere to the IACHR conclusion so the Indigenous Peoples took their case to the Supreme Court of Belize. The Government’s persistent refusal to adhere to declarations and conclusions frustrates the indigenous community. Given the significant role Indigenous Peoples play within the security forces and the indication of a consorted cross-border effort to unify indigenous grievances, it is not wise for the Government to continue aggravating the relationship it shares with its significant stakeholder in security.

8. The Indigenous Peoples were cognizant of the importance of public support to their cause; consequently, they adopted the slogan “Maya Struggle is Belize’s Struggle,” effectively shifting public sentiment to their side.<sup>13</sup> In 2010, the Chief Justice of Belize, following the precedent set by IACHR, ruled in favour of the Indigenous Peoples declaring they were entitled to their rights as asserted and the Government of Belize must incorporate those rights in the Constitution.<sup>14</sup> The Government of Belize’s refusal to incorporate indigenous rights into the Constitution, created an environment of hostility between both parties, sending the wrong message to non-indigenous Belizeans on access to indigenous ancestral lands. In June 2015 a Creole Belizean, Mr Rupert Miles, was found in the indigenous community of Santa Cruz building a wooden structure on sacred indigenous lands without indigenous permission. He was ordered to stop but instead

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations. 2007. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. New York, NY.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Organization of American States. 2009. “Indigenous and Tribal Peoples’ Rights Over Their Ancestral Lands and Natural Resource: Norms and Jurisprudence of the Inter-American Human Rights System.” *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights*. Washington D.C.

<sup>13</sup> Schertow, John Ahni. 2007. “Massive Court Victory for Santa Cruz and Conejo Maya.” *Intercontinental Cry*. accessed 19 October 2019. [https://intercontinentalcry.org/wp-content/uploads/maya\\_struggle\\_belize\\_struggle\\_small.jpg](https://intercontinentalcry.org/wp-content/uploads/maya_struggle_belize_struggle_small.jpg)

<sup>14</sup> 7 News. 2010. “CJ: Maya has Customary Land Rights.” accessed 11 October 2019.

<http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php>

became belligerent. His actions prompted a collective indigenous response resulting in him being handcuffed, tied up, a chain placed around his neck, and paraded through the principal streets of the village.<sup>15</sup>

9. In response to the Rupert Miles incident, the Government of Belize deployed a team of paramilitary police officers to quell the situation. Tensions further flared as the police officers used excessive force to detain and arrest those chiefly involved. The police treatment of those accused drew significant backlash from the wider indigenous community and tensions between the Government of Belize and its Indigenous Peoples became noticeable through the absence of indigenous members from the police team. The Government's reliance on force reflects the tendency of third world countries to use security forces to protect regimes, "in third world countries, armed forces often become political tools, imposing indiscriminate violence to maintain a political status quo".<sup>16</sup> Underscoring the complexity of the security environment and the special role Indigenous Peoples play in Belize's security forces, the Government of Belize must use available resources to incorporate indigenous land rights into the Constitution. The Government of Belize, therefore, cannot afford for tensions between itself and its Indigenous Peoples to evolve into violence because it risks repeating the Guatemalan 1979 Panzos massacre of 130 Campesinos.<sup>17</sup> Noting the possibility for the outbreak of violence, the Government of Belize needs to take proactive measures to reopen genuine lines of communication with its Indigenous Peoples, address the source for grievances, prevent the evolution of cross-border unification, and enhance Belize's national security.

## CONCLUSION

10. The Government of Belize has tried its best to adapt to the changing security environment; in so doing, however, it has failed to grasp the evolving dynamics of security. In using conventional security means, the Government of Belize has instead facilitated a spike in violence within the Chiquibul, and eroded the trust between itself and its Indigenous Peoples, enabling an environment for the accelerated evolution of internal indigenous tensions into cross-border unification and possible indigenous radicalization. The effects of the Government of Belize's strategies, therefore, underscore the ineffectiveness in the persistent reliance on the application of force to address unconventional threats. The negative effects also provide greater justification for the implementation of a multifaceted strategy to address the root of experienced influences and grievances to effectively reduce tensions, promote the resilience of affected peoples, and ultimately provide the Government of Belize greater leverage to effectively employ its meagre security resources.

11. There is no guarantee that a plan perfectly complements the situation for which it

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<sup>15</sup> 7 News. 2015. "Black Belizean Handcuffed, Hauled Out of Mayan Village in Toledo." accessed 11 October 2019. <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php>

<sup>16</sup> Keith Krause. 1998. "Theorizing Security, State Formation and the 'Third World' in the Post-Cold War World." *Review of International Studies*. Vol. 24: 125-136.

<sup>17</sup> Organization of American States. "Report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Republic of Guatemala." *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights*. (Washington D.C. 1981).



was developed, but in understanding, there is a need to shift from strategies that are not working is the first step in the right direction. A multifaceted Whole-of-Nation Approach will provide the Government of Belize the ability to use every aspect of national power while incorporating the efforts of community leaders, international organizations, and social partners, who are experts in addressing the human security needs of aggrieved communities. Moreover, in adopting a multifaceted Whole-of-Nation Approach the Government of Belize can present itself as the leader in promoting the coexistence of classical and contemporary systems of governance within Belize.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

12. It is highly recommended that the Government of Belize adopts the Iron Block to incorporate the efforts of multiple ministries, agencies and organizations to develop a comprehensive framework to address some Human Security needs of Campesinos. The strategy will rely on efforts from the Ministries of National Security, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture and the Environment, Natural Resources, the Attorney General, and Local Government. Furthermore, the Iron Block will involve the efforts of FCD, the collection of Indigenous Leaders, from both sides of the border, and international organizations such as UNDP and the OAS. The supervision of the Office of the OAS in the Adjacency Zone (AZ), over this entire process, will be essential in providing technical expertise while adding credibility. The framework will effectively delineate land and identify agricultural activities the Campesinos can conduct while infusing indigenous land practices to protect the environment. Since poverty is the driving influence behind Campesino activities in the Chiquibul, it is presumed that by providing Campesinos with land and complementing recourses, and promoting the subsistent use of demarcated natural resources, in line with indigenous ancestral customs, there will be a sharp reduction in illicit activities and the accompanying violence within the Chiquibul. Evidently, the positive results of Iron Block can reduce state to state tensions between Belize and Guatemala, promote the resilience of Campesino communities, diminish the strain on Belize's natural resources, and forge better relations between the Government of Belize and its Indigenous Peoples as both entities try to amicably and concurrently address the root of indigenous grievances.

13. In response to indigenous grievances, Iron Block will seek to employ designated Ministries of Government while incorporating efforts from the OAS, UNDP and FCD in its dialogue with Belizean indigenous leaders to promote the resilience of indigenous communities focusing on the tenets of Human Security. The strategy will rely on efforts from the Ministries of National Security, Attorney General, Natural Resources, Agriculture and the Environment, Local Government, Human Development Poverty Alleviation and Social Transformation, Immigration and Nationality, and the National Security Council Secretariat. The OAS' participation would centre on providing technical guidance on how to incorporate indigenous land rights into the Constitutions, providing the legal framework for the demarcation of concerned villages, and the instruments to officially hand lands over to corresponding indigenous leaders. The Ministries of Natural Resources, and Agriculture and the Environment, in partnership with FCD, will

collaborate with indigenous leaders on sustainable usages of natural resources to foster a symbiosis between subsistent and commercial appreciation for natural resources. The Ministries of Local Government, Attorney General, and Immigration and Nationality will educate indigenous leaders on their rights and powers under the Constitution while urging their cooperation in promoting the legal movement of non-Belizean indigenous peoples within those communities. The Ministry of Human Development Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation, the OAS and UNDP will lead the effort to coordinate with indigenous leaders to promote the resilience of indigenous communities as prescribed. It is presumed that the implementation of this multifaceted strategy will address the root of indigenous grievances, reduce the friction between the Government and its Indigenous Peoples, foster greater collaboration in combatting the negative effects of Campesino activities and posturing the Government of Belize as the beacon in exemplifying the synchronicity between the classical indigenous system and contemporary systems of governance.

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