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Redefining the Mission: Strategic Development of an HADR Capability in the Barbados Defence Force

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Exercise Solo Flight

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**Redefining the Mission: Strategic Development of an
HADR Capability in the Barbados Defence Force**

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REDEFINING THE MISSION: STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF AN HADR CAPABILITY IN THE BARBADOS DEFENCE FORCE

“Capability Based Planning (CBP) and Future Force (FF) design never have a defined end-state but instead constitutes a series of strategic “aim-points” that will continue to evolve and shift based on an ever-changing Future Operating Environment (FOE) and changing resource constraints.”¹

The Barbados Defence Force (BDF) was established as a fulltime military force in 1979 during the period of the Cold War with the stated responsibility of the “...defence of Barbados and such other duties as the Defence Board determines.”² The Defence Act goes on to note that the Defence Force may be reconfigured into different units or other military bodies.³ The 1979 configuration of the BDF which still currently exists, provides for an Infantry Unit in the form of the Barbados Regiment (BR) which encompasses both Regular and Reserve Force personnel, a maritime unit in the form of the Barbados Coast Guard (BCG), which is similarly constituted as the BR and finally, the Barbados Cadet Corps – which focusses on youth development. As the BDF prepares to undertake the first Strategic Defence Review (SDR) since its formation, it is proposed that given changes in the operating environment, specific capabilities be developed to focus on the threats that have emerged in recent years. Over the last 5 years, the BDF has been engaged in many disaster response operations in Barbados and the wider Caribbean region – namely, responses to numerous hurricanes, volcano eruptions, medical responses with respect to Covid 19 among others. Therefore, it is mooted that notwithstanding a strategic defence review, Barbados should develop a dedicated Humanitarian Assistance

¹ Capability Based Planning Handbook 2019

² Sec 4. Defence Act Chapter 159. Laws of Barbados

³ Sec 5. Defence Act Chapter 159. Laws of Barbados

and Disaster Response (HADR) capability, which would also be key in the further development of the foreign and security policy of the country.

The original structure of the BDF focused mainly on internal security (IS), Military Assistance to the Civil Power (MACP) and Military Assistance to the Civil Ministry (MACM) operations. These aspects along with the all-important state ceremonial duties, provided the ‘raison-d’être’ of the BDF. It would be a fallacy to suggest that the BDF did not provide HADR support throughout its existence. Indeed, even prior to 1979, the Barbados Regiment (which was a Reserve Regiment only) conducted numerous operations in the aftermath of weather systems in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. The important point to note then and now, is that these responses were seen as collateral duties and not the main effort. Forty-three years on however the Operating Environment has changed. What CARICOM IMPACS in its 2013 Security Strategy deemed as Tier four risks – climate change, pandemics and migratory pressure – are clearly upon us today⁴. At the time those risks were defined as ‘future risks’ with unknown probabilities and consequences. But this is certainly not the case at this time. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13 – Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact, clearly signals to the world that it can no longer be business as usual with regards to how the world treats to the environment. The United Kingdom Ministry of Defence in a recently published strategic approach to climate change noted that:

⁴ CARICOM IMPACS. CARICOM Crime and Security Strategy 2013: Securing the Region. https://caricom.org/documents/12057-caricom_crime_and_security_strategy.pdf Last accessed 27 May 2022.

“...the need for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operations will become increasingly common. Disasters at home and abroad are likely to grow in intensity and frequency. Defence will face new challenges and will need to collaborate with new types of partners to deal with them.”⁵

In Barbados, Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley has continuously stressed the need for the world to pay more attention to the effects of climate change and especially what it means for Small Island Developing States (SIDS).⁶ She has also raised the level of discourse and has articulated what changes could be brought about within the international financial organisations in order to soften the impacts of climate change and pandemics on SIDS and what the consequent funding models to be pursued to ensure continued economic viability of those fragile economies could look like⁷. It is clear that the operating environment has changed considerably from where it was nine years ago, when CARICOM IMPACS formulated its security strategy and therefore new methodologies have to be put in place in order to grapple with the conditions that present themselves today.

One important question that may be raised at this juncture is whether or not the Barbados Defence Force’s current disposition could adequately deal with any threats faced that would lead to the conduct of HADR operations. In this context HADR operations can be defined as responses to sudden onset disasters whether natural or

⁵ Ministry of Defence. Climate Change and Sustainability Strategic Approach. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973707/20210326_Climate_Change_Sust_Strategy_v1.pdf. Last accessed 27 May 2022.

⁶ United Nations. Barbados - Prime Minister Addresses United Nations General Debate, 76th Session (English). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wz_IDnay3H8 Last accessed 27 May 2022.

⁷ Chloe Farand. Mia Mottley: the ‘fearless’ leader pushing a global settlement for the climate frontlines. <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2021/11/18/mia-mottley-fearless-leader-pushing-global-settlement-climate-frontlines/> Last accessed 27 May 2022

manmade. These disasters cause serious disruption to society's ability to function effectively. Given the Internal Security mandate, both on land and at sea, the BDF finds itself challenged when required to conduct HADR ops. Let there be no doubt however, these tasks are executed in a manner which exemplifies the Force's motto of Excellence. HADR operations in Dominica, Antigua, British Virgin Islands during the 2017 hurricane season,⁸ St. Vincent in 2021⁹ and in Barbados since the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic have been seen as successes. But did this come at a cost? Security operations were prioritized in line with the available manpower resources.

Mr Jeff Payne, of the NESA Center, astutely notes that while HADR operations are a constant within multilateral security cooperation, they often lack sufficient attention among senior leaders and not enough resources are made available to forces, hence necessitating investment in this area¹⁰. He contends that "...budgets need to reflect the inevitability of crisis situations and that adequate protocols exist within government structures to empower operators to respond to those in need." Additionally, resources need to be made available for operators to participate in training exercises, workshops and seminars and to ensure that the equipment and personnel are certified and fit for deployment. So while having a dedicated capability that is specifically resourced to conduct these operations may be considered best practice in today's operating environment how can a resource challenged small island developing state afford to achieve this worthwhile objective?

⁸ <https://www.caribbeannationalweekly.com/caribbean-breaking-news-featured/rss-ends-humanitarian-mission-dominica/>

⁹ CDEMA. Barbados Defence Force HADR Contingent deployed in aftermath of Volcanic eruption. <https://twitter.com/cdemacu/status/1380958234681442306?lang=en> Last accessed 27 May 2022

¹⁰ Jeff Payne. Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies. Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Following Covid 19. <https://nesa-center.org/humanitarian-assistance-disaster-relief-following-covid-19/> Last accessed 27 May 2022.

It may be argued that given the existential threat posed by climate change, it may be a case of how can Barbados *not* afford to allocate resources to the development of this capability? To its credit, the Government of Barbados has always responded effectively when required. In 2020, at the outset of the Covid 19 pandemic, Government determined that there needed to be a dedicated isolation facility and allocated resources for the repurposing of a former United States Naval Base to establish what is now an ultra-modern medical facility¹¹. Funds from international agencies such as the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) were accessed in order to complement what government had allocated to cope with the health emergency¹². There has also been traditional support over the years for those affected by the ravages of hurricanes, flooding or any other such disaster. In the aftermath of Hurricane Elsa in 2021, Government set about a programme to repair or replace over 1,000 homes which were severely impacted.¹³ These events should be a reminder of the importance of HADR and therefore it is imperative that the Barbados Defence Force pivots from the traditional internal security operations (which are still of great importance!) and conventional warfare doctrine, to a construct in which operators can better prepare for and function in a complex multi-hazard environment. The response in the aftermath of the eruption of La Soufriere volcano in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in April 2021, was done within the context of the ‘new’ operating environment. At the time, the country not only faced the fallout from a volcanic eruption during the Covid 19 pandemic but also faced a dengue outbreak, flooding from

¹¹ Loopnews Barbados. Facility at Harrison Point to be used as Covid 19 Isolation Center.

¹² CAF. USD 100 million to Mitigate Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Barbados. <https://www.caf.com/en/currently/news/2020/07/caf-approves-usd-100-million-to-mitigate-economic-impact-of-covid-19-in-barbados/> Last accessed 27 May 2022.

¹³ Gov't's housing repairs efforts post-Hurricane Elsa gets solid support. <https://barbados.loopnews.com/content/govts-housing-repairs-efforts-post-hurricane-elsa-gets-solid-support> Last accessed 27 May 2022.

unseasonal rains and the threat from Hurricane Elsa early in the Hurricane Season.¹⁴ The response to the Earthquake in Haiti in 2021 was also within the context of a multi hazard environment. The ongoing Covid 19 pandemic, the passage of Tropical Depression Grace and a deteriorating political situation made for a challenging environment.

What therefore would be required in order to satisfy a true multi- mission capability to operate within the multi-hazard environment? It is submitted that an organisation with engineering, medical, urban search and rescue (USAR) and hazmat capacity would serve the needs of the country and by extension the Caribbean region by providing a ‘local’ response in a timely manner as required. Under the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) protocols, the region is divided into four zones (sub regions) with a country in each sub region designated as the sub-regional focal point (SRFP). Barbados is the SRFP with respect to responses to emergencies in Dominica, St. Lucia or St. Vincent, and the Barbados National Disaster Agency (NDA), takes the lead in the coordination of related activities. Mrs Elizabeth Riley, Executive Director of CDEMA, in her presentation to CANSEC 2022 indicated that there was a need to ‘...strengthen HADR capability and coordination in regional militaries’. This capability must be supported by upscaling of maritime capability and strategic airlift through greater predictability in partnerships. At present, there is very limited maritime logistic capability and there are very few platforms available which can provide the type of support required. Many of the regional Coast Guard vessels are configured for Counter narcotic and anti-gun and anti-smuggling operations but not for heavy logistic

¹⁴ Elizabeth Riley. Presentation entitled Multinational Cooperation in a Changing Operational Environment. Caribbean Nations Security Conference (CANSEC) 2022, Bridgetown Barbados 5 – 7 April 2022.

moves. Only the Bahamas Defence Force and the Trinidad Defence Force possess adequate maritime logistic capability. With regards to air, none of the military forces control any medium or heavy lift capabilities. This is to be addressed at the governmental level as it is a gap that must be filled. At present the Multi National Civil-Military Coordination Cell (MNCCC) – which is made up of partner nations (UK, Canada, USA, France, Kingdom of the Netherlands) – assist with the provision of stratlift when required.

The Barbados Defence Force has already taken some steps to strengthen its HADR capability. After the 2017 Hurricane season, the BDF sought to improve medical surge capacity through the establishment of a World Health Organisation (WHO) Type 1 classified Emergency Medical Team (EMT)¹⁵. This EMT is manned by regular and reserve force personnel, along with some civilian volunteers and can deploy in the event that the health care system in Barbados or any neighbouring country is overwhelmed. The BDF Field Medical Team can provide treatment, trauma stabilization, OBGYN, Xray, lab and pharmacy services, while fully supporting itself with all living requirements (Water and Waste management, messing, power generation etc.) Additionally, efforts are underway to improve the engineering capacity of the Force in order to provide additional civil engineering, USAR and hazmat capabilities. It is envisaged that the deployable medical response team and the Engineers should co-exist

¹⁵ PAHO/WHO Emergencies News. Barbados team classified by WHO as the first Emergency Medical Team in the Caribbean.
[https://www3.paho.org/disasters/newsletter/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=648:barbados-classified-as-the-first-emergency-medical-team-in-the-caribbean-by-the-who&catid=317&Itemid=101&lang=en#:~:text=submit%20this%20form-.Barbados%20team%20classified%20by%20WHO%20as%20the,Medical%20Team%20in%20the%20Caribbean&text=The%20Barbados%20Defense%20Force%20\(BDF,EMT\)%2C%20in%20the%20Caribbean.](https://www3.paho.org/disasters/newsletter/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=648:barbados-classified-as-the-first-emergency-medical-team-in-the-caribbean-by-the-who&catid=317&Itemid=101&lang=en#:~:text=submit%20this%20form-.Barbados%20team%20classified%20by%20WHO%20as%20the,Medical%20Team%20in%20the%20Caribbean&text=The%20Barbados%20Defense%20Force%20(BDF,EMT)%2C%20in%20the%20Caribbean.)
 Last accessed 27 May 2022.

under one command in order to form a multi-mission team that can focus on rendering assistance as required. However this cannot be done in a vacuum. The right conditions for success have to be established at the political and strategic level. A clear mandate has to be set for the Unit and properly articulated in order for there to be a wide understanding of the roles and responsibilities of persons at all levels in the organisation. There must be prior engagement to ensure that operators are provided with the right tools and personnel in order to execute the tasks that will be presented to them.

There must also be the appropriate budgetary support at the national level in order to ensure the sustainability of the HADR Unit. This must be seen as an investment rather than a cost as it will be a costly enterprise to ensure proper maintenance, training and also conduct of operations. Payne was correct in his summation of the inevitability of crisis situations – what is therefore required is the right level of commitment and planning. The build out of the BDF Field Medical Team could not have been possible without the assistance of international partner nations and several donor agencies. While this method of funding does not present a pathway to assured success, it does take some pressure off of the Government with respect to initial investment and they would be better able to focus on maintenance and future replacement of capital assets. Further to developing the strategic mandate, a robust procurement process should be established to support the enterprise.

The development of a multi mission HADR Unit is nothing new. Within the Caribbean region, the Jamaica Defence Force regularly stands up its Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART) to support affected countries as the need arises¹⁶. The Trinidad and

¹⁶ JDF Website. DART Team deployed to the Bahamas. <https://www.jdfweb.com/dart-team-deployed-to-the-bahamas/> Last accessed 27 May 2022

Tobago Defence Force also puts together a similar Team within the Southern Caribbean. It is envisaged however that a similar organisation for Barbados would be focused primarily on response activities and training and preparing for any eventuality. MACM operations would then become the secondary role to be conducted and would provide opportunities for community engagement and to build trust and support among the population accordingly. The Caribbean is somewhat fortunate to have a robust collection of regional organisations and agreements which would also provide avenues for further training and engagement.¹⁷ HADR operations are made less complexed when operating under the any of the aforementioned treaties.

It was originally posited that the Barbados Defence Force should establish a HADR unit in order to meet the new threats which face the country, even in the absence of the strategic defence review. This view remains. This is not to say that a Strategic Defence Review is not warranted – it is in fact long overdue. However, if it does not happen, does this mean that the current structures which clearly are not fit for role should continue to exist? It may be presumptuous thinking but the SDR should indicate that there is a need for transformative action to take place in line with what has been laid out here. Indeed, the reflection necessary for the establishment of the Unit would also present the authorities with the opportunity to review and update the existing Draft National Security Strategy to take account of the new threats and the impact on human security among other things. The current National Strategic Plan of Barbados 2006-2025 is also

¹⁷ These agreements include the Regional Security System Act Chapter 174B, CARICOM Treaty on Security Assistance and the CARICOM Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA)

largely silent on the existence and impact of these current threats¹⁸. Furthermore, the expeditionary nature of the unit will provide an opportunity to develop the regional integration ideals of CARICOM. Caribbean people working together for the betterment of the region projects a certain level of self-confidence. CDEMA has already shown by their many successful operations, that it can be done. Yes, a little help from our friends is required but Caribbean nationals do possess many of the required skill sets to effectively manage these disaster situations.

The threat of climate change and the increasing ferocity and number of storms is hardly likely to change. Information from the Seismic Research Unit of the University of the West Indies, indicates that there is a high degree of seismic activity in the Eastern Caribbean and therefore, it is necessary to prepare for that eventuality as well.¹⁹ With respect to pandemics, UNESCO has reported that there is a likelihood that pandemics will increase in frequency and severity²⁰. These threats are not fading quietly into the night. What is recommended is bold, innovative and firm action at the political and strategic level to properly establish and resource the Unit. Time is not at a premium as we have seen over the past two years of the pandemic. The number and diversity of disasters which have impacted the Caribbean region over the past five years is enough to give credence to the notion that action must be taken not only to mitigate but also to respond and to respond effectively and efficiently. It should be noted that this will not be a panacea for all the issues faced in operating within the complexed multi hazard

¹⁸ National Strategic Plan of Barbados 2006 – 2025. <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/bar174639.pdf>
Last accessed 27 May 2022.

¹⁹ <https://uwiseismic.com/earthquakes/eastern-caribbean-earthquakes/>

²⁰ UNESCO. Pandemics to increase in frequency and severity unless biodiversity loss is addressed. <https://en.unesco.org/news/pandemics-increase-frequency-and-severity-unless-biodiversity-loss-addressed>
Last accessed 27 May 2022.

environment. However, being prepared to do so will make a major difference and can result in saving time in response, which can translate to saving lives.

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