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The Need for Multidimensional Collaboration and Interoperability within Caribbean States

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

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THE NEED FOR MULTIDIMENSIONAL COLLABORATION AND INTEROPERABILITY WITHIN CARIBBEAN STATES

Introduction

The coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic which manifested itself worldwide in early 2020 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, highlighted the uncertainties that exist in the world where a crisis can develop in a very short space of time and become globally disruptive to everyday lives. The worldwide apprehensions and uncertainties were just as immediately obvious among Caribbean leadership and within the citizenry of each Caribbean island. As the pandemic and the invasion continues to unfold, citizens in, and in transit within the Caribbean and Caribbean residents located out of the region have been traumatized because they are not sure of what is being done to maintain their security and safety. Is there an evacuation plan for persons from the regions outside of the Caribbean, who are being severely affected to be repatriated back to the Caribbean? This was one of the first questions asked in both scenarios, how do we in the Caribbean maintain our current lifestyles and standards of living being so dependent on trade and assistance from countries external to the region? The chaos was immediate and the only way to have mitigated the effects of the events would have been to have a plan prepared, along with resources dedicated long before the actual events and also taking into consideration and preparing for the long-term effects of these events. A security plan for the region should be widescale with a view of protecting assets within and outside o the region.

The reality of the Caribbean islands surrounds the fact that the nations, territories, or dependents are small with limitations on the resources that they individually have at their disposal. Therefore, in these times of global uncertainties which can disrupt economies and threaten the lives and livelihood of Caribbean states and their citizenry without any warning, there is a need to define, establish, and put into effect a 'regional strategy and plan of action'. This should be a strategy outside of the traditional security considerations facing the region such as transnational crime, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. This plan is for the islands in the Caribbean to deal with emergencies and events that will often be external to the area but significantly impact our economies and citizens.

At the onset of the covid-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian invasion, Caribbean citizens all over the globe, and in particular in the affected regions, looked to their leadership for solutions. There was no plan of action for being our own first responders, and while there are immediate implications for the safety of property and personnel, there are long term material implications relating to issues including the repatriation of personnel, maintaining communication and information flows, cyber security, transportation security, fuel security, and food security during and after these events.

Thesis Statement

Most Caribbean states are generally unprepared and are dependent on first-world nations' assistance in dealing with sudden traumatic events, whether natural or manmade, in the global arena. This paper proposes that a collective regional strategy would help prepare for and mitigate the sudden traumatic effects of global events. The plan of action for the region should include developing a multidimensional and collaborative regional strategy, that collectively uses

the information and physical resources that the islands within the region have at their disposal, in being their own first responders, by planning, preparing for, and executing the plans in the shortest possible time in order to mitigate and recover the traumatic effects of the global events.

For the purposes of this paper, the key terms being used are defined; (i) multidimensional collaboration refers to collaboration within and among the various levels of governance from the community, national, regional, and international levels collaboration; it is also not limited to a particular type of event or disaster but the possible range of natural and unnatural international events that may negatively affect the Caribbean region. (ii) Interoperability refers to the ability of groups to synergistically operate with each other's tools, platforms, and equipment, without the issues of compatibility, towards the desired goal.

Factors affecting the Caribbean

There are thirteen (13) Caribbean independent nations and an additional twenty-one (21) islands, that are considered 'territories or dependent' nations in the region. This is compounded by language and other cultural barriers as the English, Spanish, French, Dutch, and Portuguese all have influence within the region. Because most of the Caribbean states are so small and with physically limited resources, there are gaps from the perspective of the individual states and islands in how we can cover and treat the numerous security and safety concerns. The islands regarded as territories and dependent states have the backing of their parent nations, however, the response in times of crisis may not be spontaneous especially if the parent nation is experiencing crises on its own shores.

It is proposed that in order to maximize the efforts in dealing with the issues brought on in the global environment, a Caribbean regional strategy will require a collective and integrated approach of pooled information resources, integration of persons and systems, and a mindset of collective ownership and responsibility. Therefore, looking at the possible scenarios and the solutions for the threats will require a multidimensional integrated regional security and interoperational contingency plan.

The United States of America has been dominant in Caribbean affairs more specifically as it relates to security, during and after the cold war. The problem with the US policy in the Caribbean, according to Knight and Persuad (2001), is that traditionally, the US policies focused on preventing hemispheric powers from getting a foothold in the Caribbean and ensuring that the US maintains access to the natural resources located within the Caribbean. The Caribbean states, who from time to time have demonstrated that they are committed to defending their individual sovereignty, have basically been using threat and intelligence reports and assessments that were primarily based on the threats to US national interests. Bryan (2011) in addressing Caribbean security cooperation in the 21st century posits that the critical security issues, especially for small Caribbean states, are not whether they should cooperate but rather in what manner and the mechanisms they should employ to overcome the obstacles to cooperation.

Disaster Management in the Caribbean

The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) was established in 1991, as the regional intergovernmental disaster management agency within the Caribbean. The primary responsibilities of CDEMA include the coordination of emergency services and relief efforts for participating states that need such assistance. The organization's main focus is to enhance and ensure regional sustainable development by reducing the risks and losses associated with natural and technological hazards and disasters (www.CEDEMA.org).

CARICOM (Caribbean Community and Common Market) is an institution that was established to coordinate some political and economic activities within the region. Not all the islands in the Caribbean are members of CARICOM as only fifteen have accepted the treaty and terms to promote economic integration and cooperation among its members, to ensure that the benefits of integration are equitably shared, and to coordinate foreign policy. Those efforts appear to be limited in their scope with the main intention of shaping policies for the region that encourages economic growth and trade. Very rarely do the discussions within the CARICOM group have meaningful considerations or any plan for implementing strategies involving security and mitigating security and safety-related threats to the region.

McNaughton et al (2019) in making a case for comprehensive disaster management in the Caribbean, speak to the importance of knowledge sharing as a key enabler, which when enhanced with collaborative technologies becomes very important to Small Island Developing States (SIDS). He speaks to the development of the 'Knowledge Broker' which is a part of an ICT system used for disaster management in the Caribbean. As in the case of Caribbean countries, he explained that SIDS are exposed to and affected by similar environmental issues although they may vary in socio-cultural and economic characteristics. The lack of information and resource sharing can lead to knowledge silos and wasted resources as entities end up investing and recreating solutions that already exist. So, with the challenges of limited resources mainly due to relatively small size and populations in diverse locations and the susceptibility to external shocks, there would be huge benefits of collaboration in addressing the issues. The plan for knowledge sharing and collaboration must include tools and technologies needed to support collaboration and sharing of resources and a central authority without which, the expected collaboration will be limited. McNaughton speaks further to the conversion of individual and group knowledge into accessible knowledge which connects other people and other knowledge with other people and knowledge and one of the first steps in establishing the Knowledge Broker is to engage all the region's stakeholders in demonstrating the Knowledge Broker.

Canada Prepared for the Worse

After the Cold War, the Canadian government made it a priority in producing an assessment of the threats that Russia posed to its state and its citizens. During the process, the Canadian government recognized that one of the first actions within the plan was to do a "made in Canada" intelligence assessment. Having recognized that Canada could not wait until an event, and in particular one originating from Russia, negatively impacting its country, they saw it necessary to do their own threat assessment and develop their strategy of multidimensional collaboration and

interoperability. Aronsen (2004) stated that in preparing for Armageddon and doing assessments of the Russian threat to Canada after the cold war, the Canadian government thought it necessary to make a 'Made in Canada' intelligence assessment. Just as currently being experienced in the Caribbean, the perceived vulnerabilities from the Canadian intelligence assessment shifted the Canadian government's approach and prioritized filling those gaps. This intelligence estimate which was initially conducted without public oversight was able to assist and inform the decision-making process. The initial production of the assessment was to further integrate the efforts of the 'all of government' and, 'all of the country' approach that combined military intelligence with the recommendations of External Affairs, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and the Scientific Intelligence Defence research agency. This production of the assessment also included other groups outside of government including academia, private organizations, and focus groups which enabled the Canadian government to focus on the country's own security interests and the threats that were unique to them and not a general worldview.

US Mission – National Preparedness

The United States of America government recognizes that national preparedness is a complex mission that involves a broad range of functions performed throughout government, including national defense, law enforcement, transportation, food safety and public health, information technology, and emergency management, (Yim (2002)). Their assessments of the levels of threats have ensured that there is collaboration and involvement of federal, state, local, and private sector stakeholders to meet the goals of preparedness and action in treating the national security threats. Hughes (2004) recommended that any strategy for homeland security policy must involve collaboration which when enabled with communication and coordination are key in addressing homeland security issues. The recommendations that were eventually accepted, iterated that the ability of first responders to communicate is an effective disaster response.

In evaluating the US government's actions in national preparedness, Yim (2002) also indicated that one of the first steps by the United States of America government was to create an organization that would be responsible for the coordination of the national effort as it relates to preparing and executing the security responses and plans. National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Federal Management Emergency Agency at the federal/national level. Similar to the Canadians' attempts, the US's whole strategy concept of 'mutual aid' recognizes the need to augment, foster, and maintain what particular governments do best, what the private sector and the local communities do best, and integrate these efforts through their national strategy and that federal organization have such responsibilities. The USA organizes from the federal level down to the community level. This is in addition to their relationship with Canada which they view collaboration and interoperability as key elements in protecting all of North America. Both countries collaborate in outlining contingency plans using the whole of Government approach, recognizing each nation's sovereignty but collectively owing the concepts. Of note is the point in Yim's report that made it clear that in the US, the National Governor's Association made it clear that they preferred broad guidelines or benchmarks for the states within the country rather than being told specifically what to do; this is an important feature that would be relevant to Caribbean states.

Even more, evidence is corroborated in a news brief in November 2005, from the Fire Engineering Department on how collaborated efforts of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and (FEMA) for an effective and successful emergency response strategy before, during, and after will reduce incidents of trauma at the national level. Here the Training Chief David Sharp purports that the use of communication using a "plain language" will help to ensure the safety of the public, responders, and victims alike. This language would help all participants' responses to be clear and concise in directives. Canada's strategy involves information and personnel at the federal, provincial, regional and community levels.

Multidimensional Collaboration

The islands in the Caribbean for the most part, have concentrated on their individual political and economic development and have not done much to ensure success in regional integration outside of the establishment of CARICOM; other acts of regional integration have had very limited success. Salman Sawalha (2014) in his critique of the case of the storm 'Alexa' in Jordan stated that the capacity for organizations and countries to collaborate with others does not occur spontaneously or in a vacuum. Collaboration has to be planned for and the necessary preparation put in place in order for things to function effectively. In order for collaboration to be successful, it involves combining knowledge, technology, management skills, and institutional capabilities which must be linked to local and national strategies and objectives.

One of the first obstacles to overcome in the Caribbean in establishing a regional security strategy is that of determining the global threats specific to Caribbean states as the Canadians did post-cold war. The threats as seen from the recent global events include recovery of personnel, cyber security threats, transportation security, fuel security, food security in addition to the normal safety and security issues. Therefore, a regional strategy in addition to being first responders should also be included.

The Caribbean is multicultural and multilingual and establishing a common communication platform is also essential for the implementation of procedures and guidelines for collaboration during all stages of an event. It is only after consultation, knowledge exchange, and training that the impact in the early stages of a traumatic event can be minimized. The immediate reactions and responses will determine the impact on the states and how the subsequent activities will continue to mitigate the impact or losses.

The assets within the Caribbean are diverse with each state or island having some distinct advantage; for example, Cuba is the leader in medicine, Jamaica has invested in a sizeable military and military styled search and recovery and security assets, Trinidad has transportation expertise, as they are the owners of the regional airline and with oil and oil reserves along with Guyana, Barbados and Jamaica have excellent information and communication infrastructure, Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao represents good zones for storage of equipment and emergency stores as they are outside of the 'hurricane belt'.

In May 2022, "EXERCISE TRADEWINDS 2022" was co-hosted by Mexico and Belize with the objective of promoting greater interoperability among Caribbean partners, the U.S. and Canada.

Wilder (2022) quoted U.S. General Richardson of the U.S. Southern Command who said that "…there is nothing that we cannot achieve through an integrated response with our interagency allies and partners."

The islands in the Caribbean can pool their resources in order to have multidimensional collaboration and interoperability in order to deal with safety and security issues that can affect its people, institutions, and interests.
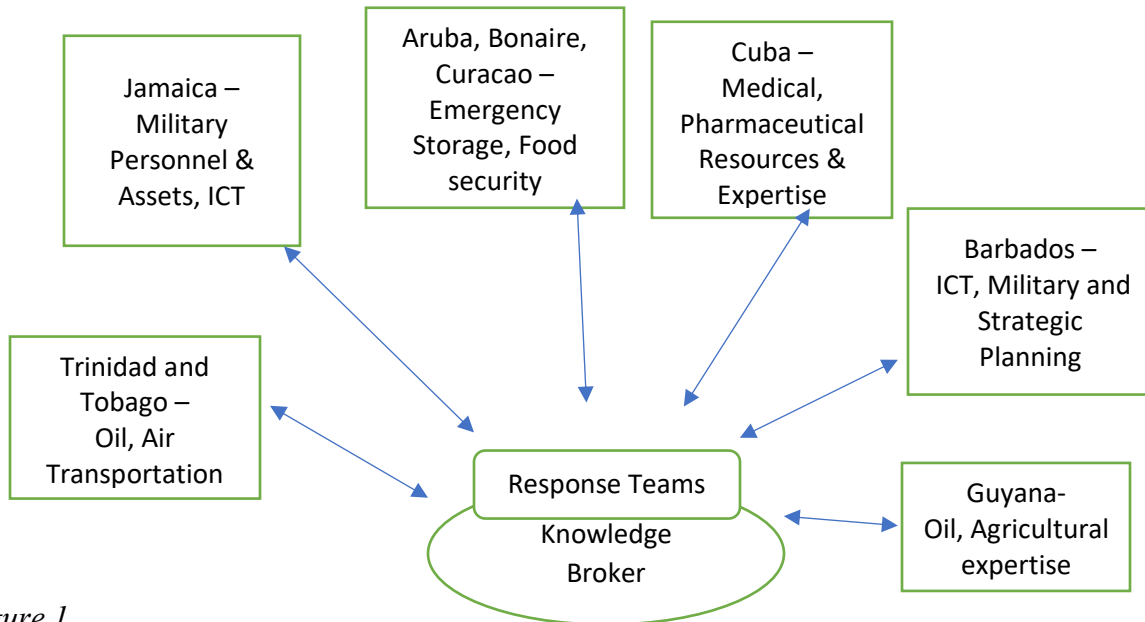
Theoretical Framework

Figure 1.

The diagram gives a simplistic view of how the knowledge broker at the center of the activities is key to the strategy of regional planning and preparedness and how knowledge is essential to the framework of the regional strategy. The islands all contribute to the knowledge broker who is the repository of information and provides guidance to the islands. Communication is two-way which would enhance the framework for the strategies, each island will be relied on for its area of expertise which can be easily shared.

Conclusion

Disasters occur when vulnerability meets the lack of resources (Cadag and Gaillard 2012) and integrating knowledge with action is the only way of disaster risk reduction. The global environment is volatile and crises in any particular area or region can affect all areas across the globe. The Caribbean region is very vulnerable as the islands are relatively small and individually, they lack the resources to properly protect themselves and recover from global unfavorable events that may occur and they have managed to establish a framework in dealing with natural disaster within the region.

Using the combined resources, in the region, the Caribbean islands may be better able to "weather the storms" initiated by global events, external to the Caribbean. Collaboration in the Caribbean should improve community, nationwide and regional resilience and facilitate immediate responses in support of relief and recovery. These aspects are extremely significant as they cover the needs and requirements of the entire disaster life cycle: before, during and after.

The vulnerability of Caribbean states to events outside the region should have the heads of government concentrating on and prioritizing the strategic analysis of general threats, natural and manmade forces, events, and political developments around the world. Because of scarce resources, it is necessary that the regional leaders pool their resources in order to maximize their use. One distinct advantage is that the Caribbean region has is the nexus to British, Dutch, French, American, and Spanish expertise, so it is possible that the individual islands can balance the developed countries' intelligence assessments and formulate a Caribbean assessment of possible threats.

Natural disasters in the form of hurricane damage represent the event that most frequently occurs in the Caribbean and therefore with the largest impact and consequences; however, as frequently as this yearly threat presents itself there are no clear collective regional provisions or plans for the possible impact. Recently there have been instances of devastating earthquakes in Haiti and smaller tremors in other islands, a volcano eruption in Monserrat, and other minor natural incidents. Therefore, having a disaster management plan that focuses only on hurricanes is limited as there are other events locally to consider. Other security and safety elements have to be considered and a regional security plan should also include protecting regional interests, personnel, and assets not located within the region.

The region is highly likely to benefit from regional strategy as the physical proximity of each island to each other makes it easier and gives a quicker reaction/response time as first responders than to countries outside the region. Several islands have distinct and comparative advantages where these advantages can be capitalized on as a part of the plan based on their location, internal infrastructure and assets, skills, and other natural resources; this will help to develop their competencies and economies. The independence of each island will not be negatively affected but as a group, as the region will be better through interdependence and interoperability.

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