

## **Toward a Reconceptualisation of Caribbean Basin Security**

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*This paper analyses the changing concept of security in the Caribbean Basin. A range of non-traditional concerns have emerged as existential threats to Caribbean Basin nations. Even as state-directed actions contribute to the severity of the challenges, non-state actors are major sources of security dangers. The paper proposes that the concept of Caribbean Basin security, traditionally viewed through narrow military/geopolitical lenses, be broadened to account for new security challenges which pertain to issues such as trafficking in narcotics and illicit arms, environmental degradation and criminal violence. I seek to answer the following two questions: 1) how is security conceptualised in the Caribbean Basin? and 2) how and on what basis is an issue accorded the status of a regional security threat? These questions will be explored examining the evolution of security challenges in the Cold War and post-Cold War Caribbean Basin through a comparative assessment. It examines the criteria for assessing security threats and uses examples of organised crime and environmental disasters to consider how and why they were elevated to the status of regional security threats in the Caribbean Basin. Moreover, the paper will incorporate the evolving and prospective involvement of the US in the region's new security environment. This research builds on the existing work of scholars in the field of Caribbean Basin security and provides a focused treatment of the dynamics involved in a transformed post-Cold War Caribbean security environment.*

### **Introduction**

The end of the Cold War has signalled the start of a new era in security concerns for several nations in the Caribbean Basin. During the Cold War the security concerns of the Caribbean Basin were shaped by, and were forced to conform to, the framework of the geopolitical rivalry of the superpowers. Hence, the dominating presence of one of these superpowers, the USA, which historically has been authoritatively involved in Caribbean Basin security, meant that Cold War imperatives drove such concerns (Ferguson, 2002). Security was thus conceptualised in the context of geopolitical and ideological rivalry, militarisation, external intervention, and of nation-state primacy in dealing with specific security manifestations, even for those countries that faced territorial claims. For decades, Caribbean Basin countries had a relative level of geo-strategic importance to great powers. It is from this perspective that security analysis and public policy were framed within conventional outlooks, particularly realism, which dominated security thinking in that period.

Following the removal of the Iron Curtain, a broad consensus emerged about the need to re-conceptualise security. This enterprise was visibly highlighted in an address to the UN Security Council in January 2000 when US Vice-President Al Gore announced that for the first time in fifty years of its existence the Council had devoted a session to what was evidently a non-traditional

security issue – the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa (Gore, 2000). At this meeting it was stated that “*AIDS is far more than a health issue in Africa, it is also a security issue.*” This suggested that the UN was intent on exploring a brand new definition of world security. The Caribbean is also involved in the exercise of re-conceptualising security, and increasing attention is being paid to this issue at the levels of academia, policy-making, and also at the regional-institutional levels. The following section will give a brief historical description of the Caribbean Basin and its geopolitical significance to great powers. This is the region where contestation over regional supremacy between the USA and Russia was the decisive factor in shaping its security priorities.

### **The Geopolitical significance of the Caribbean Basin**

Throughout history there have been different interpretations as to what constitutes the Caribbean Basin Region. For the purpose of this paper it is a distinct region of states and territories lying in and bordering the Caribbean Basin Sea and adjacent regions, including all the islands from the Bahamas in the north-west to Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago in the south-west, and the mainland countries from Mexico to French Guiana (Girvan, 1978). I find this description convenient because it includes the group of countries to which the US refers as its ‘backyard’ or ‘American Mediterranean (Smith, 1994). However, it must be noted that the Caribbean Basin is by no means homogeneous, and its territories reflect some differences based on language, history, culture, geopolitics, geo-economics and organisation.

It is impossible to recall here the history of Europe and United States-Caribbean Basin relations, but it is important to consider some key threads of development over time in an effort to understand the Caribbean Basin’s security situation (Griffith, 2004). The presence of both Europe and the US in the Caribbean Basin has been a product of a long and eventful history. European involvement can be traced as far back as 1492 when it first encountered the Americas in search of territory. Since that time, nearly all major European powers have had an interest to the extent that perhaps more than any other region of the world, the Caribbean Basin bears the impress of European colonialism (Sutton, 2001). US involvement has also been characterised by territorial and economic expansion which fits within the wider context of the growth of colonialism in this region, beginning with the 1823 Monroe Doctrine (Grant-Wisdom, 2004).

The geopolitical significance of the Caribbean Basin resided in its possession of strategic materials, in the location of vital Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC), and in the security networks of powerful states in the area (Griffith, 2004). As regards strategic materials, the Caribbean Basin possesses a wealth of natural resources that were important for military and civilian purposes during the Cold War. In relation to SLOC, two of the world’s major ‘choke’ points are in the Caribbean Basin - one is the Panama Canal which links the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the other is the Caribbean Basin Sea. Marine vessels departing the Canal from the Pacific Ocean had to use either one or several Caribbean Basin Sea passages en route to destinations in the US, Europe, Africa or elsewhere.

(Griffith, 2004). It is within this context that great powers considered the Caribbean Basin Sea strategically important. With regards to security networks, up until the early 1990s, the US viewed the region as its 'southern flank', or its 'strategic rear', and maintained a heavy force presence there. The USSR also maintained bases and networks, particularly in Cuba, and had also stationed strategic nuclear weapons into Cuba in the early 1960s (Allison and Zelikow, 1999). The Caribbean Basin was therefore gaining prominence during the Cold War because of links with the wider struggle between the US and USSR to secure a dominant position in the global political economy (Grant-Wisdom, 2004). Thus, it can be argued that the geopolitical and geo-strategic significance of the Caribbean Basin was the decisive factor in shaping the context through which the region's security concerns were defined during the Cold War.

### **Security concerns in the Cold-War Caribbean Basin**

During the post-World War II period there was a general consensus among political scientists that the Realist framework provided the conceptual architecture to examine the issue of security. Among other things, this focused on the highly militarised and polarised ideological confrontation between the superpowers. Because of the intense nature of their rivalry, political-military concerns came to dominate the security agenda. This emphasis was transmitted into the Caribbean Basin by the use of arms transfers by both superpowers as a means of exploiting already existing hostilities within the region, and as a vehicle for pursuing their own rivalry (Buzan, 1991). The Realist framework focused on the sovereign state as the exclusive unit of analysis, primarily concerned with 'traditional threats' or those related to an 'enemy. As such, security was conceptualised as 'high politics,' characterised as power-based and state-centred, with its orientation towards the international arena. It postulated that states are rational actors whose goal is to pursue their own national interests, and that the use of military force was the most effective tool to deal with threats (Griffith, Nef and Dominguez, 1993).

Having assumed the role of the dominant power in the Caribbean Basin, the United States under the newly appointed President Harry Truman in 1945 relegated the region to that of a US 'backyard' or an 'American Mediterranean'. This was because those states were – and still are to a significant degree – considered vulnerable by virtue of geographic, political, economic or other factors that cause their security to be compromised (Harden, 1985). As part of an all embracing foreign policy of the US, President Truman announced in his March 12, 1947 speech that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures" (Keylor, 2001). A precedent was set for establishing US economic and military aid programs globally, along with its commitment to oppose the spread of communism, even if it meant intervention by force. 'Containment' therefore became a major preoccupation in this region and was facilitated by the Marshall Plan. For Caribbean Basin countries this meant that they had little control over their own security, since the US rise to regional dominance required the subordination of the region's sensibilities to its preferences (Gilderhus, 2000). The region's vulnerability therefore provided

the US with the leverage to influence the security agenda as well as shape the context and contours for their governments' choices and decisions. The traditional concept of national security that evolved in the Cold War therefore came to be viewed as a function of the successful pursuit of interstate power competition (Porter, 1995).

With the intensification of the Cold War in the 1950s, US-Caribbean Basin relations continued to be dictated by predominant concerns with anti-communism in what was considered the US 'sphere of influence.' One of the boldest military manoeuvres of US interference in the internal affairs of a Caribbean Basin country is Guyana in 1953, even while that country was still under British colonial rule. Such invasion, undertaken with full British approval, could be traced directly or indirectly to the US fear that a communist beachhead was about to be established there under the Marxist-oriented People's Progressive Party (PPP), led by Cheddi Jagan. This incident must be viewed against the backdrop of substantial US investment in the bauxite and manganese industries in that country, and therefore the USSR was viewed as a threat to its geopolitical interest. The US not only urged Britain to send troops to prevent a perceived communist takeover in that country, but also influenced the British Government to suspend the Guyana Constitution in order to oust the PPP from power and counter socialism in Guyana (Dookhan, 1985). US apprehensions in the Western hemisphere during the Cold War were mainly centred on events in the Hispanic Caribbean Basin, in countries like Guatemala (1954), Columbia (1957) and Venezuela (1958) (Smith, 1994). Such concerns regarding these countries were fuelled by growing fears that Communist-directed revolutions had the potential for producing allies for the Soviet Union. Guatemala for example, had been pursuing an anti-US policy for several years and supporting the North Korean-Soviet position in the United Nations and pursuing communism (Smith, 1994).

In spite of those few instances of communist threats, US hegemony in the Caribbean Basin remained unchallenged since the late nineteenth century until a series of developments ensued following the 1959 Cuban Revolution. These included the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. Such developments led to a US policy of political and economic isolation of Cuba. In an effort to stem any further radicalisation in the hemisphere, the US proposed a non-Marxist alternative to the demand for change in the region in 1961 in the form of the Alliance for Progress, a multibillion dollar program of financial aid to support economic and social reforms (Langley, 1989).

The ensuing decades continued to witness sporadic episodes of communist operations in the Caribbean Basin which prompted the US to respond decisively - an indication that the region's security was still dominated by highly traditional militarised and ideological imperatives. For example, in 1965 the US engaged in direct intervention in the Dominican Republic to prevent the return to office of a democratically elected president who was overthrown in 1963 (Sullivan, 1993). Military action was further bolstered following several developments in the region in the 1970s including the Nicaraguan Revolution in 1979, the presence of a Soviet brigade in Cuba in 1979 and the overthrow of Grenada's Prime Minister in 1979 by the Leader of the New Jewel Movement, Maurice Bishop (Valenta and Valenta, 1984). For it was well-established that the Soviet Union and Cuba were actively engaged in

supporting revolutions throughout the Caribbean Basin, and even though the US had forced the USSR to withdraw its missiles in the 1960s, during the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviets were successful in developing the island into a Soviet base, and the Cuban military into one of the most powerful in Latin America (Langley, 1989).

Following the overthrow of the Somoza regime in 1978 by the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua, the Carter Administration publicly attacked the Marxist-Leninist character of the regime and undertook decisive initiatives to arrest the revolution from spreading to neighbouring countries. Openly worried about a resumption of Communist subversion in the hemisphere that was facilitated by the Soviet's links with Cuba and its increasingly friendly relations with the leftist regimes in Nicaragua and Grenada, the Carter Administration established a permanent Caribbean Basin Task Force Headquarters in Key West in 1979. This was equipped with attack bombers and radar navy electronics to expand its military manoeuvres in the Caribbean Basin (Smith, 1994). The Reagan Administration made no secret that it favoured regimes which endorsed US foreign policy, opposed Cuba and the Soviet Union, and subscribed to free-market policies (Griffith, 2004). From this perspective intervention in the 1980s became a major security issue for the US. However, this security environment persisted only for a few years more until the occurrence of major international developments in 1989 that eventually led to the end of superpower rivalry and the demise of communism. This subsequently marked the beginning of a new discourse on Caribbean Basin security among regional leaders in the hemisphere.

### **The end of bipolarity and the new global security discourse**

During the Cold War US security policy in the Caribbean Basin focused on three geo-political goals, namely, prevention of extra-hemispheric powers from assuming a stronghold in the region, curtailing the spread of communism, and maintaining continual access to resources in the region (Knight and Persaud, 2001). The end of bipolarity resulted in a new international order that witnessed a dramatic change in the pattern of relations between the great powers, and a reconfiguration of the global security order, with the US being the sole remaining hegemon (Buzan, 1991). Global tensions were relaxed as the threat of nuclear war between the two military camps was removed. Such changes ushered in a new thinking on security that has been influenced by factors such as globalisation, liberalisation, regionalisation, information technology, and an expanding and active transnational civil society. This new security thinking is grounded in the Globalist approach, the core of which is two-dimensional (Collier, 2005). It argues for the widening as well as the deepening of the concept of security, both of which are embedded in the Copenhagen School and Welsh School of security studies respectively. The Copenhagen School pioneered by Barry Buzan explored the widening aspect of security in terms of identifying a number of new domains that are appropriate to think about in terms of security such as the economic, environmental and societal domains. It focuses

on the understanding of security as the result of speech acts through which perceived problems become national security threats, and emphasises that what is deemed a security issue is always the result of a political and social discourse (Buzan, 1991; Buzan, Waever and deWilde, 1998; Krause and Williams, 1996). This novel security paradigm became evident in several scholarly works including McSweeney (1999) who argued that “there are also other threats to the security of states which constitute the economic, natural resource and ecological dimensions of security, as well as challenges of terrorism and drug trafficking.”

The Welsh School associated with Ken Booth explored the deepening aspect, that is, the epistemological and ontological implications of an extended security concept. This approach embraces the issues of actors and levels of analysis as essential variables in the examination of security by moving either down to the level of individual or human security or up to the level of the state or international or global security with regional and societal security as possible intermediate points (Krause and Williams, 1996). It privileges the individuals as the reference object of security over other forms of political communities (Booth, 1997). Booth’s framework focuses explicitly on the association of security with the concept and practice of emancipation. Leading advocates are the UN and its various Human Development Reports from 1994 onwards, as well as Wynn-Jones (1999) and Krause and Williams (1997) all of whom give primacy to the individual over other forms of political entities. Focusing on the human dimension, a 1995 UNDP report stated that the concept of security has been interpreted too narrowly for too long,

as security of territory from external aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy, or as global security from the threat of a nuclear holocaust....it has been related more to nation-states than to people....Human security is not a concern with weapons, it is a concern with human life and dignity....and is likely to revolutionise society in the twenty-first century.

In his discussion on the range of new global dangers that formed part of US Foreign Policy, Campbell (1998) highlighted the environment, drug use and drug trafficking as national security issues, health issues and migration as new sources of external threats, terrorism or Islamic fundamentalism as new forms of violence, and the Third World as a primary source of danger. All of those phenomena stood as dangers that challenged the well-established modes of interpretation associated with the Cold War. Moreover, Klare (1996) had argued that,

the major international schisms of the twenty-first century will not always be definable in geographic terms. Many of the most severe and persistent threats to global peace and stability are arising not from conflicts between major political entities but from increased discord within states, societies, and civilizations along ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic, caste, or class lines.

While traditional geopolitical divisions still play a role in the world security affairs, such divisions have been superseded in importance by the new global schisms. The recognition of these new global challenges has thus propelled the need for a redefinition of what constitutes security.

### **The post-Cold War Caribbean Basin context**

The end of the Cold war had important implications for the Caribbean Basin: it removed the primary security concerns of the US in the region, aborting the structural and ideological underpinnings of superpower rivalry that had reigned for almost five decades (Buzan, 1991). Such a transformed environment also led to the creation of a geopolitical and geostrategic vacuum in the Caribbean which resulted in the weakening of the strategic relevance and importance of the region to the US (Griffith, 2004). By implication, it also meant more leverage for Caribbean Basin statesmen and scholars to become more authoritatively involved in the region's security concerns than in the past, and presented them with a greater opportunity to redefine the concept of Caribbean security. Moreover, as the end of the Cold War reduced the threats of military security in the world and geopolitical rivalries between the two superpowers, it also led to changes in the Caribbean Basin's national security discourse and towards a reconceptualisation of the region's security. A series of official speeches by regional leaders in the Caribbean Basin, among other things, has helped to push the process forward. In 1991 the Minister of Defence in Barbuda and Antigua stated that,

security can no longer be achieved by merely building walls or forts... security in an age of globalization should be extended to encompass non-traditional aspects which pose a far greater threat to the region's security than does the loss of national territory to an enemy.

This line of reasoning was in concert with the Copenhagen and Welsh Schools' concepts of security which was gaining currency in the Caribbean Basin and projected itself as a powerful challenge to the traditional Realist paradigm which had defined the region's security (Collier, 2005). A decade later the Prime Minister of Barbados (Arthur, 2002) emphasised that,

it would be a fundamental error on our part to limit security concerns to any one area while the scourge of HIV/AIDS, illegal arms and drug trafficking, transnational crime, ecological disasters and poverty continue to stare us in the face.

The post-Cold War period witnessed a measurable reduction in US strategic interest in the Caribbean Basin, but it did not mean an end to traditional security threats. Neither has it meant that US involvement in Caribbean Basin security is significantly less dominant in the past or less determinative in the handling and outcome of issues (Ferguson, 2002), and a perusal of several prominent regional security developments demonstrates this: 1) Haiti's crisis of political instability which resulted in the removal of the democratically elected President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1992 (Conway, 1998); 2) the Banana War of the 1990s in which OECS countries were embroiled. It was considered part of a more strategic attempt by the US to dictate world trade terms to the EU and to impose its will on sovereign nation states (Rippel, 1999) and 3) the US-Caribbean Maritime Counter-Narcotics Cooperation Agreement, (Shiprider Agreement), which had engaged the attention of the US and

necessitated direct intervention in sovereign states in 1996-97. Even though countries like Barbados and Guyana had no major drug problem at that time and viewed the action by the US as an infringement, they felt pressured into signing the Agreement in 1997 for fear of 'untoward repercussions by the US (Abrams, 1996). All of these developments were perceived by the US as a threat to its national interest.

In addition, there are still some perennial disputes involving border and territorial claims which continue to have importance on the new Caribbean Basin security roster. Many of them arise from competition over resources, land and maritime territory, and land and sea borders, and the Caribbean Basin region is fraught with cases of this nature. Three prominent cases include Colombia-Venezuela (1932), Suriname-Guyana (1939) and Trinidad and Tobago-Barbados (2004). Milefsky (2004) argues that even though these border issues seem to affect the region less severely than domestic instabilities or transnational criminal activities, they can develop into intense and even violent conflict.

### **Non-traditional security challenges in the post-cold War Caribbean Basin**

There is no doubt that the contemporary security landscape of the Caribbean Basin is still imbued with traditional issues that are largely unaffected by changes in the relations of the great powers. However, it has become increasingly evident that in this dramatically transformed environment, even as traditional security threats remain important, a range of non-traditional security concerns has emerged as threats and glaring vulnerabilities that pose real dangers to Caribbean Basin states and their populations. These relate to economic, environmental and societal domains, and extend beyond the protection of the state to include their populations' safety and welfare (Ferguson, 2001). Moreover, even as state-directed actions contribute to the severity of the threats, non-state actors are key sources of the dangers they are required to manage (Strange, 1996).

In a 2002 Official Address to the OAS, Guyana's Ambassador to the UN, Ishmael Odeen, identified some of the critical security challenges facing the Caribbean Basin as including those of drug trafficking, money laundering, HIV/AIDS pandemic, poverty, illegal migration, political instability, illicit arms trafficking, environmental problems, natural disasters, terrorism and criminal deportees from the developed countries. This was followed by a 2007 Address by OAS Assistant Secretary General, Albert Ramdin, in which he stated that among the various challenges the region faced, organised crime posed the most serious security threat to the region. He identified the manifestations of organised crime specific to the Caribbean Basin as human trafficking, illegal drug trafficking, illicit trafficking in firearms and weaponry, money laundering, racketeering, kidnapping for ransom and proliferation of criminal gangs, and argued that they were often fuelled by the support of official corruption (Ramdin, 2007). In a wider sense, these non-traditional post-Cold War Caribbean security challenges fit into the Copenhagen and Welsh Schools' broader concepts of securitisation.

Commenting upon the gravity of organised crime in the Caribbean Basin, Jamaica's Minister of National Security, in a July 2009 Address to Caribbean law-enforcement officers at a Conference held in Jamaica, stated that all independent states within the hemisphere have been severely affected by an infusion of organised criminal activities which threaten the sovereignty of these nations, and that the wealth amassed by drug cartels is larger than the national budget of many Caribbean states (South Florida Caribbean News, July 2009). While these threats are not new to the post-Cold War Caribbean Basin environment, their unique quality has to do as much with the potentially expansive nature of the instabilities that they bring in their wake as with the range of the emergent security concerns (Ferguson, 2001). These are not security threats and vulnerabilities that can be isolated within a particular territorial boundary, nor are their consequences isolatable within such boundaries. Rather, they have potentially serious cross-border consequences which make it difficult for the state to control, and are in the final analysis, disruptive of regional and wider hemispheric stability (Ferguson, 2002).

It could be argued from a Caribbean Basin perspective that the issue of state security exceeds the traditional concept of national security as simply a factor of unilateral territorial protection. Thus, the traditional Realist approach which was used to analyse Caribbean Basin security during the Cold War, and the assumptions and institutions that governed international relations could hardly be considered an appropriate fit with these new post-Cold War Caribbean realities. It is on this basis that I use the Copenhagen School's broader concept of securitisation as articulated by Buzan (1991) to analyse the extended definition of Caribbean Basin security. This would allow for these new challenges to be embraced within the wider ambit of security so that they could be treated with the same sense of urgency afforded national security threats. Moreover, since this paper proposes that in the contemporary Caribbean Basin there is a measurable expansion of the type of actors involved in security, specifically non-state actors, the Welsh School's concept of security as advocated by Booth (1991) would allow the study to incorporate this sub-state level. As such non-state actors would include law-enforcement officers, members of the criminal justice system and judiciary, civil society, NGOs and transnational organised groups whose fundamental purpose is to affect and decisively influence the handling of the new security concerns.

## **Discussion and analysis**

It is evident that the dynamic transformations occurring at the global and regional levels no longer make geopolitics a factor of tremendous concern in the Caribbean Basin. Globalisation, liberalisation, regionalisation, information technology and an expanding and active transnational civil society, together have severe consequences for the region's security. Moreover, the strategic and ideological conflicts that were dominant during the Cold War have now given way to a broad array of social problems, and it is the combination of these factors that help to explain the shifts in Caribbean Basin security concerns in the post-Cold War era. The same can be said of the US, without the presence of

the Cold War to claim pride of place as the security threat, external challenges formerly considered of low importance have now been raised in the minds of Americans to the level of threats to national security (Bloomfield, 1998). It should be emphasised, however, that the non-traditional concerns that emerge in the post-Cold War Caribbean Basin as security challenges are not necessarily new. During the Cold War they had been marginalised and confined to the traditional analytical prism of East-West struggles between the USA and Russia (Collier, 2005). They were situated at the lower end of the spectrum and treated as social problems that could be dealt with by local civilian law-enforcement.

And although the impact of the Caribbean Basin's 'new' security threats and their importance vary from country to country within the region, a comparison of the two categories - traditional and non-traditional - reveals that many countries tend to place a higher premium on the non-traditional area (Dillon, 2004). Bloomfield (1998) argues that even though these newly-emergent post-Cold War challenges do not fit the *traditional* concept of security threats is no justification for denying them that status.

In the discourse on security and securitisation, Ullman (1983) emphasised that not all threats can be treated as security threats, while Waltz (1991) argued that broadening definitions of security should be resisted since the intellectual coherence of the field would be destroyed and that the line should be drawn at some point. In this context the paper argues that any attempt at understanding the reality of post-Cold War Caribbean security must go beyond the discourse about its expansion or what counts as a security issue as advocated by the Copenhagen School, to include questions relating to a) whose security are we talking about? b) how is security conceptualised in the Caribbean Basin? These questions are given primacy by the Welsh School.

Ullman (1983) defines a threat to national security as

an action or sequence of events that (i) threatens drastically and over a relatively brief span of time to degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state, or (ii) threatens significantly to narrow the range of policy choices available to the government of a state or to private nongovernmental entities within the state.

In an effort to accommodate the new post-Cold War realities of the Caribbean Basin several elements have been explicitly incorporated into the region's concept of national security. The Instituto De Altos Estudios De La Defensa Nacional (1998) noted that,

security is currently based on democratic stability, observance of human rights, environmental protection, the promotion of development and peace, collective coexistence, regional integration, the resolution of domestic socioeconomic problems and the reduction of domestic social conflict.

Sharing a similar view on the concept of security is Ivelaw Griffith, US-based Caribbean scholar on security studies, who emphasised its necessary ingredients as those of,

protection and preservation of a people's freedom from external military attack and coercion, from internal subversion and from the erosion of cherished political, economic and social value... those values include democratic choice and political stability in the political area, sustainable development and free enterprise in the economic domain, and social equality and respect for human rights in the social arena (Griffith, 2004).

Based on the above, it is evident that the current view on Caribbean Basin security does not focus on the state as the sole unit of analysis. There is a noticeable shift in emphasis from state security to human security, founded on the principles of human solidarity and emancipation. For regional leaders and scholars in the Caribbean Basin, security is not exclusively concerned with external orientations, the internal arena forms the platform from which the region's major security concerns emanate. Assistant Secretary General of the OAS stated that in the post-Cold War we are faced with a new concept of security which requires a holistic approach to public security in order to protect individuals and communities from violence (OAS, 2007). This new concept of Caribbean Basin security is consistent with the traditions of the Welsh School and the Copenhagen Schools respectively on two grounds. First, it includes both the levels of the individual and the state as referent objects of security rather than the state as the sole unit of analysis. Second, it encompasses a wider range of non-traditional issues which could be counted as security threats in the post-Cold War Caribbean.

This raises two questions 1) what challenges are eligible for elevation to regional security threats in the Caribbean Basin? and 2) what criteria have been used in this process? Since it is established by the Copenhagen School that it is a political and normative act to choose which issues should be prioritised as security threats, this paper attempts to show how some of the region's challenges have been accorded the status of security threats. This is done by utilising the Discrete Multidimensional Security Framework (DMSF) which was developed by Ivelaw Griffith (2004b). It provides a conceptual framework to facilitate explanation and interpretation of structures, patterns and dynamics involved in the security issue area. Drawing on the work of Barry Buzan (1991), the major feature of the Framework is the Saliency Factor. Griffith argues that the extent to which a threat is salient is influenced by the number of states affected, elites' definition and perceptions of the threats, what type of threat it is, that is, whether it is a core threat or a peripheral threat, the magnitude of resources invested by state and non-state actors, and the intensity of the threat in terms of how often it occurs, what are its consequences, how it impacts upon the population and how it impacts upon the state. So that the more intense a threat, the more legitimate is the invoking of national security as a response to it (Griffith, 2004). Based on the criteria outlined in the DMSF, this paper would now examine the nature and scope of two challenges that the Caribbean Basin presently confronts to show how and why they have been elevated to the status of regional security threats. They are 1) organised crime and 2) environmental disasters.

### **Organised crime in the Caribbean Basin**

Despite the relative economic stability throughout most of the Caribbean Basin the national security posture of several of these states is weak. The region faces an explicit enemy of an internal

origin, notably non-state actors who are involved in a range of organised crime operations. Described as the most serious threat to Caribbean security, Assistant Secretary General of the OAS, Albert Ramdin, stated that organised crime acts as a catalyst for other forms of violence and crime, and that it affects all sectors of Caribbean society and undermines the linkages between governments and their citizens (OAS, 2007). More recently, Jamaica's Minister of National Security emphasised that all independent states within this hemisphere have been severely affected by an infusion of organised criminal activities which threaten the sovereignty of these nations. He pointed out that Caribbean states are the major transshipment points for drugs produced in South America destined for the USA, Europe, UK and Canada, and that the wealth amassed by drug cartels is larger than the national budget of many Caribbean Basin States (South Florida News, July 6, 2009).

Organised crime is not a new phenomenon in the post-Cold War Caribbean. In the mid-1960s it was originally conceived in terms of drug-trafficking (Figueira, 2004; Monroe, 2004; Bryan, 2000; Griffith, 1997). However, research has shown that there is no criminal network in the Caribbean Basin that specialises solely in drug trafficking, and that organised crime takes advantage of a number of illicit activities, including smuggling in firearms and weaponry, human trafficking, export of dangerous and toxic items, organised prostitution and organised car theft (South Florida Caribbean News, July 6, 2009). These operations are often accompanied by a disproportionate number of serious crimes ranging from homicides, gang-styled executions and reprisal killings, shootings, woundings and arson (Figueira, 2006; Deosaran, 2008) on a daily basis. Despite the region's efforts to combat this menace, crime and violence continue to spiral out of control and has generated widespread concern over the last decade both at the regional and international levels. Because organised crime is perceived to emanate from the operations of international criminal networks operating within the Caribbean (The Economist, 2008), the emphasis has been on the strengthening of intra-regional and international cooperation to counteract this threat. As such, over the past two decades, Caribbean states have developed strong collaborative ties and treaties with a network of players from the wider Caribbean Basin and international governments including the US, the region's main pillar of support, the UK and Canada. Organised crime has thus become a high priority issue on the security agenda, especially targeted by policy-makers, statesmen, regional leaders and scholars, and a perusal of two constitutive elements namely, drug trafficking and trafficking in firearms, would demonstrate why this has come to be so.

### **Drugs and arms trafficking in the Caribbean Basin**

The trade in narcotic drugs is considered one of the most corrosive threats to human society (UNDP, 1995), and one of the foremost non-traditional security threats in the Caribbean Basin (OAS, 2007). During the past two decades, the narcotics industry has expanded from a miniscule enterprise to a highly organised trans- and multi-national business which generates billions of dollars in profits

(Figueira, 2006; Griffith, 1993/94). A serious force to be reckoned with, drug traffickers in some Caribbean Basin countries have been known to own larger and more sophisticated military resources than even the police or the military, and in some parts of Latin America they rely on sophisticated technology to maintain secure communications with their organisations and monitor law-enforcement counter-measures (CARICOM, 2002). Before and after 9/11, the Caribbean Basin has been at the centre of the world of drugs, generating anxiety from Caribbean Basin leaders and the US, UK and Canada governments about the magnitude of the problem. The extent of this dangerous trade was widely catapulted as early as 1992 in a West Indian Commission Report:

Caricom countries are threatened today by an onslaught of illegal drugs as crushing as any military excursion, and nothing poses a greater threat to civil society in Caricom countries than the drug problem ... nothing exemplifies the powerlessness of regional governments more (WIC, 1992).

Moreover, in a 2006 Address at the Heads of Government Conference in Barbados it was stated that, "Narco-trafficking and its associated evils of money laundering, gun smuggling, corruption of public officials, criminality and drug abuse, constitute the major security threats to the Caribbean Basin today," (Caricom Communique 2006).

Drug trafficking is a multidimensional as well as a global threat. Its scope extends into the realm of drug production, consumption and abuse, trafficking and money laundering (Griffith,1993/4). Facilitating this illegal trade is the existence of several offshore financial centres throughout the Caribbean Basin which are utilised by organised criminals and terrorist groups as financial havens for their money laundering activities (US Department of State, 2002). Implicit in this is the serious transnational consequences of the drug trade which not only threatens the security and sovereignty of states in the Caribbean Basin Region (South Florida Caribbean News, July 6, 2009) but is disruptive of regional and wider hemispheric stability. The economic effects of drug trafficking and in a larger sense of organised crime have been described as "frightening" by Jamaica's Minister of National Security, Dwight Nelson (South Florida Caribbean News, Ibid).

Apart from being a major production zone for illicit drugs, the Caribbean Basin is also a major trans-shipment zone from South to North for these, particularly the US, UK and Europe. In 2000, a little over one-third of the global supply of cocaine was intercepted in the region, and the Caribbean Basin ranked number four in the world in terms of cocaine seizures (Munroe, 2004). For it is estimated that close to 50% of the cocaine introduced into the US\$35 B United States cocaine market in 2001 passed through the Caribbean Basin corridor (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2003). Moreover, in July 2008, the Portsmouth-based frigate, HMS Iron Duke, in joint operation with the US Coast Guard, intercepted a boat hundreds of miles off the coast of Barbados and seized £40 million pounds worth of cocaine, one of the largest seizures of drugs in the Caribbean Basin which was destined for Europe and Africa (The Portsmouth News, July 2008). It is clear that in the contemporary global order the strategic value of the region is not only located in its geopolitical

significance from the perspective of state actors, but from the perspective of non-state actors as well, “with conflict and cooperation in mind, not in terms of geopolitics, but geonarcotics” (Griffith, 1993/4).

Efforts to deal with the threat of narcotics trafficking unilaterally have taxed law-enforcement officers beyond capacity, forcing some governments to commit or contemplate using military forces. This in itself jeopardises political stability and revives the militarisation that some countries experienced in the 1970s and 1980s. If in the context of the Caribbean Basin security means protection and governability, then the drug problem in the region seriously undermines the ability of states to provide security to their populations.

Facilitating the spate of drug-trafficking and other forms of violent crimes, including kidnapping for ransom and human smuggling, is the use of illegal firearms in the Caribbean Basin readily available from a thriving and lucrative underground firearms industry, with various locations throughout the region that are not easily traceable. Trinidad/Tobago’s Minister of National Security stated in 2008 that illegal firearms on the nation’s streets were the root cause of the unacceptable crime and violence in the country (Trinidad Guardian, August 2008). Earlier in 2007, the Jamaican Police Commissioner had announced that 85% of the homicides in Jamaica were gun-related and that guns smuggled into the country often escaped the hands of the law enforcement and protective services (Jamaica Observer, 2007). Further amplifying the gravity of this problem, a 2008 Report from the CARICOM Regional Task Force on Crime and Security stated that organised gangs engaging in drug trafficking, extortion, money laundering, arms-dealing and kidnapping for ransom use illegal firearms and other lethal weapons to protect shipments, intimidate competitors and witnesses, execute informants, secure internal discipline, obtain money to fund their purchases and to kill their clients when drug-deals go sour (Caricom, 2008). Such activities paralyse entire communities, eroding their democratic structures and institutions of governance, and have serious consequences for economic growth and development. Thus, contemporary Caribbean Basin law enforcement agencies must compete with organised criminal elements for control of law and order.

The level of crime and instability associated with the trade in illegal drugs and arms trafficking has been of tremendous concern to Caribbean Basin policy-makers because of the economic importance of tourism and foreign investment, some of the region’s main drivers of economic growth and development. The region is now witnessing a reduction in foreign investment and a substantial loss in tourist traffic (Caribbean Tourism Organization, 2009). Moreover, the effect of this climate of insecurity generated by organised crime negatively affects the growth of the business sector in several countries. The Caribbean Basin is now suffering from a capital flight through a relatively new trend of business people investing overseas instead of the Caribbean (Amcham Trinidad/Tobago, 2008). This disrupts the region’s economy and curtails whatever prosperity it now enjoys.

The illegal drug trade and the trafficking in firearms in the Caribbean Basin also have serious implications for civil society. Illegal drugs and firearms have made the people of the Caribbean Basin prisoners, many have lost their lives, others have been maimed by the brutality of the criminals; everyone in society is now forced in one way or the other to change how they live their lives. This has

also led to a veritable brain drain with the exodus of doctors, lawyers, engineers, academics and other professionals to developed countries such as the USA, Canada and Britain in search of safety and security. Expounding on the gravity of the crime situation in the region, a March 2008 Report in *The Economist* stated that crime in the Caribbean Basin region as a whole is significantly higher than in any other region of the world, and homicide rates are above the world average. The report links such violence to illegal drugs and firearms trafficking (*The Economist*, 2008).

The illicit trafficking in firearms is also of deep concern to the US since a majority of the illegal firearms and weapons destined for the Caribbean Basin are in fact being smuggled out of the US (Figueira, 2006; *Trinidad & Tobago Guardian*, May 2009). The gravity of drugs and arms trafficking affecting both the Caribbean Basin and the US was given resonance by President Obama, who described the situation as destroying lives and distorting economies in the Western hemisphere (WW4 Report, April 2009). Thus, it can be surmised that drugs and firearms trafficking are serious causes for concern since they seem to pose a far greater threat to human security and the stability of Caribbean Basin societies than any traditional threats (*South Florida Caribbean News*, July 6, 2009).

Unable to deal with the problem unilaterally, several countries in the Caribbean Basin have signed bilateral and multilateral Treaty agreements with the wider Caribbean Basin and international governments including the US, UK, Canada and Spain. Some of the most significant to date are 1) the 2009 USA/Caricom MOU on Illegal Firearms, 2) the 2008 Caricom/Spain Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, 3) the 2006 Caricom Treaty on Security Assistance, 4) The 2002 Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act between the Caribbean Basin and the US and UK, 5) the 2000 UK/Caribbean Cooperation on Security, 6) the 1997 Caribbean/United States Summit Partnership For Prosperity and Security in the Caribbean, and 7) the 1996 Maritime Counter-Drug Agreement Between The Caribbean and the USA (Shiprider Agreement). All of these Treaties and Agreements are significant attempts at regional and international cooperation to fight organised crime in the Caribbean Basin- a clear indication of the gravity of the threat that the region confronts. These treaties have been instrumental in achieving the objective of arresting illegal drugs and firearms trafficking and other manifestations of organised crime and have considerable domestic, regional and international reach.

The above discussion on organised crime demonstrates that drug-trafficking and the illicit trafficking in arms and weapons are clearly core threats for several states, with a high threat intensity level. Furthermore, when the regional salience factors are added, that is, the number of states affected, elite perception and material resources invested, and multinational collective response measures – organised crime is clearly a regional security threat to Caribbean Basin nations.

### **Environmental and natural disasters in the Caribbean Basin**

The case for environmental security is linked to evidence of serious degradation of the ecosystem and vital life support systems as a consequence of accelerated global economic activities with

far-reaching effects in the long term (Porter, 1995). The notion that environmental degradation can be considered a security issue when it gives rise to conflicts (Porter, 1995) seems to be in tandem with the traditional concept of national security. However, advocates of environmental security have cited social and economic forces as major causes of environmental degradation. Even though in this case the emphasis on threats does not embrace an enemy state, Krause and Williams (1996) view environmental degradation as a national and international security threat, underscoring that,

the severe consequences of continued environmental degradation are viewed as more urgent than external threats that could lead to organized violence. Moreover, national interest and sovereignty are considered less important than the well-being of the individuals.

In the post-Cold War period, it was the Bush Administration who first acknowledged environmental security as an essential component of overall United States security, and later on took the official stance of redefining national security to encompass environmental threats (Porter, 1995).

Based on Griffith's DMSF, environmental concerns have emerged as one of the most critical non-traditional security challenges facing the Caribbean Basin in the post-Cold War era (Collymore and Riley, 2004). Although the vulnerability of the region to environmental hazards posed by natural disasters such as hurricanes, volcanoes and earthquakes, and climate variability is not novel, environmental security has been singled out by regional leaders to be addressed with more urgency (Prime Minister Mitchell of Grenada, June 2007). Minister Mitchell stated that,

while the vagaries of terrorism and the avoidance of a modern nuclear arms race are important global issues, the exceptional circumstances of small size and vulnerability make the maintenance of environmental security as vital to our nations as any other threat to global security.

He further commented that environmental security cannot be extricated from the overall notion of security in the region, and that it is inextricably woven into the continued viability and development objectives.

While travellers and vacationers think of the Caribbean Basin islands as a beautiful paradise, the local populations continually live in fear of hurricanes and earthquakes, floods, droughts, and volcanic eruptions - conditions that shape not only their daily lives, but political and economic decisions at home and abroad (Barrow-Giles and Marshall, 2003). On September 9, 2004, Hurricane Ivan spread havoc throughout several islands in the Caribbean Basin including Barbados, St. Vincent, Cuba, The Cayman Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Grenada, resulting in extensive loss of life, limb and property. The hardest hit was the island of Grenada where Hurricane Ivan took the lives of 33 people and damaged 95% of Grenadian buildings (CBC News, 2004). An OECS Report assessed the overall damages on the island at EC\$2.2 B or twice the current value of the island's GDP (OECS, 2004).

However, by far the most catastrophic environmental crisis that occurred in the Caribbean Basin started in the British colony of Montserrat in the early 1990s with the eventual eruption of the volcano *Soufriere* in 1995. By 1992 approximately 70% of the population was forced to migrate to other

islands, especially Britain, in light of the impending disaster. Continued volcanic eruptions during 1995 and 1999 have now left the island virtually desolated (Druitt and Kokelaar, 2003). Such a situation has fuelled depression and political tensions, and has contributed to social deterioration of a refugee population in Britain and neighbouring islands, many of whom risk returning to their homes in the face of the stark reality of the island's vulnerability to volcanic activity. While international support from governments and their agencies as well as private authorities is helping to rebuild this volcano-stricken island, there are no chances that this tiny country would be habitable for a long time to come.

Environmental degradation is also linked to disposal of toxic waste, as well as the gradual pollution of the Caribbean Basin Sea. Campaign Director of Greenpeace International (Washington) warned that "the plutonium industry is risking the lives and livelihoods of the people of the Caribbean Basin and is courting an environmental catastrophe...an accident involving the shipment could devastate the region's travel and tourism industry and commercial fishing and shipping industries" (Greenpeace, 1998). Also contributing to the environmental security problems in the Caribbean Basin region is the heightened scarcity of critical environmental resources. Meganck (2002) pointed out that the degradation of resources through agricultural, industrial or domestic activity contributes to resource depletion and ecosystem stress which takes years to recover. While such environmental scarcities do not generate wars among countries, they "sometimes sharply aggravate stresses within countries, helping stimulate ethnic clashes, urban unrest and insurgencies" (Homer-Dixon, 1996). With the US as one of the largest Western economic trading partners of the Caribbean Basin, Homer-Dixon (1996) pointed out that "this violence affects Western national interest by destabilising trade and economic relations, provoking migrations and generating complex humanitarian disasters that divert militaries and absorb huge amount of aid." One need only recall the emergence of the 'Shining Path Guerrillas' in Peru in the face of the government's inability to find solutions for its expanding populations, land degradation and drought. Similarly, in Haiti, deforestation and soil erosion led to further exacerbation of the economic crisis, generating civil conflict and massive migration of boat people to the US.

The nature of the environmental threats in the Caribbean Basin has thus reinforced the call for multidimensional policy responses and collective action through several layers of cooperation at the national, regional and international level. Regional bodies include the Caribbean Basin Disaster Emergence Response Agency, Caribbean Basin Epidemiology Centre and Caribbean Basin Meteorological Association. Affected countries in the Caribbean Basin continue to receive significant support and assistance from governmental agencies such as ECLAC, OAS and the UN, as well as bilateral support from the US, Canada and Britain, to name a few (Collymore and Riley, 2004). While there a school of thought that environmental and natural disasters do not constitute a threat as defined in the traditional context of security, the nature, scope, intensity and consequences of such disasters revoke such perception. For the people of the Caribbean Basin, natural disasters are seen as enemies that destroy lives, homes and properties, the effect of which are similar to involvement in combat situations (Dillon, 2004).

## Conclusion

It is evident that the nature and sources of the security problematic have changed drastically for Caribbean Basin countries in the post-Cold War period. The study emphasised that during the Cold War the region's security concerns were largely defined by the US and resided within the framework of the Cold War geopolitical rivalry of the two superpowers. Caribbean Basin security was thus viewed in terms of the region's protection from external military threats and subversions, militarisation, instabilities and intervention - in other words it was all about military hardware, force and activity, and the prevailing view focused on the state as the principal unit of analysis.

The end of bipolarity may have meant the demise of the global nuclear threat and communism, but for the Caribbean Basin it meant a preoccupation with a range of new non-traditional security challenges alongside the existence of a few traditional ones relating to territorial and border disputes. The characteristics of these non-traditional threats have expanded to the extent that they pose an even far greater risk and could therefore be more destabilising to states than traditional concerns (Ramdin, 2007). The above two examples, organised crime and environmental/natural disasters, present compelling evidence that those non-traditional issues are not simply important questions of social policy for Caribbean Basin societies, rather, they present serious security threats not just for a few states but for the Caribbean Basin region as a whole. This is easy to comprehend when one considers the definition of security and the nature and scope of these threats, including their intensity, which is high for most of the affected states, their multidimensional nature, regional salience factors, their serious cross-border consequences, and the inadequacy of unilateral level management.

However, while the new security challenges represent a significant departure from the traditional notions of security and constitute some of the priority elements on the post-Cold War security roster of the Caribbean Basin, traditional security concerns have not lost their salience. Significant geopolitical shifts occurring in the region within the last two years are indicative of this. For example, since 2008 Venezuela has emerged a key player in Caribbean Basin affairs. This is demonstrated in its growing relations with several member states of Caricom with respect to the ALBA and Petrocaribe initiatives. Such initiatives have been described by the Washington-based Council on Foreign Affairs as one of the most the most significant recent developments in regional affairs that demonstrates a reconfiguration in the global political economy (CFR Task Force, 2008). The effect of this is the waning ability of the US to decisively influence and control the regional affairs in Latin America and the Caribbean which suggests that the era of US hegemony in the Caribbean Basin is over, (CFR Task Force, 2008).

Moreover, in December 2008 a fleet of Russian navy ships headed by the nuclear-powered Peter the Great cruiser arrived in Venezuela, South America to participate in joint manoeuvres with that country. This development has been viewed as a rebuff to the United States which is facing increasingly deteriorating relationships with the two nations. Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Igor

Sechin, in a 2008 speech in Latin America stated that it would be wrong to talk about one nation having exclusive rights to Latin America (BBC News, 2008). As such, the presence of Russia, as well as China and Iran, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Caribbean Basin may very well place the issues of geopolitics and geopolitical rivalry once again on the security landscape of the region. This is something worth thinking about.

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