

*Dynamics of Regional Security Engagement in the Caribbean*

By

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INTRODUCTION

The region's security environment requires multidimensional, multi-agency, and multi-level security engagement. This is because the threats and challenges are largely transnational and multifaceted. Engagement also needs to be multi-actor because (a) states are not the only actors with threatened interests, and (b) many states have such capability limitations that their individual actions are inconsequential. Thus, international governmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other non-state actors are important. The multidimensionality of the security arena makes it necessary for the actors to use a range of response instruments. These include modes, methods, policies, and programs that essentially are diplomatic, economic, emergency management, law enforcement, military, and political in nature.

This list is not offered in any order of importance. Noteworthy, too, is that threats require differing response instruments. Moreover, coping with specific threats may require the use of multiple response instruments. For instance, fighting drugs—which itself is a multidimensional threat—requires the use of military, law enforcement, economic, political, and diplomatic instruments. The actor-instrument relationships are manifest within national and international security engagement zone arenas, with the international zone arena having what might be called *multilateral security engagement (MSE) zones*. Such zones exist at the sub-regional, regional, hemispheric, and international systemic levels. Although the Zones are relatively discrete spaces, they are not exclusive spaces; they overlap. Moreover, each MSE zone has several state and non-state entities.

### Multilateral Engagement Challenges

Working within the MSE zones entails dealing with many challenges, among them challenges related to establishing priorities, institutionalizing agreements, cooperating with other actors, and sharing intelligence. Of course, these challenges are not the only possible ones related to engagement in the zones. Further, they exist not only in relation to multilateral collaboration; most of them also exist in bilateral relationships. It is important also to observe that the order in which the challenges are discussed does not suggest a rank order of the challenges themselves.

### *The Prioritization and Institutionalization Challenges*

Establishing priorities is necessary for several reasons. First, the multidimensionality of the security challenges means that the response must also be multidimensional. Yet—and this is the second reason—Caribbean states are all small jurisdictions, with various budgetary, manpower, intelligence, and other capability limitations. Beyond this, as security issues are not the only ones on national policy agendas, resources have to be allocated to other areas, such as health, education, and housing. Thus, national and regional (and other) decision makers have the unenviable task of setting priorities. This should be done in some rational way, guided by some policy framework or strategy, rather than in an ad hoc manner. The consequences of the latter are sub-optimal use—sometimes waste—of resources and little appreciable impact on the challenge at hand.

A key test of the commitment of many states to meaningfully confront the security challenges facing them is their willingness to institutionalize the multilateral arrangements by incorporating them adequately into national policy. In practical terms this can be judged, among other things, by the following criteria:

1. Whether they sign, and later ratify, the multilateral engagement instrument, whether treaty, convention, or memorandum of understanding.
2. Whether they procrastinate on such action or act with deliberate speed.
3. Whether they adopt enabling, supporting, or collateral legislation or other domestic policy instruments.

Some countries have poor records when it comes to sustaining—and sometimes just launching—initiatives. This is often because of financial, technical, manpower or other constraints, but often it is due to simple neglect driven by a lack of political will or administrative lethargy, or both. Sometimes it is a manifestation of what I call the *Solution By Platitudes Syndrome* found in many parts of the Americas. This behavior occurs when political elites seem or prefer to believe that the delivery of a grand speech or proclamation or the signing of a convention or treaty *ipso facto* solves the problem at hand, and that they can afford to pay scant attention to the implementation, institutionalization, and evaluation aspects involved. Political and bureaucratic elites therefore need to recognize that meaningful regional or other multilateral engagement

requires rising above platitudes and going beyond signing ceremonies. They are obliged to follow through, institutionalize, and implement or delegate the appropriate tasks to other officials whom they hold accountable.

### *The Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing Challenges*

The security challenges facing the Caribbean are largely transnational in nature; they are “interdependence issues.” Hence, responses to them must be similarly transnational. This necessitates cooperation, which needs to be both bilateral and multilateral. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive; it is not a case of either bilateral cooperation or multilateral cooperation, but how much of each is desirable or necessary. Indeed, many times bilateral measures are preferred, as generally they can be designed and implemented more quickly.

The cooperation challenge lies partly in the fact that, whether viewed in bilateral or multilateral terms, the need for cooperation raises the prospect that conflicts may ensue, in relation to capabilities and sovereignty, among other things. Capability disputes between or among cooperating states do not arise merely because of the actual money, equipment, and other constraints on the part of partners. They often occur because inherent in the capability disparities of cooperating partners is the expectation that those with fewer limitations will give relatively more to the collective effort. This is likely to be especially so in a multilateral context with many actors, and where just a few of them have meaningful resource capacity.

Effective cooperation is not always achievable, and for a variety of reasons, including political leadership changes within countries, public opinion within the more resource-endowed states, and the fact that policy makers in the relatively better-off states are sometimes unsure that there will be commensurate national interest returns on their nation’s investments in the collective project. It is not that they are often against collaboration; sometimes there is uncertainty or rethinking about the amount of investment to be made in the various response mixes—unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral—and the form that investment should take.

The cooperation challenge has an additional dimension, which pertains to cooperation between and among agencies *within* countries. Problems spawned by bureaucratic politics give rise to jurisdictional and turf battles and coordination difficulties between army and coast guard, army intelligence and police intelligence, health ministries and trade ministries, foreign affairs ministries and national security ministries, and such. Thus, the cooperation within countries deserves the same emphasis as cooperation between and among countries; ‘cooperation among’ and ‘cooperation within’ are but two dimensions of the same challenge.

Essential to ‘knowing the enemy’ and determining how ‘to adapt’ is information about the adversary and the threat environment, obtained through observation, investigation, and analysis. This involves the business of intelligence. Although important, matters such as the strategic and tactical levels of intelligence, the kind of intelligence—military, drug, counter-terrorism, etc.—and the intelligence cycle are beyond the purview of this discussion. But it must be noted that all these aspects are important to the security of the Caribbean, and they all are undertaken in and for the Caribbean. However, Caribbean states themselves have very limited intelligence capabilities. True, there are Joint Information Coordination Centers and Joint Operations Command Centers in the region. But in almost all cases their establishment and operation are due to interest and investment by non-Caribbean state actors, notably the United States and Britain. Similarly, regional intelligence networks and systems, such as the Caribbean Information Sharing Network, are expressions of the twin dynamics of US and European national interests and cooperative engagement.

One of the multilateral engagement challenges related to the issue of intelligence has pertained to the sharing of intelligence. Despite several significant instances of cooperation in fighting drugs and other transnational threats in the region, displeasure has often been expressed in some Caribbean security circles about the one-sidedness of the intelligence sharing relationship with the United States. In essence, this is a problem of intelligence cooperation. Some of the criticism is justifiable given some of the legislative

restrictions within the United States. But perhaps more importantly, the reluctance of US and other authorities to share intelligence often is based on sometimes justifiable concerns about the integrity of security agencies and personnel, because of corruption, operational constraints, and inefficiency. Indeed, there have been cases *within Caribbean countries* where some agencies have not shared information with other agencies precisely because of the concerns about integrity of personnel or systems.

The structures and orientation of intelligence networks and agencies in the region relate significantly to combating drugs, crime, and illegal migration, with terrorism assuming a higher profile since 9/11. Understandably, most agencies and networks are multi-functional and multidimensional in design and operation, with mandates in relation to several threats, such as drugs plus crime plus terrorism. This is true of entities based partly or fully in the region, such as CISN and the Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council (CCLEC), which is not solely an intelligence entity. It also is true of entities that are located within the United States but are critical to the functionality of the networks in the region, such as the Joint Inter-Agency Task Force-East (JIATF-E), which is based in Key West, Florida.