PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

RESEARCH NOTE

The War on Terror and the Caribbean

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Abstract: The Caribbean is profoundly under-represented in the prevailing scholarly literature on terrorism and counter-terrorism. Therefore, this research note provides a brief overview of the history of terrorism within the Caribbean context, presents a summary of the existing literature, and then examines the War on Terror's impact in the region. Drawing from a qualitative research study, the analysis concludes that the War on Terror has impacted the region in several ways. For example, countries in the region have implemented new anti-terrorism legislation; made amendments to their immigration systems; implemented counter-terrorism police units; and established a Joint Regional Communication Centre and an Advanced Passenger Information System. Overall, this research note intends to support and encourage more academic discourse regarding the War on Terror and its impact on the Caribbean region.

Keywords: War on Terror, Caribbean, history of terrorism, terrorism financing, anti-terrorism legislation, banking sector, immigration

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Introduction: A Brief History of Terrorism and the Caribbean

Caribbean leaders have long acknowledged that terrorism is a global issue and that no state or region is immune. They have often recognised and drawn attention to the potential threat international terrorism poses to the Caribbean, whether in terms of direct attacks or as a platform to launch attacks in other regions. For example, in her 2001 address to the United Nations General Assembly, Billie Miller—then-Deputy Prime Minister of Barbados—stated that "terrorism is a global phenomenon to which no country can consider itself immune."[1] Likewise, Elvin Nimrod—then-Minister of Foreign Affairs and Corporation of Grenada—stated in 2001 that Grenada had decided to suspend the Economic Citizenship Programme out of concern that terrorists might use the country's passport to engage in international terrorism.[2]

Between the years of 1968 and 2007, 11 percent of all terrorist incidents worldwide occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean.[3] Moreover, the Central American and Caribbean region recorded a total of 237 terrorism-related deaths since 2002, with eleven percent of those deaths occurring in 2019 alone.[4] While significantly higher numbers of terrorist attacks and deaths have occurred in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia, it has become clear that the Caribbean is no less vulnerable to terrorism, and remains especially susceptible to religiously motivated terrorism of Islamic nature. For example, research by Perry Stanislas and Kim Sadique discovered that Trinidad has become a breeding ground for religiously motivated violence and recruitment for ISIS in the Caribbean.[5]

It should also be noted that the Caribbean experienced a major terrorist attack by means of an airplane long before 11 September 2001. In 1972, the governments of Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago established diplomatic relations with Cuba, and these countries entered into a joint air services agreement together (despite America's disapproval, and in defiance of Organisation of American States sanctions).[6] This was met with outrage from anti-Castro forces, and on 6 October 1976, in an act of retaliation—as recounted by Dion Phillips—"a Cubana Airlines civilian jetliner, enroute on a scheduled flight from Guyana to Havana via Trinidad, Barbados, and Jamaica, exploded and crashed in the sea approximately ten minutes after departure from the Grantley Adams International Airport (then called Seawell) in Barbados, a result of bombs planted aboard by two members of the CORU (*Comando de Organizaciones Revolucionarias Unidas*), an anti-Castro terrorist group code-named El Condor."[7] This terrorist attack killed seventy-eight people and introduced the Caribbean nations to the politics of the Cold War.[8]

That same year, during what Peter Kornbluh refers to as "the bloody summer of anti-Castro violence in 1976,"[9] the Guyanese Embassy in Port of Spain, Trinidad was bombed, and the Soviet Union vessel *Dzrordano Bruno* came under attack by gunfire from a small boat while it was anchored just five miles from the Bahamas (luckily, no one was injured, and it was suspected that anti-Castro exiles were responsible for the attack, given that they were also responsible for previous attacks on Soviet ships).[10] In 1980, a separatist group calling themselves the Guadeloupe Liberation Army conducted a series of terrorist attacks, including one that used a twelve-pound time bomb hidden in a baggage locker to destroy the passenger terminal at

Guadeloupe Airport, and another in which gunmen wounded the "only white member of the City Council of Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe's largest city," triggering a campaign of violence that year.[11] The group claimed responsibility in a statement, and declared that they were starting a "'campaign of harassment' against French colonialism, warning all French living on the seven islands in the Caribbean to 'pack their bags and leave before 31 December 1980'."[12]

In 1983, the Haitian government newspaper *Le Nouveau Monde* was struck by a strong explosion, and a few days later an auto agency connected to the then-President Jean-Claude Duvalier family was bombed. No one claimed responsibility, but according to Edward Cody, Haitian officials at the time "added the blasts to a growing list of largely ineffectual attacks that nevertheless indicate new determination among those violently opposed to the government of President-for-Life Jean-Claude Duvalier."[13] Meanwhile, both Haitian and US officials had attributed nearly a dozen previous acts of violence to two Miami-based exile groups.[14] In the same year, the Revolutionary Military Council's assassination of Maurice Bishop, the former Grenadian Prime Minister (and leader of the People's Revolutionary Government), would also be considered an act of repressive terrorism, as defined by Dion Phillips.[15]

In 1987, there were two separate bombings in the Dominican Republic, in commemoration of the 22nd anniversary of the April 1965 US invasion of Santo Domingo. A Mormon Church was bombed on 24 April and a bomb exploded against the perimeter wall of the Peace Corps Office on 20 April.[16] Anonymous telephone calls claimed that the Maximiliano Gomez Revolutionary Brigade was responsible for both attacks.[17] In 1990, Yasin Abu Bakr and a small religious group – Jamaat-al-Muslimeen – sought to overthrow the government of Trinidad and Tobago in a brief attempted coup that began on 27 July, holding the Trinidad government hostage for approximately six days before surrendering.[18] At the time, Yasin Abu Bakr perceived Trinidad to be a sort of dystopian society, an unjust society that was morally corrupted and being led by "evil men", and thus he felt it was his solemn duty to charter a "new national direction inspired by the will of Allah."[19]

On 20 June 1995, Trinidad and Tobago "experienced its first political assassination" when Selwyn Richardson, the former Attorney General and Minister of National Security, was shot and killed by unidentified assailants.[20] This has also been described by Dion Phillips as an act of political terrorism in the Caribbean.[21] In 1996, Cuban exiles Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch "claimed responsibility for terrorist actions against Cuba" on live television in Miami, "which at that stage involved the bombing of tourist hotels in Havana."[22] On 5 September 1997, three hotels were bombed in the Cuban capital, and a young Italian tourist named Favio di Celmo was killed in one of the attacks.[23] On 11 July 2005, a bomb placed in a dustbin exploded on the corner of Frederick and Queen Streets in Port of Spain, Trinidad, injuring fourteen people (two critically).[24] In 2018, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS), with assistance from the US military, thwarted an attack following anti-terror raids on 8 February that resulted in the capture of four "high value targets."[25] The acting Assistant Superintendent of the Corporate Communications Unit of TTPS Michael Jackman stated that the "police uncovered a threat to disrupt the Carnival activities and detained 'several persons of interest'."[26]

In addition to terrorist incidents within the Caribbean, there have also been terrorist attacks

and plots outside the region involving Caribbean nationals. For example, in 2007 a terrorist plot was uncovered in which the co-conspirators in a terrorist plot to blow up aviation fuel tanks at the John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York.[27] Two of those charged in the plot—Abdul Kadir and Adbel Nur—are from Guyana, and had ties to Islamic extremists in South America and the Caribbean, and another—Kareem Ibrahim—was a citizen from Trinidad and Tobago.[28] All three were detained in Trinidad and then extradited to the US in 2008.[29]

And in 2011, Shane Crawford—a well-known extremist who adopted the *nom de guerre* Abu Sa'd at-Trinidadi—was arrested along with several suspects on "suspicion of involvement in an alleged plot to assassinate the prime minister and cabinet ministers,"[30] and later became one of the first Trinidadian citizens who migrated to join the Islamic State in Syria.[31] In a lengthy interview in that group's *Dabiq* magazine, aimed at potential recruits and sympathisers, Crawford called upon Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago to use violence against his fellow citizens and to "terrify the disbelievers in their own homes and make their streets run with their blood."[32] According to at least one report, over 100 citizens from Trinidad and Tobago travelled to the Middle East to join the Islamic State "to fight and die," including Tariq Abdul Haqq, the country's most prominent boxer and a former Commonwealth Games medallist with Olympic aspirations.[33]

These and other examples (see Table 1) illustrate how terrorism has been a persistent threat against countries in the Caribbean region. And in several cases, we have also seen citizens from the region become involved in terrorist activity elsewhere in the world. Further, as noted in a recent Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Counter Terrorism Strategy Report, "the fact that by the start of 2018 more than 200 individuals from CARICOM States have travelled to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq demonstrates how the Region has been caught up in global terrorism."[34] Clearly, while the transnational terrorist networks al-Qaeda and Islamic State remain operational, they will continue to pose a serious threat to the international community, including the Caribbean. As such, efforts to combat these networks — particularly under the rubric of the War on Terrorism — are sure to have some impact on the Caribbean, which is the focus of the remaining sections of this research note.

Table 1: A Representative Sample of Terrorist Incidents and plots in the Caribbean, 1972–2022

Year	Terrorist Incident	Country Involved
1976	Bombing of the Cubana Airline	Barbados
1976	Bombing of the Guyanese Embassy	Trinidad and Tobago
1976	Attack of Soviet Union vessel Dzrordano Bruno	Bahamas
1980	Bombing at Guadeloupe Airport	Guadeloupe
1980	Attempted kidnapping of Jamaica Defence Force Chief of Staff & capture of the country's Prime Minister Michael Manley	Jamaica
1983	Government newspaper Le Nouveau Monde bombed	Haiti
1983	Assassination of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop	Grenada
1987	Bombing of the Mormon Church & Peace Corps Office	Dominican Republic
1990	Jamaat-al-Muslimeen attempted coup d'état	Trinidad
1995	Assassination of Attorney-General & Minister of National Security, Selwyn Richardson	Trinidad
1996	Bombing of tourist hotels	Cuba
2005	Dustbin bomb explosion in Port of Spain	Trinidad
2018	Failed plot Carnival terrorist attack	Trinidad
2015	Cyberterrorist attack on Jamaica Information Service (JIS)	Jamaica

The War on Terror and the Caribbean

Since 2001, the War on Terror has involved government, intelligence and military actions across a broad range of geographic regions, including the Caribbean.[35] Moreover, as research by Dion Phillips reveals, Caribbean countries have over the past two decades adopted numerous UN resolutions endorsing a broad range of recommendations with regard to combating terrorism.[36] They have also drafted and passed anti-terrorism legislation at local and national levels, enacted or updated "other security-related laws and practices on emigration and passports," and sought to tackle the complex links between terrorism, organised crime, drug networks, and illegal arms dealing within the Caribbean context (which some refer to as narco-terrorism).[37] Meanwhile, research by Björnehed describes how after the 11 September 2001 attacks, reports indicated that drug trafficking had increased by some twenty-five percent in the Caribbean, likely because national and international law enforcement had become pre-occupied with "countering potential terrorism threats."[38] Moreover, it was reported that 75 percent of US Coast Guard personnel and boats that had been designated for "drug interdiction were transferred to anti-terrorist patrols."[39]

The War on Terror also had implications for Muslim communities throughout the Caribbean, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago, where some Muslims were placed on a terrorist watchlist. Further, several Caribbean Salafi scholars have been detained around the globe.[40] While some studies have described how the War on Terrorism resulted in amendments to America's immigration policy (and an increase in deportation rates) that disproportionately targeted the Latino community,[41] research by Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo found that the Caribbean country of Jamaica has also been impacted by this post-2001 shift in policy.[42] However, not much has been written from the Caribbean standpoint in terms of amendments to the region's immigration policies within the context of the War on Terror. Moreover, the prevailing literature has not sufficiently examined other areas like the financial sector or the creation of certain

agencies and policy directives that were a direct (and, in some instances, an indirect) result of the War on Terror.

A Case Study of the War on Terror's Impact on the Caribbean

This research seeks to address a central question: In what ways has the Caribbean been impacted by the War on Terrorism? To address this question, a qualitative research case study was organised, with elite interviews as the method of data collection. Elite interviews are a type of focused interview that differs from other methods of interview protocols in several aspects, as they are typically an in-depth method for data collection in which the "elites" tend to offer "very rich data".[43] This is because elite interviews typically involve respondents who are revered in their respective fields and "who hold important social networks, social capital and strategic positions within social structures because they are better able to exert influence."[44] Hence, the elite interviewees were all experts with many years of experience in their respective fields, and exert a certain level of influence within their social structures. Moreover, as Natow has argued, "it is not uncommon to see elite interview studies with relatively small numbers of respondents."[45]

For this case study, a total of five participants were interviewed: Tonya Ayow, Assistant Director of the Caribbean Community Implementing Agency for Crime and Security; Anthony Clayton, a national security expert and Professor at the University of the West Indies, Mona; Professor Suzette Haughton, a regional security expert; Grenville Williams, Assistant Director of the Regional Security System for St Vincent and the Grenadines; and Her Excellency Inga Rhonda King, St Vincent and the Grenadines Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

These interviews revealed that the War on Terror has impacted the region in a several ways. Many of the counter-terrorism measures and policies that were created directly and indirectly as a result of the War on Terror include the Joint Regional Communication Centre created during the 2007 Cricket World Cup that was held in the Caribbean; re-orienting the work of Financial Intelligence Units and establishing a Caribbean Financial Task Force; passing anti-terrorism legislation, and particularly laws focused on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism; and establishing counter-terrorism units in local police forces.

Anti-Terrorism Legislation and the Financial Sector

Initially following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, a major concern that emerged in the Caribbean related to the region's willingness and capacity to combat terrorism effectively. Although the War on Terrorism was focused primarily on countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan for almost a decade, and particularly in response to a surge of terrorist activity in the Middle East (mostly in Syria and Iraq), North and West Africa (particularly Nigeria) and Southeast Asia, the Caribbean region was also expected to implement terrorism-related policies despite not experiencing the same level of terrorist incidents (or influx of counterterrorism resources) as those other regions. These policies included efforts to combat the financing of terrorism; freezing of assets; increased the monitoring of cargo trans-shipments; and implementation of more rigorous checks of passengers before they travelled from the region into the US Caribbean countries were also expected to increase law enforcement and surveillance within the region.

These and other efforts were aimed at enhancing the region's capacity to effectively respond to the real or perceived global terrorism threat.

The various US foreign policy initiatives aimed at combating international terrorism also directly and indirectly impacted the region's financial sector. As Ambassador King observed, "there have been unintended consequences of the War on Terror for Caribbean states, which have been felt in the offshore financial sector and loss of correspondent banking relationships."[46] Further, she noted, it became "mandatory" for Caribbean states to adopt certain standards and pass "anti-terrorism legislation" in order to avoid being blacklisted and have "correspondent banking relationships interrupted."[47] Even small island developing states such as St Vincent and the Grenadines had to put in place certain measures as well as adopt certain international standards to effectively detect and track terrorist financing. The country introduced domestic legislation as well as incorporated international conventions into its domestic laws — including, for example, UN Security Council Resolutions 1373, 2482, 2462, and 2396. As Ambassador King noted, countries also adopted the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, a unique global instrument to enhance national, regional, and international efforts to counter-terrorism, and especially to enhance their local capacity for tracking the financing of terrorism.[48]

The region's local capacity for tracking the financing of terrorism was further aided by the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), which became the "national/centralized agency for the collection, analysis and dissemination of suspicious transaction reports," according to Ambassador King.[49] In addition to the FIU, the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, and the Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) initiative were also established, conducting a variety of assessments on the measures that countries must take towards countering terrorism financing. As of today, the Global Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has outlined over forty recommendations to address the issue of terrorism financing in the Caribbean.

In addition, a sanctions list was created as a result of the War on Terror. As Mr. Williams explained, the sanctions list is published and sent out by a number of different bodies, and it is assessed to see whether any individuals on the list have undertaken any questionable transaction within the region's jurisdiction.[50] This also meant that Caribbean states had to implement anti-terrorism finance laws — such as (for example) the Anti-Terrorist Financing and Proliferation Act 2015, Cap 274 of the Revised Edition of the Laws of St Vincent and the Grenadines, in which section 3 defines terrorism for the purposes of that legislation. The Act first defines terrorism as the use or threat of action designed to influence the government of the state or any other country, international organisation, or to intimidate the public or a section of it, and the use or threat is made with a view to advance a political, racial, religious, or ideological cause. It also categorises terrorist financing offences into four broad categories: organising or directing others to commit a fund-raising offence; use and possession; funding arrangements; and money laundering. Likewise, Trinidad and Tobago's Terrorism Act defines a terrorist as someone who deliberately engages in terrorism-related activities, which includes contributing to terrorist acts, the financing of terrorism or the advancing of it, directly or indirectly.

Shifting of Resources

There was also a shift in resources that the Caribbean region typically receives from the US to assist in combating some of the region's primary security threats like illicit drug trafficking. For example, Professor Haughton candidly observed that, "I think one of the ways in which the war on terror impacted the Caribbean is a shifting of resources. Because less focus was placed on the region as a whole and more focus was placed on Arab countries to try and curb terrorism…. So, whereas you would find a lot of assistance coming into the Caribbean region, it is almost like after September 11, they diverted those assets to elsewhere."[51] Professor Haughton's observation is substantially corroborated by several research studies that have noted a similar shifting of resources in terms of national and international law enforcement (as well as US Coast Guard personnel) in the Caribbean from tackling drug trafficking to countering terrorism-related matters.[52]

Immigration and Border Security

The 11 September attacks, and subsequently the War on Terror, are also linked to certain amendments to the region's immigration and border security policies, including the establishment of sophisticated mechanisms that allowed for the collection of information of travellers to the region, information that was then queried against a national and regional database to detect and thwart any possible terrorist threat to the region. For example, as Mr. Williams observed, during the 2007 Cricket World Cup (which was held in the Caribbean), countries throughout the region saw

> *a lot of security protocols put in place to deal with the influx of persons that were expected. Out of it we have had quite a few benefits, one of those that I think is most beneficial is that we have something called the Joint Regional Communication Centre, and what it does is that it obtains information from all passengers coming into the region before they arrive… You get a very basic profile of the individual. And that is a lasting legacy from the Cricket World Cup, but it was because of concerns as related to terrorism.*[53]

Another mechanism that was put in place following the 11 September attacks was the Advance Passenger Information System that is managed by the Caribbean Community Implementing Agency for Crime and Security (CARICOM IMPACS), which allows for the collection of passenger information that can be checked against national regional databases. During her interview, Ms. Ayow explained how "We [CARICOM IMPACS] manage the Advance Passenger Information System (APIS) for the region. The fifteen member states allow us to collect the information, and when we collect the information, it is automatically sent to the state to whom it belongs. They query against their national databases. We query against regional and international databases where we have the permission to do so…and the region has been doing this since 2006."[54]

Regional Efforts

Furthermore, the Eastern Caribbean security organisation known as the Regional Security System (RSS)—in which most of its members are also Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), with the exception of Barbados and Guyana, who are CARICOM member states along with the OECS members—has also expanded its role to include combating terrorism among other traditional regional security issues, such as the illicit trafficking of drugs, people and

small arms. Ambassador King emphasised the important role of the RSS and its commitment to combating terrorism in the region, noting how that organisation has in its possession two "C26 aircrafts that have been properly reconfigured to collect information," and that the "intel is shared with partners including the US, Britain, France, and the Netherlands, as all have overseas territories in the Caribbean."[55] These policies and initiatives were a direct result of the War on Terror broader international efforts to combat terrorism.

Another example of how the War on Terror impacted the region involves the amendments made to the FIU, which was initially set up to deal with money laundering. As Mr. Williams noted, "the FIU now has broader responsibilities for dealing with terrorism regulation."[56] For instance, the FIU can also act as one of the attorneys general in some cases, with authority to send out a list to financial institutions and other regulated bodies for them to determine whether an individual has engaged in any terrorism-related transactions within the region's jurisdiction. Moreover, the RSS—which includes six OECS member states of Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia & St Vincent and The Grenadines, Guyana and Barbados—even had to make certain amendments to their organisation's initial aims, objectives and responsibilities. According to Mr. Williams, "We [RSS] had to put mechanisms in place to identify the properties of those individuals (who engage or support terrorism) and freeze them, so that they cannot have access to them. We've had to put in place greater measures as it relates to our ports and point of entries. Terrorism has also now been put on the agenda of the regional security cluster of the organisation."[57]

The War on Terror also indirectly changed certain policies in the Caribbean because the region had to upgrade its systems, including greater monitoring of its shipping systems and more stringent security measures at airport check-in stations. However, as Mr. Clayton noted, a majority of these security-related policies and measures were never implemented until a decade after the terrorist attack on 11 September 2001. "The policy responses did not happen for over 10 years after 9/11, and I know that because I was involved in drafting some of those policy responses. And until I did it, there was in many cases nothing in place."[58] However, he could only speak in general terms about some of the policies that were implemented following the events of the 11 September and subsequently the War on Terror due to heightened sensitivity surrounding some of the actual operational measures that have been undertaken thus far. In addition to the many kinds of anti-terrorism legislation that were implemented as either a direct or indirect result of the war on terror, there were also practical implications in terms of the establishment of counter-terrorism units in local police forces in some Caribbean countries, including in the twin-island of Trinidad and Tobago.

Conclusion

Since the turn of the century, the nature of the terrorist threat in this region has shifted significantly, and as reflected in the insights and observations provided in these expert interviews, the War on Terror has impacted the region in several ways. Countries throughout the region have implemented new anti-terrorism legislation, made amendments to their immigration systems, upgraded security measures at their airports, and launched new counter-terrorism police units. They have adopted many recommendations of the FATF, reoriented their Financial Intelligence Units and established a Caribbean Financial Task Force. And the

governments of the Caribbean have collectively established a Joint Regional Communication Centre and an Advanced Passenger Information System that collect and analyse information from all passengers coming into the region before they arrive. These and other developments reflect the far-reaching and extensive impact that the War on Terrorism has had globally, even in countries that are sometimes overlooked when studying terrorism and counterterrorism.

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About

Perspectives on Terrorism

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