

Criminality in the Caribbean

Commentary: Caribbean Basin Security Initiative requires a broader approach in the Caribbean Commonwealth

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by Ian Francis

The growing and expanding criminal and lawless behaviour in the Caribbean Commonwealth requires global cooperation action. It is incumbent upon regional leaders to make this issue a development priority so public safety can be returned to our streets and those criminal elements are firmly dealt with.

Too much unnecessary homicides like the recent incidents that resulted in the beheading of two persons in Grenada; the murder of a grandmother Carroll Scott in Castries, St Lucia; a 15-year-old involved in an aggravated robbery on the west coast of Grenada; the Bordelais jailbreak and mule trafficking.

Caribbean leaders need to demonstrate strong leadership on criminal and lawless behaviour by understanding that the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative must go beyond drug interdiction and ensure a strategic approach to e-capacity building and sustainability across all law enforcement agencies that include the regional coast guard services.

What is very disturbing with the above criminal incidents is the inability of the local law enforcement agencies and their elected masters to fully understand what is occurring in their background and to ensure that resources and technical assistance are obtained to ensure the rebuilding of capacities and the need for effective criminal intelligence gathering to preserve public safety.

Caribbean leaders who are charged with the responsibility for public safety need to develop and sustain a broader vision about the management of public safety.

Recruitment of old retired Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and Scotland Yard personnel to head our local law enforcement agencies is an incorrect method to address escalating crime.

Secretary Robert Gates has departed Bridgetown and Caribbean leaders responsible for public safety have journeyed to Washington for another ritual on drug interdiction. Having participated in the State Department and Homeland Security rituals, they have now returned to their regional base still grappling crime and lawlessness in their jurisdictions.

Unfortunately, they sat at the meeting with Homeland Security, Defence and State Department officials with closed lips and did not have the courage to tell the United

States officials that public safety in the region goes far beyond drug interdiction and strengthening of local Coast Guards, which remain an integral part of local law enforcement agencies

President Obama's announcement at the recent Fifth Summit of Americas that \$49 million will be made available to the region to strengthen the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative seeks only to protect US interests in the region, with a priority on drug interdiction.

In my view, an effective and sustainable approach to security in the region by the United States Administration must also encompass the rebuilding of capacities in the local law enforcement agencies; donation of modern tools for crime detection and prevention; improvement of the living and recreational environment; training and creation of strong intelligence gathering mechanisms within the domestic, criminal, immigration and custom branches of the state's government; effective transportation maintenance and management; intensive life-long learning initiatives in global affairs so an admitting immigration officer would understand the difference between a drug cartel and terrorist group such as Al Queda.

President Obama must be congratulated on his foresight to recognize that crime and lawlessness in the region require a helping hand from the Administration. However, our elected leaders must show "belly" when it comes to the allocation and

disbursement of the announced \$49 million.

Criminality in the Caribbean has become very sophisticated with the utilization of various information technology tools, which have surpassed our local law enforcement agencies. Criminal misconduct in the region is not only limited to street gangs and the lumpen proletariat; it is very much institutionalized in all sectors by well known white collar players including unabated state corruption.

Therefore, it is very essential that if local law enforcement agencies are serious and committed to addressing crime within their jurisdiction, the camel's back must be broken.

Action is urgently required on this matter both by the CARICOM Secretariat and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). Based on firsthand knowledge, it would appear that the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago; Barbados and Jamaica are very much advanced with strategic and corporate planning in their various laws enforcement agencies.

The recent political error by the prime minister of Jamaica on the Dudas extradition, which resulted in the Jamaican security forces having to expose themselves to a Tivoli Gardens lawless gang with sophisticated illegal weaponry, led the Jamaican security services to demonstrate that their arsenal was superior, they were bolstered with discipline and had an effective intelligence gathering mechanism.

This response and success of the Jamaican security forces resulted from effective strategic planning. This is what is needed in the broader Caribbean region. That is why it is important to return to the drawing board in many of the Commonwealth Caribbean States.

Once the Planning Security Unit has been established within the Secretariat, the first order of activities should be a needs assessment study of all the OECS law enforcement agencies. The study should address all of the perceived needs earlier identified in this article.

The final product from the study should serve as the central strategic and planning guidance which will enable regional governments to re-engage the United States on their Caribbean Basin Security Initiative.

Approach other friendly nations such as Israel for technical training in intelligence gathering; the European Union for training of middle managers and probably Canada for assistance in several key areas where they have been most successful.

With the above approach, if pursued sensibly, with commitment and recognition of the need for appropriate follow up and implementation of recommendations, then the Commonwealth Caribbean region might be able to breathe a new sigh of relief for addressing crime and lawlessness in

the region.

Finally, our judicial system needs a major rebranding. We have to get the Lay Magistrate Act in place so qualified citizens designated as Justices of the Peace (JP) can ease the workflow within the summary division so magistrates will have more time to deal with the hardcore criminals and repeat offenders. Our crown attorneys must become tougher and stop allowing crooked and unethical defence counsels to intimidate them.

Let me conclude by urging elected leaders, law enforcement officials, the judiciary and law abiding citizens that the elimination of crime and lawlessness should be the priority as we need to regain our communities, peace and tranquility.

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