



MARITIME SECURITY LESSONS LEARNED FROM INTERNATIONAL SECURITY INITIATIVES IN THE CARIBBEAN

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KEY EVENTS

On November 15th, 2023, Jason Kelshall, Regional Coordinator, SEACOP EU, presented *Maritime Security Lessons Learned from International Security Initiatives in the Caribbean* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The key points discussed were increasing illicit trade and its effects, rising crime and drug availability, and challenges in maritime and energy resource security.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

The crossflow of narcotics and weapons between the Caribbean, Europe, and North America poses evolving challenges to regional and trans-national security, as the exchange of illicit drugs for weapons has compounding negative effects on the strong ties shared between North America and the Caribbean through systems of transportation, communications, and emigration. The challenge for law enforcement and Caribbean maritime security is staying ahead of emerging trends by increasing inter-agency joint cooperation to ensure strategic needs are being met with proper intelligence, equipment, resources, and training capabilities.

BACKGROUND

Trafficking of narcotics and weapons among the Caribbean, Europe, and North America presents evolving and complex challenges to both regional and international security, compounded by high levels of illegal migration in the region. The illegal arms and drug trafficking issue has a correlated effect to the levels of violence and increase in murder rates throughout the islands and, as Caribbean economies are heavily reliant on trade and tourism, the infiltration of illegal arms in the region presents significant harm to its development and livelihoods of the population.

Commander Kelshall explained that there is evidence to suggest tactical changes in trafficking methods have moved from the use of smaller fast marine craft towards more inconspicuous looking vessels, and uptakes in trafficking activity outline several needs to bolster Caribbean maritime security through coordinated and urgent action. Such actions should consider increasing assistance in the regions and capacity building training programs which are required to counter trafficking and ensure that the ability exists to respond to evolving and emerging threats in the region. This should include providing and acquiring the proper vessels or developing capacity for aerial surveillance, additionally, such schemes might consider specific security needs for offshore energy assets. Commander Kelshall noted that, based on a case study conducted, the required resources and equipment to respond to a scenario involving an oil platform incursion could not be met by a single island state. This points to significant resourcing issues in the region that, along with other key updates to maritime security, need to be addressed.

Commander Kelshall suggested rethinking how intelligence is processed and shared across agencies to a shift that would create more network-based approach, as opposed to the present standard of limited information sharing, which can detract from the capability and effectiveness of units. He advocated adapting the intelligence capabilities from a post-colonial/cold war model towards an infrastructure that can recognize hybrid warfare and operationalize social media and open-source intelligence.

Commander Kelshall suggested gaining a deeper understanding of the economic priorities and the state of evolution in the region, as the increase of violence, trafficking, and gang activity has a direct effect on the growth capacity of the Caribbean and the social consequences resulting from these activities. The economic fragility must be addressed with security in mind otherwise the loss of control of the sea and maritime borders could resemble conditions of hybrid warfare. The differing economic realities and states of evolutions does not translate to the required technological capabilities required to effectively contain these threats. The wealth and culture of the Caribbean emanates from the sea, therefore by protecting it is fundamental in ensuring and protecting its development, resources, and populations.

This challenge can only be met if the law enforcement and security enterprises commit to developing coordinated strategies that focus on boosting the tactical capabilities to stay ahead of emerging trends by increasing intelligence sharing, acquiring the right equipment, and the consistent implementation of targeted, specialized training.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- The escalation in trafficking of narcotics and weapons among the Caribbean, Europe, and North America presents evolving and complex challenges to both regional and international security, compounded by high-levels of illegal migration in the region.
- Uptakes in trafficking activity outline several needs to bolster Caribbean maritime security through coordinated and urgent action. Such actions should consider increasing assistance in the regions and capacity building training programs which are required to counter trafficking and ensure that the ability exists to respond to evolving and emerging threats in the region
- There is a need to update how intelligence is processed and shared across agencies in a way that creates a more network-based approach. This should centre on adapting intelligence capabilities from a post-colonial/cold war model towards one that recognizes hybrid warfare and operationalizes social media and open-source intelligence.
- A deeper understanding of the economic priorities and the state of evolution in the region is needed, as the increase of violence, trafficking, and gang activity has a direct effect on the growth capacity of the Caribbean and carries social consequences.
- Law enforcement and the security establishment must develop coordinated strategies that focus on bolstering tactical capabilities, emerging trends, acquiring the right equipment, and the consistent implementation of specialized training.



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