

RESILIENCY TO VULNERABILITIES AND VIOLENCE IN THE CARIBBEAN

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KEY EVENTS

On September 8, 2022, Dr. W. Andy Knight, a distinguished professor of International Relations in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta, presented on *Resiliency to Vulnerabilities and Violence in the Caribbean*. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives that delved into discussions on important dimensions currently affecting the Caribbean, such as transitioning from independent state-based security to regional security cooperation; developing financial stability amongst Caribbean nations; and promoting inclusiveness of Caribbean Canadians, along with an understanding of the diversity and needs of the population within the Caribbean.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

Dr. Knight's presentation was based on a topical overview of his research paper which went into detail on key components, such as historical factors that have contributed to the violence and instabilities in the Caribbean; the connection between structural violence and the region's manifold vulnerabilities; and the impact of concatenated violence or transnational criminal activity. Dr. Knight also provided some policy recommendations for Canada that can aid in mitigating the violence while reinforcing the structural complex of the Caribbean.

Question & Answer Period

During the question-and-answer period, Dr. Knight touched upon some of the Caribbean success stories that involved the transition from independent state-based security to regional security cooperation, how the Caribbean can protect

itself from external economic shocks, and how the Canadian government can promote diversity and inclusion of Caribbean Canadians.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Dr. Knight began by stating that small states in the Caribbean are suffering from vulnerabilities that have arisen through direct physical and structural violence, which has affected the region for generations. Dr. Knight discussed how the greatest challenge the Caribbean states faced was overcoming their *smallness* because this structural feature enhances their vulnerabilities. The implication behind this statement is that small states are typically at the epicenter of transnational crime, such as human, drug, and arms trafficking, which has proliferated over time. Dr. Knight stated that this has been the result of the uneven impact from globalization that has led to pushback and external economic shocks along with the increase in transnational crimes.

The post-Cold War era of neo-imperialism has raised awareness among Caribbeans about the relevant threats to their autonomy and liberty. Dr. Knight asserted that Canada may benefit from taking a proactive stance by building strategic partnerships with the Caribbean to aid them in strengthening regional institutions that can curb the level of violence experienced. According to Dr. Knight, this may be in Canada's best interest because due to its proximity to the Caribbean, a spillover effect could leave Canada equally vulnerable to similar types of violence.

Additionally, Dr. Knight discussed the colonial impact on the region and stated that the Caribbean's colonial legacy has created a traumatic legacy of trans-generational conflict that has left a physical and mental toll on the region's inhabitants. During this period of imperialism, slavery, labor exploitation, and indentured servitude, inhabitants were subjected to many different crimes by European colonial powers.

In the post-colonial era, the Caribbean region has suffered from neo-imperialism in the form of labour and economic exploitation by dominant, capitalist countries. In particular, the U.S. history of domination in the region, exemplified through the acts of military interventions in the Dominican Republic, Guyana, and Grenada, raised the level of direct physical violence experienced during the early 20th century, leading to early dependence on the U.S. for security.

Furthermore, Dr. Knight highlighted that several events during and after the Cold War led to the proliferation of small firearms, drug trafficking, illegal immigration, and terrorism as the U.S. used its unipolar hegemony to extend its dominance overseas and away from the region, leaving it vulnerable. The consequences of this legacy have paved the way towards a deepening concept of security, which has manifested in the form of dependence on colonial powers for safety and security against threats to their territorial integrity, political independence, economic security, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion. As a result, this has been prompted by an overreliance on foreign trade, foreign capital, and tourism (i.e., structural violence), presenting an equal threat to their economic viability due to the limits placed on their economic capacity.

To end his presentation, Dr. Knight listed off two significant mitigating policy recommendations: 1) the creation of a regional alliance of small sovereign states and 2) the support of the international community in investing in the development of the security apparatus in the region. According to Dr. Knight, the best way for small states to counter the transnational criminal threats they face is by pulling their sovereignty together and creating a security apparatus. Dr. Knight then noted that the Canadian government can be at the forefront of this venture and invest in the development of fusion centers, communications centers, emergency management, and other institutions similar to what CARICOM (Caribbean Community and Common Market), an organization dedicated to improving resiliency and integration of Caribbean states, is doing.

Question & Answer Period

During the question-and-answer period, Dr. Knight pointed to the creation of the CARICOM as evidence of how small states can successfully aggregate themselves into a regional union dedicated towards a significant objective. However, he also noted that the development of a union that is dedicated to regional security has been undermined by differences in ideals amongst leaders of CARICOM.

In terms of financial stability, Dr. Knight highlighted the importance of a regional approach to security when addressing the vulnerability of economic viability. In addition, forming partnerships with African regional blocs may present an economic opportunity for states due to their region's geographical affinity.

To address the last question, Dr. Knight delved into ways to improve social integration of Caribbean Canadians within Canada and proposed that community initiatives focus on developing the personal identities of individual Caribbean

Canadians while considering the intersectionality between different identity markers (i.e., gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc.). The diversity of the Caribbean region should also be factored in by the Canadian government when attempting to promote inclusiveness within Canada. Dr. Knight pointed out that by acknowledging the differences, the Canadian government could further help the integration of Caribbean Canadians.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

- The small structure of impoverished and marginalized states exacerbates the manifold vulnerabilities experienced by them in the form of direct physical and structural violence.
- Historical colonialism continues to have traumatic transgenerational ramifications for Caribbeans living in the region. Neo-colonialism has forced Caribbean states to depend on colonial powers for security against transnational criminal activity, as well as dealing with external economic shocks.
- Small Caribbean states are at the epicentre of transnational crimes, such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, gun smuggling, and piracy.
- To improve security in the region, it will be necessary for states to garner their sovereignty and create a joint regional partnership dedicated to reinforcing the security of states towards threats presented by structural and direct violence.
- Canada may be able to aid in this junction by investing in infrastructure that will make up the regional security apparatus; this aid may be necessary to offset the potential spillover of violence.

Question & Answer Period

- The CARICOM is an example of how independent states can successfully transition towards a model of regional cooperation.
- Forming a partnership with Africa may help influence financial stability in the Caribbean due to its geographical proximity.
- The Canadian government can promote inclusiveness of Caribbean Canadians by taking a regional and a communitarian approach and aid in the development of regional security.



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