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**ORGANIZED CRIME AS THREATS TO DEMOCRATIC
GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND NATIONAL SECURITY
IN TRINIDAD TOBAGO**

Wendell C. Wallace

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A B S T R A C T

Many studies have highlighted relationships between organized crime, weak governance, and national insecurity; however, few of these studies have focused on the Caribbean. This has served to limit what is known about the phenomenon in the Caribbean and has created a lacuna in the literature. As a result, this study was conducted to fill that gap by evaluating the threats posed to democratic governance structures and national security by organized crime groups in Trinidad and Tobago. The study utilized archival research and secondary data as well as survey questionnaires to top level security and defense experts in the island. The results indicate the widespread presence of organized crime groups who menace democratic governance structures and national security, and create the necessity for a new national security thinking which supports effective measures against organized crime groups in the island.

Wendell C. Wallace, Ph.D.
The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine, Trinidad and
Tobago

castarakid@gmail.com

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Introduction

A cursory review of daily media headlines and conversations in Trinidad and Tobago reveals that organized crime groups and their insidious effects are foremost on the minds of citizens. This is evidenced in the writings of numerous authors. For example, Richard Ramoutar (2012) has written an article for the *Trinidad Guardian* in which he has reported that “Trinidad and Tobago is not exempted from the cross currents of transnational organized crime (TOC) as it has not only gained a foothold in this country, but has penetrated all sectors of the society.” Apart from Ramoutar (2012), other media personnel as well as academics in Trinidad and Tobago have reported the presence of organized crime groups (as well as local terrorist groups) operating with impunity in the island. For example, researchers Williams and Seepersad (2015, p. 95-117) proffered the view that, “Apart from a proliferation of criminal gangs, organized crime has become a major concern for authorities in many Caribbean nations, including Trinidad and Tobago.” Deosaran (2003) offers support on the existence of organized crime groups in Trinidad and Tobago as he notes that subversive groups reside in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and many of the smaller Caribbean states, all prepared to strike when the opportunity arises. Deosaran (2003) also argues that some of these subversive elements are now embedded in the political life of some Caribbean countries including Trinidad and Tobago. Evidence of the operation of locally based organized crime groups is evinced by the discovery of 332 kilos of cocaine concealed in orange juice tins in Norfolk, USA, which originated from a major international port in Trinidad and Tobago in December 2013, the arrests of several Trinidad and Tobago Muslim clerics in Venezuela on terrorism charges in March 2014 and the execution of

prominent Attorney-at-Law, Dana Seetahal in the midst of a high profile murder trial, reportedly on the instructions of local organized crime bosses. As a result of the aforementioned incidents, the Caribbean Human Development Report (2012) notes that organized crime is a serious problem in Trinidad and Tobago.

With the aforementioned in mind, the study was conducted to determine whether organized crime groups pose any threat to democratic governance structures and national security in Trinidad and Tobago. Indirectly, the study also sought to determine whether there is the need for a new national security thinking by security professionals in the island. To address these important issues, this paper is structured as follows. First, a review of relevant literature is presented in order to determine important correlates of organized crime to governance and national security. Second, the results emanating from the data are illustrated and analyzed, followed by an argumentation of issues pertinent to the need for a new security thinking. The paper concludes with policy implications and recommendations for addressing the activities of organized crime groups in the island.

Background

Hofmann (2009) submits “organized crime is a growing problem worldwide” (p. 2) and as organized crime groups have exploded exponentially, no country appears to be immune from their activities. Trinidad and Tobago, for example, has not been exempted from the ‘global phenomenon’ of organized crime. In its various manifestations, organized crime has the propensity to negatively affect the stability of Trinidad and Tobago as the island is situated at the ‘gateway to the Americas’ between the drug producing countries to the South and the major drug consumers to the North. Added to the islands’ ideal location at the ‘gateway to the Americas’, Trinidad and Tobago’s porous borders and location on direct transportation routes to Europe, West Africa, Canada and the United States enhances it as an ideal location for organized crime to

flourish. In addition, the violent nature of organized crime appears pervasive in the world today and transcends borders, shown for example by the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the USA, the Bali bombings in Indonesia (2002) and the terrorist attack in Mumbai (2008).

The aforementioned attacks as well as violence by organized crime groups (sometimes acting in concert with terrorist groups) have contributed to heighten insecurity at local, regional and international levels due to the ‘globalizing nature of violence’ as described by Appadurai (2006). The brazenness of these attacks has underscored the fact that organized crime groups and their activities have transcended cultural, social and geographical barriers and that there are no completely safe countries or regions. This lack of safe spaces (largely due to organized crime) has resulted in numerous lives being lost, drug-related health problems, indiscriminate violence, failed and failing states and a preponderance of firearm related deaths due to the unscrupulous methods and motives of organized crime groups. This has caused a global dilemma among security professionals who are now grappling with the chaos caused by organized crime as never before. Trinidad and Tobago is no exception to this unease as the island faces a national security dilemma which requires a contemporary understanding of the security threats posed by organized crime groups to the democratic governance structures and national security in the island.

From a global perspective, the Organized Crime Council (2008, p. 1) argues that in recent times organized crime “has expanded considerably in presence, sophistication and significance.” This holds true for Trinidad and Tobago as an examination of its criminal landscape between 1994 and 2014 suggest that organized crime groups in the island have expanded in nature, scope and dimension (see Katz & Fox, 2010). These groups are now viewed as local, regional and international threats as a result of their global approach in seeking international criminal partners and by utilizing sophisticated strategies to subvert national security infrastructures. Further, this

approach has facilitated their infiltration into the global economic, social, financial and political systems. The result is that many individuals in Trinidad and Tobago, including innocent citizens, have been negatively affected by the activities of organized crime groups and their activities which have been widely recognized as multidimensional and multifaceted.

In Trinidad and Tobago, there exists a perception as well as some circumstantial evidence which suggests linkages between organized crime and politics/politicians, as well as other state (public officials) and non-state actors which fosters the appearance of a symbiotic relationship between the state and organized crime groups. This relationship, whether imaginary or real, has the propensity to threaten democratic governance structures as well as the national security of the island. However, in spite of numerous allegations linking local politicians to organized crime groups and organized crime (see Deosaran, 2003; Ramoutar; 2012), statutory provisions such as the Civil Assets Forfeiture Bill remains a pipe dream for the island.

Definitional issues

To be clear, the terms ‘organized crime groups’ and ‘organized crime’ have always posed a definitional problem for researchers (Abadinsky, 1990; Paraschiv, 2013). Abadinsky (1990) lends support to the definitional conundrum surrounding the term organized crime as he surmised that there is confusion and eclecticism as to what exactly constitutes organized crime. As a result of this definitional issue, many researchers have skirted around the issue by not seeking to define the terms ‘organized crime’ and ‘organized crime groups’; however, there is a definitive need for the terms to be defined.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Article 2(a)) defines an organized crime group as “a structured group of three or more persons existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences

established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit” (UNODC, 2004). Similarly, Flores and González Ruiz argued that “Organized crime [groups] can be defined as a social network made up of individuals that commit illicit activities during a prolonged period of time with the goal of obtaining the biggest economic benefit possible (as cited in Solís & Aravena, 2009).” By definition, ‘organized crime group’ is operationalized in this paper using the definition by Flores and González Ruiz (2009) above as it captures major element of these groups.

Kavanagh (2013, p. 6) has called our attention to organized criminal activities by considering the following as organized criminal activities: drug trafficking, human trafficking, illicit trade in counterfeit goods and other illegal commodities, small arms manufacture, small and conventional arms trafficking, illegal logging, illegal trade in wildlife, money laundering, internet fraud, piracy, corruption, forgery, oil bunkering, extortion, kidnapping and racketeering. Government structures are the “means by which decisions are arrived at and implemented” (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009, p. 1). In this paper, governance structures refer to the legitimate institutions which are responsible for decision making in Trinidad and Tobago.

Traditionally, national security takes military security as the foundation and main content of national security (Li, 2013, p. 29). The traditional definition of national security is exemplified by Francois’ (2009) definition who proffered “defense and security, which constitute national security, are state prerogatives aiming to ensure, in all places, at all times, and in all circumstances, the integrity of a state’s territory, the protection of its population, and the preservation of its national interests against all types of outside threats and aggressions” (p. 24). Over the past decade; however, there has been a divide over the meaning, nature and scope of

national security and this divide has widened as the traditional view of national security seems to have lost its historical relevance (see Finel, 1999; Tomé, 2010, p. 1). Indeed, as suggested by Wirtz, contemporary definitions of national security now tend to include “non-military threats to security such as resource scarcity caused by population growth and rising living standards, Third World urbanization and the attendant strains on fragile governments, overpopulation, health, and migration flows” (as cited in Tomé, 2010, p. 2).

Contemporary definitions of national security have been submitted by Ulmann (1983) who defined national security in the following manner - “a threat to national security is an action or sequence of actions that (1) threatens drastically and over a brief span of time to degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state, or (2) threatens significantly to narrow the range of policy choices available to the government of a state or to provide nongovernmental entities (persons, groups, corporations) within the state” (as cited in Romm, 1993, p. 6). Morales (1989) adds to the contemporaneity of the definition of national security “..... first entails defence in its narrowest concept - the protection of a nation’s people and territories from physical attack; and second, the more extensive concept of the protection of political and economic interests considered essential by those who exercise political power to the fundamental values and the vitality of the state” (p. 149). In this paper, it is the definition of national security by Morales (1989) that will be utilized as it is wider in nature and scope.

The problem

Harriott (2004) contends that “The problem of crime in the Caribbean – its causes, its consequences, and its control – emerged as a major concern during the 1990s” (p. 1).

Continuing, the author notes that, “Since 1970, there have been significant increases in the rate of violent crimes in every Caribbean country for which data is available” (Harriott, 2002, p. 4).

Unfortunately, for Trinidad and Tobago, ‘the problem of crime’ continued and some posit that it might have worsened to now include local organized crime groups (see Ramoutar, 2012; Williams & Seepersad, 2015) as well as transnational organized crime groups. For Trinidad and Tobago, organized crime is a reality and this reality is further compounded by the many possible threats emanating out of organized criminal activities which includes threats to democratic governance structures as well as the national security infrastructure of the island. Indeed, Burgoyne (2012) points out that criminal threats to national security can become serious national security threats while organized crime groups also threaten to weaken democratic governance structures. Added to the problem of the operation of organized crime groups in Trinidad and Tobago is a lack of empirical research on the phenomenon. This lack of empirical research on organized crime groups in Trinidad and Tobago is consistent with the view of Kavanagh (2013) who contends that, “despite these disconcerting signs, investments in academic research on the effects of organized crime on governance remains limited” (p. 4). Thus, while the problem appears uni-dimensional, it may well be multi-faceted in nature.

Objectives of the study

In the Caribbean Human Development Report (2012) the authors assert that, “Research on organized crime has a long and extensive history in the United States; in Europe, the topic has also received increasing attention, but the phenomenon has not been as systematically examined in the Caribbean” (p. 68). The Caribbean Human Development Report (2012) also highlights that “the lack of research in the Caribbean should not come as a surprise given that, as Caribbean scholars report, little attention has been given to citizen insecurity until recently and even less attention has been dedicated to gangs and problems related to organized crime” (p. 68). In the same vein, the report stated that “most of what is known comes from the two largest Caribbean

nations: Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago” (Caribbean Human Development Report, 2012, p. 68). This lacuna in the criminological literature on organized crime in the Caribbean is supported by Harriott (2011) who notes that “while there is anecdotal evidence of organized crime in the other six Caribbean-7 nations, there has been almost no systematic research examining prevalence” (p. 6). In addition, he adds that “as a consequence, the data and information required to understand the problem are lacking in the Caribbean basin” (Harriott, 2011, p. 6).

With the postulations by Harriott (2011) and the Caribbean Human Development Report (2012) and Kavanagh (2013) in mind, the main objectives of the paper is to provide further elements of knowledge on organized crime groups in the Caribbean. The study also aims to fill the gaps which are present in the criminological literature on the relationship between organized crime and various societal and institutional entities. The major questions which this paper seeks to answer are (1) whether organized crime groups acts as threats to democratic governance structures and national security and (2) whether there is the need for a new security thinking to obviate the impact of organized crime on democratic governance structures and national security in Trinidad and Tobago.

Relevance of the study

This study is relevant on several fronts. First, the research on organized crime is relevant in the context of good governance and governability in Trinidad and Tobago. This relevance is consistent with the position of Hofmann (2009) who posits that “it is therefore crucial to address organized crime and its negative impact on democratic governance” (p. 2). Second, the research is relevant within the contexts of “a security-development nexus” as noted by Boonstra and Shapovalova (2012, p. i) and in relation to governance structures in the context of a national development as noted by the United Nations Development Programme report (UNODC, 2011).

The relevance of this study can also be viewed in the light of final considerations made by West (2006), Durán Martínez (2007) and Gomez Hecht (2012) who noted the presence of significant relationships between organized crime and various aspects of societal life. Further, the United Nations also noted linkages between organized crime and the Rule of Law (UNODC, 2003a) as well as between organized crime and human development (UNODC, 2003b) which have the potential to act as individual and collective threats to Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, the study is relevant as there is a dearth of empirical studies and criminological literature on organized crime focusing on the Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago. Finally, the study is relevant as “surprisingly little is known about the impact of organized crime on governance and development” (Kavanagh, 2013, p. 8).

Methodology

The study is articulated around seven research questions and three scientific hypotheses. To answer the research questions as well as the hypotheses, research was conducted using a variety of methodological tools inclusive of the following:

1. Archival research;
2. Primary data (questionnaires to the academic experts, lawyers, Police, Customs, Immigration and Defense Force personnel in Trinidad and Tobago); and
3. Secondary data.

A strategic assessment of organized crime threats was also conducted in relation to Trinidad and Tobago. This assessment utilized unstructured interviews with individuals in the criminal underworld, an unstructured survey of one hundred law enforcement personnel in the island, analyses of approximately seventy-five media reports as well as several intelligence reports. The research was based on a series of survey questionnaires to thirty-five security and defense

experts in the island. The survey participants were drawn from academia, policy-makers in the public sector and front-line security practitioners throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The research was structured around seven basic research questions that shaped the questionnaire given to the participants. The research questions were:

1. Do organized crime groups exist in Trinidad and Tobago?
2. What are the main features of organized crime in Trinidad and Tobago and what are their particular manifestations in the island?
3. Does organized crime have the potential to corrupt democratic governance structures in Trinidad and Tobago?
4. Can organized crime groups act as threats to the national security of Trinidad and Tobago?
5. What are the possible consequences for Trinidad and Tobago as a result of organized crime in the island?
6. What has been the State's response to the challenges of organized crime in Trinidad and Tobago?
7. Is it necessary a new national security thinking in Trinidad and Tobago?

Hypotheses

Emanating from the research were three (3) hypotheses, namely:

H1: Organized crime is prevalent in Trinidad and Tobago.

H2: Organized crime has the potential to corrupt democratic governance structures in Trinidad and Tobago.

H3: Trinidad and Tobago needs a new national security thinking to effectively deal with organized crime.

While the research was primarily quantitative, the author's aim was not to be overly scientific, but to present the data in a simplified manner so as to afford academics, legislators as well as laypersons an opportunity to evaluate the threats posed by organized crime groups in Trinidad and Tobago. As such, the author initially analyzed the data from the survey questionnaires by utilizing the Social Sciences tool such as Social Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (a statistical software used for testing the hypotheses) but the findings of the study are presented using simple percentages. The study followed a path of inductive reasoning, namely it makes broad generalizations from specific observations which result from the analysis of the responses to the survey questionnaires.

Literature review

In a discourse on organized crime Sung (2004) argues "Organized crime has become one of the main security concerns in democratic and democratizing societies" (p. i) while Hofmann (2009) notes "organized crime is a growing problem worldwide" (p. 2). This growing problem along with its inherent dangers has always been of grave concern to the United Nations (U.N.) and it began receiving significant attention from the U.N. starting with resolution 1992/22 of the Economic and Social Council. The extant literature on organized crime has noted the nexus between organized crime and various sectors of society; such as, between organized crime and weak/poor governance (West, 2006; Gomez Hecht, 2012), organized crime and the threats of weakening governance structures (Gomez Hecht, 2012; United Nations, 2004), organized crime and governability (Gomez-Hecht, 2012) and organized crime and threats to the national security infrastructure of a country (Gomez Hecht, 2012). Other insidious relationships such as organized crime and politics, organized crime and economics, and organized crime and societal decay were noted by Gomez-Hecht (2012, p. 10). The United Nations also observes linkages between

organized crime and the Rule of Law (UNODC, 2003a) as well as links between organized crime and human development (UNODC, 2003b).

It is also recognized that organized crime “poses a significant and growing threat to national and international security, with dire implications for public safety, public health, democratic institutions, and economic stability across the globe” (National Security Council, 2011, p. 5).

Williams (2002) emphasized that states are vulnerable to organized crime and noted that the vulnerabilities are territorial in nature, that functional gaps can be exploited by organized crime groups (legal system, criminal justice system) and that there may be economic competition from organized crime groups due to the attractiveness of some sectors (e.g., financial and tourism) as well as state legitimacy.

Goede (2013) reported that the influence of TOC on governance in the Caribbean is worrying and that normative theories of democracy, public administration and governance no longer apply. He concludes that economic growth diminishes, unemployment rises, and crime rises as a result of the organized crime/governance nexus. Gastrow (2011) notes that, “The threat posed by organized crime is not confined to serious crimes such as racketeering, the global drug trade, or human trafficking” (p. 1). Continuing, Gastrow (2011) proffers the view that “for many developing countries and fragile states, powerful transnational criminal networks constitute a direct threat to the state itself, not through open confrontation but by penetrating state institutions through bribery and corruption and by subverting or undermining them from within” (p. 1). In a similar vein, Kavanagh (2013) points out that “many sources suggest that organized crime has a significantly detrimental impact on governance in many developing countries” (p. 4). This detrimental impact of organized crime on governance is also echoed by Godson and Olson’s work (as cited in Reinares & Resa, 1999, p. 3). Indeed, the positions adopted by Godson and

Olson (1995), Gastrow (2011), Kavanagh (2013) and Goede (2013) are closely aligned to a major tenet of this research paper which posits an unhealthy relationship between organized crime and governance.

As it relates to organized crime as a threat to national security, there is a plethora of supporting academic literature which points to an unhealthy relationship between organized crime and national security. For example, Reinares and Resa (1999) adopt the position that “.....organized crime as an increasing threat to the national security” (p. 2) and that “it is evident that recent trends in organized crime have led to the effective increase of its harmful consequences on national security in general.....” (p. 7), while the Organized Crime Council of the U.S. Department of Justice (2008) submits “organized crime is a national security problem” (p. 1). Quite succinctly, Nurgaliyev, Lakbayev, and Boretsky (2014) note that, “.....organized crime is not only a problem of law enforcement agencies and is a threat to national security” (p. 3441), while Nwebo and Charles (2015, p. 96-97) and Godson and Olson (1995) (as cited in Reinares & Resa, 1999), see “Organized crime as a threat to national security” (Reinares & Resa, 1999, p. 3).

The old and antiquated methods which were previously used to fight organized crime cannot be sustained. Elected officials in Trinidad and Tobago should no longer view themselves as experts on this issue but must now seek integrated and cooperative strategies for addressing organized crime. In order to strengthen national security and resilience in Trinidad and Tobago, this author calls for an analysis of the existing national security infrastructure in the island aimed at contemporizing its structure, operation and output. This includes steps such as modern prevention and interdiction methods, cooperation in the development of global anti-organized crime strategies, vulnerability reduction, strengthening of porous borders, improved maritime

capacity, “improved community involvement in policing” (Wallace, 2014), creation of a Police Marine Branch, cyber security strengthening as well as creating stronger international alliances. In his extant research, Bunker (2012) believes that there is a connection between gang studies, organized crime studies, insurgency studies and terrorism studies with the aim of understanding criminal threats from contemporary crime groups. This diagnostic paper seeks to provide explanations for viewing organized crime groups as threats to democratic governance systems and national security. This article therefore provides insights into the current state of threats to democratic governance structures and national security in Trinidad and Tobago from organized crime groups. Insights will also be provided into the need for a new national security thinking as a result of organized criminal activities.

Points of discussion

The results emanating from the survey questionnaires were quite illustrative of the prevailing sentiments which have been echoed in most conversations throughout Trinidad and Tobago. There was a ninety per cent return rate from the top security practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago who were randomly selected to complete the questionnaire. In terms of the demographics of the study, seventy-three per cent of the respondents were males, with an age range of twenty-six to sixty and a mean of forty-six point five years. Seventy-three per cent of the respondents were African descended, seventeen per cent were mixed and ten per cent were of East Indian descent. In terms of the number of years spent in security and defense, the years ranged from four to thirty-nine years, with a mean of twenty point five years. The data emanating from the survey instrument supported the three hypotheses. As such, the null hypotheses were rejected by the researcher in favour of the research hypotheses (H1: Organized crime is prevalent in Trinidad and Tobago, H2: Organized crime has the potential to corrupt democratic governance structures

in Trinidad and Tobago and H3: Trinidad and Tobago needs a ‘new security thinking’ to effectively deal with organized crime).

Regarding research question number one (organized crime groups exist in Trinidad and Tobago); almost ninety per cent of the respondents agreed that organized crime groups exist in the island. Added to this, ninety per cent of the respondents agreed that there is a prevalence of organized criminal activity in the island. The main features of organized crime in Trinidad and Tobago and their particular manifestations (research question number two) were described as being wide and varied in nature and scope. The main features and their manifestations were increased levels of organized criminality, sophisticated drug and firearms smuggling, increases in prostitution and human trafficking, money laundering and corruption in political and public office. Other features included the commission of top level crimes linked to politicians and local crime bosses, collusion of government and criminal gangs (for example, criminal gangs receiving state contracts), weak state institutions, polarization of wealth, and marginalization of communities. Additionally, the assassination of high profile individuals, criminals operating with impunity, revenue slippage and security forces living above their income levels were also seen as manifestations of organized criminality in Trinidad and Tobago.

As it relates to research question number three, (does organized crime have the potential to corrupt democratic governance structures in Trinidad and Tobago), eighty-nine per cent of the respondents indicated that organized crime has the potential to corrupt democratic governance structures in the jurisdiction, while seventy-five per cent proffered the view that organized crime negatively affects the national security infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago (research question number four).

Regarding research question number five (the possible consequences for Trinidad and Tobago as a result of organized crime in the island); the respondents identified a range of real and possible consequences resulting from the activities of organized crime groups in the island. These range from weakening governance structures, terrorizing local communities, money laundering, corrupting public officials, increasing the fear of crime, weakening internal democracy, undermining of citizens confidence in public institutions and weakening the Rule of Law. The state's response to the challenges of organized crime (research question number six) was depicted in a multiplicity of ways ranging from the 'dismantling of previously working approaches' to 'doing nothing' to 'doing very little' and continuing to the implementation of legislation, the creation of various crime units, the implementation of numerous non-local crime plans and rapidly changing Ministers of National Security. In this regard, it was also revealed that there was the implementation of short-term, politically expedient crime strategies, increasing the manpower of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and nepotism and cronyism in the appointment of state security officials. With regard to research question number seven, seventy-seven point three per cent of the respondents were in agreement with the statement that Trinidad and Tobago is in need of a new national security thinking. The responses to this question were generally predicated on the notion that "the national security apparatus in Trinidad and Tobago is antiquated, ambivalent, politically influenced and outmoded" (National Security expert, Trinidad and Tobago, 2014).

Several other key issues emanated from the research; however, the three most succinct will be briefly discussed in an attempt to highlight the views of the top security experts in the island. First, sixty-six per cent of the respondents were of the view that organized criminal groups play significant roles in communities in Trinidad and Tobago. Second, the possible impacts of

organized crime on democratic governance structures in the island ranged from the erosion and destruction of democracy, the undermining of governance structures and the weakening of democratic governance structures. Third, organized criminality was viewed as having the potential to corrupt government officials, render democratic governance infrastructures ineffective, facilitate the growth of the underground economy, compromise the national security apparatus, produce a general loss of confidence in government and facilitate state capture. Instructively, the views which emanated from the data are consistent with those of West (2006) and (Gomez Hecht, 2012) in relation to organized crime and weak/poor governance, Gomez Hecht (2012) and the U.N. (2004) on organized crime and threats of weakening of governance structures and Gomez Hecht (2012) on organized crime and the possible threats to the national security infrastructure.

In order to strengthen the study (validity and reliability), a strategic assessment of the organized crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago was conducted. The author of this paper covertly drew on information from several intelligence reports, data from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, about seventy-five media articles and information gathered from individuals in the criminal underworld. The strategic assessment concluded that organized crime groups in Trinidad and Tobago are a major threat to democratic governance structures, public safety and national security in the island. This was evinced by, but not limited to, the assassination of prominent Attorney-at-Law Dana Seetahal in 2014 reportedly by organized crime bosses operating from within the confines of state prisons in Port-of-Spain and Arouca.

A new security thinking

Not all national security and elected political officials are convinced of the need of a new security thinking in Trinidad and Tobago (see Politics in Tobago and Trinidad, Tobago News,

July 21, 2011), but the author of this paper is in agreement with the postulation of the Center for the Study of the Presidency (2008) which stated “we must learn to think differently about national security and devise new measures to ensure it” (p. iv) and submits that there must now be a contemporary thinking on national security in Trinidad and Tobago. This contemporary thinking must:

1. Be as multidimensional as the threats to national security in Trinidad and Tobago;
2. Ensure transparency;
3. Possess long term vision and foresight;
4. Place qualified personnel in positions to conduct relevant tasks and not be politically expedient;
5. Recalibrate the traditional mindset and approach to National Security;
6. Be broad, sustained, multi-agency and ensure the regional cooperation and development of strategies (Kugler, 2011, p. 12);
7. Lack cronyism in the appointment of state security officials;
8. Be relevant in a local, regional and international context; and
9. Possess a high level of permanence, patience and persistence (see Office of the President, 2015, p. iv) to ensure continuity of a Trinidad and Tobago national security plan when governments change.

The proposed nine point new national security thinking outlined above must be viewed within an integrated framework similar to that prepared by the Organized Crime Council in 2008 and titled ‘Overview of the Law Enforcement Strategy to Combat International Organized Crime’ which was the product of sustained inter-agency cooperation. Further, this new thinking should be dependent on every state security institution as well as other related agencies and should not be approached in a piecemeal manner. Local legislators in Trinidad and Tobago should be cognizant of the position held by Hofmann (2009) on organized crime when the author argued “solutions to organized crime are a must; however, the old and antiquated methods which were previously

used to fight organized crime cannot be sustained” (p. 2). With Hofmann’s (2009) view in mind, it is submitted that there is the need for a new security thinking in Trinidad and Tobago. This new security thinking must be predicated on the establishment of a national security plan with clear priorities and targets based on coordinated regional crime prevention strategies to complement local national security strategies. A new security thinking is also predicated on the perception that the present national security environment is radically different from what existed two decades ago and/or when the existing national security agenda was created by Trinidad and Tobago on attaining independence in 1962.

It is submitted that the new security thinking for individuals in Trinidad and Tobago must be predicated on the wisdom that there has been an exponential expansion in terms of the nature of scope of criminal organizations locally, regionally and internationally. In other words, organized crime is now a global phenomenon as it has transcended borders with increased rapidity and volatility. Combined with the aforementioned issues, is the use of modern techniques of infiltration and subversion by organized crime groups. With this in mind, a new security thinking should reflect contemporary thoughts and crime suppression techniques and should also be premised on a national security ontology which is multi-dimensional in approach and structure and regional and global in scope. The new thinking must also have continuity and the ontological focus should extend beyond the reaches of Trinidad and Tobago to include regional and international partners. This requires a broad-based multi-dimensional approach to include an understanding of traditional and non-traditional threats, new and emerging criminality as well as the propensity of organized crime groups to subvert democratic structures by subterfuge and even guile as ‘organized crime is not stagnant, but is an ever-changing industry, adapting to markets and creating new forms of crime’ (UNODC, 2011). It is clear that the contemporary

national security challenges that Trinidad and Tobago currently face cannot be addressed by the earlier traditional approaches. It is therefore important for national security operatives in Trinidad and Tobago “to understand the complex relationship between organized crime and governance in order to suggest, promote, and support better strategies to tackle and prevent this threat to the stability of states” (Martínez, 2007, p. 1).

Conclusion

There are numerous policy implications for policy makers emanating from the current study. A major policy implication is that Trinidad and Tobago must cooperate or continue to cooperate to fight organized crime groups and interrelated issues such as money-laundering, human and drug trafficking, illicit trade and corruption. Security policies must continuously engage a larger number of actors within the states, for example, military, academics and practitioners in a non-political manner keeping in mind that newer crime threats create an increasing and changing demand for institutions and for multilateral cooperation. In addition, it is necessary to restructure current national security frameworks as older ones may be inappropriate to address the imperatives of a contemporary security policy. Local policy makers must understand that organized crime transcends borders and that international efforts to stem the problem are only as strong as the weakest link. Specifically, the emergence of organized crime in the island is treated as ‘an indicator of a weak and failing state’ (see Rotberg, 2002).

The government of Trinidad and Tobago should view the threat of organized crime and its insidious effects very seriously. Based on the views which were garnered from the top experts on security and defense in the island, it is clear that organized crime groups are operating in Trinidad and Tobago and their deleterious effects are already being felt, with a host of negative possibilities to follow. Sadly, the numerous possibilities which abound as a result of organized

crime are of immense proportions and no amount of historical amnesia will allow future generations of politicians and citizens in Trinidad and Tobago to forget the effects of organized crime on the socio-political landscape of the island as they have the propensity to weaken democratic governance structures and legitimate social mores.

Instructively, new and emerging threats require new and emerging laws, sanctions and approaches. Therefore, the contemporary national security thinking and response in Trinidad and Tobago should now reflect a coordinated and jurisdictionally seamless approach. The responsibility for national security of the state is an onerous one in light of organized criminality as organized crime is complex and so too are its solutions. For national security officials in Trinidad and Tobago, the internal and external security of the island is a daunting task; however, despite the 'clear and present dangers' which they face from organized crime groups, the task is not an insurmountable one. If the national security infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago is to be successful in the fight against organized crime, true national security "demands a new thinking and a different way of doing business" (Project on National Security Reform, 2008, p. viii). Indeed, there is a need for a new national security thinking to address the contemporary challenges posed by local organized crime groups with their new networks (transnational in nature) and sophisticated methods of conducting business.

The author wishes for the implementation of a long-term national security plan which is able to support changes in the structures of government, promote greater regional cooperation on national security issues, and equip national security officials with effective intervention tools against organized crime groups and criminals. As a result, the government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago should immediately rethink its national security approach because of the

threats posed by organized crime groups on democratic governance structures and national security of the island.

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