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**THESIS**

**SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE CARIBBEAN:  
AN EXAMINATION OF EMERGING SECURITY  
COOPERATION INITIATIVES IN COMBATING  
REGIONAL THREATS OF MUTUAL CONCERN**

by

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December 2023

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REGIONAL THREATS OF MUTUAL CONCERN**

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## ABSTRACT

The Caribbean region faces a wide range of transnational criminal threats, especially narcotic trafficking. Countries in throughout the region agree that multilateral maritime security cooperation is essential to overcome these threats. In fact, they have created a variety of regional institutions to promote such cooperation. However, this cooperation has been insufficient to overcome the threats. By contrast, cooperation off the Pacific coast of Central America appears to have been much more successful in countering similar threats. This thesis conducts a comparative case study to determine whether there are lessons the Caribbean countries can learn from cooperation in the Eastern Pacific. It finds that the main difference between the two regions is the presence or absence of a sustained multilateral operation to organize and conduct interdiction operations. In the Eastern Pacific, countries have coordinated their efforts through Operation MARTILLO for two decades, but in the Caribbean similar efforts mainly have been conducted on an ad hoc basis. As a result, Caribbean countries lack the institutions that enable them to share the resources and information that are required to interdict narcotics traffickers. This finding suggests that maritime security cooperation in the Caribbean could be enhanced by establishing a formal multinational operation along the lines of Operation MARTILLO.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACIS	Advance Cargo Information System
AOR	area of responsibility
APIS	Advanced Passenger Information System
CANSEC	Caribbean Nations Security Conference
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CBSI	Caribbean Basin Security Initiative
CCSS	CARICOM Security Policy
CENTRIXS	Combined Enterprise Regional Information Exchange System
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
EPAC	Eastern Pacific
FY	fiscal year
GAO	United States Government Accountability Office
IATF	interagency task force
IMPACS	Implementation Agency for Crime and Security
IUU	illegal, unreported, and unregulated
JIATF	Joint Interagency Task Force
JISR	Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
JRCC	Joint Regional Communications Center
MASCA	Maritime and Airspace Security Cooperation Agreement
MNIS	multinational information sharing
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NORTHCOM	U.S. Northern Command
OECS	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
PNN	Participating Nations Network
RIFC	Regional Intelligence Fusion Center
RSS	Regional Security System

SIDS	small island developing states
SOUTHCOM	U.S. Southern Command
TCO	transnational criminal organization
TOC	transnational organized crime
UNODC	The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There are serious transnational maritime security threats in the Caribbean. These threats include not only traditional transnational organized crime (TOC) activities, such as illicit trafficking and smuggling, but other threats, including illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and the potential for the trafficking of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) for use as tools of terrorism. Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and other criminals have consistently exploited the Caribbean region's security weaknesses.<sup>1</sup> Most importantly, there continues to be an uptick in the trafficking of illegal drugs throughout the region, mainly from South America to Europe and North America. In assessing the global quantities of cocaine seized over the period 1998–2019, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that “the quantity of cocaine seized by countries in the Caribbean more than doubled in 2019 to reach 14 tons (1% of the global total).”<sup>2</sup> As conditions in Venezuela have deteriorated, the flow of drugs through the Caribbean has grown rapidly. The Dominican Republic is recognized as the main transit point for cocaine coming from Venezuela, and in April 2022, Dominican authorities seized 7.6 million tons of cocaine, which was more than the entire amount seized in 2018 and 2019 combined.<sup>3</sup>

Caribbean small island states are unable to overcome these transnational maritime security threats on their own, and so far, have not been able to cooperate effectively. Over the last decade, some Caribbean countries have invested heavily in providing their militaries with maritime enforcement assets.<sup>4</sup> However, since maritime enforcement assets

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<sup>1</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy, *National Drug Control Strategy: Caribbean Border Counter-Narcotics Strategy 2022* (Washington, DC: The White House, April 2022), 1, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Caribbean-Border-Counter-Narcotics-2022Strategy.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> UNODC, *World Drug Report 2021* (Vienna, Austria: United Nations Publication, June 2021), 19, [https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21\\_Booklet\\_4.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21_Booklet_4.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Anastasia Austin and Douwe Den Held, “The Dominican Republic—The Caribbean’s Cocaine Hub,” Insight Crime, September 7, 2022, <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/dominican-republic-caribbean-cocaine-hub/>.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” December 2020, 76, <https://www.stableseas.org/post/stable-seas-caribbean>.

are so expensive, most Caribbean governments under-invest in them.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as Burroughs et al. noted, “assets on the water are only one component of an adequate architecture for maritime domain awareness.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, Caribbean militaries are required to employ a greater array of resources other than those of their navies and coast guard. However, given the internal security challenges posed by organized crime in Caribbean small island developing states (SIDS), the political will to invest in maritime security has waned.<sup>7</sup> Since national resources are limited, and the Caribbean region already receives a significant amount of international military assistance, in particular from the United States, Caribbean governments instead tend to prioritize internal security.<sup>8</sup>

There are limited examples of cooperative efforts that have provided a maritime security response in the Caribbean. The Regional Security System (RSS), which was formed in 1982 out of the establishment of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), is one such example.<sup>9</sup> However, as significant as the RSS is to maritime security, it is limited in construct, since its powers and functions are geographically perimetered by the Eastern Caribbean.<sup>10</sup> There are other multilateral organizations, which have a broader scope, for example, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS), and its sub-agencies: the Joint Regional Communications Center (JRCC)—based in Trinidad and Tobago—and the Regional Intelligence Fusion Center (RIFC), based in Barbados.<sup>11</sup> However, these organizations are primarily concerned with information and intelligence, and they have no operational assets to

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<sup>5</sup> Burroughs et al., 75.

<sup>6</sup> Burroughs et al., 76.

<sup>7</sup> Burroughs et al., 74.

<sup>8</sup> Burroughs et al., 74.

<sup>9</sup> Ivelaw L. Griffith, *The Quest for Security in the Caribbean: Problems and Promises in Subordinate States* (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Griffith.

<sup>11</sup> “CARICOM IMPACS—The Caribbean Community Implementation Agency for Crime and Security,” CARICOM IMPACS, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://caricomimpacs.org/>.

conduct maritime enforcement.<sup>12</sup> There is, however, a better model of cooperative efforts that exists, which is the motivation for this research.

#### **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

The question this thesis will answer is how can Caribbean militaries cooperate effectively to combat regional threats? In particular, this thesis will explore the possibility that Caribbean maritime security cooperation can be improved by adopting the approach used by the U.S.-led Joint Interagency Task Force–South (JIATF-South) on the Pacific coast of Central America. In that region, unlike the Caribbean, the United States and its international partners have developed a formal partnership known as Campaign MARTILLO, which facilitates the sharing of information and pooling of resources to interdict a large number of target vessels.

#### **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

For decades, the general theme at Caribbean security conferences and summits has surrounded security cooperation. Nonetheless, the efforts to foster a significant regional security response to the transnational maritime security threats are slow in coming. This research has significance for the Caribbean militaries and other maritime forces with responsibilities to counter maritime security threats, as well as for the Caribbean governments and the international partners that have a vested interest in ensuring security of the Caribbean region.

The Caribbean militaries and government can benefit from this research since, if its conclusions are adopted, it may reassure the Caribbean nationals that their security and political representatives are committed to addressing the shared threats that face the region. According to the U.S. Southern Command, during the 2022 Caribbean Nations Security Conference (CANSEC 22), Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley stated in her address to the conference:

Much has been said this morning already with respect to the common threats that we now face. I don't think any of us needs to be reminded of it, because

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<sup>12</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 78.

we live it each and every day. But our role is not only cooperation. Our role is also to be able to give confidence to our populations that we have this, or as we say in Barbados and the Caribbean: we got this.<sup>13</sup>

There is a substantial international interest in the Caribbean, but none more so than that of the United States, given its close proximity. This research and its recommendations, if adopted, may allow CARICOM militaries to contribute to the stability and security of the Western Hemisphere, thereby enhancing United States security. Additionally, it may demonstrate CARICOM's commitment to stability and security of the region, which should build the confidence of foreign governments and encourage greater foreign military assistance to the region.

### C. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focuses on the academic studies of transnational maritime security threats in the Caribbean, the maritime security responses to these threats, and reasons why the responses have so far been ineffective. Finally, it examines an alternative approach to cooperation and why it might be suited to the Caribbean.

#### 1. Maritime Threats

There is agreement among scholars that illicit cross-border flows and activities pose a significant and growing threat not only to coastal states but also to landlocked states. Bruwer highlighted the complexities of transnational maritime crime and the effects they pose to people's livelihoods, the development of states, and international security.<sup>14</sup> She found that "massive volumes of illicit commodities are also moved across the world's ocean, including drugs, wildlife products, oil, and counterfeit goods."<sup>15</sup> She also noted that smuggling and trafficking are major threats to maritime security and suggested that they

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<sup>13</sup>Michael Wimbish, "Caribbean Security: Leaders from 21 Nations Meet to Discuss Challenges, Cooperation," U.S. Southern Command, April 7, 2022, <https://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/2993382/caribbean-security-leaders-from-21-nations-meet-to-discuss-challenges-cooperati/>.

<sup>14</sup>Carina Bruwer, "Smuggling and Trafficking of Illicit Goods by Sea," in *Global Challenges in Maritime Security: Advanced Sciences and Technologies for Security Applications*, ed. Lisa Otto (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 49.

<sup>15</sup>Bruwer, 50.

can be categorized into “human trafficking and migrant smuggling, drug trafficking, trafficking of firearms, wildlife and environmental crime, and counterfeit goods.”<sup>16</sup> However, she concluded that these maritime threats vary by region, based on demand and supply and other varied suitability factors for the criminal networks or rogue states involved.<sup>17</sup>

In assessing the illicit cross-border flows and activities in the Western Hemisphere, Serrano examined the connection between weak states and transnational criminal organizations.<sup>18</sup> She found that “weak states are less able than strong ones to contain transboundary criminal activities.”<sup>19</sup> She also noted that “in the past decades the variety in the forms of transboundary illicit activities, including illicit flows of money, arms, stolen cars, and people as well as drugs, has intensified.”<sup>20</sup> She concluded that “the development in areas like drug trafficking, money laundering, extortion, illicit arms transfer, and illegal migration suggest a serious erosion of the capacity of states to guarantee the security of its citizens and to maintain law and order.”<sup>21</sup> The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that “illicit activities at sea are inextricably intertwined in the sense that not only do they involve activities of ‘organized criminal groups’ within the meaning of the UNTOC, but often the same organized criminal groups are associated with more than one illicit activity.”<sup>22</sup>

The Caribbean and the Eastern Pacific are two maritime regions in the Western Hemisphere that face similar transnational maritime threats, including drug trafficking. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration found that multi-ton shipments of cocaine are still

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<sup>16</sup>Bruwer, 61.

<sup>17</sup>Bruwer, 69.

<sup>18</sup>Monica Serrano, “Transnational Crime in the Western-Hemisphere,” in *The Future of Inter-American Relations*, ed. Jorge Domínguez (New York: Routledge, 2000), 87.

<sup>19</sup>Serrano, 88.

<sup>20</sup>Serrano, 91.

<sup>21</sup>Serrano, 92.

<sup>22</sup>UNODC, *Combating Transnational Organized Crime Committed at Sea*, Issue Paper (New York: United Nations, March 2013), [https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/GPTOC/Issue\\_Paper\\_-\\_TOC\\_at\\_Sea.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/GPTOC/Issue_Paper_-_TOC_at_Sea.pdf).

being obtained by Mexican TCOs from South American traffickers, transported across the Eastern Pacific (EPAC), and then smuggled into the United States via the Southwest border.<sup>23</sup> They found that the Caribbean maritime corridor is also utilized by traffickers, namely Dominican TCOs, to transport cocaine to their consumers in the United States and Europe.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, according to the UNODC, over 40 years ago, the Caribbean corridor had the highest cocaine seizures, while the EPAC had far fewer.<sup>25</sup> By 2010, however, the percentages had changed, with more than 80% of the cocaine being seized in the EPAC and fewer than 10% in the Caribbean as a result of increased enforcement in the EPAC.<sup>26</sup> However, the Caribbean has experienced a rebound in cocaine trafficking as a result of the expansion of one of the region's most prolific drug corridors into the Dominican Republic.<sup>27</sup>

The maritime threats faced by Caribbean SIDS pose a significant challenge to the entire region, not only because of their devastating effects, but also due to the lack of capacity of these states to adequately combat these threats. In their article, Young and Woodiwiss attempted to provide an analysis of the major security threat to all SIDS.<sup>28</sup> They found that “it is the illicit trafficking of firearms from the United States to Caribbean SIDS which remains the most challenging issue faced by regional law enforcement officers.”<sup>29</sup> Agozino et al. also agreed that the Caribbean is plagued by the increased

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<sup>23</sup> Drug Enforcement Administration, *2020 National Drug Threat Assessment*, 2021, 33, [https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/DIR-008-21%202020%20National%20Drug%20Threat%20Assessment\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/DIR-008-21%202020%20National%20Drug%20Threat%20Assessment_WEB.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Drug Enforcement Administration, 33.

<sup>25</sup> UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment* (Vienna, Austria, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012), 31, <https://doi.org/10.18356/493ae18b-en>.

<sup>26</sup> UNODC, 31.

<sup>27</sup> Venezuela Investigative Unit, “Dominican Republic and Venezuela: Cocaine Across the Caribbean,” *Insight Crime*, May 24, 2018, <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/dominican-republic-venezuela-cocaine-across-caribbean/>.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Alice Young and Michael Woodiwiss, “Organised Crime and Security Threats in Caribbean Small Island Developing States,” *The European Review of Organised Crime* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1.

<sup>29</sup> Young and Woodiwiss, 1.

availability of guns and a resultant high level of gun homicide and violence.<sup>30</sup> Their analysis sought to explain such realities and found that there was a nexus between drug trafficking and gun-related violence and death in the Caribbean.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. Maritime Security Response

The academic field on maritime security response in the Western Hemisphere predominantly surrounds the United States counternarcotics efforts in the region. For decades, the United States has had the largest maritime security enforcement presence in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>32</sup> The stability of the Caribbean SIDS and the Central American countries as well as the national security of the United States are seriously threatened by transnational criminal networks.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, in order to create a stable and peaceful hemisphere where criminal organizations are less powerful, the United States acknowledges in its National Security Strategy the significant and growing partnerships it has with countries in the region.<sup>34</sup>

The UNODC noted that, irrespective of the type of maritime security response adopted by states to combat TOC, it must be noted that “without international cooperation both at regional and international level, no significant progress can be achieved.”<sup>35</sup> A coordinated regional approach at the operational level is necessary due to the common nature of the threats facing the Central American countries and Caribbean SIDS in their respective regions. Pope found that given the magnitude of operations that the United States government conducts overseas, coordinated planning and execution at the

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<sup>30</sup>Biko Agozino et al., “Guns, Crime and Social Order in the West Indies,” *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 9, no. 3 (August 1, 2009): 287–305, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895809336378>.

<sup>31</sup>Agozino et al., 287.

<sup>32</sup>Raúl Capote Fernández, “U.S. Military Presence in Latin America & the Caribbean,” MR Online August 23, 2018, <https://mronline.org/2018/08/23/u-s-military-presence-in-latin-america-the-caribbean/>.

<sup>33</sup>U.S. Southern Command, “Countering Transnational Organized Crime,” accessed July 19, 2022, <https://www.southcom.mil/Commanders-Priorities/Counter-Threats/Countering-Transnational-Organized-Crime/>.

<sup>34</sup>Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2017), 51, <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/NSS2017.pdf?ver=CnFwURrw09pJ0q5EogFpwg%3d%3d>.

<sup>35</sup>UNODC, *Combating Transnational Organized Crime Committed at Sea*.

operational level are required in complicated operations involving participants from many agencies.<sup>36</sup> His investigation looked at four different organizational reform models and suggested the interagency task force (IATF) as the best option for complex operations at the operational level.<sup>37</sup> The United States military doctrine defines interagency operations as “any action that combines the human and material resources of two or more independent organizations, whether they are governmental, international, or private, in the prosecution of a common objective.”<sup>38</sup> Pope suggests that while the Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) has not been codified in United States doctrine, it is “an interagency organization under a single military director that coordinates counterdrug operations at the operational and tactical level.”<sup>39</sup> However, it must be noted that the JIATF construct is applicable beyond the coordination of counternarcotics operations and epitomizes twenty-first century operational level military cooperation across all security domains. The U.S.-led JIATF-South is an example of successful cooperation by an interagency task force in the region. According to Munsing and Lamb, JIATF-South integrates:

the efforts of different organizations: agents and informants in South America, tactical analysis teams in Europe, law enforcement task forces in the United States, ships from the Navy and Coast Guard, planes from the Air Force and Customs, and Border Protection and diverse intelligence assets from numerous agencies, to name but a few of its allies.<sup>40</sup>

Of note, they further highlight that “JIATF-South provides military assistance to law enforcement, which requires a special relationship with the law enforcement organizations that are indispensable to the task force’s performance.”<sup>41</sup> In their

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<sup>36</sup> Robert S. Pope, “Interagency Task Forces: The Right Tools for the Job,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2011): 113.

<sup>37</sup> Pope, 113.

<sup>38</sup> Department of the Army. *Combat Health Support in Stability Operations and Support Operators* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, October 27, 2007), <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/8-42/fm8-42.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Pope, “Interagency Task Forces,” 117.

<sup>40</sup> Evan Munsing and Christopher J. Lamb, “Joint Interagency Task Force–South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success,” *National Defense University Press*, Institute for National Strategic Studies Strategic Perspectives, no. 5 (June 2011): 70, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/717918/joint-interagency-task-forcesouth-the-best-known-least-understood-interagency-s/>.

<sup>41</sup> Munsing and Lamb, 55.

investigation of how JIATF-South works, Munsing and Lamb used 10 organizational performance metrics derived from organizational and management research on cross-functional teams.<sup>42</sup> Among the 10 variables assessed as significant to the explanation of the successes of JIATF-South were team purpose, empowerment (authority and resources) and culture.<sup>43</sup> Munsing and Lamb found that at JIATF-South “a strong shared purpose motivates team members to transcend the competing cultures of their home agencies and helps unify the efforts of people with very different backgrounds and experiences.”<sup>44</sup> Munsing and Lamb also noted that, for a team to function successfully, it must be given the authority and resources it requires to achieve its objective and purpose.<sup>45</sup> This speaks to political will, and in view of that, they noted that “JIATF-South, however, is fortunate to be well empowered for its mission.”<sup>46</sup> Munsing and Lamb further noted that at JIATF-South, members must put aside their national service, agency, or personal ways of thinking, understand other points of view, and be dedicated to achieving the team’s goal by functioning as a cohesive unit.<sup>47</sup> To overcome such bureaucratic resistance, requires trust, and according to Munsing and Lamb, “once trust is established, it must be maintained, and the JIATF-South culture is tailor made to support trust relationships.”<sup>48</sup>

Two categories of effort are involved in the counterdrug interdiction operations in the Eastern Pacific and the Caribbean: a local effort and U.S.-led initiatives. Magliocca et al. noted that in the Eastern Pacific the United States’ counternarcotics forces provide major operational, financial, intelligence-gathering, and training support to Central American countries in their counterdrug interdiction activities, which are primarily carried

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<sup>42</sup> Munsing and Lamb, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Munsing and Lamb, 34–52.

<sup>44</sup> Munsing and Lamb, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Munsing and Lamb, 36.

<sup>46</sup> Munsing and Lamb, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Munsing and Lamb, 53.

<sup>48</sup> Munsing and Lamb, 54.

out by police and military forces.<sup>49</sup> Munsing and Lamb noted that the same is true in the Caribbean region, where the majority of the governments lack the resources and capabilities needed to patrol their entire exclusive economic zones.<sup>50</sup> The U.S.-led counterdrug initiative in both regions is coordinated by JIATF-South.<sup>51</sup> However, while they continue to support the maritime interdiction strategy in the Caribbean, the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) reported that the Eastern Pacific region is where they focus the most priority because Central American nations face the greatest danger and disruption from transnational criminal organizations.<sup>52</sup> This priority effort by U.S. SOUTHCOM in Central America is conducted under Operation MARTILLO.<sup>53</sup> Targeting the routes used for illegal trade in the coastal waters from the United States to Central America, Operation MARTILLO is an interagency operation coordinated by JIATF-South that enlists the help of federal law enforcement agencies, the Navy, and Coast Guard of the United States, as well as 14 other participating nations.<sup>54</sup> Davenport noted that “more significant is that Operation MARTILLO places JIATFS partner nation assets under United States tactical control, a previously unheard-of surrender of sovereignty.”<sup>55</sup> Through Operation MARTILLO, Central American nations are able to collaborate on interdiction operations which is facilitated by information and resource sharing. However, the Caribbean region lacks a comparable multinational operation. Instead, periodic multilateral exercises and operations carried out by the foreign allies constitute maritime security cooperation in the Caribbean. One example of the ad hoc regional cooperation operations in the Caribbean is Operation TRIGGER, a combined weapons operation by INTERPOL

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<sup>49</sup> Nicholas R. Magliocca et al., “Shifting Landscape Suitability for Cocaine Trafficking through Central America in Response to Counterdrug Interdiction,” *Landscape and Urban Planning* 221 (May 1, 2022): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2022.104359>.

<sup>50</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 77.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Southern Command, “Countering Transnational Organized Crime.”

<sup>52</sup> U.S. Southern Command, “Campaign Martillo,” accessed July 19, 2022, <https://www.southcom.mil/Media/Special-Coverage/Operation-Martillo/>.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Southern Command.

<sup>54</sup> U.S. Southern Command.

<sup>55</sup> Aaron C. Davenport, *Lessons from Maritime Narcotics Interdiction: Interdiction in the Maritime Source, Transit, and Arrival Zones of the Western Hemisphere* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), 17.

and the Caribbean Community Implementation Agency for Crime and Security.<sup>56</sup> Operation TRIGGER, which lasted only seven days, is the region’s first coordinated effort against weapons trafficking by INTERPOL and CARICOM IMPACS.<sup>57</sup> Another illustration is the yearly, multi-nation Operation ORION, which is a month-long drug trafficking operation in the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.<sup>58</sup>

#### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

While Caribbean regional collaborative systems are in place and are working with some degree of success, their effectiveness is limited by significant challenges. This thesis argues that Operation MARTILLO provides useful lessons to improve maritime security cooperation in the Caribbean. Both regions are similar in many respects: they are comprised of small countries with limited capabilities; they face major TCO threats, especially narcotics trafficking by sea; and they are participants in the U.S.-led JIATF-South as well as other international efforts to counter the threats posed by TCOs. However, there seems to be one major difference between the regions: in the Eastern Pacific, JIATF-South has established a formal and sustained operation to coordinate regional counter-drug operations, but in the Caribbean it has not. Instead, counter-drug operations in the Caribbean are conducted mainly on an intermittent or ad hoc basis. Therefore, this thesis expects to find that maritime security partnerships would be more effective in the Caribbean if they were organized and sustained in the way that is similar to Operation MARTILLO.

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<sup>56</sup> INTERPOL, “Hundreds of Firearms and 12.6 Tonnes of Drugs Seized in Caribbean Operation,” October 13, 2022, <https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2022/Hundreds-of-firearms-and-12.6-tonnes-of-drugs-seized-in-Caribbean-operation>.

<sup>57</sup> INTERPOL, “Project Target,” accessed December 11, 2022, <https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Firearms-trafficking/Project-Target>.

<sup>58</sup> Diálogo Américas, “Orion VI Campaign Deals Hard Blow to Narcotrafficking,” *Diálogo Américas* (blog), February 11, 2021, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/orion-vi-campaign-deals-hard-blow-to-narcotrafficking/>.

## **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The analytical approach for conducting this research was a comparative case study of the United States' Joint Interagency Task Force's construct for interagency cooperation in order to review and adapt critical areas that could be implemented in a Caribbean regional context. The JIATF construct has been hailed as the ideal model of cross-organizational collaboration and provided an ideal case for the Caribbean to emulate. Specifically, in the Western Hemisphere, the JIATF-South, as cited by Munsing and Lamb, is "well known within the U.S. government as the 'gold standard' for interagency cooperation and intelligence fusion, despite its preference for keeping a low profile and giving other agencies the credit for its successes."<sup>59</sup>

The existing Caribbean state-led security structures and institutions as well as the existing U.S.-led joint maritime security operational initiatives in the Caribbean were also examined to determine possible gaps and opportunities as well as the best way forward to effectively coordinate a collaborative response to threats of mutual concern. In the end, this thesis explains how the implementation of the best practices of a JIATF construct could mitigate the security challenges of the Caribbean region.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW AND DRAFT CHAPTER OUTLINE**

This thesis is comprised of four chapters. The first chapter introduces the major research question, significance of the research question, literature review, potential explanations and hypotheses, and the research design. Chapter II identifies examples of security cooperation initiatives that work specifically, a case study of Operation MARTILLO that examines its function, structure, successes, and challenges. Chapter III provides an application to the Caribbean and discusses the efforts to address the shared threats in the Caribbean. The conclusion, Chapter IV, discusses the overall findings and lessons learned in addition to offering recommendations for ways that Caribbean militaries can leverage security cooperation to combat regional threats.

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<sup>59</sup>Munsing and Lamb, "Joint Interagency Task Force-South," 1.

## II. THE EASTERN PACIFIC

In this chapter, the JIATF-South led Operation MARTILLO is evaluated as a potential model for combating the flow of illicit drugs, particularly in the maritime domain. This chapter focuses on the Eastern Pacific region and identifies cocaine trafficking as the main maritime security challenge in Central America. The coordinated efforts by the United States and the participating countries in Central America to combat illegal trafficking in the region are briefly discussed. This chapter also addresses the function of JIATF-South in the Eastern Pacific and the structure that allows it to carry out its objectives. The chapter then concludes that the successful cooperation to a long-term operation, such as Operation MARTILLO, seems to have been essential to enabling Central American countries to share information, share resources, and conduct interdiction missions.

### A. TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME IN CENTRAL AMERICA

The Eastern Pacific's geographical location and the internal security circumstances of the Central American nations combine to make the perfect environment for TOC. Due to the security threats that Central America suffers, a favorable environment has been created for the illicit cross-border flows that are destined for North America. These threats include serious crime issues, illegal cross-border flows of drugs and weapons, the smuggling of migrants, and human trafficking, to name a few. For example, in collaboration with their counterparts from Mexico and Central America, Colombian TCOs send several tons of cocaine via maritime conveyances to the United States each year.<sup>60</sup> Colombian TCOs sell multi-ton quantities of cocaine and smaller quantities of heroin to Mexican drug gangs, who then transport the drugs into the United States via the Eastern Pacific.<sup>61</sup> Illegal immigration to North America is also on the rise, especially from countries in Central America where there is violence, due to the region's comparatively robust economy and imagined affluence.<sup>62</sup> For instance, in the first

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<sup>60</sup> Drug Enforcement Administration, *2020 National Drug Threat Assessment*, 71.

<sup>61</sup> Drug Enforcement Administration, 71.

<sup>62</sup> Evan R. Ellis, *Transnational Organized Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean: From Evolving Threats and Responses to Integrated, Adaptive Solutions* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Lexington Books, 2018), 16, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=5316327>.

half of 2015, United States officials detained around 70,400 non-Mexican immigrants at the U.S.-Mexican border (primarily from Central America), and Mexican authorities detained an additional 93,000.<sup>63</sup> However, in FY 2022, 520,602 immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras were held in detention.<sup>64</sup>

The instability of the Eastern Pacific region is also closely connected to TOC—most notably cocaine trafficking—as controlling routes is essential for illicit traffickers and carries with it crippling violence. This connection exists because the TCOs regularly resort to severe violence in response to challenges from rivals. For instance, conflict between two rival gangs from different parts of the city that specialize in drug robberies is the main source of violence in Panama’s capital, Panama City.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, access to firearms from the 1980s civil wars, coupled with access to weapons imported or trafficked in the region from the United States, Mexico, and Europe, and drug trafficking, are the main causes for crime and violence in Central America.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the fact that Central America is affected by many illicit cross-border flows, cocaine trafficking, the organizations it empowers, and the violence it causes, pose the greatest threat to public safety.<sup>67</sup> The increase in cocaine trafficking in Central America since 2006 is primarily responsible for the violence and unrest that has occurred.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, it became riskier for traffickers to ship cocaine directly to Mexico when the new national security policy was implemented by the Mexican government in 2006, resulting in an increasing amount of the

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<sup>63</sup> Ellis, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, “Record-Breaking Migrant Encounters at the U.S.-Mexico Border Overlook the Bigger Story,” *migrationpolicy.org*, October 16, 2022, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/2022-record-migrant-encounters-us-mexico-border>.

<sup>65</sup> UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean*, 41.

<sup>66</sup> Cristina Eguizábal, “The Central America Regional Security Initiative: A Key Piece of U.S. Security Assistance to El Salvador, but Not the Only One,” in *Crime and Violence in Central America’s Northern Triangle: How U.S. Policy Responses Are Helping, Hurting, and Can Be Improved*, ed. Eric L. Olson (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2015), 286, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/FINAL%20PDF\\_CARSI%20REPORT.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/FINAL%20PDF_CARSI%20REPORT.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> UNODC, 11.

cocaine flow overland in Central America.<sup>69</sup> The new land routes crossed regions controlled by different local organized criminal groups, upsetting the power balance. A further source of income emerged from taxing the movement of drugs via gang-controlled territories. As a result, more cocaine entering the scene greatly raised the stakes and fueled rivalry for dominance of the territory. Furthermore, most of these organized criminal activities are linked.<sup>70</sup> The same TCOs that traffic narcotics also transport people, bulk cash, guns, and other items that are subject to government regulation. Ellis argues that “the use of Central America as a transit zone also substantially contributed to the corruption of already weak institutions in the region.”<sup>71</sup> Government officials in Central America have long been severely tainted by the bribery of cocaine traffickers.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the ineffective governance and public corruption has been responsible for the rise in prominence of violent street gangs in the region.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, it is without question that cocaine trafficking poses a serious threat to the region and has second and third order consequences.

The nations of Central America are neither substantial producers nor consumers of cocaine; they are mainly transit nations. Central America serves as a link between the consumer nations in the north, primarily the United States, and the producer nations in South America. Among the South American producing countries, Colombia is the main supplier of the bulk of the cocaine consumed in the United States. Colombian cocaine is primarily shipped by sea to Mexico or Central America, where it is subsequently carried by land to the United States and Canada. Fishing boats loaded with tons of cocaine frequently depart Colombia for locations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean near Mexico or along the coasts of Central America. As a result, the EPAC maritime routes are primarily utilized by traffickers to transport cocaine from South to North America (see Figure 1, which shows a visual

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<sup>69</sup> UNODC, 11.

<sup>70</sup> UNODC, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Ellis, *Transnational Organized Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 19.

<sup>72</sup> Magliocca et al., “Shifting Landscape Suitability for Cocaine Trafficking through Central America in Response to Counterdrug Interdiction,” 3.

<sup>73</sup> Ellis, *Transnational Organized Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 19.

depiction of the movement of cocaine across the Eastern Pacific, Western Caribbean, and Eastern Caribbean vectors in 2019).

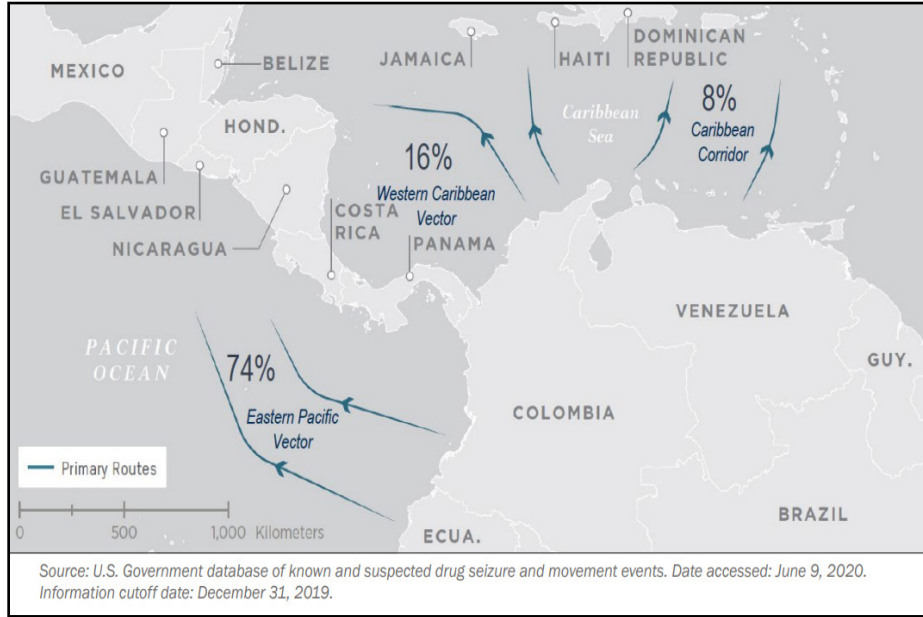


Figure 1. Cocaine Movement to Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, Calendar Year 2019<sup>74</sup>

As Figure 1 shows, approximately 74% of cocaine reported to have left South America for the United States in 2019 transited the EPAC.<sup>75</sup> This development indicates that drug traffickers preferred to use the Eastern Pacific Vector to transport cocaine to the north. The traffickers continuously attempt to exploit the maritime routes in the EPAC, typically via go-fast vessels in order to smuggle cocaine into the United States.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, drug traffickers in Central America have resorted to using more sophisticated methods, such as semi-submersible vessels that are difficult to properly intercept.<sup>77</sup> As a result, the issue has

<sup>74</sup> Drug Enforcement Administration, *2020 National Drug Threat Assessment*, 35.

<sup>75</sup> Drug Enforcement Administration, 35.

<sup>76</sup> Drug Enforcement Administration, 35.

<sup>77</sup> UNODC, *Combating Transnational Organized Crime Committed at Sea*, 27.

continued to worsen since the flow of cocaine is concentrated in a region where the impacted nations are least equipped to provide an effective response.

## **B. COUNTERDRUG INTERDICTION OPERATIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA**

There are two main categories of maritime drug interdiction operations in Central America.<sup>78</sup> The first category comprises the actions taken by the police and military forces of the Central American nations to target shipments at ports or within their exclusive economic zones.<sup>79</sup> According to Magliocca et. al. “these efforts can involve tactical operations directed at specific drug smuggling operations or personnel, or less targeted operations such as checkpoints and border inspections.”<sup>80</sup> However, throughout Central America, the armed forces have mostly failed to meet the challenges posed by transnational criminal organizations.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, local authorities have also seldomly intercepted maritime shipments, unless alerted by the United States agencies, as their navies and coast guards often have limited capabilities to observe or interdict offshore activities.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, the United States Coast Guard is often given permission to conduct patrols or engage in hot pursuit through ship-rider agreements as long as a representative of the state whose waters the operation is taking place is present to legally approve any law enforcement action.<sup>83</sup>

The second category, and the subject of this chapter, is specifically focused on U.S.-led drug interdiction measures in international waters of the Eastern Pacific Ocean, which provide a key support for Central American counterdrug interdiction efforts.<sup>84</sup> The United

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<sup>78</sup> Magliocca et al., “Shifting Landscape Suitability for Cocaine Trafficking through Central America in Response to Counterdrug Interdiction,” 3.

<sup>79</sup> Magliocca et al., 3.

<sup>80</sup> Magliocca et al., 3.

<sup>81</sup> Julie Marie Bunck and Michael Ross Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation: Drug Trafficking and the Law in Central America* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2015), 18, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=6224573>.

<sup>82</sup> Bunck and Fowler, 18.

<sup>83</sup> Bunck and Fowler, 19.

<sup>84</sup> Magliocca et al., “Shifting Landscape Suitability for Cocaine Trafficking through Central America in Response to Counterdrug Interdiction,” 3.

States mission of providing counterdrug support is carried out by two combatant commands in the Western Hemisphere: United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM) and United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM).<sup>85</sup> The land mass of Latin America south of Mexico, the oceans bordering Central and South America, and the Caribbean Sea are all included in the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility (AOR). Figure 2 shows the area of responsibility of SOUTHCOM.<sup>86</sup>

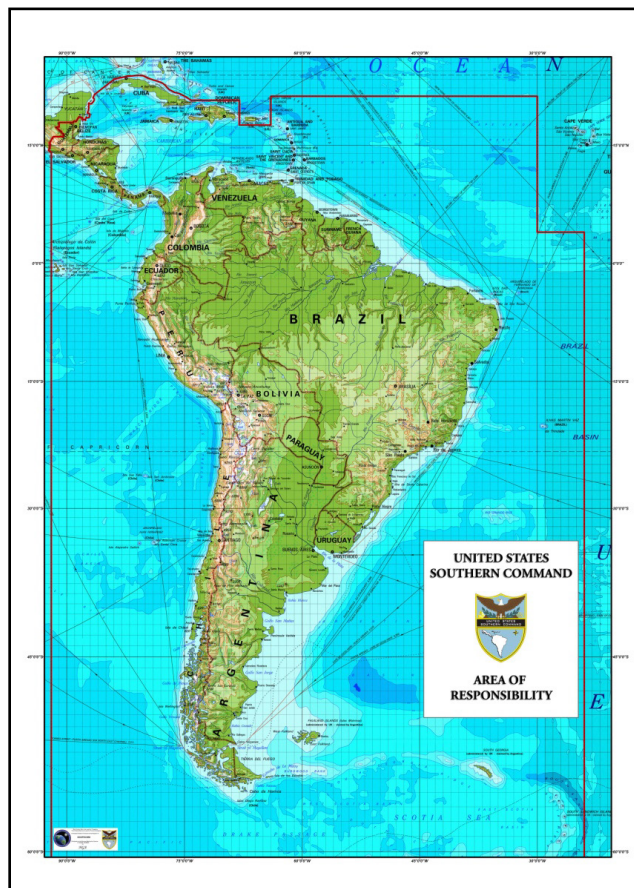


Figure 2. SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility Map<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Counterdrug Operations,” *JP 3-07.4*, February 5, 2019, IV–5, <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/jp3-07-4.pdf>.

<sup>86</sup> U.S. Southern Command, “SOUTHCOM’s Area of Responsibility,” accessed July 19, 2022, <https://www.southcom.mil/About/Area-of-Responsibility/>.

<sup>87</sup> U.S. Southern Command.

As Figure 2 reveals, despite having a fairly large AOR, the Central American region has received SOUTHCOM's main focus.<sup>88</sup> According to U.S. SOUTHCOM "as the lead U.S. agency responsible for directing illicit trafficking detection and monitoring activities, SOUTHCOM is undertaking operational and tactical activity in support of whole-of-government efforts to counter transnational organized crime in the maritime approaches to Central America."<sup>89</sup> This mission is achieved through the efforts of SOUTHCOM's task force known as the JIATF-South which is based in Key West, Florida.

### **1. Joint Interagency Task Force–South Overview**

JIATF-South is an interagency task force with the primary goal of supporting law enforcement authorities in preventing the trafficking of illegal drugs throughout their joint operating area. Its support to international and interagency drug interdiction is aimed at improving the security of the Western Hemisphere.<sup>90</sup> JIATF-South is an integrated team made up of liaison officers from partner nations as well as members of the United States military, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies (see Figure 3, which shows some of the partner nations and United States military, law enforcement, and intelligence organizations that make up the integrated team of the JIATF-South).<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>U.S. Southern Command, "Countering Transnational Organized Crime."

<sup>89</sup>U.S. Southern Command.

<sup>90</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Counterdrug Operations," I-2.

<sup>91</sup> Munsing and Lamb, "Joint Interagency Task Force–South," 5.



Figure 3. JIATF-South’s Integrated Team<sup>92</sup>

As seen in Figure 3, JIATF-South functions as an interagency cooperation since illegal drug trafficking is a shared problem. JIATF-South represents a group of United States security agencies and 20 official partner nations that collaborate to prevent illicit narcotics from reaching their destination.<sup>93</sup> The partner nations include those in Central and South America, the Caribbean, Mexico, Canada, as well as various nations in Europe, including the UK, France, Spain, and the Netherlands. European nations are involved and interested in this effort because they still have territories in the Caribbean and want to restrict the flow of narcotics from South America via the Caribbean into Europe.

<sup>92</sup> Munsing and Lamb, 6.

<sup>93</sup> Lt. Col. James R. Wilson, “Joint Interagency Task Force South Changes Command,” U.S. Southern Command, July 19, 2022, <https://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/3097365/joint-interagency-task-force-south-changes-command/>.

## 2. JIATF-South Operations in the Eastern Pacific

JIATF-South coordinates counter-drug activities throughout its expansive area of responsibility. However, in the Eastern Pacific region off the coast of Central America, these activities are conducted through a formal, long-term initiative known as Campaign MARTILLO (Hammer), which was established in 2012. This operation synchronizes and coordinates the use of aircraft, ships, and ground forces to disrupt drug trafficking. It coordinates a wide range of military and law enforcement agencies from the United States and partner countries to target the routes used for illicit trade in the coastal waters from the United States to Central America. To achieve its aim, Operation MARTILLO employs air and surface assets, as well as troops from the United States military and law enforcement agencies, to prevent the entry of illicit narcotics into the United States' fourteen participating nations—Belize, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, France, Guatemala, Honduras, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Panama, Spain, United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>94</sup> Operation MARTILLO has received assistance from Chile as well.<sup>95</sup> Through Operation MARTILLO, JIATF-South gains tactical authority over its partner nations' assets, acting as a hub for coordinating and cueing the various partner nation law enforcement forces.<sup>96</sup>

The majority of JIATF-South's interdictions were made as a result of Operation MARTILLO.<sup>97</sup> According to data supplied by U.S. SOUTHCOM, Operation MARTILLO instantly had a significant impact on the flow of drugs in the Western Hemisphere (see Figure 4, which shows the impact of Operation MARTILLO on the flow of cocaine).<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> U.S. Southern Command, "Campaign Martillo."

<sup>95</sup> U.S. Southern Command.

<sup>96</sup> Davenport, *Lessons from Maritime Narcotics Interdiction: Interdiction in the Maritime Source, Transit, and Arrival Zones of the Western Hemisphere*, 17–18.

<sup>97</sup> Angel Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork: Countering the Expansion of Transnational Criminal Networks* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), 129, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1481.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1481.html).

<sup>98</sup> Adam Isacson, "'Operation Martillo' and Cocaine in Colombia's Pacific," *InSight Crime* (blog), July 19, 2012, <https://insightcrime.org/operation-martillo-and-cocaine-in-colombias-pacific/>.

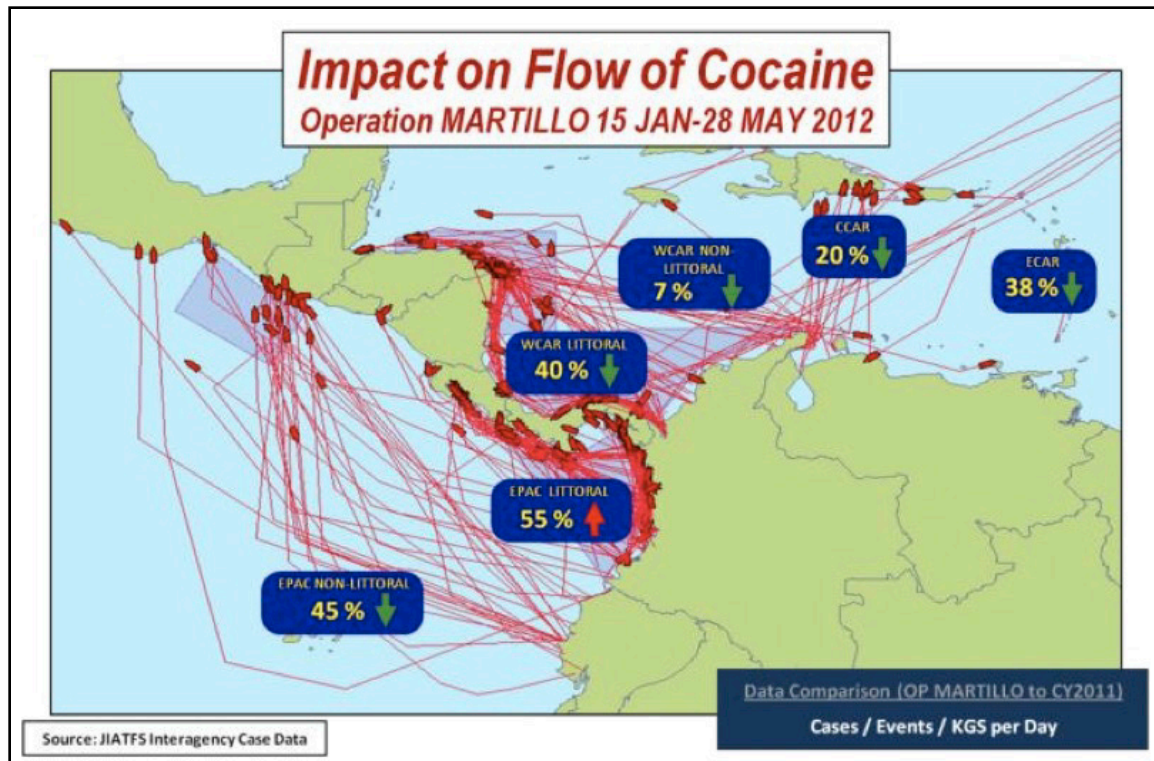


Figure 4. Impact of Operation MARTILLO on the Flow of Cocaine<sup>99</sup>

Operation MARTILLO’s first year of operation saw the confiscation of 101 vessels and the seizure of 152,762 kilos of cocaine.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, since its inception and up to 2020, Operation MARTILLO has been successful in seizing 693 metric tons of cocaine as well as 581 suspicious vessels and aircraft (in addition to countless arrests, convictions, and intelligence leads that led to many other seizures).<sup>101</sup> The findings show that cocaine flows had decreased along five of the six routes, with the EPAC non-littoral route experiencing the highest percentage decline.<sup>102</sup> The results also point to a possible initial displacement of some of the trafficking activities to the EPAC littoral route as a result of interdiction

<sup>99</sup> Isacson.

<sup>100</sup> Raul Sanchez-Azuara, “Caribbean Security, a Shared Responsibility,” *Dialogo* 23, no. 2 (February 1, 2012): 26.

<sup>101</sup> Davenport, *Lessons from Maritime Narcotics Interdiction: Interdiction in the Maritime Source, Transit, and Arrival Zones of the Western Hemisphere*, 18.

<sup>102</sup> Isacson, “‘Operation Martillo’ and Cocaine in Colombia’s Pacific.”

attempts along the non-littoral route. However, notwithstanding the likelihood for displacement, in 2021 Lindquist noted that “JIATF-South-supported interdictions at sea account for almost four times the cocaine seized by all domestic and border enforcement efforts combined.”<sup>103</sup> Additionally, in 2021, Operation MARTILLO enabled the seizure or disruption of 301 metric tons of cocaine, with an estimated street value of \$7 billion.<sup>104</sup> Operation MARTILLO’s success in stopping drug trafficking over the past eleven years has led to substantial disruptions to the flow of drugs and the money that it generated.<sup>105</sup> This accomplishment demonstrates how effective the security cooperation and coordination provided by JIATF-South and the participating nations under Operation MARTILLO has been in their battle against drug trafficking in the EPAC.

The success of Campaign MARTILLO can be measured in other ways. One of those is the percentage of suspected illicit trafficking events that JIATF-South successfully detects and hands off to assets for interdiction and apprehension. This metric can be calculated because, according to the GAO, “JIATF-South measures (1) total maritime smuggling events, (2) targeted smuggling events, (3) detected smuggling events, and (4) seized or disrupted smuggling events.”<sup>106</sup> Table 1 displays these metrics together with the outcomes for the fiscal years 2014 through 2018.

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<sup>103</sup> Edward H. Lundquist, “Successful Cooperation and Collaboration Come from the Power of Partnerships [Coast Guard OUTLOOK® 2020–2021]: Joint Interagency Task Force South Protects U.S. and Partner Nations from Illicit Drugs,” *Defense Media Network* (blog), February 3, 2021, <https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/successful-cooperation-and-collaboration-come-from-the-power-of-partnerships-coast-guard-outlook-2020-2021-protecting-us-and-partner-nations-from-illicit-drugs/>.

<sup>104</sup> Wilson, “Joint Interagency Task Force South Changes Command.”

<sup>105</sup> U.S. Southern Command, “Campaign Martillo.”

<sup>106</sup> United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Coast Guard: Resources Provided for Drug Interdiction Operations in the Transit Zone, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands* (Washington, DC: United States Government Accountability Office, June 16, 2014), 19, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-14-527.pdf>.

Table 1. Joint Interagency Task Force–South Interdiction Continuum Measures<sup>107</sup>

Fiscal year	Total maritime smuggling events	Targeted smuggling events	Detected smuggling events <sup>c</sup>	Seized or disrupted smuggling events <sup>d</sup>	Percentage of detected events handed-off to interdiction and apprehension resources (%) <sup>e</sup>	Department of Defense target (%)
2014	1,397	383	171	135	79	None
2015	2,218	526	246	192	78	90
2016	4,575	1,186	451	322	71	80
2017	4,251	1,071	410	309	75	80
2018	3,854	793	357	245	69	80

Source: GAO analysis of JIATF-South data. | GAO-19-441

<sup>a</sup>Total maritime smuggling events includes all known smuggling events reported in the Consolidated Counterdrug Database (CCDB)

<sup>b</sup>Targeted smuggling events includes the number of known smuggling events JIATF-South was able to target with its available physical assets, such as sending ships, aircraft, etc. to attempt to locate the smuggling event.

<sup>c</sup>Detected smuggling events includes the number of targeted smuggling events that JIATF-South was able to actually detect with its available physical assets.

<sup>d</sup>Seized or disrupted smuggling events includes the number of detected smuggling events where law enforcement partners were able to seize or disrupt illicit drugs.

<sup>e</sup>JIATF-South determines this percentage by dividing the total number of "seized or disrupted" events by the total number of "detected" events.

According to Table 1, JIATF-South recorded 4,575 smuggling events in fiscal year (FY) 2016, but only 1,186 of them (26%) were targeted. Out of the 1,186 targeted cases, only 451 (38%) were identified by detection and monitoring assets from the United States or a partner nation. In FY 2016, a success rate of 71% for seizures or disruptions was achieved when 322 out of the 451 detected cases were successfully handed off to United States or partner nation law enforcement interdiction and apprehension assets. In general, across the five years of data (FY 14–FY 18) taken into consideration in Table 1, JIATF-South successfully detected and handed off smuggling events for interdiction at a rate of about 70% or higher.<sup>108</sup>

This section has established that Operation MARTILLO has been effective at countering maritime drug trafficking. With the help of partner nations that place their law enforcement resources under United States military tactical control, JIATF-S conducts a successful counterdrug operation in the EPAC. As a consequence, partnership may be best described as the foundation for every success JIATF-South has experienced over the years

<sup>107</sup> GAO, 20.

<sup>108</sup> GAO, 20.

under Operation MARTILLO. The willingness of the participating countries to share information and provide the necessary resources is what will determine if Operation MARTILLO continues to be successful.

### **C. THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIP IN JIATF-SOUTH'S SUCCESS**

JIATF-South's success in the EPAC through Operation MARTILLO is dependent on partnership. There are three key factors to this partnership: information sharing, resource sharing, and targeted operations. All three factors combined are critical to effective interagency coordination as in the case of Operation MARTILLO. Lundquist notes that the foundation of JIATF-South's effectiveness is the strength of its partnerships since majority of its seizures or disruptions are as a result of partner-nation collaboration.<sup>109</sup> This section outlines these three key elements of partnerships that have been central to JIATF-South operational effectiveness under Operation MARTILLO: the sharing of actionable law enforcement information, resource sharing, and ultimately the successful execution of targeted maritime interdiction and apprehension operations.

#### **1. Information and Resource Sharing**

Operation MARTILLO facilitates information sharing by placing the partner nation assets under United States tactical control, resulting in the creation of a counter-narcotics network in which a central processor (JIATF-South) coordinates and cues individual state security forces.<sup>110</sup> Consequently, in addition to conducting interdictions, the United States serves as an information collector and provides partner countries with cueing data.<sup>111</sup> The United States and the participating partner nations under Operation MARTILLO are able to readily share information in close to real-time owing to the multinational information sharing (MNIS) programs such as Participating Nations Network (PNN) and Combined Enterprise Regional Information Exchange System (CENTRIXS). CENTRIXS is an automated web-

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<sup>109</sup> Lundquist, "Successful Cooperation and Collaboration Come from the Power of Partnerships [Coast Guard OUTLOOK® 2020–2021]: Joint Interagency Task Force South Protects U.S. and Partner Nations from Illicit Drugs."

<sup>110</sup> Davenport, *Lessons from Maritime Narcotics Interdiction: Interdiction in the Maritime Source, Transit, and Arrival Zones of the Western Hemisphere*, 17–18.

<sup>111</sup> Davenport, 17.

based interoperable system that enables the United States and its allies to share information in multinational operations. By utilizing CENTRIXS-based infrastructure, the U.S. Southern Command has been able to greatly enhance partner nation situation awareness and information exchange throughout the Americas since 2006.<sup>112</sup> CENTRIX has shown its value in Pacific areas and greatly improves information sharing and situation awareness among United States' partners.<sup>113</sup> A successful example of such cooperation is the eight days of continuous surveillance and detection operations carried out by a U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Air and Marine Operations aircraft in April 2021 which led to the detention of fifteen people and the seizure of 3,588 pounds of marijuana and 7,805 pounds of cocaine by law enforcement assets from partner countries in the EPAC.<sup>114</sup> The creation of such a partnership for information sharing enables the exchange of counter-drug information and improves the efficiency of the available resources.

The operational resources for the missions that JIATF-South plans and executes are contributed voluntarily by various countries and agencies.<sup>115</sup> The counterdrug effort under Operation MARTILLO is no different. In order to deploy throughout the EPAC, the United States military, Coast Guard, law enforcement, and partner nations pool their resources as part of Operation MARTILLO.<sup>116</sup> These resources include vessels, aircraft, troops, sailors, and law enforcement officers.<sup>117</sup> This elaborate operation seeks to halt cocaine shipments coming up from South America. On November 16, 2014, under Operation MARTILLO, the USS Gary and the Panamanian Coast Guard collaborated to capture 7.5 kilos of marijuana and 57

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<sup>112</sup> Admiral James Stavridis, "Sailing in Southern Waters: A New Wind," U.S. Naval Institute, May 2007, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2007/may/sailing-southern-waters-new-wind>.

<sup>113</sup> Stavridis.

<sup>114</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection, "Air and Marine Operations P-3 Crews and Partners Seize Almost 6 Tons of Narcotics in 8 Days in Eastern Pacific," June 15, 2021, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/air-and-marine-operations-p-3-crews-and-partners-seize-almost-6-tons>.

<sup>115</sup> Munsing and Lamb, "Joint Interagency Task Force–South," 36.

<sup>116</sup> Eguizábal, "The Central America Regional Security Initiative: A Key Piece of U.S. Security Assistance to El Salvador, but Not the Only One," 89.

<sup>117</sup> Eguizábal, 89.

kilograms of cocaine from a go-fast vessel in the EPAC.<sup>118</sup> The combined interdiction was initiated after one of the USS Gary's helicopters detected the go-fast boat and relayed its location to the Panamanian Coast Guard.<sup>119</sup> An example of success where two countries used their resources to target a suspect vessel and carry out a well-coordinated interdiction. However, while each participant brings different resources and strengths to the table, each one depends on the contributions of the others. For instance, the distinctive surveillance powers of U.S. aircraft aid in the maritime operations of both the U.S. law enforcement agencies and its partner nations to combat the illicit trade.<sup>120</sup> These aircraft conduct surveillance of areas where there exists a history of illicit trafficking and coordinate with partner nations to effect interdictions. In addition to pooling physical resources, the participating members also coordinate their activities to share assets. As a result, narcotics being smuggled through the EPAC are being intercepted and captured at a higher rate because of the Operation MARTILLO, which has continued with great success. For instance, on February 14, 2021, during a JIATF-South led operation under Operation MARTILLO, four people were detained and 1.7 tons of cocaine valued at over \$58 million seized as a result of the coordination from a NASOC P-3 Long Range Tracker crew that had identified a suspect vessel in the EPAC, handed it off to a partner nation aircraft, who then vectored a USCG cutter to carry out the interdiction.<sup>121</sup>

In sum, the air and surface assets supplied by various agencies, services, and partner nations, strengthen the ability of the task force to conduct the vital surveillance and detection operations necessary for interdictions and arrests.<sup>122</sup> Consequently, the interaction and

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<sup>118</sup> “Bilateral Cooperation Leads to Multiple Drug Seizures through Operation MARTILLO,” *Diálogo Américas* (blog), December 11, 2014, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/bilateral-cooperation-leads-to-multiple-drug-seizures-through-operation-martillo/>.

<sup>119</sup> *Diálogo Américas*, “Bilateral Cooperation Leads to Multiple Drug Seizures through Operation MARTILLO.”

<sup>120</sup> U.S. Southern Command, “Countering Transnational Organized Crime.”

<sup>121</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “CBP Air and Marine Operations and Partners Seize Nearly Two Tons of Cocaine Worth Over \$58 Million,” March 1, 2021, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-air-and-marine-operations-and-partners-seize-nearly-two-tons>.

<sup>122</sup> Richard M. Yeatman, “JIATF-South: Blueprint for Success,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 42 (July 2006): 26–27.

mutual support amongst all parties have made Operation MARTILLO very successful, by aiding in the fight against drug trafficking in the EPAC.

## 2. Targeted Maritime Interdiction and Apprehension Operations

The operational accomplishments of Operation MARTILLO over the past 11 years have shown that interdiction and apprehension operations are far more likely to be effective when resources are pooled, and valuable law enforcement intelligence is shared. However, JIATF-South plays a crucial role in the effective execution of Operation MARTILLO's maritime interdiction and apprehension operations, due to its detection and monitoring capability, even though it is the coast guards that lead end-game activities. These end-game activities include detaining suspects, compiling case files, gathering information, seizing contraband and vessels, and handing custody of the vessels over to the lead federal agency or partner nations.<sup>123</sup> These end-game activities are much improved under Operation MARTILLO, since JIATF-South's detection and monitoring operations serves as an early notification system to law enforcement agencies.<sup>124</sup> JIATF-South accomplishes this objective by leveraging intelligence with the resources that have been allocated to it from United States agencies and partner nations, including ships and surveillance aircraft. The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) highlighted the following as an example of a JIATF-South's detection and monitoring operation:

When JIATF-South receives information about a potential illicit drug smuggling event, it will use available air and maritime assets allocated to it to detect and monitor the suspect smuggling vessel. Once JIATF-South locates the suspect vessel and has assets in place, JIATF-South turns over control of the assets to the relevant law enforcement agencies (e.g., the Coast Guard, CBP, etc.) to interdict the smuggling vessel and any illicit drugs that may be on board.<sup>125</sup>

The requirement to act distinguishes JIATF-South's detection and monitoring operations under Operation MARTILLO from those conducted with partner countries in the

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<sup>123</sup> Davenport, *Lessons from Maritime Narcotics Interdiction*, 11.

<sup>124</sup> Davenport, 12.

<sup>125</sup> GAO, *Coast Guard: Resources Provided for Drug Interdiction Operations in the Transit Zone, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands*, 11.

Caribbean. As part of Operation MARTILLO, United States tactical control of partner nation assets enables JIATF-South to command the assets depending on the intelligence they receive. Other partners, on the other hand, retain control and are free to determine whether or not to act on the information provided by JIATF-South. Therefore, a failure to act, for instance because of other operational obligations or unserviceable assets, would mean that a potential smuggling event would not be intercepted or apprehended. As a result, Operation MARTILLO continues to be successful thanks to the shared commitment of all agencies and participating nations in the EPAC to the effective execution of targeted maritime interdiction and apprehension operations.

### **3. Examples of Coordinated Actions**

Although there are no systematic studies of how often participants in Campaign MARTILLO share information, pool resources, and interdict target vessels, there is widespread evidence that they do so. Successful cooperation between the United States and partner nations often reflects the fact that partners have a large number of smaller vessels that can respond to targets, while the United States usually can deploy only a few frigates to Operation MARTILLO.<sup>126</sup> One example of the level of cooperation that takes place under Operation MARTILLO occurred in November 2014. In that case, the USS Gary and the Panamanian Coast Guard collaborated to stop a speed boat off the coast of Central America transporting 57 kilograms of cocaine and 7.5 kilograms of marijuana.<sup>127</sup> This joint interdiction was carried out by the Panamanian Coast Guard after it was informed of the location of the suspect vessel by a USS Gary helicopter.<sup>128</sup>

The collaboration has continued to produce notable outcomes in the years that have followed. Sutton and Willett noted that “in fiscal year 2019 (which ran from 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019), international partners supported 50% of ‘Campaign Martillo’

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<sup>126</sup> Coast Guard Aviation Association, “2001—Drug Interdiction in the Eastern Pacific Transit Zone,” Coast Guard Aviation History, accessed December 11, 2022, <https://cgaviationhistory.org/2001-drug-interdiction-in-the-eastern-pacific-transit-zone/>.

<sup>127</sup> Diálogo Américas, “Bilateral Cooperation Leads to Multiple Drug Seizures through Operation MARTILLO.”

<sup>128</sup> Diálogo Américas, “Bilateral Cooperation Leads to Multiple Drug Seizures through Operation MARTILLO.”

disruptions.”<sup>129</sup> More recently, the United States Coast Guard and Costa Rica’s Air Surveillance Service (*Servicio de Vigilancia Aérea*) cooperated in an operation that resulted in the seizure of more than 1,700 pounds of cocaine valued at more than \$29 million.<sup>130</sup> The interdiction occurred in April 2020 after a Costa Rican maritime patrol aircraft was called to assist a United States Coast Guard cutter that had seen a fishing vessel that it suspected was transporting drugs.<sup>131</sup> These cases and data illustrate how Campaign MARTILLO facilitates cooperation between United States and partner countries to detect and disrupt drug trafficking at sea.

#### D. CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the maritime drug threat in the Western Hemisphere’s Eastern Pacific region. The counterdrug interdiction efforts in Central America were investigated, with an emphasis on JIATF-South. The chapter also emphasized three key characteristics that were crucial to JIATF-South’s interagency coordination and operational success: the sharing of actionable law enforcement information, asset sharing and the successful execution of targeted maritime interdiction and apprehension operations.

This chapter also showed how Operation MARTILLO has coordinated efforts across agencies and countries to achieve maritime security while effectively allocating each agency’s resources. The combined efforts of the participating countries have had a significant impact on illicit trafficking and might be viewed as a successful model for addressing comparable dangers of shared concern in the Caribbean. The subsequent chapter will explore the Caribbean region and the approaches it ought to adopt were it to achieve the same outcomes that JIATF-South as achieved in the EPAC.

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<sup>129</sup> H. I. Sutton and Dr. Lee Willet, “Narco-Sub Seized off Spain May Have Reached Europe from Across Atlantic,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, January 13, 2020, 6.

<sup>130</sup> U.S. Southern Command, “U.S. Coast Guard, International Partners Seize 1,700 Pounds of Cocaine off Central America,” U.S. Southern Command, April 13, 2020, <https://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/2147736/us-coast-guard-international-partners-seize-1700-pounds-of-cocaine-off-central/>.

<sup>131</sup> U.S. Southern Command.

### III. THE CARIBBEAN

This chapter reviews the main maritime security threats, especially trafficking of illicit drugs, that take place in the Caribbean. Then it examines the two major efforts to combat these threats. One is a variety of initiatives led by major maritime powers from Europe and North America. These countries conduct interdiction operations throughout the region and provide a great deal of assistance to Caribbean countries. However, they have not established a framework like Campaign MARTILLO that includes small Caribbean countries in sustained operations to detect and disrupt trafficking at sea. The second type of initiative includes cooperation among countries in the region to organize their own counter-trafficking efforts. Among these, only the Regional Security System (RSS) has developed a framework for sharing information and resources to conduct interdictions, but its achievements have been limited by a lack of resources.

#### A. TRANSNATIONAL MARITIME SECURITY THREATS IN THE CARIBBEAN

Both the Caribbean and the EPAC region face comparable maritime security threats. TCOs effectively exploit the strategically placed “islands, islets, and remote bays” of the Caribbean to conceal and conduct the trafficking of people, narcotics, and weapons.<sup>132</sup> Consequently, transnational maritime crime poses a significant danger to the Caribbean’s maritime security. Caribbean nations are confronted with rising drug trafficking and associated violence, yet they lack the resources to tackle these problems.

The Caribbean countries, except for mainland Belize, French Guiana, Guyana, and Suriname, are all island territories and as such, they have vast coastlines and territorial seas to govern (see Figure 5 which shows the maritime area of the Caribbean region).

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<sup>132</sup> Sanchez-Azuara, “Caribbean Security, a Shared Responsibility,” 61.



Figure 5. The Maritime Area of the Caribbean Region<sup>133</sup>

As seen in Figure 5, the maritime region encompassing Belize in the northwest, the Bahamas in the north, French Guiana, and Suriname in the southeast represents the Caribbean region.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, under 10% of the Caribbean region represents landmass compared to its maritime domain of almost 2.75 million square kilometers.<sup>135</sup> Consequently, Caribbean countries' island character allows TCOs access to and egress from hundreds of various spots along their shores.<sup>136</sup> TCOs may therefore move swiftly across the Caribbean's island chain, giving maritime law enforcement only a brief window of opportunity to intercept them.<sup>137</sup>

Cocaine is the main narcotic that is trafficked across the Caribbean.<sup>138</sup> Drug traffickers seeking to move huge volumes of cocaine from South America to the north find the Caribbean to be a lucrative route, due to its poor interception capabilities and proximity to

<sup>133</sup> Burroughs et al., "Stable Seas: Caribbean," 1.

<sup>134</sup> Burroughs et al., 1.

<sup>135</sup> UNODC, *Caribbean Drug Trends 2001–2002*, (Vienna, Austria: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, February 2003), [https://www.unodc.org/pdf/barbados/caribbean\\_drug-trends\\_2001-2002.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/barbados/caribbean_drug-trends_2001-2002.pdf).

<sup>136</sup> Ivelaw L. Griffith, *Caribbean Security on the Eve of the 21st Century* (Forest Grove, OR: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 34.

<sup>137</sup> UNODC, *Caribbean Drug Trends 2001–2002*.

<sup>138</sup> Maritimes Crimes, "Drug Trafficking in the Caribbean Sea," *MariTimesCrimes*, February 25, 2022, <https://maritimescrimes.com/2022/02/25/drug-trafficking-in-the-caribbean-sea/>.

South America.<sup>139</sup> Each year, the Caribbean is thought to be traversed by about 1000 metric tons of cocaine.<sup>140</sup> However, since only around 6% of this traffic is ever detected and routes are frequently changed to avoid detection, the figure might be much higher.<sup>141</sup> Although cargo ships are the most effective way to move large quantity of cocaine through the Caribbean, go-fast boats and narcosubs are other common maritime methods utilized by drug traffickers.<sup>142</sup> According to Hernandez-Roy, Bledsoe, and Cerén “there are a multitude of paths drug traffickers may take through the Caribbean into Europe, including island hopping and moving through European overseas territories.”<sup>143</sup> The same is true for North America, since a significant amount of the cocaine that is trafficked into the United States mainland from South America transits through Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.<sup>144</sup>

The maritime security threats are exacerbated by ineffective governance in the region. For instance, the majority of the Caribbean countries are incapable of providing adequate maritime law enforcement because they are disproportionately land-focused as a result of the pressing requirements created by internal security challenges, making them exposed to illicit trafficking.<sup>145</sup> For example, in Haiti, the current gang crisis has led to the displacement of over 20,000 people, and the country is experiencing an economic crisis that is causing food prices to soar and the establishment of a black market for gasoline.<sup>146</sup> Due to its persistent internal security issues, 1,500 km of coastline, and 360 km of land border with the Dominican

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<sup>139</sup> Christopher Hernandez-Roy, Rubi Bledsoe, and Andrea Michelle Cerén, “Tracking Transatlantic Drug Flows: Cocaine’s Path from South America Across the Caribbean to Europe,” *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, September 19, 2023, <https://features.csis.org/tracking-the-transatlantic-cocaine-trade>.

<sup>140</sup> Maritimes Crimes, “Drug Trafficking in the Caribbean Sea.”

<sup>141</sup> Maritimes Crimes.

<sup>142</sup> Hernandez-Roy, Bledsoe, and Cerén, “Tracking Transatlantic Drug Flows.”

<sup>143</sup> Hernandez-Roy, Bledsoe, and Cerén.

<sup>144</sup> United States Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: United States Department of State, 2022), 115, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/22-00767-INCSR-2022-Vol-1.pdf>.

<sup>145</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 9.

<sup>146</sup> United Nations, “Haiti’s Crises at New Levels of Desperation, Top Officials Warn Security Council, Urging Critical Assistance for National Law Enforcement, Humanitarian Aid,” September 26, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15037.doc.htm>.

Republic, Haiti is especially exposed to the illicit trafficking in goods, mainly narcotics, weapons, and ammunition.<sup>147</sup> Jamaica, with an average of 49.4 murders per 100,000 inhabitants in 2021, had the highest homicide rate in the whole Latin American region.<sup>148</sup> In addition, inadequate port security, due to lack of resources and cooperation between port staff and TCOs, corruption, and advanced concealing techniques allows for opportunity for smuggling with minimal risk of being detected.<sup>149</sup> For example, the British Virgin Islands Premier Andrew Fahie and Port Authority Managing Director Oleanvine Pickering Maynard were arrested by Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents in Miami in April 2022 for allegedly planning to import thousands of kilograms of cocaine.<sup>150</sup> Such examples of high-level corruption exacerbate the issue presented by TCOs since cooperation between government officials and TCOs greatly hampers law enforcement efforts.

The Caribbean Sea has not seen a decline in the amount of cocaine trafficking. Instead, it is advancing, and because of the EPAC's increased law enforcement activities, as well as the problems in Venezuela, TCOs are likely to use the Caribbean routes more frequently to evade detection. However, the inability of several Caribbean countries to fully monitor their exclusive economic zones, or in some cases, their own territorial waters, makes the region more vulnerable to TCOs who may take advantage of different jurisdictions' weaknesses, while avoiding the states with more robust maritime security capabilities.<sup>151</sup> In the absence of concerted efforts at harmonization, regional maritime security will be only as effective as the most lax national enforcement measures.<sup>152</sup> Retired Lt Gen Rocky Meade as cited by McIntosh noted that "it is only through cooperation with our partners that we can hope to combat the networks of transnational criminal organizations who look to exploit the gaps that

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<sup>147</sup> United Nations.

<sup>148</sup> Statista Research Department, "Homicide in Latin America & Caribbean," Statista, November 17, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/topics/5388/homicide-in-latin-america-and-caribbean/>.

<sup>149</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy, *National Drug Control Strategy: Caribbean Border Counter-Narcotics Strategy 2022*, 1.

<sup>150</sup> "BVI Premier, Port Director Arrested for Cocaine Smuggling Conspiracy," *St. Croix Source*, April 28, 2022, <https://stcroixsource.com/2022/04/28/bvi-premier-port-director-arrested-for-cocaine-smuggling-conspiracy/>.

<sup>151</sup> Burroughs et al., "Stable Seas: Caribbean," 77.

<sup>152</sup> Burroughs et al., 77.

result from limited cooperation and information sharing.”<sup>153</sup> Consequently, due to the similarity of the maritime threats in the Caribbean to those faced in the EPAC, it is more probable that the lessons learned from the EPAC will be relevant to the Caribbean region.

## **B. MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE CARIBBEAN**

In the region, Caribbean nations and international partners conduct a range of kinetic operations, information sharing arrangements, and capacity building initiatives, most of which are led by the United States. Additionally, there are several security measures spearheaded by the Caribbean, namely by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Eastern Caribbean’s Regional Security System (RSS).

### **1. Institutional Security Arrangements Led by Outside Powers**

Countries from outside the region direct the majority of institutional structures that make up the foundation of Caribbean maritime security cooperation. International partners including the United States, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Canada provide the Caribbean with a significant amount of operational support.<sup>154</sup> Examples of these security arrangements include foreign assistance through programs such as the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative and multilateral exercises and operations.

#### ***a. The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative***

In 2010, the United States created the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) as a framework for its efforts to combat all types of trafficking in the Caribbean.<sup>155</sup> The CBSI includes nearly all the countries in the region, with the Caribbean islands of Montserrat, Haiti, Belize, and the Dutch islands being observers.<sup>156</sup> Figure 6 illustrates the CBSI partner

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<sup>153</sup> Douglas McIntosh, “JDF Acquires New Surveillance Aircraft,” Jamaica Information Service, November 16, 2018, <https://jis.gov.jm/jdf-acquires-new-surveillance-aircraft/>.

<sup>154</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 79.

<sup>155</sup> Burroughs et al., 87.

<sup>156</sup> United States Department of State, “Caribbean Basin Security Initiative,” *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed October 16, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/caribbean-basin-security-initiative/>.

countries.<sup>157</sup> The goal of CBSI, according to the GAO, is to “increase citizen safety through provision of U.S. foreign assistance to CBSI partner countries to reduce illicit trafficking, improve public safety and security, and promote social justice.”<sup>158</sup> This strategic stance underpins many United States security activities in the Caribbean region as well as financial support for a rising number of maritime security-related capacity-building programs.<sup>159</sup>

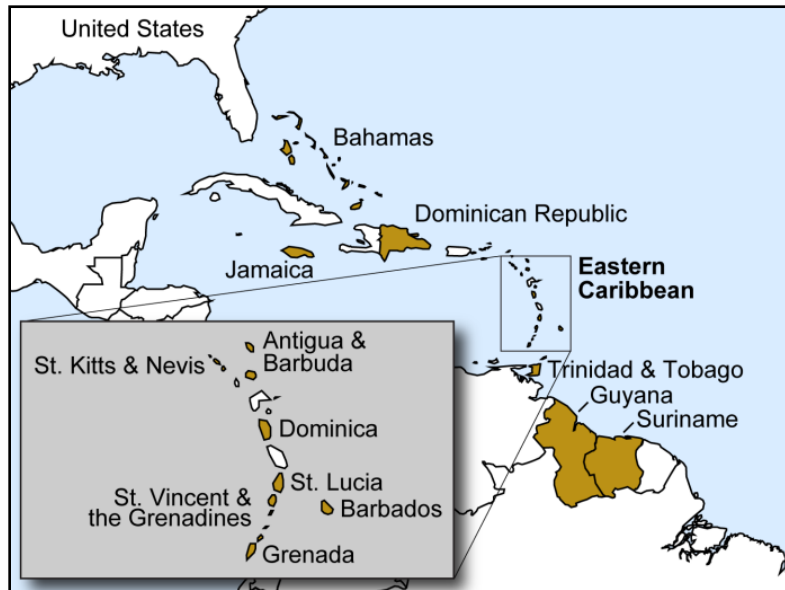


Figure 6. Caribbean Basin Security Initiative Partner Countries<sup>160</sup>

Through the CBSI, the United States has focused on providing security assistance to strengthen the maritime and aerial security capabilities of Caribbean countries.<sup>161</sup> According to Sullivan, this endeavor includes “assistance to strengthen Caribbean

<sup>157</sup> United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Security Assistance: U.S. Agencies Should Establish a Mechanism to Assess Caribbean Basin Security Initiative Progress*, (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, February 27, 2019), 5, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-201>.

<sup>158</sup> GAO, 5.

<sup>159</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 87.

<sup>160</sup> GAO, *Security Assistance*, 5.

<sup>161</sup> Mark P. Sullivan, *Caribbean Basin Security Initiative*, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 12, 2022), 1, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10789.pdf>.

maritime and aerial operations capability, improve radar coverage, and sustain those capabilities.”<sup>162</sup> For instance, in the Eastern Caribbean, the Regional Security System has received assistance in the form of training and equipment from the CBSI as part of its efforts to reduce illicit trafficking in the Caribbean.<sup>163</sup> The assistance in terms of equipment included funding to refurbish the maritime patrol aircraft operated by the Regional Security System.<sup>164</sup> The CBSI has also provided boats to the Jamaican government, enhancing the island’s capacity to carry out its anti-drug operations.<sup>165</sup> Ellis noted that over the period of 2010 to 2021, the United States under the CBSI, “appropriated \$751 million to the region.”<sup>166</sup> However, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and the Eastern Caribbean nations have gotten the greatest financing out of the 13 CBSI partner nations.<sup>167</sup> Assistance from CBSI is crucial for the region since many Caribbean nations lack the resources and capabilities, such as ships or aircraft, to intercept drug traffickers or lack the secure communications technology required to cooperate in a regional law enforcement effort.

***b. Joint Military Exercises and Operations***

Another example of a foreign-led maritime security initiative in the Caribbean involves occasional multilateral exercises and operations. For instance, the largest exercise that the United States finances each year with CARICOM member states is Tradewinds.<sup>168</sup> Since the middle of the 1980s, the United States military and Caribbean nations have participated in this combined and joint exercise to strengthen their capacity to respond to security challenges.<sup>169</sup> These exercises include training sessions that demonstrate various

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<sup>162</sup> Sullivan, 1.

<sup>163</sup> GAO, *Security Assistance*, 11.

<sup>164</sup> GAO, 11.

<sup>165</sup> GAO, 12.

<sup>166</sup> R. Evan Ellis, “The Caribbean in the Crossfire: Between Covid-19, Narcotics, China, and Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, April 2022, 5.

<sup>167</sup> GAO, *Security Assistance*, 7.

<sup>168</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 85.

<sup>169</sup> U.S. Southern Command, “Tradewinds 2022,” accessed October 17, 2022, <https://www.southcom.mil/Media/Special-Coverage/Tradewinds-2022/>.

regional strategies for countering new and developing threats using realistic scenarios.<sup>170</sup> The training sessions also improve communication between participants, provide space for the emergence of natural cooperative processes, and raise regional readiness to respond to emerging threats.<sup>171</sup>

Exercise Tradewinds is a notable example of operational collaboration among Caribbean nations, although its infrequent nature lessens its overall impact. Burroughs et al. note that Tradewinds exercise offers “often the only chance each year for operators from different parts of the region to collaborate.”<sup>172</sup> However, there is no assurance of a continuous regional collaboration after the Tradewinds exercise because only a limited number of participants from a small number of Caribbean nations attend each iteration. As a result, there is a lack of continuity since, after the exercise, the operators usually go back to their operational units and a new group of participants is selected for the exercise’s subsequent iteration.

Aside from exercises, there are ad hoc collaborative counterdrug operations in which the foreign partners temporarily commit air or surface assets to a particular Caribbean nation or the region. For instance, SOUTHCOM noted that in order to assist expanded counter-narcotics operations with international partners targeting illegal traffickers in the Caribbean, the United States Air Force temporarily deployed four aircraft and troops to Curacao in 2020.<sup>173</sup> United States forces often have support from Canada, whose “ships and aircraft deploy to the region on a rotational basis” in support of the United States counterdrug efforts.<sup>174</sup> Canadian forces take part in SOUTHCOM’s expanded

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<sup>170</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 86.

<sup>171</sup> Burroughs et al., 86.

<sup>172</sup> Burroughs et al., 80.

<sup>173</sup> U.S. Southern Command, “U.S. Air Force to Support Counter Narcotics Operations in Caribbean,” U.S. Southern Command, June 19, 2020, <https://www.southcom.mil/News/PressReleases/Article/2225606/us-air-force-to-support-counter-narcotics-operations-in-caribbean/>.

<sup>174</sup> Government of Canada, “Operation CARIBBE,” education and awareness, November 14, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-caribbe.html>.

counter-narcotics activities as part of their own operation known as Operation CARIBBE.<sup>175</sup>

Another example of ad hoc cooperative operations in the region is Operation TRIGGER. Operation TRIGGER is a joint firearms operation by INTERPOL and the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS). Law enforcement officers from 19 nations coordinated controls at airports, seaports, land borders, and other hotspots during the seventh iteration of Operation TRIGGER, which took place over a week from September 24 to September 30, 2022.<sup>176</sup> Acting on information about TCOs involved in the trafficking of firearms, the operation netted the seizure of 350 weapons, 3,300 rounds of ammunition, 10.1 tons of cocaine and 2.5 tons of cannabis.<sup>177</sup> According to INTERPOL, the nature of the seizure highlights “the convergence of trafficking routes and the use of firearms used to control the illegal drug trade.”<sup>178</sup> This was the first coordinated action against firearms between INTERPOL and CARICOM IMPACS in the region, and was conducted as part of Project Target, INTERPOL’s wider initiative to target arms trafficking in the Caribbean, Sahel, and West Africa.<sup>179</sup>

Some drug trafficking operations may last more than a month and include participants from the source, transit, and destination nations. One such instance of a multinational endeavor is Operation ORION. In its sixth iteration, Operation ORION, led by the Navy of Colombia, involved coordinated and multifaceted counterdrug activities in the Caribbean Sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, as well as the rivers that border Colombia.<sup>180</sup> Over a 45-day period between September 15 to October 30, 29 countries and 51 international organizations took part in Operation ORION VI, which led to the discovery of more than 90 tons of cocaine hydrochloride, 33.2 tons of hashish, 3.5 kilos of

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<sup>175</sup> Government of Canada.

<sup>176</sup> INTERPOL, “Hundreds of Firearms and 12.6 Tonnes of Drugs Seized in Caribbean Operation.”

<sup>177</sup> INTERPOL.

<sup>178</sup> INTERPOL.

<sup>179</sup> INTERPOL, “Project Target.”

<sup>180</sup> Diálogo Américas, “Orion VI Campaign Deals Hard Blow to Narcotrafficking.”

heroin, and 28 kilograms of amphetamines.<sup>181</sup> Nations from Europe, North, Central, and South America, as well as the Caribbean, were represented among the participating countries in Operation ORION VI.

Additionally, there are other unilateral operations by foreign nations to protect their interest in the Caribbean. Agencies of the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) also conduct other operations to combat drug smuggling in the Caribbean.<sup>182</sup> In order to combat drug trafficking into and within Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, DHS initiated Operation Caribbean Guard in September 2012.<sup>183</sup> The Coast Guard contribution to this initiative has focused particularly on stopping the primary and secondary flows of illegal narcotics from South America to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands as part of Operation Unified Resolve.<sup>184</sup> As a result, the Coast Guard has increased vessel and aircraft operations as part of this DHS-wide initiative to stop the flow of narcotics being transported by speedboats toward the islands.<sup>185</sup> According to the GAO, “Operation Unified Resolve initially began as a surge operation, but in October 2013, the Coast Guard made the surge operation a standing operation—and, according to Coast Guard officials, established a new baseline for drug interdiction operations in support of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.”<sup>186</sup> In May 2014, two Dominican Republic citizens were detained and nearly 1,280 kilograms of cocaine worth an estimated \$37 million were seized by the United States Coast Guard, United States Customs and Border Protection, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Puerto Rico Police as a result of the DHS Operation Caribbean Guard and the Coast Guard’s Operation Unified Resolve.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Diálogo Américas.

<sup>182</sup> GAO, *Coast Guard: Resources Provided for Drug Interdiction Operations in the Transit Zone, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands*, 25.

<sup>183</sup> GAO, 25.

<sup>184</sup> GAO, 25.

<sup>185</sup> GAO, 25.

<sup>186</sup> GAO, 25.

<sup>187</sup> United States Department of Justice, “U.S. Coast Guard, Caribbean Border Interagency Group Authorities Seize \$37 Million Worth of Cocaine in the Caribbean Sea,” April 8, 2015, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-pr/pr/us-coast-guard-caribbean-border-interagency-group-authorities-seize-37-million-worth>.

According to the United States Department of Justice “since June 2012, the Coast Guard and its interagency partners supporting Caribbean Guard and Unified Resolve have seized more than \$1 billion in illicit narcotics and detained nearly 90 suspected smugglers.”<sup>188</sup>

## **2. Caribbean-led Initiatives**

There are no regional bodies in the Caribbean, according to Burroughs et al., “whose exclusive purview is maritime security.”<sup>189</sup> However, there are two with mandates that impact maritime security. The Regional Security System (RSS) in the Eastern Caribbean directly concerns the interdiction of illicit narcotics trafficking in a small part of the region, while CARICOM indirectly affects maritime security throughout the entire Caribbean region.

### ***a. Cooperation in the Eastern Caribbean***

The most effective illustration of a sub-regional multilateral organization centered on marine security cooperation in the Caribbean is the RSS, which includes seven small countries in the Lesser Antilles, which are in the eastern Caribbean. Figure 7 shows a graphical representation of the member states of the RSS.<sup>190</sup> This small organization is the only one in the Caribbean that provides a mechanism, like Campaign MARTILLO, to coordinate the sharing of information and resources to interdict trafficking at sea. Unlike MARTILLO, however, it does not involve any great power from outside the region.

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<sup>188</sup> United States Department of Justice.

<sup>189</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 82.

<sup>190</sup> Burroughs et al., 86.

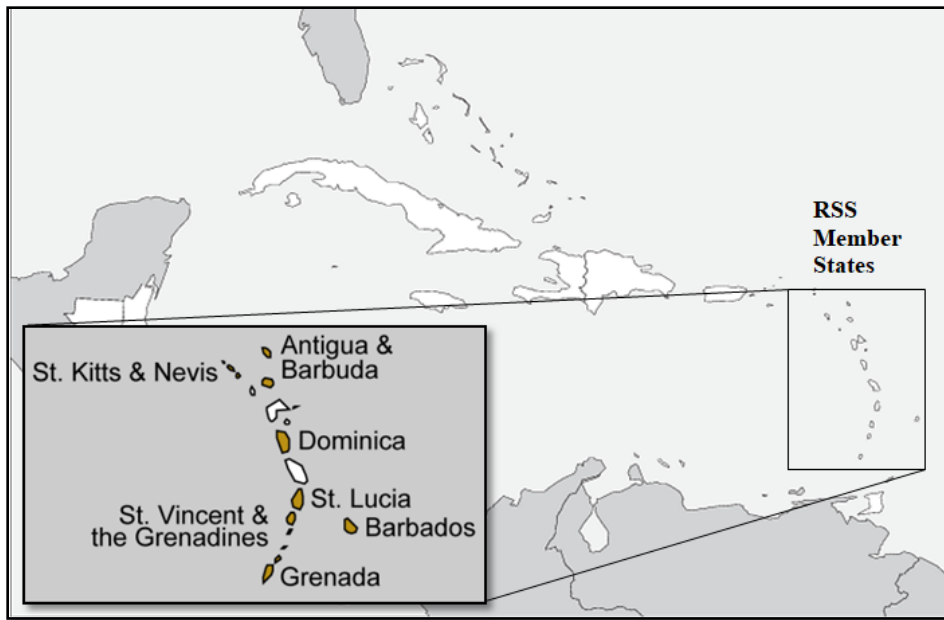


Figure 7. Map of the Member States of the RSS<sup>191</sup>

As illustrated in Figure 7, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are seven of the Lesser Antilles’ states that are part of the RSS.<sup>192</sup> The RSS was formed in 1982 out of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) in response to threats that faced the Eastern Caribbean region during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>193</sup> Since then, the RSS has evolved and it is currently aimed at ensuring “the stability and well-being of Member States through mutual cooperation in order to maximise regional security in preserving the social and economic development of our people.”<sup>194</sup> One illustration of this mutual cooperation at the operational level is the use of the two maritime patrol aircraft operated by the RSS, which significantly assist all of its member states in enforcing maritime security by

<sup>191</sup> Source: Adapted from: Regional Security System “Member States,” accessed November 16, 2022, <https://www.rss.org.bb/member-states/>.

<sup>192</sup> Regional Security System, “About Us,” accessed November 20, 2021, <https://www.rss.org.bb/about-us/>.

<sup>193</sup> Griffith, *The Quest for Security in the Caribbean: Problems and Promises in Subordinate States*.

<sup>194</sup> Regional Security System, “About Us.”

supporting maritime interdiction operations.<sup>195</sup> Burroughs et al. note that “the seven member states cooperate with the assistance of the aircraft and the RSS headquarters staff to address maritime law enforcement issues in their waters, provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and contribute to wider regional security in the Caribbean.”<sup>196</sup> For instance, the RSS performs air surveillance flights to support the maritime search and rescue and counter-narcotics activities carried out by its member states. The RSS air wing has also provided logistical support to the member states by arranging aerial transportation of personnel and equipment. According to Waterman “in terms of achievements, the RSS’s air wing has had success in their counter-drug missions with 834 arrests, nearly 800 prosecutions, and seizure of 128,000 lbs of marijuana and 21,000 kilos of cocaine.”<sup>197</sup> Overall, the RSS has some capacity to manage tasks related to regional security, such as monitoring coastal areas and combating drug trafficking.

Despite these accomplishments, RSS has some shortcomings. First, member states’ ability to identify, prevent, and interdict TCOs, is constrained by a lack of resources, especially those required to conduct patrols.<sup>198</sup> Second, even though the seven member states collaborate with the help of the aircraft and information shared through the RSS headquarters personnel, they do not share surface assets. Unlike the EPAC model that shares both air and surface resources, the member states of the RSS retain authority over their surface assets. Third, the scope of its authority and activities is limited, by design, to the Eastern Caribbean. Nevertheless, the RSS indicates that the establishment of a mechanism similar in some respects to Operation MARTILLO is politically acceptable to countries in the region and helpful to maximizing the impact of their limited capabilities.

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<sup>195</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 86.

<sup>196</sup> Burroughs et al., 87.

<sup>197</sup> Kerry Waterman, “How Small States Work Together for Regional Security in Complex Security Threat Environments,” *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare* 3, no. 3 (October 19, 2021): 195, <https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v3i3.3728>.

<sup>198</sup> Waterman, 196.

*b. Cooperation in the Wider Caribbean Region*

The Caribbean Community, known as CARICOM, represents a more general approach to regional cooperation throughout the region. However, despite having some references to maritime security, it is not primarily intended for that use, nor does it offer a way to coordinate targeted actions against drug trafficking at sea. The wider Caribbean region’s quest for a more holistic regional security mechanism gave birth to CARICOM in July 1973.<sup>199</sup> Twenty Caribbean nations make up CARICOM, of which 15 are full members and five are associate members (see Figure 8 which shows the 15 member states of CARICOM).<sup>200</sup>

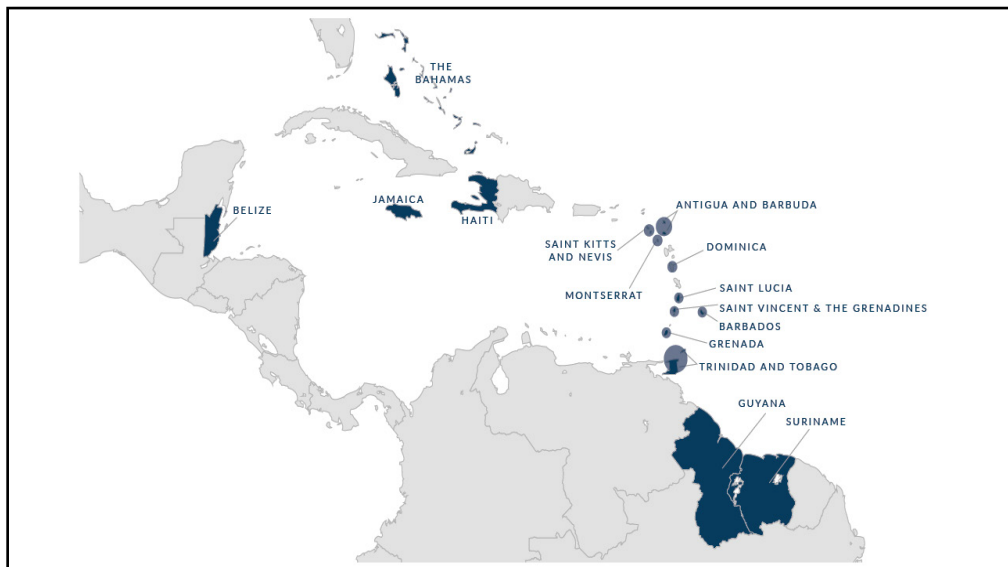


Figure 8. The 15 Member States of CARICOM<sup>201</sup>

While security is listed as one of CARICOM’s four pillars of integration, “fostering economic integration and coordinating foreign policy have” been its principal objectives,

<sup>199</sup>CARICOM, “Who We Are,” accessed November 20, 2021, <https://caricom.org/our-community/who-we-are/>.

<sup>200</sup>CARICOM.

<sup>201</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 83.

according to Sullivan.<sup>202</sup> In the mid-1990s, during the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Heads of CARICOM, a set of recommendations aimed at strengthening the security focus of CARICOM was devised and agreed upon by the various heads of delegations; however, these initiatives have not come to fruition.<sup>203</sup> The staging of Cricket World Cup 2007 in the Caribbean paved the way for the creation of robust security structures and institutions in the region which still exist today. These entities included the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS), based in Trinidad and Tobago, and two sub-agencies: the Joint Regional Communications Center (JRCC)—also based in Trinidad and Tobago—and the Regional Intelligence Fusion Center (RIFC), based in Barbados.<sup>204</sup>

These three institutions have come a long way in improving regional security cooperation in the region. The JRCC supports CARICOM’s Advanced Passenger Information System (APIS) and Advance Cargo Information System (ACIS).<sup>205</sup> The APIS is the system that checks passengers coming into and leaving the CARICOM region via official air and seaports while ACIS is a computer-based information system that tracks cargo.<sup>206</sup> JRCC also acts as a focal point for tracking the movement of suspicious persons and potentially harmful or illegal goods across the Caribbean.<sup>207</sup> These platforms make it possible to share critical information with Member States, for example of known traffickers, thereby enhancing border security and intelligence analysis in support of law enforcement efforts. The RIFC supports the JRCC’s efforts by identifying significant areas of intelligence concern and facilitating the flow of pertinent intelligence throughout the

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<sup>202</sup>Mark P. Sullivan, *Caribbean Region: Issues in U.S. Relations*, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, October 27, 2006), 2.

<sup>203</sup>Brigadier General Rudyard Lewis, “Initiatives for Cooperative Regional Security: The Eastern Caribbean Regional Security System,” in *Security in the Caribbean Basin: The Challenge of Regional Cooperation* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2000), 177–83.

<sup>204</sup>CARICOM IMPACS, “CARICOM IMPACS—The Caribbean Community Implementation Agency for Crime and Security.”

<sup>205</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 85.

<sup>206</sup> CARICOM IMPACS, “CARICOM IMPACS Sub-Agency: The Joint Regional Communications Centre (JRCC),” accessed December 2, 2022, <https://caricomimpacs.org/sub-agencies/jrcc/>.

<sup>207</sup> Burroughs et al., “Stable Seas: Caribbean,” 85.

region.<sup>208</sup> Consequently, the RIFC supports key regional stakeholders with intelligence in an effort to identify, prevent, and reduce crime in the region.<sup>209</sup> Institutions such as JRCC and the RIFC are important current mechanisms that may be used to promote information sharing about the plans, intents, and capabilities of TCOs across CARICOM nations in order to give the basis for decision and action among law enforcement agencies. However, these systems are not supported by agreements to share the resources or conduct interdiction operations against traffickers at sea.

CARICOM has adopted two documents that could support cooperative actions in the future, but so far, they only indicate that countries have begun to agree on the need to prioritize maritime security cooperation. One is the CARICOM Crime and Security Strategy (CCSS), which was established in 2013 and is the main regional security strategy. Coupled with enhancing maritime domain awareness, the maritime-related strategic goal of the CCSS includes strengthening CARICOM's borders, particularly contiguous land borders.<sup>210</sup> The other is the CARICOM Maritime and Airspace Security Cooperation Agreement (MASCA), which is specifically targeted at boosting maritime security in the region.<sup>211</sup> According to CARICOM, the goals of MASCA are:

- (a) to promote cooperation among the States Parties to enable them to conduct such law enforcement operations as may be necessary to address more effectively their own security as well as the security of the Region, consistent with their available law enforcement resources and related priorities, and in conformity with international law and applicable agreements; and (b) to maintain and develop the individual and collective capacity of States Parties through mutual assistance and self help.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Burroughs et al., 85.

<sup>209</sup> CARICOM, "CARICOM Implementing Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS)," accessed December 3, 2022, <https://caricom.org/institutions/caricom-implementing-agency-for-crime-and-security-impacs/>.

<sup>210</sup> Burroughs et al., "Stable Seas: Caribbean," 84.

<sup>211</sup> Burroughs et al., 83.

<sup>212</sup> CARICOM, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I Begin by Thanking..." *CARICOM* (blog), May 28, 2010, <https://caricom.org/ladies-and-gentlemen-i-begin-by-thanking-all-state-parties-including-the-joint-working-group-for-their-efforts-in-ensuring-that-todays-high-level-security-cooperation-dialogue-has-become-a-r/>.

In general, countries in the Caribbean have agreed that the shared nature of the threats to Caribbean region requires a coordinated regional mechanism at the operational level. So far, however, only a small group of small countries has been able to cooperate in concrete ways to combat trafficking in illicit drugs.

### **C. CONCLUSION**

The security of the Caribbean region depends on fostering partnerships among Caribbean militaries to share intelligence, information, and resources in order to disrupt the illicit cross-border flows and activities and dismantle the organizations that control them. However, there are only a few regional structures that deal directly with maritime security. The majority of actions to interdict maritime drug trafficking in the Caribbean are organized and conducted by North American and European countries, whose naval and coast guard forces are committed to the region on an intermittent or ad hoc basis. The way forward must begin with effective utilization of existing mechanisms while striving to adopt a broader integrated maritime security approach.

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## **IV. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CARIBBEAN**

This thesis addressed how Caribbean militaries may effectively collaborate to counter regional threats. It contrasted previous regional efforts to address the shared maritime dangers in the Caribbean to the JIATF-South led Operation MARTILLO as a prospective model. The goal was to demonstrate that if the Caribbean region embraced important components of the approach used by JIATF-South and its partners in EPAC, they could solve their difficulties, which were comparable to those that the EPAC region faced. In this chapter, the findings will be summarized and recommendations for the Caribbean region to mitigate maritime threats will be presented.

### **A. FINDINGS**

First, operational cooperation, like Operation MARTILLO, has an important undertone of fostering regional inter-military partnerships. Through Operation MARTILLO, a cooperative atmosphere amongst neighbors is fostered that would not otherwise exist. Operation MARTILLO is a sustained collaborative effort between a variety of entities in the EPAC to combat TOC. It is an approach that is based on formal partnership, rather than a unilateral approach. It synchronizes and coordinates the operational resources from the United States and partner nations to target routes utilized for illicit trafficking in the EPAC.

Second, since its establishment in 2012, Operation MARTILLO has demonstrated efficacy in countering maritime drug trafficking, leading to several notable interdictions. However, collaboration has been essential to its success. From the analysis provided in Chapter II, Operation MARTILLO's operational effectiveness depended heavily on three essential elements: the sharing of actionable law enforcement information, assets sharing and the successful execution of targeted maritime interdiction, and apprehension operations. Information sharing is facilitated through the development of a counter-narcotics network, in which JIATF-South gathers intelligence, and shares with and cues individual state security forces. In addition, operational resources such as law enforcement

officers, ships, and aircraft are provided by partner nations and several United States agencies to facilitate the counter-narcotics network's numerous missions. Under Operation MARTILLO, maritime interdiction and apprehension operations have significantly improved since they have been targeted, meaning that they are guided by detection and monitoring activities which act as an early warning system for law enforcement authorities.

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CARIBBEAN**

In examining the case of Operation MARTILLO in the EPAC, it was determined that a joint operational construct affords CARICOM militaries three critical advantages vital to combating regional threats: collaboration of capabilities, information and intelligence sharing, and the ability to execute region-wide, targeted maritime interdiction and apprehension operation. Independently, CARICOM militaries possess limited capabilities to effectively combat regional threats because the budgets of individual Caribbean governments, though already minimal, are further strained by national socio-economic conditions to allow for any significant investment in improving military capabilities. Furthermore, from the findings in Chapter III, the Caribbean lacks a sustained region-wide law enforcement effort towards maritime security. Indeed, regional organizations such as CARICOM and the RSS have limited impact on maritime security and do not benefit from region-wide involvement. Consequently, the proposed joint operational construct allows the Caribbean to overcome these shortcomings by the pooling of resources, which also afford international partners, in deciding how to allocate their foreign assistance, to have a better appreciation of the limitations of not just one country but the entire region.

### **1. Leveraging Foreign Assistance**

The Caribbean's maritime region has attracted a lot of international maritime law enforcement interest. Particularly, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard have significantly increased their presence in the Caribbean with an emphasis on fighting drug trafficking. The regional security mechanism employed by CARICOM militaries must therefore leverage foreign assistance. Not only does the foreign assistance under the CBSI form a vital part of the U.S. national security strategy, but it affords the Caribbean region

significant opportunities to enhance regional security. In particular, a centralized effort in the Caribbean region would allow foreign military assistance to be used more effectively.

Consequently, in assessing how to build the capacity of the maritime domain awareness capability of the region, it would be more feasible for the United States to consider the capacity of sub-regions, for example, the Eastern Caribbean in comparison to the Western Caribbean region, instead of one of two countries from the region. The pooled resources, once effectively coordinated by a joint operational construct, would therefore offer greater efficiency and operational viability as well as greater confidence to international partners that the support offered is being effectively utilized.

## **2. Effective Utilization of Existing Mechanisms**

The Caribbean does not have to start from scratch to function as a unit, since the existing framework of CARICOM, the RSS, and the information sharing agreements under CARICOM IMPACS, provide a starting point to effectively enforce their maritime security. According to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (JISR) is vital for all military operations,” because it increases decision-makers’ situational awareness of the operating environment.<sup>213</sup> Therefore, to effective counter TOC in the region, Caribbean military leaders must make good use of the systems already in place.

Similarly, the sharing of information and intelligence among Caribbean militaries is also vital for regional security. With the established mechanism of a joint operational construct, military leaders would be able to benefit from the information and intelligence sharing from all member agencies and thus would be better able to guide operational deployments. Additionally, the existing information and intelligence mechanism of CARICOM sub-agencies (JRCC and RIFC) would have to be leveraged and integrated to ensure that the joint operational construct can benefit from these intelligence apparatuses in the region.

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<sup>213</sup> NATO, “Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance,” NATO, accessed December 12, 2021, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_111830.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111830.htm).

### 3. Build International Confidence

This joint operational construct would demonstrate CARICOM's commitment to stability and security of the region, which would build the confidence of foreign governments and would likely encourage greater foreign military assistance. Consequently, the joint operational construct implies that CARICOM is committed to a long-term mutual commitment to guaranteeing regional security. By building the operational capacity of militaries in the Caribbean region under the joint operational construct, the United States, through its security cooperation and security assistance activities, would enable Caribbean militaries to contribute to the stability and security of the Western Hemisphere, thereby enhancing the U.S. security. As Ellis acknowledges, "through the United States providing intelligence, equipment, training, or other benefits, the partner is able to perform some particular activity or function that benefits U.S. objectives, without the U.S. having to do so itself."<sup>214</sup> For example, as Admiral Faller highlighted, U.S. SOUTHCOM, through security cooperation programs, has focused on building partners' capacity to conduct ground and maritime interdiction, secure their borders and sovereignty, and maintain domain awareness.<sup>215</sup> The collaborative effort of CARICOM militaries and the enhanced capacity and capability that the United States offers, through its security cooperation and security assistance activities, afford the region a viable security mechanism.

### C. FINAL THOUGHTS

Using the U.S. template of security cooperation in the Western Hemisphere, it is important to review and adapt critical areas that can be implemented in a broader integrated maritime security approach in the Caribbean. The establishment of a collaborative effort akin to Operation MARTILLO in CARICOM is one such mechanism and offers the Caribbean militaries the ability to effectively coordinate a collaborative response to threats

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<sup>214</sup> R. Evan Ellis, "The U.S. Military in Support of Strategic Objectives in Latin America and the Caribbean.," *Prism* 8, no. 1 (2019): 27–39.

<sup>215</sup> Admiral Craig S. Faller, "United States Southern Command Strategy 'Enduring Promise for Americas,'" May 8, 2019.

of mutual concerns. The United States government has devised security policies that enable the United States military to assist nations that share threats. A collective and sustained response aimed to ensure the stability of the Caribbean region is in support of U.S. objectives. Therefore, CARICOM militaries need to leverage the foreign military assistance provided by the United States, whilst ensuring the best utilization of existing security mechanisms in the region.

Notwithstanding the economic inadequacies that Caribbean governments face, by collaborative efforts, small states in the Caribbean can realize regional security by effective utilization of their militaries and emulating established security mechanisms. Such a long-term commitment of ensuring a collective defense in the Caribbean region would not only provide a robust response to threats such as natural disasters but also a sustained response to traditional threats, varying from illicit trafficking to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

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