



COLLEAGUES FOR THE AMERICAS SEMINAR SERIES

“The Caribbean Strategic Environment: Coping with Problems Without Passports”

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Featured Speaker: Ivelaw L. Griffith, Ph.D., Dean, The Honors College and Professor of Political Science, Florida International University.

Commentator: Daniel P. Erikson, Director of Caribbean programs at the Inter-American Dialogue.

Ivelaw Griffith is a specialist on Caribbean and Inter-American security and narcotics issues, he has published seven books, most recently *Caribbean Security in the Age of Terror: Challenge and Change*, *Drugs and Security in the Caribbean*, *Sovereignty Under Siege*, and *The Political Economy of Drugs in the Caribbean*. Griffith has been a consultant to Canada’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the OAS, USAID and other international bodies. He has lectured extensively at academic, military and law enforcement institutions in the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States. His research has been funded by The MacArthur Foundation, the University of Miami’s North-South Center and FIU and he is a recipient of FIU’s Award of Excellence in Research. Griffith is also a past President of the Caribbean Studies Association.

A summary of the seminar follows.

Griffith’s aim was to remind us that the Caribbean is a strategic area that requires greater U.S. and local attention, especially in a time of terrorism. He used Kofi Annan’s term, “problems without passports,” to focus attention on several transnational challenges to U.S. and regional security and on the need for more serious multilateral engagement. He reminded that just because a region is a low priority or a problem is not given attention, does not mean that it is unimportant.

The Local-Global Nexus

Griffith immediately emphasized that the geopolitical links between the United States and the Caribbean could make the region a theater of action against U.S. interests and those of its allies. He pointed out that the nations that comprise the Caribbean Basin are subject to “vulnerability interdependence”¹—developments far away from one country or region can impact it and perhaps the entire Basin.

¹ This idea came from Robert Keohane, a well known U.S. political scientist at Duke University. “Power comes not simply out of the barrel of a gun, but from asymmetries in vulnerability interdependence – some

Before examining four serious problems without passports, he addressed territorial disputes. Currently there are 40 border and territorial disputes in the region although most are dormant. However, some of these disputes are making their way into the world context. These lingering problems tend to receive little external attention but, in fact, seriously impact governmental decision making. He highlighted the natural resource-driven difficulties between Guyana and both Venezuela and Suriname, which continue to restrict Guyanese development of such resources as petroleum and gold, and the tension between Barbados and Trinidad-Tobago over undersea hydrocarbons and fish. Millions of dollars in legal fees to resolve their dispute are draining both national treasuries.

Regional challenges in the age of terrorism

Griffith chose to focus on only four transnational problems: crime, drugs, arms trafficking and the environment. In making the following points, he stressed the growing desperation with poverty, political instability, corruption, and ineffective justice:

- **Crime:** escalating homicide and kidnapping epitomize this problem. He sees both as indicators of the deteriorating fabric of society, especially in Jamaica where there is an estimated one death every six hours. He is deeply concerned that this problem will impact investment decisions by tourism and other industries.
- **Drugs:** he stressed that all aspects of the industry must be addressed, not just movement of product. The criminal networks, production, and money laundering need greater attention.
- **Arms trafficking:** he does not find governments to be serious about addressing this problem, which is growing in magnitude. Today, the flow of weapons into the Caribbean has shifted from Europe to South America, especially from Venezuela and Brazil. The weapons are going to gangs and criminal networks in Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Guyana and several small island states.
- **Environment:** The devastation of recent natural disasters, such as Hurricane Ivan (estimated \$3 billion damage in Grenada) and Tropical Storm Jeanne (over 3,000 dead in Haiti), has a high impact on societies, increasing their vulnerability to criminal enterprises that offer easy avenues to new livelihoods. A more concerted effort to bring positive response to these disasters, reconstruction and re-development, is needed.

Strategies and challenges in engagement

According to Griffith, there is a need for U.S. and Caribbean engagement in order to strengthen the geopolitical links in this age of terrorism. Engagement might be individual or bilateral, but increasingly a multilateral strategy is required, driven by the transnational nature of problems, the smallness of Caribbean nations, and the limited availability of resources. Griffith suggested “engagement zones” as a means to engage stakeholders outside the region. These zones would incorporate as contributors Caribbean countries,

of which, it turns out, favor certain non-state actors more than most observers anticipated. The networks on interdependence along which power can travel are multiple, and they do not cancel one another out. Even a state that is overwhelmingly powerful on many dimensions can be highly vulnerable on others.” (such as petroleum, water) *Dialog – International Organization*, Spring 2002

non-Caribbean countries, and organizations, all in an effort to help secure the region from threats and to deal with regional security problems.

Griffith stressed three key challenges that security stakeholders must meet. They need to prioritize efforts, making best use of limited resources, stop the platitudes and move to action, and coordinate cooperation between and among states. He introduced the 2007 Cricket World Cup, to be held in eight Caribbean countries over two months, as a huge security challenge as well as a perfect opportunity to overcome collaborative difficulties. This event will impact the entire region, and some security preparation is underway.

Conclusion

Griffith underscored that the Cricket World Cup is not the only potential target for terrorism in the Caribbean. Griffith pointed out the real vulnerability of oil and liquefied natural gas facilities and transshipment routes, which, in his view, have inadequate physical security. Little attention is being paid to this problem. He was concerned particularly with the minimal security arrangements at the Hovensa oil refining facility in the Virgin Islands, one of the world's largest, which serves the gasoline and heating oil markets in the U.S. Gulf coast and the eastern seaboard.¹ U.S. facilities in the region, such as the submarine exploration base located on Andros Island, continue to have minimal security. The Caribbean is, in essence, the "third border" of the U.S. requiring increased and continuous resources for protection.

Commentary

Dan Erikson added depth to Griffith's strategic overview by briefly discussing worrisome political conditions in Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. He noted the continuous problems these nations have with governance, and that many emerging democracies are struggling to grapple with the challenges of economic globalization, while new actors like Venezuela and China are seeking influence in the region. More U.S. and regional attention to the Caribbean's strategic environment is necessary. Crime, economic stagnation, weak infrastructures and a host of other issues are disrupting the region. Erikson emphasized that the U.S. can better help the Caribbean confront these dilemmas by firstly acknowledging that these problems are widespread and then by discussing these issues and possible solutions with clear and open dialogue.

¹ The modern Hovensa facility can process 515,000 barrels per day. The majority of the crude currently comes from Venezuela. In the Caribbean Basin, there are oil fields in eight countries: Barbados, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Suriname, Trinidad-Tobago, and Venezuela.

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