

Security Challenges in Guyana and the Government Response

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On December 23, 2018, a Venezuelan navy ship and its embarked helicopter attempted to intercept the Bahamian-flagged seismic survey ship Ramform Tethys, which was conducting oil exploration activities for Exxon Mobil in Guyanese waters. This action forced a temporary suspension in some of Exxon's offshore operations and highlights one of many challenges to Guyana's national security.

For those with only a superficial knowledge of the often overlooked, sparsely-populated nation on the northeast coast of South America, Guyana is a land of contradictions. It has cultural diversity and a wealth of natural resources that coexists with poverty and isolation, all of which will likely change in unpredictable ways as the country's first significant oil income begins to pour in, in 2020. As suggested by the Ramform Tethys incident, the exploitation of the estimated 30 billion barrels of recoverable oil offshore of Guyana will not only bring significant new wealth, but will give rise to new flows of goods, people, and financial connections for the nation. Such new wealth, flows, and connections will magnify and transform the host of security challenges the nation now faces in the context of a government both paralyzed by political crisis¹ and struggling to prepare itself for the task.

In the context of the transformation of Guyana through its potential oil wealth and the strategic importance those resources imply, this work examines the current and emerging security challenges to the nation, and the work of its government to manage them.

The Political crisis

Guyana's security challenges are compounded by a domestic political crisis which has not only impeded the government's ability to respond, but also has the potential to generate significant internal unrest and invite opportunistic challenges to Guyana's sovereignty by neighboring Venezuela and Suriname.

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On December 21, 2018, Guyana's principal political opposition, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) successfully passed a no-confidence motion against the governing coalition formed by A Party for National Unity (APNU) and the Alliance for Change (AFC), enabled by the surprise defection of AFC-member Charrandas Persaud.² With substantial oil revenue to begin flowing into Guyana in 2020,³ the vote and events following it have polarized all sides in the country, whose politics have long been divided on ethnic lines between those of Indian descent (who disproportionately have favored the PPP), and those of African descent (disproportionately favoring APNU and its core party, the People's National Congress (PNC)).

In the current crisis, APNU-AFC supporters see the Persaud defection as a dirty trick, attempting to exploit the government's near-term problems (including the shutdown of many government-operated sugar production facilities⁴) and seize control of government before oil revenues begin flowing in. The PPP views the government's efforts to delay elections through a combination of legal challenges and obstacles generated by what they view as a purely partisan electoral commission (GECOM) as an attempt to short-circuit the nation's democratic process and the will of the majority, as they contend the PNC did repeatedly in the past.⁵

Whatever the outcome, a significant number of Guyanese will be highly dissatisfied with the outcome and convinced that their interests can no longer be protected through traditional democratic mechanisms, raising the prospect for violence. Moreover, as the conflict escalates, neighboring Venezuela could take advantage of internal disorder to pursue its territorial claim, as many Guyanese perceive it tried to do in December 2018 with the attempted intercept of the *Ramform Tethys*.⁶

Guyana's Security Challenges

Guyana's security challenges include both external threats to its sovereignty and a range of non-traditional challenges.

Externally, two of Guyana's three neighbors continue to pursue significant claims on the territory of the nation (only Brazil does not). Guyana is attractive for its natural resources (which includes not only the previously mentioned petroleum, but also gold, timber, and productive agricultural land) and offers a convenient target for aggression because it is sparsely populated and weakly defended.

Venezuelan Territorial Claims

Venezuela claims 2/3 of Guyana's territory, to the Essequibo River in the East of the country, a claim pressed both by the populist socialist regime of Nicholas

Maduro and its opposition. During a political rally near Cucuta, Colombia, the head of that opposition, constitutionally legitimate interim president Juan Guaido, showed a map of Venezuela with Guyana's territory appended to it. Beyond Essequibo, Venezuela also makes two claims on Guyana's offshore Exclusive Economic Zone, the source of its newfound oil wealth: a maritime border based on a projection into the sea derived from the aforementioned territorial claim, and an alternate projection from the current de facto border at the mouth of the Orinoco River, at Puerto Playa, but using a line projecting into the Atlantic from that point that point on a 70-degree angle. Although the latter lacks substantial basis in international law, Venezuela has used that unusual projection to claim part of Guyana's (and Suriname's) Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Based on the combination of such claims, in 1966, Venezuelan forces seized control of Ankoko island in the Cuyuni River in Guyana's interior, which they turned into a military outpost and continue to occupy.⁷ In 2000, Venezuela blocked a Texas-based company, Beal Aerospace, from building a facility in the disputed territory.⁸ The Venezuelan Navy has also interfered with oil industry vessels conducting work authorized by the Guyanese government in the area. Such actions include an incident in October 2013, when the Venezuelan navy ship Yekuana intercepted a petroleum exploration vessel owned by Anadarko petroleum, escorting it to Venezuela and arresting its crew, including five Americans,⁹ as well as the previously mentioned harassment of the Ramform Tethys in December 2018. In addition, in June 2015, the Venezuelan Navy declared an "integral defense zone" encompassing the area.¹⁰

Surinamese Territorial Claims

To Guyana's east, its neighbor Suriname claims a remote, sparsely-populated, but large wedge of land in the interior of the country dubbed the "New River Triangle." In December 1967, shortly after Guyana's independence, through Operation Kingfisher, the Guyana Police Force successfully expelled Surinamese from the region, who were there as part of their government's own claim to the area due to its hydropower potential.¹¹ In August 1969, the GDF successfully conducted its own operation there to clear Surinamese "encroachers."¹² The Guyanese government subsequently established a small base in the area to serve as a tripwire against any Surinamese attempts to usurp the territory. Nonetheless, in October 2015, Surinamese President Desi Bouterse announced that he was placing the conflict over the disputed region once again on his country's agenda.¹³

Beyond the New River Triangle, Suriname previously disputed control of the Corentyne River with Guyana. In 2000, it interfered with an oil platform operated by CGX performing work in that area licensed by the Guyanese government.

The dispute was eventually settled in 2007 through a United Nations tribunal, based on the Law of the Sea convention (UNCLOS).¹⁴ Guyana solved the dispute by ceding the entire river to the low-tide point on the Guyanese side to Suriname. This generated new problems because of the people inhabiting the islands in the Correntine River delta (many of whom are engaged in narcotrafficking and other criminal activities), and the failure of Suriname to adequately control the area, resulting in the robbery, killing, and harassment of Guyanese fishermen operating in the area.¹⁵ The worst incident to date occurred in May 2018, when sixteen Guyanese fishermen were murdered by those believed to be Surinamese pirates,¹⁶ in what may have been a reprisal for the prior killing of a Surinamese drug boss.

Non-State Challenges

With respect to non-traditional security issues, Guyana is principally challenged by issues arising from criminal activities conducted in the sparsely inhabited interior of the country. A combination of difficult terrain, a lack of transportation infrastructure, and limited capabilities of its police and security forces there make that part of the country difficult to control. The principal threats currently include illegal mining, some illegal timber extraction, some narcotrafficking, and the incursion of Venezuelan refugees into the national territory.

Mining-Related Criminal Activity

A range of informal, generally unlicensed mining for gold occurs in the interior of Guyana, particularly in the basins of the Cuyuni and Mazaruni River basins west of Bartica. Such mining activities cause severe environmental damage, poisoning the water supplies of the indigenous and other communities living in the areas through the toxic chemicals used in the process. Such informal mining also attracts a range of illicit activities such as prostitution. Moreover, in the relatively lawless context of remote mining communities, the combination of gold, cash, alcohol and other factors also contributes to high levels of violence and crime among those participating in the mining economy of the area.

The desperation and lawlessness in neighboring Venezuela has led armed criminal groups, loosely referred to as *sindicatos*, to rob or extort those engaged in such mining,¹⁷ including extracting tolls along the rivers delimiting the Guyana-Venezuela border, and extorting and robbing those in Guyana itself. In November 2018, a Guyanese police officer was shot in an incident ascribed to the *sindicatos*.¹⁸

Such criminal activities include multiple, possibly competing, relatively well-armed groups of Venezuelans and Brazilians (among others). Some reports sug-

gest that the Colombian terrorist group Ejército Liberación Nacional (ELN) may even have a presence in the area, including inside Guyana.¹⁹

Money Laundering

The extraction of gold creates opportunities for money laundering by a range of criminal actors. One technique uses illicitly-obtained cash to purchase gold for a premium, often in Bartica (the gateway town for Guyana's gold region), and reselling that gold to the official Guyanese government Gold Board, or one of the nine private companies officially licensed to buy it,²⁰ producing a certification that the income came from mining proceeds.²¹

Beyond the mining industry, Guyana's single operating casino, the Princess, in Georgetown, is also believed to play a role in money laundering, with large amounts of cash flowing through the enterprise. Indeed, the former Assistant Commissioner of Police, David Ramnarine, suspiciously declared thousands of dollars of winnings weekly from the Princess, generating speculation that his money was actually coming from illicit sources.²² On the other hand, Georgetown's two other casinos have shut down, and the Princess (technically) is only open to foreigners and a select group of Guyanese. Moreover, the single operating casino in Georgetown compares favorably to the nearby city of Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname, where there are 28.

Illegal Timber Extraction

Control of the timber operations in Guyana's interior is inadequate, and companies such as Bai Shan Lin have been accused of exporting large quantities of wood from the country without a proper license.²³ Bai Shan Lin may have concealed its exports by moving logs in closed containers and using smaller licensed logging companies operating in the area to actually claim the exports.²⁴

Narcotics Production and Narcotrafficking

Guyana is both an exporter of marijuana to Brazil and a transit country for cocaine. Granger administration Finance Minister Winston Jordan has asserted (with strong objections from the opposition PPP) that a substantial amount of the country's economy depends on the proceeds from narcotrafficking.²⁵

Guyana produces modest quantities of marijuana in plots along the coast, and in more arid portions of the interior such as near Kurupukari, Annai, and Mahdia. Although Guyanese marijuana is considered low quality against competing marijuana grown in Paraguay and Colombia, some Guyanese marijuana is exported to the remote neighboring Brazilian state of Roraima, where its low quality is less of

a problem. That marijuana is traditionally smuggled across the border at Lethem, contributing to the criminal dynamics of that town.²⁶

Modest quantities of cocaine are also smuggled through Guyana. Most is bound for Europe through Suriname, although some also is believed to be smuggled to the US. In general, shipments of cocaine are hidden under shipments of rice,²⁷ sand, and other bulk cargo on barges transiting Guyana's rivers and departing from its coast.

For reasons of geography, most of the cocaine transiting Guyana is believed to originate in Colombia, passing first through Venezuela to Guyana, then through Suriname to Europe (generally via the Netherlands). In 2018, two members of the Brazilian criminal group First Capital Command (PCC) were captured in Georgetown, indicating the establishment of a small PCC cell there with the intention of controlling the cocaine route through Guyana to Europe.²⁸ Separately, in October 2014, a semisubmersible craft was found abandoned in the Waini River near Venezuela.²⁹ The craft was thought to be used in smuggling cocaine to Africa or Europe, or alternatively, toward Trinidad, ultimately to the US.

Overall, the quantity of drugs passing through Guyana to date has been limited because of the limited commercial shipping routes from Guyana that would provide cover for smuggling, as well as the limited domestic market. As oil revenues begin to flow into Guyana in 2020, however, the expansion of the economy, flows of people and goods, and financial connections will increase Guyana's potential as a narco-trafficking hub.

Human Smuggling, Trafficking, and Migration

As noted previously, an estimated 2,800 Venezuelans have entered Guyana in recent years as that nation's economy has collapsed.³⁰ In addition, another 20,000 or more Guyanese once living and working in Venezuela, have been forced to return.³¹

While the number of migrants arriving in Guyana from Venezuela has been modest as compared to more than 1.2 million Venezuelans fleeing to Colombia,³² those arriving in Guyana have placed severe strains on the health, education, and other infrastructure of the small towns in the sparsely inhabited Essequibo region, as well as Georgetown. Compounding the problem, those arriving in Georgetown have been disproportionately female, transforming the dynamic of prostitution there, which had been previously dominated by Brazilians.³³

A significant number of Cubans are also entering Guyana, traveling to Georgetown, to purchase products unavailable in Cuba, and to apply for visas to the US (after it was forced to close its consular office in Havana). Many of those, as well as Venezuelans, are taken through the country into Brazil at Lethem, headed toward the southern cone or the US to be exploited as prostitutes. In 2018, an esti-

mated 25,000 Cubans entered Guyana, of which 10,000 went to Brazil, mostly crossing at Lethem.³⁴

Haitians are also smuggled or trafficked through Guyana. Most of those entering the country are in transit to French Guyana, with a popular Copa flight bringing Haitians from Port au Prince to Panama City, and from Panama City to Georgetown, from where they travel to French Guyana by land. Some Haitians also stay in Guyana to obtain citizenship and work there, with those arranging the transaction reportedly charging US\$1,000 per person to obtain Guyanese citizenship through arranged marriages to a Guyanese.³⁵

Finally, an unknown, but significant quantity of Chinese migrants enter Guyana, facilitated by infrastructure projects and other work done in Guyana by Chinese companies. These immigrants are believed channeled through a network of Chinese-owned restaurants and shops in which their labor is exploited (sometimes for years) as part of a long-term journey to the US.³⁶

Perhaps the most positive element of Guyana's security environment is that criminal violence has been limited, especially in urban areas. The country's murder rate, approximately 19.4/100,000,³⁷ is low compared to nearby states such as Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Jamaica, and especially Venezuela.

With minor exceptions, the capital Georgetown is relatively free of criminal street gangs and their related criminal activities.³⁸ The country's most notorious gangs, associated with the country's two major ethnic groupings, are generally a part of the past. These include the Fine Man Gang,³⁹ whose roots were in the afro-guyanese stronghold of Buxton (and believed by some tied to the afro-guyanese-dominant party the PNC), as well as a narco-trafficking group tied to Roger Kahn, with a disproportionate identification among indoguyanese. As this article went to press, the expected return of Kahn to Guyana in July 2019, after having served a ten-year sentence in the US,⁴⁰ generated speculation in Georgetown that he might either seek to re-create his prior criminal enterprise, or alternatively be put on trial in Guyana for other crimes or killed before such a public trial could occur.

One threat that has been relatively absent from Guyana's security environment is radical Islam.⁴¹ Although Guyana has a modestly sized Islamic community (between 3 percent and 6 percent of the population),⁴² there have been relatively few cases of Guyanese traveling to the Middle East to fight for the terrorist group Islamic State, as happened with at least 175 Muslims from Trinidad and Tobago.⁴³ One difference may be the relative absence of criminal street gangs in Guyana, which in Trinidad and Tobago were the principal source of recruitment by radical mosques.

Although the Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi was believed to be nurturing some Islamic radicalism in Guyana in the 1970s, there has not been strong evidence of similar activities by Iran or other Islamic states of concern in recent years.⁴⁴ The best known case is arguably Abdul Kadir, former mayor of Linden Guyana, who was arrested in 2007 for involvement in a plot to bomb JFK Airport in New York. Many interviewed for this work assessed that Kadir's involvement was an isolated incident, and that even he may not have had a significant role in the plot.

Chinese Commercial and Security Sector Activities

Finally, the growing presence of the PRC in both commercial projects and security sector activities in Guyana, and the associated growth of its political influence in Guyana, arguably creates strategic concerns for the US.⁴⁵

During the PPP administrations of Bharat Jagdeo and Donald Ramotar prior to 2015, the commercial presence of the PRC expanded significantly through a number of major infrastructure and other investment projects that raised questions about the level of Chinese influence in the country.⁴⁶ Major examples included the US\$800M Amaila Falls hydroelectric project (subsequently abandoned), the renovation of Cheddi Jagan International Airport, the acquisition of the Omai bauxite mine by the Chinese firm Bosai, construction of the Skeldon sugar factory, and the construction of electricity transmission infrastructure by the Chinese firm CEIEC. Other examples include telecommunications cables and other projects by the Chinese firm Huawei, an education program supplying Chinese Haier-built laptop computers to impoverished Guyanese families, logging concessions awarded to the Chinese firm Bai Shan Lin,⁴⁷ and the construction of a new Marriott Hotel by Shanghai Construction Group. In the security sector, under PPP governments, the Guyana Defence Force was the recipient of a Chinese Y-12 transport aircraft,⁴⁸ and its officers regularly attended professional military education and training courses in China (PRC).⁴⁹

Under the APNU-AFC government of David Granger, the concessions to Bai Shan Lin were largely terminated.⁵⁰ Several of the other Chinese projects also ran into difficulties resulting in the abandonment of the fiber-optic cable from Georgetown to Lethem (over multiple breaks and other technical difficulties),⁵¹ the closing of the Skeldon sugar factory, problems with and the scaling back of the airport modernization,⁵² and the ending of the One Laptop per Child program and the associated disappearance of Haier as a computer brand in the country.

Nonetheless, in the face of a more challenging business environment, the Chinese continue to make progress, including participation of China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) in the Exxon-led coalition to develop Guyana's offshore oil, the successful completion of the Marriott as Guyana's leading luxury

hotel, hosting oil industry executives and technical personnel as they came into the country, a decision by the competing Pegasus Hotel's owner, Robert Badal, to contract the construction firm China Harbor for a major expansion project of his own hotel,⁵³ and a number of road construction projects contracted to the Chinese, as well as commercial real estate projects throughout Georgetown funded by Chinese money. Under the Granger administration, the Chinese also officially opened a Confucius institute in the University of Guyana⁵⁴ and engendered considerable goodwill in the security sector by donating over US\$2.6M in vehicles and equipment to the Guyana Police Force (GPF),⁵⁵ donating construction equipment to the GDF,⁵⁶ and continuously bringing Guyanese government and security personnel to PRC for training and goodwill visits.

With the likely return of the PPP to power in 2019 elections,⁵⁷ its leadership is talking about a new generation of infrastructure and other projects likely to be built by the Chinese and funded by the revenues from oil, including the resurrection of the Amaila Falls hydroelectric project and an interconnection to the Brazilian power grid (likely to be built by a major Chinese company active in Brazil such as China State Grid, or State Power Industrial Corporation), the construction of a deep water port near Berbice, and an associated road and rail link to Brazil.⁵⁸ It is also possible to anticipate the participation of Chinese oil companies in future oil exploration and development licensing rounds as well as the entry of Chinese petroleum service companies in the support sector, and possibly the expansion of Bosai's Reunion magnesium mine in the northwest of the country.⁵⁹ While the PPP has also expressed an interest to work closely with the US and Western investors,⁶⁰ such projects are likely to give the Chinese particular weight in the economic and political dynamics of the country in a future PPP government (as well as, to a lesser extent, in a APNU one).

Response by the Guyana Government and its Security Forces

Under the administration of David Granger, the government has made tangible, albeit limited steps to respond to the security challenges facing the nation. In general, the government response has been hampered by a combination of a lack of resources available to the security sector and a deeply entrenched culture of societal corruption.

National-Level Planning Processes

With respect to the formulation of security policy and strategy by the Guyanese government, the National Security Council (NSC) is currently the body most focused on internal and external security matters affecting the nation. The NSC

meets once a week, headed by the President, and including (when available) the Prime Minister, the Minister of State, the Minister of Security, the director of the National Intelligence and Security Administration (NISA), the Director of the Police, and the head of the Armed Forces, among others. Narrower and less operational matters of defense policy are handled by the Defense Board, which meets, in theory, once per month, with a somewhat narrower group and sometimes produces policy directives. Nonetheless, while meetings of the NSC and Defense Board to some degree foster a process of coordination and planning, the Guyanese system contrasts with its counterparts in the US and Europe in the relative absence of a formal process and supporting documents guiding members of the government from policy guidance to the acquisition of capabilities and specific lines of action. While the Guyanese constitution specifies the role of the Defense Force and other security institutions and there is a nominal document for National Defense Strategy, there is no overarching national security policy document nor a process for analyzing challenges to the nation, determining requirements, assessing gaps, and planning coordinated solutions for how to fill them.

Guyana Defence Force

By contrast with some Western nations, the Guyanese Defense Force (GDF) has responsibility for not only the security, but also the stability of the nation. It has implicit authority to support the police against internal threats, although of the elements of that force, only the naval component of the GDF, the Guyana Coast Guard, has authority to make arrests under normal circumstances. The GDF is comprised of a land component, a small air corps, and a Coast Guard.

GDF Land Component

The GDF land component is a light infantry force of approximately 2,000 active duty personnel, including an infantry battalion, a special forces squadron, an artillery company, an engineering battalion, and a services support battalion.⁶¹ It is complemented by a recently reorganized and renamed reserve component, the Guyanese People's Militia.

The land component has a number of aging Urutu and Cascavel armored vehicles with sometimes low levels of operational availability. As a force, it is very limited in its combat capability. Most defense analysts consulted for this work believe that if Venezuela actively pressed its previously mentioned territorial claims, the GDF would be quickly overrun. Some speculate that the GDF would likely be outmatched by the military capabilities of neighboring Suriname as well. Thus, Guyana's government, including its current President, retired Brigadier General

David Granger, openly emphasizes that the center of its strategy for protecting the nation against an external aggressor is diplomacy and not military force.⁶²

The engineering battalion of the GDF has received special attention under the Granger government, with the President seeing the GDF, through activities such as road construction, playing a role in national development. The GDF receives approximately US\$1M in equipment donations per year from the PRC, which are allowed to accumulate, with the GDF typically taking delivery on a multi-million-dollar donation from the PRC every couple of years. In 2015, the Granger government and GDF leadership, in coordination with their Chinese counterparts, decided to use four years of accumulated donation credits in the form of construction equipment, which was delivered to Guyana in April 2017.⁶³ Although a number of GDF engineers and others have reportedly received training on the operation and maintenance of the equipment in PRC and the equipment is operational and remains under the control of the GDF, it has not yet been employed in support of any significant public works project, with the exception of the “New Horizons” humanitarian and civic assistance exercise.⁶⁴

The active duty ground force of the GDF is complemented by a reserve force. This force, previously called the Reserve Battalion, was reorganized in 2015 following the election of the APNU-AFC government. It is now called the Guyana Peoples Militia (GPM), resurrecting the concept of a local community-based defense organization from an earlier time in Guyana’s history. The plan for the GPM was to create a force 1,500 people over a three-year period, recruiting from and basing the force in each of the nation’s ten regions (although still responding to centralized-national-level command in a three-battalion structure). By the end of 2015, the former reserve battalion was transferred under control of the GPM, and the new organization began standing up its own units in the regions, although the process remains incomplete. Equipping and constructing the base infrastructure in each region remains a work in progress.

The concept of the GPM is to serve as a grassroots organization more closely linked with the communities in Guyana’s sparsely populated interior, leveraging local knowledge and ties for use in addressing problems related to that area such as maintaining awareness and defending against incursions of foreigners such as the immigrants and criminal bands which enter the interior of the country from Venezuela.

The GPM is also in charge of the National Cadet Corps, a program similar to scouting in the US. The program is focused on instilling discipline and positive values as well as creating interest in careers with the GPM and GDF.⁶⁵

GDF Air Corps

The aviation portion of the GDF, the Air Corps, has almost no operational capability. Its newest assets are two BN-2 Islander aircraft acquired in 2018 from Brazil but lacking significant sensor packages that would magnify their capability as Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms. The BN-2s are considered a practical acquisition, owing to their capabilities for operating from the often short and soft-field landing strips throughout the interior of the country. They were reportedly acquired from Brazil because the aircraft is familiar to maintenance technicians in Guyana as it is used in civilian roles as well as military ones.⁶⁶ Despite hopes within the GDF to eventually outfit the aircraft with sensors and other equipment to make them more effective in an ISR role, there are no specific plans on the books or programmed resources to acquire such capabilities.

In addition to the BN-2s, the GDF Air Corps also has one other light fixed-wing aircraft, a Cessna Skyvan.⁶⁷ Like the BN-2s, it is generally used for transport and observation. Until recently, the GDF also had an older-generation Chinese-made Harbin Y-12 military transport aircraft, which had been donated. Unfortunately for the GDF, the aircraft had regular mechanical issues and was difficult to maintain. The Y-12 has subsequently been scrapped, and the GDF reportedly turned down a Chinese offer to sell them a newer model.⁶⁸

In addition to its three functional fixed-wing aircraft, the Air Corps also has one operational helicopter, a Bell 206, which is used mostly to transport senior GDF and government personnel. It also reportedly has a Bell 412, which was not in service at the time this article went to press.

To supplement the lack of aviation assets, the GDF periodically charters civilian aircraft and flies them over the nation's maritime exclusive economic zone and other areas, crewed with GDF officers manned with binoculars, in order to provide a minimal detection capability.

GDF Coast Guard

The Guyanese Coast Guard, like the Guyanese Air Force, has almost no real capability to protect the nation's maritime areas or inland waterways. The only true military craft capable of patrolling Guyana's coastal waters, the *Essequibo*, was a repurposed British minesweeper, which lacks the speed to operate and the equipment to be effective. While its heavy metal hull offers some protection in the eventuality of combat against pirates or others, it is highly fuel inefficient and suffers frequent breakdowns. It has been repaired so often as to render its seaworthiness in doubt, with the result that it is only periodically used.

Beyond the Essequibo, the Coast Guard has seven light Metal Shark patrol boats acquired from the US. The crews and maintainers are being trained with US support and will also be able to be used in the nation's rivers. Beyond these, however, the Coast Guard has no boats large enough and with enough endurance to go out into the Atlantic for sustained periods to perform fisheries patrols, or to respond to attacks against, or emergencies involving, the oil platforms that will be increasingly operating far offshore in Guyana's EEZ.

Although Guyana is known as the "land of many rivers" for the number of waterways covering the interior, the Coast Guard has almost no riverine craft to patrol them, save the aforementioned Metal Sharks. In recent years, it has acquired two "mobile bases," essentially barges with living spaces, command and control, and fuel and supplies for operating smaller boats. One of these has been given to the Coast Guard and deployed on the Waini River near the Venezuelan border, while another has been given to the police. Neither, however, can maintain a sufficient number of boats available to be effective.

By contrast to some other defense organizations in the hemisphere such as those of the Dominican Republic and Guatemala, the GDF does not have a fleet of boats or other assets confiscated from narcotraffickers and repurposed to control the nation's coast and waterways. This deficiency reflects both the legal system of Guyana, which despite the creation of the State Assets Recovery Unit (SARA) in 2017,⁶⁹ does not have an agile legal procedure for confiscating assets. It also reflects the general absence of narcotraffickers perceived to be using Guyana's rivers and coastal waters.⁷⁰

As noted previously, while the GDF works with both the US and the British, it also has a significant and ongoing relationship with the PRC. The GDF receives approximately US\$1M per year in military equipment donations or accumulated credits and regularly sends personnel to professional military education programs and training courses in PRC. While the majority of such engagements involve short courses a few weeks in duration and brief official institutional visits, GDF officers have also attended the regular People's Liberation Army (PLA) military academy program, as well as year-long Command and General Staff courses near Nanjing, and an extended pilot training course.⁷¹

Guyana Police Force

For internal security, the (GPF) is the nation's first line of defense against crime and insecurity, with the GDF in a supporting role where necessary. Thanks in part to Guyana's small population and British heritage, which does not emphasize a strong distinction between the police and military as the US does, GDF-GPF coordination is relatively good. Nonetheless, there are coordination issues. Police Force Control, for

example, lacks the ability to communicate directly with the GDF, and there is no Joint Operations Center.⁷²

On its own terms, however, the GPF is both undermined by significant internal corruption, and underfunded. The mean pay of a Guyana Police Force member is \$300 per month, approximately half that of the next worst-paid police department in the Caribbean. As a consequence, the GPF does not attract the most capable members of society to be part of its organization, and police personnel are readily tempted to engage in bribe-taking just to survive. GPF members are also frequently poorly equipped, sometimes delaying their responses to serious crimes because of the non-availability of police cars. A number of GDF facilities are literally falling down from disrepair.

Through funds from the European Union (EU), police training, equipment, and infrastructure is being improved. Highlights of such efforts include the Citizen Security Strengthening Program (CSSP), which helps improve professionalization of the GPF and increase its focus on community-oriented policing. Through CSSP, approximately 20 percent of Guyanese police stations have been refurbished, although the conditions of those that remain is, in some cases, appalling.⁷³

In addition to assistance from the EU, the Granger administration also modestly increased basic police salaries, and the GPF has sought to combat corruption and improve the organization through the counsel of a “strategic management team” comprised of former senior police officers, and with donations of computers and equipment to the team from the US. Much work remains to be done.

Perhaps one of the highest-profile elements of the GPF, and one of the most politically controversial, is its Special Organized Crime Unit (SOCU). SOCU was originally formed to conduct investigations of persons organized as suspicious through the financial analysis of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). SOCU has been criticized, however (particularly by the PPP), for focusing its investigations almost entirely on senior PPP-affiliated functionaries of the previous government and their business partners without, to date, producing any convictions. One of the more public incidents was the March 2017 arrest of senior PPP leaders Bharat Jagdeo, Roger Luncheon, and Robert Persaud in a public forum with the press present.⁷⁴

Those more sympathetic to SOCU would say the focus was driven by the involvement of the members of that government in corruption, and that the reason for the lack of convictions has been the inability or unwillingness of the Director of Public Prosecution Mrs. Shalimar Ali-Hack (appointed by the previous PPP government), to take cases forward.⁷⁵

As with the GDF, the GPF has interactions with the Chinese. Most prominently in November 2017, when the PRC donated US\$2.6M in vehicles and other equipment including 56 pick-up trucks, 44 motorcycles, 35 all-terrain vehicles, and 5 buses, helping the GPF to compensate for its severe shortage of vehicles.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, several of

these cars have been lost to accidents since their arrival,⁷⁷ including one just a day after being donated.⁷⁸

Financial Intelligence Unit

As noted previously, the work of SOCU is, in principle, supported by Guyana's Financial Intelligence Unit, whose job it is to monitor financial transactions and identify suspicious ones to be investigated by SOCU.

Guyana's contemporary FIU traces its origins to Anti-Money Laundering / Combatting Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) laws of 2009, implemented by then Attorney General Anil Nandlall during the PPP administration of Donald Ramotar, following recommendations and pressures from the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF). Despite Nandlall's initial steps, the CFATF pressured the Ramotar administration to do more. Nonetheless, the opposing APNU-AFC (with a majority in parliament), refused to pass laws proposed by the Ramotar government to address CFATF concerns, on the grounds that they were flawed and filled with loopholes that favored persons affiliated with the PPP.

As a result of the impasse, the CFATF and its parent organization, the Financial Action Task Force, ultimately rated Guyana and its FIU negatively.

When the APNU-AFC coalition took power in 2015 with a majority in parliament, it quickly passed a series of laws addressing issues raised by the CFATF and EU, leading to an improved rating from the former, and removal from the EU blacklist.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, PPP leaders and legal scholars advise that many of the new laws, which they believe were passed in haste, may violate due process protections and are unconstitutional.

Operationally, while the work of the FIU under the current government is well regarded, some complain that its work sometimes overlaps with the SOCU, and that it focuses too heavily on politicians who are presumed to receive payoffs or otherwise benefit from illicit activities rather than the criminal leaders who actually conduct them.⁸⁰

Customs and Anti-Narcotics Unit

Guyana's independent Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) is roughly the nation's equivalent to the US Drug Enforcement Administration/DEA. Although a significant quantity of drugs are not believed to move through Guyana at present, the organization has played a leading role in the major intercepts which have occurred, including the May 2017 discovery of US\$550M in cocaine in a shipment of wood bound for the US.⁸¹

CANU works with, and generally has a positive relationship with, the DEA, which was invited back into the country at the end of the Ramotar administration in 2015. Since the DEA's formal return to the country in February 2016,⁸² the two organizations have built a relationship of trust, in part through the special vetting of personnel.⁸³

There are some concerns of corruption within CANU,⁸⁴ including a high-profile mishandling of a drug intercept in 2017, leading the government to suspend the head of CANU, James Singh, and appoint a commission of inquiry.⁸⁵ The ability to combat corruption in the ranks is facilitated by the fact that most of the organization's personnel work on one-year contracts, making it easier to eliminate those who fail to pass polygraphs or whose honesty otherwise comes into question, by simply not renewing their contracts. Nonetheless, according to one Guyanese security expert, half of CANU officers given a polygraph failed it, and many of those who did are still in the organization.⁸⁶

Within the GPF, the work of CANU is complimented by the police counter-narcotics unit, which focuses more on the growing, selling, and distribution of drugs at the local level. Recognizing the overlap that exists between the missions of both agencies, the Granger administration has proposed to merge the two organizations into a single National Anti-Narcotics Agency (NANA).⁸⁷

Joint Intelligence Center/ National Intelligence and Security Administration

Beyond the GDF and the GPF, the Guyanese government is working to build a civilian intelligence organization, the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA).⁸⁸ Built from an organization originally designed to coordinate intelligence from police, military and other sources for national-level decision makers, and conduct electronic surveillance (the Joint Intelligence Center), NISA is the brainchild of the JIC's current head, Bruce Lovell, who seeks to build NISA into an organization which has both an analytical and collection capability, with a presence in each of Guyana's regions, and in theory, eventually some capability to collect intelligence on foreign targets.⁸⁹

Other Organizations

Finally, there are a range of other organizations that play roles in combatting criminal activity and other security challenges in Guyana as part of their duties.

The Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) has responsibility for inspecting the loading of sugar, sand, minerals, and lumber and other bulk material onto barges for export, including the duty to ensure that illicit substances like cocaine are not

buried in the shipments. The GRA, however, has insufficient personnel to inspect more than a miniscule fraction of cargos being loaded.

One of the most challenged organizations within the Guyanese law enforcement system is the Guyana Prison System, a part of the Ministry of Public Security. As in many parts of Latin America, the prison system suffers from severe overcrowding and neglect. In July 2017, Guyana's main prison at Camp Street in downtown Georgetown was largely destroyed by a fire.⁹⁰ Although the facility has been partially renovated, it now has beds for only 300 prisoners, a fraction of its previous capacity, and is no longer suitable for maximum security inmates. With the fire in the Camp Street prison, the Lusignan prison facility is now Guyana's largest, with capacity for 1,200. It is here that the prisoners from Brazil's First Capital Command (PCC) gang are being held. The third prison, Mazaruni, is relatively isolated, and features better conditions. As of the time this work went to press, Mazaruni was in the process of a renovation and expansion, to include construction of a new wing designed to hold 400 prisoners.⁹¹

Recommendations

The appropriate response for the US to Guyana's security challenges is complicated by the nation's current political crisis. Under the APNU-AFC government of David Granger, the nation was making meaningful, if slow process in combatting corruption and reforming its institutions.⁹² While the PPP governments which preceded it manifested relatively competent administration and a pro-business orientation, the accusations of corruption, and their level of cooperation with leftist populist regimes such as Venezuela, as well as the PRC, arguably caused discomfort in Washington.⁹³ The first strategic imperative for the US with Guyana is to avoid taking a position in the current political crisis, either affirmatively or by omission, inconsistent with Guyana's constitution and the dictates of its political process. The US should be prepared to work actively toward security with whoever prevails so long as they do so consistent with democratic processes and Guyana's own constitution. At the same time, given concerns regarding corruption in prior PPP administrations, while the US should embrace and work in good faith with a future PPP government, it must do so with its eyes open, holding the PPP to account with respect to its commitments to transparency, democracy, and commitment to free market and the rule of law.

As Guyana's oil revenue comes in, the focus of US engagement in the security and other sectors should aim to strengthen the nation's capacity for good governance, including technically competent, rational processes for planning, acquisition, and program evaluation, to help the country best take advantage of its petro-

leum and commercial interactions with the PRC, and other opportunities to advance national development.

US Security Planning Assistance

With the concurrence of the Guyanese government, the US should help its Guyanese counterparts develop a process for elaborating defense policy and strategy, identifying and developing required capabilities. If the Guyanese government is not comfortable working with US institutions such as the Defense Institution Reform Initiative (DIRI) or the Ministry of Defense Advisory organization (MODA), the US should also explore coordination with the British in supporting United Kingdom (UK) initiatives aligned with the Guyanese experience.

The Guyanese government should rationally determine its own defense needs, flowing from its identification of challenges, the strategy to meet them, an analysis of gaps and alternatives. Nonetheless, there are a range of areas in which help is needed with respect to the security sector, and in which the US should be prepared to offer its support:

Professional Military Education

The US should offer International Military Education and Training (IMET) support, with billets at all level for the professional military education of GDF officers. Guyana's US State Partner, the Florida National Guard, arguably has important contributions to make in this area.

For naval programs, the US Coast Guard arguably will have programs and interactions relevant to Guyana's needs, both in improving control of its EEZ, as well as the country's coast and interior rivers.

The ability of the US to provide certain types of security assistance may become increasingly constrained as Guyana's oil revenue begins to come in and its per capita income grows (putting the country above the threshold for certain types of assistance under US law). Nonetheless, the US must be prepared to ask for special exceptions to these laws, recognizing that extra-hemispheric competitors to the US, PRC, and Russia are likely to increase their own offering for training and exchange programs for the Guyanese beyond what they currently provide. While the US has a compelling case regarding the value of its own programs, and while the Guyanese government must naturally pay a fair share of their cost, the US must offer such programs at a cost and under conditions that make them attractive to the Guyanese government to work with the US and not just PRC as a partner.

With respect to material solutions, while the Guyanese government must make the final decisions regarding its needs, following an objective, thorough, and

transparent analysis of the alternatives. The analysis in this work suggests that the US should be prepared to offer comprehensive packages of materiel, spares, training and maintenance support focused on building Guyana's ability to patrol the far offshore waters of its EEZ, respond to encroachments of those waters by the navies of foreign nations, unauthorized fishing vessels, narcotraffickers, pirates, and other actors who might threaten the oil rigs. Such a package would logically include the capability to respond to emergencies there, including, but not limited to, oil spills. Through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program, the US may wish to offer the GDF a limited number of offshore patrol vessels (OPVs) capable of operating with embarked helicopters, and persistent surveillance platforms, possibly including UAVs and manned aircraft outfitted with appropriate sensors such as Forward-Looking Infrared Radar (FLIR), as part of that solution.

For the control of the interior, both the GDF and police and other supporting agencies will likely need an expanded number of riverine patrol craft. The US, through providing the GDF Coast Guard seven metal shark boats and associated support and training, already has a good sense of GDF needs and is thus well-positioned to suggest well-designed and balanced packages of complementary capabilities.

On the air side, the GDF will likely need an expanded number of simple, rugged light transport aircraft appropriate for the approximately 120 non-improved airstrips of the Guyanese interior (such as the previously acquired BN-2s) which could also potentially serve as maritime patrol aircraft, as well as more vehicles for both the GDF and police.

Finally, the GDF and GPF will likely need an expanded, albeit limited, helicopter-mobile special operations capability to respond to some of the larger and more heavily-armed criminal groupings operating in the interior, including the sindicatos and others from Venezuela threatening miners and other local populations inside Guyana. Such SOF has a training and equipment component, all of which the US is uniquely well-positioned to suggest a solution appropriate to the Guyanese reality.

It will be particularly important for the US to work with the Guyanese government to design and implement the solution in an incremental, coordinated fashion so that the acquisition of material capabilities proceeds in tandem with the training of personnel to operate and maintain those assets in a sustained fashion.

Guyana must work in conjunction with the US, the UK European Union and other partners and fundamentally reform its security and law enforcement institutions, as well as other parts of government. Part of that solution may be a significant elevation of police salaries. These organizations will also require assistance in the institution of a transparent, merit-based promotion system associated with clearly

defined requirements for acquiring and demonstrating skills at each level, and adequate training and education opportunities to acquire them. They will also require well as reforms in the management of police (and others) to ensure that the skills invested in are used, through both the retention and wise assignment of personnel.

With such incentives, it will also be important for the US to help the GDF, GPF and other relevant organizations implement expanded confidence testing, such as regular polygraphs and interviews (not just entry level screening, or specialized units), as well as periodic investigations including home visits to guard against corruption by officers (including leaders, which must not be exempt), by ensuring that the lifestyle of personnel is commensurate with their salaries.

Organizations undergoing such reform must also ensure that those who are identified as having engaged in corruption are removed and followed after their removal, and not simply transferred to another part of their organization.

In improving the institutional capabilities of the GDF and the GPF, there are a range of good analyses which have already been done and accepted by the Guyanese government, although not meaningfully acted upon, including the 2016 report on Security Sector Reform, and the 2018 UK advisor's follow up report.⁹⁴ Such detailed reports should be the starting point in taking institutional reform forward. The constructive role played by the UK and the European Union in Guyana's security sector reform to date also highlights the importance for the US of coordinating with such partners as closely as possible to avoid duplication of work and achieve maximum synergies from their collective efforts, as well as learning from each other's successes and errors in the country.

Overall, the institutional reforms and acquisition of capabilities described in this work represent a significant departure from where Guyana's security institutions are today. While their acquisition in an incremental fashion will ease the burden, they will not be cheap. Guyana's expanding oil wealth will not only provide a way to fund such investments, but an imperative for making them. As noted previously, the economic growth accompanying those oil operations will both attract persons from across the world and create significant new opportunities for criminal activities. While Guyana has already been prejudiced to some degree by a lack of capability to respond to its existing internal and external security challenges, without the ability to protect its oil and without capable, professional security services to maintain control as that wealth expands, the oil boom and associated development will ultimately be unsustainable.

After a long history of receiving relatively little attention from the developed world, Guyana is on the cusp of a profound transformation, driven by its soon to arrive oil wealth. The risk of Guyana becoming "rich" without adequately strengthening its institutions risks that the very petroleum revenues that promise to be

Guyana's salvation could be its undoing. For Guyana and its South American and Caribbean neighbors, and for the US, the imperative of getting it right is strong. □

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He is a research professor of Latin American Studies at the Institute of Strategic Studies of the US Army War College with a focus on the region's relations with China and other non-Western Hemisphere actors. Dr. Ellis has published more than 90 works, including the 2009 book *China in Latin America: The Whats and Whys*, the 2013 book *The Strategic Dimension of Chinese Engagement with Latin America* (The strategic dimension of Chinese activities in Latin America) and the 2014 book, *China on the Ground in Latin America*. Dr. Ellis has presented his work in a wide range of commercial and government forums in 25 countries. He has testified about Chinese activities in Latin America before the US Congress, and has talked about his work in China and other external actors in Latin America in a wide range of radio and television programs, including CNN International, CNN En Español, The John Bachelor Show, Voice of America and Radio Martí. Dr. Ellis is usually quoted in the print media in both the US and Latin America for his work in this area, including the Washington Times, Bloomberg, America Economy, DEF and InfoBAE. Dr. Ellis has a doctorate in political science with a specialization in comparative politics. The opinions expressed in this article are strictly yours.