

Feature Address at the launch of
Selected Essays on Contemporary Caribbean Issues:
An International Relations Perspective

by

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Honorable Speaker of the National Assembly Raphael Trotman

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Members of the Diplomatic Corps

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Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honored to be here with you this evening to help mark the achievements of the first Guyanese cohort of Masters in Science in Global Studies at the University of the West Indies. Let me extend my heartfelt congratulations to the graduates and to their professors and mentors from the Institute of International Relations at the University of the West Indies. I wish you continued success in whatever course your professional life should take you. In today's interconnected world, Guyana's future is inextricably linked to the international environment. To

succeed, Guyana needs future leaders who understand the world and how to advance Guyana's interests in an increasingly complex, globalized context.

That is why I am delighted to be part of the launch of "*Selected Essays in Contemporary Caribbean Issues: An International Relations Perspective*," edited by Dr. Marlon Anatol and Dr. Mark Kirton. This collection of original essays offers valuable insights into some of the leading domestic and international challenges facing Guyana, from the conduct of democratic elections and how to harness the energies of young people to national development, to the impact of climate change, the effectiveness of foreign assistance, and the implications and opportunities of participation in regional groupings. The essays offer well-researched analysis and useful information in a beautifully written and edited forum for scholars and practitioners alike.

Having dabbled in academia during my years working on my doctoral thesis on Jamaican foreign policy, I welcome the opportunity to offer a few thoughts today drawing on the inspiration and perspectives provided by this collection of essays. My own research on Jamaica sought to understand the unique challenges and opportunities facing small Caribbean states, and the impact that a state's conduct of foreign policy could have on its national development. I am pleased to see that this research remains relevant today, for as Dr. Kirton notes in his

introduction: "Although national, regional, and international programmes to promote the development of small states such as Guyana have proliferated, the factors that ensure success, and why they do so, remain in debate." What gives this collection of essays particular relevance, is that they not only offer valuable descriptive information, but, more importantly, prescriptive thoughts for how Guyana can achieve its national development goals, strengthen its democracy, and ensure its stability and security in a volatile world of natural and human challenges.

When I looked at Jamaica's post-independence foreign policies pursued by both JLP and PNP governments from 1962 to the mid-1980s, I was struck by the extent to which the right policies could have a positive impact and the wrong policies could have a negative impact on national development. Small states in the international system do have choices to make, and these choices matter. In the first decade after Jamaica's independence, its foreign policy was guided by a belief that the country's interests could best be advanced by pursuing markets, capital, and technical expertise with predominantly traditional partners. Over this time, Jamaica averaged 8 percent growth per year and enjoyed social and economic stability, but still faced persistent social challenges. In the ensuing eight years of PNP governance, Jamaica shifted gears, seeking major changes in the international

system, developing new international alliances, aggressively challenging social problems, downplaying the value of markets and capital, and sparking a major exodus of educated and highly trained citizens. As a result, Jamaica's GDP declined every year from 1974 to 1980, its human talent emigrated in high numbers, national debt exploded, and economic confidence was eroded.

The prescriptive lessons I gleaned from my research was that the best foreign policy for small states is a pragmatic policy – one that avoids ideologically rooted orientations, recognizes limits, and seeks to work within those limits to attain specific, realistic national goals through the international system. In fact, I was intrigued to hear Minister Rodrigues-Birkett make much the same point yesterday in her remarks to the ECLAC report presentation when she observed that the only 'ism" that matters in today's world for small states is "pragmatism."

The specific goals a country pursues may be political -- raising international status or assuming positions of regional leadership – or economic – developing new markets, seeking external financing or assistance for development goals, or promoting more favorable policies from international institutions. But, in the end, their attainment is likely to depend less on traditionally assumed factors of influence such as natural resource base, military power, or location, than by sound leadership, fiscal prudence, domestic stability and security, and a clear

understanding of how to attract and support investment and new businesses while identifying and seizing economic and social opportunities.

The other clear prescriptive outcome of my research was how inextricably linked domestic and foreign policies are to each other: each can either reinforce or undermine the other. Successful small states will seek to ensure they are working in synch – that foreign policy will advance domestic objectives, and that domestic policies will run parallel to and reinforce international objectives. This requires a clear understanding of a country's economic needs and how its international engagement can advance or hinder them. A responsible, carefully calibrated foreign policy consistent with internal needs can be an essential element of a country's drive to improve living standards, build social and economic infrastructure, and strengthen democratic participation and national security. By contrast, ideologically rooted policies out of synch with national needs can hinder development, undermine economic growth and social progress, and increase national dependence.

It is from this perspective of my own research that I found the collection of essays assembled by Dr. Anatol and Dr. Kirton to be so valuable. The first essay on Elections, Election Observation, and Monitoring by Ryan Kirton and Dr. Mark Kirton brings a strong focus on the vital role of effective democratic institutions

and practices to a country's development. Only when all people in a country are able to take part in governance can they enjoy the rights and freedoms that will allow them to contribute in a meaningful way to national development. And, in situations where democratic processes are fragile or mistrust persists, international election monitors, they argue, can help strengthen democracy by boosting the confidence of citizens in the outcomes.

Given that democracy "is ultimately about expanding human freedom and potential," it is only logical to assess, as Marlon Anatol does so effectively, how best to tap into Guyana's greatest economic resource – the energy, creativity, and human potential of its young people. He rightly observes that, in Guyana, as elsewhere in the region, there is a crisis among young people from economic and social marginalization, limited job prospects, and violence, and that all of these issues can undermine the strength of the region's democracies. To counter these worrying trends, Anatol posits that young people need to become more involved in the political process, that governments need to earn their confidence by being transparent and accountable, ensuring respect for the rule of law, and conveying a sense of fairness for all. Such youth empowerment must go hand in hand with greater economic opportunity through training and job skills development that is adapted to market needs.

The Government of Guyana has made considerable strides in this area through a number of innovative programs, and I am pleased that USAID has been able to contribute to the goal of youth training and employment through President Obama's Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI). The Skills and Knowledge for Youth Employment, or SKYE, program under CBSI is expanding education, skill-building, and employment for at-risk youth with the goal of reducing youth crime and violence by strengthening civic engagement and economic participation. As Anatol observes, the issues facing young people need to be addressed with urgency, within the framework of governance, inclusion, public trust, and democracy. I was especially pleased to note that our program in fact followed Anatol's suggestion that there be a "skills-needs analysis" to identify the most critical areas for training. The initial results of that Labor market assessment were shared with stakeholders last month. U.S. engagement on this issue, I believe, highlights the potential contribution of international donors and a country's foreign policy for addressing core domestic challenges.

The broader issue of the contribution of foreign aid to development is thoughtfully addressed by Clement Henry, who traces Guyana's economic history and how the role of foreign aid has shifted over time as Guyana's economic needs have evolved. While concluding that there is no clear correlation between foreign

aid and rates of economic growth, Henry does suggest that the environment created by a country's policies is a critical factor in shaping the effectiveness of foreign assistance. This is a vital point because foreign aid in most countries represents a modest addition to investment and national resources. Its role is perhaps best seen as seeking to encourage and shape the kinds of policies and investments that will attract greater private investment and stimulate greater economic activity. Henry convincingly concludes that for foreign aid to be effective, "it is imperative that government foster a political climate that engenders confidence among all local stakeholder groups [by] . . . adhering to democratic principles, making public administration more participatory and transparent, and providing opportunities for the poor to improve their lots." He also calls on the Government to continue implementing structural reforms, strengthen institutional capacity, take steps to retain skilled personnel, and encourage greater Diaspora engagement in the country's development. Finally, Henry concludes that "the main task of policy makers is to provide an investment climate conducive to public, domestic, and foreign private investment" through macroeconomic stability, efficient institutions, and adequate physical and social infrastructure.

As I consider our own assistance to Guyana in the context of this analysis, I note that our approach has evolved from major project aid such as the Soesdyke-

Linden Highway and PL 480 food support to our very successful economic growth activities through the Guyana Trade and Investment Support (GTIS) project, public health investments under PEPFAR to boost Guyana's capacity to meet the HIV/AIDS epidemic, support for democracy and governance, and, more recently, efforts to help create new opportunities for at-risk youth. Our programs have succeeded in strengthening critical institutions, including the Ministry of Trade, Bureau of Standards, the Guyana Forestry Commission, the Ministry of Health, the Guyana Elections Commission, the Electoral Assistance Bureau and many more. We have partnered to boost non-traditional exports in agriculture, tourism, forestry products, and fisheries through a value chain development approach. We have provided care and treatment to thousands of people affected with HIV/AIDS and developed new systems for managing the supply of medicines. And, we have strengthened democratic political processes, the growth of civil society, and enhanced the rule of law.

All of this suggests that purely economic metrics may miss the broader value of foreign assistance in supporting the development of policy, institutional, and human capacity frameworks needed to boost national development. How do you measure the investment that comes in because elections are peaceful? How do you measure the economic contributions of people whose lives have been saved from

HIV treatments or infections presented? The issues are complex, and do not lend themselves easily to mathematical analysis. Rather, it suggests to me that the most vital contribution that can be made by foreign aid is to boost human capacity, encourage policy reform, and strengthen institutions of governance.

In recent decades, the issue of climate change has moved from the margins to the center of international attention and is proving both a challenge and opportunity for domestic development. Commodore Gary Best and Bonita Marissa Lowden offer two complementary analyses of the importance of climate change issues for Guyana's development and its foreign policy. Commodore Best focuses on the rise of Global Environmental governance, its shortcomings, and its implications for Guyana, offering food for thought for the Government of Guyana as it seeks to navigate these evolving structures and systems to advance its innovative Low Carbon Development Strategy. His essay also serves to remind the international community of the critical importance of meeting climate commitments if we are to meet the climate change challenge. Lowden calls on Guyana to build on its already impressive global advocacy on REDD-plus and its LCDS to take an even greater lead role in global advocacy. Only through vigorous engagement, she suggests, can Guyana ensure that vulnerable countries' risks are addressed and their mitigation roles appropriately compensated. Lowden

effectively makes the important point that Guyana's international LCDS advocacy must be reinforced by a domestic development strategy that actively promotes sustainable development: "Foreign policy and domestic policies must be linked in order to establish effective climate change. . ." she rightly concludes.

We are pleased that here, too, the United States has been able to play a strategic role in assisting the Guyana Forestry Commission to develop its capacity for monitoring, reporting and verification and to develop a National Forest Inventory as part of its implementation of the REDD-plus initiative. The LCDS is clearly an area where Guyana is playing and will continue to play a leading role on the world stage as it seeks to build support for its own and other efforts to mitigate climate change.

The final three essays in this collection raise issues of Guyana's international alignments and the role of regional cooperation and integration in national development and foreign policy. These essays seek to assess the relative value of both traditional and new regional groupings, specifically CARICOM and UNASUR, and offer valuable perspectives on the future of Guyana's engagement in regional integration efforts. Noting Guyana's longstanding activism in regional integration, Hugh Todd seeks to assess opportunities available to Guyana both in traditional regional institutions of CARICOM and the Caribbean Single Market

and Economy (CSME) as well as in the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). While noting that CARIFTA had originally boosted intra-regional trade by 300 percent, he notes that the CSME has not achieved desired goals because of limitations on the region's competitiveness in many sectors and the small size of Caribbean markets overall. He therefore sees in UNASUR the potential for Guyana to link with much larger markets, to integrate with a dynamic continent, and to mitigate border tensions that have inhibited Guyana's development.

Clinton Urling, while noting Guyana's commitment to both CARICOM and UNASUR, questions whether engagement with either grouping is likely to achieve the desired economic gains. Developing an innovative model for assessing the effectiveness of regional cooperation that includes factors such as gains from trade, complementarity of trade flows, potential for foreign direct investment and oversight institutions to monitor and enforce commitments, Urling sees CARICOM's success rate as "strikingly low" with the bloc performing poorly on his array of indicators. While engagement with UNASUR is substantively different from the functional and institutional commitments embodied in CARICOM, it, too, poses challenges from a low demand for Guyana's exports in UNASUR countries, a lack of structure and enforcement mechanisms, and a lack

of focus for the organization's diverse goals. Despite these limitations, Urling boldly proposes that Guyana "abandon the CARICOM project" and focus its attention and resources on UNASUR. This recommendation is certain to generate a lively debate, especially in the face of ongoing efforts to revitalize CARICOM and strengthen Caribbean regional integration.

While the United States is not a member of either organization, we welcome the various regional groupings that have emerged and the signal they send for greater integration among countries in the region. We certainly believe that Caribbean countries can benefit from closer regional cooperation, both within the Caribbean sub-region and the Hemisphere as a whole. We have worked successfully with CARICOM to advance President Obama's Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, and CARICOM IMPACS -- despite its recent challenges -- has emerged as a vital partner to coordinate effective regional security strategies, training, and security cooperation. We are working with CARICOM's public health units CARPHA and PANCAP to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and other diseases in the region. We regularly sit down to discuss trade issues that affect the region as a whole, and have supported CARICOM's ability to negotiate regional trade initiatives. And, we have worked closely with

CARICOM to respond to Haiti's needs following the devastating earthquake in 2010.

To me, the core assessment that countries need to make in evaluating regional and even bilateral associations is one of values: does a given organization and its member states reflect the values that one's nation holds dear? In the case of Guyana, that would encompass values such as respect for democracy, the rule of law, religious and racial tolerance, free markets, equality, and respect for human rights. Certainly CARICOM reflects and embodies those values, and UNASUR also speaks to its desire to strengthen democracy, eliminate inequality, and achieve social inclusion.

When a nation's foreign policy diverts from those values, it is often quickly apparent to the citizens of the nation. Recently we witnessed a vigorous debate within Guyana following a decision to abstain from a critical UN general Assembly Resolution condemning Syria for its indiscriminate use of heavy weapons in civilian areas and other violations of human rights -- a resolution supported by over 130 countries including regional counterparts such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Grenada, as well as major UNASUR members such as Brazil, Chile, and Argentina, and those countries closest to the situation -- the entire Arab League. For most people in Guyana, such a position seemed to run

counter to what one letter writer described as "the sensibilities of freedom-loving Guyanese people." Again, the theme of the compatibility between domestic and foreign policies is clear.

President Ramotar, speaking yesterday at the launch of the ECLAC publication on Structural Change and Equality, observed: "We always argued that it is impossible for us to have sustained economic and social development unless we have a strong democracy." He added that his government continues to try to strengthen and deepen democracy and establish legislative and institutional frameworks to protect fundamental human rights. This argument truly does reflect the values of the Government and people of Guyana that I have experienced. As President Ramotar prepares to visit Cuba next week, Guyana would be well represented if he brought these same values to the fore in his discussions. Just as it is impossible for Guyana to enjoy sustained economic and social development without a strong democracy, the same applies to all other Caribbean people as well, including the Cuban people. I have always believed that the countries of the English-speaking Caribbean have such a vibrant expression of democratic elections, labor unions, freedom of expression and association, and respect for the rule of law to share with their Cuban friends, but they have been bashful in sharing their experiences and encouraging support for those same values with others.

So as you can see, this intriguing volume has certainly stimulated my thinking on how changes in the global and regional environment are affecting Guyana. I applaud all the authors for the quality of their research and the engaging and compelling presentation of their analyses. This truly is a readable and thought-provoking collection, which I commend to all who are interested in how Guyana's foreign policy is contributing and can continue to contribute to building a secure, prosperous, and democratic Guyana as part of a dynamic and evolving Caribbean region.

Thank you.