

The Political Dimension: Analysis

9.1 The vulnerability of small states to threats depends to a considerable extent on the security environment in which they are located. Since all are classified as developing countries they will face security problems which are similar to other developing countries but qualitatively different from more developed countries. As small states they are also particularly sensitive to geopolitical realities which in turn underlines the need to take into account the regional context. The 1985 *Vulnerability* report identified the Caribbean, the South Pacific, the Indian Ocean and Africa as distinct regions with their own security problems. These remain valid categories and the development of regionalism in the post-Cold War period suggests that greater emphasis than before needs to be placed on the region as well as recognising important sub-regional variations. What follows is an overview of the major security challenges which have arisen since the survey in the *Vulnerability* report, identifying the important political dimensions of economic and environmental threats as well as more specific military and political concerns.

The Caribbean

9.2 The Caribbean continues to be faced with demanding security problems. There was a major incident in Trinidad and Tobago in 1990 when members of a fundamentalist sect took the Prime Minister and seven of his ministers hostage. The situation was quickly brought to an end with no major loss of life. The circumstances of the coup, however, were a textbook demonstration of how comparatively few men with guns can seriously compromise the security of a small state. This was an isolated, country specific incident and there has not been any fallout effect in the rest of the region. It should be noted, however, that both in Trinidad and Tobago, as in the Maldives, the logistics for holding a trial of the coup leaders placed quite a strain on the administrative and security resources of a small state, and in the former case, the costs of holding the subsequent trials turned out to be considerable.

9.3 It is the activities of non-state actors which currently are the source of greatest concern in the region. Its position as a chain of small units linking North and South America makes the Caribbean a perfect communications link, and this has been exploited by criminal elements engaged in the trade of high value illegal goods and services, mainly

connected with drugs. The region, from Belize to Guyana, is a principal transit area for both American and European destinations with as much as 40% of the yearly import of cocaine in the US said to pass through the Caribbean. Illegal trafficking in drugs is controlled by national and international cartels, using state-of-the-art communications systems and possessing effective coercive capability for enforcement of their will within communities and, if necessary, willingness to use force against state security. All countries are at risk but in the last decade those that have been the most targeted include The Bahamas, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. The Eastern Caribbean has also been ensnared, particularly in trafficking drugs to EU countries.

9.4 Drug trafficking has also directly threatened the social fabric of the concerned small states, as it has stimulated both increased drug production and consumption in the region, apart from fostering corruption and feeding other criminal elements. Indeed, some regional analysts consider the activities of international criminal elements to be the most serious threat facing the region now, and over the next few decades. Since the US is the major destination for the drugs, that country's 'war on drugs' has inevitably meant that these small states are drawn into both co-operation and conflict scenarios with their superpower neighbour. Among the most controversial have been ship-rider arrangements which place Caribbean personnel aboard US coast guard ships, thereby providing a basis for the US to board vessels, arrest suspects and confiscate drugs in the territorial waters of Caribbean states. States permitting this include Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. Barbados and Jamaica have now also concluded agreements which meet their concerns about the preservation of their national sovereignty.

9.5 An allied problem is money laundering. The Caribbean is the site of the greatest concentration of offshore financial centres in the developing world. The growth of these in the 1980s and into the 1990s has been linked to the transnationalisation of finance and investment. They provide services for which there is a rising legitimate demand and which are functional to the development of international capital. At the same time the conditions of confidentiality and permissive legal frameworks that surround their activities offer facilities that are useful to the criminal and the drug trafficker. Much of the concern has centred on banks and businesses established in the British dependent territories and in the Netherlands Antilles, but as other independent countries have joined The Bahamas in offering such services the need to develop a vigorous policy to combat money laundering has gathered momentum. Of note here have been actions taken by the Caribbean Financial

Action Task Force and by the Commonwealth Secretariat. Any effective programme against money laundering should take into account that the problems for small states occur both at the time of the enactment of legislation and regulatory regimes and later at the enforcement stage.

9.6 Regional security effectiveness was enhanced when Belize and Guyana were able to overcome the barrier to their membership of the Organisation of American States (OAS) which had existed because of their territorial disputes with OAS member states, Guatemala and Venezuela respectively. This success owed much to co-ordinated and sustained regional pressure by the CARICOM member states of the OAS which made the issue one of their priority concerns in that organisation. Progress was also made on several territorial issues. The maritime dispute between Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago was eventually settled by a treaty in 1990. Although the Venezuela–Guyana issue has been the subject of some political accommodation over the last decade it has not receded as a major political issue. Suriname also has a territorial claim against Guyana. While Guatemala has not formally abandoned its claim, in 1991 it made substantial concessions and deflated the issue considerably by, for the first time, recognising the sovereignty of Belize and establishing diplomatic relations. Against this background there have been ongoing consultations between Belize and Guatemala on the implementation of confidence-building measures. There has been no need for several years to convene the Commonwealth Ministerial Committee on Belize but the discussion of the issue at each Commonwealth summit is a useful way to indicate that Commonwealth monitoring continues.

9.7 Although the regional small states have good relations with Cuba, they have to deal with the reality that, for the US, Cuba remains an unsettled Cold War issue, and that this could have unwelcome repercussions for them. An example is the 'The Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act', popularly known as the Helms-Burton Act. This allows US citizens to seek compensation in the US courts against third parties 'trafficking' in properties 'confiscated' from them by the Cuban government and allows the US government to suspend US visas granted to foreign nationals who have 'benefited' from or 'trafficked' in such properties. The extraterritorial reach of the legislation has been condemned by CARICOM and by the OAS, among others, and while there has been some immediate mitigation of its application, its long-term effect can only be discouraging to CARICOM's attempts to 'normalise' relations with Cuba.

9.8 Refugees and illegal migrants continue to be a major problem in the cases of Haitians and Cubans into The Bahamas and Guatemalans

into Belize, not only at the political level, but as a considerable strain in administrative and financial terms. Over the years The Bahamas has developed a sophisticated policy of accommodation that is a credit to a small state. Belize also has adjusted well, but its problem is more complex, given the territorial claim of Guatemala. Because of the small population of the receiving states the number of permanent settlers who have entered over the last few decades are a significant addition.

9.9 Another source of unwelcome migrants, and one which has very destabilising effects in a small state, comes from the developing custom in certain metropolitan states of systematic deportation to the region of significant numbers of drug-related and other violent criminals who are Caribbean nationals. The effect has been to deepen the sophistication of criminal activity in concerned countries and territories, with the local police often being at a disadvantage in terms of the weapons used. A regional source has commented, 'they leave our islands as high school criminals and return to us as postgraduates'. The US is also a significant source of firearms which are illegally diverted to other countries.

9.10 Thus both with drugs and refugees, two cases where the destination which generates the market is the regional great power, that power seeks to use offshore small states as a buffer in managing the problem, adding unnecessary and expensive burdens to these societies. Jamaican officials, for example, have estimated that security measures by the garment industry to combat drug smuggling add 8% to operating costs. They have also been the major recipient of deported criminals.

9.11 The Caribbean has also been involved in a considerable effort to deal with the problem of the transit of hazardous and radioactive waste. The region has one of the highest densities of cruise liners and of cargo vessels (including many tankers) in the world with a commensurably higher risk of pollution. It has also been concerned with the shipment of spent nuclear fuel (plutonium) from Japanese nuclear reactors through the region, with at least six such shipments between 1992 and 1996. In 1995, CARICOM Heads of Government issued an important Statement which addressed their concern about the matter.

9.12 Where small states abut a very large, powerful, energetic neighbour, the spill over effects of its policies in areas such as drugs, general crime, pollution and the spread of corruption can have devastating effects on fragile societies unless that power is sensitive and benign. It also has to be aware of the wider impact of policies. One particularly telling example is in relation to the banana industry. The Caribbean

depends on guaranteed access to the EU market to maintain its exports. This is done under the banana regime of the EU which has been the product of difficult and protracted negotiations in the EU and with the US and Latin American producers. The decision by the US and several Latin American countries to challenge its legality in the WTO, and the recent finding by the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body which calls for changes to the regime, is a body-blow to several countries in the Eastern Caribbean. There is no ready alternative to the employment and foreign exchange the industry generates. If it is allowed to collapse the effects, in the words of one report, will be 'disastrous' with 'severe economic consequences' contributing to 'socially unmanageable fallout' and an 'explosive political situation'.

9.13 Finally, and although low key, the possibility of secession is always present. The announcement by the Premier of Nevis that steps would be taken to separate from St Kitts occasioned early action by the Chairman of CARICOM and an offer by the Commonwealth to seek to resolve differences.

The South Pacific

9.14 Over the last decade the security challenges in the South Pacific have been a mixture of conventional issues and environmental ones. Fiji and Papua New Guinea are the only two states with significant military establishments and it is these two states which have had major security problems. The former was the only case of a successful takeover of a government by military coup in the region in contemporary times and it is a mark of its political unacceptability that, many years later, Fiji remains estranged from the Commonwealth. Much depends on the outcome of the constitutional review process which began in 1993.

9.15 Papua New Guinea has a long permeable border with Indonesia, but its neighbour is so large and has such a sophisticated military capacity that Papua New Guinea prefers to approach its border problems at the diplomatic level. However, over the long term, this border is likely to remain a potential security problem.

9.16 Papua New Guinea has also had to deal with a unique challenge to its territorial integrity – the attempted breakaway of Bougainville. The first attempt at secession in 1975/76 was non-violent and ended in a constitutional solution. The second, begun in 1989, has been marked by violence with direct casualties from the conflict numbering in the hundreds and direct and indirect costs running into billions of dollars. The success of the rebels of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army in establishing control over the copper mine (which closed) was facilitated by the inexperience of a small state army and the clearly indicated regional disapproval of an all-out war.

9.17 In late 1994 a ceasefire was brokered and negotiations began, but broke down in early 1996 with the resumption of violence. The recruitment of mercenaries led to difficulties between the government and the Papua New Guinea Defence Force. While the involvement of mercenaries has been condemned internationally it is also striking that even though the rebellion has lasted eight years, no regional state has recognised the rebels. By and large, the spill over into the Solomon Islands excepted, the matter has been seen as one internal to Papua New Guinea, with the most significant regional involvement to date being the establishment of a South Pacific Regional Peacekeeping Force which was sent to Bougainville in October 1994 as part of the process of negotiation. The Bougainville issue is clearly problematic, but to many observers it is also manageable and does not represent any developing regional trend.

9.18 The continuing colonial issue of the political evolution of the French territory of New Caledonia has long been a matter of concern in the region. In the 1980s the Melanesian states of Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands created the Melanesian Spearhead Group to support the independence campaign in international fora. The 1980s were also marked by several outbreaks of major violence as it became clear that France was not about to grant independence readily in the face of the opposition of the territory's powerful European population. The small states of the region have always looked upon the issue as having the potential for creating international tensions and disrupting regional security; thus through their regional organisation, the South Pacific Forum, they have pursued a resolution of the matter directly with the French and, in particular, at the UN, including mobilising support in the Asian region.

9.19 New Caledonia is now becoming a pressing matter as the ten year moratorium on the issue of political independence agreed in the Matignon Accords of 1988 is coming to an end. The intervening period has been marked by an absence of political violence, but the underlying causes of earlier disruption remain and may have become exacerbated by the further concentration of economic wealth in the hands of the Europeans at the relative expense of the rest of the population. The referendum on the status of New Caledonia is due in 1998. In the past, elections have been associated with violence and this cannot be ruled out in the future, particularly as the result is likely to be contentious. It may also have ripple effects elsewhere with elements in French Polynesia building on gathering support for independence in their territory.

9.20 A principal area of concern is environmental issues, in particular the use of the Pacific Ocean and some islands for the dumping of

nuclear waste and for nuclear testing. A remark by the President of the Marshall Islands that his government was considering the possibility of establishing an international facility for destroying and disposing of nuclear waste on islands already contaminated by nuclear testing became a matter of concern at a SPF meeting in 1994. Several years earlier island governments had expressed concern over US plans to destroy chemical weapons on Johnston Atoll. In 1995 the SPF adopted the Waigani Convention which banned the importation of all hazardous and radioactive waste into Forum island countries and sought to ensure that any transboundary movement of hazardous waste within the area was controlled in an environmentally sound manner. It also reiterated its opposition to dumping of radioactive waste at sea and expressed its belief that the chemical weapons destruction facility at Johnston Atoll should be closed when the current programme was completed.

9.21 In the early 1990s there was increased concerted regional opposition to French nuclear testing, and a mobilisation of international opinion led by the SPF. The success of these efforts owed much to France's international isolation on this matter and to the timing, but it also was a demonstration both of effective protest tactics and of a sustained diplomatic initiative by a grouping of small states. As part of that campaign the regional states in 1985 agreed on the Treaty of Rarotonga declaring the area the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone. It prohibits the manufacture, stationing or testing of any nuclear explosive device in the treaty area and includes Protocols seeking to limit the nuclear powers from testing in the region. All five nuclear states have now undertaken to respect its provisions and so far four, the former Soviet Union in 1986 and France, the UK and the USA in 1996, have signed the Protocols to the treaty. The SPF has always held a strong position on nuclear issue and those issues tend to loom large at their annual meetings. The Forum suspended France's status as a 'Dialogue Partner' (and thus her right to participate in the post-Forum consultative meetings) during the dispute over the resumption of testing in September 1995 but agreed to its return at the 1996 Forum. The resolute opposition by the SPF (as a crucial element of world-wide opposition to the testing) is held by many to have prompted France to call off the tests early.

The Indian Ocean

9.22 Because of the vast gaps between them in the immense reaches of the Indian Ocean, the small states of that region, Mauritius, the Seychelles and the Maldives do not interact in a functional sub-regional political or security agency. Mauritius and Seychelles have

not had any significant security challenges over the past decade. By contrast in 1988 externally located dissidents, nationals of the Maldives, attempted to take over the government in an invasion by sea and involving the use of foreign mercenaries. India rapidly and successfully, came to the aid of the Maldives and the attackers were captured. The Maldives and the international community welcomed and praised the Indian contribution as a timely and merited neighbourly exercise.

9.23 After the coup the Maldives sought to mobilise international opinion on the issue of the protection of small states by successfully piloting through the UN in 1989, a resolution calling on that body to examine the matter (GARes.44/51). However, in the Security Council discussion, there was no agreement as to whether small states deserved a special security status and the issue foundered especially as the number of returns from member states to the Secretary General's invitation to submit suggestions on the issue were very low. The adoption of the International Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries by the UN General Assembly is of great relevance to countries like the Seychelles, Maldives and Papua New Guinea.

9.24 A low level but persistent problem is raised by the US military facilities on Diego Garcia. Originally the islands were administered from Mauritius but were detached from it immediately prior to independence to form the British Indian Ocean Territory. They were then leased to the US by the UK. Currently both Mauritius and the UK claim sovereignty. Mauritius is unlikely to seek a resolution of the issue in the immediate future although the potential for it to become one remains and may be precipitated by use of the base to project military power (as recently in Operation Desert Storm) or by any decision of the US to withdraw before its lease expires in 2025.

9.25 Other security concerns with a pronounced political dimension have included the subtle influence of France in the South-West Indian Ocean and the potential spill-over of rivalries among countries of the littoral leading to an increased military presence in the region. There may be problems of boundary delimitation if offshore petroleum is discovered or over fisheries rights. The Indian Ocean remains an important strategic region because of the Gulf oil shipping lanes. The most important threats, however, remain internally generated.

The Mediterranean

9.26 Cyprus, though not typical of small state security issues, continues to be a seemingly intractable security problem. Since the invasion and occupation by Turkey of the northern part of the island in 1974, there

have been a number of attempts by the UN, including one currently underway, to find a solution but all have so far failed to make substantial progress. Among the objectives for a solution, as set out in UN resolutions and endorsed by the Commonwealth, are the speedy withdrawal of Turkish forces and settlers, the return of refugees to their homes in safety, the restoration and respect of human rights of all Cypriots, and accounting for missing persons. There has also been considerable concern over the increasing number of Turkish settlers and the level of forces. Turkey keeps a large military force of some 35,000 on the island. Recent proposals by the Cypriot government for the complete demilitarisation of the Republic of Cyprus have been welcomed by the international community and supported by the Commonwealth.

9.27 UN policy as expressed in numerous resolutions, in addition to the objectives cited above, favours a settlement based on a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with a constitution approved by both the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities, with effective participation of both communities in a federal government. The Commonwealth, recognising that the issue has been a dispute primarily within the jurisdiction of the Security Council, continues to support the UN's role in reaching a settlement. The Commonwealth Action Group on Cyprus, created by the 1975 CHOGM, continues to monitor developments and facilitate the UN Secretary-General's efforts and to support the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of the Republic of Cyprus. These goals have been reaffirmed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in their meetings over the years since 1974, including the most recent meeting in Auckland.

9.28 Malta has not had a significant security threat in recent years. Its status of neutrality as well as the end of the Cold War have made it less vulnerable to military threats. It is now developing into an important centre for regional co-operation. However, Malta's openness has created new threats in the form of money laundering and of drug trafficking, smuggling contraband goods and illegal migration through Malta into Europe.

Africa

9.29 Before the removal of the apartheid regime, South Africa pursued a policy of intimidating and destabilising its neighbours, including the small states of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, on whom the impact was greater because of the political, economic and strategic stranglehold in which Pretoria held these states. When it chose, it would intervene through direct military incursion, quite apart from a range of subversive

techniques. That era is over, but while post-apartheid South Africa is a friendly regional partner, it remains the leading regional power whose internal stability and external policies necessarily impact on the neighbouring small states including those in the Indian Ocean.

9.30 The Gambia has, by contrast, been free of any serious threat from its neighbours. In 1982 it entered into a confederal arrangement with Senegal which was dissolved in 1989. The impetus behind confederation were security concerns in The Gambia and Senegal's fear of instability in The Gambia which, from time to time, has led it to commit military forces in support of the Gambian government. The most recent manifestation of instability was in July 1994 when the army overthrew the government in a bloodless military coup. Since then The Gambia has come under considerable external pressure to restore democracy. Elections returning the government to civilian rule were finally held, though under controversial conditions, in 1997. The Commonwealth played a major role in monitoring the return to civilian democratic rule in The Gambia through the mechanism of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration and through providing technical assistance.

9.31 Lesotho has also been troubled by regime instability and military coup. Civilian government was restored after seven years of military rule in 1993. However, tensions between it, the armed forces and the King remained high and led to the dismissal of the government by the King in August 1994. This triggered intervention by Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe to restore the government and subsequently the King abdicated in favour of his father. The Commonwealth has also played advisory and active good offices roles in these developments.

9.32 Swaziland has also experienced some political unrest in recent years. This has been the consequence of power struggles in the ruling monarchy and of attempts at political reform. In 1993, elections were held, but a ban on political parties was in force at the time which has led some observers to question their fairness. There were also violent trade union-led protests in 1995.

9.33 All the African countries have had problems with refugees and/or with borders. The end of the wars in Mozambique and Angola, along with the end of apartheid, have considerably diminished the problem in South Africa. With the exception of a minor border dispute between Namibia and Botswana, which has been referred to the International Court of Justice for adjudication, there are no contentious issues at present.

Assessment

9.34 What is striking about the overview is the diversity of threats which have faced the various regions. While some identified in the *Vulnerability* report have dropped out (ideological rivalry in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean, plus the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa) others have proved remarkably durable (environmental and decolonisation concerns in the South Pacific) while others (notably the occupation and division of Cyprus) are seemingly as intractable as ever and the cause of Commonwealth and international concern. Additionally, while there have been coups or attempted coups as well as significant regime instability in four of the regions (Caribbean, South Pacific, Indian Ocean and Africa) the outstanding characteristic has been the specificity of each case, underlining both the fact of general vulnerability and individual circumstance. An individual security audit therefore remains necessary to comprehend the particular configuration of political threats facing any small state as at the same time it is evident that many small states share similar if not identical security profiles.

9.35 It therefore still remains possible to identify a small state security problem in a political and military sense. This derives in large part from weakness in relation to other powers and instability in its social and political institutions. The former appears to be of less relevance than it was a decade ago. Small states then had to be mindful of the interests of superpowers and while they still need to be aware of great power manipulation it has been largely absent from the threats identified above. Small states have also not become the deliberate targets of revisionist states or of regional hegemons. This is not to argue that they will not have to confront such threats in the less structured international system which has emerged from the Cold War, but for the moment they are potential rather than actual threats. The most pressing threats small states face in the international system have been from the growth of transnational activity which has multiplied the number of non-state actors, some of whom are criminal in activity and intent.

9.36 International criminal elements have taken advantage of communications advances to network their activities on a world-wide scale and made serious incursions into small states which, initially, were practically without, and continue for the most part to lack, relevant defence against this type of criminal activity. The need for enhanced international assistance in this area cannot be overemphasised, and is well merited as clearly these small states are very much pawns in an international game.

9.37 With great power budgetary constraints and a reduction in their naval global presence, there is the danger that criminal elements may feel freer to engage in a range of illegal activities, including piracy, on the high seas. Such piracy is likely to grow considerably over the next few decades – and in sophisticated forms. Multi-island states may be very vulnerable to their activities and to their need for havens.

9.38 The awareness of the dangers of international crime has been improving as the international community may be gradually coming to appreciate that, in the case of narcotics, this is a global issue which needs to be fought with global resources and co-ordination. For small states a particular problem is at the domestic level, where a great increase in the use of drugs is often a fallout from the country being used by the international drugs mafia as a conduit for the international drug trade. The impact in a small society of a mushrooming drug problem is comprehensively devastating.

9.39 Over the last decade a significant increase in domestic crime is emerging in some states as a dangerous social and physical threat since their small scale and open, relaxed societies makes them vulnerable to being easily terrorised. This is especially so because of the state-of-the-art weaponry and communications systems which the criminals often possess and which usually are superior to those of the local police. The international community needs to accept that the continual development of sophisticated weaponry and communications creates ready victims in some parts of the globe, and to consider what is the global responsibility for law and order at this level.

9.40 The other threat is political and social instability. The majority of security threats which arose in the last two decades have been domestic in source; that is, they were regime threats rather than state threats since the state itself has hardly been threatened save in the few secession cases. The major sources of discontent in 'developing states' are economic hardships, questions of political legitimacy, authoritarian rule, ethnic violence and military dissension. Small states have experienced all of these, but the indications are that, outside of cases of ethnic violence, the moderating of economic hardships is the key variable. In geopolitical terms there are, in Commonwealth small states, very few cases where ethnic violence can possibly lead directly to interstate conflict. Cyprus is the obvious exception. Elsewhere, there are, at present, no significant ethnic issues, in terms of potential for violent conflict, simmering below the surface, but there are situations which, in the absence of sensitive, participatory and fair dealings, can get out of hand given the geographically small areas of some of these states and/or the residential juxtaposition of some nationalities.

9.41 But, in general, it is fair to conclude that in comparison to larger states, small states exhibit an enviable record of political stability. The incidence of civil disorder is low; social pressures to conform are high; and political preference for maintenance of the status quo is higher still. Nevertheless, political order does, on occasion, break down and when it occurs the effect is always magnified, precisely because the political and social system is small. Personal, familial, group and community relations are strained weakening social ties and politicising them. International events and issues can become domestic flash-points and domestic tensions and rivalries become internationalised with little or no warning. Small states can be traumatised when conflicts intensify. There is therefore no room for complacency since the stakes can very quickly escalate beyond the survival of a particular regime to the survival of the core values of the society itself.