

# Reflections on Armed Violence and Development in the Caribbean

## Norman Girvan<sup>1</sup>

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The extraordinary events surrounding the proposed extradition of Jamaica's Christopher 'Dudus' Coke have served to highlight the pernicious consequences of transnational organised crime in the Caribbean region. These consequences are not only for the realization of MDG's and development generally. They extend to the spheres of politics, governance, sovereignty, social organization and the economy. They call into question the entire model of development followed by the region in recent times as well as the model of governance which was at the heart of the post-colonial dispensation in the English-speaking Caribbean.

To recall the essential facts: the crisis emerged as a result of the demand by the US Government for the extradition of a Jamaican citizen to face narcotics and arms charges, under the terms of the treaty existing between the two countries. However this was not just 'any' individual. Mr Coke—and this is in fact, his real name--has been described as one of the most dangerous international drugs traffickers, heading a gang reportedly responsible for scores, if not hundreds, of murders in the US. And he has close ties with the Jamaica Labour Party—the ruling Party in Jamaica's government. In fact, he is- or was--the principal "Don"--i.e. strongman- in the Parliamentary constituency represented by the Prime Minister himself, Mr Bruce Golding.

The extradition request, which was made by the US authorities in August 2009, was stalled by the Government of Jamaica for approximately nine months. The reason given by the government was that the evidence, on which the extradition request is based, was illegally obtained. This explanation lacked credibility, in that under the terms of the US-Jamaica extradition treaty, the government was only called upon to sign the order permitting the extradition hearing to be held by the

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Jamaican courts, where the issue of the legality of the request could be argued and determined.

A subtext of this affair was the hiring of a Washington law firm to lobby the US government on behalf of the government of Jamaica and Mr Coke. The Prime Minister's denial of government involvement in the hiring of this firm was ultimately shown to be disingenuous. He eventually admitted that he had indeed sanctioned this initiative, but claimed that this was not done in his capacity as Prime Minister but rather in his capacity as the leader of the Jamaican Labour Party. This about-face led to strident calls for his resignation from the Parliamentary Opposition and a broad cross-section of civil society and the media, so far ignored.

By the time the government reversed its decision and announced that the extradition order would be signed, Mr Coke's supporters in his stronghold of Tivoli Gardens-- surrealistically named after an amusement park in Scandinavia-- had barricaded themselves. In the ensuing days hundreds of them mounted street demonstrations in his support; declaring to the media, government and the public at large that they would die in his defence. Brazen attacks were mounted on several police stations, some burnt to the ground and at least 2 police officers were killed, in what amounted to a crypto- insurrection in various parts of the capital city and some other parts of the country. When the army and the police eventually moved in on Tivoli in order to apprehend Coke this led to the deaths of over 70 civilians, many under questionable circumstances, and the escape of Mr Coke.

In reviewing this operation, Professor Richard Drayton<sup>2</sup> (From [Kabul to Kingston](#), The Guardian, June 13 2010) observed that the Western media, in its coverage, generally ignored:

The linkages between the Jamaican crisis, the security establishments in the US, Britain and Canada, and the mutations of the “war on terror”...

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<sup>2</sup> Rhodes Professor of Imperial History at Kings College, University of London,

(The) strategy and tactics deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan are being applied in Jamaica. Drones fly over Kingston, and were used in the 24 May assault to select targets. On 7 June, Tivoli residents discovered that to enter or leave the area they had to produce "passes" issued by the police (revised, after protests, to restrictions on movement after dark). There is blanket surveillance of electronic communications in breach of Jamaican privacy protections – indeed, it was the illegal provenance of some of the evidence against Christopher "Dudus" Coke that initially [held up extradition proceedings](#).

Propaganda "information operations" are at full tilt: while the army guides the Jamaican press on tours in which soldiers pat the heads of children, and in which criminal "torture chambers" are revealed, abroad we are told this is just about breaking drug gangs.

Over a month passed before Coke was captured, without a fight, earlier this week. He was reportedly on his way to the US embassy to give himself up; not wishing to risk the fate of his own father who died some 20 years ago in a Jamaican prison while awaiting extradition to the United States.

The fact that Mr Coke, and others like him, derive wide support from the people in the communities where they operate is a direct consequence of the failure of the social and economic order of Jamaica to provide basic social and economic rights to a large section of the population; increasingly crowded into large sections of the capital city and other urban areas. The right to decent housing, decent work, sanitation, accessible and affordable health care and quality education; and above all the right to social justice and to respect have been systematically denied to a large section of the population in a society which still carries the legacy of slavery and the plantation system. Jamaica's independence dispensation from Great Britain conferred on the populace the right to vote in a five-yearly ritual of choice between competing fractions of the country's elite entrenched in its two main political parties, but left intact the basic features of the colonial social and economic order.

The cultural historian [Mervyn Claxton](#) ("A Flawed Analysis: The Inadequacies of Western Liberal Democracy") quotes Rigoberta Menchu, the 1992 Guatemalan Nobel Peace Laureate, in rhetorically asking

"What kind of democracy is it that gives you the freedom to starve, to be homeless, and to lack medical care?" Drawing attention, in her Nobel Prize acceptance address, to the fact that 84% of Guatemala's population is poor and 60% "very poor", Menchu declared: **"No less characteristic of a democracy is social justice. This demands a solution to the frightening statistics on infant mortality, of malnutrition, lack of education, analphabetism, wages insufficient to sustain life."**

Claims of inadequate resources to provide these basic public goods to the broad mass of the Jamaican population ring hollow in a country where the upper classes boast lifestyles which would be the envy of many people in the rich world; and where a parasitic financial class has appropriated a large slice of the national income over the last two decades, while the government has become one of the most indebted in the world. As a blogger on the Jamaican crisis wrote eloquently

"As a "person of privilege" I have worked in some of the poorest areas in JA, been bitten by BOTH political parties (death threats, etc) and in most cases WAS safer in ghetto's and garrisons than I was from men in jacket and ties (go figure!). People, I was open to learning how and why systems worked in order to get projects completed and it was an eye opener. I can assure u all, until u spend some good time IN the system, u have NO clue. I guess it was really brought home on new years eve (4 years ago). I left a landfill where children were picking thru garbage for food. I went home got "dolloed up" in my 800usd BCBG dress and went to a hotel for the "party of the year" where I was served caviar and Dom.P. There were many ministers and leaders of the opp. All getting along - nothing like we see in parliament.

I tell u, I felt sick when I thought of the kids I left behind and after barfing, I went to midnight mass instead- seeking some sense of "understanding".."

Into this void have moved criminal organizations which provide employment, welfare benefits, security and rough justice to the members of these communities. When they emerged in the 1960s they were allied with—and in some instances were the creation of—unscrupulous politicians who rewarded them with government contracts in return for the reliable delivery of votes at election time. In the past thirty years these individuals and organizations have shifted their connections and much of their allegiance to international criminal networks engaged in the marketing of marijuana, the transshipment of cocaine, the smuggling of small arms and heavy weapons and money laundering. The [indictment against Mr Coke](#) and the affidavits of his former associates, now turned state witnesses, read like something straight out of a movie or a TV show—in fact it is the stuff on which movies and TV shows are based. The relationship with the politicians continues, with the bargain being—“you give me protection from the police, and contracts which allow me to operate as a legitimate business, and in return I deliver you votes at election time”. According to one columnist in a leading Jamaican daily, the arrangement between ‘Dudus’ and ‘Bruce’ (the Prime Minister) amounted to a [‘constituency power-share’](#).

Moralising about corruption in Jamaica by the rich world and global media, however, rings hollow in that the vast financial resources and weapons for all of this come from the United States and other global centres of consumption of illicit drugs and production of arms. Indeed the UN’s world drug report published yesterday, contains the disturbing information that while cocaine consumption in the US has declined, that of Europe has doubled in the past 10 years; with the result that West Africa is increasingly becoming a transit point for the shipment of that commodity from South America.

What we are faced with, therefore, is a situation where armed violence does not impact so much on the MDG’s, but the reverse; or rather that the failure of a social and economic order to cater to the fundamental rights as well as needs of

its citizens creates the conditions under which armed violence may flourish; especially where other ingredients make it possible to practice such activity profitably and with impunity. As Professor Ivelaw Griffith of the City University of New York author of several books on Caribbean security, has wisely noted ([Jamaica's Sovereignty Saga](#)) :

Not that all residents in garrison communities are criminals. Nevertheless, in the context of survival realities, they recognize the locus of the political and economic power and their loyalties shift from the power holders of the official state to those within “their state.” This is especially when their power brokers are able to secure contracts from the formal state to help meet their economic and social needs.

I emphasise here fundamental rights and needs because merely providing certain quantified deliverables, which is the focus of the MDG's will not satisfactorily address the situation in the absence of an accompanying framework of social justice, economic opportunity and full equality before the law for all citizens. In turn, such armed violence cannot but have a negative impact on what we generally call 'development', by lowering investment, accelerating emigration of the most skilled and financially well endowed members of the society, lowering productivity, hugely increasing expenditures on security, both private and public; discouraging tourism etc., all of which have been amply documented and quantified for the Caribbean in a report by the [World Bank and the UN Office for Drugs and Crime](#).

The Table shown below gives the rate of homicide per 100,000 within selected Caribbean countries on the most recent data available. Two countries--Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago-- now have rates in excess of 50, making them among the highest rates in the world—and ten others have rates of between 30 and 10, which is high by international standards. Most rich countries, and many developing countries, have rates of 2 per 100,000 or less; the US rate is about 6. Although time does not permit a more detailed comparison, it is almost certain that most Caribbean countries have significantly homicide higher rates than other countries at similar levels of per capita income and human development.

A few weeks ago my attention was drawn to a report prepared by the Institute for Economics and Peace, a think tank in Australia, which had prepared something they call the Global Peace Index. This index was compiled with the aim of providing “A quantitative measure of peacefulness comparable over time”. It is made up of 23 indicators and countries are scored on these indicators on a range from 1 to 5, where 1 equals the most peaceful. Let me say at once, that I do not support the claim of the authors that the index provides “a greater understanding of the mechanisms that nurture and sustain peace”. In fact it provides indicators of effects rather than of causes; such as the level of organised conflict, violent demonstrations, deaths from internal conflicts, deaths from external conflicts, etc.

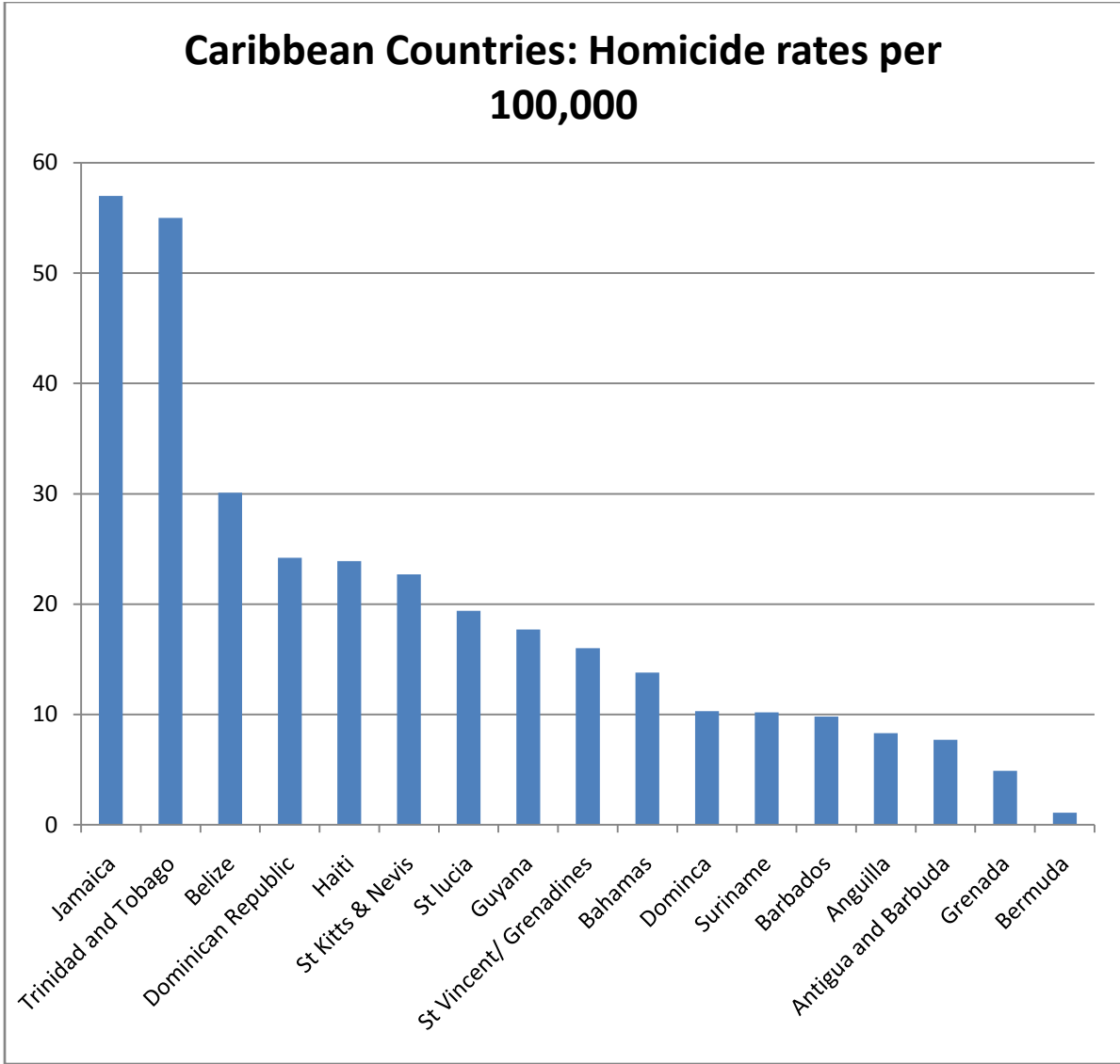
What I found interesting of the indicators however was the way in which they could be used to bring out the differences in the nature of the problematic of armed violence between the Caribbean and other areas of the world where civil conflict is prevalent. To do so I divided the 23 indicators into those related more specifically to the incidence of criminal violence on the one hand; and those related mainly to violence associated with civil conflict on the other. The majority of the indicators fall into the category of violence associated with civil conflict; only six of 23 indicators are obviously related to criminal violence. The scores for six Caribbean countries for both sets of indicators are shown in the table.

With the exception of Cuba, the Caribbean countries on the whole have high scores for the indicators related to criminal violence; such as level of violent crime, number of homicides and access to weapons. On the whole the scores for the civil conflict related indicators are lower; in fact they are the lowest possible for several indicators for several countries.

These indicators, of course, carry a significant degree of subjective judgement exercised by those who compile them, and are also dependent on the quality of data provided from national sources. Nonetheless they seem to provide support for the belief that the problem of armed violence in the Caribbean is less one that is associated with civil conflict as in parts of Europe and Africa and more one of criminal violence. We have argued that this the twin result of the failure of the

social and economic order and the compromising of governance systems together with the pernicious effect of incorporation into international criminal networks catering to consumption of illegal substances in the rich countries. Its implications for development are no less for that. Therefore, both the internal and the external aspects of the problem situation have to be tackled, if a lasting solution is to be found. That is a big challenge, but its enormity should not become a reason for inaction.

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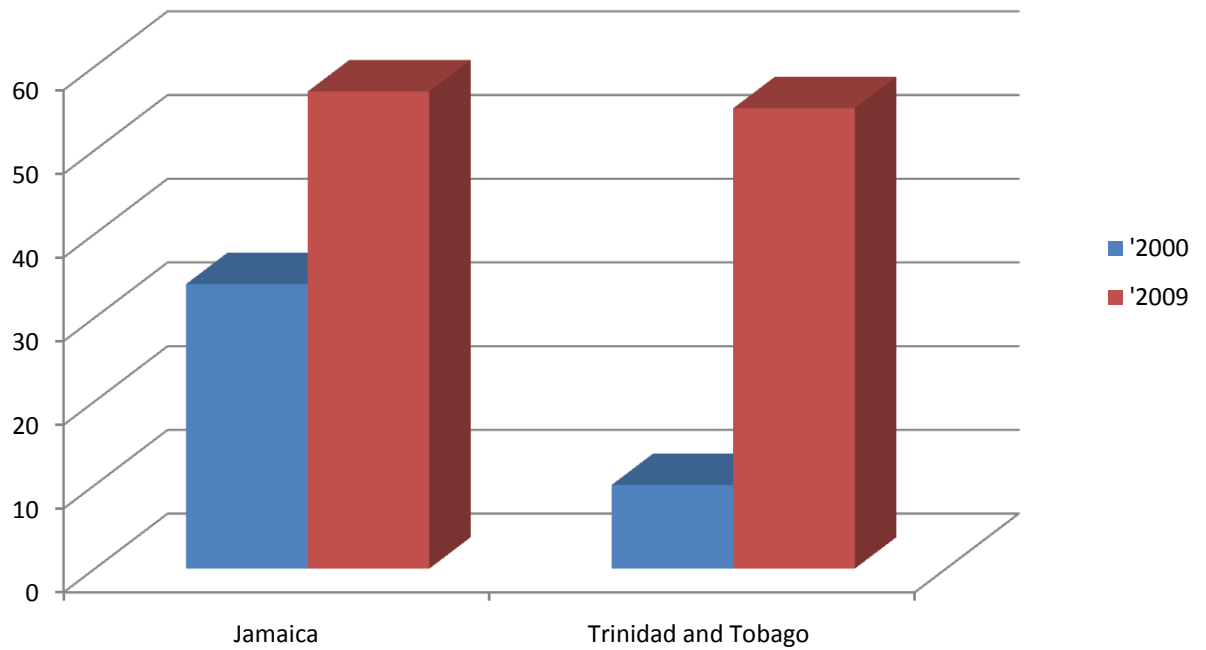


Data taken from the Guardian data base at

[http://spreadsheets.google.com/cc?key=tAJzrYuGxXOGbU\\_HO2s\\_PrQ#gid=0](http://spreadsheets.google.com/cc?key=tAJzrYuGxXOGbU_HO2s_PrQ#gid=0)

The national data source, where available, is used in preference to the WHO estimate. Most sources are for the years 2005-2005; but the Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago figure have been updated to 2009 based on newspaper reports.

## Increase in Homicide Rate per 100,000



Source: based on data in the Guardian data base and newspaper reports.

Source: data extracted and reclassified from the Global Peace Index compiled by the 1 The Global Peace

	CUBA	GUYANA	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO	JAMAICA	HAITI
<b>Global Rank</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Overall Score</b>	<b>1.964</b>	<b>2.095</b>	<b>2.103</b>	<b>2.107</b>	<b>2.138</b>	<b>2.27</b>
<i>A: Crime Related Indicators</i>						
1 Level of violent crime	1	4	3	5	5	4
2 Number of Homicides	2	5	5	5	5	5
3 Access to weapons	2	3	3	4	4	3
4 Perceived criminality in society	2	3	4	3	3	4
5 Security officers and Police	4	3	2	3	2	2
6 Jailed Population	3.5	2	1.5	2.5	1.5	1
<i>B: Civil Conflict Related Indicators</i>						
7 Level of organized conflict	3	2	1	2	3	3
8 Violent demonstrations	2	3	2.5	2	3	4.5
9 Political Instability	2.75	2.5	2.75	2	1.75	3.75
10 Respect for Human Rights	3	3.5	4	2.5	3.5	2.5
11 Weapons imports	1	1	1	1	1	1
12 Potential for terrorist acts	1	2	1	2	2	2
13 Deaths from internal conflicts	1	1	1	1	1	1
14 Military exposure	2	2.5	1	1	1	1
15 Armed services personnel	1	1	1	1	1	1
16 UN Peacekeeping funding	1	1	4.5	1.5	1	1.5
17 Number of Heavy weapons	2.5	1	1	1	1	1
18 Weapons exports	1	1	1	1	1	1
19 Military capability/sophistication	2	2	2	3	2	1
20 Number of displaced people	1	1	1	1	1	1
21 Neighbouring country relations	3	2	2	1	1	2
22 Number of conflicts fought	1	1	1	1	1	1.5
23 Deaths from external conflicts	1	1	1	1	1	1

Source: Data extracted and reclassified from the Global Peace index by Vision of Humanity:

<http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/#/2010/scor>. Retrieved 16th June 2010. The 'Global Peace Index' is compiled by the Institute for Economics and Peace in conjunction with the Economists Intelligence Unit. It is made up of 23 indicators, with countries scored on each indicator on a range from 1 to 5, where 1 equals most peaceful.

