Caribbean Diplomacy:
Research on Diplomacy of Small States

Abstract:

With little recourse to traditional economic and political power in their international relations, diplomacy for Caribbean states is a key mechanism to achieve the realisation of the region's overall development agenda. The Caribbean is no stranger to diplomatic challenges. As Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the very nature of these vulnerable countries combined with other endogenous and exogenous factors, have historically posed challenges in terms of their capability and capacity to engage effectively and efficiently in the international arena. However, globalisation and the development of the Information Society, in part through the pervasive nature of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), has impacted the nature and scope of diplomacy, bringing to the fore new issues and actors and creating a global arena which not only potentially compounds such challenges, but also facilitates the proliferation of new ones. This paper will examine small states diplomacy in reference to the diplomacy of the Caribbean within the context of the increasingly interconnected and globalised international system.

Introduction

Although there is the growing recognition that a wider[1] definition of the Caribbean may be more comprehensive in the increasingly globalised international system, reflecting the acknowledgement of not just the increased importance of non-traditional hemispheric diplomatic partners, for the purposes of this paper, which focuses on the characteristics of small state diplomacy, the Caribbean states referred to will be the narrower construct of those constituting the CARICOM region. Although the grouping has begun its own efforts at widening its composition beyond the traditional Anglophone Caribbean, a broader definition of the greater Caribbean includes states which, whilst they are developing countries, are not all small countries. Caribbean states face the same challenges of other developing countries; however these are often exacerbated by the characteristics of small island states.

Although engaged in a global system in which theoretically is based on the equality of states; in practice, power distribution and other factors impact on the effective participation of small states in this arena. It is argued[2] that these states have little recourse to change their position within the wider world system and consequently are predetermined by the very nature of the system itself to operate on a peripheral basis. These small developing states, born out of a historical condition of colonialism; its processes and institutions, tend to have little recourse to the traditional realist options of significant military and economic power. However, there is the potential through

diplomacy and soft power to surmount challenges, limitations and the pessimistic predetermined lot assigned.

The small island problematique of Caribbean states of vulnerability and capacity with respect to their sustainable development, their international relations and diplomacy is a key concern of these states. Internal vulnerabilities, linked to their small size include environmental, open economies and limited diversification, inadequate and weak institutional capacity and capabilities; whilst exogenous challenges are related to the globalisation of the international system. What constitutes a small state has been an ongoing debate in the literature. From factors ranging from small land mass, insignificant military and economic power and population size, a conceptual small state definition has evolved based mainly on population size, although other factors are taken into account (Sanders, 2005).The definition used for this presentation shall be that of the Commonwealth[3]. Small states according to this report are those of population size 1.5 million inhabitants or under. While this definition generally describes the states of the region, Jamaica with a population in excess of 1.5 million is excluded and as such level of development should also be taken into account

The Caribbean in the Contemporary International System

Caribbean states are operating in an international system in the current manifestation of globalisation, which itself poses both challenges and potential opportunities for their diplomacy. Historically globalisation has been focused on as an economic phenomenon; however, increasingly it is being examined with respect to the overall interconnection of the socio-economic, the technological, the organisational, the ideological, and the geopolitical. (Jan Aart Scholte, 1997; Camilleri and Falk, 1992) and it has been argued that the current international system has entered into a new techno-economic paradigm[4].

The international system is increasingly characterised by accelerated changes, in part due to the Information Revolution, corresponding advances in Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), increased globalisation and the permeating influence of the benefits of the ideology of trade and financial liberalisation. These have increasingly propelled the international system towards the development of an information society and pose increased and new challenges to Caribbean states. The pervasive nature and rapid diffusion has fuelled interdependence in international relations, as states becomes more and more vulnerable to the impact of decisions taken elsewhere. Transcending national borders, a wide range of low politics issues (human rights, the environment, global health concerns and the regulation of international capital flows) increasingly join high politics issues on the diplomatic agenda.

Furthermore, states are increasingly engaging with non-state actors in this contemporary system. Strange and Stopford (1991), suggest that this globalisation has altered the nature of traditional diplomacy, "These sets of forces are transforming the old game of diplomacy. No longer can national boundaries define the rules. … The traditional players are still in business, but they have been joined by other actors within their states and globally. All are involved in bilateral and multilateral negotiation."[5]

Not withstanding the debate of the degree to which this is a change of or within the international system, it can compound existing and introduce new challenges for CARICOM states in their international relations. As such, to secure and safeguard their security and meet their overall developmental goals and objectives, they must ensure that they are effective participants in a dynamic and increasingly technologically determined international system through utilising approaches in their diplomatic activity.

Caribbean Smallness

Caribbean states cannot be isolated or disassociated from their smallness; small size and other related characteristics contribute to their diplomatic challenges and effectiveness and can reinforce the conceptual framework of these states as peripheral in the international system. As small states, Caribbean nations have inherent vulnerabilities linked to their small size, openness and the fragility of their economies.

Sutton and Payne[6] identify those characteristics of small states, which directly relate to the way in which these states pursue their foreign policy objectives in the international system. These characteristics are openness, insularity or enclave-ness, resilience, weakness and dependence. The openness of these states is linked to their focus on external trade and the international market as a result of their narrow resource bases and small domestic markets. This is matched in the political system by vulnerability to external pressures, manipulation, penetration, and reliance on external information among other issues. Insularity is common to Caribbean states as most of these states are island states, which translates into higher economic and administrative costs and indefensibility. The third characteristic identified is resilience in which traditional political systems are retained and the exercise of a system of parliamentary democracy and, to a large extent, political stability is experienced. As a result, these states should therefore be able to more effectively engage in collaborative relations internally and externally with other like states.

Weakness in terms of external relations is also seen to be characteristic of small states. Economically and militarily these states possess low capabilities and consequently this leads to the final identified characteristic in that they are dependant in many ways on larger states to meet many of their needs especially as they are outward looking economies. According to a report by the Commonwealth Consultative Group, "Small states have no military or economic power to wield; they are forced to rely on diplomatic means in order to convey to other countries the nature of their national interests in the different areas of international relations that are vital ... to their survival."[7] Hey (2003) contends that the relatively weak power capacity of small states propels these small states to be more reactive and passive in their diplomacy and international relations.

Caribbean Diplomacy

Diplomacy is seen as a means by which states try to secure their foreign policy goals and objectives in the wider international system in order to advance and fulfil their national developmental agendas, mainly through negotiation. For Caribbean small states, usually among the weakest states in the international system, diplomacy plays a

central role in their international relations. These states usually have little recourse to great military or economic power and as such, diplomacy remains the only effective means by which such states can attempt to impact and interact in the international system for their benefit.

The current state of Caribbean diplomacy is compounded by a relatively small negotiation capacity and challenges faced as a consequence of their smallness and an increasingly changing international system. The formation of trade arrangements, illustrates the essential requirement of negotiation and diplomacy, as it is integral for the pursuit and formation of any arrangement that involves the establishment of complex forms of collaboration. Sir Shridath Ramphal assessed the realities of this situation for the Caribbean, stating that these negotiations have as their basic rationale, the improvement of the national situation, and as such while the Caribbean faces many options concerning these arrangements, the only option that they do not have is to do nothing. According to Ramphal, "If you stand still while the world changes around you – you will cease to be where you are." [8] Consequently a decision to opt out of these arrangements will not lead to the maintenance of the status quo.

The Caribbean faces a peculiar situation, unique to the region, as it is currently engaged in several international trade negotiations concurrently. It is actively engaged in World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations, in European Union – African, Caribbean and Pacific group EU-ACP EPA negotiations for alternative trade arrangements when the Cotonou Agreement ends in 2008. These, coupled with stalled Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations and regional and bilateral negotiations place tremendous pressure on available resources and capacity of these states.

Caribbean diplomacy, is informed by the premise, as stated by Henrickson (1998) and Ramphal (1984) that the special circumstances and vulnerabilities of small states must be taken into account in their interactions in the international system, rather than applying the same general set of assumptions. Not only do small states engage in strategic forms of diplomatic organisation as a result of their nature as small states, they also treat with their 'smallness' as an issue on the global diplomatic agenda. Tackling international reluctance to treat with these states on this basis to seek to secure some latitude and flexibility for the region in their international relations on this premise is a high on the diplomatic agenda of these small states.

In addressing this concern, CARICOM Secretary General Edwin Carrington, noted, "the Region faces a major challenge posed by the reluctance on the part of the international community to recognise that small countries face special problems and even where such problems are recognised, there remain strong opposition to establishing a special category of small states. The work of the Commonwealth Secretariat has facilitated this process but there is still an uphill task in convincing the international community that the case for special treatment is a just one. The opposition was clearly stated in the Doha decision to establish a work programme for smaller economies in the WTO but not to establish a new category."[9]

To contend with the challenges they face in the wider international system, various diplomatic strategies are pursued by small states. (Henrickson 1998; Rana, 2007). Those which Caribbean states tend to utilise include associative diplomacy, building of

small-large country alliance, multilateral institutional diplomacy, Diaspora diplomacy and cyber diplomacy.

Associative or Group Diplomacy

The Caribbean actively engages in what Sanders (2005) identifies as Barston's defined associative diplomacy. The small states of the region, aware of their endogenous and exogenous imposed limitations have entered into various associative groupings and alliances, in part believing in the old term strength in numbers.

Historically from the first attempts at the West Indian Federation, Caribbean states recognised the advantages of engaging in collaborative activity coming out of a tradition in which there was a shared colonial administrative and production system. Although the region has been through various interpretations of some form of regional collaboration, the premise of the advantages to be gained from cooperation remain true. Regional cooperation with regard to foreign policy coordination and external economic negotiations was established with the formation of CARICOM in 1974. One of the fundamental principles of the establishing Treaty of Chaguaramas is for the coordination of members states foreign policies. The development of COFCOR[10] is the institutional articulation of this principle which was advance with the establishment of the CRNM in part as a concerted effort to overcome the diplomatic shortcomings of Caribbean states in their diplomacy through a pooling of resources, designed to address technical and human capacities as well as financial resource constraints. In its report of 1992, the West Indian Commission recognised the benefits of increased visibility and negotiating power as members of a larger grouping.

The model of collaborative negotiation as a regional mechanism through the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM) was established to provide the region with an advantage in its negotiations. Benefits include offsetting the financial burden of the negotiation and the traditional low bargaining power of small states. Schiff and Andriamananjara (1992),[11] use the example of CARICOM to illustrate that regional cooperation has significant advantages vis-à-vis a situation of small states operating in a situation of isolation from each other with small states.

In 2005 and 2006, the realization of the Caribbean Court of Justice and the Single Market and Economy (CSME) initiatives are significant for such regional diplomacy efforts. Most recently, the efforts to secure hosting of the games to the collective functionalism in the single domestic space and visa initiatives for 2007 Cricket World Cup provides another illustration.

However, this associative diplomacy is often forestalled by the examples where individual interests of member states generate discord, where Caribbean regionalism is sidelined to national interest by the unwillingness of member states to allow the greater regional benefit to prevail. Saunders argues that this is often seen in cases where issues of high politics are determined to be of greater individual import to the individual country. Amongst such incidences are dissents among CARICOM leaders over the legitimacy and recognition of Haiti's interim government, the recent acceptance of some member states of the Petro-Caribe initiative of Venezuelan President Chavez[12], the failure to present a unified stance on the bilateral USA

immunity agreements, divergent stances with respect to whaling policies and the recognition of the People's Republic of China or Taiwan.

Forming political associations, such as The Association of Caribbean States (ACS), also provides Caribbean member states with an institutionalised expression to present greater political influence in a wider Caribbean context. Likewise the Commonwealth also, with a sizeable number of small state members provides an effective arena for such states, through conference diplomacy, to advance their objectives and unite to overcome individual smallness and relative power deficiency in the international system.

However, Girvan (2002:217) argues that the development of further collaborative diplomacy through South-South and functional cooperation through the institution of the ACS has not been effectively used in the regions diplomatic agenda. He highlights several areas for effective utilisation of the ACS Trade Committee as a forum for dialogue on the banana issue, concerning the situation of smaller economies, on negotiating positions vis a vis the FTAA (stalled) and the WTO and sub regional and bilateral trade agreements.

Diplomatic representational strategies employed by Caribbean Small states

Henrickson (1998), Mohammed (2001) and Rana (2007) address the importance of diplomatic representational strategies employed by small states. Three identified strategies employed by Caribbean states, to various degrees are; maximising on the unilateral representation of other states within their countries to serve their own diplomacy, multiple accreditation of diplomatic representatives serving simultaneous representation and Joint representation. The first two are used to a lesser degree, mainly only by Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados; however, joint representation is heavily favoured by the OECS countries. This strategy also is utilised with CARICOM (although not a supranational organisation) and mechanisms such as the CRNM, providing similar representation although not in the true definition.

Small state-large State alliances

Having lost some of its traditional geo-strategic significance with the end of the Cold War, Caribbean states have wrestled with positioning themselves through diplomacy to benefit from alliances with more influential states on specific issues. Often this may provide a direct challenge to the principles of the cohesiveness and the strength of the unified common Caribbean diplomacy, with member states engaged in conflicting policies and positions, as earlier identified with the recognition stances of Caribbean states of the Peoples Republic of China vs. Taiwan[13].

Caribbean engagement in Multilateral Institutions

The multilateral institutional framework is deemed by many to be exceedingly important for small states. Within such institutions there is the ability to engage in alliance building between like minded states to enhance diplomatic influence, especially in economic diplomacy. Rana (2007) indicates that small states, perhaps in recognition of their limited recourse to other avenues in their international relations, tend to be "upholders" of the rule of law and the institutionalised multilateral

cooperation system defined, on principle, if not in reality, of the UN system. He identifies the prominent position of Trinidad and Tobago in the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Caribbean also utilised the multilateral arena as active participants through diplomatic means in the establishment of the Law of the Sea, with the development of the 1972 Santo Domingo Declaration on the Patrimonial Sea, seen as the centrepiece of the UNCLOS Francis (2002). Despite a perception of the failure to maximise the potential of the ACS, again with the Law of the sea, the grouping was effective in achieving the recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area, illustrating how effective greater Caribbean diplomacy can be.[14]

With the pursuit of recognition of the implications of vulnerability and smallness, Caribbean states juxtapose a call for special and differential treatment within a system of sovereign equality. According to CARICOM Secretary General Carrington, the region must utilise their diplomacy to "continue our struggle to have our special needs accommodated in all the negotiating fora. In this regard every effort should be made to provide the regional negotiating machinery the information and support it requires to present our case in the respective negotiating for a; and It is imperative that we seek and build alliances with like- minded countries in each fora and with influential countries in the process."[15]

Under-representation in international negotiations has often translated to inadequate reflection of the interests of small states. This is compounded by the institutional capacity gaps in many developing countries with respect to understanding the changing trading environment, formulating appropriate policy and effectively negotiating to secure their trading interests at negotiating fora. To alleviate this situation, funding has been provided in some cases for joint regional representation offices in Geneva, for providing advisory as well as human resource assistance for missions, and technical assistance to address the institutional gaps which exists in their respective trade administrations Briguglio (2005). Similarly, this recognition of the vital nature of diplomacy to small states, especially within a multilateral context is evidenced by the decision by the Commonwealth to provide financial assistance to facilitate representation in the permanent missions to the United Nations. Sanders (2005).

Implications of a changing international system and multi-stakeholder diplomacy

Caribbean diplomacy in the 21st century environment concerns both the regional environment and the larger international context in which it operates. One result of a changing international system is a change in the nature of diplomacy as it is these events, circumstances and interactions which are the concern and scope of diplomacy. Wiseman (2002) concludes that the happenings in the international system will require states and their diplomatic representatives to adopt new concepts, skills, instruments and outlooks for operating in a polylateralistic diplomatic arena. To adapt to this reality and given their limited human capacity Caribbean states must take into account non-state actors and relationships by and the increased participation of such actors in representation within national delegations, preparatory committees and negotiations at international fora.

Already in the region, the CSME and activities of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating

Machinery (CRNM), has necessitated the involvement of different stakeholders nationally and regionally. Consequently, states increasingly must engage in a more inclusive multi-stakeholder approach to their international relations and diplomacy.

Engaging in Diaspora Diplomacy

Moreover, increasingly states are addressing the sizable Caribbean Diaspora. These are identified as having a strategic role in the further economic development of these states; "Diaspora diplomacy is emerging as new plank of international relations and international security in the post 9/11 era" (Nurse, 2004). Consequently, there is increasingly recognition of the potential of these communities and an effort to engage with them through diplomatic representation to further such efforts, especially in the area of public diplomacy or instances of informal diplomacy. Small state can tap diaspora resources for the promotion of the Diaspora country. Nurse (2004) identifies the examples of Haiti[16] and Jamaica as two CARICOM states with active government policies concerning this community and the importance of engaging with them. Jamaica has a new governmental focus on the diapora, with the Jamaicans Overseas Department (JOD) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; mandated in part "to operate as an information centre and contact point for Jamaican organizations and communities abroad; to promote the development of a policy towards supporting the interests of the Jamaican communities abroad in their respective host countries through political action and to encourage and mobilize Jamaicans abroad to assist in the development of the country in an ongoing relationship of national support.[17]

Cyber Diplomacy

Increasingly the developments of the Information Society and associated ICTs are seen not only as a diplomatic agenda concern but also as a possible enabler for the amplification of the Caribbean voice in international diplomacy. However, these same limiting factors attributed to these small states can impede their ability to take advantage of such technologies. In addition, states, through their Ministries of Foreign Affairs are increasingly forced to analyse information, formulate, disseminate and implement policies whilst at all times being cognisant of the interplay of relationships among other actors on these events. Consequently, states are hampered in their abilities to adjust to the tyranny of real-time (Grant 2004).

A challenge for CARICOM states, is to ensure their active and meaningful participation and forestall information exclusion which could further exacerbate a global peripheral position, which could in turn create the cyclical dilemma of being left out in the international system (Cross and Mohammed, 2004). For effective operation and participation in the world information society, the Caribbean must have a clear and unambiguous view of he concept of such a society. However, given the limited active participation thus far and the resources constraints of these states, developing such a policy could be a tremendous undertaking. Applewhaite (2005), indicates "Ultimately the Information Society will be what we in CARICOM and the rest of the world decide to make it." However, CARICOM countries can only ensure that the Information Society is developed within a framework which is acceptable to the grouping and that takes into consideration the goals and needs of its states, only through its active participation.

Coupled with the Global Information society is the issue of the digital divide for these small states. Like many of the issues confronting the world, the Digital Divide assumes a transnational character, which requires a holistic and systemic solution, requiring the concerted efforts of the global community through multilateral diplomacy as it extends beyond the capability and capacity of a single nation. Disproportionate gaps exist in access and effective utilisation of ICTs in the international system. These disparities are unlikely to be removed in the near future without rigorous action at the national, regional and international levels for a truly inclusive global information society.

The digital divide poses a challenge for Caribbean diplomacy on two core-related fronts. First, as a global diplomatic concern compelling action by all relevant stakeholders in the international system to address the phenomenon and second, with respect to the integration of ICTs as enabling tools for the conduct of internal and external diplomatic activity. Accessibility, flexibility, and connectivity are important watchwords of diplomacy in the Information Age that recognizes that old structures and habits are no longer sufficient to engage and lead in an increasingly digital and networked international system (Spalter and Moran 1999). Human capacity development and institutional framework remain central issues to ensure that the 'mismatch'[18] of technology in the Caribbean is forestalled.

Conclusion

In their international relations, Sanders (2005:135) proposed the firm view that, "diplomacy is not the instrument of last resort for small Caribbean states, but the primary instrument. Neither its relevance nor its function in international politics can be overstated." As such nor is diplomacy a luxury[19] but rather a necessity if these states are to further their active and effective participation in the global system. To this end, we observe that the states of the region engage in various strategies related to their smallness in order to be active and effective participants on the global diplomatic stage, with associative or group diplomacy offering perhaps the most effective means of amplifying their influence. In tandem with this smallness the changing international system continues to present challenges which Caribbean diplomacy must address as issues and as situations requiring such strategic diplomatic initiatives.

Endnotes

[1] Professor Norman Girvan, former Association of Caribbean States (ACS) Secretary General defines the greater Caribbean region as "those states comprising the entire Caribbean Basin, including The Bahamas, and the entire littoral (Mexico, Central America, Panama, Columbia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana." El Gran Caribe

[2] As postulated in World Systems Theory. For further information see Immanuel Wallerstein …

[3] The Commonwealth in its work on small states, whilst using a population threshold of 1.5 million people is flexible on this definition, including countires with larger populations which share other characteristics of small states. Commonwealth Advisory Group (1997). A Future for Small States: Overcoming Vulnerability.

[4] Perez, Carolta (2002). Technological Revolutions and Financial Capital: The dynamics of Bubbles and Golden Ages. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar

[5] Susan Strange and John Stoford, Rival States, Rival Firms (1991)

[6] Paul Sutton and Anthony Payne, "Lilliput under threat: the security problems of small island and enclave developing states". Political Studies, Vol. XLI No.4 December 1993 p579.

[7] Report of the Commonwealth Consultative Group. Vulnerability: small states in the global society." London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1985. p.68

[8] Sir Shridath Ramphal, "The Negotiations: Process and preparation" a speech given at Free Trade Seminar for The Bahamas Public and Private sectors, 6th March 1998. http://caribrnm.net/westhem/speeches/nassau.htm

[9] Remarks by Secretary General Carrington's feature address at the Re-launch of the Council of External Trade of St. Lucia. http://www.caricom.org

[10] Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas

[11] Schiff, Maurice and Soamiely Andriamananjara present a model of collaborative organisation based on reduced international negotiating costs and increased bargaining power. "Regional Groupings Among Microstates". World Bank Working Papers International Economic Trade, Capital Flows-1992.

[12] The Petro-Caribe Initiative won wide support with 13 CARICOM member states signing on.

[13] Within the Caribbean region, there has recently been the switching of recognition between the Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. As of 2005, only three CARICOM countries continue to recognize Taiwan: Haiti, St. Kitts & Nevis, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines.

[14] On December 20, 2006, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled: "Towards the Sustainable Development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations" (A/C.2/61/L.30)[14]. This resolution differs from previous resolutions (54/225, 55/203, 57/261 and 59/230) adopted by the UN in that its declared objectives are unequivocal. Upon careful examination, the resolution is an achievement in light of efforts made almost a decade ago by organisations in the region including CARICOM and the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) to secure the recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development by the international community. http://www.un.org

[15] Carrington (2002). Op Cit.

[16] The Preval government established the Ministry for Haitians Living Abroad or "Tenth Department" to manage relations. Perito, Robert and Greg Maly (2006). Can the Diaspora Solve Haiti's Enduring Social Conflict? United States Institute of Peace (USIP) http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2006/0821_haiti_diaspora.html

[17] Further information can be obtained from the Jamaica Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, http://www.mfaft.gov.jm

[18] Perez, Carlota (2002) Technological Revolutions and Financial Capital: The Dynamics of Bubbles and Golden Ages. Cheltenham, UK, Edward Elgar.

[19] Rana (2007)