



Handbook on Caribbean Community Foreign Relations and Statecraft

A Regularly Updated Collection of Primers

By

Nand C. Bardouille

A living/dynamic [online document](#), updated via regular additions of successive primers which shed new light on an ever-changing international relations context and its far-reaching consequences for the Caribbean

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To my wife, Julie

Handbook on Caribbean Community Foreign Relations and Statecraft

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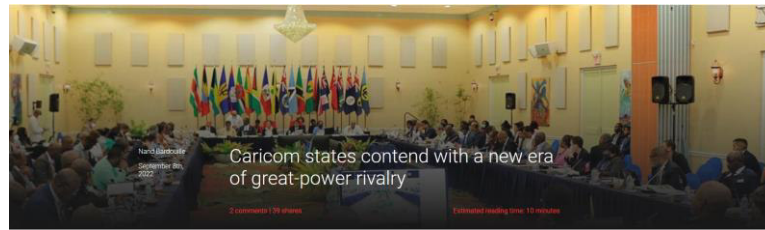
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Primer Nº 1

The Caribbean Community and Contemporary International Affairs

Keywords:

CARICOM	Contemporary International Affairs	Russia- Ukraine War	Foreign Policymaking	Geopolitical Moment	International Organizations	Small States	Diplomatic Successes
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Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Ralph Gonsalves attends a ceremony with Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen during a visit to Taipei, Taiwan, Aug. 8, 2022.
Credit: [Office of the President, ROC \(Taiwan\)](#)



Photo: Heads of State and Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) condemning the invasion of Ukraine on March 3, 2022. Source: CARICOM Secretariat.



CARICOM's Evolving Foreign Policy Thinking on the Ukraine War

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While the bloc initially viewed this conflict through a security lens, economic necessity has since compelled a foreign policy refocus.



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OPINION - May 3, 2023

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International Organizations' Outsized Place in CARICOM's Diplomatic Playbook

SITUATION REPORTS - August 22, 2023

Against a prevailing IR theoretical mainstream that suggests otherwise, CARICOM's diplomatic success often hinges on its active participation in international organizations.

The Caribbean Community *and* Contemporary International Affairs

A Collection of Three
Volumes of Essays

Published over the period:
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August 30, 2023

By
Nand C. Bardouille

Volume I

What the Russia-Ukraine War Means for the CARICOM Bloc:

A Compilation of some Analyses and Related Assessments

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

November 17, 2022

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A Compendium of Four Articles on What the Russia-Ukraine War Means for the CARICOM Bloc

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November 8, 2022

Published by the KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies

The Russia-Ukraine War marks a watershed for contemporary international politics, ushering in a multipolar international system. [Great powers](#) continue to exert influence over this transition. All the while, a bevy of other actors on the international stage are diplomatically positioning themselves to have their say in this era-defining geopolitical moment, whose effects are now (and for the foreseeable future will be) ubiquitous in international relations. In this regard, placing an emphasis on what it means for their countries and the regional integration grouping, the leadership and policymaking communities of the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#) bloc of [small states](#) have concerns about this moment.

With the geopolitics of our age in flux, for Caribbean foreign affairs policymakers, among the many questions arising are: Where do CARICOM member states stand? Moreover, how could this period of flux possibly impact on these states? In this context, given the varying foreign policy objectives at play, what are some of the dynamics in the relational mix?

In three recently-published articles, with an eye to the dynamic official foreign policy positioning of those small states relative to great powers, I proffer a preliminary assessment of these research questions. In a fourth and final article, which caps off this series of foreign policy and diplomacy-centric analyses, I take stock of and enhance views conveyed in the three articles in question. Those interconnected articles – in order of publication (inclusive of their respective subheadings) – are titled:

1. [‘CARICOM States Contend with a New Era of Great-power Rivalry’](#) – published on September 8, 2022 by the LSE Latin America and Caribbean Centre.

As the [Caribbean Community \(Caricom\)](#) foreign policy apparatus is concluding preparations for the upcoming 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which is the UN’s main policy-making organ, the bloc will harness the event to reaffirm its broader interests in foundational tenets of the UN Charter.

2. [‘Saint Vincent and the Grenadines’ Diplomatic Efforts During the Latest Taiwan Strait Flare-up’](#) – published on September 10, 2022 by *The Diplomat* magazine.

The prime minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines visited Taiwan even while China’s military drills surrounding the island were ongoing. Here’s why.

3. [‘The Russia-Ukraine War and Two Interrelated Ways to Think about CARICOM States’ Associated Diplomacy’](#) – published on October 26, 2022 by TheGlobalAmericans.org.

As CARICOM member states diplomatically contend with the fallout of the Russia-Ukraine war, which is an era-inducing catalyst for systemic change, the duality of purpose of their national interests has shone through on the international stage.

4. ‘Whither CARICOM States’ Interests in a New Age of Great-power Geopolitics?’ – published on November 3, 2022 by the United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS).

For great powers and small states alike, geopolitical eras provide a cue to foreign policy orientations. This geopolitical reality must be understood within the context of “great-power leadership” and the national interest, as is well-known by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) bloc of small states.

The foregoing articles are informed by a particular and consequential geopolitical moment in the early twenty-first century, which great-power rivalry is ratcheting up. In these circumstances, with a view to framing the stakes involved in terms of the major powers, international relations professionals conventionally approach their analyses in one of two ways:

1. They place on the analytical front burner international structure *qua* alliances, as well as attendant tradeoffs *vis-à-vis* institutions, which – in their estimation – are beholden to power in the international system; or,
2. They call attention to what they view as the overriding importance of international institutions in/to the interstate system, contending that – over time – such institutions have a bearing on state behaviour. (In their thinking, international institutions lessen: (a) the degree to which the spectre of international conflict overhangs the so-called ‘anarchical’ international system; and (b) the role of war relative to “significant changes at the systemic level.”)

While the two perspectives are connected by some paradigmatic common sinew (e.g. “neo-utilitarian precepts and premises”), each has its own axiological commitments, with which one can approach the study of foreign policy behaviour. Constructivists also offer a useful analytical schema, which is a significant departure from the disciplinary mainstream, with its focus on the ideational and identity-related dimensions of interests.

In the four articles under reference herein the neorealist and the neoliberal institutionalist oriented stakes in play in this moment, as they pertain to the CARICOM bloc of small states, are on full display. The third of the four articles, as listed above, also draws – in part – on constructivist thinking.

In this reading, which is ever mindful of their divisions about theorizing real-world international relations, discrete disciplinary paradigms can be used to good effect. Indeed, the aforementioned articles and their findings contribute to our understanding of the significance of this geopolitical moment to those states, while providing insight into the latter’s associated foreign policy preferences, beliefs (intentions) and decision-making.

Moreover, the intent of the analyses and related assessments is to provide policymakers with requisite insight to help inform decision-making at this crucial juncture. This body of work should also be of interest to some international/regional affairs-related academic and policy communities, among others, as they buildout their respective scholarly and policy agendas *per* the ongoing global reconfigurations *vis-à-vis* the determinants of state behaviour.

CARICOM States Contend with a New Era of Great-power Rivalry

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As the [Caribbean Community \(Caricom\)](#) foreign policy apparatus is concluding preparations for the upcoming 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which is the UN's main policy-making organ, the bloc will harness the event to reaffirm its broader interests in foundational tenets of the UN Charter.

In line with their status as [small states](#) in the international system, when it comes to politics among nations, Caricom member states have a long history of routinely taking the stance of the inviolability of national sovereignty and territorial integrity and the political independence of any State. (Even the [tenets](#) of their respective foreign policies contribute to such a stance.) At this juncture, they will double down on this mindset in the UN, committing significant resources and political capital to champion such cornerstone principles.

Small states are at a bigger risk of international law breaches

Caricom member states are organizing themselves diplomatically in this way against a backdrop of Russia's now more than six-month-long high-stakes, full-scale invasion of Ukraine. From the perspective of such small states, this state of affairs risks upsetting the applecart in respect of the post-war, UN-underwritten 'rules of the road' for the international system.

In their estimation, if those rules and norms go awry, more than most, the system could potentially leave them in the lurch, and as some [international relations theorists](#) have determined, such a scenario would lead to troubling, [power politics](#)-related excesses.

Among the first casualties is international law, which small states prefer to focus attention on per power asymmetries. In this regard, Caricom member states have shared and intersecting interests.

[Hegemons](#) can also warp international institutions, as [some](#) have accused Russia of doing in the case of the UN Security Council (UNSC) *vis-à-vis* its attack on Ukraine.

As one of the half-dozen principal UN organs, pursuant to the UN Charter, the primary charge of the UNSC is the maintenance of international peace and security. This is why the UNSC holds a vitally important [brief](#) on Russia's grinding war of attrition in Ukraine, which has become a proxy war that pits the Euro-Atlantic security order against Russia, but whose security implications are wide-reaching.

Also at risk is the [Pax Americana](#)-hinged [liberal world order](#), whose [guarantor](#) is the United States. On the other side of the geopolitical ledger, just as crucially, are contender and revisionist states. While the rise of such states has attracted considerable [scholarly attention](#),

less attention has been paid to Caricom member states in that regard. This article expands the focus of the ongoing ‘great-power rivalry’ debate accordingly—as some work has already done—drawing from one of its most recent talking points: Revanchist Russia.

Guardrail matters

Regarding Caricom member states’ post-independence foreign policies, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the national interest. Notwithstanding, in one key respect, they reflect the following consensus: These states have historically seen the most gains when leader countries do not stray wildly from the bedrock principles of the UN Charter. This applies to global and/or regional players’ statecraft, as it hinges on various “conceptions of power” held up in foreign policy decisions relative to small(er) states.

This is primarily why Caricom member states joined with most of the international community in adopting a landmark UNGA resolution “demanding that Russia immediately end its military operations in Ukraine” when the country invaded Ukraine in February this year.

This is also why they expressed disquiet about Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014—which in hindsight was a prelude to the Kremlin’s current aspirations to partition Ukraine—as well as the Kremlin’s hand in the insurgency in Eastern Ukraine thereafter.

The bloc’s leadership and foreign policy-making communities are mounting effective—albeit disparate—diplomatic responses as regards their concerns about Russia’s ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, not least because it could potentially open the door for some hegemonies to act with reckless abandon to have their way in their purported spheres of influence.

There is little question that Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Ralph Gonsalves’ recent state visit to Taiwan, which came on the heels of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s high profile and a high-stakes visit to that island, is an outgrowth of this thinking. Gonsalves led a delegation on a six-day state visit to Taiwan, beginning on August 8th.

As we saw with a letter addressed to his Russian counterpart, Prime Minister Gonsalves underscores that his country is “deeply disturbed” by the Kremlin’s so-called “special military operation” in Ukraine, calling for an end to the same.

Assessing seismic systemic shifts vis-à-vis Caricom member states

As previously intimated, as much as the Vincentian leader waded into oft-fraught Taiwan Strait relations in aid of Taiwan at an especially combustible moment, his diplomatic action was not just about amplifying collective push back regarding a consequential Indo-Pacific power’s aspirations in that part of the world.

Furthermore, it may appear self-evident that such action resonates with Caricom member states at large. However, a diplomatic playbook that action is not.

The primary issue is that per the Caricom bloc's [constituent treaty](#), the conduct of foreign policy in terms of the regional grouping hinges per se on coordination, not harmonisation. The following captures this reality: Only five of the 14 sovereign Caricom member states extend [diplomatic recognition](#) to Taiwan. The rest subscribe to the [One China principle](#), the linchpin in Beijing's portrayal of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in international politics. The PRC's relations with countries of the Caribbean Basin is a prime example.

Over the last two decades, the PRC has extended its geopolitical footprint and foreign policy presence across the Caribbean, building on decades-old diplomatic ties with several states therein. The impetus is the PRC's 'rise', apposite to America's relative disinterest in several world regions—the Caribbean included—following the end of the Cold War in 1991 and up until the end of the unipolar moment in 2014.

It looks like Washington is coming around to the thinking that, in the post-Cold War age, the United States needs to treat with the Caribbean systematically. Some analysts of PRC-Caribbean relations remain [critical](#), though, of Washington's about-turn.

Whether it is in the form of the PRC's "[growing economic and political presence in the Caribbean](#)" or the Washington-backed [U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030 \(PACC 2030\)](#), the Sino-U.S. global rivalry has expanded to include the Caribbean.

One of the factors driving Washington's ramped-up engagement with the Caribbean nowadays is that, somewhat on the back foot, it is ostensibly a response to Beijing's efforts to entwine the Caribbean Basin in the PRC's great-power aspirations.

Emblematic of our time and consistent with the PRC's attempts to woo support in the Global South writ large, in the main (Cuba, for example, excepted), the Biden Administration's strategy is soft power-driven. It rests on an evolved geopolitical and geo-economic footing, which marks a departure from heavy-handed carrot-and-stick foreign policy.

Even so, in this still emergent era of post-Cold War great-power rivalry, Caricom member states will potentially have to contend with some knock-on effects of a revanchist Russia. [Elsewhere](#)—a scholarly contribution previously [summarized](#)—I explain how that response is already taking shape.

In the case of the PRC, through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), its influence in large parts of the Caribbean is likely to continue to grow. There are implications for Taiwan, whose diplomatic recognition has steadily eroded in the wider region.

That said, things are far from clear-cut in respect of the BRI. First off, the COVID-19 pandemic will [likely affect](#) the Initiative. Secondly, China watchers have sounded a [cautionary note](#) about the risks associated with the BRI for its Caribbean beneficiaries in the same vein as the "[BRI's scale and complexity](#)" give some pause.

As regards the third (preeminent) great power—the United States—at this time, regional states must be mindful of Washington's power play relative to Beijing in the Caribbean Basin. Thus, they must assess anew and recalibrate their respective foreign policies.

Indications are they stand to gain markedly from the relationship during the Biden Administration, but as always, by how much and how fast turns on the nature of American domestic politics' influence on American foreign policy. In short, post-pandemic and post-Trump America is facing unprecedented headwinds, the effects of which are wide-ranging.

Amid these shifts, chock-full of differing goals and motives, Caricom's leadership is concerned. Fundamentally, the bloc has a considerable stake in the region as a 'Zone of Peace'. This is a long-standing refrain of the region's leadership, who look to the past, citing the useful lessons it holds regarding hegemony who set in motion events with lasting ramifications for the region and its people. Periodically, when hegemony flexes their geopolitical muscles in a manner that has implications for jurisdictions bordered by the Caribbean Sea, leaders [invoke](#) this concept. A case in point is a [statement](#) made in recent months by Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Amor Mottley on Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Looking to the future

A strategic competition involving China, Russia and the United States, then, has the Caribbean eyeing how to gain an advantage and hedge against post-'unipolar moment' hegemonic geopolitics, in a context where—by its very nature—the new wave of great-power rivalry will keep Beijing and Washington focused on the region for the foreseeable future.

Going forward, Caricom member states need to definitively decide what they want from this new era of great-power competition, just as much as they need to determine what they want from each other in this geopolitical context.

While the bloc has a set of common foreign policy interests, this moment threw its conduct of foreign policy into sharp relief, as the dominant narrative is coordination-centric. In this dispensation, as hegemony increasingly focus on Caricom member states, the latter will have to engage in an ever more complex juggling act geared toward achieving foreign policy goals animated by [“a community of sovereign states in which sovereignty is pooled but never ceded.”](#)

By leveraging the [available deliberative process](#), this is a propitious time to broaden [prevailing debates](#), focusing on the bloc's foreign policy construct relative to the salience of the stakes, preferences and interests involved in the revival of great-power competition.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Patrick I. Gomes, Ambassador Colin Granderson, Ambassador Riyad Insanally, and Ambassador Wayne McCook for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. The usual disclaimer applies for any remaining errors and omissions.

To access the foregoing published article online, please [click here](#).

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' Diplomatic Efforts During the Latest Taiwan Strait Flare-up

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The prime minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines visited Taiwan even while China's military drills surrounding the island were ongoing. Here's why.

U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's recent high profile and high-stakes [visit](#) to Taiwan, which made global headlines, [prompted](#) other politicians to take high-level visits of their own to the island.

One month ago, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Ralph Gonsalves entered the fray. With no outward signs of hesitation, beginning on August 8 as China was continuing to conduct unprecedented military drills around the island, he led a delegation on a [six-day state visit](#) to Taiwan.

At a time when cross-strait relations rested on a knife-edge, what did Kingstown hope to gain from Gonsalves' trip to Taiwan?

Kingstown's Motivations

First off, some basic facts about this [small state](#) serve as a useful context. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is among the smallest of the 193 member states of the United Nations. This sovereign country, whose capital is Kingstown, has a population of just over 100,000.

A former colony of Great Britain, whose Westminster model of governance it has inherited, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is also a [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#) member state.

Currently in his fifth consecutive term in office, Gonsalves holds the record as the longest continuously serving head of government in the country's post-independence period to date.

In deciding to take the trip to Taiwan, with which Kingstown has diplomatic relations, Gonsalves appeared to be betting that such high-level diplomacy would send an impactful signal that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines stands with Taiwan. As Taipei maneuvered to defy Beijing's saber-rattling, Gonsalves' trip demonstrated his resolve in standing up for that island nation in its hour of need.

With this view in mind, one can also frame Gonsalves' trip from a different angle: Taipei actively encourages and places considerable stock in such visits. The impetus for this form of diplomacy is Taipei's determination to move the needle in favor of establishing the Republic of China's

sovereign *bona fides*, contemplating an uncontested place among sovereign states, on the basis of the [Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States](#).

The impetus is also that such visits serve as [tangible expressions of support](#) by members of the international community for Taiwan, as Taipei perennially stares down what [some](#) describe as Beijing's scaremongering in its quest to unify Taiwan with the mainland.

In the process, as Gonsalves perhaps sees it, his state visit to and continued interest in Taiwan amid its politically charged relations with China also provides a fillip to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' diplomatic tradition of advocating on behalf of smaller states in the international system. As was evident in this crisis moment, what is also notable about Gonsalves' trip is that he stepped up to the plate in support of Taiwan when it mattered the most. Thus, the prime minister's visit was a testament to the strength of Vincentian-Taiwanese relations.

With regard to Gonsalves' August visit, then, timing was everything. Another key ingredient was the personal involvement of the prime minister in laying the ground for the trip, although little is known about the day-to-day, behind the scenes political and diplomatic preparations for the visit.

During Gonsalves' visit to Taiwan, authorities [deepened ties](#) through new agreements. This was the highlight of his visit, which no doubt provides a boost to the new phase in Vincentian-Taiwanese relations.

As Beijing attempts to assert dominance over large swathes of the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, Taipei will be the subject of even more pressure from Beijing – and even more in need of backers like Kingstown. For the latter, the [rewards](#) could potentially increase several-fold.

For Taipei, which is heavily invested in keeping just five of the 14 sovereign CARICOM member states [on side](#), Kingstown's diplomatic backing is highly prized. That Taiwan's [diplomatic recognition](#) has [steadily eroded in the wider region](#) plays to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' advantage in its relations with this island nation.

Wider Concerns

Gonsalves' trip to Taiwan in August was [his twelfth](#), which suggests that island nation is a Vincentian foreign policy priority. In Kingstown's internationalist thinking, maximizing its diplomatic sway is significantly linked to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' commitments in such hot-button issues of the highest order in international politics. With this in mind, it matters not only how Kingstown positions itself diplomatically, but how Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is viewed because of its position by others in the international community.

The prime minister's visit received the plaudits of Taipei and the smaller jurisdictions that diplomatically align themselves with Taiwan, all of whom have determined such diplomacy is fit for purpose, serving to raise to prominence small(er) states who are in the crosshairs of large countries' foreign policy gambits.

In this sense, as the Vincentian leader waded into fraught cross-strait relations in aid of Taiwan at an especially combustible moment, his diplomatic action was not just about amplifying collective push-back regarding China's aspirations in that part of the world.

Russia's February 24, 2022, invasion of Ukraine has raised concerns among CARICOM member states, not least because it could potentially open the door for other hegemonies to act with reckless abandon in their purported spheres of influence.

There is little question that Gonsalves' visit to Taiwan is an outgrowth of this thinking, with parallels to be drawn to Beijing's hostility toward and threat to Taipei.

In a [letter](#) addressed to Russian President Vladimir Putin earlier this year, Gonsalves emphasized that his country is "deeply disturbed" with the Kremlin's so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine, calling for an end to the same.

At the same time, Gonsalves' visit helped to shore up Taiwan's diplomatic defensive line, not least because it added a respected Caribbean voice to protestations over China's unprecedented display of hard power targeting Taiwan in recent weeks.

Kingstown's Diplomatic Assertiveness: Punching Above Its Weight

It also seems to confirm that in striving to give effect to the country's foreign policy objectives under the Gonsalves administration, Kingstown has gained a larger share of the international diplomatic spotlight. The recent visit came on the coattails of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' two-year term as a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council (UNSC).

In 2019, after a highly competitive [selection process](#), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines copped a much sought after non-permanent seat on the UNSC. The eastern Caribbean state held that seat from 2020 to 2021, [the smallest nation ever to do so](#).

For small states like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines – as I argue in a [recently-published scholarly contribution](#), [summarized](#) previously – a non-permanent seat on the UNSC represents an opportunity to enhance their international status. It is a feather in Kingstown's diplomatic cap, which also includes Gonsalves' prominent and long-standing backing of leftist Latin American leaders and [associated initiatives](#) geared toward the wider Latin America and the Caribbean region.

All too often, small states tend not to receive the recognition they are due for their foreign policy hand in consequential international diplomatic moments, where the focus tends to be on global and/or regional players. Fundamentally, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' diplomatic efforts vis-à-vis the latest Taiwan Strait flare-up are an important example and reminder of how small states can effectively rise to the occasion in high-stakes diplomatic episodes of global significance and of significance to their national interests.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Patrick I. Gomes, Ambassador Colin Granderson, Ambassador Riyad Insanally, and Ambassador Wayne McCook for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

The Russia-Ukraine War and Two Interrelated Ways to Think about CARICOM States' Associated Diplomacy

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As CARICOM member states diplomatically contend with the fallout of the Russia-Ukraine war, which is an era-inducing catalyst for systemic change, the duality of purpose of their national interests has shone through on the international stage.

All of the [Caribbean Community's \(CARICOM\)](#) sovereign members formed part of the 143 United Nations (U.N.) member states who, on October 12, voted in favor of a recent U.N. General Assembly (U.N. GA) resolution that: (i) condemns Russia's "[attempted illegal annexation](#)" of the Ukrainian regions (per its internationally-recognized borders) of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia; and (ii) "[calls on all States, the U.N. and international organizations not to recognize any of Russia's annexation claim and demands the immediate reversal of its annexation declaration.](#)"

In that act, along with the resolution's other supporters, CARICOM member states sent an unequivocal message (as they have [elsewhere](#)): The violation of key principles of the U.N. Charter—respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of any State—is patently unacceptable.

The interplay between their vital interests and multilateralism, which is to the [small states](#) of CARICOM what power is to international politics, has a lot to do with that diplomatic stance.

CARICOM Member States' Vital Interests and Multilateralism

Consider that CARICOM member states have an enduring set of foreign policy objectives that, to a large degree, they advance through their respective multilateral diplomatic pursuits. At the core of those objectives are "[economic considerations both in relation to the general lack of diplomatic resources and the fact that economic development is the main goal of foreign policy.](#)"

For the Anglophone members of CARICOM, who gained and sought to reinforce independence from the 1960s to the 1980s, an [overriding foreign policy concern](#) is their economic *qua* developmental advancement.

In their emphasis on this dimension of foreign policy, wider security concerns also hold broad applicability. In this regard, CARICOM member states gear their foreign policy thought toward harnessing processes and institutions of multilateralism to amplify those sovereign states' voices in and to expand their foreign policy outcomes *vis-à-vis* international politics. They

pursue this strategy, because in the international ([polarity](#)) context, the (Anglophone) Caribbean comprises “[system-ineffectual states](#).”

Testing Time, Amid Tried-and-tested Foreign Policy Casting

By the same token and insofar as such small states have a major stake in the cornerstone U.N. principles under reference, Russia’s grinding war on Ukraine brings about a major test for them.

In short, the [nature](#) of this conflict is bound to make it far harder for CARICOM member states to conduct their international relations. After all, in [hierarchy-minded](#) international relations, Russia is one of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council that has brought the U.N. principles in question off-kilter.

In the Kremlin’s wider strategy of upending the “[regional security order in Europe](#),” Russia is pummeling such principles, which have long been thought of as a security blanket in international politics—not least for small(er) states.

CARICOM member states’ steadfast commitment to multilateralism, which the U.N. Charter upholds, is understood in those terms. One needs to look no further than key tenets of their respective foreign policies, as illustrated in Table 1 (below), to glean this foreign policy approach.

Table 1: Select CARICOM Member States’ Key Foreign Policy Tenets

<i>Country</i>	<i>Foreign Policy Focus</i>
Barbados	It reaffirms Barbados’ commitment to multilateralism as a cornerstone of the country’s foreign policy, leveraging Bridgetown’s traditional and non-traditional partnerships, with a view to making strides in Barbados’ broad-based developmental agenda.
Belize	Belize’s foreign policy underscores national sovereignty and territorial integrity, while framing the practice of Belizean diplomacy per basic principles of the U.N. Charter.
Guyana	It privileges Guyana’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.
Jamaica	It espouses a strong commitment to multilateralism, which extends to the principles of the U.N. Charter as “ govern[ing] the conduct of [Jamaica’s] international relations and serves as the basis for [Jamaica’s] approach and presence on the international stage .” While the foregoing is an essential part of Jamaica’s foreign policy, relevant epistemic communities also place an emphasis on addressing multi-dimensional national challenges, as well as contributing to national development goals.
Trinidad and Tobago	Sovereignty, augmented by a stated commitment to international law and the principles of the U.N. Charter, is a central component in Trinidad and Tobago’s foreign policy.

Source: Author, drawing on information from some CARICOM member states’ foreign ministry websites.

As is apparent, a common thread (aspiration) runs through the foregoing foreign policy ideals. One can deduce that the said thread provides a cue to shared, far-sighted small state-themed thinking *vis-à-vis* a foreign policy-related worldview in/of the CARICOM bloc.

The National Interest in the Scheme of Things

That said, respective member states' foreign policy orientations are circumscribed by and hinge on the [national interest](#). In the exercise of those interests by taking a public position on an international politics-related matter, they typically prioritize historical and contemporary relations (e.g. ties of an [ideological qua identity](#) and/or commercial nature, etc) with and allegiances to third states farther afield.

Their positioning on a [U.N. GA vote](#), which came just weeks following the outbreak of Russia's war against Ukraine, to suspend Russia from the U.N.'s Geneva-based Human Rights Council put this reality into sharp relief.

The following CARICOM member states voted in favor of the suspension: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, and Saint Lucia.

The other members, as follows, exercised the abstention option: Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

In the final analysis, all of those states voted on principle in keeping with their respective national interests.

Main Takeaway

Eight months into Russia's high-stakes, full-scale invasion of Ukraine, CARICOM member states' track record of associated U.N.-level diplomatic maneuvering has brought attention to why this geopolitical moment is alarming them. I assess that, as far as the conduct of statecraft is concerned, two core interests drive this concern.

First, such small states have a lot to lose in a post-Cold War age—now nearing its end—with a great-power that, in respect of the liberal international order, is playing fast and loose with a foundational set of U.N. principles. Ultimately, as regards world regions in which they have vested interests, the war in Ukraine elevates insecurity and the specter of [hard power](#)-related dust-ups far beyond the latter's borders. For the CARICOM bloc, having regard to the national interest, this cannot stand. In foreign policy terms, etched as it is on one extreme of the national interest-related spectrum, such a diplomatic posture shores up "[multilateralist vectors](#)."

Second, as the die is being cast on an emergent geopolitical era wherein Ukraine is in the eye of the storm of that transition, the CARICOM bloc is wary of the (unintended) consequences of attendant great-power tussles spurring churned-up global processes. This anticipated outcome has already come to pass, tracking well with the return to prominence of [realpolitik](#) at the

hands of great powers, which are [jostling](#) to get the upper hand in the international order-related endgame of their choosing. (All the while, the Kremlin continues to [up the ante in Ukraine](#).)

Notably, against a backdrop where “[small states benefit disproportionately from international cooperation](#),” the [gravity](#) of this unfolding situation is [gumming up](#) certain global processes. The [global politics](#) involved, which play on its wide-ranging [knock-on effects](#), are also impeding cooperation across the board. What is more, at the risk of downplaying the seriousness of the situation, those power plays’ ripple effects are seemingly [all-consuming](#). For the CARICOM bloc—seen from the opposite end of the national interest-related spectrum (i.e. “[foreign policy-based transactionalism](#)”)—this war only worsens these [extraordinarily challenging times](#), compounding some of the prevailing [hardships](#) that regional states face.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Riyad Insanally and Ambassador Patrick I. Gomes for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

To access the foregoing published article online, please [click here](#).

Whither CARICOM States' Interests in a New Age of Great-power Geopolitics?

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For great powers and small states alike, geopolitical eras provide a cue to foreign policy orientations. This geopolitical reality must be understood within the context of “great-power leadership” and the national interest, as is well-known by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) bloc of small states.

In a new age of great-power geopolitics, which is currently taking form, the CARICOM bloc of small states has met with renewed interest. Among the manifold reasons for this is some regional states' geographic positioning relative to the Panama Canal, which is of great importance in Sino-United States (U.S.) competition, especially in light of Washington's handover of the Panama Canal to Panama over two decades ago. While the national security and foreign policy establishments of the great powers gauge CARICOM member states' geopolitical importance in such terms, the natural resource base of a few and the collective diplomatic usefulness of all also influence their value to that policymaking elite. This has long been the case.

A Glimpse at Cold War and Post-Cold War Geopolitics vis-à-vis the Caribbean

During the height of the Cold War, which was an especially active period regarding U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), Washington highly valued the Caribbean Basin. The latter is, of course, closely identified with one of the Cold War's most significant moments, the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Insofar as the Caribbean is the U.S.'s so-called “backyard”, historically, the region has attracted Washington's foreign policy attention.

However, with the demise of the Soviet Union, Washington's foreign policy priorities shifted. One outcome of this recalibration was that the LAC region featured less in U.S. foreign policy-making, even as the Caribbean – as the U.S.'s so-called ‘third border’ – remained in Washington's foreign policy sights. Among the reasons for this focus was that – given its proximity to some Latin American countries which for several decades now have been contending with rampant organized crime, drug cartels with global reach and the narco-state phenomenon – the Caribbean grew in prominence as a major transshipment hub for illicit drugs entering the U.S. mainland. Also, some Caribbean countries emerged as major cultivation sites for marijuana. As a result of these developments – whose knock-on effects include corruption, drug-related crime and violence – several regional states have become considerably insecure.

Even as Washington worked to help shore up the U.S.'s 'third border' (especially over the last two decades of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century), partnering accordingly with Caribbean states, the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland fundamentally changed the orientation of and left an indelible mark on Washington's foreign policy calculus.

As the LAC region fell by Washington's foreign policy wayside throughout the 2000s and for much of the 2010s, with the American-led '[war on terror](#)' unfolding in earnest, a rising China moved to fill the breach. Once again, great powers are jockeying systematically for influence in the Caribbean.

This latest round of power plays in respect of great powers provides important clues about the evolution of their geopolitical thinking, even as it elicits associated questions.

Geopolitics in Flux: Recapping some Interests related to CARICOM States

With the geopolitics of our age in flux, for Caribbean foreign affairs policymakers, among the many questions arising are: Where do CARICOM member states stand? Moreover, how could this period of flux possibly impact on these states? In this context, given the varying foreign policy objectives at play, what are some of the dynamics in the relational mix?

In a series of three recently-published articles, with an eye to the dynamic official foreign policy positioning of those small states relative to great powers, I proffer a preliminary assessment of these research questions. Those interconnected articles – in order of publication – are titled:

1. '[CARICOM States Contend with a New Era of Great-power Rivalry](#)' – published on September 8, 2022 by the LSE Latin America and Caribbean Centre;
2. '[Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' Diplomatic Efforts During the Latest Taiwan Strait Flare-up](#)' – published on September 10, 2022 by The Diplomat magazine; and
3. '[The Russia-Ukraine War and Two Interrelated Ways to Think about CARICOM States' Associated Diplomacy](#)' – published on October 26, 2022 by TheGlobalAmericans.org

The first and the third articles – as listed above – provide insight into a new era of great-power rivalry framed around the CARICOM bloc, highlighting some emerging patterns of such competition as driven by Russia, the U.S. and the People's Republic of China (PRC), respectively.

As I explain in the third article and as I also set out [elsewhere](#), CARICOM member states are contending with some knock-on effects of a revanchist Russia. However, there are interesting differences in support for the [Russian geopolitical narrative](#) across the LAC region. It is especially noteworthy that while [Russia is not as isolated](#) as Western leaders and diplomats let on publicly *vis-à-vis* its war on Ukraine, the Kremlin's allies in the wider region [do not demonstrate unwavering support](#) in that regard. That said, the Kremlin relies most on Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela and correspondingly leverages its post-Cold War era foreign policy *démarches* to firmly re-establish a geopolitical and geo-economic foothold in parts of the LAC region. For example, the Kremlin has ["deployed warships and nuclear-capable bombers to](#)

Venezuela and directed Russian oil giants, including Rosneft and Gazprom, to pump South American crude.”

In this moment, there has been a payoff for the Kremlin. Russia enjoys strong support in some of the LAC region, with which the Kremlin has wide-ranging ties, including in the area of military cooperation. Some analysts have also called attention to Russian trade and investment in the wider region. While by their reckoning such engagement is “modest” relative to that of the U.S. and China, “Russia’s engagement with the region has openly challenged U.S security interests in the region in a way that the activities of other extra-hemispheric actors in the region have not.”

Although Russia’s contemporary relations with CARICOM member states are not purposed *qua* configured in this way, as compared to just a decade ago, the Kremlin is clearly paying more foreign policy attention to certain regional states. Notwithstanding, as intimated earlier, “[t]he security environment of the Caribbean is shaped by its proximity to the United States.” Regarding U.S. relations with CARICOM, the soft power-driven dimension of the U.S.’s CARICOM-related foreign policy approach is now favoured over the heavy-handed carrot-and-stick U.S. foreign policy approach of the Trump Administration. A good example of this is the U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030 or PACC 2030, which the Biden Administration’s first National Security Strategy highlights and which was launched at the Ninth Summit of the Americas held in June 2022.

As regards the U.S., as I also note, regional states must be mindful of Washington’s power play relative to Beijing in the Caribbean Basin. This point comes through in the first article, as listed above. Washington is acutely aware of and compelled to up its Caribbean-wide foreign policy game in response to, *inter alia*, the growing role of Chinese lending and investor-type institutions in the Caribbean. Along with Chinese State Owned Enterprises, they are increasingly a fixture in high-profile sectoral/national developmental and capital projects from The Bahamas and Jamaica in the northern Caribbean to Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago in the southern Caribbean.

This comes at a time when “[t]he Latin American region [is] play[ing] an important role in China’s strategy for gaining access to natural resources worldwide.” While analysts of Sino-Caribbean relations point to the fact that the Caribbean is not in a position to extend to Beijing the scale of natural resources or even types of alliances that larger regions can, they also note how “geopolitically the region provides economic and symbolic incentives for China’s investments.” Notably, “[m]any of China’s largest infrastructure projects, like ports in the Bahamas and Jamaica, will be used to accommodate larger volumes of cargo coming from China for transshipment throughout the Western Hemisphere.”

Much of Beijing’s diplomatic activity and economic cooperation should be seen in the context of the PRC’s competition with Taiwan for diplomatic recognition in the region. This is a matter I discuss in the second article, as listed above. It highlights bilateral foreign policy-making in reference to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines’ (whose capital is Kingstown) diplomatic efforts during the latest Taiwan Strait flare-up. The article points to the fact that the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves has taken an increasingly hard line on Beijing’s

bid to escalate rhetoric and actions directed at Taipei's efforts to challenge the PRC's ambitions relative to Taiwan.

That Kingstown's Taiwan-directed external action is *sui generis* stands out, against the broader background of concern among all CARICOM bloc members about certain large states potentially being emboldened to make a mockery of the multilateral system.

The story of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' diplomatic efforts during the latest Taiwan Strait flare-up also illustrates that in cases of [high politics-based](#) foreign policy-making by respective CARICOM bloc members, prioritizing strategic relationships with extra-regional third States is the most likely foreign policy approach.

Final Reflections

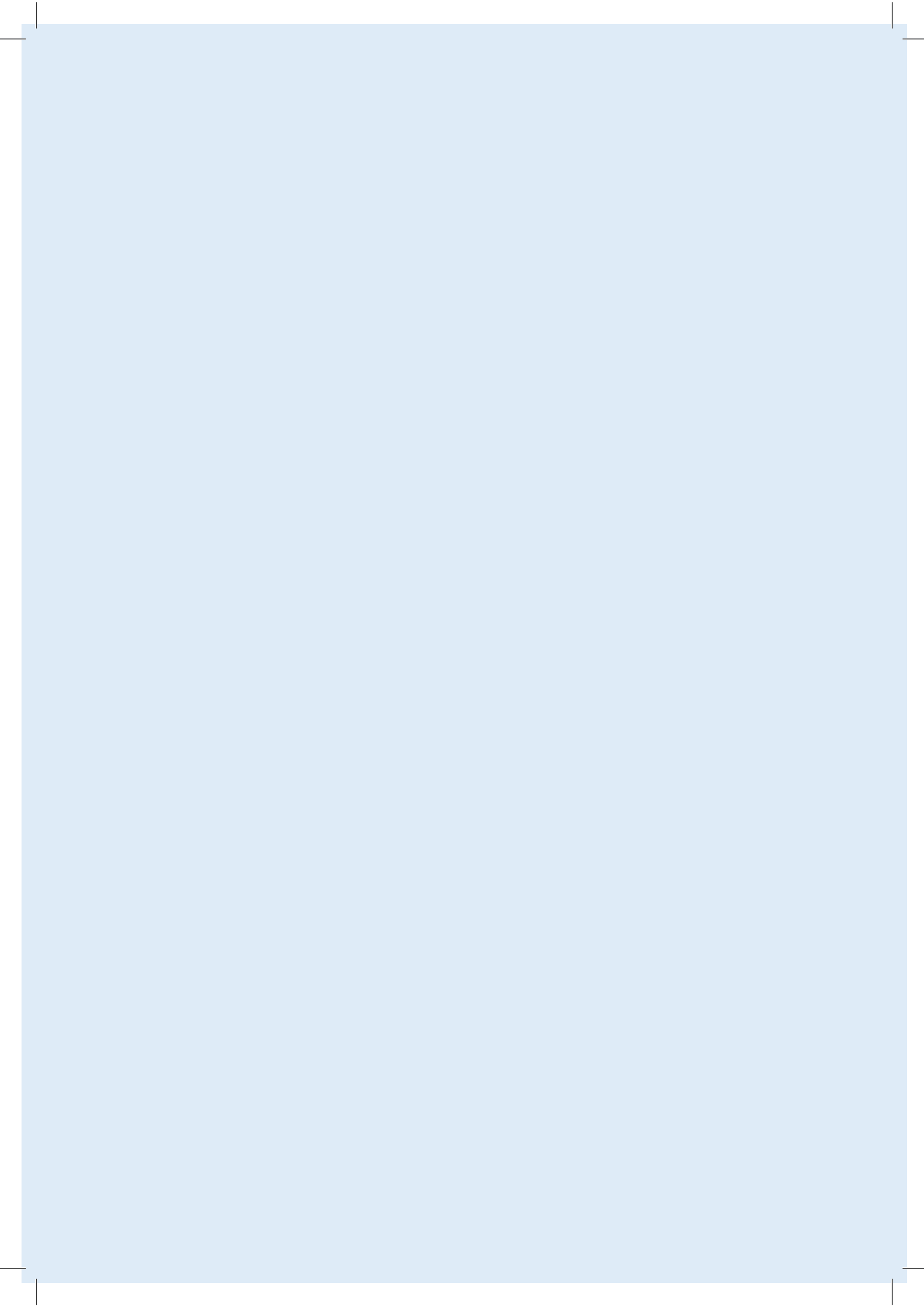
The combined articles under reference show that, following a relative (post-Cold War-related) lull in great-power rivalry, the contemporary foreign policy environment of CARICOM member states is characterized by heightened great-power-related complexities. Such complexities are especially difficult for those states to contend with in the face of balance-of-power challenges to the interstate system and to the postwar international order, which is buffeted by a crystalizing multipolarity. This at a time when – as compared to any other moment following the demise of system-wide bipolarity in the early 1990s – great powers are now seemingly edging closer to a new Cold War, with the geopolitical prize firmly in their sights, as is the Caribbean's role in their wider foreign policy ambitions.

We must also factor into the geopolitical equation a core foreign policy precept in respect of the CARICOM bloc: The coordinative form of foreign policy-making in the regional integration schema. (This is a point that I underscore in the first article, as listed above.) Accordingly, the bloc is caught in a double bind: hawkish great-power competition is afoot in the core of the Caribbean Basin, once again, while the present trajectories of CARICOM member states' foreign policy decision-making are such that key national-level considerations outstrip regional integrationist interests.

In sum, the CARICOM bloc's current foreign policy construct likely will not resolve the broader question of relations between the bloc's membership and great powers in a new age of (hegemonic) geopolitics. Foreign policy coordination among the bloc's membership, then, must be improved by better (re)aligning associated regional intergovernmental processes. Now, more than ever they must be responsive to and function in sync with surfacing global realities, which more likely than not will be baked into the international system for some time to come.

More broadly, there must be a return to wholehearted and unequivocal support of fundamental and consequential United Nations (U.N.) principles among a representative cross-section of the U.N.'s membership. CARICOM member states' respective multilateral diplomatic agendas ought to have a hand in giving new impetus to strategies for and agency in respect of international cooperation. After all, the future success of small(er) states in navigating international politics depends on that membership continuously reinforcing attendant institutions.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Riyad Insanally for his very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.



Volume II

CARICOM Foreign Policymaking and the 'Geopolitical Moment':

A Compilation of some Analyses and Related Assessments

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

May 3, 2023

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CARICOM's Evolving Foreign Policy Thinking on the Ukraine War

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Shortly following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, on February 24, 2022, the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#) bloc unequivocally condemned the act, [underscoring](#), "The principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of another sovereign state, the prohibition on the threat or use of force, and the peaceful resolution of all disputes must be adhered to by all nations." This CARICOM foreign policy pronouncement was motivated to a great extent by security-related foreign policy thinking—understood as a typical feature of the foreign policy logic of [small states](#). It boils down to and mirrored CARICOM member states' own fears—as small states—of becoming the victims of [hard power](#) conflict.

This foreign policy posture also reflects how many understand international relations as: 1) dominated—at least on paper—by 'equal' [sovereign](#) states, whose [power](#) differentials are determinative of their [status](#) or standing in world politics; and 2) animated by the absence of a supranational global authority, impacting significantly on the behavior of states in the international system. (For this reason, like [other](#) United Nations (UN) member states, CARICOM member states want to [maximize](#) their security.)

However, this perspective tells only part of the story. It reflects only one of two key dimensions in CARICOM member states' respective foreign policies, the security logic.

A Framework for Analyzing CARICOM Bloc Foreign Policymaking

At first glance, security considerations appear to have a ubiquitous influence in CARICOM member states' foreign policy thinking. However, at this stage of the conflict, such considerations should not be overstated. To a significant degree, their foreign policies are held up by [economic development](#) considerations—[focusing](#) on "strengthening regional and global market integration of Caribbean economies."

To achieve that goal, CARICOM's diplomacy is geared towards advancing efforts on: [graduation](#), non-access to [concessional financing](#), [blacklisting](#), debt relief, [correspondent banking](#), the [unfair treatment](#) of middle-income countries by the international financial institutions, shortfalls in the [Green Climate Fund](#), and the '[loss and damage](#)' climate change issue, among others. These are core foreign policy priorities, coming up in CARICOM engagements with third countries regarding the bloc's advocacy for diplomatic backing and development aid in support of its membership's development challenges. Featured on the official [regional agenda](#), they are emblematic of an economic development-related foreign policy logic.

As the CARICOM foreign policymaking community sees it, there is no uniformity of views on whether one logic takes precedence over the other. In fact, these distinctive logics represent a particular foreign policy outlook on and normative assumptions about the conduct of international relations.

For the most part, these long-standing foreign policymaking logics have played out in the CARICOM bloc with the benefit of esprit de corps-filled moments of compromise. To many, this provides impetus to CARICOM member states' collective diplomatic voice on the international stage. Ultimately however, either collectively or individually, CARICOM member states seek to leverage each logic to their own advantage at a given time and on a given international issue.

Shifting Trajectory of Foreign Policy Thinking

A case in point is regional states' diplomatic state of play relative to the Ukraine war. A good barometer is the [recently adopted](#) UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution calling for Russia to pay war-related reparations to Ukraine. [Thirteen](#) CARICOM member states abstained from voting, with one state absent. (Of the 193 UN members, 73 abstained, with just 94 voting in favor of the resolution and 14 against.)

While CARICOM member states have a record of voting-related abstentions in relation to some of the five Ukraine-related UNGA resolutions—with a view to telegraphing wider concerns—the virtual unanimity of CARICOM member states' position on this particular resolution signals a shift in the bloc's foreign policy thinking on the issue.

Bringing Economic Considerations Back In

To understand this diplomatic maneuvering, a focused discussion of the Ukraine war's economic repercussions regarding CARICOM member states is in order. Set against the backdrop of a war that is nearing its one-year anniversary and that is showing few signs of resolution, CARICOM member states' foreign policy goals vis-à-vis the conflict must increasingly account for economic considerations. This reflects their long-standing foreign policy prioritization of economic development as well as their deep concern that the bloc is paying a high economic price in relation to the wider effects of the conflict.

The economic repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine war are undermining the economic fortunes of these countries. They already face systemic [vulnerabilities](#), as well as myriad [crises](#), which the COVID-19-induced [economic slowdown](#) has compounded.

The pandemic became synonymous with [lockdowns and border-related closures](#) aimed at promoting public health imperatives. However, these same measures [spelled](#) economic ruin for the largely tourism-dependent economies of many CARICOM member states. Ensuing pandemic-related [supply chain issues](#) only added to recovery-related woes, given these small open economies' [high dependence on trade](#) and their [infrastructural constraints](#). Topping the list of these woes are the ongoing inflationary pressures facing the region. All told, the pandemic's knock-on effects have [brought about](#) a historically consequential economic contraction in CARICOM.

Viewed through this prism, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has exacerbated the Caribbean's dire economic situation. The global inflation crisis, which has brought about [price shocks](#), is a phenomenon that [national authorities](#) in the Caribbean link to the conflict. In the case of Jamaica, even though some [organizations](#) are upbeat about the country's economic recovery and performance—citing exogenous factors—they [warn](#) of a likely recession. They even [highlight](#) “risks to a sustained growth path [as being] elevated.” This narrative of high vulnerability is [not unique](#) to Jamaica. Even pre-pandemic, for example, many CARICOM member states—which rank as being among the most indebted countries in the world—were grappling with high levels of [public debt](#).

In this setting, Caribbean leaders are making [difficult](#) choices to support key policy reforms. For the moment, economic reform imperatives are an urgent priority and CARICOM leaders must weigh the attendant political risks of not keeping pace with stakeholders' expectations regarding a revival of their countries' flagging economies.

Whither the Proverbial Foreign Policy-related Balance?

In the circumstances, balancing the norms of nonintervention with economic necessity may pressure Caribbean governments to take a different tact on how they approach the Kremlin-orchestrated invasion. Indeed, some in CARICOM's foreign policymaking community see reason to review and change foreign policy orientations. They underscore that, through no fault of their own, CARICOM member states are being hemmed in economically by a global crisis that has arisen from the [“international fallout”](#) of Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine.

Yet, others have much to say about and have a clear sense of the security dimension of CARICOM member states' foreign policy thinking—expressing doubt that economic considerations trump sovereignty and territorial integrity issues and the use of force. It is not lost on them that what is at stake in this perilous moment is not just the European security order, but also their countries' security. After all, the latter hinges on the sanctity of core principles of the ‘rules of the (multilateral) game’. From that perspective, the [Statement of the Conference of CARICOM Heads of Government on the War and Humanitarian Crisis in Ukraine](#) is just as relevant today as when it was issued in March 2022.

Concluding Thoughts

The CARICOM bloc's diplomatic response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was built around security-related foreign policy thinking. Since then, however, the Russia-Ukraine war's economic repercussions have become a foreign policy priority for CARICOM—marking a return to another tenant of the bloc's foreign policy logic. Economic necessity is seemingly shaking up the initial foreign policy thinking of CARICOM's political and foreign affairs elites. Relatedly, these effects' macro-level consequences are a consideration for them. In short, at a time when the Russia-Ukraine war's far-reaching impacts are overshadowing global policymaking [discourse](#), it becomes that much harder for policymakers to move the needle on economic imperatives. That said, just because the bloc's Russia-Ukraine war-related foreign policy attention has taken on the characteristics of economic statecraft, security-related foreign policy thinking has not necessarily been lost.

As the Russia-Ukraine war and its (in)direct impacts become increasingly salient in international relations, CARICOM member states will likely ratchet up calls for an end to the conflict. They should close ranks behind requisite foreign policy démarches, not least to set the tone of such a narrative. In the near-term, official pronouncements on this CARICOM foreign policy context may come from two upcoming high-level regional meetings. The CARICOM [Council for Foreign and Community Relations](#), which is scheduled to meet again in May 2023, could provide important clues about the further evolution of member states' foreign policy thinking. So, too, could a CARICOM summit that takes place early in 2023.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Colin Granderson and Ambassador Riyad Insanally for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. His other scholarship on what the Russia-Ukraine war means for the CARICOM bloc is set out in a compendium of articles, which is published online [here](#).

To access the foregoing published article online, please [click here](#).

CARICOM's Foreign Policy Standpoint on the Ukraine War, One Year into the Conflict

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The Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) foreign policy establishment ought to confront the reality that alliance politics regarding great-power competition are back with a vengeance. From the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) eastward expansion to the Kremlin's vociferous spheres of influence-based rejection of Ukraine possibly joining the ranks of that alliance and Western concerns about the deepening contemporary alliance between Beijing and the Kremlin, this is the geopolitical situation of particular consequence. In the latter case, the stronger alliance has arguably emerged because of Russia's ostracism by the West. (While some focus to a considerable degree on the U.S.-led West's open-ended promise to extend NATO membership to Ukraine, with such outreach making headway among some of the other former Soviet republics, it might also be argued that the latter moved west; it was not necessarily that NATO moved east.)

Accordingly, with due regard to its risks/opportunities and in pursuit of its core security-cum-economic interests, CARICOM ought to also systematically bring this relatively new, post-Cold War (international relations) normal into dialogue with the coordination of foreign policies among its member states.

In the Year since its Inception, the Ukraine War Looms Large on CARICOM's Foreign Policy Agenda...

Today, as never before, the Ukraine war occupies a prominent place in CARICOM member states' foreign policy decision-making. They have intensified their policy focus toward the Ukraine war, especially in the UN, taking a hard line against Russia's aggression.

Following a year of the conflict, in this historical moment, virtually all of the 14 sovereign states of the bloc lent their support to a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution committing to that country's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity in accordance with its internationally recognized borders. But beyond that commitment, this resolution on "Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine" demonstrates the Assembly holds firm convictions on Russia halting hostilities and removing its military forces from Ukraine without delay, completely and unconditionally.

CARICOM member states, along with 128 other UN members, voted in favour of this much-anticipated, nonbinding resolution adopted on 23 February, 2023. Just seven countries opposed the resolution, revealing on the face of it that—as this war entered its second year—with altogether 141 members of the world body doubling down on condemning Russia's war

of aggression and strongly supporting Ukraine, the international community demonstrably still stands with that war-torn country.

...But it's Complicated...

The big picture take on the stance of the international community (inclusive of CARICOM) toward the Ukraine war is not so straightforward, though, not least because this protracted conflict—the largest in Europe since World War II and with global salience—is playing out as a key aspect of great-powers' post-'unipolar moment', *realpolitik* ambitions. What's more, in this extraordinarily complex geopolitical moment, "[h]ow countries define their national interest largely determines their willingness to work toward goals that are perceived to be in the global interest."

In this regard, it is also notable that 32 countries—the People's Republic of China (PRC), which is a consequential *friend* of CARICOM, among them—exercised abstentions in respect of the UNGA vote to mark the (grim) one-year anniversary of the Ukraine war. This almost mirrored the voting dynamics regarding the adoption of a *similar* UNGA resolution in March 2022, which mustered 35 abstentions, while 141 UN members backed it and five countries voted against it.

Given this reality, what is dominating *political* and *foreign policy* elites' Ukraine war-related debates in CARICOM capitals are questions regarding *whose* security and economic interests are being served by the conflict and, beyond that, at *whose* expense; but also, *what* kinds of (re)calibrations need to be made in respect of the bloc's initial (on principle) *formal condemnation* of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, 2022. That condemnation brought into focus normative stakes and international law-related implications of Russian aggression, which UN Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned as "*an affront to our collective conscience*;" reaffirming similar *remarks* he made last year.

One year into that war, CARICOM leaders are seemingly coming around to the view that, by and large, their *small states'* interests might be better served by turning the (diplomatic) page on and to the exclusion of the said initial condemnation, focusing instead on a call "*for a diplomatic and peaceful solution to the [Ukraine war]*." If their record of abstentions—which I discuss *elsewhere*—in relation to Ukraine war-related UNGA votes is anything to go by, CARICOM member states have seemingly been coming around to this foreign policy stance for months now.

These states' respective foreign policies, then, are not simply promulgated on principle *à la* a unidirectional foreign policy outlook. When the exigencies of their international relations demand it and to achieve their goals in certain contexts, they are also pragmatic. In this regard, as I elucidate elsewhere, the respective national interests of CARICOM member states are most aptly viewed through the prism of "*foreign policy-based transactionalism*."

...CARICOM is Weighing Up the Balance...

This against a backdrop where, in *general terms*, CARICOM tries to balance between Washington—Kyiv's *principal Western ally*—and Beijing, which is Russia's *close ally*, whose purported *neutral stance* on the war *strains credulity* in the West. Also of note, for the last two

decades, Sino-CARICOM relations have deepened considerably and Beijing's diplomatic influence in the region is only growing, as nine CARICOM member states become more dependent on the PRC's "[development assistance, trade and foreign investment](#)."

Like any other great-power, the PRC's pursuit of [soft power](#)-hinged economic statecraft is geopolitically motivated. Russia's relationship with CARICOM is [nowhere near as developed](#), with implications for the exercise of direct coercion or inducements. (Indeed, Sino-CARICOM and Russo-CARICOM relations are a [study](#) in contrasts.)

As the war drags on, the Kremlin's calculation on the imperative of [continuously](#) driving a [wedge between](#) the Global South and Global North on the Ukraine war may increasingly draw on the considerable reach of the PRC's diplomatic influence, raising the question: What does this augur for the future of CARICOM's foreign policy standpoint on the Ukraine war as it has entered its second year?

As of now—as an initiative that has been drawn to CARICOM's attention *via* high-level diplomatic channels and diplomatic maneuvers unfolding behind the scenes—Beijing is drumming up support for its 12-point [peace plan](#) to end the Ukraine war which, in some quarters, has raised [eyebrows](#).

That said, Beijing's diplomatic efforts to gain influence in the Caribbean and the Kremlin's diplomatic maneuvering to possibly dovetail selectively on the same have to be viewed in a context where "[t]he United States has maintained extensive international hierarchies over states on the Caribbean littoral for more than a century." Moreover, comparatively, the [contours](#) of Washington's contemporary soft power-related hand in the Caribbean stand out.

...Yet, when it comes to Policy Drivers, Much Depends on Out of the Box Thinking

With the foregoing in mind, there needs to be a more concerted effort to periodically sync meetings of the CARICOM [Council for Foreign and Community Relations \(COFCOR\)](#) in respect of the recent change in the frequency and dynamic of CARICOM summits. There is an "[agreement \[arrived at a summit of CARICOM leaders held in July 2022\] to establish a calendar of six \(6\) Meetings of the Conference annually, with regular in-person Meetings being held in February and July, and virtual intersessional meetings scheduled during the year.](#)"

Such a step alone has important implications for how the bloc's political directorate will think about the regional integration schema relative to the world at large, which is caught up (for some time to come) in strong Ukraine war-related geopolitical headwinds. After all, as a policy [decision-making collective](#), regional leaders can ill afford not to be on top of things in that regard. The political directorate should, therefore, be applauded for their imprimatur in relation to the COFCOR meeting held in the margins of the recently-concluded [Forty-Fourth Meeting of the CARICOM Heads of Government](#) in Nassau, The Bahamas. Going forward, more of this is needed.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Riyad Insanally and Ambassador Patrick I. Gomes for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. It is dedicated to the memory of the late Ambassador the Hon. Dr. Richard L. Bernal, OJ, a valued mentor, who passed away earlier this year.

The UK-Caribbean Partnership Takes on Safe Bets, Confronts New Realities

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Much as in 2021, when Whitehall released the '[Integrated Review 2021](#)' (IR2021) ahead of the Tenth United Kingdom (UK)-Caribbean Ministerial Forum, just days prior to the Eleventh such meeting to be held on [May 18th](#) in Jamaica, Whitehall has published the 'Integrated Review Refresh 2023' (IR2023). Just as IR2021 puts forward a single and contemporary whole-of-government strategy, which is complemented by "[numerous other 'strategies'](#)", IR2023 constitutes an update of relevant "[policy priorities](#)." It treats [holistically](#) with the UK's national security, foreign and defence policy, and international development approach.

Accordingly, IR2023 will impact the broad sweep and orientation of the UK's external action in the Caribbean, including the 14 [sovereign](#) member states of the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#), as well as Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

It is not lost on CARICOM that IR2023 will inform London's priorities in respect of the Eleventh Ministerial Forum, which will bring together UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office higher-ups (among others) and counterparts from Caribbean countries and UK Overseas Countries and Territories in the Caribbean. The Forum's agenda is still to be finalized.

A May 16th to 17th meeting of [the CARICOM Council for Foreign and Community Relations \(COFCOR\)](#) is expected, among other things, to come up with a coordinated CARICOM position on the upcoming high-level, biennial UK-Caribbean dialogue. No doubt, IR2023 will occupy delegates' attention at the COFCOR meeting, even as CARICOM is expected to seek to build on the current [political accord](#) and [action plan](#) between the two sides.

IR2023

Officials would be well advised to consider the difference in approach between IR2021 and IR2023. Whereas IR2021 is reflective of a [Brexit](#) moment, representing a landmark in the still young post-Brexit journey of the UK, IR2023 tamps down on its predecessor's [Brexit undertones](#). IR2023 also glosses over the [aftermath](#) of Brexit in respect of the UK's economy, in a policymaking setting where defence spending has been [boosted](#). It looks with greater purpose at the "[geopolitical moment](#)" which Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine brought about.

In short, IR2023 represents the Sunak government's updating of the British vision of the UK in the wider world. This comes against the backdrop of key security-related [trends](#), which IR2021 previously identified, having accelerated still further. This transpired—just months removed

from the publication of IR2021—to a degree that British authorities likely had not anticipated in their associated risk assessments.

It is a vision that in large measure projects the UK's role as a European security actor, in keeping with the country's security interests. It is geared towards improving the UK's global prestige and standing. This reflects this [middle power's](#) self-ascribed outsized role in [backing](#) Kyiv in Ukraine's defiance of Russia, its status as an ever more [consequential](#) player in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and a growing rapprochement between London and Brussels. Both London and Brussels, at least by all outward appearances, seem to have [turned over a new leaf](#)—following an acrimonious Brexit.

Within this understanding of the geopolitical moment, with its emphasis largely on [great powers](#) vying "[for dominance in the global order](#)," Washington (a close ally of London) has gone to great lengths to [pit](#) democracies against autocracies. The United States' (U.S.) Intelligence Community distinguishes between the challenges posed by Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC), respectively. There is an undercurrent of sentiment that the [Kremlin's](#) and [Beijing's](#) so-called recalcitrance and [revisionist](#) agendas are a [threat](#) not just to U.S. interests but, by extension, to those of Western powers writ large—of which the UK forms an integral part.

In this way, the UK's foreign and security policy outlook is in stark contrast to the PRC's newly-minted 'comprehensive national security' [approach](#) and the latest Russian [Foreign Policy Concept](#), both of which are [international status-driven](#). In a context of the escalatory nature of the renewed wave of [great-power competition](#), prominent in Whitehall's IR2023 considerations are:

- (i) The PRC's stepped-up, now months-long [aggressive actions/provocations](#) focused on Taiwan; (this is against the backdrop of the [shifting tone](#) of that country's now [blunted](#) three-plus decades-long [rise](#), which must also be viewed through the geopolitical [prism](#) of the UK's 'tilt' toward the Indo-Pacific—amid Beijing's [growing influence](#) there.)
- (ii) Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, whose reverberations are being felt across the UK's [security](#) landscape, the [European security order](#) (forged at the Cold War's end) and the post-war [liberal international order](#).

'The Times They Are A-Changin'

In the 25 years since the first Ministerial Forum was held, following a historic decision by the UK and Caribbean in 1997 to strengthen and deepen cooperation via regular and systematized engagements, the two sides have approached [security realities](#) and [security aspirations](#) careful not to conspicuously bump up against great-power competition. And yet, given the magnitude of its interests in the geopolitical moment, the UK's calculus suggests that it may have to rethink that approach. In this moment, also considering the China-Russia '[no limits](#)' [partnership](#), the UK could stand to lose (to a degree) the influence it has gained from the Ministerial Forum.

As evidenced by their diplomatic signals to Caribbean counterparts, Whitehall mandarins appear to have concerns over the positioning of states of the wider region relative to the dual high priorities of Whitehall, as enumerated above.

Broadly, London is looking on with concern at Beijing's "[considerable—and increasing—Chinese involvement \[in\] and engagement \[with\] the Caribbean states.](#)" (In the case of CARICOM, while [five](#) member states maintain formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan (recognizing that island nation as a sovereign state)—which is "[a key U.S. partner in the Indo-Pacific](#)"—the others extend diplomatic recognition to the PRC.) Generally speaking, although they are not new, those concerns centre on the [Belt and Road Initiative \(BRI\)](#). The BRI has, though, increasingly come under scrutiny as a vehicle to advance the PRC's interests, [including in the Caribbean](#). As of 2022, [10 Caribbean countries](#) have come on-board the BRI initiative.

Additionally, London is wary of [several risks](#) associated with an initiative that is now under considerable [strain](#); more specifically, calculating how this may translate into Beijing possibly trying to gain or already having gained more political and diplomatic leverage over the states concerned. That the nine CARICOM member states diplomatically backing Beijing have, by and large, steered clear of pronouncing on Beijing's recent sabre-rattling aimed at Taipei has not gone unnoticed in Whitehall. One of those members of the bloc has gone so far as to say that "[the One China policy is important, not just for China, but for the stability of the region.](#)"

This as some Taipei-backers in the bloc, among them [St. Vincent and the Grenadines](#) and, more recently, [Belize](#), have conversely stepped up their rhetorical support of Taipei's [independence](#); at a time when its relations with Beijing are especially fraught with geopolitical danger. Such Taipei-backers tend to [draw parallels](#) between Ukraine and Taiwan.

All the while, [Havana has backed](#) the Kremlin's stance on the Ukraine war. London is deeply concerned with Cuba's positioning in this respect, which the latter [adopted](#) fairly early on in the [fast-developing](#) conflict.

And the Ukraine war has brought the sovereign CARICOM member states' into conversation, once again, regarding the United Nations' (UN) focus on security and peace vis-à-vis "[denying legitimacy to aggressive behavior by any state, including the great powers.](#)" As history shows, these [small states'](#) relations with great powers have prompted the former to adopt a course of foreign policy action that either comes into direct confrontation or aligns with the said focus. For example, the bloc [fell short](#) in singing from the same hymn sheet on the [U.S.-led invasion of Grenada](#), which the UN General Assembly [overwhelmingly deplored](#) at the time—[along with](#) the UN Security Council (UNSC)—notwithstanding [Washington's justification](#). (More recently, against the backdrop of the U.S.'s wider [interests](#), CARICOM member states have been divided in the Organization of American States on "[addressing political instability in Venezuela.](#)") But 20 years later, when it came to the [Iraq War](#), the bloc [got behind](#) the previously mentioned focus of the UN.

In an [earlier work](#), which underscores economic development considerations germane to these states' foreign policymaking, I conclude that the protracted Ukraine war has put to the test the bloc's commitment to this key focus of the UN.

This is cause for concern for the UK, a bastion of the liberal international order. It could very well underline CARICOM's democratic credentials as reason enough for the bloc to regard the Ukraine war as a ["contest between democracy and autocracy,"](#) resolving to do its part to present a united front.

In sum, this particular geopolitical moment overhangs the Eleventh Ministerial Forum. On the one hand, in this moment, rather awkwardly, the heterogeneity of interests among the wider Caribbean constituency that comprises the partnership has bubbled to the surface. On the other hand, insofar as this moment has stirred up a global north/global south [divide](#) that brings into sharp relief the competing interests in play, cooperation in the Forum along these lines could be a tricky business. After all, London is [beating the drum](#) about the importance of like-minded partners.

Moreover, just in terms of Whitehall's corresponding Ukraine war-related [adjustments](#) to UK government priorities, an inference can be drawn about how London will likely treat with CARICOM going forward. For instance, in conjunction with a situation of ["reduced UK aid spending and the Government's wider foreign policy intentions to increase UK efforts in Africa and the Indo-Pacific, partly in response to China,"](#) the UK Foreign Secretary has called attention to the need to look beyond ["pre-existing friends."](#) And even though the Foreign Secretary's recent statement to the House of Commons on IR2023 makes passing mention of the Commonwealth, the UK's role in international development and its commitment to pursue ["patient, long-term partnerships,"](#) it is conspicuous by the absence of any reference to the Caribbean. This should be cause for concern in CARICOM.

Music to Caribbean Ears

Nonetheless, CARICOM policymaking and diplomatic circles are enthused by the [UK Small Island Developing States strategy 2022 to 2026](#), which ["sets out objectives to help SIDS adapt to climate change, protect their biodiversity, enhance their access to external finance, and improve their economic resilience and diversify their economies."](#) They have also welcomed the UK's stated commitment to ["continue to work with \[its\] Caribbean partners to enhance their economic resilience and ability to adapt to climate impacts, including through direct support \[via various\] initiatives."](#)

In addition, the 2022 UK aid strategy's emphasis on and prioritization of climate change and biodiversity have been well received by CARICOM, which comprises small island and low-lying coastal developing states, especially as Whitehall officials have played up the UK as being well placed to support the region's climate-related ["needs and asks."](#) (In a significant way, there is carryover to IR2023.) Such signals seem propitious, as CARICOM is [playing](#) an increasingly important role in global climate governance and related action. In this regard, the bloc is exercising a leadership role in marshalling an agenda for and action around the climate crisis.

Such international actors have no other choice but to do so. This is because the [prevailing circumstances](#) undermine the [national interests](#) of and continuously raise the stakes for virtually all CARICOM member states, not least because they are confronted by ["debt and climate emergencies"](#) and for whom [resilience-building](#) is key.

Against this backdrop, [unorthodox policy solutions](#) are required, the likes of which Barbados—a leading member of the bloc—is at the [forefront of promoting](#) through [international cooperation and multilateral processes](#). Indeed, Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley has emerged as a [leading voice](#) among [those](#) making the case for sweeping reform of the global financial architecture. In these political and diplomatic circles, such calls are [amplified](#) by [debates](#) around climate finance and concessional financing. For instance, they have given impetus, among other things, to a climate change-themed, Paris-hosted [summit](#) carded for June, whose [sights](#) are set on advancing a New Global Financial Pact.

As their interests and future are most at [risk](#) due to the multifaceted nature of this [crisis](#), lending to a so-called "[uncertainty complex](#)," CARICOM member states are rightly at the [forefront](#) of [international efforts](#) to address this challenge, which they view in existential terms. Prospective British support of such efforts can only strengthen CARICOM's hand on the international stage, helping to drive impact in international climate-related policy. Securing British support should therefore be a key CARICOM objective going into the Eleventh Ministerial Forum.

What Else to Watch for regarding CARICOM Interests, Expectations

CARICOM member states' delegations are also expected to call for the Eleventh Ministerial Forum to make headway on other matters at the heart of contemporary UK-Caribbean relations. They include the implementation and operationalization of the [CARIFORUM-UK Economic Partnership Agreement](#), which is a [trade continuity agreement](#) arising as a result of Brexit. There is also a strong interest in encouraging UK investment in the Caribbean. The UK's private sector is [exuberant](#) about Guyana's new and [booming](#) oil and gas sector, which international relations experts contend Western powers are thinking about in terms of "[\[t\]he need \[in the current international environment\] for energy security](#)." In light of its [energy security priorities](#), at a time when [Europe's energy security](#) is also the subject of [intense focus](#) vis-à-vis the loss of the continent's [peace dividend](#), the UK is a demandeur in this policy area.

For its part, CARICOM has adopted a strategy on advancing energy security. This in a policy context where heads of government have "[agreed to increase focus and investment in energy security by utilising and harnessing hydrocarbon resources in the region towards reducing dependency on external resources and supplying the growing global needs arising out of the Russia-Ukraine conflict](#)."

These matters, among others, are likely to see a push at the Ministerial Forum, not least because both sides coalesce around them.

Some other issues remain a work in progress. For instance, there is the question of the desirability of wider visa-free travel for Caribbean nationals visiting the UK.

Haiti's "[multi-dimensional crisis](#)," which the UNSC is "[keep\[ing\] under continuous review](#)," is also of [concern](#). The Ministerial Forum will surely take this matter up.

Finally, the united Caribbean view on the need for [reform](#) of the UNSC may come up for discussion. Possible diplomatic manoeuvring, on the part of the UK delegation, on the Ukraine

war could be met by the Caribbean side calling attention to prevailing [criticism](#) of the Security Council. The geopolitical moment has [sparked](#) a resurgence of interest in UNSC reform.

On Balance

It certainly is the case that some of what London has telegraphed in the lead-up to the Eleventh Ministerial Forum has given the Caribbean side pause. But there is reason for optimism, in answer to the underlying question, 'Can this Forum deliver?' Set against the promising climate-related meeting of the minds over the years between the UK and Caribbean sides, which are seized of the [dire assessments](#) of and [recent gains](#) in associated international efforts, the Forum holds promise to move the partnership forward and strengthen requisite action by all parties concerned. And then there are the expected cumulative gains associated with advances in other policy areas, as highlighted above. In short, the partnership should benefit from progress foreseen in those areas. Strides in giving effect to the above-mentioned action plan must also be taken into account.

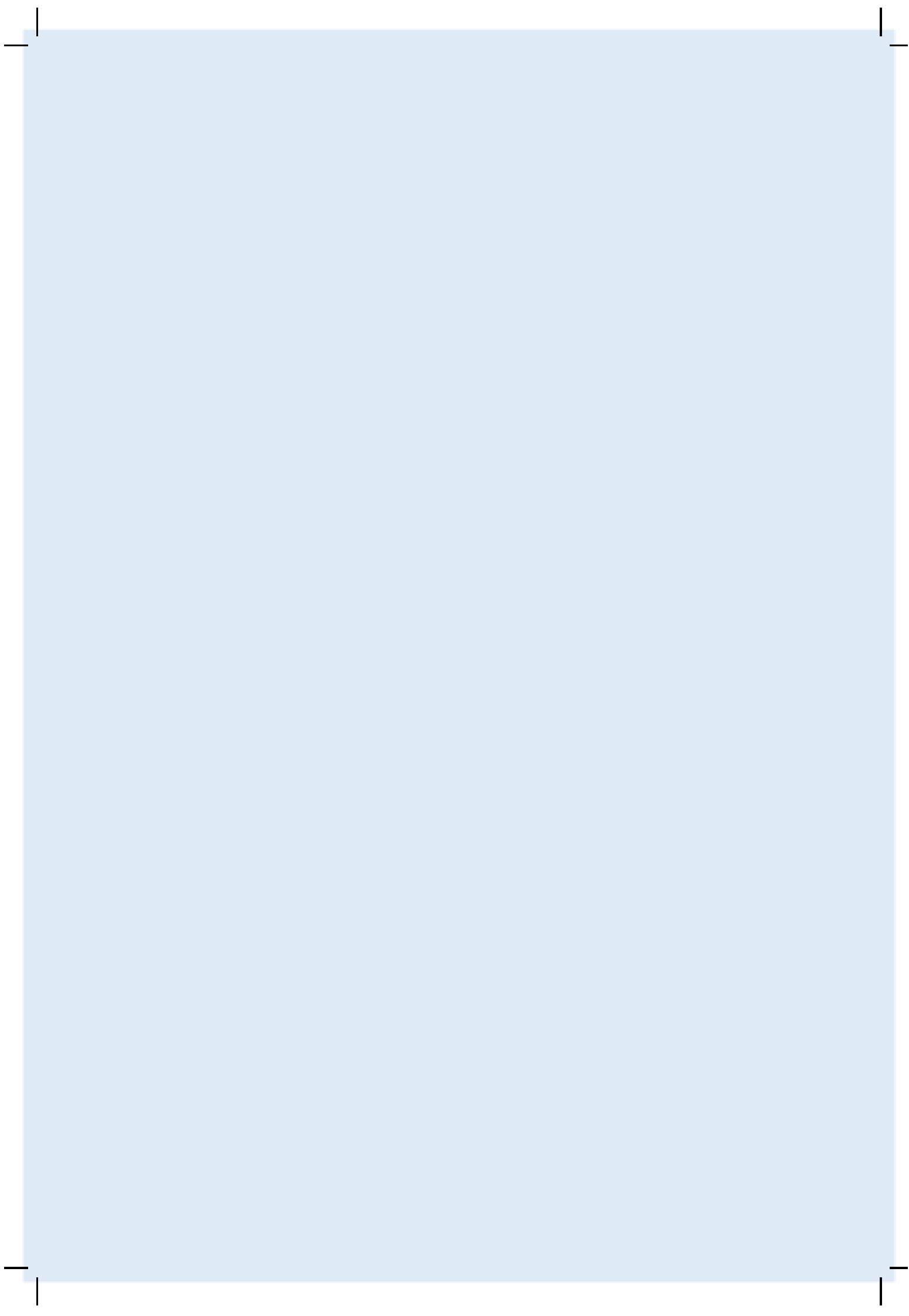
However, one or both of the sides may find that the security-related considerations of this geopolitical moment could have a bearing on the dynamics of cooperation. In this reading of the upcoming deliberations it becomes apparent that, in this moment, the notion of stretching the conventional understanding of the parameters within which UK-Caribbean partnership talks take place is as much a Caribbean interest as it is a UK interest. But the reasoning behind such a diplomatic scenario has different motivations and geoeconomic-cum-geopolitical end goals, which align with the respective sides' distinctive national interests.

That said, for some CARICOM foreign policy insiders, the UK's determination of its geopolitical priorities vis-à-vis Africa and the Indo-Pacific will be far more influential in regard to the level of cooperation with the Caribbean than the geopolitical sentiments of the moment stemming from the Ukraine war.

Suffice to say, having reached its silver anniversary, the UK-Caribbean partnership is grappling with an increasingly expansive and complex agenda, which warrants a relook into the conduct of the relationship.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Patrick I. Gomes, Ambassador Colin Granderson, Ambassador David Hales and Ambassador Riyad Insanally for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

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Volume III

An International Organization-hinged Explanation of CARICOM's Diplomatic Successes

Insights from Five Cases, along with a Research Companion to
the published article titled '*Small States, Big Impact*'

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

August 22, 2023

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Small States, Big Impact: CARICOM's High-level Diplomatic Successes

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Meaningful gains in aspects of contemporary, high-profile processes of international cooperation and multilateralism have taken on a [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#)-related character.

CARICOM has a special focus on amplifying its members' voices and advancing concerted attention to and action on their interests in international affairs, emphasizing the importance of ["enhanced co-ordination of Member States' foreign and \[foreign\] economic policies."](#)

Drawing on International Relations (IR)-related scholarly insights that ["leadership requires an institutionalised context"](#) and that it [manifests in institutional terms](#), not just [structurally](#), I glimpse at five international-level instances where such [small states](#) have a sharper focus on leading from the front. I also showcase some interests driving their associated statecraft, for which [international organizations \(IOs\)](#) are hands down the difference makers. In analytically treating these states as more than just variables of [system-level](#) dynamics in hegemonic order making (of [one kind](#) or [the other](#)), whose claims downplay their diplomatic hand, we can uncover how CARICOM is leaving its mark on global leadership.

Top-line Diplomacy, with a CARICOM Character

Case No.1

Recently, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations (UN) Dennis Francis was [elected](#) by acclamation to the presidency of the 78th Session of the [UN General Assembly \(UNGA\)](#). A historic first for Trinidad and Tobago, this election took place against a backdrop where it was the Group of Latin America and Caribbean States' (GRULAC) turn to preside over that body and it was CARICOM's turn to present a candidate accordingly.

Prior to Trinidad and Tobago's upcoming UNGA presidency, the [following](#) CARICOM member states held that role: Antigua and Barbuda – 68th session (2013); Saint Lucia – 10th emergency special (resumed) session (2004, 2003) & 58th session (2003); Guyana – 48th session (1993).

Amid rising global stakes, it is significant that Trinidad and Tobago is set to assume the UNGA presidency. By UN Secretary-General António Guterres' own reckoning, this country of around 1.4 million people will take up this role at a time when the UN arguably faces what perhaps is its most [fraught moment](#) to-date.

Weighing the significance of the UNGA's contribution at this time against that of the [UN Security Council \(UNSC\)](#) is revealing for the following reason. The latter body, whose primary

responsibility is taken up with the maintenance of international peace and security, has seen its ability to function [undermined](#) by the “[geopolitical moment](#)” brought about by Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Given the Ukraine war-related [logjam](#) in the UNSC, but also the “[global collective action](#)” imperative regarding [global issues of the day](#), the international community has had to turn with increased frequency to the UNGA—the [world’s ‘town hall.’](#)

What is more, chairing such an international body affords an opportunity to steer “[a potential power platform in international cooperation.](#)” This should be seen as driven by the logic that having such a seat at the [global governance](#)-related table is decisive for bringing about fundamental rethinking on how to address *inter alia* CARICOM’s enduring challenges; all while rallying support for requisite policy action and, possibly, clinching “[significant outcomes in international affairs.](#)”

Case No.2

Moreover, non-permanent UNSC membership is also highly sought-after by the [14 sovereign, Small Island and Low-lying Coastal Developing States \(SIDS\)](#) which comprise the CARICOM bloc. In point of [fact](#), “[t]he political leadership and foreign policy establishment in this type of state seek to astutely use this status tactic to good effect in order to play more of a role in global affairs and corresponding international regimes as well as discerning opportunities to successfully achieve their foreign policy goals.”

Guyana was the first of just a handful of CARICOM member states that to-date have held a non-permanent UNSC seat, having done so in the first instance only nine years after it was admitted to the UN in 1966.

In January 2020, St. Vincent and the Grenadines became the [smallest country ever](#) to secure the GRULAC [allocated](#), non-permanent seat on the UNSC. St. Vincent and the Grenadines had a particular interest in calling attention to “[pandemics, environmental challenges, climate change and its security consequences and the nexus between development and peace and security;](#)” all of which align with CARICOM member states’ respective [national interests](#).

Insofar as international politics is constitutive of “[status communities,](#)” St. Vincent and the Grenadines’ status got a significant boost in those terms. This matters, given that “[small states’ positions in international relationships create constraints and opportunities in their pursuits of key goals.](#)”

Just a few weeks ago, Guyana was [elected](#) as a non-permanent member of the UNSC for a two-year [term](#), which spans January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2025. This is the third time that Guyana has secured this seat and it is an accomplishment that distinguishes it within CARICOM. Only three other CARICOM member states have also had stints on the UNSC, but only either once or twice.

Georgetown is touting an [ambitious UNSC-related focus](#), which will likely redound to the benefit of CARICOM, not least because of the bloc’s [special interest](#) in its designation as a [Zone of Peace](#).

Case No.3

Beyond the UN, in the realm of interregional diplomacy, earlier this year, at the VII summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), St. Vincent and the Grenadines assumed the pro tempore presidency of this 33-nation bloc.

The [first](#) CARICOM member state elected to this position, this eastern Caribbean country would go on to co-chair the [2023 EU-CELAC summit](#), held last month. In a context where the two-day summit was overshadowed by “[wrangling over](#)” the said geopolitical moment, St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves had to rise to the occasion in seeing through the [summit declaration](#). Gonsalves had a huge stake in doing so, taking into consideration that: 1) It afforded yet another opportunity for his country and the Caribbean to burnish their credentials as a global leader; and 2) EU-CELAC relations cannot be viewed in isolation from the Caribbean’s [long-standing](#) relations with the EU, which in recent years have been transformed under the aegis of a [new legal framework](#) (known as the [post-Cotonou Agreement](#)) and are a key component of enhancing its multilateral footprint in service of its developmental objectives.

Case No.4

It is also hard to see past the hand of CARICOM when thinking about [climate action](#) which, to a significant degree, informs the foreign policy choices of this bloc. It is of some significance that Guterres, who has emerged as a [friend](#) of these states, [appointed](#) Grenadian Simon Stiell to head the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Indeed, in staking out a consequential role in both regards, these states are enjoined to leverage coordinated diplomacy, while “[bolster\[ing\] ... relations with like-minded states.](#)” This diplomatic positioning is responsive to the climate change-related reality regarding CARICOM member states, for whom the stakes are high.

That reality has laid bare the costs and risks, which are steadily accumulating. Consider that while it is widely viewed as the “[defining crisis of our time,](#)” global climate change is recognized as “[the defining feature of the Caribbean developmental landscape.](#)” Having regard to the emphasis placed on [extreme global weather and climate-related events](#) in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s [sixth assessment report](#), it is [instructive](#) that “[t]he Caribbean is the most exposed region to climate-related natural disasters, with estimated adaptation investment needs of more than \$100 billion, equal to about one-third of its annual economic output.”

It is now clear that for Caribbean countries, the climate crisis and its [multi-pronged](#) fallout are especially untenable. Just in economic growth terms, they are the worse for it, not least because they are among the [most indebted](#) in the world. That SIDS [bear the brunt](#) of climate change, all the while facing what are [well-documented](#) structural constraints, their developmental prospects are burdened still further. (An illustrative example is [Dominica’s experience](#) with Hurricane Maria and its [aftermath](#).)

This at a time when there is little of note pertaining to a much-needed paradigm shift in respect of [concessional financing criteria](#) vis-à-vis most CARICOM member states. Indeed, while the

basic concept behind a [multidimensional vulnerability index](#) seems reasonable enough in many quarters, efforts to advance on the same on the international stage have yet to gain full momentum. All the while, efforts to move the needle on climate change-related [financing solutions](#) have yet to close the gap between best intentions and meaningful action. Simply put, while COP27 ended with great fanfare regarding a much-touted historic loss and damage fund for developing countries, with establishment players [underscoring](#) that “the negotiated text recognized the need for financial support from a variety of sources, no decisions have been made on who should pay into the fund, where this money will come from and which countries will benefit.”

Making headway in that regard, tantamount to developing country-centric potential gains, would be critically important for CARICOM member states.

It is noteworthy that in recent decades, the international community’s resolve in supporting the cause of SIDS like those of CARICOM has strengthened. The [Accelerated Modalities of Action \(SAMOA\) Pathway](#), in which CARICOM remains [integrally involved](#), is a landmark multilateral initiative that has brought this cause into focus.

Case No.5

Climate change is no less challenging an issue on the global agenda than reform of the international financial system, which is yet another initiative that Barbados is [out front](#) on. Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley is leading a growing chorus of [calls for an overhaul](#) of the international financial order, all in ways that are [influencing debate](#) on whether [certain international institutions](#) and the [development aid](#) system are [fit for purpose](#).

CARICOM Heads of Government are seized of the urgency of [bringing](#) on stream “measures to improve the functioning of the global financial system, particularly in the context of the numerous crises adversely affecting the Community and which put Middle Income Countries at real risk for reversal of economic gains and descent into impoverishment.” Accordingly, especially given their SIDS-related concerns, these leaders have thrown their weight behind [The Bridgetown Initiative](#), [agreeing](#) that it is “a viable model to build on with respect to the reform of the global financial system.”

More broadly, among the top drivers of the debate on the important issues at stake relative to global governance reforms *vis-à-vis* SIDS [are](#) “altering the way official development assistance is defined, generating new forms of debt relief, reforming climate financing mechanisms, and facilitating access to the labour markets of the Global North.” In a number of quarters in the Global South and Global North, [concerted efforts](#) are already underway to make that happen. Once again, CARICOM is deeply [involved](#) diplomatically.

Thus far, the [signals](#) from establishment power centres have been encouraging. Yet, there is seemingly a long way to go to achieve reform-related goals. Nonetheless, it counts for a lot that Guterres, who is [pushing](#) for his organization’s membership to come back on track to achieving the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) in a post-COVID-19 pandemic era world, has [come down hard](#) on the global financial architecture.

Implications and Conclusion

What should be readily apparent from the foregoing analysis is that small states in international politics have drawn renewed (even heightened) attention, and in so doing are dispelling the [conventional wisdom](#) about them being “[marginal actors who exist on the periphery of global affairs](#).” I have argued firstly that, in defiance of the large *qua* powerful/dominant state-leaning structural realities of the international system, which is [hierarchically](#) configured, today’s CARICOM bloc is best seen as having successfully tapped into international relations-based agenda setting.

My aim, however, is not to oversell this point. Rather, in the terms outlined above, recognizing that their power repertoire is [circumscribed](#) by size-related circumstances and the [nature](#) of the international system, those small states are shown to have a keen interest in disrupting [conventional understandings](#) of *who* should lead globally and *in what* aspects of global governance they should stake a claim to leadership.

This finding has implications for how we should view small states’ foreign policy concerns and IOs which, in the overall scheme of things, are a pivotal factor in these states’ foreign policy calculus.

Certainly, [key power players](#) have also gotten behind them in that regard, at a time when an emergent petro-state among them “[has](#) suddenly become a country of real interest to the most powerful nation in the world.”

This was not always the case. Jamaica’s [involvement](#), for instance, in concerted attempts to bring off the overambitious New International Economic Order (NIEO) comes to mind. This now decades-old transnational initiative held out the promise of systematically cutting away at the legacies of colonialism and empire that the global political economy [perpetuates](#), as characterized by its [backers](#), who were concerned with the “[pervasive effects of the operation of world capitalism](#).” Ultimately, NIEO proponents were [met with](#) varying degrees of push back in some Western quarters.

Second and relatedly, with Trinidad and Tobago’s leadership role in the UNGA on the international politics-related horizon, both this southern Caribbean country and, by extension, CARICOM will take a step forward regarding global leadership. (In all fairness, while significant for the respective states, the UNGA and UNSC cases herein must be seen in the context of the GRULAC turn and its internal rotation.)

More than that, and finally, given the apparent heightened positioning of the other global leadership-driven diplomatic manoeuvres in question in such states’ foreign policy praxis, the nexus between that sort of leadership and their international agency becomes apparent. Indeed, recent decades have seen an increased focus on the part of CARICOM member states on this praxis. The latter is steeped in a logic of international agency, as viewed through the prism of an ever-evolving, more complex contemporary international system.

An Agenda for Further Research on CARICOM and Global Politics

This article contributes to the development of a better understanding of CARICOM member states' strategic approach to [power](#) vis-à-vis the conduct of their international relations, underlining the prominence given thereto to IOs. This in a context where the [mainstream](#) scholarly reading of international relations [straightjackets](#) small states, as it rests on the belief that "a state's power [is] the combination of the tangible resources used to serve its interests." That perspective is paradigmatically ill-configured to take into account the extent to which IOs are [force multipliers](#) for such states' international cooperation, a driving force behind their [development](#).

That said, this article leaves many unanswered interrelated questions about:

1. How the bloc has sought to attain its many achievements on the international stage;
2. How the bloc has successfully boosted its standing in the international community and under what conditions; and
3. What the bloc must now do better and how so.

There is still much we do not know about how CARICOM has made the most of its diplomatic hand, even though some [IR scholars](#) have made important intellectual strides in that regard. Over the last 10 years, a period of seismic shifts pertaining to the international system, this matter has received far too little scholarly attention.

All the more reason, then, that the issues under reference ought to be up for debate, with a view to gaining a full picture of and shedding new light on CARICOM's associated diplomatic playbook.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Patrick I. Gomes, Ambassador Colin Granderson, Ambassador David Hales and Ambassador Riyad Insanally for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

To access the foregoing published article online, please [click here](#).

International Organizations' Outsized Place in CARICOM's Diplomatic Playbook

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At a time when there is renewed scholarly attention in International Relations (IR) to small states and their circumstances, the publication in June 2023 of a case study-informed edited volume titled *The Success of Small States in International Relations* is a welcome contribution. According to its editor and renowned small states scholar Professor Godfrey Baldacchino, this timely and impressive book showcases “thirteen episodes in modern history where small states” carried the day in international politics. In this telling, which pushes back on academic caricatures of small states in the discipline, an emphasis is placed not on “strategies of resistance ... but strategies of success.”

For the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), a bloc of small states, international organizations (IOs) are fundamental to strategies of success regarding the conduct of its international relations in a context where the prevailing (international) politics often prove far costlier for such states. Accordingly, IOs feature prominently in the calculations of the bloc's foreign policy establishment, i.e. The Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR).

Small States, System Let Down and the Bottom Line

Unlike major powers and, to a lesser degree, middle powers, small states—which are typologically vague in the discipline of IR—have not traditionally held the scholarly spotlight.

The prevailing tendency of “problem-solving” qua neorealist IR scholarship is to narrowly view small states through the prism of their materially weaker positions relative to large states, making associated determinations about their lot in the anarchic international system. As one scholar argues, small states do “not have a foreign policy; they merely have a policy of existence.” Notwithstanding all of the loose talk of the marginal role of such states—e.g. CARICOM member states—in international affairs, as this article points out, the picture is much more complex.

A more nuanced reading of what obtains in that regard suggests that they are adept at tapping into IOs as force multipliers vis-à-vis their international cooperation, a driving force behind their development. (For IOs, too, benefits arise from the nexus between themselves and small states' foreign policy praxis.) Moreover, for CARICOM member states, IOs are the difference makers, not least because these international actors better position them to exert influence over global debates—as some of the bloc's “latest diplomatic victories” have shown.

In this sense, CARICOM member states have a keen interest in disrupting conventional understandings of who should lead globally and in what aspects of global governance they should stake a claim to leadership, with a view to challenging associated shibboleths.

In doing so, they want to [jolt](#) (Western) hands in global [power](#) centres. The rationale is that, amid the enormous complexity of conflicting interests and competing agendas in the global governance space, by leading from the front the development-related interests of the [14 sovereign Small Island and Low-lying Coastal Developing States \(SIDS\)](#) comprising the CARICOM bloc will get a fair(er) shake from the said system.

This in a context where CARICOM member states' [experiences](#) with climate action and the international financial system are a reminder that, for them, the *status quo ante* has fallen short. What is more, for now, CARICOM member states' development is [veering off course](#).

CARICOM Has Laid New IO-related Plans with Immediate Significance

As the CARICOM bloc is driven to step up at this time to assume global leadership responsibilities, the task of upgrading the IO-related pivot of its diplomatic playbook has taken on new urgency.

This helps explain why regional foreign policymakers publicly [allude](#) to “the vital importance of candidatures to CARICOM’s foreign policy and the need for coordination to ensure that CARICOM candidatures are successful.” Specifically, at the most recent meeting of CARICOM foreign ministers, a decision was [taken](#) to “establish a Technical Working Group to undertake a comprehensive review of the Principles to Guide the Identification of CARICOM Candidates for International Positions ... [and that] [t]he Group is to prepare a report for [a] Special Meeting of the COFCOR in September 2023.”

Nonetheless, placing CARICOM representatives in leadership and senior posts in international organizations has been a long-standing feature of CARICOM foreign policy. Indeed, the item of CARICOM candidacies for international and regional posts has been on the COFCOR agenda from day one. From time to time, foreign ministers have made requests to have the relevant guiding principles reviewed, as was decisively done recently.

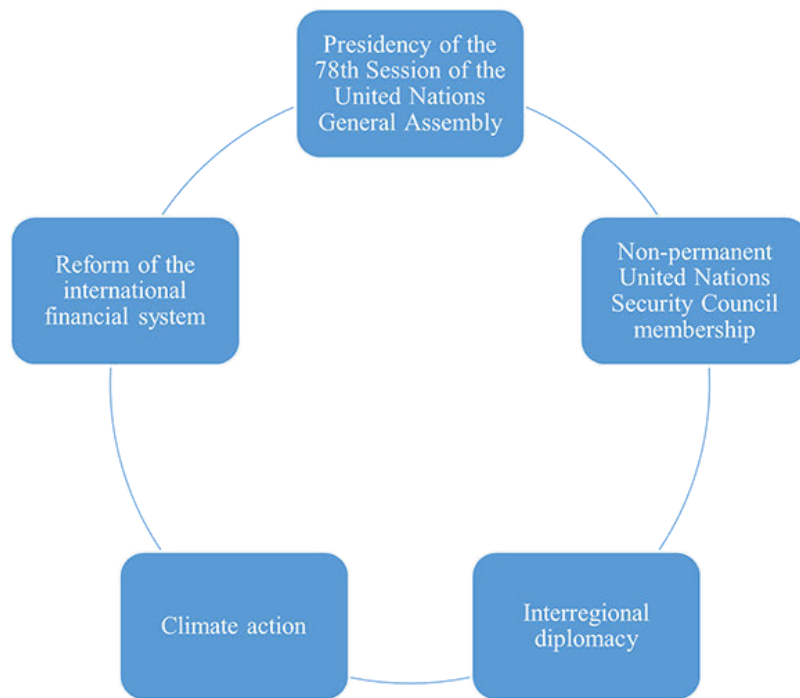
This lends itself to system-level change, which challenges conventional thinking and, by extension, established players in international politics.

In short, if the goal is to pursue “[self-help strategies](#)” and bring about a paradigm shift as regards solutions to thorny issues like climate action and reform of the international financial system, for instance, anything less won’t do much good.

CARICOM is looking at the big picture, putting a premium on global leadership on select issues of foreign policy significance.

CARICOM Is Holding Its Own

Recently, [attention was drawn](#) to five prominent international-level instances where CARICOM sought to leverage IOs to get ahead in global leadership. The cases—which provide a window into how such states were up to the task of global leadership and the degree to which they are invested in multilateralism—are illustrated below.



Five CARICOM-related Cases of Leading from the Front in Global Governance

The thinking behind the bloc’s diplomatic positioning as it pertains to the aforementioned cases of global leadership is instructive. Notably, for the Anglophone members of CARICOM, who gained and sought to reinforce independence from the 1960s to the 1980s, an [overriding foreign policy concern](#) is their [economic qua developmental advancement](#). In their emphasis on this dimension of foreign policy, wider security concerns also hold broad applicability. ([Looking to history](#), then, those [interests](#) have primarily been of an economic and political nature.) It bears repeating that, as “[system-ineffectual states](#),” CARICOM member states gear their foreign policy toward harnessing processes and institutions of multilateralism to [project](#) their voices in and to expand their foreign policy outcomes *vis-à-vis* international politics.

With the 78th session of the [United Nations General Assembly \(UNGA\)](#) commencing in less than a month, when the international community will be focused on the high-level UNGA [General Debate](#) (along with the [High-level Week 2023](#)), CARICOM’s foreign policy cognoscenti is weighing how best to [promote and protect](#) the bloc’s interests. With its leaders out front, as expected, this regional grouping will underline its unwavering commitment to international cooperation and multilateralism. But even as this diplomatic stance resonates with them—given the existential challenges they face and the stakes involved—they are probably more of the mind to reaffirm calls for Western governments in particular to hit the reset button on Global North approaches to those very debates.

Topping the list is climate change, which is no less challenging an issue on the global agenda than reform of the international financial system. As already intimated, global (in)action in this respect can make or break the developmental prospects of CARICOM member states.

To be sure, much like any other complex set of policy issues in the international development space which are regarded as being portents of such states' [underdevelopment](#), these top-tier CARICOM foreign policy matters are not mutually exclusive.

The sooner Global North and Global South countries reach a consensus on the nexus between the two and the requisite solutions-driven action, the sooner developing countries—like those of CARICOM—can get the help they so desperately need to turnaround their [developmental prospects](#).

Along the way, in an effort to help move Global South perspectives to the front burner, CARICOM must be afforded the opportunity to continue to meaningfully lay the groundwork accordingly.

A recently-held, UN-facilitated [regional forum](#) that St. Vincent and the Grenadines hosted and that is integral to UN-level efforts to successfully bring off next year the [fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States](#) did just that, having [deepened understanding](#) of and policy-related positioning on several interlinked matters of concern to SIDS. The [Bridgetown Initiative and the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index](#), which both enjoy strong support among CARICOM's leaders, attracted [special attention](#) in that vein.

The meeting adopted an [outcome document](#), which outlines “[comprehensive recommendations and strategic action plans specifically tailored for the Caribbean region](#).” To be clear, this outcome is pivotal for the *fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States*. This planned high-profile meeting is geared towards evaluating progress made over the last decade in the implementation of the [Accelerated Modalities of Action \(SAMOA\) Pathway](#), in which CARICOM remains [integrally involved](#) and which is a foci of the international community's resolve to support the cause of SIDS.

No less importantly, that outcome also illustrates the strength of the CARICOM bloc's leadership, which will be on display *inter alia* at the UNGA General Debate and the bevy of associated meetings, including bilateral meetings which will take place in the margins.

In sum, CARICOM—which has a special focus on amplifying its members' voices and advancing concerted attention to and action on their interests in international affairs *via* “[enhanced co-ordination of Member States' foreign and \[foreign\] economic policies](#)”—is harnessing IOs to good effect. This is paying off, as CARICOM's stake in continued SIDS-related advocacy demonstrates. Consequentially, from this effort sprang a certitude that such states—as evidenced by their ability “[to advance global climate policy in defining ways](#)”—have the wherewithal to lead on the international stage.

Concluding Discussion and Outlook

This article, whose small states-related agential narrative dovetails with that of Baldacchino et al. under reference, has presented an IO-hinged explanation of some of CARICOM's highly visible diplomatic successes. The aforesaid book by Baldacchino et al. is an outgrowth, on the one hand, of the [current period](#) of intellectual ferment in IR (at a meta-theoretical and theory-building level) and, on the other hand, the broader and long-running [agency-structure](#) debate

in social theory. In either case, by and large, its contributors are united by the belief in and research traditions of an [actor-specific focus](#). On the IR side of the ledger, taking into consideration Baldacchino's dismissal of the mindset that '*small*' is obviously and naturally weak and inconsequential, the collaborators on the book seemingly find much in common with the intellectual standpoint of interpretivists or [reflectivists](#). On the social theory side of things, which [some IR scholars](#) treat with in a foreign policy context, the volume's analytical approach takes seriously the salience of revisioning of small states' agency in international politics.

The empirical contribution of this article coheres with the intellectual framing of the book in question by Baldacchino et al., integrating concern for the need to better understand the IO-driven nature of CARICOM foreign policy into a growing wave of small states oriented, agential IR scholarly research. One limitation of this work is that it does not focus on the fact that CARICOM's foreign policy-related IO approach has its limits, not least because regional states do not necessarily define their national interests concordantly with each other. A case in point is that regarding resolutions in the Organization of American States pertaining to Venezuela's political instability, CARICOM member states "[have been divided](#)." Furthermore, one would do well to ask: [Whither CARICOM states' interests in a new age of great-power geopolitics?](#) This matter has important implications for CARICOM's foreign policy-related IO approach.

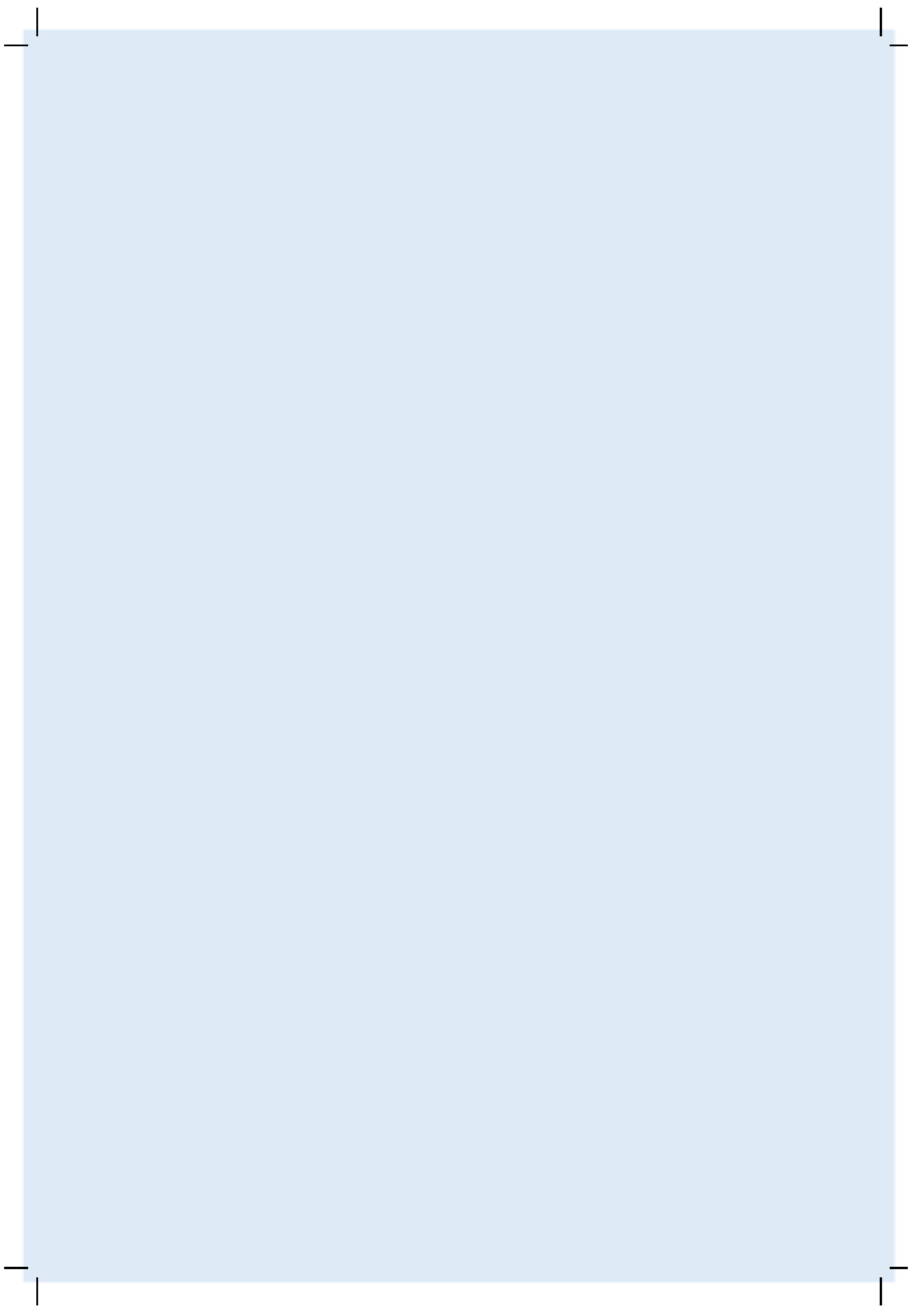
The stark reality of the foregoing, CARICOM-related case also needs to be brought to light. All this suggests even more demands will be placed on the Foreign and Community Relations Directorate of the Guyana-headquartered CARICOM Secretariat—"the [principal administrative organ of the Community](#)"—making it crucially important that (in light of its relatively small institutional footprint) this directorate be adequately resourced. This will send the strongest possible signal that at a time when the CARICOM bloc is leaning into a renewed foreign policy focus, the Secretariat is primed to energise its support of those efforts.

That said, matching these demands with the imperative of appropriately [financing/configuring](#) the CARICOM Secretariat and efforts to secure the [political will](#) to deepen regional integration are proverbial sticking points. While both are essential to fully achieving this more assertive foreign policy approach, they are elusive. (Whether this reality will be reversed any time soon remains to be seen.) Taken together, and not lost on CARICOM insiders, they are key to the CARICOM bloc finding potent solutions to the increasingly challenging nature of foreign policymaking in contemporary international politics.

Future work should pay close attention to these issues, and more. While research efforts into the 'black box' of CARICOM's foreign policymaking have [received their due](#), a new generation of IR scholars would do well to unpack anew the manifold issues arising in the context of today's international politics.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Patrick I. Gomes, Ambassador Colin Granderson and Ambassador David Hales for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. Special thanks to Ambassador Godfrey Baldacchino for his insightful feedback.

To access the foregoing published article online, please [click here](#).



Primer Nº 2

The Caribbean Community and the Coming, High-Stakes Multipolar International Order

Keywords:

CARICOM	Multipolar International Order	BRICS	G20	Summit Diplomacy, Power and the National Interest	Post-Western Global Order	Unipolar Moment and Great-power Competition & Engagement	Geopolitics of Wars of Attrition/Ukraine War	Small States	Foreign Policy Establishment
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Towards a New BRICS-G20 Nexus

OPINION - September 18, 2023

The BRICS grouping may have taken the world by storm, but the national interests of various member states continue to stymie the emergence of any meaningful pan-BRICS ideology.



BRICS: An Inconvenient, Hard Truth

OPINION - September 19, 2023

The BRICS grouping owes its ascent in large part to a shared disdain for the excesses of the unipolar moment, and this is making for some awkward comparisons in the shadow of the Ukraine war.



High-Stakes Geopolitical Manoeuvres of the Moment

OPINION - September 25, 2023

As one geopolitical epoch gives way to another, Churchill's old dictum rings true as always: "In history lies all the secrets of statecraft."

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The Caribbean Community

and the

Coming, High- Stakes Multipolar International Order

A Collection of Two
Volumes of Essays

Published over the month:
September 2023

September 26, 2023

By

Nand C. Bardouille

Volume I

The BRICS Group, G20 and the Geopolitics of Great-power Competition

A Lead and Companion Article

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

September 19, 2023

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Towards a New BRICS-G20 Nexus

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September 18, 2023

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An ascendant BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—has now reached new heights, ranking as a geopolitical force for the West to reckon with at the cusp of and in the seemingly emergent multipolar international order.

If gaining greater global standing is a measure of [power](#), the [expansion](#) of the BRICS group to include the likes of Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates will likely give the grouping a leg up in taking the US/Western-led [liberal international order](#) to task, along with the [global governance](#)-related scheme of things.

Much of the [criticism](#) levelled at the BRICS group misses this point.

Yet, the group is under no illusion about its unmet leadership potential in the [international pecking order](#). Given the [role](#) of hierarchy in international politics—[whose](#) “systems are ... intrinsically political [either turning on] a relationship of legitimate authority [or] as intersubjective manifestations of organized inequality”—the group’s Global South constituency is looking to address its liminality in that vein.

If the tone of some of the most prominent voices contesting “[the West’s geopolitical dominance](#)” is any guide—or, put differently, given the full extent of ostensibly Global South-related leadership hands at work—a [post-Western global order](#) is seemingly [in the cards](#) for a constituency of countries.

The XV BRICS [Summit](#) held in South Africa from August 22nd to 24th, 2023 lends to and reinforces this view.

Moreover, what has also come into focus for BRICS watchers is the [outsized](#) role of respective BRICS members regarding the September 9th to 10th India-helmed, developing world-[oriented](#) G20 [summit](#).

Note should be taken that, historically, the emergence of the G20 is tied to global responses to the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. Accordingly, both in its form and function, a strong economic dimension permeates the group. Indeed, by the late 2000s, the G20 had established itself as a leading intergovernmental forum for international economic cooperation, boasting an expanding agenda and the incorporation of leader-level summits.

Up until the [recent admission](#) of the African Union to the G20 as a permanent member, it stood as a grouping of 19 countries and the European Union; altogether, constituting the world’s [largest economies](#). Traditionally, according to some observers, its Western members wielded virtually unchecked power over others.

Apparently, and owing to the considerable influence of respective members of the BRICS group, this latter dynamic and the carefully crafted image that has held it up for years are [under challenge](#).

Indeed, European leaders [worry](#) about the West's waning influence internationally.

In all of these respects, the G20 presidency under India—which recently [handed over](#) the reins to Brazil—has further chipped away at the Global North's leadership narrative. [Already](#) under stress, it is seemingly giving ground to other narratives. Not the least of these is that the G20 is now part and parcel of the BRICS group's [power](#) play for “[global prominence](#).”

But the true lesson of the G20 summit under reference, when viewed through a BRICS-related prism, is that—fundamentally—what exactly that play is and how that prominence is defined are not indicative of a unified narrative across/in the group.

Take, for example, the case of Russia. Adopted by consensus, the [G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration](#)—insofar as it “[avoids](#)” condemnation of Russia's hand in the Ukraine war—lends itself (at least in the Kremlin's mindset, calculation and public diplomacy) to Russia's wider foreign policy ends.

Going into the summit, the Kremlin had the narrowest of priorities (but a no less consequential geopolitical play for prominence in its diplomatic sights), and the ugly truth is it succeeded on that score.

The G20's top-tier advanced economies—which make up another group called the G7 (having traditionally played a leading role in the coordination of key aspects of global policy), whose prestige has been [called into question](#)—took a calculated risk in settling for such curbs on language in requisite, behind the scenes G20 declaration-related [negotiations](#).

Ultimately, they [came up short](#), against a geopolitical backdrop where security analysts are increasingly calling out the West for its part in Kyiv's “[stalling](#)” counter-offensive to retake Russian occupied Ukrainian territory.

In sum, the BRICS group's expanding influence in international politics has taken the diplomatic world by storm, against a background of those emerging nations having come into their own in the last few years.

But a reality check is in order for developing countries' foreign policy practitioners.

The clincher is with regard to how and to what end the BRICS group did just that is revealing of the sizeable degree to which respective [national interests](#)—and not the greater collective's much vaunted interests per se—are the driving forces behind the BRICS project(s). At the very least, this takes some of the shine away from the much-hyped mythology of the ‘[Bandung Spirit](#)’ tie-in to a so-called ‘[BRICS Spirit](#)’ and, by extension, the rhetoric of a common *qua* shared post-Western global order-related vision.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Riyad Insanally for his generous and insightful advice on an early version of this article, as well as his engaged commentary on related work. Special thanks to Ambassador David Hales for perusing an earlier draft of this article and for wide-ranging discourse, which shaped the author's perspective on underlying themes. The author is especially grateful to Ambassador Patrick I. Gomes for his incisive feedback, openness and encouragement regarding his scholarship, which also benefits from Ambassador Colin Granderson's input.

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BRICS: An Inconvenient, Hard Truth

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In Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises*, a well-known passage centres on a character's bankruptcy. In reflections therein on how he arrived at his misfortune, the following punchline is invoked: "[Gradually, then suddenly.](#)"

Changes in international politics happen much the same way, as the BRICS' (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) story to-date attests.

It is fitting and timely to frame the BRICS in such terms, calling attention to the group's recently held XV [Summit](#). This landmark summit gave new impetus to the group, whose history is steeped as much in a *narrative of reform* of the US/Western-leaning [international order](#) as it is in a *narrative of righteousness*.

Some two decades ago, appalled with some of the [worst excesses](#) of the [unipolar moment](#), Brazil took the lead in marshalling together a handful of like-minded, emerging nations.

At the time, in what was indicative of great hubris, Washington determined that "[the United States enjoys a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence.](#)"

Moreover, following 9/11 and related events, which ushered in the [Global War on Terror](#), Washington zealously pursued [military campaigns](#) in the Middle East and beyond.

The idea of such a grouping of emerging nations was to make common cause with each other, with a view to pushing back on Washington's unilateralism.

In this enterprise, Brasília, for instance, drew on "[Latin American contributions to international order \[which\] spring from a tradition of 'republican internationalism', rooted in the region's domestic political traditions and practices.](#)"

Years later, as regards the [Iraq War](#), other like-minded developing countries—like those of the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#)—unreservedly identified with and publicly [got behind](#) those who blazed a trail much earlier. The latter [took issue](#) with the Bush Doctrine, "[the policy framework for the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.](#)"

Short of venturing into a history of the BRICS, for our purposes, it is perhaps useful to emphasize that—over the years—the group's concerns with the international order's Western-built/oriented economic scaffolding and with its geopolitical ones have become more tightly bound, as international affairs analysts have [pointed out](#).

Associated calls for reform of [global governance](#) have fed into this narrative, coming at the expense of [conventional understandings](#) of the same. In this regard, the narrative orthodoxy reflects the post-war *status quo*, which is seemingly tone deaf to contemporary realities.

Instructively, the BRICS group came to signify those realities.

In the decade-plus since taking its current form, the BRICS have *gradually* become more assertive and weightier a group. The group looms large on the international stage, featuring in the geopolitical test of wills of our age, whose respective Sino-US and Russian-US relational axes form the fulcrum of the multipolar international order's imminent emergence.

With the advent of the Ukraine war, the BRICS group has *suddenly* assumed a new order of prominence.

The irony is that, as of February 24, 2022, on account of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the group is confronted with a throwback to its past *qua* origin story.

The difference is that, this time around, one of its own members is in the storm centre.

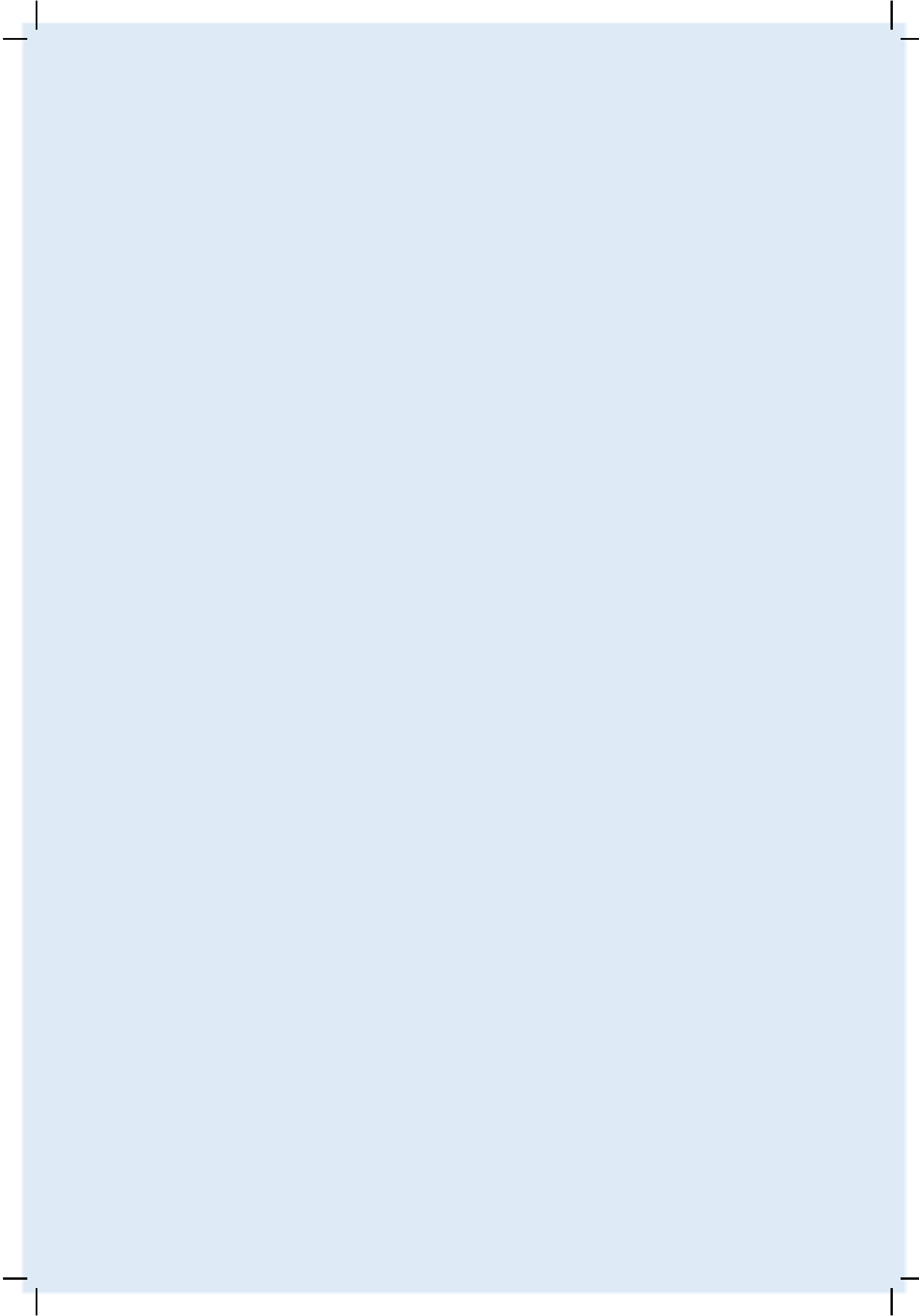
Not to be outdone by Washington's unipolar era-related overreach, in this interstices of eras, the Kremlin's Ukraine war-related [hubris](#) is attuned to 21st century [\(information\) warfare](#).

The very ([hard power](#)-related) unilateralist narrative that BRIC—established in 2009—and later BRICS (when South Africa joined the group in 2010) railed against in the 2000s and 2010s, respectively, appears not to figure in relation to Russia's war of aggression.

To the degree that the BRICS group's origin story draws significantly on its moral indignation with the unipolar moment going awry, now that the other shoe has dropped—in unipolar era-related egress—at least four of its five members are probably wrestling with and haunted by an inconvenient, hard truth.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Riyad Insanally for his generous and insightful advice on an early version of this article, as well as his engaged commentary on related work. Special thanks to Ambassador David Hales for perusing an earlier draft of this article and for wide-ranging discourse, which shaped the author's perspective on underlying themes. The author is especially grateful to Ambassador Patrick I. Gomes for his incisive feedback, openness and encouragement regarding his scholarship, which also benefits from Ambassador Colin Granderson's input.

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Volume II

The Geopolitics of Great-power Competition and 'The Rest': A Churchillian and CARICOM-related Assessment of the Stakes

A Lead and Companion Article

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

September 26, 2023

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High-Stakes Geopolitical Manoeuvres of the Moment

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With regard to international diplomacy of the hour, the [78th Session of the United Nations \(UN\) General Assembly General Debate](#) is where it's at. This yearly highlight of multilateralism, which draws world leaders together to shine a light on and debate solutions for important issues of the day, is just about to be in the international community's rear-view.

Yet—first, in the context of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) group's landmark XV [Summit](#) and, second, in the manner of the BRICS membership's [outsized](#) role regarding the G20 [summit](#) held thereafter—another consequential diplomatic moment only recently garnered the international community's attention.

This [BRICS moment](#), as it were, is revealing of the fact that the [interests](#) of two principal sub-groupings therein seemingly cut in opposite directions, even as there is some confluence of thinking on the Ukraine war.

Insofar as they are locked in [great-power competition](#)—which has once again eclipsed great-power engagement—with the United States, “[America's strategic competitors](#)” *à la* the BRICS group stand at one geopolitical pole. Notably, Russian President Vladimir Putin and the People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping have committed to a ‘[no limits](#)’ bilateral partnership.

Their respective U.S./Western-directed foreign policies are sharply confrontational, pointing to a break from the goodwill-*cum*-trust generated by the Clinton-Yeltsin [entente](#) (in the case of Russian-U.S. relations in the earliest days of the post-Cold War era) and the Nixon-Mao-driven—[Kissinger-orchestrated—rapprochement](#) (in the case of Sino-U.S. relations in the period of the ‘opening of China’ in the 1970s).

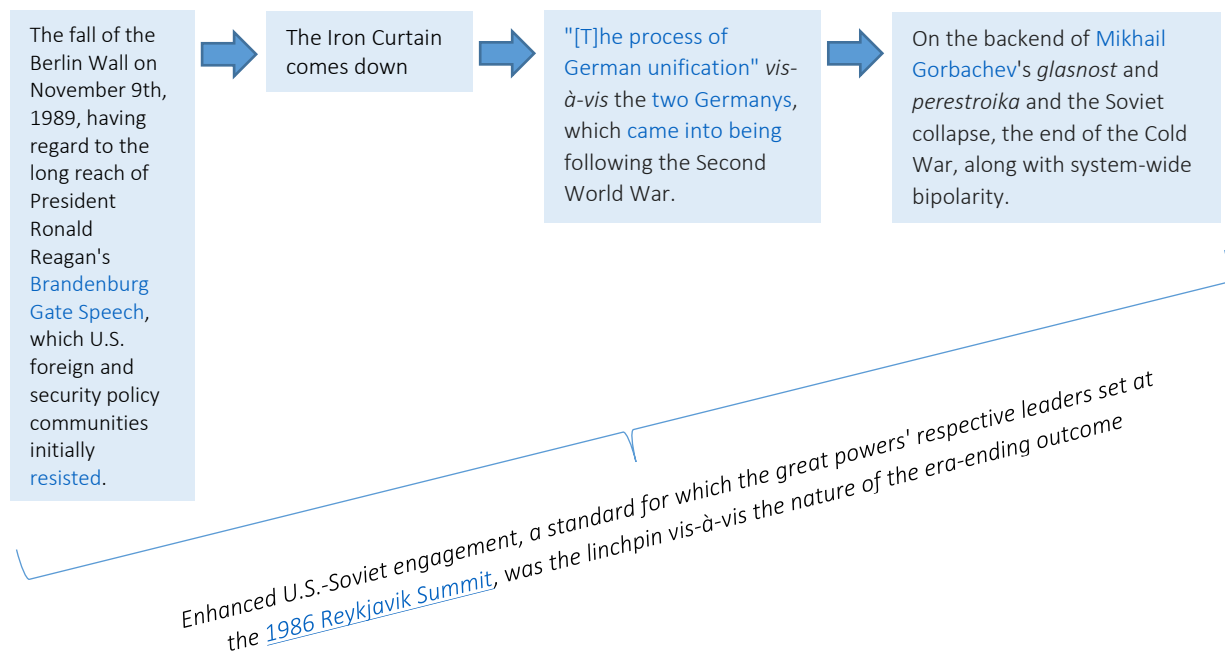
Taken together, these cases heralded a new age of great-power engagement.

With the foregoing in mind, it is useful to glimpse back in time; in particular, casting our gaze to the period of transition on the cusp of the aforesaid entente. As the United Kingdom's Second World War leader and statesman extraordinaire, the late Winston Churchill, famously said: “[The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see.](#)”

For our purposes, the Cold War's end is of interest. Instructively, great-power engagement was the hallmark of that geopolitical transition that played out just over three decades ago.

The idea that a geopolitical windfall, or, at the very least, security-related dividends will (likely) emerge from that type of sustained, high-level engagement especially rings true in the historical reality in question.

On account of a set of final negotiated steps—as illustrated below—the Cold War came to a “peaceful end,” which the international politics fraternity [failed](#) to predict.



Source: Author

As it pertains to the post-Cold War Russian-U.S. relational axis, that engagement collapsed in on itself, and the so-called [Putinisation](#) of Russia is particularly telling.

With regard to the Sino-U.S. relational axis, it was a decades-long, productive engagement—a highlight of which was the PRC’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001.

In the 2000s, great-power relations began to breakdown. Ultimately, they took a turn for the worse. [Brinkmanship](#) over [hot button issues](#) continues to unsettle the geopolitical landscape, sharpening divisions between adversaries. (Yet, their fraught relationship notwithstanding, the PRC and the U.S. [need](#) each other, as the world needs them to keep their cooperation even-keeled.)

Those relations, which reverberate at the level of the [global security architecture](#), soured. The common geopolitical denominator: Worsening relations with Washington come into play in a [system-level](#) context where the United States and Russia are going [toe-to-toe](#) in their confrontation with each other, with the PRC [running interference](#) for its [junior partner](#).

However, India, an Asian regional power—on account of the PRC’s geopolitical designs in the Indo-Pacific—is [deepening](#) security ties with the United States. Yet, New Delhi underlines its neutrality in respect of the Ukraine war. Notwithstanding its [hand-wringing](#), New Delhi makes no bones about its close relations with the Kremlin. Both of New Delhi’s above-stated positions are an outgrowth of “[its concerns vis-à-vis China and Pakistan](#),” as well as its desire to keep

the Kremlin in check in respect of further deepening of Russia's bilateral relations with each of them.

While early in the Biden Administration's first term in office Brasília signalled that it was [eyeing](#) a new era in Brazil's relations with the United States, in the period since, there has been a sharp change in tone. This South American powerhouse has taken to [bashing](#) American hegemony, all while pressing for a Brazilian [peace plan](#) as regards the Ukraine war that has not been well received by Kyiv. Stating plainly, it has raised the ire of both [Kyiv](#) and [its backers](#). As expected, regarding this turn of events, Brazil hands have expressed grave consternation.

Meanwhile, in several quarters, South Africa's hand in what is widely seen as a [bungled](#) African peace mission earlier this year to Russia and Ukraine *vis-à-vis* the Ukraine war continues to come under fire. Washington remains especially vocal about Pretoria's "[close ties with Moscow](#)," which [run deep](#), casting doubts about South Africa's [purported neutrality](#) in respect of the Ukraine war.

These latter three countries (i.e. [middle powers](#)) are in the captioned second (catch-all) sub-group, for whom the Ukraine war also features frontally in foreign policy calculus.

In line with their respective national interests, with an eye to the first sub-group's respective actors (i.e. [major powers](#)), they play off how they diplomatically angle on the matter.

That said, for the reasons outlined above, India is invested in strong ties with the United States and the West. Beyond this, the importance of U.S.-India [economic ties](#) cannot be overstated. The same applies for [U.S.-Brazil](#) and [U.S.-South Africa](#) relations.

But the other side of the coin is that no matter how one slices it, the BRICS group has been instrumentalized *vis-à-vis* the Ukraine war.

In sum, seemingly overpowering *qua* displacing the group's [standard-fare narratives](#), this war *is* the elephant in the 'BRICS (diplomatic) room'.

A lot of the oxygen in the group is now taken up with such geopolitical power plays which—irrespective of respective BRICS members' geopolitical dances with the United States—are a common thread within the group.

What is more, the [principal drivers](#) of strategic competition, which the late historian Eric J. Hobsbawm referred to as '[political forces](#)' in the shaping of epochs, are racing against one another to win over backers in the Global South—i.e. '[the rest](#)'.

By the looks of things, even as the Ukraine war is weighing on Western leaders' hearts and minds, it has seemingly been an uphill struggle for Western foreign and security policy communities to get many Global South decision makers and foreign policy representatives/hands to view and [prioritize](#) the conflict in the way that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and his Western backers are [framing](#) it.

Rightly, UN Secretary-General António Guterres [underscores](#) that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine "is aggravating geopolitical tensions and divisions, threatening regional stability, increasing the nuclear threat, and creating deep fissures in our increasingly multipolar world."

The world is in the throes of a multipolar international order *in the making*, proximate to a new Cold War with wars of attrition—such as the Ukraine war—likely being the first in a chain of conflict and wider insecurity in international relations. (This stands in stark contrast with the post-Cold War-related transition.)

As great-power competition casts an ever longer shadow in that regard, the wider security-related implications have seemingly not yet caught on as widely as Washington and Kyiv—along with their backers—had once hoped.

Moreover, in these high-stakes geopolitical manoeuvres of the moment, the Kremlin's Ukrainian gambit has the makings of a two-for-one (sucker) punch. In short, it has run roughshod over the European security architecture—as expected, [violating](#) UN-underwritten norms and rules of the road—all while [muddying](#) the waters still further as regards the Global North's relations with 'the rest'.

Adding to the air of geopolitical uncertainty, one consequential, anti-Western spoiler has [pulled back](#) from a prime dimension of its relations with the United States.

Such episodes of high politics are a window into how great-power engagement—aspects of which, in a bygone era, were once [extolled](#) by Reagan and Gorbachev—is now on the losing end of a test of geopolitical wills, whose proverbial currency of [power](#) is hewed more than ever to grievance against the U.S./West.

This in an age where—for the West, at least—the combination of recalcitrant, emergent powers and an [increasingly assertive](#) patchwork of Global South actors in geopolitical play make for a *more* risky, *less* familiar coming international order, which in Churchillian terms may well ["open a quarrel between the past and the present."](#)

Churchill's assessment of what this type of quarrel portends for the future is grim, indeed.

In this moment, then, yet another one of Churchill's many bits of sage advice also resonates with students of International Relations: ["Study history, study history. In history lies all the secrets of statecraft."](#)

The author would like to thank Ambassador Riyad Insanally for his generous and insightful advice on an early version of this article, as well as his engaged commentary on related work. Special thanks to Ambassador David Hales for perusing an earlier draft of this article and for wide-ranging discourse, which shaped the author's perspective on underlying themes. The author is especially grateful to Ambassador Patrick I. Gomes for his incisive feedback, openness and encouragement regarding his scholarship, which also benefits from Ambassador Colin Granderson's input.

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CARICOM-BRICS Relations Are in the Spotlight. Here Are Some Takeaways

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The argument — voiced in an Aug. 29, 2023 [guest editorial](#) titled ‘Caricom and new BRICS’ in the *Jamaica Gleaner* newspaper—that the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#) bloc’s leadership “should commission an urgent, and robust, assessment of the implications of the BRICS expansion, and other initiatives proposed by the group, for this region” makes eminent sense.

(That editorial, also carried by other regional media houses, was published in the days following the XV BRICS—i.e. Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—[Summit](#) that, as never before, thrust the group into the diplomatic limelight.)

Even so, that missive has shortcomings.

For one thing, the author’s perfunctory exhortation that “Caricom as a group should, perhaps, seek observer status within BRICS” runs up against the missive’s strong opening salvo—referenced above. In this sense, the argumentation in question puts the cart before the horse.

Second, the author provides a pared-down discussion of what s/he characterizes as “the larger principles of having [in BRICS] a strong platform from which to pursue global equity.” Thus, s/he misses an opportunity to address a key talking point among BRICS watchers relative to the group’s hand in any (possible) [post-Western global order](#): The need for a clearer articulation of the vision(s) thereof.

Such a clarification is especially pertinent, when casting an analytical gaze to the BRICS group *post*-Feb. 24, 2022.

Take the example of Russia. It is well known among [Putinologists](#) that Russian President Vladimir Putin has a [narrative of grievance](#), which looms large with respect to the Ukraine war. It also serves as a crutch for Putin’s particular brand of [challenge](#) to the West writ large. Significantly, in part, it holds up the Kremlin’s doctrine of [Russian worldmaking](#).

This begs the question: What bearing does such a narrative have on the BRICS group, including *vis-à-vis* its wider reformist-*cum*-philosophical [narrative-related projection](#), especially since the likes of [Iran](#) have been invited to join the group?

In a cross-section of policymaking and diplomatic circles, there are heightened concerns that such a trajectory could set in motion a hardening of views regarding the thrust and contours of an *imagined* post-Western global order which, in short, could become a euphemism for anti-Western *ordering*.

Finally, with its contention “that BRICS isn’t founded solely on [certain] geopolitical contestations,” the piece profoundly misunderstands the [geopolitically heavy trajectory](#) of the group.

Having regard to the Kremlin’s Ukraine war-related diplomacy, purportedly, within the BRICS group’s ranks, neutrality is the name of the game. However, the exercise of and diplomatic positionality around such neutrality is [problematic](#): The group’s contemporary diplomacy—both [within](#) and [outside](#) of its ranks—is ensnared in efforts to come up with a workaround regarding criticism of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 and its associated war of aggression.

With this in mind, it is instructive that CARICOM is non-neutral on the war.

On February 24, 2022, the bloc registered its [strong condemnation](#) of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine; a position that, on March 14, 2022, it [reaffirmed](#). Since then, as regards the ongoing hostilities, CARICOM has repeatedly conveyed its concern in international fora.

The author does not mention this at all.

Given this particular juncture in the BRICS-related (soon-to-be BRICS+) diplomatic journey, when highlighting CARICOM-BRICS relations, it is ill-advised to shy away from the significance of CARICOM’s principled, promptly-stated Ukraine war-related stance.

CARICOM member states are looking out upon the uneasy interregnum between the short-lived [unipolar moment](#)—now in our rear-view—and the unsettled, emergent era with a new appreciation for consequential [shifts](#) in the [balance of power](#), as well as the implications arising, with a resolution to the Ukraine war firmly in their diplomatic sights.

In all of this, in a context where “[the prevailing \(international\) politics often prove far costlier for such states](#),” the Ukraine war-related turn of (international) events is [roiling](#) the conduct of CARICOM member states’ global affairs.

Above all, against the backdrop of their “[development landscape](#)”—which is directly tied to “[threats ... in the Anthropocene context](#)”—the Ukraine war makes it that much harder for the [14 sovereign Small Island and Low-lying Coastal Developing States \(SIDS\)](#) that comprise CARICOM to contend with “[critical crises facing the globe](#).”

As [major powers](#) pivot to the epoch to come, the now 18-month-old Ukraine war and associated macro factors stand as a significant obstacle in the way of CARICOM SIDS’ own [bid](#) to take a step forward, serving as an all-too-familiar reminder of the role that [system-level](#) factors play in such an undertaking.

Even though “[\[the Ukraine\] war ... pits the Euro-Atlantic security order against Russia, \[then, it has\] security implications \[which\] are wide-reaching](#).”

This is an important consideration for CARICOM members, which are “[system-ineffectual](#),” [small states](#), and it is pivotal to understanding why—shortly following the onset of Russia’s full-

scale invasion of Ukraine—CARICOM Heads of Government put the stakes involved for their respective countries even more [starkly](#).

Indeed, CARICOM members “[have historically seen the most gains when leader countries do not stray wildly from the bedrock principles of the United Nations Charter](#).” Hence, they were eager to associate themselves with a consequential United Nations General Assembly resolution “[demanding that Russia immediately end its military operations in Ukraine](#).”

In sum, one ought to dichotomize CARICOM-BRICS relations *pre-* and *post-*February 24, 2022.

Instructively, for years now, CARICOM has a [track record](#) of capitalizing on “[opportunities](#)” to deepen BRICS-related ties. This is informed by CARICOM leaders’ [longstanding imprimatur](#) for the bloc to advance relations with non-traditional partners, as well as by the imperative of most CARICOM member states needing “[to improve \[their\] export performance with BRICS](#).”

Given the geopolitics of the day, CARICOM may well have cause to ask searching questions around the extent to which the *post*-February 24, 2022 BRICS group can serve a wide cross-section of its [interests](#).

By the same token, it would be short-sighted to throw the baby out with the bathwater. For example, some of what is in the XV BRICS Summit declaration resonates with CARICOM. One such matter is the “[call for reform of the Bretton Woods institutions](#).” In this regard, on the international stage, CARICOM is a [leading voice](#) for reform of the international financial system. Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley has taken a special interest in the matter, championing [The Bridgetown Initiative](#).

Furthermore, to the extent that bilateral and multilateral relations are complementary, a strong case can be made—for example—that deepening [Guyana-Brazil relations](#) lend themselves to overarching CARICOM-BRICS relations.

That said, CARICOM member states are also deeply wrapped up in aspects of the U.S./Western-led [liberal international order \(LIO\)](#) and, by extension, its [institutional bedrock](#).

Those interests are also of a piece with Washington, which—having neglected its ‘[third border](#)’ for much of the unipolar moment—is in the midst of a [charm offensive](#) with and is winning over member states of CARICOM, who are collectively invested in the pursuit of even deeper ties with their northern neighbour.

This marks a big change to the way that the United States views the Caribbean, with which relations looked very different some thirty years ago.

As regards “[the post-1945 international system and the bipolar stand-off between the United States and the Soviet Union](#),” Washington prioritized “[security concerns \[over\] other policy interests](#),” such that—in the determination of the United States’ foreign and intelligence services—by “[the late 1980s ... \[Caribbean states had\] lost strategic importance](#).” What is more, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, when there was a geoeconomic swing to a [new wave](#)

of globalization, those states were caught flat-footed in respect of their developmental trajectory.

In reflecting on this dire state of affairs, the then-Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago cautioned that regional states were at risk of “becoming a backwater.”

By the late 20th Century, then, the Caribbean occupied vastly reduced real estate in the United States’ foreign policy agenda.

Over a generation later, times have changed.

With much fanfare, the Biden Administration has called attention to new Caribbean-related assistance.

In fact, CARICOM’s Council for Foreign and Community Relations “[has] expressed satisfaction with the reset in CARICOM’s relationship with the United States of America.”

Washington is pursuing such a diplomatic approach, by and large, to counter the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) growing influence in the Caribbean.

In this regard, Beijing’s “motives ... are both economic and political and have to be examined in the wider context of China’s overall foreign policy, its shifting worldview, its superpower status and the geo-politics of the current global conjuncture.”

Much the same could be said of CARICOM member states’ approach to bilateral foreign policymaking writ large. Of note, these states pursue their respective bilateral foreign policies in line with their national interests. How they navigate relations with respective BRICS members and with Western powers—such as the United States—is a sovereign decision.

In fact, with one caveat, CARICOM member states have long-standing diplomatic ties in that regard.

What, then, is the rub? In short, given key fissures regarding their respective foreign policy frameworks, they will likely run into difficulties in the realm of coordinating a regional approach to the BRICS group.

The one-China principle (which underlies the aforementioned ‘caveat’) is an apt example in this regard, considering that only five of the 14 sovereign CARICOM member states extend diplomatic recognition to Taiwan.

That CARICOM is on the cusp of a high-stakes multipolar international order, which has many unprecedentedly complex moving parts, it is of paramount importance the several issues (including the central questions) arising form part of a standing item on the agenda of the bloc’s foreign policy establishment.

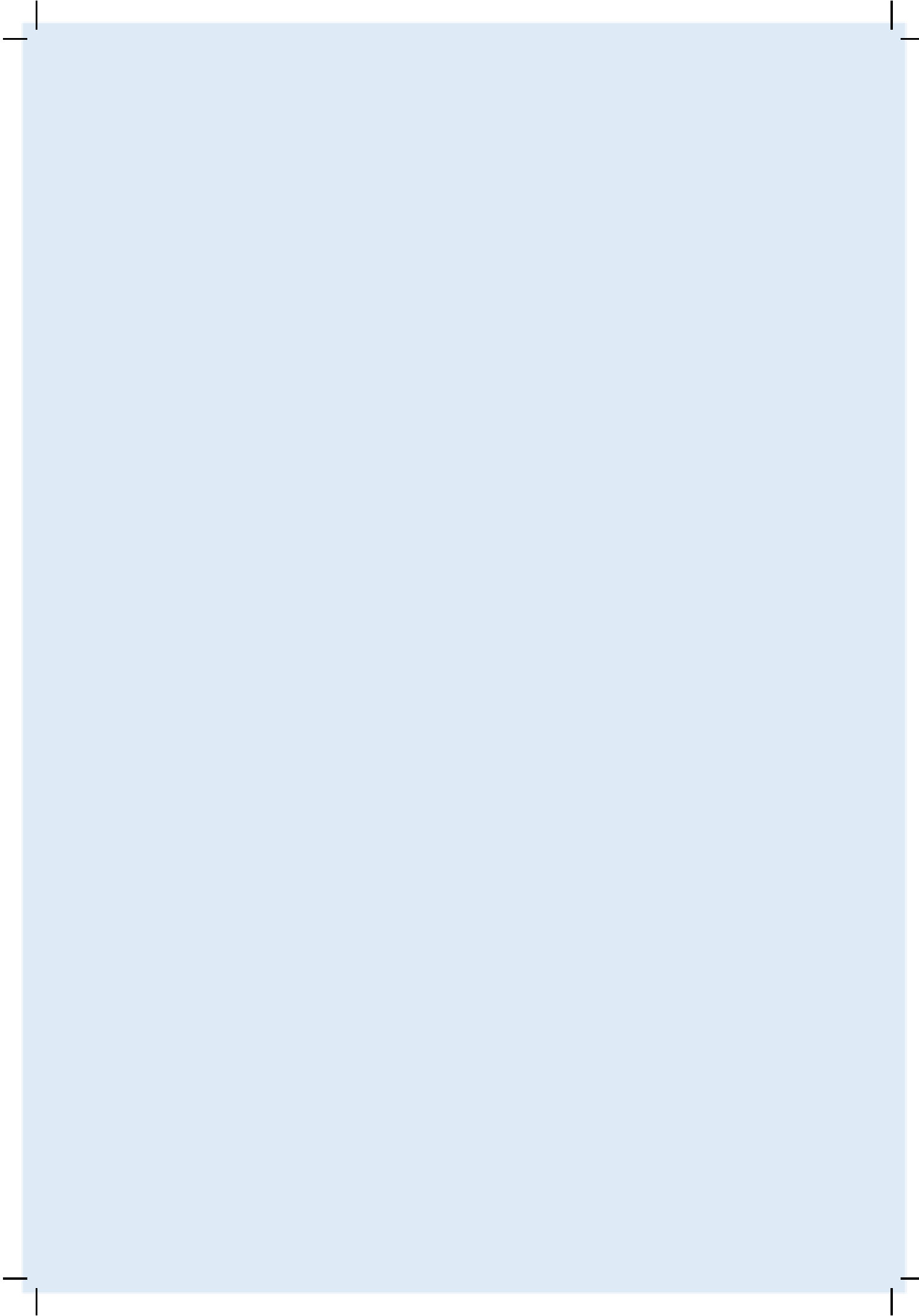
The op-ed under reference would have done well to draw attention to such issues, too.

Still, the far more important takeaway from that guest editorial is that—going forward, with due regard to overriding foreign policy interests—CARICOM needs to do a lot more thinking about its relations with the BRICS group.

At this juncture, the group benefits from an unprecedented [boost](#) in its [status](#) in international relations. Accordingly, it behoves CARICOM to do its homework regarding turning the BRICS group's growing influence to its advantage, while—in the process—careful not to undermine its small states-related principles and interests.

The author would like to thank Ambassador Riyadh Insanally for his generous and insightful advice on an early version of this article, as well as his engaged commentary on related work. Special thanks to Ambassador David Hales for perusing an earlier draft of this article and for wide-ranging discourse, which shaped the author's perspective on underlying themes. The author is especially grateful to Ambassador Patrick I. Gomes for his incisive feedback, openness and encouragement regarding his scholarship, which also benefits from Ambassador Colin Granderson's input.

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Primer Nº 3

Global Flashpoints, Global Security. A Dual Case Analysis against the backdrop of the 'CARICOM Statement on the Developments in Israel'

Keywords:

Israel-Hamas war	Global Flashpoints	Global Security	Anti-Status Quo Belligerents	Buying Time	Spoiler-Centric Foreign Policy	Irresolution of Conflicts	<i>Realpolitik</i>	Clausewitzian Prism	Monopoly of Truth
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GEOPOLITICS

Why Today's Anti-Status Quo Belligerents are Problematic for Global Flashpoints and Security

Like Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year, Hamas' Oct. 7 assault out of the...

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille – October 18, 2023

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October 18, 2023

Global Flashpoints, Global Security

*A Dual Case Analysis
against the backdrop of the*

'CARICOM Statement on the
Developments in Israel'

A Two-Volume
Assessment

Published during the month:
October 2023

October 18, 2023

By
Nand C. Bardouille

Volume I

Setting the Scene:
CARICOM's Reaction to the
October 7, 2023 Hamas Attack on Israel

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

October 18, 2023

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Highlighting the 'CARICOM Statement on the Developments in Israel'

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October 18, 2023

On October 9, 2023, the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#), a bloc of [14 sovereign Small Island and Low-lying Coastal Developing States \(SIDS\)](#), issued a Statement in which it conveyed that it "[abhors the attacks in Israel and the counterattacks in the Palestinian territory of Gaza.](#)"

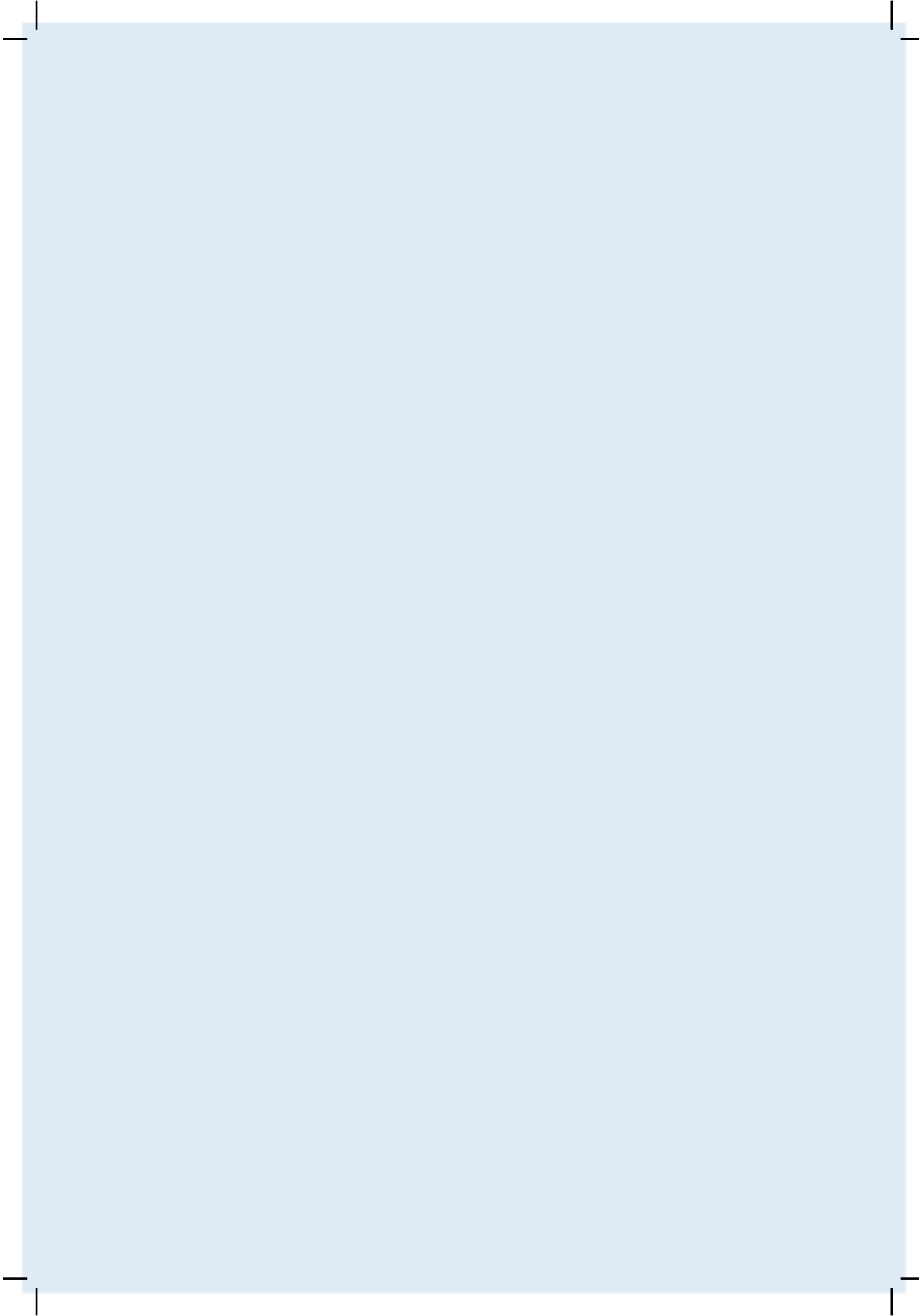
Further, the bloc *inter alia* underscored that it "[joins the responsible members of the international community in calling for an immediate ceasefire and end of hostilities by all parties.](#)"

The Statement under reference serves as the backdrop of an assessment, published under the theme: 'Global Flashpoints, Global Security'. It identifies and examines the implications of three peremptorily-derived, interconnected strategic priorities of anti-*status quo* belligerents—constituting international actors at the top table, mid-tier players and instruments of [power](#) play-related set pieces, respectively—in the emergent, broader [spheres of influence qua control](#)-configured geopolitical context. In this regard, the spotlight is on the Israel-Hamas war and the Ukraine war.

To download that assessment, which constitutes Volume II of this Primer, please [click here](#).

To access the aforesaid Statement online, please [click here](#).

NB As regards the developments under reference, CARICOM member states have also issued statements and/or expressed views of their own.



Volume II

Power and International Politics Seen Under a Clausewitzian Prism

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

October 18, 2023

“It is a dangerous thing to be a Machiavelli.
It is a disastrous thing to be a Machiavelli without *virtù*.”

Hans Morgenthau,
'*The Political Science of E. H. Carr*' (1948)

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Why Today's Anti-*Status Quo* Belligerents are Problematic for Global Flashpoints and Security

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Published by The Geopolitics (TGP)

Like Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year, Hamas' October 7th assault out of the Gaza Strip (*via* air, sea and land) on Israel provoked a visceral reaction from the international community. Indeed, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres [strongly condemned](#) the attack.

For its part, the UN Security Council (UNSC)—whose principal mandate, as a key organ of the UN, is the maintenance of international peace and security—also [condemned](#) the brazen attack.

Yet for all the [outrage](#), just as the 15-member UNSC is unable to display unanimity regarding the Ukraine war, this time around, history repeated itself in the worst of ways.

This highly coordinated terror attack killed more than 1,200 Israelis, unleashing a steady [stream of rockets](#) targeting major Israeli cities and towns; although, by and large, Israel's [Iron Dome](#) anti-missile system has withstood the onslaught.

Israeli forces are [striking back](#), simultaneously laying the groundwork for a wider offensive, amid harrowing [accounts](#) which continue to surface of the [brutality](#) visited upon civilians. All the while, among authorities, there is [mounting concern](#) for the fate of dozens of Israeli and other nationals who were abducted to the Gaza Strip to serve as bargaining chips.

And there is growing [alarm](#) over the wider effects of Israel's retaliatory strikes which, in the context of the [laws of war](#), are coming under [scrutiny](#).

In the closed-door UNSC meeting in question, Russia, the baleful belligerent in the Ukraine war, also skirted the said condemnation. (Regarding the ensuing Israel-Hamas war or Gaza war, to date, in contrast to Kyiv's stance, the Kremlin's messaging is [guarded](#). Kyiv has made a show of [support](#) for Israel which—relative to its post-February 24, 2022 dealings with Russia—has [curtailed](#) casting its lot with the West's pro-Kyiv foreign policymaking.)

Short of an outright rejection in that vein, increasing the odds of the inability of the UNSC to effectively get its arms around the Israel-Hamas war, the current highly fragmented multilateral diplomacy will come to be seen for what it is—a [signification](#) of [intractable divisions](#) among great powers reflective "[of a multipolar international order in the making.](#)"

In this [anarchic international system](#), the Ukraine war is the [polarity](#)-based lodestone.

The situation at the UNSC also reveals at least three peremptorily-derived, interconnected strategic priorities of anti-*status quo* belligerents—constituting international actors at the top

table, mid-tier players and instruments of [power](#) play-related set pieces, respectively—in the emergent, broader [spheres of influence qua control](#)-configured geopolitical context.

The first is ‘buying time’ with a malign outlook/intent, as a means of outmanoeuvring a foe. As a [major power](#), Russia—for instance—approaches this calculation *systemically*. In this regard, consider the Ukraine war. Raging unabated, now in its twentieth month, this is the largest interstate war on the European continent since 1945. As a proxy war, its dynamic hinges on major powers duking it out (at arm’s length)—informed by [great-power competition](#).

On February 24, 2022, notwithstanding the Kremlin’s repeated [insistence](#) that military action was not on the cards as regards Ukraine, Russia’s so-called ‘[special military operation](#)’ got underway. Historically, the Kremlin [prevaricated](#) on the matter and, with a view to misleading the international community, [equivocated](#) endlessly. It either approached processes tied to the so-called [Minsk agreements](#) in [bad faith](#) or simply stonewalled them.

This buying time manoeuvring, which European leaders were [not](#) especially attuned to previously, was all a ploy to get its warmaking ducks in a row.

Notably, Russian President Vladimir Putin and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping have committed to a ‘[no limits](#)’ bilateral partnership. While on paper the new Sino-Russian relationship lends itself to a partnership of equals, in practice, Russia is the [junior partner](#). Be that as it may, with Russia now notoriously perched atop the United States’ (U.S.)/West’s list of pariah states, in [diplomatic](#) terms, the Kremlin has engaged Beijing to good effect. Consequentially, Beijing has been pivotal to the Kremlin coming up with a meaningful workaround regarding [Western sanctions and more](#).

Then there is a recalcitrant’s second priority: A conviction, by any means necessary, to exact a ‘spoiler’-centric foreign policy. In this regard, what immediately comes to mind is Putin’s other crucial chess piece: The Wagner Group. It is a paramilitary outfit, founded by the late Russian mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin. Its advent, nearly a decade ago, is directly linked to the Russian state.

[Bankrolled](#) by Putin’s government, the Wagner Group has [lent](#) to the expansion and deepening of that country’s post-Cold War geopolitical footprint in Africa and elsewhere. To wit, a yet more focused aim of this mercenary group is to backstop pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Also, it was integrally involved in those Kremlin-directed military exploits [geared towards](#) the invasion and Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 (i.e. the largest land-grab in Europe since the Second World War).

Whether it has been cast further out or reeled in, the Wagner Group has also been strategically and tactically deployed by the Kremlin on the battlefields of Ukraine.

The Ukraine war came eight years after a turning point for that country—the Maidan Revolution and Ukraine’s [pivot](#) to the European Union (EU)-*cum*-the West.

Post-independence Ukraine saw fit to move, in earnest, away from Russia’s orbit.

In the intervening period, conflict broke out in the Donbas. From that point on, the Kremlin's involvement in Ukraine's internal affairs only deepened.

Kyiv's pushback was met with an increasingly forceful response; the most egregious: the Kremlin taking revanchist liberties in-country.

Ultimately, in metastasizing, this calculated move came at a heavy price. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the attendant war has been ruinous for post-independence Ukraine, impacting the country and its people in a "horrific" manner—as the UN documents. According to reports, genocidal violence is ubiquitous. What is more, the economic fallout has been dire.

In today's geopolitical context, on account of the wide-ranging foreign policy actions of the Kremlin and its agents, it seems nigh impossible for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) leaders to follow through on this Western defense alliance's stated commitment in 2008 to one day bring Ukraine into its fold, even as they continue to rhetorically beat that drum.

Ukrainian NATO membership remains a Russian redline, which is steeped in historical controversy. Kyiv's push for EU membership, though, is another story.

A third priority of authoritarian and rogue regimes centres on the 'irresolution of conflicts' which have a bearing on their respective countries' national interests, typically, with a view both to regime survival and the promulgation of an ethos which stands in opposition to the West.

For Putin (who is heavily invested in the perpetuation of frozen conflicts in Russia's near abroad, in a slow motion iteration of the implosion of the Soviet Union), in leveraging the Kremlin's Ukrainian gambit, Wagner mercenaries and Russia's regular military are hulking "tools" to give effect to Machiavellian scheming around tightening his grip on the reins of power in Russia. In this sense, the Russian national interest is contorted in the upside down image of Putin's *realpolitik*—as it were—of domestic survival. Russia's existential security questions, then, have been transmuted into questions around Putin's political and literal survival.

One can conclude that, having regard to the scholarship of the late Halford J. Mackinder, Putin is a 'ways and means'-oriented realist in a context of the Kremlin's "neurotic view of world affairs [comingling with a] traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity." (A renowned British political geographer, Mackinder was instrumental in the formative development, during the interwar period, of International Relations' (IR) realist school of thought. The discipline later established itself through the scholarly work *inter alia* of E.H. Carr, Nicholas J. Spykman, Reinhold Neibuhr and Hans Morgenthau. The latter, as the standard-bearer for classical realism, shared Mackinder's assumptions about power relations and laws of history, but in deference to the conceptual abstraction of human nature à la aspatial statecraft, as opposed to Mackinder's attempts to play up the nexus between human societies and the natural environment in that schema.)

That said, bearing in mind some of Putin's Ukraine war-related utterances which *inter alia* underscore historical grievances relating to "Russian lands," along with related

assessments of experts, and in order to make better sense of it all, it is prudent to also highlight the work of Spykman on the primacy/permanency of geography (which stands apart from Mackinder's work) in matters of statecraft or international conflict dynamics. Russia's ongoing attempt to dismember and/or carve out a rump state from its contiguous neighbour Ukraine, then, also seemingly ties in with "conflicts over land and resources [which] are intensified by physical proximity, leading to greater incentives for expansion and more destructive conflicts over time."

The case of Iran, whose enemies have (the threat of) transnational terrorism *qua* the Sword of Damocles hanging over their respective heads, is also apt in this analytical regard. Iran is a regional or middle power, which Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu holds up as a straw man or bogeyman (depending on the audience).

Tehran is focused on regional calculations. (At the same time—albeit, with differing emphases—Tehran is ramping up diplomatic efforts to look in earnest farther afield in the pursuit of Iran's wider foreign policy objectives and to address related concerns.) At the direction of its Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and with due regard to its statecraft-related endgame, Tehran leans on the ethos of the Islamic Revolution *vis-à-vis* Shia Islam and wider narratives (invectives) about Israel and the West.

All the while, Tehran makes use of its proxies or agents, among which are armed non-state actors, like Hezbollah and Hamas. The latter group does not fit the mould of a belligerent to a tee; but, like the Wagner Group, it is a pertinent example of an international, spoiler-driven actor operating on the ground level. It does so at the behest of others. (By and large, those 'handlers' are located further up the stratagem-related totem pole.)

Notwithstanding, Hamas is deeply invested in the promulgation of its agency. Namely, it is the self-anointed steward of the Palestinian cause *vis-à-vis* the Palestinian question and, by extension, the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people.

Given that these Palestinian Islamist militant groups serve Iran's foreign policy ends in the Levant, and in respect of biding its time before deploying them to deadly effect, one might expect Tehran to make the foreign policy calculation that the targets of Hamas' heinous October 7th attack on Israel are fair game. (In this thinking, to boot, the Levant will likely spiral into war-related crosshairs, as the conflict possibly spills over from the Gaza Strip.)

The common wisdom and historical record suggest that, given the scale of the attack, but also Tehran's hold over the group, the attack bears the hallmarks of Iran's hand, even as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has cast doubt in that regard.

For its part, on the heels of the said game-changing Hamas-orchestrated attack on Israel, Tehran rejected claims of Iran's involvement thereof. (This even as it has an obvious interest in tipping the scales in the long running Israeli-Palestinian conflict—such that it (abruptly) ventures into uncharted territory, with broad implications for the projection of Iranian hegemony in the wider Middle East.) Even so, Tehran seemingly justifies that attack.

Such a narrative, then, is about goading supporters into escalatory steps along a subversion to straight-up war-footing-related continuum, where conflagrations are long-standing. As

Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz famously said of wars: Their “outcome[s] [are] not always to be regarded as final.”

Beyond this, as already intimated, Tehran’s interests are linked to undercutting U.S. prestige in the wider Middle East and beyond, and given America’s own interests in Saudi Arabia (as the world’s leading petrostate), Washington backs Riyadh—Tehran’s arch-enemy—in a Middle East context that has been the subject of a “dangerous new hegemonic confrontation.”

The other part of the equation: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has moved assiduously to cement his majority Sunni Muslim country’s “regional leadership”-related ambitions. Having run afoul of Washington, well after the difficult 9/11 period of Saudi-U.S. relations, Riyadh is once again in Washington’s good graces.

This is the case even more so now in the midst of speculation in Western capitals that the Hamas attack under reference was partly fuelled by Iranian attempts to scuttle The Abraham Accords and, by extension, the progress towards the normalization of Arab-Israeli relations which they engender.

This in a context where, following Saddam Hussein’s ouster in 2003, and as an outcome of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Iraq War, Iran’s stock qua status (standing) in world politics was buoyed. (In the early 2000s, Iraq suffered a debilitating blow to its power in the region; and, by the 2010s, Baghdad was firmly ensconced in Tehran’s orbit.) It is also noteworthy that, for Iran, as regards Russia and Syria, foreign policy-related synergies became increasingly apparent in recent years. Taken together, having emerged as a “treacherous triangle” in geopolitical terms, Iran, Russia and Syria are colluding to undermine U.S. interests in the Middle East.

In this geopolitical milieu, the U.S. and Israel are staunch allies, with the latter’s military “bolstered by more than \$3.8bn of military aid a year from the US.”

(Washington, too, is wise to attempts by one of its “strategic competitors”—i.e. the PRC—to “assert power” in the Middle East, including by having brokered a historic thaw in Iran-Saudi relations.)

At its core, then, the Israel-Hamas war (and the repeating conflagrations between those parties) is a conflict in which a sovereign state is facing off against an armed non-state actor. This in a wider context where Israel is indirectly embroiled in a conflict with Iran, which the U.S. Intelligence Community assesses “had accelerated its overall nuclear program [even as it] was not producing a nuclear weapon.”

In short, Iran has hegemonic aspirations in the wider Middle East. Moreover, Riyadh is in Tehran’s foreign policy sights.

Significantly, against the backdrop of The Abraham Accords, there is a growing rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia. This is now on the line.

Indeed, in the week-plus since that surprise attack on Israel, the world seemingly remains in the grips of a moment whose magnitude appears to have overshadowed a war of horrendous proportions on the European continent.

And Israel is on a war path, with Netanyahu having formed a national unity war cabinet. As it looks ahead, some tough questions will have to be answered in respect of how Israel's military was seemingly caught [off guard](#) by this attack.

Instructively, Israel's political and military elite may have unwittingly fallen for a stratagem that sought to lull the latter into a false sense of security. The background: as the most [far-right](#) and religiously conservative government in that country's history, the Netanyahu administration has an interest in trying to undercut and undo the ability of the West Bank-based, state-like Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority to advance Palestinian interests. Insofar as it does not view Hamas in these terms, it sought to divide and rule.

In fact, that administration was widely seen to be fanning extremist flames which are said to have [further undermined](#) Israeli-Palestinian relations and, ultimately, with the power play in question backfiring, Israel became more susceptible to some of the wider dynamics set out above.

It is also instructive that Netanyahu's government faced an [uphill battle](#) in getting most Israelis on side regarding related foreign policy issues; i.e. pre-October 7th. In fact, prior to this grim date, Netanyahu's government had been severely weakened by deep-seated [societal cleavages](#).

As Israel has been severely rocked to its core—in a manner that defies comparison, save (perhaps) for the era of the Yom Kippur War—the United States has stepped up to the plate.

Where Washington has [risen to the occasion](#), the executive arm of the 27-member EU has come in for [harsh criticism](#). This at a time when it seemingly takes every opportunity to [hype up](#) its self-proclaimed geopolitical power *bona fides*, even as the forthrightness of such a global standing seemingly has [not](#) seen much light of day on this matter.

The EU had only just [deftly](#) one-upped the U.S.—whose lawmakers recently [jettisoned](#) military assistance for Kyiv in a budget-related imbroglio—on the Ukraine war.

The United States is on the front foot, putting would-be mischief-makers intent on exploiting Israel's [9/11 moment](#) on notice. Contemporaneously, Washington has its eye on [mitigating](#) the potential fallout relative to the wider Middle East.

Taking a leaf from former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy in the region relative to the Yom Kippur War, as the Middle East is once again "[on the brink](#)," Blinken is [criss-crossing](#) a handful of Arab states and Israel to build consensus on the way forward.

Unlike Kissinger's time serving as a broker in Arab-Israeli warring, key sets of belligerents are not directly in the mix in Blinken's monumental diplomatic touring. Instead, a number of them are on the side-lines, with a renewed attempt by the parties concerned to advance on stratagem-related power plays.

While Washington has a crucial role to play in steadying an unsettled 'new' Middle East, UN-facilitated multilateralism should be the order of the day.

Yet, not since its founding in the aftermath of the Second World War has the UN been put to the test in the way that it has today. Now more than ever, global security is being held to ransom by the incredible complexity of global flashpoints which, both in *form* and *function*, are outpacing the UN's ability to adapt.

To this extent, an esoteric Hegelian take on the rhythm of human history/affairs comes to mind: "[P]hilosophy ... always comes too late."

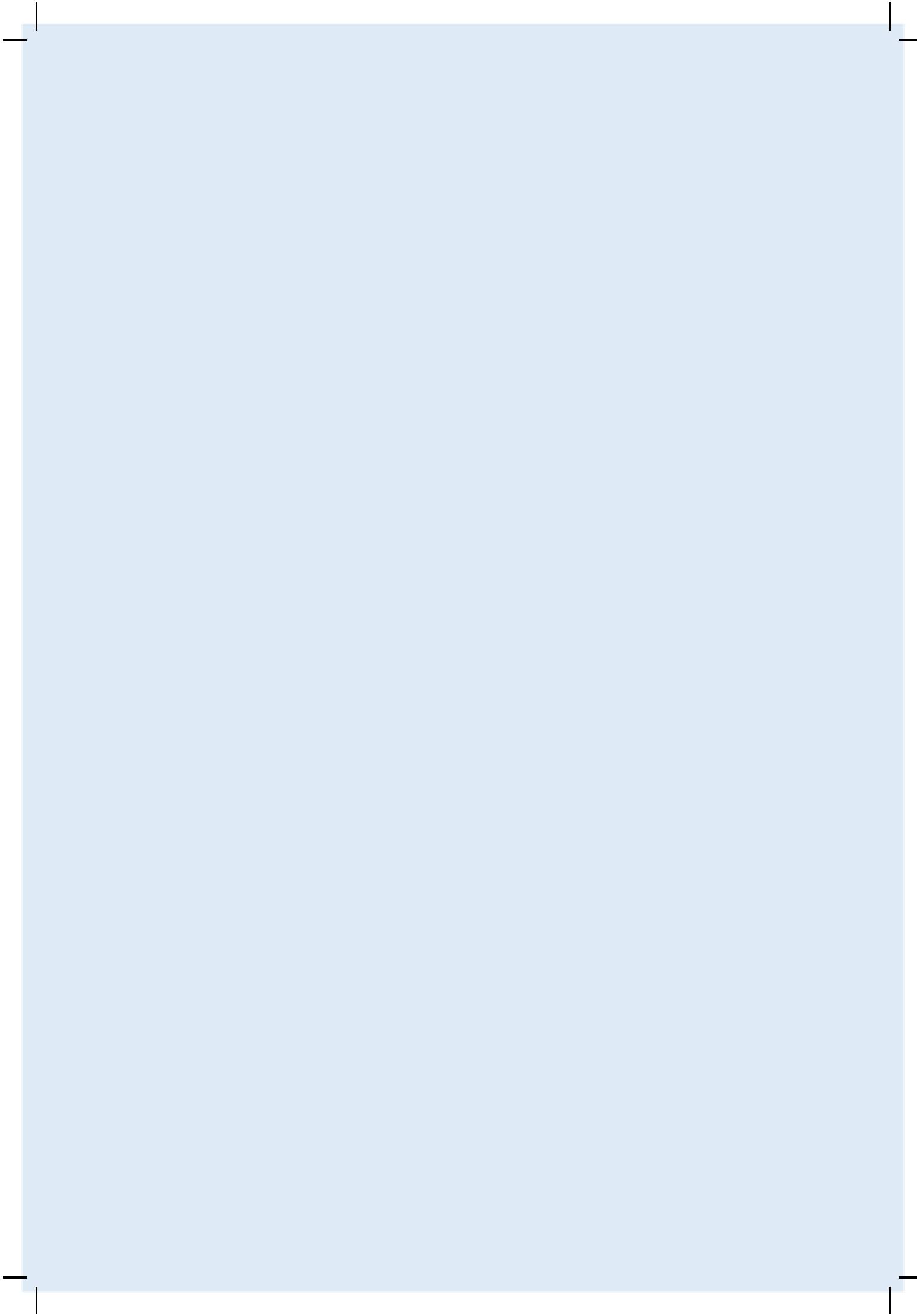
Among the themes which run through this attenuated but no less complex quip is the timelessness of power, which is omnipresent in all manner of (international) political projects.

This essay has attempted to shine a light on just two of them, which potentially constitute geopolitical touchpapers, applying a [Clausewitzian prism](#) to highlight a class of actor-specific foreign policy decision-making and decision makers.

It is chock-full of disruptors, whose foreign policy-related actions are located within a broader, *zero-sum* geopolitical milieu. In this regard, Carr's admonishment of international politics' "[moral bankruptcy](#)" rings true.

In all of this, drawing on Carr's intellectual insights once more, the takeaway is clear: a given actor in a "[diplomatic dramaturgy](#)" does not hold "[a monopoly of truth](#)."

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Primer Nº 4

Is it Time for a San Francisco Moment 2.0? A Case Analysis specific to the Caribbean Community vis-à-vis the Gaza and Ukraine Wars

Keywords:

Gaza War	Ukraine War	United Nations	UN Reform	Crises	Great-Power Competition	CARICOM	Self Determination	Sovereignty	Territorial Integrity
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Gaza, Ukraine Wars Push UN Towards Its Tipping Point

OPINION - November 3, 2023

The Gaza and Ukraine wars are compounding institutional inertia at the United Nations and further highlighting the need for sweeping reforms.



FOREIGN POLICY

Gaza, Ukraine Wars Elicit Different Reactions in the Caribbean's Foreign Policy Milieu

Insofar as the spotlight tends to fall almost exclusively on major Western powers and...

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille - October 31, 2023

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Gaza and Ukraine Wars

A Two-Volume
Assessment

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By
Nand C. Bardouille

Volume I

Setting the Scene:
Gaza, Ukraine Wars *Raise the Ante*
in terms of Global Insecurity

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

November 3, 2023

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Gaza, Ukraine Wars Push UN Towards Its Tipping Point

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For all the defining moments in history post-"the long nineteenth century," spanning to the [unipolar moment](#)'s recent end, the advent of the United Nations (UN) has perhaps meant more to the cause of international peace than any other. After all, a corrective to the short-lived *qua* ill-fated League of Nations, the UN was [formed](#) in the crucible of peace.

There is much in its [storied history](#) to support this view. But this framing has its limits, especially as the [liberal international order](#) has come under unprecedented strain over time.

Alas, having regard to its central aim of tamping down and resolving international conflicts/crises, the UN's ability to serve as a [cornerstone](#) of international cooperation is currently undermined in at least two ways.

The first centers on the nature of the crises themselves. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres readily admits, this moment of international politics is "[marked by increasingly complex crises for our world.](#)"

In fairness, in some instances, this is through no fault of its own. A case in point is the COVID-19 pandemic's "[deeply negative impact on SDG progress.](#)"

Regardless, in the early goings of this post-unipolar moment-related conjuncture, the UN's risk exposure-*cum*-profile has risen exponentially. A centerpiece of that risk is the emergent [global transition](#) to a [multipolar](#) system, which hinges on and is driven by great-power competition.

Beyond that, and secondly, as Guterres also underscores, "[geopolitical mistrust](#)" is at an all-time high. This is because great-power competition is in full swing, widening East-West and Global North-Global South divisions.

The [main architects](#), along with their proxies, of unfurling post-Western-oriented geopolitical dynamics have seen to it that great-power engagement is in the [rear-view](#).

Inasmuch as they are geopolitically significant moments in their own right, the Gaza and Ukraine wars are emblematic of those broader divisions, which are also unsettling the extant international order.

Just how those conflicts further take shape and the implications arising thereof will have a bearing not just on the UN's 193-strong membership, but also on its fortunes going forward. This is playing out in a context where the UN, straining under the weight of a mismatch of organizational functionality and aspects of the shifting geopolitical realities in question, is already at a tipping point.

The UN Security Council, which is [caught up](#) in and is seemingly adding to international system-level dysfunction, is a prime example.

In the circumstances, the [P5](#) UNSC members can ill afford to continue to [pay lip service](#) to UN reform.

Given the stakes involved, [small states](#), such as those of the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#) bloc, also have a lot riding on UN reform. That's how they [see](#) it; not least because their leaders have expended political capital on the matter.

Indeed, recognizing the wider, security-related impact of these conflicts, they have adopted a highly participatory approach to international diplomacy of the hour as regards the Gaza and Ukraine wars, which are [on](#) center stage in international relations. (That said, as part of their attendant diplomacy, CARICOM member states have [pitched](#) their reactions differently *vis-à-vis* the aforesaid conflicts.)

Yet it is important to recognize that, also in their view, such diplomacy will only achieve so much.

In that respect at least, for crises-related diplomacy to be given effect in ways that matter, UN organs like the UNSC must be fit for purpose *vis-à-vis* today's (security) realities.

For all the world body's success since it first opened its doors on October 24, 1945, then, such UN-related staples as the Security Council continue on as a vestige of a bygone era, whose architects have long since passed on. And as is often the case in such large organizations, owing to their path-dependent design, [institutional inertia](#) sets in. Given that its roots run deep through history, the UN is especially prone to such a state of affairs.

The UN's roots can be traced to a series of high-level conferences, held in the 1940s, which took place at the behest of Allied powers' statesmen of the day, who were committed to and vested in crafting the institutional contours and systemic orientation of the post-war international order.

But first, they had to craft a way out of the war. The Yalta Conference and the Potsdam Conference were crucially important in that regard, constituting final steps in the Allied powers' efforts to bookend the war.

By May 1945, Germany had unconditionally surrendered. This resulted in an Allied victory over that leading Axis power, ushering in the ["zero hour"](#) or ["Year Zero."](#)

Yet, this marked only the first of two hard stops to the war.

The final one came later on in 1945, stemming from Japan's unconditional [surrender](#). This occurred in the wake of the United States' atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also—thereafter—the Soviet Union's [declaration](#) of war on this second of the two foremost Axis powers.

Given the sheer scale of that war's [devastation](#), 19th century German dramatist Georg Büchner's [outlook](#) on mankind was likely never far from the minds of statesmen and diplomats of the day; i.e. mankind is held beneath the "hideous fatalism of history...[and] human nature [has] a terrible sameness, in human circumstances an ineluctable violence vouchsafed to all and to none."

In hopes of distancing humanity from war and its uglier side, thereby charting a way forward towards some semblance of peace in the [anarchic](#) international system, yet another monumental conference took place to set the stage, as it were, between April 25, 1945 and June 26, 1945. This United Nations Conference on International Organization—held in San Francisco, California—brought together delegates of 50 governments.

Informed by the work of other, previously-held high-level meetings and outcome documents from the [same—including](#) The Atlantic Conference & Charter (1941)—this Conference (dubbed the [San Francisco Conference](#)) unanimously approved, *inter alia*, the [UN Charter](#) and the Statute of the International Court of Justice, thereby establishing the UN.

Today, for the reasons outlined above, one may well ask—is it time for a [San Francisco moment](#) 2.0?

After all, the UN is [struggling](#) to navigate towards a resolution to the Gaza and Ukraine wars, which *raise the ante* in terms of global insecurity. The UN is at a crossroads, then, and all the more so because of the Gaza and Ukraine wars.

All things considered, notwithstanding the state of the world, it is less likely now that such a moment will (meaningfully) see the light of day. In short, in this geopolitical moment, the grand sweep of great-power competition is too much of an encumbrance to that end.

It would take a leap of the imagination to believe otherwise.

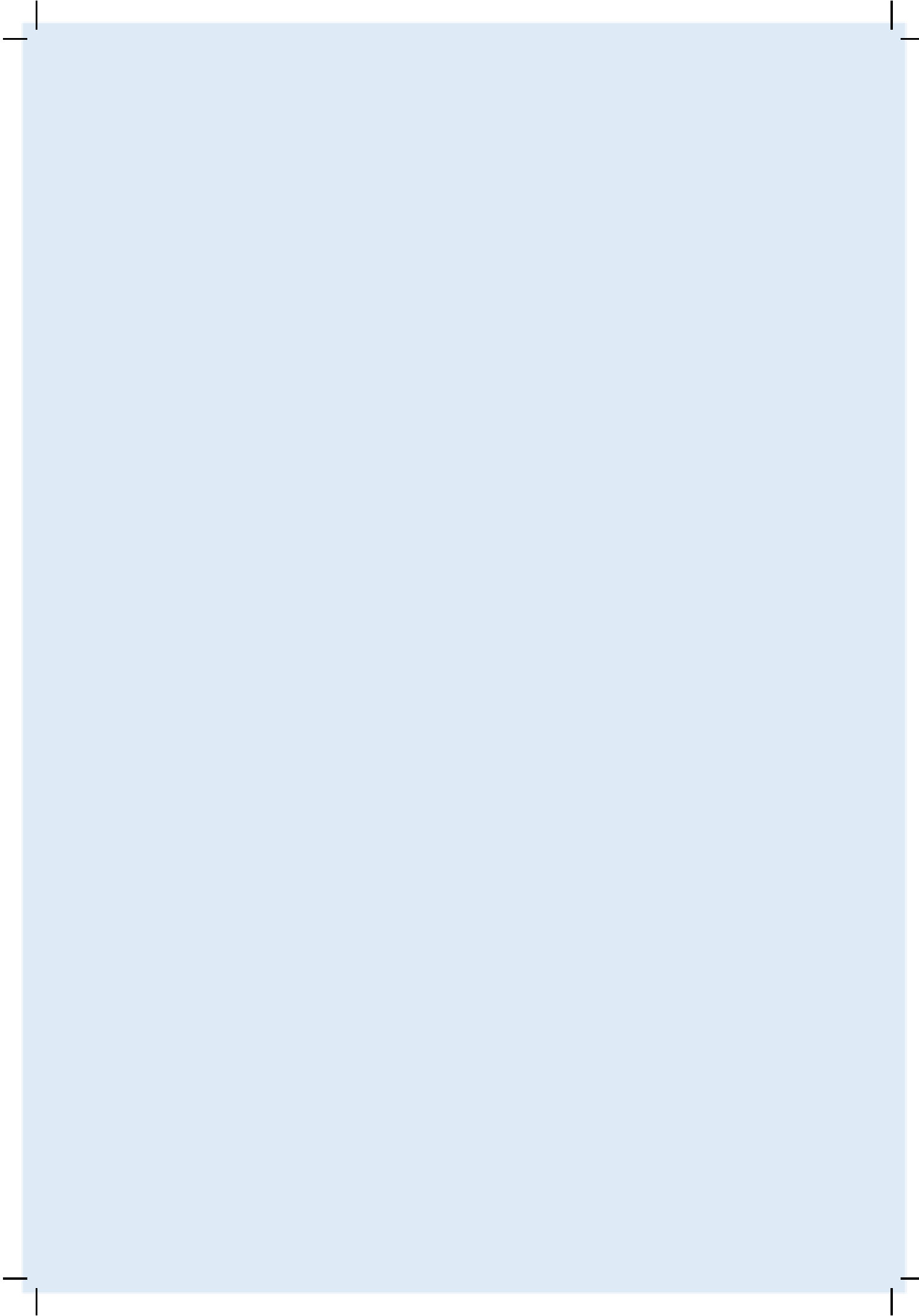
But that should not hold back the good work of those who are contributing to efforts to advance on the UN's future development and, in this regard, UN reform. To paraphrase ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, *change is inevitable*.

It is also worth noting, Rome was not built in a day.

But it is also the case that, as some of the world's most intractable conflicts and crises continue to spiral unabated—putting virtually all of the international community in peril, as the UNSC is [hamstrung](#) by "strategic competition between the United States, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the Russian Federation"—the UN and its membership do not have all the time in the world.

Something has got to give.

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Volume II

Why Two Global Security Crises bring a Renewed Sense of Urgency to UN Reform: A CARICOM Viewpoint

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

October 31, 2023

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Gaza, Ukraine Wars Elicit Different Reactions in the Caribbean's Foreign Policy Milieu

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Insofar as the spotlight tends to fall almost exclusively on [major Western powers](#) and regional (middle power-type) players relative to global flashpoints, such as the weeks-old Israel-Hamas War and the now 20-month-old Ukraine war, the focus is on their interests and the power dynamic thereof.

Such conflagrations also pose a risk to the security of others, though, notwithstanding that they are farther afield from these geopolitical hotspots.

The [14 sovereign](#) Small Island and Low-lying Coastal Developing States (SIDS) of the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#), which as small states [share](#) common foreign policy interests and challenges, are a case in point. (The grouping's mostly Anglophone, sovereign members gained independence from the 1960s to the 1980s.)

Unsurprisingly, whether it harnesses the United Nations (UN) or other means of diplomacy, this bloc has not missed the opportunity to weigh in on these current crises. What is behind this highly participatory approach to international diplomacy of the hour? For its members, amid mounting concerns within their political directorates and foreign policy apparatuses over the need to proactively shield [interests](#) in an ever more complex/unpredictable world, it is an opening to reaffirm their principled stand in relation to key tenets of the [UN Charter](#)—which articles 1 & 2 elucidate. So, too, is it a vehicle by which—for what are still relatively young polities—to shore up statehood and treat with concerns about would-be aggressors in their neck of the woods.

Instructively, as part of their attendant diplomacy, they have pitched their reactions differently *vis-à-vis* the aforesaid conflicts, which are [on](#) centre stage in international relations.

With regard to the unfolding Israel-Hamas War—which, given the historical and geopolitical driving forces involved, has the [makings](#) of a larger regional war—its outcome holds important implications for a major, UN-underwritten principle (that also informs CARICOM member states' respective foreign policies): self-determination.

It is instructive that the [statement](#) CARICOM published on October 9th, through which it first reacted to Hamas' October 7th surprise terrorist attacks on Israel, among other things, casts a critical eye on Israel's retaliatory strikes.

In so doing, its choice of narrative reference is powerfully evocative of members' own collective, pre-independence pasts—i.e. [“colonialism.”](#) On the face of it, and bumping up

against the statement's bid to tread a tightrope on the Israel-Hamas War, this is seemingly a CARICOM overture to Palestine.

CARICOM took a sharply different line than Washington, then, for whom the scale of Israeli military actions is considered to fall in the realm of a legitimate defensive response to the said attacks. (Even so, U.S. foreign and security policy communities have [counselled](#) the Israeli government to respect the laws of war and not to risk repeating America's post-9/11 mistakes.) Washington and Israel are, however, increasingly isolated on this position.

This is even more so the case in light of the much-anticipated vote conducted under the aegis of the Tenth Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), held October 26th – 27th, on a resolution that [calls](#) for an "immediate and sustained humanitarian truce" between the warring sides. (The EU, the [largest](#) aid donor both to Gaza and the West Bank, stated its [position](#) beforehand on humanitarian 'pauses' in connection with the Israel-Hamas War.)

This resolution—spearheaded by Arab states—received overwhelming support in the now suspended emergency session of the UNGA, with a recorded vote of 121 in favour to 14 against, with 44 abstentions.

The United States and Israel are the most prominent of the dissenting voices, with the former having gone against the grain to show support for Israel in a key organ of the UN. (That said, in recent days, Washington has [nuanced](#) its blanket backing of Israel, "emphasizing the need to protect Palestinian civilians in Gaza ahead of a looming Israeli ground invasion.")

On October 18th, the U.S. [scuttled](#) efforts in the UN Security Council (UNSC) to adopt a Brazilian-backed resolution calling for humanitarian pauses. (This is just the latest instance of the UNSC—whose principal mandate is the maintenance of international peace and security—suffering the effects of its [entanglement](#) in Ukraine war-related great-power competition.)

As is the case with UNGA resolutions, the resolution titled 'Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations' is non-binding. It is symbolic, though. It sends an important message in respect of the standpoint *qua* sentiment of most of the international community—which makes up the 193-member world body—on giving effect to the cessation of hostilities.

In the scheme of things, [virtually](#) all CARICOM member states voted in favour of the resolution, which some of them [co-sponsored](#). (The Bahamas, along with some other countries, was quick off the mark in publicly [welcoming](#) its adoption.)

This aligns with CARICOM's October 9th statement on the conflict, which unequivocally calls for an immediate ceasefire. In it, the parties concerned are urged to bring an end to hostilities. In the context of the way forward to [secure](#) Israel-Palestinian peace, what stands out is the bloc's support for UN-related [efforts](#) to bring about a two-state solution.

In the three weeks since the attacks, a growing chorus of CARICOM member states has reinforced this multi-tiered messaging.

Barbados, for instance, [called](#) for “an immediate ceasefire and end of hostilities by all parties.” Bridgetown cites the steadily [deteriorating](#) humanitarian situation on the ground in the Gaza Strip, voicing concern for persons’ wellbeing on both sides of the conflict.

All told, in its estimation, the urgency of putting a stop to the fighting turns on humanitarian considerations.

Bridgetown also underscores the international community’s responsibility to “now urgently agree and take action to ensure that the Palestinian people can exercise their right to self-determination in an independent internationally-recognised state of their own in accordance with international law.”

Barbados’ diplomatic posture on Palestine is a long-standing one, which is shared by other postcolonial CARICOM states, for whom self-determination-related international agendas are a top foreign policy priority.

For example, over a decade ago, Georgetown “[formally recognize\[d\] the State of Palestine as a free, independent, and sovereign state, based on its 1967 borders.](#)” The governing party has also [pronounced](#) on the war between Israel and Hamas, against a backdrop where Guyana’s President Irfaan Ali has [championed](#) the Palestinian cause on the international stage.

That South American country, whose population is partly of Muslim faith, [maintains](#) close ties with the Muslim world.

In the current circumstances, some commentators have gone so far as to [call](#) on Georgetown to “reset relations with Israel.”

Belize—having joined with its sister CARICOM states in calling for the cessation of hostilities in this most recent (though, in its scale, unprecedented) round of Israeli-Palestinian conflict—has also lent its [support](#) to efforts to breathe new life into the [case](#) for a Palestinian state.

These diplomatic narratives are telling. As intimated earlier, they engender a tie-in to [struggles](#) experienced in the colonial Caribbean. There is deep empathy for the prevailing “[epic suffering](#)” of Gazans who, by all appearances, are also the object of “[collective punishment](#)” and reportedly [dehumanizing invectives](#). (The Gaza Strip got the short end of the stick in the Israel-Hamas War and, in the process, the West Bank has also been [ensnared](#).)

CARICOM’s strong inclination toward the [right](#) of self-determination of the Palestinian people, as regards the [Palestinian question](#), is [not](#) uncommon across the developing (inclusive of the Arab) world.

CARICOM foreign policy [elites](#)’ associated thinking is that, as far as the conduct of friendly international relations is concerned, in [terms](#) of the ‘principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples’, this moment marks a [setback](#).

Like so many other quarters of the international community, as the [carnage](#) meted out by the Israeli war machine to Palestinians in what is widely [referred](#) to as the ‘world’s largest open-

air prison' continues unabated, CARICOM is left to ask hard questions about the [value](#) of Palestinian lives.

In short, there is a deep-seated current of Caribbean support to end systematized Palestinian subjugation—which plays out in the context of an imposing [panopticon](#) and [other](#) “sweeping restrictions” by Israel’s hand. It is understand that this is a throwback, of sorts, to a colonial past *à la* the “[plantation economy](#).” And given their [enduring](#) sense of societal trauma in the latter regard, CARICOM member states are also moved to show solidarity with the Palestinian nation.

Those parallels are not apparent in these countries’ foreign policy approach to another geopolitical context, the Ukraine war. (It is worth noting that the Ukraine war is tantamount to modern Ukraine’s war of independence, even though that nation-state—in its current [incarnation](#)—sprang into statehood out of the collapse of the Soviet Union some thirty years ago.)

Instead, that war is principally [seen](#) as being fraught with risks to the UN’s sovereignty and territorial integrity rule-book. To the extent that it is under challenge, a partial run-on effect on CARICOM member states arises.

There is no better example to enunciate this point than the Venezuelan security threat to the region, which is [escalating](#) anew.

Of note, recently, the Venezuelan National Assembly took a decision to mount a referendum in respect of Venezuela’s territorial [claim](#) of the Essequibo—proffering provocative and incendiary [narratives](#) in relation to that planned plebiscite.

This against the backdrop of a decades-long border dispute, which pits Caracas against Georgetown, with the former—a formidable foe for Guyana—laying claim to more than two-thirds of Guyanese territory.

As Guyana’s geopolitical [stock](#) has risen, on account of its recent [oil boom](#), so, too, have Caracas’ [bellicose statements](#) directed at Georgetown. On that score, having long since concluded that the threat in question has a bearing on all of its membership’s national interests, the bloc continues to stand its ground. It does so by standing with Guyana as Georgetown faces such existential moments of high politics.

It has, once again, come out in [support](#) of Guyana, whose border woes with Venezuela are a [standing](#) item in CARICOM summitry. The Guyana-Venezuela border issue also features in the calculations of the bloc’s foreign policy establishment, i.e. [The Council for Foreign and Community Relations or COFCOR](#).

In situations like this, the bloc’s members call attention to the primacy of international law. Simply put: As small states, they are outmatched by larger countries’ [hard power](#) repertoire; such that their principal recourse to sabre-rattling, or worse, from third parties is wholesale rejection of the use of force or military means (or threats thereof) to resolve disputes.

In such circumstances, whether it was in the especially vulnerable period of their initial postcolonial steps, or, in the decades following the same, as independent states coming into their own, they instinctively pivot to international law.

At the [heart of the matter](#), as Guyana's leadership underscores, is to spare no effort to resist Venezuela's "persistent endeavours to undermine Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity." (Those underlying elements of its foreign policy are sacrosanct for this CARICOM member state, as they are for the bloc's other members, too.) Accordingly, Georgetown is on record in rejecting "the latest actions by the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in pursuit of its spurious claim to the Essequibo territory of Guyana."

As regards the peaceful resolution of the Guyana-Venezuela border issue, in seeking advantages over Caracas, Georgetown pursues several multilateral tracks. In addition to the CARICOM route, the UN is one such track. Georgetown utilizes hemisphere-level diplomatic [thoroughfares](#), too, chief among which is the Organization of American States.

Moreover, bilateral relations give a fillip to Guyana's sovereignty-related cause regarding the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy. In this regard, Brazil's [support](#) is especially consequential.

Taken together, these tracks turn as much on recourse to international norms and law as they do on soft power-driven diplomatic imperatives.

This particular [moment](#) poses a critical test and has potentially serious consequences for Guyana's foreign policy, whose biggest prize is the peaceful resolution of this border dispute.

Caracas' plebiscite-related ploy to try to one-up Georgetown is just the latest twist in this long-running saga, in which Venezuela has—rhetorically but also *via* cross-border skirmishes—made a play for the Essequibo.

The present power play is deeply disconcerting for Guyana and CARICOM writ large, not least because it is partway reminiscent of Russian President Vladimir Putin's [revanchist playbook](#) *vis-à-vis* his Ukraine-related gambit.

Given this reality, the Kremlin's so-called special military operation in Ukraine—for CARICOM and Guyana alike—hits too close to home. Fundamentally, given its scale and the aggressor involved (a [P5](#) UNSC member, no less), this war represents the greatest test yet to core tenets of the UN and the post-war international order: sovereignty and territorial integrity or political independence.

For this reason, CARICOM came out forcefully and quickly to condemn the full-scale invasion (and the attendant war) perpetrated on Ukraine by Russia, which—to its mind—plays fast and loose with the UN Charter and the international system that constituent document helps to undergird.

In all of this, in a context where the prevailing (international) politics often prove far costlier for such states, the Ukraine war-related turn of (international) events is [roiling](#) the conduct of CARICOM member states' global affairs.

In sum, at such a critical moment, with the Middle East and Europe both poised on a knife-edge, CARICOM's international relations also face high costs. After all, they are subject to the knock-on effects of wars whose wider impact on global (in)security is far-reaching. Those wars complicate challenges and dilemmas for all concerned, at all [levels](#). And they further [test](#) a multipolar international order *in the making*.

For CARICOM, the significance of the Gaza and Ukraine crises is in the degree to which—as sketched in the foregoing analysis—it has a growing stake in how those wars play *qua* pan out relative to the security environment globally and in the Caribbean Basin, yet, it is faced with significant obstacles regarding its ability to help bring game-changing influence to bear.

Getting to that point turns, among other things, on UN [reform](#)—in [all](#) its forms.

Efforts to lay the groundwork for such an overhaul have long since been established, with some demonstrably more [visible](#) than others. Along the way, CARICOM has taken a keen [interest](#) in leaving its mark on the process.

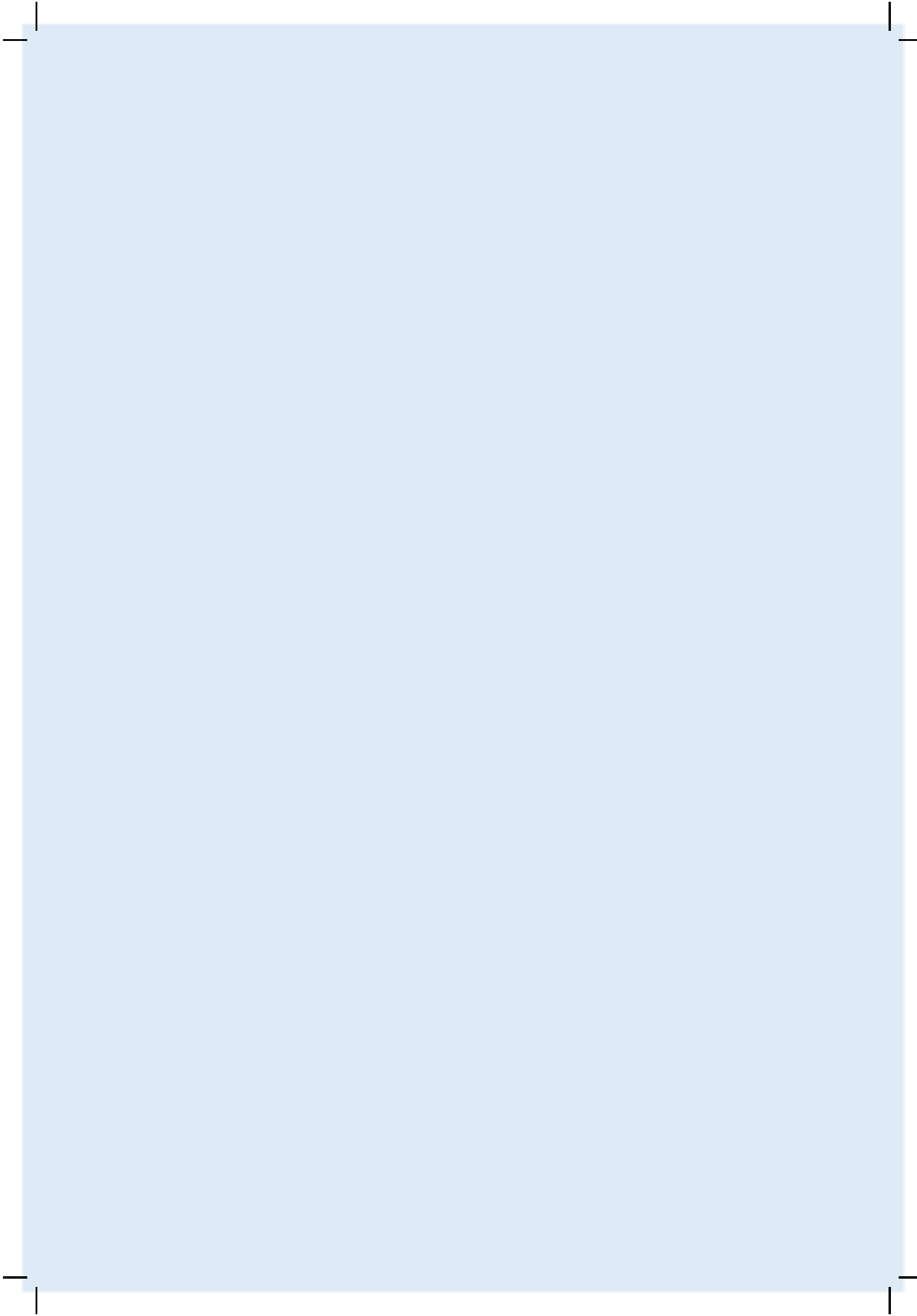
Today, as the UN has hit a tipping point, with the above crises only adding to this sad state of affairs, making headway as regards reform-related [efforts](#) is an imperative duty.

If there is a silver lining to those crises-configured moments, it is that their all-round ghastly effects on humanity ought to act as a spur to a [San Francisco moment](#) 2.0.

Whether next year's much [vaunted](#) Summit of the Future can rise to the challenge is an open question. Regardless, there is much in the 'Our Common Agenda' initiative that resonates with and appeals to CARICOM member states, which should seize this moment and meaningfully contribute to efforts to shape the development of an inclusive, UN-centric multilateral system.

They can't afford not to.

To access the foregoing published article online, please [click here](#).



Primer Nº 5

Why UNSC Reform Dynamics Matter to Key Dimensions of CARICOM's Security

Keywords:

| UN Reform | UNSC | Sovereignty | Territorial Integrity | Thrust and Parry | Anarchic Global System |

UN Security Council reform: A Caribbean view

AUTHOR : NAND C. BARDOUILLE

Expert Speak Raisina Debates

Published on Dec 14, 2023



For CARICOM, a reformed Security Council is vitally important in beating back hard power-related action that undermines the Caribbean's security



Why UNSC Reform Dynamics Matter to Key Dimensions of CARICOM's Security

A Two-Volume Assessment

Published during the month:
December 2023

December 14, 2023

By
Nand C. Bardouille

Volume I

Setting the Scene:
The UN Security Council in the Thrust-and-Parry
of the Anarchic Global System:
A CARICOM Standpoint

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

December 14, 2023

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Highlighting Salient Issues

Nand C. Bardouille

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December 14, 2023

In official foreign policy discourse in respect of the 14 sovereign SIDS of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) bloc, the "maintenance and preservation" of sovereignty and territorial integrity (which go hand in hand) is a common refrain. Realizing that the spectre of the extreme Hobbesian side of the anarchic global system weighs heavily on such small states, political and policy elites go to great lengths to get behind that stance.

And they are right to do so. After all, international politics' record offers warnings.

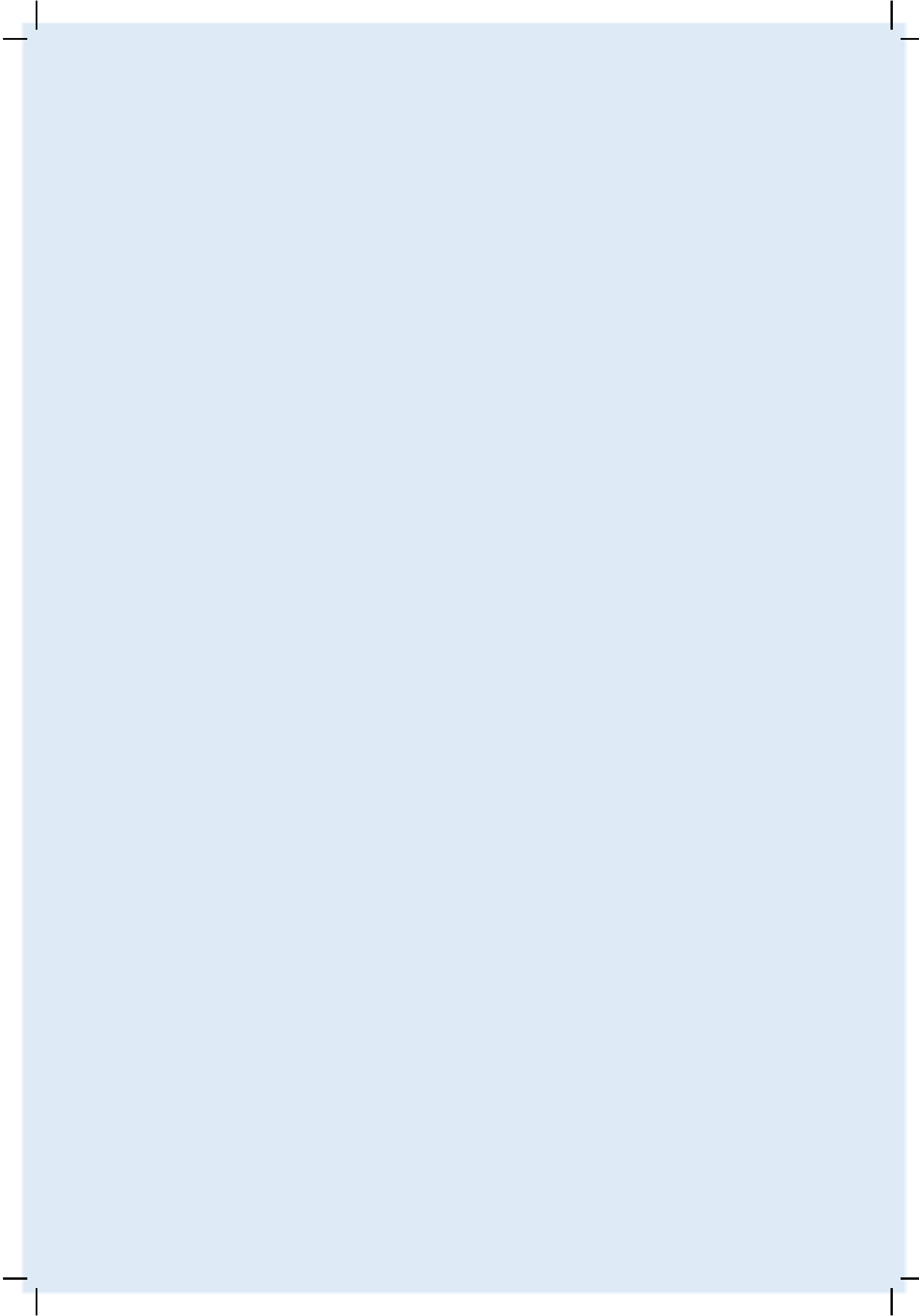
A case in point: Caracas' recent attempts to ratchet up pressure on Georgetown *vis-à-vis* the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy. (This headline making turn of events is explored in greater detail in a three-part analysis featured in Primer № 6 of the *Handbook on Caribbean Community Foreign Relations and Statecraft*.)

Against this backdrop, and out of concern for their respective interests, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is seen as vitally important in safeguarding such states' security.

Yet if "structural and functional reforms of the [UNSC]"—which major powers seemingly do not attach any great urgency to—are not meaningfully addressed, in reality, that article of faith may not hold up.

Relatedly, high-stakes geopolitical manoeuvres of the moment are such that UNSC reform efforts have a hard task ahead, and—as the assessment at Volume II of this Primer contends—CARICOM has a stake therein. Put differently, and with an eye to the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy, Security Council reform-related half measures could be costly for the bloc.

To download that assessment, please [click here](#).



Volume II

UN Security Council Reform: A Caribbean View

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

December 14, 2023

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UN Security Council Reform: A Caribbean View

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December 14, 2023

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It is now apparent with respect to the seemingly intractable Gaza and Ukraine wars, whose wider effects reverberate, not only regionally but also internationally, the bill for the slow rolling of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reform has come due. These conflicts, which raise the ante in terms of global insecurity, have virtually sidelined the UNSC. It has just experienced yet another institutional setback. In recent days, a [resolution](#) aimed at dialling back hostilities in respect of the Gaza war was scuttled, exposing the extent of the dysfunction therein. (For the first time since the outbreak of those hostilities, the Council only backed a [resolution](#) accordingly on 15 November 2023.)

This as the world is in the [throes](#) of a multipolar international order in the making; a geopolitical variable that, among a confluence of other variables, is increasingly foreclosing the UNSC [P5](#)'s impetus to consistently accord with the Council's mission. It is also the clearest signal yet that the UNSC is being set up to pay a price for the resultant forfeit of great-power engagement, which has seemingly gone the way of the dinosaur.

It is high time for traditional Security Council power brokers to realise that for this premier UN organ to step into the future, the ongoing Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN)^[i] process must meaningfully take on board key [asks](#) of the L69 group of countries—a grouping that includes countries from Africa, Latin America, Caribbean, Pacific Island states and Asia—as follows:

- Expansion of the Council, both permanent and non-permanent categories of membership, because this will lend to the body's representativeness, legitimacy, and effectiveness. (The matter of a rotating SIDS-related seat has also been raised.)
- Enhanced role, along with presence, of developing countries in the Council, which is linked to ensuring equitable geographical representation, especially as it pertains to under-represented and unrepresented regions and groups. (This is in connection with both categories of Council membership.)
- In principle, the IGN process ought to approach associated talks from the vantage point of text-based negotiations *vis-à-vis* a single consolidated text—in keeping with a fixed timeframe.

Broadly, UNSC reform is taken up with the following five-fold issues:

1. Membership-related categories;
2. The veto that the P5 members hold;
3. Regional representation;
4. What an enlarged Security Council engenders on account of size, not least regarding its working methods; and
5. The relationship between the UNSC and UN General Assembly (UNGA).

The 14 sovereign SIDS of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) bloc, comprising mostly Anglophone members who gained independence from the 1960s to the 1980s (and which share common foreign policy interests/challenges), have a sizeable stake in UNSC reform. This is the case because the Council is central to their collective security strategy. (What is more, any dysfunction in that body undercuts their own defence capabilities). A recent example is the UNSC's authorisation, in October 2023, of a landmark international security mission for Haiti—one of CARICOM's two non-Anglophone members—with a view to helping its “national police quell surging gang violence and restore security across the strife-torn Caribbean nation.” In October 2022, Haitian authorities first appealed to the international community for assistance in the restoration of security, as well as in the alleviation of the humanitarian crisis that has beset the embattled country. The UNSC's requisite follow through took a while to bear fruit and, in the interim, the conditions in-country worsened.

Moreover, and by way of yet another example, CARICOM member states deem the UNSC as vitally important in beating back hard power-related action that undermines the Caribbean as a zone of peace, which Venezuela's Guyana-related adventurism threatens to do. In this context and more, from the prism of its much-anticipated reform, they have a lot riding on the UNSC being up to the task in line with a consequential UNGA resolution titled 'Protection and security of small States' that *inter alia*

Calls upon the Security Council and other relevant organs of the United Nations to pay special attention to the protection and security of small States in the restructuring and revitalization of the work of the United Nations, especially within the context of the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization and in the follow-up activities of the report of the Secretary-General of 17 June 1992 entitled "An Agenda for Peace." (emphasis added)

CARICOM member states record of close involvement in processes^[ii] intended to move the needle *vis-à-vis* rejigging the Council must also be seen in the context of their active engagement in the affairs of this UN organ. A case in point is St. Vincent and the Grenadines, one of just a handful of CARICOM member states which have served as P10 elected UNSC members. It has left its mark and led on such ‘big ticket’ Council reform issues as representativeness, not least by being instrumental in the advent of and placing itself firmly behind what is considered to be the most important development in the Council's recent history: The diplomatically innovative 'A3 Plus One Mechanism'.

In coming into being, this mechanism has enabled formalised coordination and collaboration between St. Vincent the Grenadines and African countries on the UNSC. Beginning in 2024, Guyana will take up that mantle *vis-à-vis* its two-year tenure on the Security Council. (Essentially, owing to this initiative, Africa is afforded yet another seat on the UNSC.)

Such a diplomatic stance goes hand in glove with a cardinal principle of CARICOM member states' foreign policymaking: They will fare best at confronting security threats if they, too, are in the diplomatic driver's seat regarding advancing associated solutions. This thinking has led to St. Vincent the Grenadines, for example, at this moment, leveraging its Pro Tempore Presidency of the Community of Latin American and the Caribbean States (CELAC) for the

period 2023 in the service of high-level diplomacy on the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy.

Notably, principally addressed to his Guyanese and Venezuelan counterparts, a 9th December letter from Vincentian Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves calls attention to a presidential meeting that will be held in St. Vincent the Grenadines on 14 December. It is convened under the auspices of CELAC and CARICOM, with a view to focusing on matters consequential to the border controversy between Guyana and Venezuela.

This comes against a backdrop of the latter party having flouted the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) decision, handed down on 1 December, which states that both sides in the said controversy should refrain from taking any action that changes the *status quo* in the territory in question. Caracas' sabre-rattling compelled Georgetown to take up the matter at the UNSC, with—to quote Prime Minister Gonsalves—“recent events and circumstances attendant upon the border controversy” occupying the attention of CARICOM Heads of Government at a recently held virtual meeting.

In short, Guyana and, by extension, CARICOM are currently confronted by a live security-related threat to sovereignty and territorial integrity or political independence, emanating from Venezuela. With regard to its territorial claim of the Essequibo, Caracas is now menacing anew. Georgetown sought immediate relief from the ICJ, which is presiding over the case of the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy, even as the UN has traditionally kept tabs on the matter.

All told, the reality of the relatively small size of the respective CARICOM countries—which are no match for large(r) counterparts—makes an effective UNSC the paramount issue in their (collective) security strategy.

In conclusion, in establishing the UN, nearly 80 years ago, fitting of the moment, on paper, the international community put the anarchic global system on an international peace and security footing. Although that intent came into sharp focus at the time, gradually, this historic experiment in multilateralism has been subjected to the test of states' predisposition “towards conflict and competition.” If there is a single reason for this behaviour, according to the realist school of thought in the discipline of International Relations, it is states' preoccupation with (the search for) security. This needs to be said, if only because (in)security is the prism through which small and large states alike view international politics; the first set is no less than the second.

It follows that, in respect of their principal security blanket, a dysfunctional UNSC augurs ill for CARICOM member states; possibly, they could end up ceding diplomatic and/or political ground *qua* leverage to would-be aggressors. (There is little for these states to gain from—to paraphrase the late former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan—going all in with diplomacy in interstate relations, absent the means of appropriate recourse to the UNSC's “firmness and force” in a bid to amplify its effects.) After all, they are reliant on the Security Council upholding legitimacy, effectiveness and an unwavering commitment to implement its decisions.

In one of history's great ironies, then, a Council that was fashioned by Allied powers' statesmen of the day is a lifeline for some of the contemporary international system's [smallest](#) states. For CARICOM, a Security Council that is fit for purpose is best able and suited to serve its security interests, which can only really be upheld through third parties at that level; given its membership's size-related constraints.

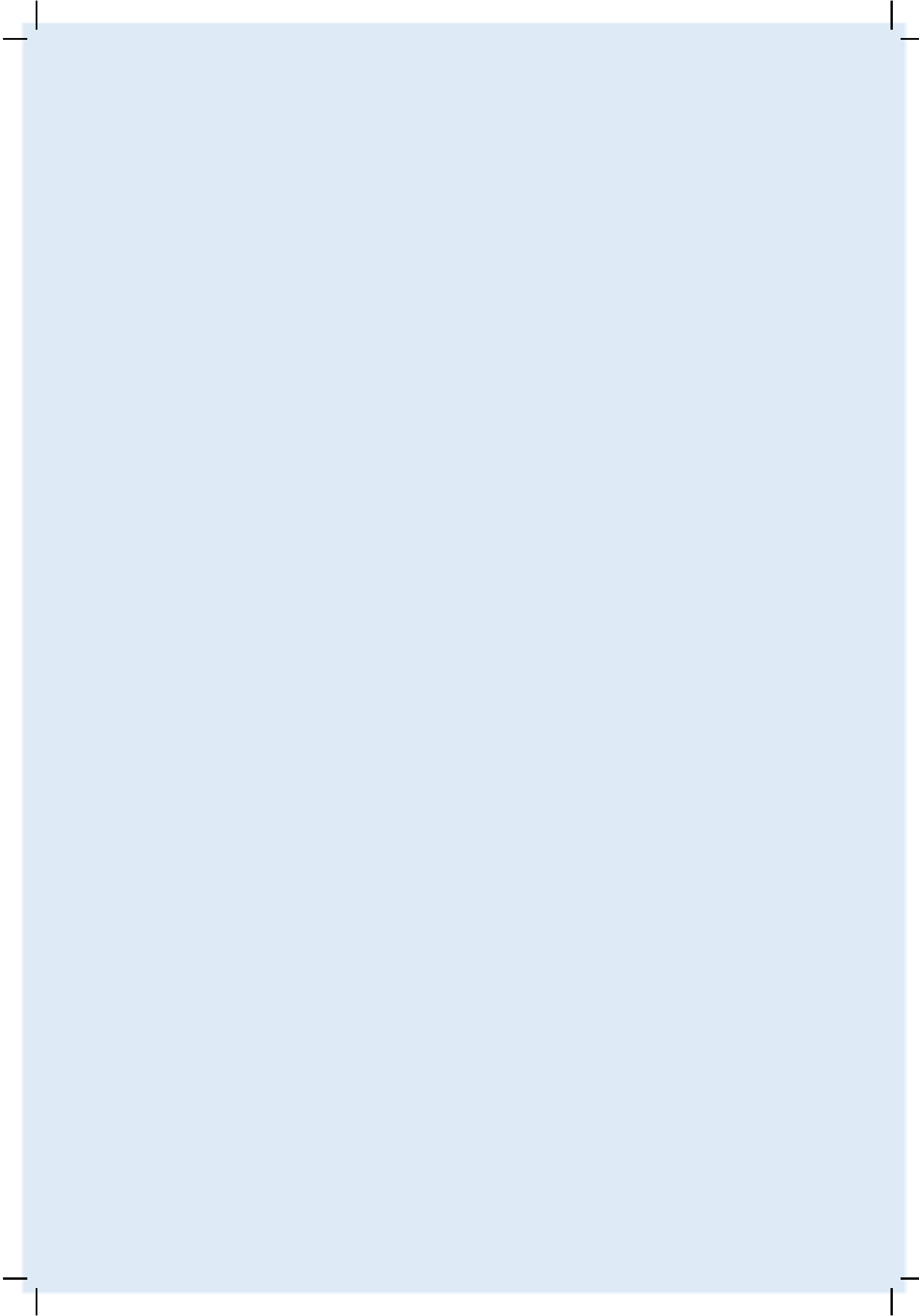
Instructively, as regards UNSC reform, CARICOM supports only one model: Expansion in both categories. Consequentially, in this vein, representativeness is the key to transformation at the level of the Council and systemically. This resonates with post-colonial states, like those of CARICOM. For such states, as it is currently configured, the UNSC is a vestige and reminder of the imperialist past. Some would say it is a 'relic' of a bygone era. Indeed, its [composition](#) “no longer reflects global geopolitical realities.”

Paying [lip service](#), then, to UNSC reform is a nonstarter. From CARICOM member states' perspective, having regard to the foregoing analysis, to do so is to gamble on their future. Finally, doing so would also be revealing of the fact that there are some who are less determined to take seriously the UNSC's guardianship of the [UN Charter](#). This is self-defeating, considering the UN Charter is principally taken up with buttressing international peace and security, precisely because the anarchic global system is hardwired to do otherwise.

[i] i.e. Intergovernmental Negotiations on the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other related matters to the Security Council, or IGN.

[ii] For a useful online resource that contextualizes and traces the evolution of the IGN over a 25 year period, please refer to [Handbook on Security Council Reform: 25 Years of Deliberations](#). The L69 is behind this resource document, which was published in 2018.

To access the foregoing published article online, please [click here](#).



Primer Nº 6

**Heightened Guyana-Venezuela Tensions in a Geopolitical
Climate of Shifting Mindsets**

Keywords:

Guyana-Venezuela Border Controversy	CARICOM's Security	National Interest (intra- and extra-CARICOM)	Geopolitical Climate	Shifting Mindsets
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Guyana's Rise and Caribbean Regionalism: Point of Friction or Rallying Point?

SITUATION REPORTS - February 21, 2024

Venezuela's ongoing military build-up near Essequibo represents a major test of CARICOM's diplomatic cohesion.



A Janus-faced Essequibo Policy? Venezuela Stokes Up Border Tensions

SITUATION REPORTS - February 15, 2024

Recent military build-ups along the Guyana border strike a stark contrast with earlier steps toward a diplomatic resolution on Essequibo.



Guyana Emerges from Whirlwind 2023 with Elevated Global Standing

SITUATION REPORTS - February 8, 2024

In a geopolitical David and Goliath story, Caracas' heavy-handed attempted land grab for the oil-rich Essequibo region has failed (for now) due in large part to deft regional diplomacy.

Heightened Guyana-Venezuela Tensions in a Geopolitical Climate of Shifting Mindsets

A Three-Volume
Assessment

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February 21, 2024

By
Nand C. Bardouille

Volume I

Guyana's Contemporary Security Relations with Venezuela, viewed against the Broad Sweep of CARICOM and other Interests: *Part 1 of 3*

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

February 8, 2024

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Guyana Emerges from Whirlwind 2023 with Elevated Global Standing

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February 8, 2024

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In a red-letter day for Guyana earlier last month, for the third time, it took up an [elected](#) non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), with its latest brush with Venezuela barely in the rearview mirror.

The bigger picture: At a time when the relationship between Guyana and Venezuela reached a nadir—creating a new test for all concerned—that Guyana came out on top in the border spat carried its own message. Of note, ineluctably, in terms of the atmospherics of this juncture in the international relations of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), there is a palpable sense that Guyana is primed to be bumped up the [“diplomatic hierarchy.”](#)

The grounds for why this is the case are that—owing to other transformational successes, as well—Guyana turned the corner in what historically has been a lopsided, marred relationship with Venezuela. This is the very thing that Caracas feared most as it hatched a scheme that threatened to place off balance the security order in the Caribbean Basin, coming at a geopolitical moment when the stakes could not be any higher, with [system](#) effectual [wars](#) raging in the Middle East and Europe.

As 2023 drew to a close—having long been in Venezuela’s crosshairs, against the backdrop of Caracas’ long-held [claim](#) of the oil-rich Essequibo region—Guyana faced a profound and perilous moment, which brought these two South American countries closer to a new crisis.

Not for the first time, strongman President Nicolás Maduro sought to parlay the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy into a geopolitical bully pulpit, which in itself has the potential to be a prelude to the use of force. Maduro leaned on his [“authoritarian gambit,”](#) on the one hand, in a harbinger of Venezuela’s vaunted regional [hard power](#) prowess and, on the other hand, in a [bid](#) to up the ante regarding his regime’s [politicization](#) of the long-running territorial dispute. (Relatedly, with a view to [rallying](#) support to remain a political force in-country, the Maduro regime also sought to distract attention from multiple internal/domestic [crises](#).)

With characteristically [bellicose](#), freewheeling public remarks leveled against Guyana—Venezuela’s contiguous eastern neighbor—Caracas assumed a more confrontational posture, contriving a pretext for and a hyping of an ominous annexation-related [machination](#). To put it in context, at the height of this latest clash of wills—pitting an authoritarian-led petrostate (that has lost its luster) against a democratically governed petrostate (that is ascending at an astonishing clip)—Venezuelan [hawks](#) routinely militated for escalation. As never before, they were seemingly intent on Venezuela lurching headlong into war. And they seethed at the national unity on [display](#) in Guyana, as Caracas ratcheted up its rhetorical attacks, a foreshadowing of Venezuela’s losing hand.

While tone deaf to the international clamor against it, Caracas' message to Guyana then was clear-cut. And it was a veiled threat to other regional (ostensibly island) states, bearing in mind Venezuela's [unilateral extension](#) of its maritime boundaries some years ago. In this sense, inasmuch as the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy is the single-most important security issue for Georgetown, when framed against differences over Caracas' maneuvering in respect of Venezuela's exclusive economic zone, the implications for Guyana's [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#) sister [SIDS](#) are significant.

Disagreements over the Ukraine war are also pertinent, having regard to CARICOM's foreign policy [standpoint](#) on the same, which is in stark contrast to Venezuela's [backing](#) of Russia's full-scale invasion of its smaller western neighbor and to the [deepening](#) of Russia-Venezuela relations.

Fundamentally, Venezuela flexing its muscles amped up the specter of a Caracas-orchestrated land-grab in respect of a founding member of the CARICOM bloc, whose [14](#) mostly Anglophone [sovereign](#) members once depended heavily on Venezuela's largess. As polities which only gained political independence in the 20th century, some were recently [angling](#) for a reboot of attendant (now defunct) oil diplomacy. Seen in this light, Caracas' certitude to dominate its surrounding region does not sit well with them.

With heightened [tensions](#) between Caracas and Georgetown, whose suspicions qua threat perceptions only grew by the day, the two sides traded diplomatic [barbs](#). But it was not long before other parties also with a stake in the matter got involved; among them, the bloc of CARICOM states. Through the collective effort of all concerned, Maduro was offered (and took up) an offramp from the course of action that he initiated.

Once the dust had settled—further to the investment of political capital by Kingstown, Brasília and others to try to get Caracas to play ball on the so-called [Joint Declaration of Argyle for Dialogue and Peace between Guyana and Venezuela](#)—Caracas went from seemingly holding all the cards, when this saga [began](#) in September 2023, to being in a diminished position diplomatically at its end.

Sure enough, that accord's strictures overshadowed the [“largely symbolic referendum”](#) on the creation of a new Venezuelan state in the Essequibo region. What is more, even though it was held on December 3rd and voters—albeit, in the context of an apparently [low](#) turnout—backed Caracas' territorial claim, the referendum has not had any legal or practical effect. Rather, and in spite of Caracas' (toothless) attempt at [face-saving](#), it has been relegated from the news headlines to a footnote in the history of Guyana-Venezuela relations.

This turn of events was not lost on Georgetown, which is wise in the ways of the well-worn Essequibo-related page in Caracas' foreign policy playbook. Despite its best efforts to deploy that stratagem, Caracas came away grasping at straws in what was a ham-fisted referendum.

Significantly, in the face of the swirl of Caracas' baseless provocations, held up as a show of strength, Georgetown stuck to its guns on the primacy of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the overall scheme of things. A sober-minded Georgetown seized on Caracas' rhetorical

flare-ups to repeatedly bring to the fore the ICJ's [role](#) in furnishing the legitimate, definitive resolution to the border controversy, once and for all.

In hindsight, what is apparent is that Caracas overplayed its hand, with little if anything to show for it. (After such costly misses, it is unsurprising that analysts do not have a favourable [outlook](#) for Venezuela's looming presidential elections.) If anything, as reflected in the aforesaid accord, agreement to establish forthwith a joint commission at ministerial and technical levels in respect of Guyana and Venezuela (to treat with pertinent matters) is a material concession that Georgetown received.

On the question of what has changed since then, that can be summed up in Georgetown having set its sights on a turnabout in the story of Guyana's foreign policy.

With this in mind, and as is discernible from its foreign policy ether, material capabilities and coercion [no longer](#) hold sway over Guyana's border woes, for a three-pronged set of reasons.

First, if what the [fuss](#) is about in international politics is power, a great deal of the latter hangs on a country's geopolitical [stock](#), which in the case of Guyana has gone through the roof. (There is a resultant tension that arises, insofar as a multitude of interlocking risks also come into play.) More broadly, in such a context, the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy is now salient for [great](#) and [balancing](#) qua [middle](#) powers. (For their part, as previously intimated, [small states](#) are also deeply invested in the same.)

Hugely influential is Washington's [staunch](#) support for Guyana's sovereignty, which is a concept under assault in a [liberal international order](#) under severe challenge. So, too, is London's [support](#), which Georgetown [counts on](#) to a considerable degree.

Among the principal actors in this narrative are [transnational oil companies](#). Some—among whom ExxonMobil [looms large](#), as the oil giant that made the record-breaking oil discovery off Guyana's coast in 2015—are heavily invested in-country. Those stakes are also helpful in making [sense](#) of the motivations and actions of some of the states involved, which comprise what ontologically constitute "[key actors in international relations](#)."

With considerable oil deposits, Guyana is now a consequential part of U.S.-cornered capitalist production at the intersection of energy, security and international politics, encompassing interests at the heart of the neoliberal hegemonic [project](#) vis-à-vis the international environment. Already, Guyana is at the [sharpest](#) phase yet in its quest to join the [ranks](#) of leading fossil fuel producers. In a span of just four years as an oil producer, on a per capita basis, the value of Guyana's [oil reserves](#) is among the highest the [world over](#).

The shared interest of the powers set out above, relative to the border matter in question, who have thrown their weight behind Guyana, adds gravitas to the latter and, by extension, cuts away at any misplaced notion of Venezuela exercising authority as a superordinate actor thereof.

Still, with the inviolability of borders being routinely tested by the aforementioned wars, stable balance of power dynamics are under assault.

Second, as it turns out, Georgetown has not quite cast its lot with the West. A case in point: Georgetown [backs](#) Beijing.

This in the knowledge that going all-in risks geopolitically constraining how Guyana can position itself in the international environment, amid [shifts](#) in the international balance of power.

Hence, while the old, now-familiar status quo between Guyana and Venezuela is steadily eroding, it will not have a bearing on the former's stance on such Caracas-backers as the People's Republic of China (PRC), which recently [elevated](#) its ties with Venezuela.

Furthermore, it is hard to imagine that Beijing is inattentive to the geopolitical competition over the Essequibo region. That said, while the PRC has [expanded](#) its presence in Guyana, including in the petroleum sector, Beijing insists that its involvement in the latter is "[not in any disputed area](#)."

Above all, and as a result, Guyana has at its disposal "[a wide range of policy options](#)."

Third, be it in [UN](#) or in [Organization of American States](#) (among other) institutional settings, Guyana's border issue is of greater urgency than at any time in recent history. (Moreover, the little-known border controversy—at least outside of the wider LAC region—has now caught the world's eye.) It looms large in international organizations' thinking notably on [high politics](#), lending to what scholars call their "[throughput legitimacy](#)."

The wider context is their interest and stake in standing up for the inviolability of borders, fearful that their historically understood roles as conduits qua catalysts for cooperation and peace may be sacrificed on the altar of international politics-related visioning à la the [struggle for power](#) qua realpolitik. This [line of thought](#), which stands opposed to realist [explanations](#), "rests on the belief that institutions are a key means of promoting world peace."

Beyond this, and as a means to further their respective interests, small states like Guyana are also invested in such organizations. By way of example, with regard to its current tenure at the UNSC, Guyana is advancing a [five-fold](#) set of priorities. In terms of Georgetown's interest in [highlighting](#) the nexus between climate change, food insecurity and conflict, it is behind a high-level open [debate](#) (set to take place later this month) that is carded as the signature event of Guyana's presidency of the Security Council.

In sum, all of this suggests that the tide of history is in Georgetown's favor. The far more important takeaway from this series of developments is that—as borne out by the foregoing analysis—Caracas' heavy-handed, antagonistic foreign policy-related antics backfired, proving ineffective and counterproductive.

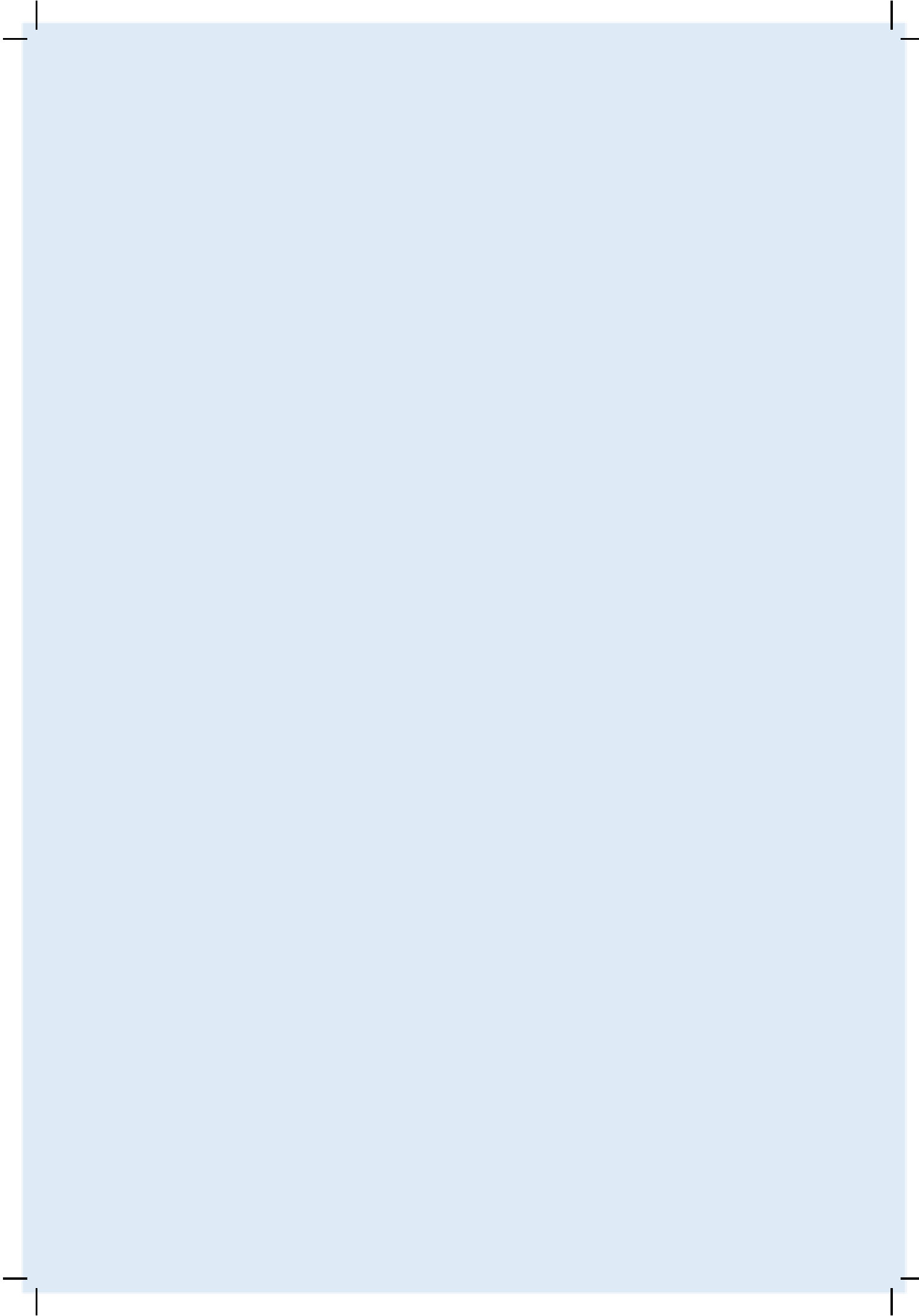
For one thing, and in a diplomatic move that will resonate for years to come, Georgetown upset Caracas' wider regional strategy. For another, it mostly weathered the onslaught.

Which is not to say that the risk of a Guyana-Venezuela showdown goes away, or, that greater, fast-moving risks to that country's security are sucked away, too.

Alas, this is the nature of the [anarchic](#) international system.

My thanks go to my daughter, Annmarie, for helping me work through some perspectives in this article.

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Volume II

Guyana's Contemporary Security Relations with Venezuela, viewed against the Broad Sweep of CARICOM and other Interests: *Part 2 of 3*

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

February 15, 2024

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A Janus-faced Essequibo Policy? Venezuela Stokes Up Border Tensions

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In a [previous article](#) published on February 8, I analyzed Guyana's latest brush with Venezuela. The border spat, which flared up toward the tail end of 2023, was manufactured by the Nicolás Maduro regime. It brought these two (contrasting) petrostates closer to a new crisis, making things worse for Caracas diplomatically.

Not so for Georgetown, as my article contends in three steps. It concludes that Caracas' heavy-handed, antagonistic foreign policy-related antics backfired, proving ineffective and counterproductive.

For one thing, and in a diplomatic move that will resonate for years to come, Georgetown upset Caracas' wider regional strategy. For another, it mostly weathered the onslaught.

However, my article's conclusion also signals a cautionary note. It underscores that the risk of a Guyana-Venezuela showdown does not go away and that greater, fast-moving risks to that country's security still exist.

In recent days, within sight of Guyana's western border, [indications](#) (reportedly made public by Guyanese authorities) are that Venezuelan military maneuvers are afoot. This reported build-up of Venezuelan forces near that border, now receiving greater coverage by the international media, has come under scrutiny relative to a recently minted agreement to [de-escalate](#) tensions between these two South American neighbors.

It is noteworthy that pursuant to the terms of the Joint Declaration of Argyle for Dialogue and Peace between Guyana and Venezuela—and in the context of the first meeting of the Joint Commission—on January 25th, the Foreign Ministers of Guyana and Venezuela met in Brasília. Those talks were [facilitated](#) by Brazil's Foreign Minister, with representatives of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and the United Nations on hand as observers.

This reported Venezuelan saber-rattling has cast a shadow over the first tentative steps on the previously agreed path of the aforementioned Joint Commission-driven process which, as currently configured, may falter.

It is telling that—according to a timely piece of analysis (titled '[Miscalculation and Escalation over the Essequibo](#)') published by a leading Washington-based think tank—Caracas is employing a 'compellence strategy' vis-à-vis the border controversy. This, in the view of one of the authors, bears the hallmark of a "[duplicitous policy](#)" on the part of the Maduro regime.

Reportedly, leaders of the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#) bloc have set their [sights](#) on advancing a sweeping response. In that regard, backing down is not in the cards for Guyana, or, for that matter, this regional grouping of [small states](#).

That said, with a major joint natural gas [project](#) recently clinched, Trinidad and Tobago is trying to walk the tightrope between Georgetown and Caracas. The agreement, which Washington had to [scrutinize](#), caused [disquiet](#) in Georgetown.

However, and insofar as several regional states are pursuing diplomatic gambits geared toward deepening relations with Venezuela, that reaction from Georgetown is not illustrative of the [view](#) in CARICOM member states writ large vis-à-vis Venezuela-connected energy deals. Even as Guyana has rallied sister CARICOM members to stand up to Venezuela's Essequibo-related geopolitical bullying and bad-faith diplomacy, those countries are not doing themselves any favors by accentuating policy differences on such deals.

For all the talk about their differing records in diplomatically treating with Venezuela, though, in line with their respective [national interests](#), CARICOM member states are all of one mind about Caracas' latest scheme aimed at Guyana: It may be Caracas' riskiest geopolitical bet yet, given the stakes, interests and players involved. (I outline these issues in my [aforesaid article](#).)

It represents a test not just to Guyana, but to CARICOM, as well as to the regional security and international orders.

Inasmuch as there are apparent divisions within the CARICOM grouping over Venezuela, then, Georgetown must put the latest provocation by Caracas into perspective by paying heed to the long-standing priority of the bloc's strategy relative to the wider region. Namely, the intention is for the latter to remain a [Zone of Peace](#).

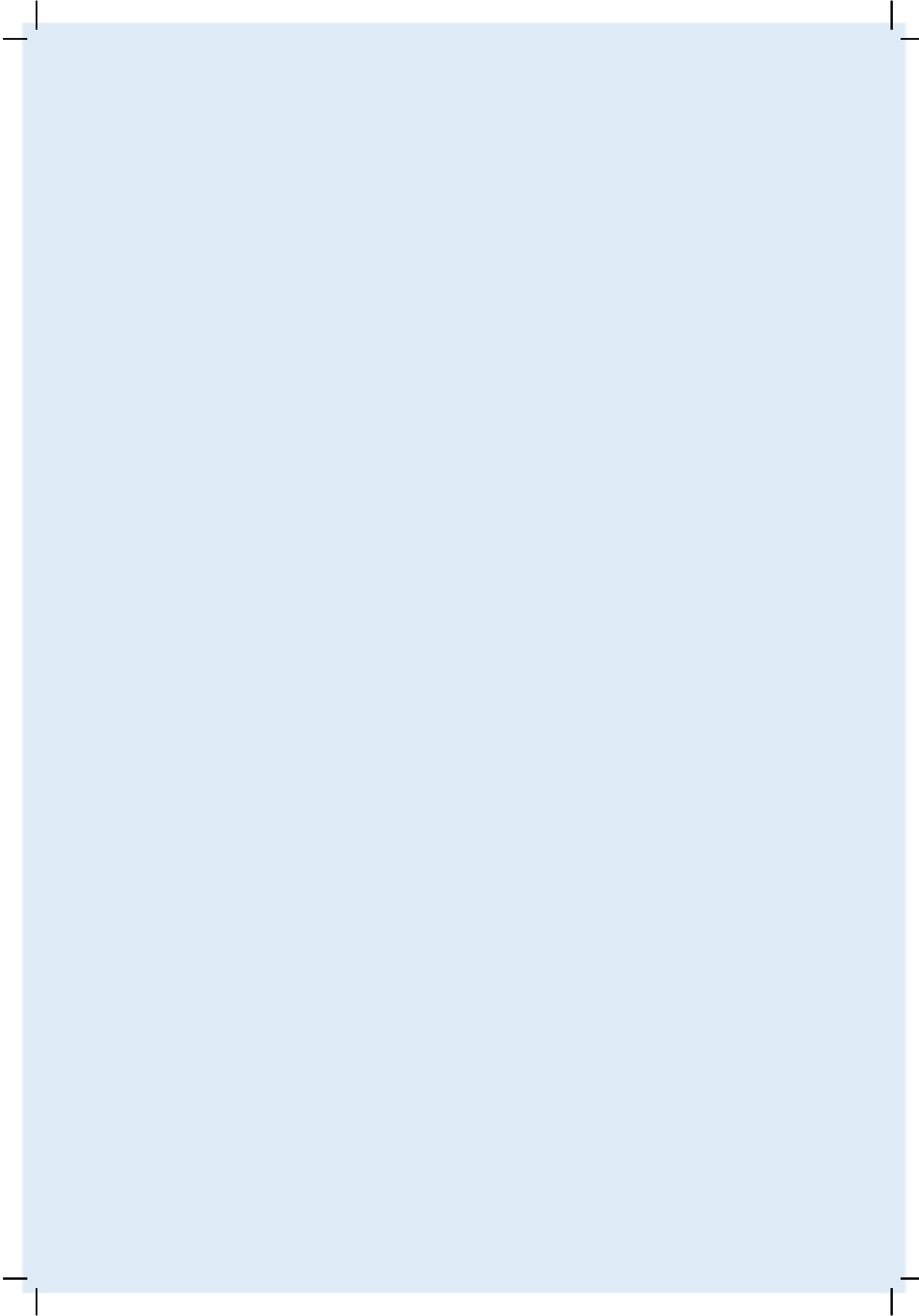
That international relations approach and a combination of [support](#) from key global and regional powers, along with the backing of the processes of international cooperation and multilateralism, all play a vitally important role in seeing Guyana through to its Essequibo-related foreign policy endgame; along the way, thwarting Caracas' hawkish posturing.

This in the context of Guyana's [headline](#) grabbing, international law-centric foreign policy [journey](#) in respect of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The ICJ—it is widely believed—will furnish the legitimate, definitive resolution to the border controversy.

Caracas' [provocation](#) of the hour, then, is also the latest reminder that—although the tide of history is in Georgetown's favour—the twists and turns of the journey in question are aplenty.

Georgetown needs to keep its nerve now, recognizing that the border controversy is now part of a familiar tangle of protracted global geopolitical rivalry.

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Volume III

Guyana's Contemporary Security Relations with Venezuela, viewed against the Broad Sweep of CARICOM and other Interests: *Part 3 of 3*

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille

February 21, 2024

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Guyana's Rise and Caribbean Regionalism: Point of Friction or Rallying Point?

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An upcoming [summit](#) of the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#), a bloc that comprises [14](#) mostly Anglophone [sovereign small states](#), is [billed](#) to put the latest [episode](#) in Venezuela's saber-rattling vis-à-vis the oil-rich Essequibo region under a spotlight. Just weeks on, since Caracas marshalled a phalanx of military assets near Venezuela's border with Guyana, one of the more interesting questions regarding CARICOM regionalism is whether—as far as a diplomatic response is concerned—member states can act decisively and uniformly in this moment.

It is entangled with an imminent, high stakes [presidential race](#) in Venezuela, as strongman President Nicolás Maduro is doubling down on using the border controversy as a political football. It is also caught up in what, beneath the surface of public-facing diplomacy, are growing divisions (behind the scenes) in the politics of regionalism in respect of members showing solidarity with Guyana and what this portends for their bilateral relations with Venezuela.

What this dynamic interplay of competing forces reveals about whether CARICOM member states are similarly invested in pursuing sharper versions of the attendant [diplomacy](#) on display, to-date, can be sketched in a four-pronged manner.

First, by and large, they are approaching their energy security with [due regard](#) to Venezuela. This is hardly surprising, given the [extent](#) of their dependence on energy imports; “on average, [they] import an estimated 87 percent of their oil.”

CARICOM member states are still too reliant on oil, and they are price takers in and are at the mercy of the global oil market.

Years ago, with some exceptions, they welcomed Caracas' now defunct oil-driven diplomacy. Several still hold out [hope](#) for a reboot of the so-called [Petrocaribe](#) initiative, which was once the linchpin of Caracas' diplomatic inroads into the CARICOM bloc.

Such a stance is hardly novel to the region, seeing that—in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which elicited wide-ranging Western [sanctions](#)—even as European Union members make strides to decouple themselves from Russian gas supplies, they are not “[ready to give it up](#).”

Regardless of its political geography, then, the praxis of regionalism does not stand apart from [realpolitik](#).

Second, if [interest](#) indeed is “defined in terms of power,” CARICOM member states have multi-sided Venezuela-related interests, with deep historical qua diplomatic roots. And those states are bent on advancing them on their own merits. (If Venezuela crosses the Rubicon à la Guyana, though—which is CARICOM’s redline—those respective relations stand to go over the edge.) In point of fact, while they have certain common interests as [SIDS](#), the grouping’s [constituent document](#) only commits them to “co-ordinate [their] foreign policies.”

This means policy differences are [apparent](#). They are especially stark, with respect to governments of the day, along ideological and attitudinal lines. For instance, where relations between Guyana and Venezuela have deteriorated—so much so that they are highly instrumentalized and flush with suspicion (amid rising stakes)—the latter country enjoys strong [ties](#) with St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Indeed, with Caracas in its diplomatic sights, Kingstown promulgates a consensual normative foreign policy vision. These efforts paid [dividends](#), courtesy of Caracas, for Kingstown.

Third, historically, the top dog moniker has been variously applied to a handful of states in the CARICOM bloc. They took up the mantle, at any one given time, on account of their economic and foreign policy bona fides. Guyana’s [rising](#) oil and gas stock has contributed in droves to both, which comprise [relational](#) status metrics.

One need look no further than the [astronomical](#) growth of the Guyanese economy since the advent of oil production in that country’s offshore territory, which undergirded the “highest real GDP growth in the world in 2022.” This state of affairs is projected to translate into a boon for the country’s long-term economic prospects. Moreover, insofar as Guyana’s sovereignty is now bound up in consequential Western-backed [hydrocarbon capitalism](#), associated security actors have [deepened](#) their security cooperation with Georgetown.

As International Relations scholars contend, the quest for status plays an outsized [role](#) in shaping foreign policy. Arguably, respective CARICOM member states also [strive](#) for such status. For better or for worse, they do so in full view of each other.

Guyana is becoming, in its own right, a force to be reckoned with among the bloc’s long-established power brokers. Sister states look on, with some having [hit](#) rough patches in trying to get in on the action.

Fourth, as they are careful not to burn bridges with a range of third parties, CARICOM member states have held starkly contrasting positions on Venezuela. This may not be about Venezuela per se, but about its allies and partners, with whom CARICOM bloc countries tend to also have an interest in maintaining good relations. Cuba, a long-standing friend of CARICOM, comes to mind. (Instructively, and perhaps with a like-diplomatic logic in mind, Havana has elected to [refrain](#) from publicly pronouncing on the flare ups regarding the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy.)

Such small states, the scholarly thinking goes, [hedge](#) their foreign policy-related bets—in line with their security challenges and in order to derive advantages vis-à-vis their respective national interests.

What is also true is that, to a large extent, increasing energy cooperation between several CARICOM member states (Guyana excepted) and Venezuela will undercut Georgetown's interests, weighing down Guyana's rise within the bloc and beyond. This will also clear the way for Caracas' increased influence in CARICOM regionalism, at a time when it is on the outs with Washington.

Concurrently, members of the CARICOM bloc are faced with the choice between supporting a more weighty role for Caracas relative to this grouping, with implications for them and Guyana alike, or, casting their lot with Georgetown's efforts to counter Caracas in the region, if not more so solidifying its status-related prestige.

What is clear as day is that, given the strategic environment, the stakes are high. For some, who remain wary of Caracas' geostrategic ambitions, the juxtaposition of CARICOM (energy) security and Venezuela speaks for itself. For others, they are not so convinced.

Seen through this foreign policy-related prism, the CARICOM bloc is at an inflection point.

From Guyana's point of view, it has some hurdles to overcome within the grouping.

Given these stakes, any notion of a cohesive regional approach to threat assessment around border issues—the realm of [high politics](#)—is increasingly playing second fiddle to national-level diplomatic considerations.

There are clear differences in the way that respective CARICOM member states approach their relationships with Venezuela which, in turn, affects how they engage with each other accordingly. Given these myriad foreign policy contexts, coalescing around a single approach or strategy directed at Caracas—when it acts with a hint of menace—is easier said than done.

This record is at odds with CARICOM member states' holistic diplomatic stance relative to Russia, whose adversarial posture regarding the full-scale [invasion](#) of Ukraine undermines their security, too. For them, there is no daylight between their respective positions on the global-level, geopolitical issue of the hour: Russia's now two-year-old war in Ukraine. The conflict inspired a [unity](#) among these states in defense of such United Nations' (UN) [principles](#) as sovereignty and territorial integrity, the likes of which Caribbean analysts have not seen in years.

In short, this globally impactful geopolitical [maneuver](#) of the moment threw those very UN [guardrails](#) on the 'rules of the (multilateral) road' into a crisis of historic proportions and, given the wider (potential) [repercussions](#) for them, CARICOM member states were not having any of it. What is more, generally, they have forgone foreign policy-related opportunities which run afoul of this principled stand.

Guyana, one would have thought, figures frontally in this calculus. (This is not to say that, in the process, other CARICOM states are not looking out for themselves.) No [stranger](#) to contested borders, and compelled in recent years to seek legal [recourse](#) at the International Court of Justice, Guyana has been in an unenviable position since the earliest days of its post-independence journey thus far. (A quintessential former British colony, whose erstwhile

overlords wrongheadedly engineered a societal superstructure on top of a [plantation economy](#), Guyana gained its independence in 1966.) For decades now, it has been dogged by Venezuela's Essequibo-related territorial claims.

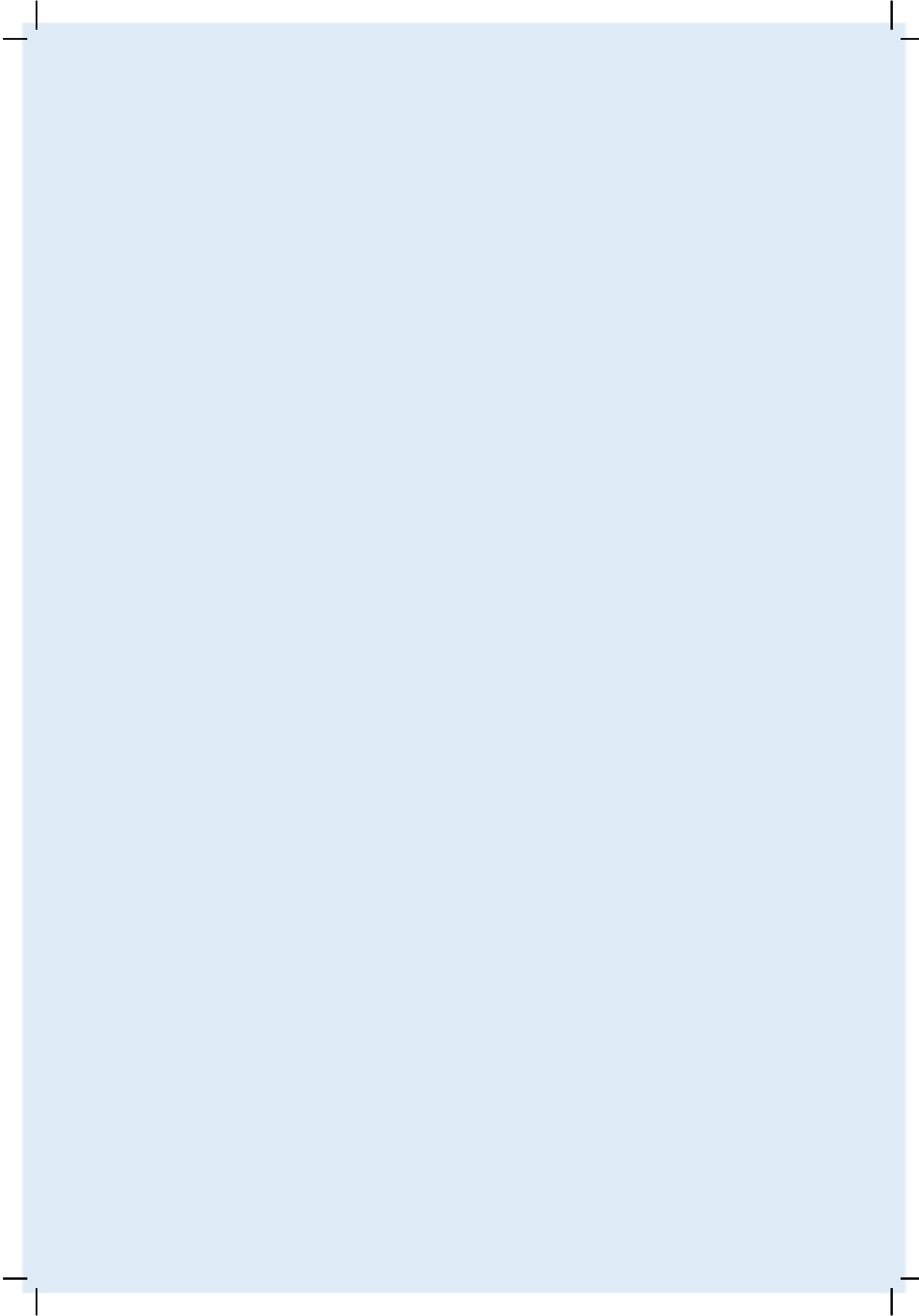
Back then, as now, Guyana's sovereignty was / is (partly) tied to its fraught relations with Venezuela. When border tensions bubble over, given the [military power](#) qua military [force structure](#) constraints on such a small state, Guyana is left scrambling to contain the situation. This in a context where, for decades, Guyana was [weighed down](#) by the vagaries of acute underdevelopment.

Seized of these dynamics, Georgetown makes no bones about [calling attention](#) to Guyana's unfettered right to come into its own by leveraging its newfound oil [prowess](#). Above all, Georgetown is dead set against efforts by Caracas to [stymie](#) Guyana's rise, to cutaway at its sovereignty and to hold back CARICOM regionalism's progress.

In sum, today, in a context where the specter of Venezuela wielding its [hard power](#) in the only English-speaking country in South America—thus, looming over the fate of Guyana's sovereignty—also hangs over the CARICOM regional grouping, their collective security challenge is even greater. More fundamentally, it seemingly does not feature prominently in the bloc-level, foreign policy-related long game (and there is little realistic prospect that it will); at least, not in the same way that the primacy of the national interest is zealously pursued.

If there was ever a time for the reverse to be the case, as regards this narrative, it would be now.

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Handbook on Caribbean Community Foreign Relations and Statecraft

A Regularly Updated Collection of Primers

by

Nand C. Bardouille

About this Handbook

Geared towards both practitioners and academics, this source of well-documented essays on Caribbean Community (CARICOM) foreign relations and statecraft aims to bring together original, timely published research which offers an International Relations (IR)-grounded contribution to our understanding of the complex inter-connections between such small states and power in international politics. This collection of essays is organized by way of and segmented into primers, which are the conceptual building blocks of the handbook. In engaging critically with issues of the moment, with a focus on CARICOM, having methodologically tracked associated developments, respective primers assess the stakes at play. Moreover, drawing on policy communities' perspectives and other sources, while analytically leaning on IR-related paradigmatic frames, the series of essays therein convey expert insights regarding the handbook's titular subject-matter. This as one geopolitical epoch gives way to another, marking a turning point in global actors' power to influence international politics, as well as in their ability to contend with core challenges and take up opportunities arising *vis-à-vis* (uneven) outcomes.