

Transcript of The Address by H. E. Brigadier David Granger President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana at The Annual Guyana Defence Force Officers' Conference

“Towards greater operational readiness for National Defence and Security”

3rd March, 2016

H. E. Brigadier David Granger:

Chief of Staff, thank you for your kind introduction. Honourable Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs; Honourable Khemraj Ramjattan, Vice-President and Minister of Public Security; Honourable Basil Williams, Minister of Legal Affairs and Attorney General; Honourable Joseph Harmon, Minister of State; Commissioner of Police, Mr. Seelall Persaud; Chief Fire Officer; Senior Officers, Junior Officers, members of the media. I am very happy to be here in Camp Ayanganna, once again, to discuss with you your government's concept of diplomacy and defence and how we are approaching the question of collective security in this region and on this continent, of which Guyana is a part.

Guyana is a small state, as you know, and from the time of independence we have been victims of a variety of security problems such as outright aggression, adaptation of our territory - up to the present time the Venezuelans are still in possession of Guyana's part of the island of Ankoko. We have been faced with incursions, insurrection, and transnational crime. Guyana, therefore, needs a coherent and comprehensive defence strategy to counter these threats which can undermine the security and the stability of the state.

Guyana is an integral member of the Caribbean Community. The Community is at the core of Guyana's security strategy. Guyana is a partner in the promotion of regional peace and security. The revised Treaty of Chaguaramas establishing the Caribbean Community, including the Caribbean Single Market and Economy, commits the Council for Foreign and Community Relations to - and I quote - "... establish measures to coordinate of foreign polices of member states of the Community; including proposal for joint representation and to seek to ensure as far as practicable, the doctrine of community positions on major hemispheric and international issues." This is very important because the coordination of foreign policy in the Caribbean community is central to our defence strategy.

Security, like the coordination of the foreign policy, is another pillar of the Caribbean Community. The security threats facing the countries of the region were examined at the 27th Inter-Sessional meeting of CARICOM Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community in Belize last month. The Caribbean Community agreed to a protocol - and I quote again - "...Amending the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas to incorporate the Council for National Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE) as an Organ of the Community and the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) as an Institution of the Community." These are very important for both ministers - both vice-presidents here today, vice-president for foreign affairs and vice-president for public security. Both of them have mandates under the Treaty of Chaguaramas.

Guyana's National Defence Strategy, therefore, over the next four years taking us to 2020, must acknowledge the need to take steps in concert with our regional partners to address security threats facing the Caribbean. Guyana must be a reliable partner in the cause of regional security and in ensuring that the Caribbean remains a zone of peace.

The philosophy steering Guyana's national defence strategy, therefore, must reflect a long term thinking process to respond to the multiple crises facing the country, facing the

Caribbean Community and facing the continent; that is to say, at the national, regional and international levels. Our strategy must emphasize that Guyana is a national power, but within the framework of regional interests. Our strategy must ensure that national independence is preserved, that our sovereignty is secured and that our territorial integrity is guaranteed.

Guyana's defence strategy is under-graded by the concept of total national defence. This implies that all the elements and instruments of national power - economic, military, political, social and technological - will be employed in the interest of national security. Guyana, for 50 years, employed diplomacy as its first line of defence. Guyana deployed its diplomacy to denounce acts of aggression against its territory, to isolate aggressive states internationally, to bring pressure on them to or retract or retrace their aggression and to refrain from continuing similar conduct.

Guyana mobilizes international solidarity to support its sovereignty. It reaffirms important principles of international law such as respect for the unviability of borders and international agreements; the peaceful settlement of disputes; non-aggression and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and the right to peaceful co-existence.

Guyana, for 50 years, successfully deployed diplomacy as an instrument of defence. Guyana is a small state, but we have used our diplomatic might to garner support for our efforts to deter aggression, to safeguard our territorial integrity and to secure the cooperation of the international community. We have successfully suppressed internal insurrection.

Guyana has already had recourse to the international juridical mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes. We took our maritime controversy with the Republic of Suriname to the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea in February 2004 and that tribunal ruled in Guyana's favour, ensuing that sovereignty over 31,000 square kilometers of Guyana's sea space should remain unchallenged.

Guyana, through diplomacy, expanded its relations with a plethora of states and international organizations, including the Caribbean Community, which it was instrumental in establishing in 1973; the Commonwealth; the Union of South American States (UNASUR); the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC); the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR); the Organisation of American States; the Association of Caribbean States and other international organisations. Our membership of all of these organisations is critical to our concept of collective security.

Guyana's diplomacy continues to yield a defence dividend and the communique of the 24th meeting of the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth in Malta in 2015 pointed out - and I quote from the communiqué -, "...Full support for the United Nations Secretary General to choose a means of settlement in keeping with the provisions of the Geneva Agreement of 1966 to bring the controversy between Guyana and Venezuela to a definitive end. Heads reaffirmed their unequivocal support for the maintenance and safeguarding of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Similarly officers, the communiqué issued at the end of the 27th Inter-Sessional Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community held in Belize in February 2016, stated - and I quote - "The Heads full support for the role of the United Nations Secretary General and his efforts in keeping with the provisions of the Geneva Agreement to bring the controversy between Guyana and Venezuela to a definitive and judicious conclusion. Heads of Government re-affirmed their unequivocal support for the maintenance and preservation of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

These recent expressions of support for Guyana's territorial integrity from the Commonwealth and from the Caribbean Community follow a series of similar statements which have served as a deterrent against aggression in years gone by. Guyana will continue to pursue diplomacy to advance relations in the international community and to secure our vital interests, including defence against external threats.

The Caribbean is a zone of immense geopolitical significance in the western hemisphere. This zone, however, has the imperial footprints of Britain, of France, of the Netherlands and the United States. Venezuela's persistent attempts to redraw a maritime map of the Caribbean and to seize large portions of Guyana's land and sea space cannot be dismissed. Guyana's sea and land frontiers are now as much under threat as they have ever been in the past 50 years. Guyana, as a member of the Caribbean Community, however, has amply demonstrated its aptitude and its ability to deploy its defence force in support of several military missions over recent years.

Guyana is a signatory to the Treaty of Security Assistance among Caribbean States signed in July 2006. This Treaty establishes a security assistance mechanism which has, as its objective, the efficient and timely response to the management of natural and manmade disasters; expeditious efficient mobilization and deployment of regional resources in order to manage and diffuse national regional crisis; and to combat serious crimes and the illumination of threats to national and regional security and the preservation of the territorial integrity of the contracting states, of which Guyana, of course, is a part.

A protocol to this Treaty created the Caribbean Operations Planning and Coordinating Staff (COPACS). Guyana is also an associate of the Regional Security System (RSS) and a signatory to the Maritime Cooperation and Airspace Agreement. These agreements have been the bases of Guyana's defence engagement in the Caribbean, particularly in the areas of disaster relief and humanitarian assistance.

The Guyana Defence Force, as you know, provided military personnel to assist the Caribbean Disaster Relief Unit (CDRU) following the destruction brought by hurricane Hugo in 1989 (when I think the GDF troops almost exterminated the iguana population in Montserrat). A company of soldiers were also deployed in Trinidad and Tobago in 1990, following the insurrection of the Jamaats-al-Musilimeen which occurred in that island. It also deployed a contingent of troops in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, during the 5th Summit of the Americas in 2009. Those troops did not seem to like manioc as much as iguana.

The force sent a company of soldiers to rebuild parts of Grenada after the destruction brought by hurricane Ivor in 2004. Another contingent went to Haiti following the earthquake that wrecked a part of that country in 2010. Defence diplomacy, therefore, facilitated the involvement of Guyana in peace keeping operations and peace promotion missions under the auspices of the United Nations.

The force was part of the CARICOM contingent in the United Nations mission in Haiti, the United Nations Operations in Mozambique, the Commonwealth Military Training team in Uganda, the Mission of the United Nations assistance in Rwanda and assistance in the group of the United Nations transitional period in Namibia.

You can see the GDF was part of these collective security arrangements over the last thirty years. Defence diplomacy, therefore, presented opportunities for our soldiers to be involved in major international training exercises. As you know, the force usually participates in the annual Exercise Trade Winds which involves some seventeen countries, including Canada

and USA and, of course, other countries of the Caribbean. We were part of Operation Fused Response in 2012 with the United States Army Special Operations Command and we were part of operation Caimex with the Brazilian Navy.

Guyana`s practice of defence diplomacy, therefore, allows for a variety of engagements. These included Brazilian support for our Coast Guard, the exchange of visits of high ranking military personnel, and the provision of recruitment to the defence force; the agreement between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil on defence related cooperation, enabling the training of officers of both countries, the exchange of intelligence and the sharing of military experience, which continues up to this day.

The Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the United States of America since 1981 entered into an agreement concerning the provision of training related to defence, in the framework of the international program of international educational training. This agreement provides funding for the training of military and civilian personnel. The agreement on security cooperation, established with the United States under the Status of Forces Agreement, encourages high level dialogue between policymakers, government officials and defence officials of both countries - humanitarian, civil and military assistance on the exchange of information and data.

Guyana has also benefited under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative from assistance in the areas of maritime border and aerial security. Several other agreements with other states support greater defence cooperation with the defence force. The agreement on military cooperation between Guyana and the French Military Forces promotes the exchange of bilateral training between the Guyana Defence Force and the French Armed Forces. The State of Forces Agreement between the United Kingdom and the Defence Force of Guyana determines the rights, privileges and responsibilities of UK servicemen who are deployed in Guyana.

Security cooperation between Guyana and the People`s Republic of China provides for the procurement by the GDF of non-lethal military equipment; it also provides for the training of military officers at the Chinese Military School and Academies. Defence diplomacy, therefore, over the years has fortified Guyana`s international posture. This is evidenced by Guyana`s membership of the South American Defence Council. Diplomacy has also allowed the Guyana Defence Force to enhance its capabilities through training and the receipt of equipment from foreign forces and governments.

Diplomacy facilitated dialogue with defence partners on security challenges. It led to advance cooperation on common interests. It contributed to peace-keeping and peace-making and to disaster relief. The joint military exercises and peace promoting missions undertaken with foreign forces have assisted - have contributed to military inter-operability among Caribbean Defence Forces. Diplomacy, therefore, is an important aspect of defence; it contributes to continent building between the armed forces and managing crises and resolving disputes between states. Diplomacy will continue to be an integral part of the arsenal of this state and as part of Guyana`s National Defence Strategy.

Officers, the defence force allowed diplomatic service in the final analysis as the custodians of Guyana`s territorial integrity, political independence and security. The GDF, in particular, is entrusted with defence and must be strong enough to undertake the task of defending. Guyana needs a well commanded, well trained and well equipped defence force. Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, advised us some years ago - and I quote -

“You can do a lot with diplomacy; but with diplomacy backed up by force, you can get a lot more done.” This is true for Guyana; we need diplomacy but we also need force.

The strength of the Guyana Defence Force is not going to be increased above its present establishment levels. The force, however, will be built up, not only with a strong regular force but it will be augmented by a stronger reserved force, which, as you know, has already reverted to its original name, The Guyana People’s Militia. The regular force and the reserved force together must always be in a state of operational readiness and be capable of being deployed to any part of our country and also to fulfill any commitments we have in the Caribbean.

Organizational changes which have been directed will ensure that the defence force within its financial limitations can adequately discharge its duty to defend Guyana. Guyana’s borders are too extensive, its land space is too expansive and the cost of maintaining large regular units too expensive. If we are to preserve our territorial and coastal security - the coastal surveillance and security of our territory demands that the force has a physical presence in each administrative region, not only in the form of regular units but also in the form of part-time reserves. The reserve force will support and supplement the regular force.

Reservists must be deployed in greater numbers in every region to ensure that Guyana’s defence is total and comprehensive, covering our borders, our sea space, our air space and our land. Reservists will be the force’s eyes and ears. Reservists will constitute a sort of army of the people, protecting our communities and making the residents safe. The deployment of reservists to every region will ensure that the Guyana Defence Force can readily and rapidly respond to any threat which may occur at anytime, anywhere in Guyana.

Guyana’s National Defence Strategy, therefore, Officers, seeks to preserve peace and security. Guyana is committed to non-aggression and to the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes. Guyana seeks peace so that its natural resources can be devoted, can be developed, can be deployed to securing a good life for all of its people. Guyana’s National Defence Strategy, most of all, aims at a system of collective security. We are not alone - we are part of the Caribbean, we are part of the Caribbean community - and this is what should guide the Guyana Defence Force and determine its missions over the next four years.

Our strategy must combine military defence with our state’s craft, with our diplomacy. This combination is the basis for restructuring of the Guyana Defence Force and for the development of your military plans. It is the force’s Military Manifesto and its mission and, with that statement of your manifesto and your mission, I thank you and pray that God may bless you with your efforts.