

The Caribbean IMPACS/Small Arms Survey study titled: “Weapons Compass The Caribbean Firearms Study” (April 2023) states: “firearms trafficking in the Caribbean and the specific characteristics of the markets fuelled by this trade have received little research attention. Crucially, a region specific assessment of small arms in the Caribbean is lacking...” “A critical information gap surrounds the mechanics of small arms trafficking both within the region itself and from source countries in other regions.” (Pg. 26).

The said study by IMPACS and Small Arms Survey on small arms trafficking in CARICOM in no way fills the information gap that must be filled in order for the national security apparatuses of CARICOM member states to strategically engage with the small arms trade in the Caribbean. This grave failure is the product of the manner in which the problem was visualized, conceptualized and the methodology that was embraced in order to effect the study. Salient characteristics of the illicit small arms market of the Caribbean island chain as a result were then rendered invisible to the gaze of the researchers who apparently had no Caribbean field experience and did not speak to those who do have said experience. To embrace only sources within the reach of the state as official statistics, state agencies and those imprisoned for gun possession meant that the study was blind to the dynamics of the supply side of the market. This blindness rendered the study functionally inadequate to fill the information gap that exists, as the study is inadequate to the task of informing a new discourse of engagement with the illicit trades of the Caribbean.

The study is blind to, hence silent on the operational reality where Transnational Organized Crime groups control the illicit drug trade, the illicit gun trade and human smuggling in the Caribbean. The illicit gun market is the creation of transnational organized crime to serve the interests of transnational organized crime in the Caribbean. The small arms trade provides the weaponry necessary to secure their operations through arming their employees and affiliates in and external of Gangland. Since there are different transnational organized crime groups in the Caribbean, some in conflict with each other there is then an arms race ongoing which drives the volume of illicit trafficking. The sale of illicit arms to third parties is a strategy not only to advance wealth generation and maximization as demand constantly escalates as a result of the weaponization of interpersonal conflict in the social order. But also to build a web of patronage that encapsulates the middle, upper and oligarch echelons of the social order who seek illicit arms for their personal and property protection, especially those in these echelons who are drug traffickers in their own right. The supply side of the small arms illicit market under the hegemony of Transnational Organized Crime drives demand by flooding the market with supply which changed the nature of interpersonal violence which constantly drives demand through ever escalating rivers of blood thereby creating the cult of the gun, legal and illegal.

The order of power of the supply side of the illicit gun market of the Caribbean must then be articulated in order to inform any attempt at meaningful, efficacious intervention by the state. The business model of transnational organized crime utilized to drive the

Caribbean illicit trades of the illicit drug trade, the illicit gun trade, human smuggling and money laundering must then be articulated to reveal the following: 1. The transnational organized crime groups involved and their business models, namely the old hegemonic Colombian model and the newly hegemonic Mexican business model. 2. The specific discourse of gun trafficking for both business models and that of the independents and their structure of the operationalization of their business models across the Caribbean must be articulated. 3. The nature of the trafficking pipelines that move arms and ammunition into and across the Caribbean. In this quest the production point, the source of the weapon is not central to the task, what is the strategic imperative is understanding the smuggling structures of the transit countries where the weapons and ammunition are transshipped through to and within the Caribbean with all the modalities utilized. 4. The structure which matches supply to demand and how the cash derived from sales is washed. With the Colombian model the weapons and ammunition brokers are central to this structure whilst in the Mexican model there are no brokers. In the Mexican model you don't sell your premier weapons to your competitors/enemies, your primary mandate is to arm your soldiers and Gangland affiliates to always ensure that they possess superior fire power compared to your competitors in the Game and the state agencies charged with policing the Game. The Mexican model then drives an arms race in every market they are operationally present, presently this arms race is impacting the illicit drug trade of Latin America and the Caribbean. Hence the push to source semi-automatic assault rifles in the USA for export to the Caribbean by those faced with the juggernaut of the Mexican model.

The point of production of the weapon is then a red herring as there are multiple transition zones through which the small arms and ammunition transit to the Caribbean and within the Caribbean. There is the Colombian source with Venezuela as a transit zone, there is the direct pipeline from Colombia into the Caribbean, there is the pipeline from Central America, from Europe and there are weapons imported legally and diverted into the trade in Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, and the Dominican Republic or illegal imports. There is the pipeline that flows from Brazil and the latest political squeeze the pipeline from the USA. **If the pipeline from the USA is shut down the flow into the Caribbean will increase rather than diminish given the sustainable acquisition machine of transnational organized crime in the Caribbean.**

Transnational organized crime has operated and evolved its business model in the Caribbean from the 1960s to present without any damaging intervention by the state. This failure to act effectively has then granted impunity to transnational organized crime in the Caribbean for decades. With this impunity the illicit trades of the Caribbean are now in its fifth evolutionary stage: 1. Medellin Federation, 2. Cali Federation, 3, Valle Norte Federation, 4. Colombian Paramilitary organizations and 5. The Mexican Transnational Trafficking Organizations (MTTOs), exerting power which subverts the monopoly on violence the state demands and expects with no adequate response from the state. The politicians and the national security apparatus of Caribbean states in its powerlessness spanning decades resorted to creating a discourse of denial which refuses

to articulate the reality on the ground choosing instead to create causal reality: gangs which is alienated from reality on the ground especially its organic link to transnational organized crime. The study continues with this flawed, myopic discourse which is incapable of addressing the reality of gun violence in the Caribbean today on the ground. There is a fundamental reality of gun violence in the Caribbean today which the study does not see as it is incapable of gazing upon this reality as its hegemonic discourse is blind to this reality. The fact is that the premier, Apex transshipment sites of the illicit trades of the Caribbean: Venezuela (19/2021), Dominican Republic (DR) (11/2021), Suriname (6/2021), Puerto Rico (17/2020), Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana have the lowest murder rates in the region. Suriname is the premier trafficking point of CARICOM and it has the lowest murder rate in Caricom. Whilst the most violent social orders in the Caribbean are **not** primary, apex trafficking points, some are not even second level trafficking points as St Lucia (39/2021) and St Vincent and the Grenadines (31/2021). Why then in countries of the Caribbean where transnational organized crime is entrenched, hegemonic in their pursuit of wealth generation and accumulation through these transit points these social orders are not riven with gun violence? The answer lies in the high volume of investment made by transnational organized crime to turn these states into sustainable traffickin points which means that they closely guard the illicit business environment of these states by instilling discipline in the order of power of the Game which impacts the level of violence in the social order. In non apex markets they use all measures to stimulate demand, sell without restraint and have no interest in disciplining the order of power, the result is Gunlandia, where impunity reigns devoid of discipline which spawns an illicit trade driven by nihilism coupled with desire, as in the rest of the social order. A comparison of the murder rate for Puerto Rico (17/2020) and the US Virgin Islands (41/2021) is potently instructive on this specific Caribbean reality where there is a hierarfchy of trafficking states created by transnational organized crime. Please do not cite Venezuela as the exception to the rule utilizing the regime change discourse of massa on Venezuela. Venezuela is the only state in the world where in calculating its murder rate massa adds classic murders carried out by civilians to deaths as a result of action by state agents, thrashing the otcome of investigations on these deaths by state actors. The massa discourse insists that a death by a state actor is a murder punto final. This is the means they use to create Venezuela's so-called violent social order problem. The fact of the matter is Venezuela presently has one of the lowest murder rates in the Caribbean and when you add the deaths by state actors it is still lower than Gunlandia of the Caribbean. The importance of Venezuela to transnational organized crime in the Caribbean has not diminsed and presently Venezuela is under the hegemony of the MTTOs who have heightened discipline within the order of power of the illicit trades thereby impacting the social order. This hegemony has displaced the Colombian paramilitary organizations and their Gangland which has brought the new order to Venezuela of maximization of profit enhanced by disciplined peace in the illicit trades.

The murder rate for the production zone of Colombia, Peru and Bolivia and that of Mexico is necessary to the task of placing the violence in the non-Apex trafficking zone of the Caribbean in real context. In 2021 in Colombia the murder rate was 27 per 100,000 persons, in Peru it was 6 in 2020 and in Bolivia it was 3 in 2021, whilst in Mexico it was 28 in 2021. The murder rates of the non-Apex trafficking points of the Caribbean outstrip that of the core production states and that of the apex trafficking point to the USA, Mexico, thereby placing these marginal trafficking states in a league of violent social orders which amount to an undeclared civil war.

The case of Puerto Rico today is an instance in the Caribbean where a new order is being written on the ground by the MTTOs thereby changing the order of power created by the Colombian model where Puerto Rico was subservient to the DR. Puerto Rico is now an Apex transition point to the USA in the Caribbean, thereby reducing the volume moved through the Dominican Republic to the USA. The order of power of the Game in Puerto Rico is presently under reconstruction without an escalation of gun violence as Puerto Rican transnational organized crime both local and of the Puerto Rican Diapora are involved in this reconstruction as affiliates of the Mexican TTOs. The rise of Puerto Rico as an Apex trafficking point has not diminished the importance of the DR to the illicit trades in the Caribbean and there is no outbreak of endemic gun violence in the DR as a result, the order of power of transnational organized crime remains hegemonic in the social order of the DR. As is the case of Venezuela there are now semi-submersibles moving to Puerto Rico loaded with product without the endemic violence of the periphery of the illicit trades of the Caribbean, as in Gunlandia of the Caribbean who are all non apex trafficking points, expendables in the Game controlled by transnational organized crime. The contrast between the murder rates of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands is then instructive. **The abiding lesson for the citizens of Caribbean Gunlandia is that a reduction in especially gun violence only occurs in Caribbean Gunlandia when transnational organized crime moves into your island to turn it into an apex trafficking point; the state, the politicians and the national security apparatus continue to repeatedly indicate from the 1960s to the present that they are incapable of so doing. All they can do is shuck and jive as the social order is immersed in rivers of blood. Pax Mexicana!!!**

Referenc

"Intentional Homicides per 100,000 people" The World Bank
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5>