



EDITORIAL

Editorial

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Welcome to the third issue of the *Caribbean Journal of International Relations & Diplomacy*. In my previous editorial, I noted that these are fascinating times to be an observer of regional and global affairs, as evinced by a number of interesting developments, not least the visits of US Vice President, Joe Biden, and then, Chinese President, Xi Jinping to Trinidad & Tobago earlier this year.

Yet international politics continues to evolve at a stunning pace. In just the few short months which have passed since, we have witnessed a historic series of events and processes unfold, many linked to developments in the Middle East. There are two specific things which have happened recently which strike me as being particularly important.

The first is represented by the successive diplomatic solutions which appear to have been found to the ongoing crisis in Syria, or at least the aspect of it which involves the controversy over the Assad regime's apparent use of chemical weapons against Syrians. For a short time, it seemed as if Western countries would be drawn into another messy and protracted war in the region. This would not have been a re-run of Iraq, of course, but the drumbeats which could be heard in certain Western capitals undoubtedly carried somewhat depressing echoes of it. However the major players on the United Nations (UN) Security Council have, at least at the time of writing, apparently found a series of thorny, yet nonetheless genuine, solutions which have forestalled, for now, an armed intervention. For those of us who take an interest in diplomacy, and consider it by far the best way to resolve international disputes,

this is surely something to celebrate. It may even foretell, at long last, the re-emergence of the UN itself as a diplomatic forum which is shown a little more respect than has sometimes been the case by some of the most powerful countries in the world.

This brings me to the second development: the historic handshake between President Obama of the US, and the new President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, and with it the commitment by both leaders to begin to explore new avenues of diplomacy. Clearly, this process is potentially fraught with enormous obstacles, and may well be unsuccessful in the longer term. Yet it is impossible to overstate what a dramatic and unanticipated event this was, particularly given that we are just a decade beyond George W. Bush's notorious – and, to my mind, extremely misguided – 'Axis of Evil' speech. The festering diplomatic relationship between the US and Iran, which goes back to overthrow of the (democratic) government of Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953, has, as the veteran American journalist Stephen Kinzer has persuasively argued, taken a senselessly devastating toll on world politics.¹ The coup, which paved the way for the Islamic Revolution of 1979, is arguably one of the defining historical events of the Twentieth Century. So, for Presidents Obama and Rouhani to come together to shake hands and open the door to diplomacy is extremely significant.

More broadly, these two crucial events are surely to the great credit of Obama personally. In a presidency which has been dogged by controversy and criticism – from both left and right – and in which he has precious little time before becoming a 'lame duck', Obama is potentially setting up a considerably more creditable legacy that we might have imagined just a few months ago, particularly as the horrors of the Snowden revelations and remote killings by drones in Pakistan and elsewhere appeared to be the major foreign policy bequests of his administration. If these two diplomatic interventions in relation to Syria and Iran bear real fruit over the next couple of years, it is quite conceivable that, at long last, we may see an evolution of Western policy towards the Middle East which is a little less belligerent and a little more contrite. We have consequently commissioned a number of articles for *The Caribbean Journal of International Relations & Diplomacy* from across the spectrum, which will, in a future issue, explore many facets of the unfolding change in the Middle East in greater detail.

In this issue, we have a feast of articles. We begin with an analytical note by Courtney Lindsay, one of our PhD candidates here at IIR, on the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership

Agreement (EPA). It is quite striking, in fact, just how little research has been done on the EPA in recent years. It generated a huge amount of controversy and critique, from both academics and the policy world, when it was signed in late 2008.² However, since then, there has been a deafening silence from academia, especially, on the broader implications of the EPA, the extent of implementation in the CARIFORUM region, the effects of continued resistance by (some) African countries to the agreement, or the distributional consequences for particular sectors, industries and countries. As Sir Shridath Ramphal noted recently in a lecture at the University of the West Indies, Caribbean countries have not even taken the opportunity to review – and, by implication, renegotiate aspects of – the agreement after five years, something which was explicitly built into it.³ So, Lindsay's article – which was written while he spent six months working at the South Centre in Geneva, and undertaking fieldwork at the WTO – provides an important piece of new primary research on the EPA five years on.

Following this, our Forum in this issue – which has been introduced and edited by one of my partners in the team of managing editors, Michelle Scobie – addresses the crucial issue of the preparations for the SIDS+20 meeting which will take place in Samoa in late 2014. The articles that we publish here grew out of a meeting conceptualized and organized by Scobie herself, and which took place at the Institute of International Relations in June 2013, bringing together a wide range of Caribbean stakeholders with an interest in this critical issue. We are pleased to have such a diverse range of participants in the forum: this begins with Scobie's overview piece which sets the scene and expansively outlines the many varied issues facing Caribbean academics, policymakers and diplomats as they grapple with the unfolding global environmental agenda, before moving on to contributions from the world of international institutions (Chris Corbin of the United Nations Environment Programme), non-governmental organisations (Nicole Leotaud and Anna Cadiz of the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute), and, finally, academia (Michael Witter of the University of the West Indies at Mona). We hope that this wide variety of voices collectively offers an interesting and thoughtful analysis of the preparations and implications of the Samoa meeting, which, at the time of writing, is barely a year away.

Next, we return to an issue which is gaining increasing salience in the Caribbean: convergence. This is something which has been developed and discussed at length in previous issues by one of the

chairs of our editorial board, Winston Dookeran. It is rapidly gaining currency within the region, and, in turn, is being subjected to considered critique and analysis by Caribbean academics and integrationists. My suspicion is that, over time, as more people come to engage with the idea of convergence, and as it becomes fleshed out in greater depth and detail, it could plausibly offer a series of alternative approaches to an integration movement which many have suggested is faltering. Akhil Malaki's policy brief in this issue therefore represents an important contribution to this unfolding debate.

Finally, we end this issue with an extensive and wide-ranging interview with Vaughan Lewis, one of the region's most eminent intellectuals and policymakers. He has served as Director General of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), Prime Minister of St Lucia, and he is Professor Emeritus of the University of the West Indies. The initial idea for supplementing our Reflection section of the journal with such interviews actually came from a member of our international advisory board, Anthony Payne, and I am confidently of the view that Andy Knight's interview with Vaughan Lewis is testament to what a great idea that was. What we are able to publish here is nothing less than a document of significant historical importance. We would certainly welcome suggestions for similarly eminent and influential people whom we might ask to reflect on their lives for future issues.

Welcome, then, to the third issue of the *Caribbean Journal of International Relations & Diplomacy*. We hope you enjoy reading it, and, as ever, we welcome your support and contribution to our debates. So please disseminate the journal far and wide – electronic copies of the articles here are freely available at our website – and, if you have suggestions, comments or ideas to share with us, please do feel free to drop us a line.

NOTES

¹ See Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (New York: John Wiley, 2008, 2nd Edition).

² For a critical discussion of the EPA and the broader debate which was generated by it, see Matthew Louis Bishop, Tony Heron and Anthony Payne, 'Caribbean Development Alternatives and the CARIFORUM-European Union Economic Partnership Agreement', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 16, 1, 2013, 82-110.

³ Shridath Ramphal, 'A Conversation with Sir Shridath Ramphal', University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad, 7 October 2013.