



Trinidad and Tobago's stance on US imperialism could upend trade bloc

## Description

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U.S. President Donald Trump greets Kamla Persad-Bissessar, SC MP, Prime Minister of the Republic of

Is Caribbean unity at a turning point? Since the brazen and horrific US attack on Venezuela in January, the Caribbean's regional trade bloc [CARICOM](#) has been in crisis. What has been left out by much of the media is the assistance that some Caribbean countries like Trinidad and Tobago gave the United States in its [imperialist](#) attack on the South American country.

## Trinidad and Tobago support of the US

The Dominican Republic and Guyana [all played a role](#) in providing the US with bases and logistical support. However, more than any other country, Trinidad and Tobago provided temporary radar surveillance and the airbase that the US could use to launch its criminal attack that [killed at least 80 Venezuelans](#)

Since then, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has [defended the strikes](#) and launched her own verbal attacks on CARICOM member states. She has even gone as far as to question [CARICOM's viability](#) and failure to reflect the economic and geopolitical interests of Trinidad and Tobago.

These tensions have brought into sharp focus the growing challenges in working to bring about regional integration in the Caribbean.

## Caribbean collaboration

The region has a long history of [regional integration attempts](#) going back almost 70 years with the most recent - the short-lived West Indies Federation - collapsing in 1962.

This latest division will likely test the resilience of CARICOM at a critical time when US imperialism is particularly volatile and a threat to the entire region. As small island states, Caribbean countries have managed to survive the post-independence period through regional cooperation and negotiating as a single bloc.

However, beneath this resilience hides an elite-driven, state-centric approach to development that reproduces economic dependency and creates the conditions for wealthier member states, like Trinidad and Tobago, to pursue unilateral agreements with larger powers.

## T&T's grievances are a decade in the making

To understand how we got here, we have to look at what is motivating the Trinidad and Tobago government to take the position it has against CARICOM.

For months, Persad-Bissessar has been questioning CARICOM's effectiveness on maintaining regional security, challenging the idea of Trinidad and Tobago's place within the bloc – especially as the country contributes 10% of CARICOM's annual budget, which amounts to \$20 million.

She has since demanded that CARICOM's Secretary General, Carla Barnett, step down once her five-year term ends later this year.

Persad-Bissessar has also repeatedly defended the US's controversial actions in the lead up to its attack on Venezuela. Between September and December 2025, the [US murdered 115 people](#) in the Caribbean Sea on the unproven pretext of "drug smuggling".

Since then, many [fishermen across the region](#) have been reluctant to go out to sea for fear of a US strike, which has had adverse effects on people's livelihoods.

In September 2025, Roosevelt Skerrit, Prime Minister of Dominica, asserted that the Caribbean Sea should remain a ["zone of peace"](#) in response to the increased US military build up against Venezuela.

However, Persad-Bissessar also defended the US's presence, stating:

CARICOM has chosen to support the Maduro narco-government through the fake zone of peace narrative.

## Demographic shock

For Trinidad and Tobago, the position on the US strikes on Venezuela is different from other Caribbean countries. This is in part due to the proximity of the island nations, which is only 11-12km (7 miles) away from Venezuela, making the Caribbean country the closest to South America.

This is important because, for over a decade, migration from Venezuela to Trinidad has steadily increased, due in part to the economic mismanagement of the [Maduro government](#) and the brutal and

coercive US sanctions that were designed to cripple the Venezuelan economy. As a result, more than 30,000 Venezuelans have settled in Trinidad and Tobago, adding to the population of 1.5 million people in a short space of time.

This demographic shock has produced familiar anti-immigrant rhetoric around integration, crime, housing and competition for jobs that often emerge in migration discourse in the West. However, in Trinidad and Tobago, this migration wave has exacerbated existing issues, including public service provision for citizens and general unpreparedness for refugees outside of the Caribbean.

Persad-Bissessar's frustrations stem from what she and other Trinidadian elites view as the disproportionate humanitarian focus that CARICOM has prioritised in relation to the Venezuelan migration.

For Trinidad and Tobago, the priority is to militarise its border as a measure against what it sees as the threat of drug trafficking. These priorities have found a perfect synergy with the US's refocus on controlling the Caribbean on the dubious basis of security.

Whether Persad-Bissessar's intention is to position her country as a key node of US imperialism in the Americas, which would tend to increase tension within CARICOM itself.

## CARICOM and the global economy

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It could be argued that the tensions between CARICOM and Trinidad and Tobago are structurally rooted in the roles that both polities play in the global economy.

For CARICOM, its state-centric and elite-driven structure means that a lot of its decision making is dominated by heads of government, senior technocrats and private sector lobbies.

It has been said that CARICOM is designed to manage capitalism in the Caribbean. Many critics, such as Jamaican economist Norman Girvan, have argued that such a structure ensures that narrow interests centred around attracting foreign investment, harmonising tax incentives for multinationals and maintaining a tourism-focused development model, deepens the Caribbean's position at the periphery of the global economy.

To-date, regional integration through CARICOM has failed to include workers or unions in regional decision making, develop plans for regional public ownership in energy, transport and food systems – all of which could strengthen state and regional systems.

Defenders of CARICOM would argue that, as small island states, CARICOM was created to strengthen and amplify the diplomatic power of individual Caribbean countries through collective action. This allows them to better resist absorption into US foreign policy and economic interests.

CARICOM's foreign policy machinery, the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR), was designed specifically for this. It creates coordinated foreign policy positions for CARICOM member states to act as a collective in drafting and creating treaties and trade agreements outside of the US sphere. The aim being to reduce dependence on the United States.

## The consequences of foreign dependence

For Garvin and earlier thinkers (prior to CARICOM's inception) like [Walter Rodney](#) the issue is that Caribbean elites reproduce and maintain Caribbean dependency on foreign investment, remittances, extractive industries and trade with global powers like the US and European Union (EU). This is because they benefit directly from those structures in terms of having access to those markets. They are more inclined to compromise on policy in order to enjoy the benefits that they as a class could access from the developed world.

As a result, we have a region with a weak industrial policy, limited economic diversification and low wages.

It is a region also beholden to EU development funds, IMF frameworks and WTO rules. Even if CARICOM resists US imperialism in a limited context, the elite structure ensures that this resistance will never go far enough in creating full economic and political self-determination.

The bloc's limitations [clashes with CARICOM regionalism](#) **default watermark** This weakness cascades into Cuba as it faces economic strangulation by the US is an [example of this](#) relationship with wealthier members like Trinidad and Tobago, which [does not have any real mechanism](#) to obstruct its own attempt to align with global capital.

There is a perception among wealthier Caribbean countries that CARICOM holds them back from acting with full autonomy. Trinidad and Tobago policymakers increasingly question why they must go through their lower-income CARICOM counterparts to craft foreign policy given the country is significantly more industrialised than its neighbours.

As such, Trinidad's own elites seek to assert their country's ability to form independent agreements with the US and dictate their own migration policy. Trinidad and Tobago's elites do not feel as dependent on regional integration as less developed Caribbean countries. Meanwhile, CARICOM [does not have any real mechanism](#) to enforce regional integration and cooperation of member states.

## Is CARICOM at risk of collapse?

The unilateral foreign policy positions taken by Trinidad and Tobago are concerning for the long term viability of the bloc.

Last year, as US military build-up was increasing, Trinidad's foreign affairs minister stated there was "no need to consult CARICOM". Her comments indicate that at least in this moment, Trinidad and Tobago's government is prepared to move the country away from multilateralism.

The effect is that distrust and suspicion have increased among other CARICOM member states towards Trinidad which could have an effect on regional cooperation in other areas.

However, Trinidad and Tobago is one of the biggest beneficiaries of CARICOM, accounting for a significant share of Trinidadan manufactured goods, energy products and financial services.

If Trinidad and Tobago was to leave CARICOM, it could incur trade losses of up to \$3 billion. As such, a sudden Brexit-style departure would be unlikely, even with [the current tensions](#).

## The effects of CARICOM hostilities

Nonetheless, a departure is not impossible, but Trinidad and Tobago's issues, if left unresolved, could weaken CARICOM in the long term.

Trinidad and Tobago do not have to formally leave CARICOM to undermine the bloc and its neighbours. It could simply reduce or cease engagement altogether over time if the government determines the bloc is unable to serve its interests.

As CARICOM lacks the regional mechanisms to enforce unity, there is space for Trinidad and Tobago to undertake this. However, Trinidad and Tobago's lack of engagement would weaken CARICOM.

This is the threat that Trinidad and Tobago's position poses, and it has already started.

The Prime Minister of Barbados urged governments across CARICOM to negotiate as a single bloc since historically, the US has taken Caribbean states and interests more seriously when they negotiate together. The actions of Trinidad and Tobago [sets a greater precedent](#) for the US to expect bilateral negotiations going forward for other Caribbean countries.

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## Regional shifts

These changes are not without their consequences. Venezuela, in response to Trinidad and Tobago's US assistance, has cancelled a number of key oil and gas deals. Relations with the two countries have remained cold, even with Venezuela's new President, Delcy Rodriguez.

Rodriguez, on her first foreign visit in April, skipped past Trinidad and Tobago and [went to Grenada](#) and then [to Barbados](#) to discuss partnerships on a range of issues, such as food and energy security. Unlike Trinidad, both Caribbean countries resisted US pressure to install a radar system and to allow their territories to serve as launch points for an attack on Venezuela.

This signals another trend going forward: if CARICOM continues to pull away from each other, many other countries will see the opportunity to form partnerships with individual states rather than the collective bloc. In the short to medium term, this could seem like an opportunity. But over time, as small island states, this builds dependency and locks the region into internal competition with each other.

For regional integration to work, the Caribbean must rethink how CARICOM functions. It faces too many internal contradictions that will undermine it. This is the challenge facing the Caribbean: how can it create and maintain regional integration that accommodates all the economies in the region?

## An alternative to CARICOM?

Perhaps a completely different model is needed to resolve the tension between national and regional interests with a goal of liberating the Caribbean from the divergent and competing capitalist priorities that CARICOM operates under.

[The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America](#) (ALBA) demonstrated the possibility in 2004. Both Cuba and Venezuela founded ALBA to challenge neoliberal blocs like CARICOM, and the US-led Free Trade Area of the Americas. They did this by implementing a different economic model of regional integration that does not foment competition amongst its members.

ALBA prioritised solidarity through shared development plans, joint public enterprises, mutual aid during crises and energy integration through barter arrangements as opposed to market determinants. It was [deliberately post-capitalist by design](#) and sought to empower Caribbean countries to delink from US-led capitalism.

Countries like Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica and Antigua and Barbuda joined ALBA at the time, benefiting from Cuban doctors and engineer exchange, as well as public ownership in the development of regional institutions like [the development bank](#)

But ALBA would go into decline in 2014 due to Venezuela's economic crisis and the devastating US sanctions imposed.

However, it represents the most recent attempt at creating a regional integration alternative in the Caribbean that resolves the internal contradictions of regional integration in its current form. It shows that such alternative models of regional integration are possible.

## What does the Caribbean need now?

If models that prioritise public ownership over elite control are implemented, then the tensions between regional integration and national self determination that define the conflict between Trinidad and Tobago and CARICOM can be mitigated. And in time, completely dissolved.

Solving the conflict is essential for the [Caribbean](#) not only to meet the challenges presented by US imperialism but on other issues, such as the climate crisis and growing food and energy security.

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