



Haiti's Last Resort: Gangs and the Prospect of Foreign Intervention

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What's new? Violent gangs have taken the opportunity presented by Haiti's prolonged political crisis to seize control of much of the country, bringing its economy to a halt. With cholera resurgent, Haiti's government has called on the UN and foreign partners to deploy a public security force to push the gangs back.

Why does it matter? Decades of foreign interventions in Haiti have instilled reluctance in the country and abroad to contemplate a public security mission. Operational risks and the country's political divide have also cooled foreigners on a possible deployment, but interviews suggest that popular support for it, especially in gang-controlled areas, is rising.

What should be done? The collapsing Haitian state and the severity of the humanitarian emergency justify preparations for a mission. But its deployment should hinge on adequate planning to operate in urban areas and support from Haiti's main political forces, including their firm commitment to work together in creating a legitimate transitional government.

I. Overview

Foreign powers are considering whether to deploy a public security force to Haiti as rampant violence spearheaded by gangs and high-level political gridlock tips the country toward catastrophe. Made up mostly of young men from poor urban areas, the gangs have massively expanded their ranks and influence in recent years. Following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021, gangs exploited the vacuum generated by a disputed line of political succession to grab even more power. Formerly dependent on elite patrons, these outfits have grown more autonomous; acquired larger arsenals; widened their territorial footprint; stepped up their political demands; and become increasingly bold in frontal combat with security forces. Despite fears among Haitians about repeating past mistakes, foreign intervention may be required to break the gangs' grip on the country. But these forces must be prepared to operate in dense urban areas and should not deploy until a critical mass of Haiti's main political forces commit to support the mission and work together to create a legitimate transitional government.

Across the country, gangs have mounted an offensive aimed at seizing control of crucial thoroughfares and hubs for the flow of goods, including markets, ports and main roads, fuelling waves of unrest. The capital Port-au-Prince, home to almost one third of Haiti's 11.5 million population, has seen most of its connections to the rest of the country severed, with gun battles flaring between rival gangs as they vie to control its main gateways. Following an alarming spike in violence caused by clashes between two feuding gang coalitions on the capital's outskirts between May and July – which killed nearly 500 people, most of them civilians – protests erupted in several cities. Demonstrators railed against the lacklustre state response to the gangs' onslaught, which has made it even more difficult for households to put food on the table amid surging inflation and fuel shortages. Protests intensified after the acting prime minister, Ariel Henry, announced sweeping cuts in fuel subsidies on 11 September, paralysing several cities.

A day after this announcement, one of the two gang coalitions operating in the capital, the G9 an Fanmi e Alye, also known as the G9, blockaded the country's main oil terminal. Jimmy "Barbecue" Chérizier, a former police officer who has led the G9 since it was formed in mid-2020, said the group would maintain the blockade until Henry resigned as prime minister. The resulting shortages, and their knock-on effects on a national energy system that depends almost entirely on oil-based products, brought the country to a halt.

Compounding the country's hardships, cholera re-emerged in October, recalling the horrific outbreak in 2010 that has been attributed to the UN force then in the country. Most of the suspected cases are found in the capital's gang-controlled slums. Limited access to drinking water, disruptions in the flow of essential goods, blockages of humanitarian aid and the difficulties faced by health clinics, such as lack of fuel, have provided fertile ground for transmission of this lethal disease. Though few people are travelling, cholera has already reached nine of Haiti's ten departments, with almost 15,000 suspected cases and nearly 300 deaths; the real number of cases is likely to be substantially higher.

Unable to temper these interwoven and intensifying crises, Haiti's government called for an urgent international mission. Henry made a first official request on 7 October to foreign partners, asking them to immediately deploy a specialised armed force to fight the gangs. Mindful of the country's history of failed interventions, many Haitians took to the streets and social media to voice their opposition. But support for the plan has emerged in some quarters, due to recognition that foreign troops might be indispensable to any return to safety and normality.

Security conditions, meanwhile, have slightly improved over recent weeks. After two days of clashes, and amid rumoured negotiations between the government and the gangs to ease the oil terminal blockade, Haitian authorities announced on 3 November that security forces had regained control of the port. Fuel distribution soon resumed in the capital, but the gangs still control the main roads to the north and south, obstructing supply to other regions.

Despite this modicum of respite from the gangs' stranglehold, demand for an international mission to Haiti continues. Government officials insist that the national police cannot curb gang violence on their own. They say the police need the support of foreign forces to wrest back control of the streets and ensure that humanitarian relief reaches those who need it. While not all Haitians agree, dozens of Crisis Group

interviews in Port-au-Prince suggest that an increasing number of them, particularly in areas wracked by violence, see in the prospect of intervention hope of loosening the gangs' life-threatening hold at long last.

That said, many Haitian political and civil society groups voice grave misgivings. They regard the proposed mission as a relic of colonial dependence and a potential reprise of unpopular past foreign operations. They also worry that the arrival of international forces would enable Henry to reinforce what they see as his illegitimate grip on power. Henry has been acting prime minister since July 2021, when soon after Moïse's killing he received the blessing of foreign powers – notably members of the Core Group, an informal body made up of representatives from the UN and the Organization of American States, as well as ambassadors from the U.S., Canada, France, Brazil, Germany, Spain and the European Union. His adversaries portray him as an obstacle to resolving the country's political divisions, corruption and violence. They fear that the show of support implied by the deployment of foreign troops or police would allow him to avoid negotiations with the opposition on restoring political stability or paving the way to fresh elections. In their view, the most important step toward shoring up security would be Henry's exit.

Against this backdrop, prospects for intervention remain up in the air, with Haiti's foreign partners struggling with fundamental questions about whether to intervene and, if so, how. Should the severity of the humanitarian emergency convince foreign governments to move ahead with these plans in order to prevent a major loss of life, they should follow a number of guiding principles to make sure the eventual mission can meet its goals. The most important is to guarantee that both government and a sufficient cohort of opposition leaders agree on the basic terms for the mission's mandate so as to mitigate any backlash. As a further precondition, Henry and the opposition should firmly commit to a blueprint for a transitional government that could plot the way to fresh elections and begin the job of rebuilding the state and providing much needed services to citizens. Foreign states involved in planning the mission should encourage all sides to reach such a deal.

Any mission will also need to have sufficient and properly equipped personnel, as well as robust operational planning. The latter will be essential if the mission is to liberate economic lifelines and urban arteries, weaken the connections between gang combatants and their support networks, and avoid harming civilians or violating human rights. The threat of foreign armed intervention should be exploited to encourage the gangs to surrender, with Haitian authorities ready to offer paths to demobilisation and reintegration into law-abiding society for those gang members who opt for this path. Lastly, a comprehensive international aid plan should also include a raft of other measures to address Haiti's decades of institutional malaise and instability.

Hurdles in the way of the proposed mission's establishment and eventual success make it understandable that so many Haitians and international partners are hesitant about it. But the scale and speed of the country's violent breakdown may well require an extraordinary response. For any mission to have a hope of bringing the gangs to heel, Haitian political forces and civil society groups should as a matter of priority foster broad backing for it and ensure it has the legitimacy to underwrite difficult operations on hostile ground.

II. Contemplating a Rapid Action Force

The Haitian government called for an outside force to help release the country from the gangs' clutches only after years of rising criminal violence, culminating in the move by the largest gang coalition to seize control of its main oil terminal. The gangs' power grew notably under the late president, Moïse, with a number of independent investigations finding that his government collaborated with crime rings to stifle huge protests demanding that he step down. Since Moïse's still unsolved murder in July 2021, the gangs have gained even more clout.¹

A. Haiti's Request

Over the past two years, an estimated 200 or more gangs operating in the country have increasingly ventured from their historical bastions in poor neighbourhoods to occupy zones that are crucial to the functioning of the national economy or the justice system. Armed clashes triggered by their expansion reached new heights in June 2021, when fighting in the Martissant neighbourhood involving three gangs cut off the main road linking Port-au-Prince to the south. While the police tried to re-establish control of the area, incursions by gangs progressively blocked the main gateways to the capital from the north and east.²

The paralysis became even more serious in September when, just hours after Henry announced a sharp, sudden hike in fuel prices, gangs affiliated with the G9 coalition began their blockade of the Varreux terminal on the northern outskirts of Port-au-Prince, which accounts for 70 per cent of the country's oil storage capacity.³ Although the police have carried out a number of successful operations against the gangs, including the liberation of the Varreux terminal and its fuel stock facilities almost two

¹ See Crisis Group Latin America and Caribbean Briefing N°44, *Haiti: A Path to Stability for a Nation in Shock*, 30 September 2022. After Moïse announced a fuel price hike in July 2018, his administration was shaken by repeated waves of mass demonstrations. Several foreign human rights organisations and research centres documented at least three massacres in La Saline, Bel-Air and Cité Soleil, all Port-au-Prince neighbourhoods. These massacres were allegedly perpetrated by gangs, in collaboration with Haitian police officers, with the aim of breaking up demonstrations. That November, the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned two high-ranking officials close to Moïse for taking part in planning the La Saline massacre and providing weapons used to carry it out. See "Killing with Impunity: State-Sanctioned Massacres in Haiti", Harvard Law School International Human Rights Clinic and Observatoire haïtien des crimes contre l'humanité, April 2021; "Treasury Sanctions Serious Human Rights Abusers on International Human Rights Day", U.S. Treasury Department, 10 December 2020.

² An alternative route to the south, which runs through an area known as Laboule 12, avoiding Martissant, is under intensifying attack by a gang led by Carlo Petit-Homme, aka "Ti Makak". National Route 1, connecting the capital to the north, is increasingly blocked at Canaan and Cabaret by the Village-de-Dieu and other gangs. The main road linking Port-au-Prince to the Dominican Republic is controlled by the 400 Mawozo and Kraze Barye gangs.

³ The G9 had previously blockaded the Varreux terminal between 17 October and 12 November 2021, the first time that gangs had taken full control of the port for an extended period. Both in 2021 and 2022, Chérizier made Henry's resignation as prime minister a condition for lifting the blockade. In 2021, the G9 withdrew from the port facilities following negotiations with Haitian officials in which they were granted benefits that were never made public.

months after the blockade began, the Haitian police and its new anti-gang task force are hard pressed to contain the violence that has proliferated in the capital and beyond.⁴

Evidence of a new cholera outbreak, with the first suspected cases cropping up in two gang-controlled areas of Port-au-Prince, prompted Henry's government to call in October for the "immediate deployment of a specialised armed force" to combat gang violence and counter its humanitarian effects.⁵ In short order, UN Secretary-General António Guterres sent a letter to the Security Council proposing deployment of a "rapid action force" to reinforce the Haitian National Police's anti-gang campaign, stressing the urgent need to provide security for relief efforts for the cholera outbreak's victims.⁶ The proposal underscored that the force would be temporary (the U.S. has said it would last six months); autonomous of UN command, if need be; and limited to ensuring public access to basic services as well as safe use of key roads, ports, airports and oil terminals. It would withdraw once Haiti's security forces had regained control of critical infrastructure, to be succeeded by a mission aimed at supporting the national police.⁷

At a special Security Council meeting held on 17 October, the U.S. and Mexican delegations announced they were drafting two resolutions to address Haiti's insecurity. The first, unanimously adopted at a second meeting four days later, provided for sanctions against gang leaders and their sponsors, including an asset freeze, travel ban and arms embargo. Although these sanctions will only be imposed by early 2023, when a group of experts advising the Council establishes who will be targeted (only gang leader Chérizier is included right now), the U.S. and Canada have already adopted their own sanctions against several of Haiti's most powerful politicians, including former President Michel Martelly, two ex-prime ministers and two Senate presidents, as well as three high-profile members of Haiti's business elite.

The second draft resolution prepared jointly by the U.S. and Mexico is far more ambitious in scale, though so far it has not been submitted to the Security Council. It proposes a "non-UN mission led by a partner country with the deep, necessary expe-

⁴ In its latest report on the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), the UN secretary-general's office noted that the police have carried out operations against gangs, but also that violence has increased in the capital and spread to other regions. "United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti: Report of the Secretary-General", 13 October 2022, p. 4. Since 10 June, the gang led by Johnson André, aka "Izo 5 Secondes", has occupied the Court of First Instance in downtown Port-au-Prince. This same gang has partnered in recent months with other armed groups operating in the capital's northern outskirts, and took control of Port Lafito in early October, one of the country's most important private ports.

⁵ Two of the first three cholera cases registered on 2 October were in Cité Soleil's Brooklyn district, which is under the control of the gang led by Gabriel Jean Pierre, aka "Ti Gabriel", who created a coalition of gangs to fight those grouped under the G9. The other case was detected in Savane Pistache, located along an alternative road used to avoid passing through Martissant and a strategic site for extortion, which at least three gangs are vying to control.

⁶ The letter did not completely rule out the return of a peacekeeping mission, noting it would be a last resort should outside powers fail to act promptly. "Letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council", 8 October 2022.

⁷ The secretary-general's letter proceeded to outline two options for the medium term following withdrawal of the intervention force: a multinational police contingent that would focus on enhancing the Haitian police's "tactical and operational capabilities", or a collection of "well-equipped special police units" drawn from several countries to work with Haitian counterparts in operations. *Ibid.*

rience required for such an effort to be effective”.⁸ In keeping with the terms of Henry’s request and the UN secretary-general’s written proposal, the initial goal would be to restore security to allow for humanitarian aid to flow freely. The U.S. assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, Brian Nichols, stated in late October that the mission under consideration “would be largely a police force with a military component”.⁹

B. *Reactions in Haiti*

The first reactions of many Haitians to the proposal that foreign troops be invited to fight the country’s gangs were overwhelmingly negative. Many politicians and public figures were quick to condemn the plan as redolent of colonial interventions, while reiterating that the country needs a “Haiti-led solution”.¹⁰ The Montana Accord group, the main opposition coalition, declared that “history teaches us that no foreign force has ever solved the problems of any people on earth”.¹¹ Critics also claimed that Henry, as acting prime minister, had no legal standing to call for foreign assistance.¹²

Resistance to the proposal also arose from citizens, many of whom resent a history of foreign meddling that they say has done little to improve their lives.¹³ Crowds took to Port-au-Prince streets in late October, chanting, “Down with the prime minister! Down with the occupation!”.¹⁴

More than a few critics outside Haiti also disparaged the proposal. A U.S. media outlet stated that “under the current conditions, any foreign military intervention could likely do more harm than good”, while a former U.S. envoy to Haiti warned that a foreign military foray into such complicated terrain could result in a bloodbath.¹⁵

But, at least in Haiti, some of the initial opposition appears to have waned. Slowly, and with a degree of reluctance, more Haitians have started to speak up in favour of a foreign mission, although very few unreservedly endorse the deployment of foreign

⁸ Remarks by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield at a UN Security Council Briefing on Haiti, 17 October 2022.

⁹ “Special Briefing: The Secretary’s Upcoming Travel to Canada”, U.S. State Department, 26 October 2022.

¹⁰ “Haitians want a ‘Haitian-led solution’”, *Politico*, 4 November 2022.

¹¹ Tweet by the Bureau de Suivi de l’Accord de Montana, 10:15 am, 8 October 2022.

¹² “Henry has no mandate at all. There was no nomination letter; he didn’t swear before congress. He’s there because the international community put him there. Someone who has no mandate, who is illegitimate, an autocrat, asks for foreign intervention. There’s something inherently wrong with this”. Crisis Group telephone interview, Montana Accord member, 25 October 2022.

¹³ Crisis Group Briefing, *Haiti: A Path to Stability*, op. cit. An opinion poll in early 2022 revealed a more nuanced perception of the UN’s role, possibly reflecting that MINUSTAH, the peacekeeping force that operated in Haiti from 2004 to 2017, had some success in curbing gang activities. Twelve per cent of respondents had a very favourable opinion of the UN, and 27 per cent had a favourable impression, while 20 per cent had an unfavourable view. Respondents also supported UN involvement in responding to conflict, addressing gender violence, organising elections and reducing corruption. Haiti survey conducted by Sociodigital Research Group between 19 February and 18 March 2022, polling 1,023 respondents, shared with Crisis Group.

¹⁴ “Many people in Haiti are actively resisting international intervention”, KPCC (Southern Californian Public Radio), 27 October 2021.

¹⁵ “Sending troops to Haiti would make a bad situation worse”, Bloomberg, 11 November 2021; “Haitians have united against foreign intervention – and one former US diplomat agrees”, *The New Republic*, 12 October 2021.

troops on Haitian soil. A growing number of civil society groups have begun to insist that international partners need to assist national authorities in dealing with the humanitarian emergency, arguing that the priority should be to fight gangs that hamper the flow of basic goods and medical aid.¹⁶ At the same time, even many supporters of intervention caution that it would not provide a long-term solution to the conditions giving rise to mounting gang violence.¹⁷

Despair at the country's acute overlapping political, security, economic and now health crises – all linked in some way to the gangs – seems to be driving some members of the public to reconsider their opposition to intervention. Several interviewees in Port-au-Prince who now support the idea drew a direct connection between the gang clashes in the impoverished Cité Soleil slum of Port-au-Prince in July and the resurgence of cholera. Cases started to appear in Cité Soleil's Brooklyn neighbourhood, which has been bereft of even the most basic sanitation services since it was isolated by fighting in July.¹⁸ From there, the disease spread to the rest of Cité Soleil and to Port-au-Prince, which now account for more than half the country's suspected cases. As blockades of the main roads have prevented the transport of medical supplies, cases in the rest of the country have gone untreated.¹⁹

Cholera is not the only humanitarian need going unaddressed. Many international humanitarian officials have left the country due to dire security conditions in recent months. As a result, survivors of sexual violence have less access to time-sensitive care, such as treatment to prevent HIV, sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancies and urgent surgery for severe traumatic injuries resulting from collective rape.²⁰

A number of Port-au-Prince residents defended the proposal for a foreign force out of a growing sense of hopelessness. "Bandits roam all over the city without the

¹⁶ The president of the Haitian Pharmacists Association has stated that the police's ineffectiveness in dealing with armed groups makes foreign intervention necessary. "Des acteurs de la société civile lancent un appel au calme et à la bonne gouvernance", *Le National*, 26 October 2022. In its most recent report, the Center for Human Rights Analysis and Research (CARDH) declared that the humanitarian crisis and systematic human rights violations in Haiti make it incumbent on outside parties to intervene, but that any intervention must address issues of governance and corruption. "Régimes de sanctions des États-Unis, du Canada et du Conseil de sécurité pour contenir la criminalité en Haïti", CARDH, November 2022.

¹⁷ The director of Haiti's National Human Rights Defense Network, Pierre Espérance, argued that deploying an international armed force would bring only cosmetic change without providing a real solution to the country's problems of governance, impunity and corruption. Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 30 November 2022.

¹⁸ A person with extensive knowledge of Cité Soleil told Crisis Group that since the July clashes, residents of the Brooklyn neighbourhood have had extremely limited access to drinking water and water purification. They must rely on wells filled with contaminated water. Another person who knows the area well added that the July clashes coincided with heavy rains. As piles of rubbish formed in a canal running between the Brooklyn and Bois Neuf neighbourhoods, where some of Port-au-Prince's garbage is dumped into the sea, massive flooding occurred, and sewage spilled into the area. Crisis Group interviews, Port-au-Prince, November 2022. For more details on the clashes in Cité Soleil, see Diego Da Rin, "New Gang Battle Lines Scar Haiti as Political Deadlock Persist", Crisis Group Commentary, 27 July 2022.

¹⁹ "Until last year, the police still provided some support for secure humanitarian convoys, but they no longer have the capacity to do so". Crisis Group interview, international aid worker, Port-au-Prince, 25 November 2022.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, international aid worker, Port-au-Prince, 25 November 2022. "Sexual Violence in Port-au-Prince: A Weapon Used by Gangs to Instill Fear", BINUH/OHCHR, October 2022.

police being able to do anything about it, and this happens in plain sight”, a civil society leader said.²¹ There is widespread fear of the way in which gangs use sexual violence against women, members of the LGBTQI+ community and, to a lesser extent, straight men, to assert power in the neighbourhoods they control, coerce those who resist their orders and humiliate their opponents, among other reasons. Human rights organisations have denounced gangs using collective rape of children as young as ten, as well as women, to inflict punishment and intimidate the population.²² Many parents refuse to let their children leave the house for fear of what might befall them.²³

Support for a foreign deployment seems particularly high in areas worst afflicted by gang violence. Reflecting on the risks of gun battles between foreign troops and gangs in his neighbourhood, a man living in an area controlled by armed groups stated: “There will certainly be people killed, but fewer than what is happening day after day”.²⁴ A member of a Haitian civil society organisation stressed that most people living in the *zones de non-droit* (lawless zones) would support a mission able to defeat the gangs.²⁵ Inhabitants of Cité Soleil and other gang-controlled areas also betrayed a streak of impatience with political elites who oppose foreign troops: “The people who speak out against armed intervention, you have to see what their social status is and where they live. In these areas [under gang control], they prefer an intervention that would be far from perfect, but which would at least allow some security”.²⁶

Residents and businesses also cite economic reasons to make the case for foreign troops. Haiti's leading business associations said in a statement that they “understand and support the Haitian government's difficult but responsible decision to ask for some form of robust humanitarian support from friends in the international community ... since the Haitian national police, in spite of all its efforts, has not been able to face alone the destructive actions of armed gangs”.²⁷

²¹ “The situation is extremely dire. ... The question is whether today Haiti has crossed the threshold of the duty to intervene. We think so. We are no fools: an armed intervention will not solve the situation. But to stop the spiral of violence, a multinational force is needed”. Crisis Group interview, Samuel Madistin, president of Fondation Je Klere, Port-au-Prince, 22 November 2022.

²² “Sexual Violence in Port-au-Prince: A Weapon Used by Gangs to Instill Fear”, op. cit.

²³ “[It is] foolish to think diesel is closing schools. Kidnapping is the biggest reason to stay home, followed by the price of transport, followed by hunger”. Crisis Group correspondence, humanitarian aid worker, Port-au-Prince, October 2022.

²⁴ “95 per cent of the people who are really suffering are just waiting for this. The people who don't want it are either politicians who want to continue with their scheming, or they are great nationalist ideologues who don't care about their brothers and sisters who are dying”. Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 22 November 2022.

²⁵ “People are kidnapped every day. Sometimes 100 people are kidnapped in one weekend, and even if the police know where they are held, no intervention can be carried out to free the hostages. If somebody is kidnapped, his family has to go into debt and spend money from 30 years of work to pay a ransom. Spectacular crimes are perpetrated on police officers, sometimes even inside police stations. Women are filmed being raped in the street, the videos are posted by gangs on social networks to further humiliate them, and the police are unable to carry out an intervention”. Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 22 November 2022.

²⁶ “In the absence of the state, the gangs have become the protectors of the local population. But if a legal force arrives, 80 per cent of those who live in these areas would support it, because the situation is really unbearable”. Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, November 2022.

²⁷ “Le secteur privé supporte les demandes d'aide sécuritaire et sanitaire du gouvernement Henry”, *Le Nouvelliste*, 15 October 2022. In private meetings, businessmen who are greatly affected by the gangs express their support in a less subtle fashion. “Even though they have lost control of the

III. Operational Challenges

Specialised international forces could provide the support that many Haitians claim the police needs to meet the increased firepower of the gangs, which have obtained large quantities of ammunition and high-calibre weapons via arms trafficking.²⁸ At the same time, the prospect of high-intensity clashes in densely populated urban areas, where gang members and civilians are hard to tell apart, poses many operational challenges. A strategy based on concrete objectives to be achieved in coordination with the Haitian police, while causing the least possible collateral damage, will be essential to the success of any eventual mission.

Among the short-term security objectives of any mission, the most urgent and perhaps the most challenging would be cracking down on gang strongholds such as Cité Soleil, where relentless turf wars have raised food insecurity to the most severe levels ever recorded in Haiti.²⁹ If any such operation takes place, it would be essential that the risks of using armed force in densely populated urban environments are fully anticipated and managed. Haiti's gangs have increasingly targeted civilians in battles with rival groups, using murder, rape and destruction of homes in a bid to compel residents to collaborate in their campaign to seize territory.³⁰ These tactics suggest that the gangs could try to coerce or co-opt civilians into helping them defend themselves from police assault.³¹

Protecting civilians while fighting for control of these areas will be not easy. Neighbourhoods where gang members take refuge are often located at the heart of over-

Varreux terminal, the gangs are still extremely aggressive. Yesterday, the G9 hijacked seven shipping containers on La Saline boulevard in lower Delmas. Last year, the gangs hijacked at least 200 containers. In the port of Port-au-Prince, about twenty guards have twelve-gauge shotguns, and there is no police protection at all, while the gangs have heavy weaponry made for war. There is no way to solve this problem with our Haitian forces. We are absolutely in favour of a military mission". Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 22 November 2022.

²⁸ Representatives of two Haitian National Police unions pointed out that there is a great disparity in the calibre of weapons used by the police and the gangs. The latter reportedly have weapons that can perforate the armoured vehicles used by the police's special units in anti-gang operations. Crisis Group interviews, Port-au-Prince, 23 and 30 November. The chief of Miami's Homeland Security Investigations stated that there had been a substantial increase in the number and calibre of weapons illegally trafficked from Florida to Haiti. "Weapons smuggling to Haiti is on 'alarming trend': Feds crack down, ask for public help", *Miami Herald*, 18 August 2022.

²⁹ The Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme have warned that, for the first time, food insecurity in Cité Soleil has reached a "catastrophic level", the highest in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. More than half the population is suffering high levels of food insecurity. "Analyse IPC de l'Insécurité Alimentaire Aigüe", FAO/WFP, 14 October 2022.

³⁰ During the May-June clashes between the 400 Mawozo and Chen Mechan gangs, 143 of the 191 people killed were civilians. "A new war in Cité Soleil: The RNDH requires the immediate intervention of the police institution", National Human Rights Defense Network, July 2022, p. 3. Similarly, during armed clashes between rival gang coalitions in Cité Soleil in July, the G9 prevented access to food and water in the Brooklyn district in an attempt to coerce civilians into rallying to their side. "Report of the Secretary-General", op. cit., p. 8.

³¹ In many areas where gangs operate, locals are used as human shields to discourage police raids. Residents often need permission to cross boundaries that delineate gang territories. A member of a civil society group reported the case of a Cité Soleil family in which both parents work outside the area, but only one is allowed to leave at a time to ensure they do not flee the district. Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 20 November 2022.

crowded slums criss-crossed by narrow streets, and gang members are not visibly distinct from civilians. Furthermore, the lack of facilities to accommodate internally displaced persons means that most residents have no option but to remain where they are, even when under the gangs' yoke; the inability to escape is particularly alarming in the case of women forced by the gangs into sexual servitude.³² Instead of counting on brute force of numbers and arms, security operations should rely on intelligence to gauge the extent to which gangs' strongholds can be entered without endangering civilian lives.

Protecting civilians is also likely to preclude the security mission from turning immediately to the sort of urban tactics that might appear to be the most effective. An element of surprise, for example, might prove critical to success in a raid targeting a gang bastion. But given the risk that these operations could result in the death of civilians and minors who have been recruited by the gangs, some Haitian analysts suggest that priority should be given instead to using the threat of armed intervention as a deterrent.³³ For example, if and when a mission is deployed, authorities could push gang leaders to leave certain neighbourhoods by threatening that the forces will move in if they do not comply.

Despite the operational difficulties, members of these beleaguered communities and security experts suggest that the arrival of troops would make an immediate difference. In fact, some argue that just the credible threat of a strong foreign armed intervention to support the police would make some gang leaders reconsider and try to negotiate their own surrender.³⁴ In those areas where gangs remain steadfast after troops have arrived, the prospect of stronger law enforcement could still weaken community tolerance of the gangs. Currently, a code of silence prevails in gang-controlled territories, as residents know that denouncing the gangs or sharing information with security forces carries with it the risk of dire punishment. But sources in Port-au-Prince believe that the arrival of foreign troops and the possibility that they could stage raids would shift the balance of power, spurring residents to share intelligence and even leading some gang members to give up voluntarily.³⁵

³² Some of the people who stay in the *zones de non-droit* because conditions are no better elsewhere are women and girls who are forced to engage in sexual relations with gang members. If they do not want to risk being killed while fleeing the area at night, they are forced to become one of the many sexual partners of the armed men. In return, they are sometimes granted a privileged status that allows them to have enhanced protection. "If they denounce, they have to leave the area, and risk being killed. Sometimes a gang leader maintains sexual relations with both a mother and her daughter. This is a situation where women have to accept the unacceptable". Crisis Group interview, human rights activist, Port-au-Prince, 23 November 2022.

³³ "If there are four helicopters coming in making noise and everyone sees them arrive at the airport, [the gang members] will panic: they will know that they will now face superior forces, that they will not be able to resist and that they will be killed". Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 29 November 2022.

³⁴ Two residents of gang-controlled areas agreed that there was a temporary reduction in inter-gang clashes when Henry called for international forces to deploy in Haiti. They also stressed that the gangs will not feel real pressure until images circulate of foreign troops on Haitian soil, along with warnings of impending operations. Crisis Group interviews, Port-au-Prince, November 2022.

³⁵ "When we see that discussions about a mission are not a joke and that international armed forces are really here, people who have weapons but are not fully engaged in the gang will leave their territories. Losing some of their soldiers will start to destabilise and weaken the gangs". Crisis Group, interview, Port-au-Prince, November 2022.

Prior to any eventual operations, force commanders would also have to think through how residents can get out of areas where fighting is raging. They could mount a communications campaign through social media to announce anti-gang operations and assistance for civilians who seek to leave their homes and for gang members who prefer to lay down their arms.³⁶ In this case, authorities would need to establish camps equipped to accommodate a large number of displaced people. Given that girls and women have been victims of sexual violence in existing camps, planning would need to incorporate measures to prevent assaults and provide services to survivors. It would also need to create safe spaces where intelligence units could collect information on gang members, the areas in which they operate and any other information useful for armed operations.³⁷

Any potential force should also provide a strict protocol prescribing the exact security procedures that should be employed in the event of being confronted with protests from civilian groups unrelated to gangs. Parts of the Haitian public are outspoken in their criticism of past peacekeeping missions because of mistakes and crimes committed, such as sexual exploitation and abuse cases involving dozens of UN peacekeepers as well as the introduction of cholera to the country via the mission's troops.³⁸ The resentment that many Haitians feel toward foreign forces could again lead to protests. In the past, gang leaders have joined marches against Henry, and should they do so again security personnel would have to respond carefully; confrontations leading to loss of life could be politically explosive. At the same time, one way to allay public concern would be to create clear reporting mechanisms providing local people with the opportunity to share information about alleged human rights abuses by international police and troops.

Meanwhile, to prevent leakage of information from undermining potential joint operations between foreign forces and the Haitian police, vetted and specially trained local anti-gang units would have to be prepared to take part in these operations.³⁹ A fully vetted anti-gang task force has been established: it was 150-strong by October.⁴⁰ But this force is still not large enough for Haitian police to assume a major role in joint operations, considering that the strongest gangs have up to 500 members and are intimately familiar with the territory they control.⁴¹ The Haitian police should continue to vet and train new recruits to the anti-gang unit, even as discussions about a foreign

³⁶ People support gangs primarily because they provide basic social assistance in their territories and fend off rival gangs' attacks. Haitians depend on information shared through social media to know which areas are safe to enter and where attacks are occurring. "People will forego food if they need the money to have a phone", one source said. Crisis Group interviews, Port-au-Prince, November 2022.

³⁷ In addition to discovering the exact location of gang leaders, intelligence gathering should pay special attention to arms depots, which could be among the first targets of operations. Crisis Group interview, human rights organisation member, 22 November 2022. "Surge in use of rape against women and rivals in Haiti camps", *The New Humanitarian*, 14 November 2022.

³⁸ "UN peacekeepers in Haiti said to have fathered hundreds of children", *The New York Times*, 19 December 2019; Michael Dziedzic and Robert M. Perito, "Haiti Confronting the Gangs of Port-au-Prince", U.S. Institute of Peace, September 2008.

³⁹ There are cases of informants who were reportedly killed after leaks by police officers to the gangs. Crisis Group interview, human rights activist, Port-au-Prince, 22 November 2022.

⁴⁰ "Report of the Secretary-General", op. cit., p. 5.

⁴¹ Crisis Group telephone interview, 3 November 2022.

mission continue. They should also keep these efforts going if and when such a mission deploys, thus helping pave the way for the police to take over from the foreign troops sooner rather than later.

More broadly, efforts by the Haitian state to bolster the national police would have to be ramped up to ensure that any security improvements in the course of foreign intervention endure under a potential future UN mission.⁴² This endeavour would not be new for the UN, since strengthening the police stood at the heart of MINUSTAH's mandate.⁴³ Those efforts failed to achieve the desired results, however, because corruption, lack of resources, failings in coordination between donors and national authorities, as well as the devastation wrought by the 2010 earthquake caused reforms to falter.⁴⁴ Likewise, initiatives to vet police officers and prevent their co-optation by criminal groups have been undermined by conditions in a force that finds itself underfunded, poorly equipped and saddled with low pay.⁴⁵ Future international support for the Haitian police could be accompanied by the creation of an expenditure monitoring team led jointly by Haitian officials and international experts to ensure that funds are dedicated to strengthening police officers' professional standards, improving remuneration and increasing the size of the force.

IV. Political Pushback

Acting Prime Minister Henry's appeal for international police and military support was met with consternation by his critics, who fear that a foreign intervention could prop up an extremely unpopular government. This concern is especially prevalent among Henry's political opposition – most prominently, the coalition known as the Montana Accord. The Montana Accord was created around an agreement outlining a plan for a political transition in Haiti, signed in August 2021 by nearly 200 political parties and civil society organisations.⁴⁶ It has accused Henry of having tolerated the gangs' spread, without offering resistance, and of using the violence they generate as a means to hold on to power. It has further described Henry's call for international

⁴² Haiti's ambassador to the U.S., Bocchit Edmond, said "this time an intervention would be different. It would be to buttress the National Police and buy time to beef up security around the country. ... In the short term, we want to strengthen our security forces' capacity". "Would intervention by foreign troops help stabilize Haiti?", *Latin America Advisor*, 25 October 2022.

⁴³ Crisis Group Latin America and Caribbean Briefing N°26, *Keeping Haiti Safe: Police Reform*, 8 September 2011.

⁴⁴ Sarah Mehard and Aleisha Arnusch, "Haiti: Police and Law Enforcement", Strategic Studies Institute, pp. 73-96.

⁴⁵ "As gang's power grows, Haiti's police are outgunned and underpaid", *The New York Times*, 26 October 2021.

⁴⁶ For details, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Haiti: A Path to Stability for a Nation in Shock*, op. cit. The Montana Accord provided for a two-year transitional plan, led by a president and a prime minister accompanied by an executive control body that would re-establish the institutions required to organise elections. See "Accord du 30 août 2021", Citizen Conference for a Haitian Solution to the Crisis, 30 August 2021. The agreement was initially signed by some 180 civil society and political groups and then broadened in January 2022, when the original signatories reached a consensus agreement with another coalition of seven major political parties known as the Protocole d'Entente Nationale. Monique Clesca, "Haiti's Fight for Democracy: Why the Country Must Rebuild Before It Votes", *Foreign Affairs*, 1 February 2022.

military support as an act of treason.⁴⁷ Fritz Alphonse Jean, chosen by the Montana Accord in January to lead a transitional government, has condemned Henry for preferring the intervention of foreign forces to talks about a political agreement with his own compatriots.⁴⁸

Sticking points between Henry and the Montana Accord – which shape the latter's views on intervention – include his unwillingness to discuss an arrangement for handing over power. Representatives of the Montana Accord have met with Henry and his allies for discussions on numerous occasions.⁴⁹ But Henry has refused to budge on whether future talks should take on the issue of his departure from high office.

The feasibility and timing of elections has also been a hot topic since Moïse's assassination. The late president had cancelled the 2019 legislative elections, and many foreign partners, including the UN, pressed Henry to call new polls soon after he took power.⁵⁰ Instead, the acting prime minister dismissed the electoral authorities in September 2021.⁵¹ Deteriorating security conditions have made it impossible to conduct reasonably fair elections since then, but government critics have urged Henry to agree to a power-sharing scheme that would allow for creating a stable transitional administration.⁵² Nevertheless, despite the weakness of his ruling coalition and protesters' demands for his resignation, Henry has rejected the notion of handing over power to other political leaders ahead of organising fresh polls.⁵³

Many in Haiti and even a number of foreign diplomats are concerned that the acting prime minister appears still to enjoy the full support of the above-mentioned Core Group of foreign states and international bodies, and thus feels secure in his post notwithstanding his government's perceived failings.⁵⁴ Other political platforms and civil society groups, meanwhile, complain that they have not received enough attention from foreign representatives, particularly the U.S.⁵⁵ Henry, for his part, appears

⁴⁷ "Nòt piblik biwo swivi Akò Montana a kont okipasyon peyi Dayiti nou an", Montana Accord Monitoring Office, 7 October 2022.

⁴⁸ "Fritz Alphonse Jean, rejetant toute intervention d'une force étrangère en Haïti, prône un 'consensus suffisant'", *Gazette Haïti*, 7 October 2022. On 30 January, the National Transitional Council, made up of 42 members from the political, religious and civil society groups that signed the Montana agreement, elected a president, Fritz Alphonse Jean, and a prime minister, Steven Benoît, to lead the executive during the transitional period.

⁴⁹ Members of the Montana Accord Monitoring Office and Henry and his allies have had three rounds of talks in 2022: one in February, another in May and a third beginning in July, which ended on 2 August. The two main points of disagreement have been that Henry is unwilling to negotiate questions of governance, while Montana is reluctant to include other participants in the negotiations.

⁵⁰ "United Nations Security Council presses for elections in Haiti", *Miami Herald*, 5 October 2021.

⁵¹ "Haiti elections postponed indefinitely amid political crisis", *Al Jazeera*, 28 September 2021.

⁵² See Crisis Group Briefing, *Haiti: A Path to Stability for a Nation in Shock*, op. cit.; and Da Rin, "New Gang Battle Lines Scar Haiti as Political Deadlock Persists", op. cit.

⁵³ The UN Security Council had expressly asked Henry's government for a report on the progress of negotiations over a political agreement, with a 17 October due date, but the briefing was not presented. The Council meeting that day focused on Henry's request for international military assistance.

⁵⁴ Daniel Foote, a former U.S. special envoy for Haiti, has been very critical of the role the Core Group has played in the political crisis, claiming it was initially dismissive of the Montana Accord and has sustained Henry in power. Crisis Group telephone interview, 21 October 2022.

⁵⁵ Thirteen members of U.S. Congress recently wrote a letter to President Joe Biden stressing that "Henry has no constitutional mandate" and claiming that Washington has "failed to send a clear signal that the United States does not consider Henry the sole path through which any Haitian-led

determined to reach a political agreement with opposition forces that, having won the approval of certain private-sector and civil society figures, would enable him to continue leading the government during a transitional period ending in elections.⁵⁶

He may yet succeed. Having campaigned so far unsuccessfully to force the prime minister from power, the Montana Agreement has begun to suffer internal splits. These pit those who will not accept, under any circumstances, that Henry stays on as head of government against others who are open to considering the possibility under certain conditions. Henry has turned these differences to his advantage, negotiating separately with different sectors of the Montana group.⁵⁷ The best hope for an agreement would likely involve a power-sharing deal between Henry and those factions willing to see a role for him in some future transitional government, although this course would risk leaving the acting prime minister's more intransigent opponents on the sidelines.

If such a deal becomes feasible, Haiti's foreign partners should support it. The deadlock has hindered creation of a transitional government, and also imperils the necessary conditions for deployment of an international security force. Foreign states are extremely wary of supporting a mission and deploying troops without the explicit approval of the country's main political forces, which would help reduce the risk of protests, shore up public support and curb the danger that a mission might exacerbate the country's tensions, perhaps bringing even greater instability once its mandate is over. States contemplating the formation of a mission, including potential financial and troop contributors, should keep insisting that these plans can move ahead only with backing from both the government and a critical mass of the opposition, as well as a commitment by those forces to work together in forming a transitional government that can restore services to the public and pave the way for fresh elections.

solution must flow." "Bicameral letter to President Biden regarding Haiti", 6 October 2022. Crisis Group interview, U.S. civil society representative, December 2022.

⁵⁶ Talks are under way about a new agreement that seeks to bring together various political parties, private-sector representatives and civil society groups. A Haitian civil society leader, who has been consulting with a broad range of actors, has drafted an accord that would leave Henry in power until new elections are organised and create a five-member consultative body made up of two politicians, two representatives from the private sector and one from civil society. The Montana group is divided: one sector, mostly political parties, have said they would be willing to accept this arrangement, while the Monitoring Office has refused to support it. Crisis Group interview, individual close to Henry, Port-au-Prince, 21 November 2022.

⁵⁷ "Montana is a very difficult entity to engage – it has got its own internal divisions and biases. Yet it is a group that is representative of civil society". Crisis Group telephone interview, U.S. expert on Haiti, 19 October 2020. Some of those who initially supported the Montana transitional program point out that the focus on struggling against Henry has caused them to lose their connections with the public. "At first, the Montana Accord appeared to be a promising political movement made up of competent people, but they neglected ordinary people, since there was no mechanism for the effective participation of different social sectors from all the country's departments. Many organisations signed the agreement, but not all are still aligned with Montana. Ariel [Henry] is well aware of this. He doesn't listen to them, because they are not really a unified opposition force supported by the population". Crisis Group interview, human rights lawyer, Port-au-Prince, 23 November 2022.

V. The International Angle

Lack of agreement between Haiti's political forces, in combination with the daunting challenges posed by gangs, underpin foreign reluctance to commit resources and manpower to the proposed rapid action force. The U.S. and Mexico, which have taken the diplomatic lead in pressing for the deployment of foreign troops or police, have sought to identify states willing to volunteer personnel and, perhaps most importantly, lead a mission to Haiti. But their task has been complicated by a sequencing dilemma. These two countries want to avoid tabling the draft resolution before the Security Council until they have real commitments to staff the mission, yet the lack of a resolution defining the mandate makes it difficult to confirm the participation of potential troop contributors.⁵⁸

While diplomats in New York suggest that some potential contributors have been identified – eg, Trinidad, Kenya and Rwanda – it has been more difficult to convince capitals to take on the costly task of leading a mission.⁵⁹ Washington, acutely aware of the backlash that its previous interventions in Haiti have provoked, and no doubt conscious that a war-fatigued public might be less than supportive, is reluctant to send troops itself.⁶⁰ At the same time, U.S. policymakers are acutely aware that further deterioration of conditions in Haiti could create a refugee crisis, which could in turn change their cost-benefit calculations with respect to intervention.⁶¹

As a result, the U.S. has turned to Canada. In late October, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken travelled to Ottawa to meet with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly, in an attempt to convince them to assume the lead of the mission. Canadian officials are considering the proposal; in private, they voice concern that Haiti will suffer even worse calamities in the absence of a foreign mission.⁶² But they also understand the difficulties of dispatching their own nation's forces at the invitation of a head of state whose grasp on power is feeble and contested. Trudeau has declared there will only be an intervention if all Haitian political parties agree to it.⁶³

Given it is unlikely that every single party in Haiti will support a foreign intervention, the question of how broad an agreement would need to be remains pending. While the more inclusive the better, the mission should not deploy absent a deal that includes Henry and a critical mass of those opposition factions, welcomes foreign troops and clearly establishes the boundaries of a security mission's mandate. As noted above, deployment should also hinge on a firm commitment by these parties to work together in creating a transitional government.

At the same time as mulling an armed intervention in Haiti, the U.S. and Canada have moved decisively to sanction several of the country's leading politicians for allegedly funding gangs. A month after the U.S. revoked visas for several current and

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, 18 November 2021.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and UN functionaries, November 2021.

⁶⁰ "As Haiti unravels, US officials push to send in an armed foreign force", *The New York Times*, 29 November 2022.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, U.S. civil society representative, December 2022.

⁶² Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, November 2022.

⁶³ "Haitian leaders must all agree if Canada leads military intervention: Trudeau", *National Post*, 19 November 2022.

former Haitian government officials, Henry's justice and interior ministers were forced to resign on 11 November. Following the announcement by the two countries of joint financial sanctions on the current and a former president of the Senate – the second most powerful post in Haiti's political system – Canada unveiled further measures against eight of the country's most influential politicians, including former President Martelly and two of his prime ministers. These politicians are seen by many as major figures in the Haitian Tèt Kale Party, which ruled the country between 2011 and 2021.⁶⁴ By stepping up sanctions, these two nations appear to be meeting demands Henry's opponents have made for sweeping measures against public figures believed to have armed and funded gangs.

Even if Canada resolves to push forward, a short-term international mission in Haiti could be affected by broader geopolitical concerns. During the Security Council session convened by the U.S. and Mexico to discuss the proposed mission, Russia and China expressed reservations about possible reactions in Haiti to the arrival of foreign troops.⁶⁵ Additionally, a number of Security Council members are worried that, given the short-term mandate envisaged for the rapid action force, it might be followed by a request for a costly UN peacekeeping mission, for which there is little appetite in New York.⁶⁶ Furthermore, given U.S. involvement in presenting this initiative to the Security Council, the proposal could be treated by Russia and China as a new opportunity to block Western initiatives to resolve armed conflicts, as well as inflict a diplomatic defeat on Washington.⁶⁷

VI. Beyond Immediate Needs

Haiti's security dilemmas are the product of longstanding failings in its police forces and state institutions, as well as the country's dire poverty rates, and will not be solved in any lasting way by a rapid international mission to combat gangs. Even if foreign states reach an agreement to deploy a security force to open humanitarian corridors that allow fuel, food, water and medicine to reach the people in greatest need, preventing a recurrence of the current crisis will hinge on a more prolonged commitment to addressing its deeper causes. Careful consideration would have to be given in particular to the design of a longer-term police support mission of the kind proposed by the UN secretary-general. Preparation for the handover to such a mission and an exit

⁶⁴ While no formal charges have been brought against Martelly or others in this party, human rights organisations and media outlets have reported their alleged connections to criminal groups. See "Joint Statement from U.S. Human Rights Clinics in Solidarity with Human Rights Defenders in Haiti", 27 June 2022; "Killing with Impunity: State-Sanctioned Massacres in Haiti", op. cit.; "G9 and Family", InSight Crime, 18 July 2022.

⁶⁵ China, which had pressed for closing BINUH, surprised observers in July, when it demanded that sanctions be imposed against gang members and supporters. China's interest in the fate of Haiti's government is likely related to the fact that the Caribbean nation is one of the fifteen countries which maintains relations with Taiwan instead of Beijing. Despite signs that China is now interested in a more active role for the UN in Haiti, its representative raised concerns in the October Security Council session about the risks of sending foreign troops at present. Russia echoed these warnings.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interviews, UN diplomats, October-November 2022.

⁶⁷ Richard Gowan, "The UN is Another Casualty of Russia's War: Why the Organization Might Never Bounce Back", *Foreign Affairs*, 10 March 2022.

strategy for foreign troops will also be essential to avoid overstretch of the force and accusations that it infringes on Haitian sovereignty.

Despite the immediate focus on the terms of an international security mission, strengthening the national police remains the sole viable long-term strategy for subduing Haiti's gangs. Steps in this direction will depend on recruiting more police officers and improving their living and working conditions. Foreign donors should also provide assistance aimed at bolstering the force's intelligence-gathering capabilities through training and deployment of international specialists, as well as funding the purchase of better equipment, notably armoured vehicles, high-calibre weapons, protective gear and high-tech material for operations against armed groups. Material and financial assistance should in turn be accompanied by training programs in anti-gang and community-oriented policing techniques. Again, a comprehensive vetting of special units directly involved in combating gangs is indispensable in order to prevent collusion between these groups and the police.

Outside actors should also take action to curb their own contributions to Haiti's instability. In particular, Haiti's regional partners should step up their efforts to combat illicit trafficking of arms and ammunition to gangs in the country, including by helping Haitian land and maritime customs guards to reinforce controls of incoming shipments. Considering that most of the arms, including the high-calibre weapons, circulating illegally in Haiti come from the U.S., especially from ports in southern Florida, U.S. customs should enforce mechanisms to check all shipments heading to Haitian ports.⁶⁸

Aside from security, Haiti faces a tough road ahead as it seeks to achieve stability and re-establish effective state institutions that draw on public support. Come January 2023, when the mandate of the ten last sitting senators ends, there will be not one official with an electoral mandate left in the country.⁶⁹ As mentioned earlier, Haiti's main international partners should not just demand the support of government and opposition for any future security mission, but also launch a unified diplomatic push to encourage establishment of a transitional government that might pave the way to fresh elections by helping the main political forces forge a political agreement to this end. Once there is clarity about the government's composition, rebuilding electoral institutions and the justice system will be vital steps in regaining public support for and trust in the state.⁷⁰ A specialised judicial unit devoted to tackling high-level corruption and politician malfeasance should be a vital part in the process of reconciling Haitians with the authorities. It should receive financial and technical support from international partners.

Finally, a main cause of gang membership remains the lack of economic opportunities for young people living in poor neighbourhoods affected by a chronic lack of public services. With expected growth of a meagre 1.4 per cent in 2023, the combination of poverty, unemployment and inequality is likely to continue to push new recruits into the hands of criminal groups. Assembling support from Haitian businesses, the country's large diaspora and foreign donors for a program to kickstart economic growth

⁶⁸ "Haiti: Spike in weapons smuggled into country from the US", BBC, 18 August 2022.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group Briefing, *Haiti: A Path to Stability for a Nation in Shock*, op. cit.

⁷⁰ Ibid. For details of the problems facing the electoral and justice systems, see also George Fauriol, "Haiti's Problematic Electoral Dynamics", Center for Strategic and International Studies, 10 January 2022.

and generate jobs remains the best route to avoiding the recurrent bouts of instability that the country has suffered for decades.

VII. Conclusion

Oppressive gang violence, cholera, hunger and a government lacking public support conspire to turn Haiti's predicament into one of the most complex emergencies facing the Western Hemisphere. The nation's foreign partners are earnestly debating how to respond to the Haitian government's request for a foreign security intervention, with the U.S., Mexico and Canada wrestling with their own reservations as they explore how to staff, fund and lead such a mission.

The reasons for their doubts are clear and compelling. Fighting fast-moving criminal bands in crowded shantytowns could result in significant casualties, ill-will and reputational damage. At the same time, while some Haitians see these risks as outweighing the potential benefits of such a mission, others – seemingly especially those in gang-held areas – do the same calculation and arrive at the opposite result. While many politicians and public figures, particularly those who reject Henry, are adamant in their opposition to the deployment of foreign troops, a growing number of citizens despair at the hostile environment in which everyday life is conducted. These people look to international intervention as the last hope for a swift improvement.

Foreign forces may be able to shift the balance of power against the country's gangs, but for a mission to be effective, certain minimum conditions will need to be in place. Troops must be trained and equipped to protect civilians in the densely populated urban environments where they will be operating. Moreover, at the political level, any decision to put foreign boots on the ground should at the very least depend on the explicit consent of a critical mass of Haiti's main political forces – including government and opposition – and on their reaching a firm agreement that they will create a transitional government. The risks of deploying an international security mission are undeniable, but so are the perils of protracted inaction in the face of Haiti's humanitarian emergency. Haiti's foreign partners should urge the country's duelling political factions to create the conditions that would make a successful deployment possible, and should they do so, be prepared to act.

Port-au-Prince/New York/Washington/Brussels, 14 December 2022

Appendix A: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former Foreign Minister of Argentina and Chef de Cabinet to the United Nations Secretary-General, Susana Malcorra.

Comfort Ero was appointed Crisis Group's President & CEO in December 2021. She first joined Crisis Group as West Africa Project Director in 2001 and later rose to become Africa Program Director in 2011 and then Interim Vice President. In between her two tenures at Crisis Group, she worked for the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kiev, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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