



USIPEACE BRIEFING

WHAT ROLE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS IN HAITI?

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BACKGROUND

On October 13, 2009, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved a one-year extension of the mandate for the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). The sixth mission since 1995, MINUSTAH was first authorized in 2004. The mission, under Brazilian command, comprises 6,940 soldiers and 2,211 police. It also has unprecedented star power since the May 2009 appointment of former U.S. President Bill Clinton as U.N. special envoy to Haiti.

The day after MINUSTAH's reauthorization, a panel of experts met at the United States Institute of Peace to discuss the U.N.'s future in Haiti and the continuing need for peacekeeping forces. The panel consisted of:

- David Harland, director of the Europe and Latin America division, U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations;
- Ambassador Raymond Joseph, ambassador to the United States, Republic of Haiti;
- David Beer, director of business development, Pearson Peacekeeping Centre of Canada;
- Eduarda Hamann, deputy coordinator, Peace Operations Project, Viva Rio of Brazil.

Dr. Robert Maguire, associate professor at Trinity Washington University, chair of USIP's Haiti Working Group and former USIP Jennings Randolph senior fellow served as moderator. The following is a summary of the views expressed during the meeting.

AN EVOLVING MISSION

In 2004 Haiti was a country in chaos. With the 2,500 strong Haitian National Police force (HNP) in disarray and the country under the grip of armed gangs, public safety had eroded completely. Intense political rivalry – often devolving into violence – further undermined both citizen safety and economic wellbeing. In this context, MINUSTAH's first order of business – the 'Plan A' of most U.N. Peacekeeping Missions – was deployment to provide immediate security, followed by efforts to help create legitimate political process and to support elections, with a view in mind of

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working with the government that would emerge. The mission also undertook direct operations against gangs and provision of support to build-up the capacity of security institutions.

By 2007, the 'Plan A' approach had yielded positive results. An elected government was proving itself a capable partner in a context of lively democratic process and economic growth. Violence and kidnappings had decreased and a sense of public safety had reemerged. Efforts to help rebuild and reinforce the capacity of the HNP had begun to bear fruit. Newly trained recruits have boosted the force to roughly 9,500 officers by mid-2009, well past the halfway mark of an envisaged goal of 14,000 officers by 2011. Concurrently, police reform efforts resulted in the removal of 1,000 rogue officers from the force. Public confidence in the HNP grew as public safety improved.

During 2008, however, a cost-of-living crisis driven by rising food prices followed by the collapse of the government and the devastation caused by four strong storms underscored how the mutually reinforcing elements of weak government, poverty, violence and vulnerability to external shocks had created a situation so brittle that the positive results seen in 2007 were easily reversed. From a U.N. perspective, MINUSTAH's 'Plan A' peacekeeping orientation had shown itself as a necessary, but insufficient approach for achieving enduring peace in Haiti. To achieve enduring peace, the mission's largely successful efforts to restore security and public safety would have to be complemented by a more robust approach toward a social and economic agenda. The approach – referred to short-handedly as 'Plan B' – encompasses a development and reform agenda that draws upon ideas and analyses emanating from assessments of late 2008 and early 2009, including a pivotal one undertaken by economist Paul Collier.¹ These assessments have yielded broad agreement within the U.N. and with Haitian officials on the importance of heightened emphasis on manufacturing, agriculture, job creation, education, health, disaster preparedness and poverty reduction as necessary pre-conditions for the improvement and maintenance of security. This approach is reflected not just in UNSC Resolution 1892 extending MINUSTAH's mandate to mid-October 2010, but also in the secretary-general's most recent report on Haiti to the U.N. Security Council.

BENCHMARKS AND CHALLENGES

As underscored in the September 2009 report of the secretary-general on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, significant advancement has been made in four of five key

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benchmarks and indicators of progress: political dialogue and elections, extension of state authority, ensuring security and stability, and rule of law and human rights. Less progress has been made on the fifth benchmark: social and economic development.² More must be accomplished in this area because improvement of the social and economic situation is recognized as the key both to protecting and sustaining achievements in the other four areas and, ultimately, to a successful U.N. exit.

One prerequisite for achieving social and economic development is to assist this country that has suffered so much to escape the trap of its often-undeserved negative image. For example, even though Haiti's homicide rate is lower than other Caribbean nations, its image remains that of the region's most violence-prone country; not of a generally peaceful nation, a view commonly held among public safety officials working there. Also indicative of the idea that Haiti deserves a new image is the fact that Cite Soleil – the massive Port-au-Prince slum synonymous with violence in Haiti - has disappeared from international headlines because violence in it has also disappeared. More broadly, kidnappings have been reduced to the point where they do not make headlines any more. Sustaining these improvements, however, is not automatic. Gains in areas other than security are also needed to help maintain progress.

Efforts undertaken by special U.N. envoy to Haiti, former U.S. President Bill Clinton, are an important element for sustaining MINUSTAH's successes. "As special envoy," wrote Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon in his report to the Security Council, "President Clinton will assist the government of Haiti and its people in efforts to create new jobs, improve the delivery of basic services and infrastructure, strengthen disaster recovery and preparedness, attract private sector investment and garner greater international support."³ A recent Clinton-led investment mission that attracted several hundred potential investors to Haiti, viewed within Haiti as successful simply because it represents a sea change in attitude, has begun to yield investments in export zone development, a key area of needed large-scale job creation. Other investments, notably in tourism infrastructure improvement and agricultural production, especially in the mango sector, are helping to open the door to a new image for Haiti as well as to create jobs.

Star-power such as that brought by Clinton can go only so far, however. Partnerships with key actors within Haiti are essential to the ultimate success of U.N. endeavors. Significant and sustained progress in job creation that can do more than just keep up with Haiti's exploding

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demographics, as well as achievements in the provision of basic services and infrastructure are needed, along with successful completion within Haiti of economic reform and judicial reform agendas. Otherwise, the massive and required scaling-up of promising new initiatives in social and economic rejuvenation will be neither achieved nor sustained. Without robust investment in Haiti's future by its own economic and political elites the hoped-for rejuvenation will not occur. Without the dedication of the Haitian government to justice sector reform, and to setting a new direction for national development, there will be no sustainable development.

A TENUOUS FUTURE

Continued improvements in the security sector remain essential for a stable and developed Haiti. A backwards glance at the erosion of progress made in security sector reform in the 1990s following the withdrawal of prior U.N. missions and subsequent deterioration supports this contention. In short, it is essential that the U.N. 'stay the course' in Haiti in order to ensure that a strong foundation for long-lasting peace is established. For all its recent progress, Haiti remains a fragile state, as viewed through the lens not only of the events of 2008, but also of the tenuous state of Haiti's current political stability, which will be challenged as the country moves through an electoral calendar in 2010 and 2011 that includes a presidential election.

On the plus side, the HNP is demonstrating significant institutional consolidation and greater operational independence, but in terms of modern policing capacity, much still needs to be done. Force capacity is mostly restricted to the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area; a narco-influenced economy remains a threat to its stability and development; and public confidence and trust, while on the upsurge, can easily shift according to perception and day-to-day incidents. Key challenges confronting MINUSTAH in security sector reform and development include the need for it to move away from operational roles in order to place responsibility squarely in the hands of the HNP. MINUSTAH priorities must also focus on sustainable development and capacity building within the HNP against such operational challenges as confronting narcotics trafficking, corruption and smuggling. The U.N. mission continues to struggle with its language capacity. More French or, ideally, Creole speakers are needed. The provision of security for upcoming elections along with continued protection of children and vulnerable population groups, and training and preparation for natural disaster mitigation and response remain key areas that continue to require MINUSTAH's attention.

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Finally, the renewal of the U.N.'s bilateral partnerships and the avoidance of so-called 'Haiti fatigue' are of critical importance in ensuring an effective role for the U.N. into the future. Included in the former is increasingly positive U.N./OAS (Organization of American States) collaboration. The unanimous action by the Security Council to extend MINUSTAH's mandate through mid-October 2010, and the secretary-general's identification of benchmark goals through October 2011 are good signs that the U.N. and its international partners are determined to 'stay the course' in Haiti. Critical among those partners are Latin American nations that have played key roles in MINUSTAH since the mission's inception in 2004.

LATIN AMERICA'S EVOLVING ENGAGEMENT

Nine Central and South American countries contribute a total of some 4,100 troops to MINUSTAH. Of them, four South American countries – Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay, also known as the ABCU countries – contribute 84 percent of all Latin American troops currently deployed to the U.N. stabilization mission. Latin American deployment of police on the other hand, is more limited. Only four percent of MINUSTAH's police contingent – 83 officers – is from Latin America. Brazil, the largest contributor of Latin American troops with 1,282 soldiers, and which provides MINUSTAH's force commander, has only three police officers in the U.N. mission.

As MINUSTAH moves gradually toward more police officers and fewer soldiers, prospects for South and Central American countries to supply increased numbers are problematic. Language capability presents a challenge as does a residual police culture inside Latin America stemming from years of dictatorship and militarization of the police. Aware of these issues, Brazil is focusing on improved recruitment and training, particularly so the latter is no longer provided by the army. It is also seeking exchange opportunities with Haitian police.

As MINUSTAH enters its sixth year, little erosion of Latin American engagement with the mission is apparent. Rather, Latin American countries, especially the ABCU, are maintaining their commitment while concurrently taking advantage of their joint engagement in the mission to create a forum to exchange information and build consolidated support to build security and stabilization in the region in general. In view of Brazil's predominant role in MINUSTAH, an assessment of the mission's ultimate success or failure will have to take into account what some

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academics speak of as a ‘Brazilian way of peacekeeping’ that includes good humor and creation of rapport, a facilitating approach, and, of course, ‘futbol diplomacy.’ As the U.N. places greater emphasis on supporting its social and economic development benchmark, Latin America’s most developed countries, including Brazil, Argentina and Mexico, will be challenged in the context of their U.N. engagement in Haiti to move toward embracing a greater development role.

CONCLUSION

That the U.N. will remain engaged in Haiti for the foreseeable future seems assured. Only the exact nature of that evolving engagement remains to be determined. The secretary-general has already proposed benchmarks and indicators for a 2010-2011 extension of the mission, and, in view of Haiti’s continuing fragility, few, if any, are suggesting a repetition of the early exit of previous missions in the 1990s. Haiti’s fragility will continue until security gains are matched by improvements in the socioeconomic status of the country and all its citizens. Helping to achieve and sustain these gains is now the U.N.’s greatest challenge. As such, it appears that the role of the U.N. in Haiti continues to be to help establish a strong foundation for lasting peace which will preclude it having to come back again and again.

¹ Paul Collier, “Haiti: From Natural Catastrophe to Economic Security – A Report for the Secretary-General of the United Nations,” December 27, 2008.

² “Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti,” United Nations Security Council Report S/2009/439, September 1, 2009.

³ Ibid, p. 3

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This *USIPeace Briefing* was written by Robert Maguire, a Haiti specialist, is an associate professor of international affairs at Trinity Washington University. He was a Jennings Randolph Senior Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace in 2008–09 and currently serves as the chair of the Institute’s Haiti Working Group. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of USIP, which does not advocate specific policies.

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