

The United Nations and Spain in Haiti¹

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The recent legislative and presidential elections in Haiti were held in a climate of great tension. However, international observers point out that the process was carried out without great irregularities and with less violence than has been seen over the last two years. René Preval's supporters, the ex-president who almost received an absolute majority, organised demonstrations to create pressure so that their leader would be declared the winner with 48.7% of the votes, thus ensuring that a second round of voting would not be held. The electoral committee and the Brazilian government (who leads the international force) decided to be flexible in their interpretation of the electoral laws and awarded the victory to Preval in order to avoid more serious incidents.

At the same time this process was being carried out, the Spanish Defence Minister, José Bono, ordered the return to Spain of 200 troops which formed part of the UN Mission for Stabilising Haiti (MINUSTAH). The withdrawal of Spanish forces will pose a problem for the UN, as it will weaken a very complex and controversial mission, and leave the Haitian population in a more insecure position.

The State's many crises

Haiti is the poorest State in Latin America. It has 8.5 million inhabitants and four out of ten are under fourteen years of age. The country has had a negative economic growth for the last 25 years. It is in the 157th position (out of a list of 177 countries on a UN index that measures Human Development in areas such as education, health or life expectancy). Most of the population lives on less than one dollar a day, and thousands of citizens try to emigrate, especially to the US and Canada.

Its structural instability is due to its colonial legacy, slavery and domination by a corrupt and repressive mulatto elite (5.4% population) that has ruled over the black population (94.2%) since independence in 1804 up until the US occupation (1915 – 1934). When foreign companies lost interest in Haiti as a cheap labour paradise owing to instability it suffered economic bankruptcy. Added to this, its agricultural produce was displaced by other competitors and prices fell (coffee and sugar) or stumbled against the Northern countries' tariff barriers. The rise of AIDS and the political climate led Haiti to lose its tourism as well.²

Poverty in the countryside, environmental destruction, mass emigration and internal migration towards chaotic cities, are all part of life in Haiti.³ In post-colonial times, Haiti was made up of an alliance between the army and the business elite. Two hundred years later the State has collapsed with regard to its capacity to provide services and guarantee rights, as well as to provide employment. Land is neither productive nor competitive, the elite is fragmented (and part of it has fled the country) and the Lavalas movement, led by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, caused the lower middle classes to irrupt in the circles of power. Similar to some African states, the impact of integration in the global liberal market, corruption and internal institutional fragility caused the breakdown of post-colonial alliances. The result is that violence has become a means of fighting for ever scarcer resources.⁴

¹ Extracts from this article were published in *La Vanguardia*, 18th February 2006

² An excellent book with texts on history, politics, economics, culture and other aspects: Charles Arthur and Michael Dash (Eds.), *Libèrté. A Haiti Anthology*, Markus Wiener Publishers and Latin American Bureau, Princeton and London, 1999. <http://www.latinamericabureau.org/?lid=1957>.

³ See dossier and bibliography on Haiti at the Centro de Investigación para la Paz (Peace Research Centre): <http://www.fuhem.es/portal/areas/paz/>

⁴ See Roger Fatton Jr., *Haiti's predatory republics: the unending transition to democracy*, Lynne Rienner, 2003; and Peter Dailey, "Haiti: the fall of the house of Aristide", *New York Review of Books*, 13 March, 2003, pp. 41-

France, the former colonial power, lost interest in Haiti over the last few decades. For the US it is a relevant issue because of the Haitian *balseiros* who arrive in Florida and cause problems by competing for resources with the North American Cuban community. Black members of the US Congress also exert pressure to defend the mainly black population in Haiti. These two reasons led president Bill Clinton to intervene in 1994.

It is estimated that emigrants send back 1,000 million dollars annually to the country. The freezing of US economic aid in 2000 intensified the crisis. The economist Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University, and Kofi Annan's advisor, denounced that the Haitian crisis was fomented by Washington who backed a criminal opposition instead of supporting the president elect Aristide.⁵

Aristide gained strong popular support during his years fighting against *Baby Doc* Duvalier's dictatorship. He was elected president and ousted seven months later in 1990. He returned to power along with US forces in 1994. From that point on his popularity waned. His government (and that of the now recently elected Prime Minister, René Prével), was plagued by corruption, internal power struggles and repression. On the other hand, Colombian narco-trafficking groups began to use Haiti to introduce drugs into the US. The police forces became deeply corrupt.

Since Aristide – an anti-imperialist leader for some and a dictator for others – was forced to step down by the US and France in February 2004, the country has been governed by an interim government. At the same time, the UN Security Council organised the stabilising mission which has succeeded in organising the elections but has not been able to put a halt to the increase in internal instability, violence, the growing prominence of armed groups and economic crisis.

The mission and "diffuse" conflict

MINUSTAH has a 9,000-strong force: 7,265 soldiers under Brazilian command and a 1,741 police force headed by Canada. It is the first time that a Latin American country (Brazil) heads a peacekeeping operation on the continent and in which, moreover, other countries of the region are participating (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Ecuador, among others) as well as NATO members with soldiers and police officers (Spain, Canada, France and the US). It is a novelty, too, that Spanish and Moroccan forces are collaborating in a mission. The political part is under the responsibility of the Chilean lawyer Juan Gabriel Valdés. The UN Security Council extended the mandate by six months on Tuesday, 14 February 2006⁶

In some Latin American circles, the UN mission is considered to have been undertaken in a hurry to satisfy US needs or because Brazil, Argentina and Chile wanted to win recognition or to compensate for the fact that their governments rejected Washington's position on Iraq. They also say that Haiti's problems have been exacerbated by their presence.⁷ On the other hand, the fact that Aristide left power in a way that was not clear is considered by some to be a form of coup d'état.

However, for some Latin American governments, the operation has proved to be a way of managing a crisis on the continent, especially in a country where the US has always intervened. At the same time, this intervention has opened the debate on interventionism in Latin America: this is good news for some and bad for others who fear

47. By Roget Fatton Jr., also see in PBS, Wide Angle: "Unfinished country", <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/shows/haiti/briefing.html>

⁵ Jeffrey Sachs, "Don't fall for Washington's spin on Haiti", *Financial times*, <http://www.earthinstitute.columbia.edu/about/director/pubs/FT030104.pdf>

⁶ See Elena Couceiro, "La MINUSTAH, un mandato fuerte, una interpretación frustrante". Papers on International Issues, N° 92, 2005

http://www.cipresearch.fuhem.es/pazyseguridad/Haiti_MINUSTAH_Couceiro.pdf

⁷ Juan Gabriel Tokatlián, "Intervención en Haití, misión frustrada: una crítica de América Latina", in <http://www.fride.org/ClientsFride/showpage.aspx?OriginId=618>

that the classification of some States as "failed" or "fragile" leaves the door open to interventionism and that this is a dangerous step for Latin American sovereignty.

Another frequent criticism is that the UN multinational force has taken sides with the group opposed to Aristide, by fighting against the latter's followers and it has not done anything to disarm the militias of the dissolved Haitian Armed Forces.⁸

Unlike what has happened in other UN operations over the last 15 years, MINUSTAH's mandate has been more widely interpreted, and this has entailed the use of force on occasions. In some UN circles it is considered to be an "explorative" mission, combining peacekeeping negotiated between armed actors with the imposition of peace, in other words, using force without the consent of those actors. In the UN in New York, they speak of a "diffuse conflict, which is not a case of separating two groups but rather of multiple actors who establish mobile and changing alliances."

However, other UN circles consider that the mission was improvised, and that instead of a peacekeeping operation, an international police deployment would have been necessary in 2004, as well as significant investment in development resources for immediate needs. This should have been combined with an effort in promoting reconciliation between the groups in conflict, paying special attention to deactivating the political view of *winners take all*, predominant in Haiti.

This critical view considers that the UN mission should have centred its attention on rebuilding the police force, so as to break the self-fulfilled prophecy that international forces cannot leave because there is no local security. "We have a Kosovo-style mission," according to a source who prefers not to be identified, "with civilian officials but we do not run the towns, and we do not have experts in dialogue and reconciliation".

Lack of appropriate equipment and funds, which do not allow the situation to be controlled, compound this mistaken mandate. As a result it is being criticised for not disarming Haitian society. It is estimated that around 390,000 short weapons are in the hands of citizens and violent bands (the *chimères*) who carry out an average of 10 kidnappings a day. Amnesty International has indicated that the UN should improve the protection of its citizens, carry out disarmament and prevent impunity by taking to court those responsible for human rights violations.⁹

The problem is that weapons are a means of protection for the rich and of earning a living for the poor. And this means that disarmament must be accompanied by options and incentives to encourage people to disarm. On the other hand, the state system is on the verge of collapsing and there is no provision for services nor the rule of law. The UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, considers that the forces should move from a peacekeeping mission to a peacebuilding mission, in areas such as the legal system.¹⁰

Secretary General Kofi Annan's idea is that there should be long-term engagement, for at least a decade.¹¹ Haiti could also be one of the cases where the Peacebuilding Commission, which was created by the United Nations in September 2005, could begin to function.¹² However, in general, the trend regarding interventions in fragile states over

⁸ Justin Podur, "Kofi Annan's Haiti », *New Left Review* n° 37, London, January 2006.
<http://www.newleftreview.net>

⁹ <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/hti-index-eng>

¹⁰ <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9533/>

¹¹ See Report of the Secretary General on Haiti, 16 April, 2004.
<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/minustah/reports.html>

¹² Jessica Almqvist, "A peacebuilding commission for the United Nations", in FRIDE:
<http://www.fride.org/ClientsFride/showpage.aspx?OriginId=618>

the last decade and a half has been to go in with a fast exit strategy, which is apparently less risky and cheaper, but not necessarily more efficient.¹³

International aid

In July 2004 the international donor conference promised 1,250 million dollars. Around 50% has been made effective. The NGO Oxfam denounced then that 422 millions were in the form of loans and that this would increase external debt. Some months ago, the Spanish Defence Minister Bono complained about international slowness in channelling the aid and announced that if that trend continued he would pull out Spanish troops. In UN circles, they remember however, that big projects need time. Damián Onses Cardona, a MINUSTAH spokesperson, explained to us by telephone that Haiti is receiving aid from important projects but that it needs "other mechanisms for more immediate projects" that would satisfy peoples' urgent needs and create trust.

Until 2006, the country received 165 million dollars annually in aid, but this was frozen because of accusations of corruption. In 2004, Spain placed Haiti on its list of priority countries and was committed to donating 4.1 million euros until 2006, distributed by the Spanish International Cooperation Agency and the Secretary of State for Cooperation. The areas given priority were government management, water supply, food security and education.

The UN considers that Spain and Morocco are fulfilling an important role. On the other hand, it is very unusual for a State to withdraw its troops giving only 45 days notice compared to a standard of between nine months and a year's notice so as to facilitate the replacement of troops and avoid logistical problems. The reasons that led the Minister of Defence to withdraw the troops are not officially known, but they could be related to the perception that the mission has failed, or to the army preference for taking part in NATO missions. It could also be due to the fear of casualties and that this could be taken advantage of by internal Spanish opposition to criticise Zapatero's government.

The UN Security Council extended the mandate for six months on Tuesday, 14 February 2006. As has happened with other UN missions since the end of the Cold War, MINUSTAH has not achieved its goals and this failure could now have serious consequences. The total withdrawal of troops could give rise to chaos or perhaps a temporary return of US troops and the resistance of armed groups. This in turn could lead to a new cycle of foreign forces leaving, chaos, and their return. The scenario would be Somalia or Afghanistan, in the Caribbean.

If Preval's government does not succeed in stabilising the situation, with the presence of UN troops (under a different mandate more sensitive to some of the criticisms), and with the support of foreign donors, Haiti will fall into another wave of violence. This will open the debate as to whether fragile countries such as this one should be placed within a protectorate system established by the international community, either formally or informally, for a certain period of time. This scenario is rejected in Latin America, and it does not arouse much enthusiasm in the international community.¹⁴

¹³ Analysis of the UN mission in this context by Luis Peral, "*Acción del Consejo de Seguridad en Haití: fortalecimiento de la democracia y contención del flujo de refugiados*", Analysis in www.fride.org, May 2004. <http://www.fride.org/File/ViewLinkFile.aspx?FileId=294>

¹⁴ See Richard Caplan, *International governance of war-torn societies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

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- *Intervention in Haiti: frustrated mission. A critique from Latin America* by Juan Gabriel Tokatlián, FRIDE Comment, October 2005.
<http://www.fride.org/File/ViewLinkFile.aspx?FileId=774>
- *The UN Security Council action in Haiti* by Luis Peral, FRIDE Analysis, May 2004.
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RESOURCES¹⁵

HAITI I

Documents

Resolutions of the Security Council on Haiti 1993-2006
Reports of the Secretary-General on Haiti 2004-2006

MINUSTAH Web, link to UN documents

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/minustah/docs.html>

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Cadre de Cooperation Interimaire

<http://haiticci.undg.org/uploads/ReportVersion8%20Fre%20FINAL%20Low%20Res.pdf>

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Newsletter #6, June 2005

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Haiti's Elections: The case for a short delay, November 2005

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Haiti: Un bicentenaire au goût amer, Sept03-Jan04

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Plan de Travail juillet 04-juin05

http://scm.oas.org/doc_public/FRENCH/HIST_04/CP13160F04.doc

Report on Human Rights in Haiti

<http://www.cidh.oas.org/annualrep/98eng/Chapter%20IV%20Haiti.htm>

Note du Secrétaire Général de l'OEA au Secrétaire Général des NU

http://oashaiti.org/31marsnotesg_032104fre.pdf

¹⁵ Resources selected by Isabel Moreno and Eva Hernando.

CARICOM

Statement on Haiti, February 2005

http://www.caricom.org/jsp/communications/meeting_minutes/16inthgc_statement_on_haiti.jsp?menu=communications

Statement by Caricom Heads of Government on Haiti, December 2002

http://www.caricom.org/jsp/pressreleases/pres151_02.htm

Caricom Statement on Strengthening Democracy in Haiti, July 2001

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HAITI V

Documents

SPANISH CONGRESS

Comparecencia del Ministro de Defensa (Bono Martínez) para informar sobre el posible envío de tropas españolas a Afganistán y Haití, 21 February 2005

Comparecencia del Ministro de AAEEC y del Ministro de Defensa respecto a la participación de España en la misión de la ONU en Haití (MINUSTAH), 1 July 2004

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

ACUERDO sobre participación del contingente militar español en operaciones internacionales.

HAITI VI

Documents

Selection of documents by Susana Fernández Herrero, Centro de Documentación CIP-FUHEM
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