

The United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti: Analysis and Recommendations for Future Mandates of the Mission



Seminar in New York

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The United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti: Analysis and Recommendations for Future Mandates of the Mission

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After nearly two decades of instability, political leaders inside and outside of Haiti are hopeful that the country is moving in the right direction. The current government is enjoying strong support from the population as well as local and international legitimacy and is taking advantage of the “unprecedented” international commitment to assist with this process. Despite this optimism, members of Haitian civil society remain skeptical, having hosted seven UN missions since 1991, and still point to continued violence, poverty and lack of institutional capacity. These internal problems, coupled with a myriad of daunting external challenges including international organised crime, drug trafficking and environmental threats, will not be easily resolved.

The United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the seventh UN mission to intervene in Haiti in recent history, is the centerpiece of international efforts to assist Haiti in state-building. Members of the international community recognise that this intervention must not be repeated and as such, there is at least a rhetorical commitment to do what is needed to establish a solid foundation for liberal democracy in Haiti. At the same time, political realities in contributing countries demand results and a clear exit strategy. Must MINUSTAH be strengthened so that it can achieve success, and if so, how? What is the role of the private sector, the Haitian diaspora, Haitian elites, other international and regional organisations and national and international civil society in Haitian state-building? How can they complement the efforts of MINUSTAH?

On 28 January 2008, representatives of Haitian civil society, donor governments and the United Nations were brought together by the Fundación de Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) in collaboration with the Canadian Permanent Mission to the United Nations to discuss these very questions. Experts focused on how to consolidate the progress that has been made thus far and enumerated recommendations regarding the role of MINUSTAH and other actors in continuing to strengthen the

Haitian state. What follows are the key points of discussion and recommendations from this meeting, divided into three main areas: the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Haiti, state-building and regional cooperation.

The UN Peacekeeping Mission in Haiti: MINUSTAH

This is a critical time to be considering the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti. The current mandate for MINUSTAH will end in October of this year, at which time there must be a plan in place for what comes after - presumably a renewal, consolidation or the beginning of a process of transition to the government and regional actors. The initial task of MINUSTAH, to stabilise the country has generally been achieved, the violence has drastically diminished, and recent reports are optimistic about the situation. However, participants at the New York seminar agreed on the need to consider the following questions before October:

1. What benchmarks can be agreed upon by the international community and by Haitians to measure the success of MINUSTAH and to determine the next steps?
2. What must be done to ensure the long-term commitment of the international community to Haiti?
3. How much can the mission take on? Can the mission take a more proactive role in establishing the rule of law, economic development and fighting the drug trade and other manifestations of international organised crime?
4. Is it possible to consider an exit strategy now? What would this transition look like?

Benchmarks

In thinking about next steps for the United Nations in Haiti, and more generally the involvement of the international community in state-building, experts pointed to the need to define benchmarks that could be assessed to determine success and linked to the draw-down strategy. Latin American representatives highlighted the need to assess the investment their governments are making in Haiti.¹ Without evidence of some progress, it would be difficult to make the case for continued involvement. The discussions about benchmarks showed the embryonic stage in which the international community finds itself. The nature, use, timing and measurement of progress are still unclear as well as how this information should be used. This reality is explored in the following paragraphs.

Among the many questions around the concept of benchmarking were the following concerns: Who decides what these benchmarks should be? How to establish relevant proxy data given the difficulty in collecting data within Haiti? How critical it would be to have benchmarks in place at the start of a new mandate so that data could be collected from the beginning? Who from within the UN system should monitor benchmarks? Would be possible to measure the permanence or sustainability of benchmarks? This last point was made in considering what happens when the UN mission draws down - would fragile advancements hold?

There was a lengthy discussion over whether or not establishing benchmarks is the same as defining success in Haiti more generally. A UN official noted that, within the UN system, benchmarks are used to measure the degree to which security in the country is threatened as compared to the capacity of national authority to handle that threat. As the threat decreases and the capacity of the national authority increases, the UN recognises that conditions allow for various elements of the mission to be drawn down.

¹ Nine Latin American countries - Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay - are contributing military personnel to MINUSTAH. Please see report from the Secretary General 22 August 2007, S/2007/503.

This narrow definition of benchmarks was challenged by some who believe that benchmarks should emerge from how we define the problem. Thus, if the problem in Haiti is one of both insecurity and lack of development, the benchmarks must reflect that. Within Latin America, there is a belief that progress towards development has a great deal to do with the sense of progress towards security on the ground and thus the two concerns are integrally linked.

One academic questioned the utility of benchmarks in determining when the mission could be drawn down unless there was some means to project the permanence of changes, especially in light of various external factors, such as a global economic slowdown, natural disasters, etc. Even if it were agreed that the national government had the ability to handle security threats, would this capacity deteriorate over time? It was suggested that a long-term look at the extent to which benchmarks in Mozambique and Cambodia have been maintained over time would provide important lessons learnt in the area of sustainability.

This differs greatly from the broader concept of success in state-building in Haiti. Participants brainstormed various indicators that one might look at to measure this broader success. These indicators included: a reduced socioeconomic divide; an increased number of women in government and the private sector; the reduction of gender-based violence; an increase in sustainable jobs that would be maintained after the international community leaves; the stability of the private sector and how reliant it is on the diaspora and remittances; the continued reduction in gang violence; fewer guns in circulation; a reduction in international organised crime; improvements in the Haitian national police based on their independence and their ability to take over the tasks of international forces; the enhanced training of judges and parliamentarians; an increased number of professionals with management skills.

Importantly, seminar attendees questioned what role Haitians should have in determining this success and whether there might be a way to measure public

perceptions of economic and social improvements. While this might not enter into the process to determine UN-established benchmarks, some flagged this as crucial to the process of determining the long-term success of state-building. The confidence to invest in the economy is dependent on a real sense of change and stability in the country.

In concluding the discussion about benchmarking, one UN official noted that even if the international actors improve their ability to benchmark progress, politics will not go away. The international community may lose interest or get distracted regardless of what the benchmarks tell us.

Long-term commitment

The problems in Haiti are not new, though the political and contextual conditions have evolved. The current mission is the 7th UN mission since 1991. However, MINUSTAH is unlike the previous interventions that were short and principally aimed at strengthening the Haitian National Police and monitoring human rights. MINUSTAH has a broader mandate composed of large military, police and civilian components and the international community appears to be committed to sustaining its presence.² Some experts felt that there have been six prior missions because, in the previous cases, the international community had not remained in the country long enough to resolve its deep-seated problems.

For these experts, they stressed the need to provide long-term, consistent attention to stability and state-building in Haiti. One official commented that “past international involvement has come in spurts; the international community must stick with it for the long haul.” Another participant felt that addressing the root causes of violence in Haiti would require a “decades-long involvement in social, economic and

political issues and in creating economic opportunities.”

Despite the recognised need for sustained assistance on the part of the international community, a key contradiction emerged around the need for visible progress in order to retain troop contributions. A representative of a Latin American government contributing to MINUSTAH commented that members of his government are asking to see results as a precondition for renewing their commitment.

It was also noted that if assistance efforts are to be maintained for the long-term, they must be sustainable. Involving regional and sub-regional partners in the UN efforts would make the best use of the comparative advantages of each organisation. The engagement of the Organisation of American States and the “unprecedented involvement” of Latin American countries were both important for Haiti’s future relations with its neighbours and its successful re-engagement in regional systems.

A representative of the Canadian government commented that her country has been involved in all of the past UN missions to Haiti and that there is non-partisan support within Canada to be there “for as long as it takes”. She believes that there is a need to reconfigure MINUSTAH but not to end it – perhaps to increase its involvement in development. She also sees MINUSTAH as providing a forum for coordinated involvement, rather than each donor country taking a bilateral approach.

During discussion about the need for a longer-term commitment to Haiti, there was some debate over how the current UN Mission or any future mission might differ from past missions, besides from in the amount of time governments were willing to commit. The implication of this thread of discussion was that those previous missions “failed” to establish sustainable peace and that this created the need for future missions. Unless the substance of the international involvement improves, this cycle might continue. One UN official highlighted the increased involvement of

² The initial military and civilian police deployment authorised in Security Council Resolution 1542 was 6,700 troops and 1,622 police. A peak figure, of 7,500, was authorised during the height of violence and the elections periods by Security Council Resolution 1608. The last Security Council Resolution reduced the number of troops to 7,060 and the number of police has increased since Resolution 1780 to 2,091.

Haitian stakeholders and the need to resolve the root causes of conflict with close cooperation among national actors and members of the international community. She explained that this is a lesson that the UN has learnt over the last 17 years in the country. The Canadian representative pointed to the increased involvement of Latin American troops in the stabilisation mission which has allowed the Canadian government to focus on development and police reform.

Breadth of a new mandate

In considering the content of a future mandate for Haiti, several participants commented on how the current context in Haiti differs from the situation in 2004 when MINUSTAH was deployed. At the time, the mission faced the multiple challenges of an interim government, rampant thugs and gangs creating a significant security threat and security forces that were “empty shells”. Since then, many argued that the security situation has improved, that judicial reform will slowly lay the foundation for economic development and that there has been modest economic growth. A UN official cited reports by the Secretary General of the UN and the OAS who are both “guardedly optimistic” on the topic of Haiti. This official noted that the current mandate was thoughtful and achievable with new concrete tasks, such as border monitoring.³

Despite progress, all agreed that a great deal of work remains. A representative of Haitian civil society took a more pessimistic position arguing that kidnappings reinforce a sense of insecurity and discourage economic development while corruption and a lack of true democracy run throughout the political system. An expert on international organised crime commented on how international criminal networks such as drug and arms traffickers have infiltrated the Haitian economy. In determining a new resolution and possibly a new mandate, there must be clear decisions of what the mission can take on and what should be handled by other actors.

The current mandate is fairly broad, focusing on stability, security and assisting the government in capacity building, mainly in the rule of law sector. It is not intended to promote development but it is expected to create the conditions for development. Some participants felt strongly that there was a continued need to maintain this focus while encouraging other partners, from within the UN system or outside, to take on development tasks, such as job creation. Officials stressed the need for the Haitian diaspora and the private sector to get involved in fostering development, saying that the UN could not do it all. Already, one civil society expert worried that, as MINUSTAH has expanded to take on more tasks that must eventually be taken over by the Haitian government, it has raised questions about how it relates to national actors and whether it is creating dependency.

In encouraging a narrower mandate, one expert felt that MINUSTAH was not the best entity to address the problems of organised crime, noting that it lacks a strategic analysis of the organised crime issue, and instead focuses on “containment” by tackling gang violence rather than resolving the root causes of this problem. Instead, other international agencies such as Interpol and the Organisation of American States were recommended as more appropriate actors to work in this area.

Several attendees made a strong case for expanding the future mandate further to include development activities. In discussions about the current peacekeeping mandate in Haiti, Latin American countries wanted to expand the mandate to include economic development but said that this was resisted because peacekeeping was “just about security”. However, it was later agreed that the mandate should at least create the conditions for development even if it was not directly responsible for development tasks. One participant stressed that the next mandate should not just be security - that “it must be more holistic or else there will need to be an 8th MINUSTAH”.

³ See Security Council Resolution 1780, 15 October 2007.

Exit strategy

Another important theme of the discussion was whether or not it was too early to begin to think about an exit strategy. Officials noted two key factors for developing a plan – involving “everyone” in negotiations with the government so that no one becomes an obstacle and determining what other international actors should become involved in order to continue supporting the government as needed. For example, the prevalence of organised crime will require a great deal of coordination with Interpol and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

A UN official also noted that in the past it was assumed that peacekeeping missions would be drawn down all at once. However, now there is an understanding that a mission such as MINUSTAH has many different elements and these various elements may be reduced in different stages. The Haitian government will have a central role in determining the timing for this process.

As the mission does get drawn down, an important question arises over what comes next. Transitioning from a peacekeeping mission accountable to the Security Council to a United Nations Development Programme country case with administrative accountability would be a dramatic change. Instead, one expert suggested that there should be a strong Security Council political mandate to back up the authority of a continued UN presence and assure assistance to the local government, even if this no longer takes the form of a peacekeeping mission.

Rebuilding the state

While the seminar had a strong focus on the role of the UN Stabilisation Mission in rebuilding Haiti, this is just one way in which the international community is involved in state-building. Seminar participants also debated the best ways to consolidate the state through this broader state-building process. While the discussion covered a number of themes, the main focus was on developing the rule of law, determining the most effective political model and strengthening the capacity of the state to handle external shocks. A cross-cutting concern running throughout this discussion was the need for external actors to find a balance between strengthening the state and allowing the state to strengthen itself.

National perspectives

Representatives of Haitian civil society stressed the need to build true democracy by reforming the political structure, improving the system of checks and balances to eliminate or reduce corruption and strengthening civil society. They also highlighted the key point that state-building cannot just be about creating state capacities - there must also be work done to understand and address the root causes of conflict.⁴ Additionally, they noted the need to increase the involvement of Haitian civil society in ongoing discussions around decentralisation, constitutional reform and economic policy to ensure the incorporation of a range of perspectives but also to ensure that those who are not involved in these debates do not become obstacles to progress.

One Haitian argued that since 1986, only the external signs of democracy have developed. In fact, he felt that the latest elections exhibited the same problems that have existed for the last 10 years. Additionally, he described the Haitian state as a “predatory state”

⁴ See also Gauthier, Amélie., “Voices of the Actors: a Research Project on the Mandate of the UN mission”, Working Paper 52, FRIDE, February 2008.

where people try to gain political power and control for economic advantage as they see a direct link between power and economic enrichment. Additionally, officials and parliamentarians do not understand their role, responsibilities and the limits of their power. He believed that this problem can only be addressed by instituting an improved system of checks and balances among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government and by decentralising power to strengthen local authorities outside the capital.

A UN official based in Haiti talked about 2008 as the year of partnership and the need to have Haitians participate in the process of state-building, insisting on the commitment of the local population. This will involve finding ways to get the Haitian elites “on board”, with a greater interest in stability than in continued and disorganised violence. He argued that decentralised power would not resolve the problems of corruption but in fact worsen the situation by distributing them throughout the system. He also argued that the current government remains weak and unable to provide basic services to the majority of the Haitian people and that decentralisation would further weaken the state.

Haitian experts also highlighted the need to further improve the security situation. Ongoing impunity for crimes such as kidnapping heightens the sense of insecurity and belies claims that the situation is improving. One Haitian felt that state-building practitioners had too easily embraced the belief that the violence in Haiti is directly linked to poverty. He suggested that the root causes of violence should be investigated further so that they can be tackled more effectively.

The role of the international community

Regardless of the state-building strategy implemented by the international community, Haitians must “own” the process. One UN official based in Haiti referred to

Haiti as an “open air museum of failed projects” initiated by the international community. He said this had taught international agencies that the focus must be on mutual responsibility for all reconstruction projects. A civil society representative referred to the “fine line” between partnership and outside intervention, affirming that if Haitians do not see progress, outside involvement will be seen as the latter. Another participant struggled with the requirement to strengthen local capacity to meet humanitarian needs while also delivering services to meet these needs in the very short term.

In discussing the role of the international community in state-building processes in Haiti, experts identified the need to continue to improve security, law and order, including the fight against organised crime. They also discussed the need to deliver tangible evidence of economic improvement as a way of consolidating state-building efforts. In discussions about improving security and promoting economic development, those present underscored the role that Haitians must play in this process.

In the area of security, the specific goals of establishing independent Haitian security by 2011 and of training a total of 14,000 police officers over the next three years were mentioned. One UN official felt that this could happen with the continued involvement of a peacekeeping mission and with additional commitments to such a mission by member states. Security and economic needs must both be met since they are mutually reinforcing.

In order to encourage economic development, the international community should have an important and positive impact. One civil society expert argued for special consideration in international trade policy to provide Haiti with the opportunity to develop its economy and improve its chances of integrating successfully into regional and international economic systems. She also argued for increased international assistance for the rural sector to generate opportunities outside the capital and address the urban/rural economic divide. Another expert

recommended a focus on self-sustaining infrastructure projects that could physically rebuild the country while also creating jobs.

Given the threat that global climate change, due to environmental degradation, poses for Haiti, it was also recommended that the international community consider promoting environmentally sustainable projects that would also generate jobs and would help people stay in rural communities. In addressing the illegal drug trade, it was noted that the international community could positively impact the situation by addressing the demand for drugs within donor countries rather than simply focusing on the problem of supply.

One official cautioned that aid for development alone does not develop the country and that Haitians need access to capital so that they can build up a private sector.

A civil society expert recommended that Haiti be put on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission since this should be a tool to help clarify priorities and might assist in improving national and international cooperation.

Regional involvement in state-building in Haiti

Throughout the seminar, participants highlighted the importance that regional actors have had in the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti and broader state-building efforts there. The participation of Latin American governments is new and is worth looking at more closely in order to determine if their involvement has changed either the approach to or the outcomes of work in this area.

A UN official noted that there was initially some skepticism about the capacity within Latin America to lead MINUSTAH, but that this concern is now believed

to be unfounded. Instead, many believe that Haiti provides an interesting case for looking at the involvement of states outside of the traditional donor states in state-building. A Canadian government representative noted that Latin American countries have a more direct experience in being recipients of development aid and can bring this perspective to make it work better in Haiti. It also increases the legitimacy of the mission in the eyes of Haitians.

A Peruvian government representative explained that Latin American countries have made a long-lasting commitment to lead and make up the majority of troops of the peacekeeping mission. He stated that Latin American cooperation was premised on the belief that it was important for the region to stabilise Haiti, to prevent a reversion to conflict and to lay the foundations for development to end the impoverishment that has existed there for decades. He also noted that Latin American participation has increased the regional capacity for cooperative security. Several Latin American representatives in the seminar expressed the commitments of their governments to remain involved beyond the current UN mission.

The Organisation of American States was also mentioned as a key partner in assisting the electoral process and aiding the development of democracy.

Conclusion

Avoiding an 8th UN intervention in Haiti will require the combined commitment of national and international actors working together to increase security, strengthen government institutions and promote economic growth. Greater involvement from regional countries and organisations means that there are new resources and perspectives to put towards resolving the deep-rooted problems this country faces. This coupled with the experience of countries such as Canada, with decades of experience in Haiti, gives grounds for optimism.

Haitian actors bring the deepest understanding of the national context to the problem and as such, they must own the process of state-building while being able to draw on the experience and assistance of an array of international and regional actors. Only through the broad involvement of national actors in the Haitian exercise of building their state will there be the widespread commitment to peace that is needed to stay on the road to progress.

Key recommendations

UN Peacekeeping Mission in Haiti: MINUSTAH

1. Clearly define benchmarks and link these to a draw down and exit strategy.
2. Determine indicators of success separately, involving Haitians in the process.
3. Establish means to track progress and secure the continued involvement of key troop contributing countries.
4. Avoid over-encumbering the mission of MINUSTAH. It should not be responsible for tackling organised crime or fostering economic development.
5. Enlist the support of appropriate national, regional and international partners to take up those tasks that do not fit within the MINUSTAH mandate. For example by involving the private sector and the diaspora in economic development.
6. Begin planning the exit strategy now, getting as much input from national government and non-government actors as possible.
7. Take steps to empower the UN entity that replaces the peacekeeping mission.
8. Propose Haiti for consideration by the Peacebuilding Commission.

Rebuilding the state

1. Involve Haitian civil society in national discussions about decentralisation, economic policy and constitutional reform.
2. Reform the political structure, strengthening checks and balances and reducing corruption.
3. Study the root causes of conflict, political and power structure rather than assuming that poverty reduction will eliminate tensions.
4. Motivate Haitian elites to join the process of state-building.
5. Maintain a focus on diminishing violence as a way to encourage economic development.
6. Empower Haitians to own the process of state-building, even when there is involvement by the international community.
7. Increase international development assistance in rural areas and in environmentally sustainable projects.
8. Provide Haiti with preferential treatment within trade agreements to protect the development of its economy.
9. Focus on the demand side of the drug trade as a means to combat the devastating impact of the drug trade on Haiti.

Regional involvement in state-building in Haiti

1. Study the impact of the involvement of Latin American countries in MINUSTAH.
2. Maintain the involvement of Latin American countries as troop contributors and the involvement of regional organisations such as the Organisation of American States.

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The United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the seventh UN mission to intervene in Haiti in recent history, is the centerpiece of international efforts to assist the country in state-building. Members of the international community recognise that this intervention must not be repeated and as such, there is at least a rhetorical commitment to do what is needed to establish a solid foundation for liberal democracy in Haiti. At the same time, political realities in contributing countries demand results and a clear exit strategy. Must MINUSTAH be strengthened so that it can achieve success, and if so, how? What is the role of the private sector, the Haitian diaspora, Haitian elites, other international and regional organisations and national and international civil society in Haitian state-building? How can they complement the efforts of MINUSTAH?

On 28 January 2008, representatives of Haitian civil society, donor governments and the United Nations were brought together by the Fundación de Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) in collaboration with the Canadian Permanent Mission to the United Nations to discuss these very questions. Experts focused on how to consolidate the progress that has been made thus far and enumerated recommendations regarding the role of MINUSTAH and other actors in continuing to strengthen the Haitian state. This report relates the key points of discussion and recommendations from this meeting, divided into three main areas: the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Haiti, state-building and regional cooperation.

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