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Emerging Practices in New Mission Models: The Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti

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STIMSON

On November 5, 2024, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a workshop to discuss emerging practices in new mission models in the case of the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission in Haiti. The event was part of a new series of workshops that aims to support the sustained engagement of UN member states in discussions on how to make peace operations' missions and mandates more adaptable, nimble, and effective. It builds on the previous series, "Prioritizing and Sequencing UN Security Council Mandates." This meeting note was drafted collaboratively by IPI, the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report. It summarizes the main points raised during the discussion under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution and does not necessarily represent the views of all participants. The project is funded with the support of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Introduction

In October 2023, the UN Security Council authorized member states to form and deploy a Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission to Haiti under Kenya's leadership.¹ Since June 2024, around 400 Kenyan and Caribbean police and military officers, out of a target of approximately 2,500 personnel, have deployed to Haiti as part of the mission. In September 2024, the council renewed the mission's authorization for an additional twelve months. The current political process remains fragile in Haiti, and violence has escalated, causing a severe humanitarian crisis that has displaced over 700,000 people. Politically connected criminal gangs have expanded their presence and now occupy more than 85 percent of Port-au-Prince, severely restricting movement within and outside the city.²

The International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report co-hosted a roundtable on November 5, 2024 to examine the MSS mission's progress and challenges in implementing its mandate. The roundtable offered a platform for member states, UN officials, civil society stakeholders, and independent experts to share their assessments of the situation in Haiti. It aimed to help the Security Council make more informed decisions regarding the MSS mission and to explore the available measures to make the mission more effective and sustainable. The discussion covered salient policy considerations surrounding some of the operational challenges on the ground, as well as the future of the mission.

Notwithstanding the many challenges the MSS mission faces, its deployment signifies the Security Council's willingness to explore alternative approaches to peacekeeping and presents a critical test for the council as it commits to finding adaptable and nimble solutions to complex security challenges. In authorizing the MSS mission, the council aimed to respond to the 2022 appeal by the government of former acting prime minister Ariel Henry for the deployment of a specialized international force to help the Haitian National Police (HNP) counter the country's escalating gang violence and reestablish security in Haiti.

¹ UN Security Council Resolution 2699 (October 2, 2023), UN Doc. S/RES/2699.

² UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 30 September 2024 from the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2653 (2022) Addressed to the President of the Security Council Jaqueline Charles*, UN Doc. S/2024/704, September 30, 2024; "Intensified Gang Violence, US Flights Ban Leave Haitians with Few Options to Flee," *Miami Herald*, November 27, 2024. Addressed to the President of the Security Council Jaqueline Charles, UN Doc. S/2024/704, September 30, 2024; "Intensified Gang Violence, US Flights Ban Leave Haitians with Few Options to Flee," *Miami Herald*, November 27, 2024.

At the same time, and as evidenced by the MSS mission's experience since its deployment, standing up and sustaining missions without the leadership and backstopping of the UN presents significant financial and logistical challenges. In Haiti, funding shortfalls have delayed the deployment of personnel, and the mission remains under-equipped and understaffed. Many participants agreed on the need for additional international support to Haiti to avoid a security vacuum. However, there is a lack of consensus among member states on how to address this shortcoming. Although there have been calls from some member states—including Haiti's Transitional Presidential Council (TPC), which replaced Henry's government—to transform the MSS mission into a UN peacekeeping operation, some council members remained opposed to this option, and participants underscored that any such transition would need to be guided by a political strategy and clear assessment of the potential risks.

Early Action by the MSS Mission

The operational design of the MSS mission was envisioned with four stages: deployment, decisive operations, stabilization, and transition. The mission is making simultaneous progress on the initial two phases, but delays in deployment are leading to delays in decisive operations. Moreover, there remains uncertainty surrounding the sequencing and operationalization of the subsequent stabilization and transition phases.

In the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, the HNP, armed forces, and MSS mission have launched joint operations that achieved some initial success in driving gangs out of certain neighborhoods and reestablishing control of critical infrastructure, such as the airport and the general hospital. One participant noted that the MSS mission's deployment has also had an encouraging "psychological" impact by creating positive expectations among Haitians regarding security gains. Despite these initial achievements, participants acknowledged that the security situation in the capital and other regions, including Artibonite, has since deteriorated.

One participant noted that to advance to the second stage of decisive operations, the MSS mission needs to broaden its operational scope to include active patrolling of public spaces where gang activity is taking place. This will allow the mission to increase its visibility alongside the HNP in high-risk areas and provide direct support to the national police to ensure public safety. Additionally, the mission should prioritize real-time communication with the Haitian armed forces and work closely with the national police to enhance their capacity and facilitate the free movement of people.

The MSS Mission's Operational Challenges

Many participants acknowledged that the authorization of the MSS mission in 2023 marked a significant development in the international community's response to the deteriorating security situation in Haiti. However, the mission is not a panacea for the multifaceted challenges facing the country. It operates in a complex and volatile environment where gang members are embedded in densely populated urban areas, making it difficult to conduct security operations while minimizing harm to civilians. This requires the mission to adopt a cautious approach in order to protect both civilians and its own personnel. Additionally, the task of maintaining control over liberated areas is demanding, especially for a limited force operating in a challenging security environment.

The sustainability of the MSS mission is contingent upon adequate and reliable funding. The mission's current reliance on voluntary contributions from member states presents significant challenges. While the estimated annual cost of the mission is \$600 million, it has only received around \$400 million in actual funding so far, provided through bilateral contributions and a UN-administrated trust fund that has received \$85 million to date.³ The slow disbursement of pledged funds and the limited number of contributing countries further compound the financial difficulties faced by the mission. These challenges mirror some of the

³ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General: United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti*, UN Doc. S/2024/742, October 15, 2024.

difficulties experienced by regional and subregional missions in Africa that relied on trust funds. The experience offers lessons for future missions that are authorized by the UN Security Council but not funded through the peacekeeping assessed budget, which may result in delays in personnel deployments and a lack of adequate equipment.⁴

Engagement with the Host Community

Participants expressed that many Haitian civil society organizations are open to supporting a foreign mission such as the MSS mission under the condition that it is temporary and the terms are defined by Haitian leadership. At the same time, many Haitians perceive the mission as a passive force with unclear objectives. This perception, combined with many Haitians' unmet expectations that the mission's deployment would bring a rapid resolution to the crisis, undermines public support for the MSS mission. Thus, participants discussed the importance of fostering public understanding of and trust in the mission, including clearly communicating the mission's objectives and the progress it has made toward achieving them, addressing misinformation and disinformation, and increasing transparency about its work.

Building trust also requires constructively engaging with Haitian communities. One participant noted that while UN Security Council Resolution 2699—which originally authorized the mission—emphasizes the importance of meaningful civil society engagement, such consultation has been lacking in practice. In response, participants encouraged the MSS mission to increase its engagement with Haitian stakeholders, including civil society and youth, as well as the Haitian diaspora, to ensure that it is responsive to a range of Haitians' needs and priorities and takes a “Haitian-owned approach.” However, another participant mentioned the challenges with ensuring Haitian ownership considering the internal divisions within the country. Participants also noted that references to “Haitian civil society” often imply a

unified front, despite deep political divisions and fragmentation, including among women's and human rights organizations. This lack of unity underscores the complexity of politics in Haiti and hampers the ability of civil society to effectively advocate for a common political goal.

The Security Council has mandated the MSS mission to establish a robust compliance mechanism to prevent human rights violations and abuses. Generally, all participants highlighted the importance of such a mechanism to ensure adherence to international law and human rights standards. Although the mission has internal regulations and sensitization training programs in place for its personnel, concerns persist about the lack of an independent monitoring body to oversee compliance. This absence exacerbates the existing vulnerability of civilian populations to human rights violations and abuses.⁵

Long-Term Stability

Participants highlighted that the MSS mission's mandate extends beyond Haiti's immediate security issues, including the creation of an environment conducive to elections. However, the international community's determination to hold elections in Haiti within a specific timeframe raises concerns about the potential negative impact of elections on the country's stability given the fragile environment. It is essential to carefully consider the timing of elections and to prioritize the establishment of secure and sustainable conditions for their successful implementation. Other participants emphasized the potential role of international election monitors to strengthen democratic processes in Haiti, in collaboration with Haitian civil society organizations.

In terms of longer-term stability, including stability beyond the mandate of the MSS mission, participants underscored the importance of addressing the root causes of the crisis. This will require strengthening border security to curb the illicit trade of drugs and weapons, enhancing law enforcement capabilities to investigate and

⁴ There are previous cases in which some Security Council-authorized missions deployed much quicker than UN peacekeeping operations, such as the International Force East Timor (INTERFET). However, the MSS mission does not enjoy the same level of operational support.

⁵ Jeffsky Poincy, “Rethinking the International Response to Haiti's Security Crisis,” Stimson Center, July 23, 2024.

prosecute gang leaders, and addressing underlying social and economic issues like poverty, unemployment, and inequality that continue to fuel the proliferation of gangs.

Future of the MSS Mission

Security Council negotiations on renewing the MSS mission's mandate in September 2024 and the subsequent formal request from the TPC to the secretary-general to urgently transform the mission into a UN peacekeeping operation generated debate on the possibility of such a transition and its implications.⁶ One key concern raised by participants was that the push to transition into a UN peacekeeping operation has been mainly driven by financial and resource pressures and shortfalls rather than an assessment of whether or not UN peacekeeping is the most appropriate tool for Haiti. Participants highlighted the mixed record of peacekeeping in Haiti and advocated for a cautious approach and clear-eyed review of potential risks. Some participants proposed alternative models that would allow the UN to provide logistical support to the MSS mission without transforming it into a full-scale peacekeeping operation, including the type of logistical support packages provided to Security Council-authorized regional operations.⁷ However, previous UN efforts to support non-UN missions have revealed the limitations of this approach in settings involving more kinetic operations, given that UN support packages are designed for peacekeeping rather than peace enforcement mandates.⁸

Conversely, other participants emphasized the potential benefits of transforming the MSS mission into a UN peacekeeping operation. They argued that this could strengthen international political support and enhance backstopping from the UN Secretariat. A multidimensional mission that brings together a range of military, police, and civilian actors could also engage in a more integrated and comprehensive set of activities.

Some participants further argued that the focus of discussions should be on the type and configuration of a potential peacekeeping operation, with consideration for how it would fit into a broader political process in Haiti. In this regard, they referenced the new UN independent study on peacekeeping operations, which presents a variety of flexible and adaptable peacekeeping models that can be applied in different contexts.⁹

Participants further noted that a UN peacekeeping operation may not be sufficient for the present context, considering that the current security situation in Haiti is worse than when the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was deployed in 2004. Some participants questioned the long-term efficacy of another peacekeeping mission, suggesting that it would be a temporary solution that fails to address the root causes of the ongoing crisis. Recognizing these limitations of peacekeeping and the lack of consensus in the council on transforming the MSS mission into a peacekeeping operation, participants underscored the importance of developing a contingency plan to ensure the mission's sustainability, including the option of a logistical support package to the mission.

Moreover, some participants noted that the future of the MSS will be impacted by US domestic politics, including the policies of the incoming Trump administration and the composition of the US Congress. This will play a crucial role in determining the level of US support and the overall trajectory of the mission.

Conclusion

The deployment of the MSS mission signifies the Security Council's willingness to explore new models for addressing complex security challenges. However, the mission's resource and financial constraints highlight the challenges of sustaining missions outside the UN framework. While some

⁶ UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 22 October 2024 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2024/765, October 25, 2024.

⁷ The UN has been providing logistical support since 2009 to the various African Union (AU) missions in Somalia, first through the United Nations Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA) and later the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS).

⁸ Paul D. Williams, "The United Nations Support Office Model: Lessons from Somalia," IPI, September 2024.

⁹ UN Peacekeeping, "The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities," October 2024, available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/the_future_of_peacekeeping_new_models_and_related_capabilities_-_nov1.pdf.

participants agreed on the need to transition the MSS mission to a UN peacekeeping operation, such a move requires careful evaluation. The challenges in Haiti are multidimensional and demand a comprehensive strategy instead of a militarized response. While participants acknowledged the TPC's request for a peacekeeping operation, they

also noted the imperative to have a realistic assessment of peacekeeping capabilities and limitations, particularly in light of the trust deficit that a new operation would likely encounter in Haiti. Overall, there was agreement that the decision to pursue a peacekeeping operation should not be driven by the perceived absence of viable alternatives.

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