

Muddled Interventions: Haiti, the UN and Resolution 2699

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A country broken by constant foreign interventions, its tyrannical regimes propped up by the back brace of the United States (when it wasn't intervening to adjust it), marred by appalling natural disasters, tells a sad tale of the crippled Haitian state. Haiti's political existence is the stuff and stuffing of pornographic violence, the crutch upon which moralists can always point to as the end, doom and despair that needs change. Every conundrum needs its intrusive deliverer, even though that deliverer is bound to make things worse.

Lately, those stale themes have now percolated through the corridors of the United Nations to renewed interest. The staleness is evident in the menu: servings of failed state canapes; vicious, murderous, raping, pillaging gangs as the main musical score; collapse of civic institutions as the dessert. It's the sort of menu to rile and aggravate any mission or charity, and yet, military-security interventions continue to capture the feeble imagination.

Since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021, the constant theme in reporting from Haiti is that of rampant, freely operating gangs. Sophie Hills, a staff writer of the *Christian Science Monitor*, [offered this description](#) in October last year: "Armed gangs have immobilized the capital, Port-au-Prince, shutting down the already troubled economy and creating fear among citizens to even walk the streets."

This October 23, the UN special envoy to Haiti, María Isabel Salvador, [reported](#) to the UN Security Council that the situation had continued "to deteriorate as growing gang violence plunge the lives of the people of Haiti into disarray and major crimes are rising sharply to new record highs." These included killings and sexual violence, the latter marked by instances of rape and mutilation.

To add further complexity to the situation, vigilante groups such as the "Bwa Kale" movement have responded through resorting to lynching (395 alleged gang members are said to have perished in that gruesome way between April 24 and September).

Image is from [Haiti Libre](#)



Moïse's opportunistic replacement, Ariel Henry, has served as acting prime minister, persistently calling for foreign intervention to right the worn vessel he is steering into a sunset oblivion.

The past presidential elections were last held in 2016, but Henry has not deemed it appropriate to stage elections, preferring the bureaucratic formula of a High Transition Council (HTC) tasked with eventually achieving that goal. When the [announcement establishing the body was made](#) in February, Henry loftily claimed that this was “the beginning of the end of dysfunction in our democratic institutions.”

These weak assertions have not translated into credible change on the ground. The contempt with which the HTC has been viewed was indicated by the news from the UN envoy that its Secretary General had been kidnapped by gang members posing as police officers.

In September, Henry [addressed](#) the UN hoping to add some mettle to the Haitian National Police, urging the Security Council to adopt measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to “authorize the deployment of a multinational support mission to underpin the security of Haiti”.

The measure can be read as a stalling measure to keep Henry and his Haitian Tèt Kale Party (PHTK) ensconced. This is certainly the view of the National Haitian-American Elected Officials Network (NHAEON) and the Family Action Network Movement (FANM). In their September letter to President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the organisations [warned](#) that,

“Any military intervention supporting Haiti’s corrupt, repressive, unelected regime will likely exacerbate the current political crisis to a catastrophic one.” The move would “further entrench the regime, deepening Haiti’s political crisis while generating significant civilian casualties and migration pressure.”

In its eternal wisdom, the United Nations Security Council felt that an intervention force consisting of Kenyan police, supplemented by assistance from other states, would be required for this mission. Resolution 2699, establishing a Multinational Security Support Mission led by Kenya, received a vote of 13 in favour, with Russia and China abstaining. This would entail a co-deployment with Haitian personnel who have melted before the marauding gangs. Thus, history continues to rhyme (the US occupation, 1915-1934 and the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) from 2004-2017).

Armed gangs feature as a demonic presence in the UN deliberations, regularly paired with such opaque terms as “a multidimensional crisis”. It is telling that the cliché-governed reasons for that crisis never focus on how the gang phenomenon took root, not least those mouldering state institutions that have failed to protect the populace. Little wonder then, that the Russian representative Vassily Nebenzia [felt](#) that sending in armed elements was “an extreme measure” that unnecessarily invoked the provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

Undeterred by such views, the US representative Jeffrey Delaurentis [noted](#) that the mission would require the “inclusion of dedicated expertise in anti-gang operations, community-oriented policing, and children and women’s protection.” That Washington approved the measure can be put down to endorsing a policy which might discourage – if only in the short term – the arrival of Haitian asylum seekers which have been turned around en masse.

Despite claiming a different tack from his predecessor in approaching the troubled Caribbean state, President Biden has [sought to restrict the influx](#) of Haitian applications using, for instance, Title 42, a Trump policy put in place to deport individuals who pose a pandemic risk, in spite of any asylum credentials they might have. Within 12 months, the Biden administration [was responsible for expelling](#) more than 20,000 Haitians – or as many as the combined totals of three different presidents over two decades.

Resolution 2699 also suffers from another glaring fault. Kenya’s dominant contribution to the exercise has raised searching questions back home. Opposition politician Ekuru Aukot, himself a lawyer who had aided in drafting Kenya’s revised 2010 constitution, saw no legal basis for the government to authorise the Haitian deployment. In [his view](#), the deployment was unconstitutional, lacking any legal backbone or treaty.

In granting Aukot an interim injunction, this point was considered by the Nairobi High Court worthy of resolution. Judge Enock Mwita was “satisfied that the application and petition raise substantial issues of national importance and public interest and require urgent consideration.” The judge accordingly issued a conservatory order “restraining the respondents from deploying police officers to Haiti or any other country until 24th October 2023.”

On October 24, Judge Mwita [extended](#) the duration of the interim order till November 9, when an open session is scheduled for the petition to be argued. “This court became seized of this matter earlier than everyone else and it would not make sense for it to set aside or allow the interim orders to lapse.” The whole operation risks being scuttled even before it sets sail.

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Featured image: It took Haiti 122 years to pay off its debt of independence, a neocolonial strategy that

remains in place and leads to chronic underdevelopment. Photo: Juvenal Balán

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