

The United States Has Its Fingerprints All Over the Chaos in Haiti

The ongoing turmoil in Haiti has been exacerbated by US meddling. There's a very good chance that the foreign intervention announced by the United Nations will make things worse.

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The situation in Haiti — which will now see an unprecedented foreign intervention aimed at quelling the bedlam that's gripped the country the past two years — is an awful, bloody mess, and one without any satisfying immediate solutions. But we can say two things for sure.

One is that while Haiti's current turmoil is largely presented as just [another misfortune](#) plaguing a seemingly cursed nation, getting to this point has involved a series of typically underpublicized decisions by Washington and its partners. The other is that the entire saga is a perfect illustration of how little-known US foreign policy decisions stack on top of one another until military intervention seems like the only possible choice.

Yesterday, the United Nations Security Council [approved](#) what it called a "historic first" decision to send a Kenyan-led international security force to Haiti, which has been engulfed in chaos since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and is now buckling under a cruel combination of a cholera uptick, skyrocketing inflation, [dire shortages](#), and violence at the hand of gangs that reportedly control half the country and most of its capital.

The military forces are being sent at the request of the country's acting prime minister, Ariel Henry, who had asked for international assistance last October, and the situation is so bad, it's [apparently](#) led some ordinary Haitians — many of whom had vehemently [opposed](#) foreign intervention as late as last November — to reluctantly [back](#) the idea as the best hope for getting things back under some semblance of control.

Though it's not as if everyone in Haiti is calling for foreign intervention, it's understandable

that increasing numbers are given the havoc that currently reigns there, with rampant kidnappings, widespread [school closures](#) in the face of violence, and a 30 percent annual inflation rate. But as usual, as you read about whatever turn the tragic events in Haiti take next, what you won't hear is all the different paths that could have been taken to prevent any of it from happening in the first place.

US Meddling

Let's start with the event that precipitated all this madness, namely Moïse's assassination. At least seven of the Colombian former soldiers accused of being involved in killing him, or roughly a quarter of the assassin squad, received [US military training](#) as part of Washington's long-standing support for often-repressive Latin American security forces. This distinguishes the disorder in Haiti as one of at least a dozen [cases](#) in recent years where US-trained soldiers have ended up violently toppling a government somewhere in the Global South, usually in West Africa.

But the US role in the assassination could go even deeper. According to two [separate New York Times reports](#) (both of which buried the information paragraphs and paragraphs down), conspirators were told that the plot to kill Moïse was a "C.I.A. operation" and that it "had the full support of the United States," which was nervous about the late president's alleged links to various ne'er-do-wells. These claims are by no means confirmed, so we should be careful about jumping to conclusions, but it suggests that, at minimum, the US government is indirectly responsible for the central triggering event that led to the current situation, and at worst, should more evidence come to light, that it was *directly* responsible for it.

Once Moïse was dead, the US government and the "international community" it leads steadfastly backed acting prime minister Ariel Henry, who only holds the office because he was chosen by the United States and its European allies, not Haitians themselves.

Since then, he has postponed an election he knew he would lose, meted out [repression](#), and generally clung to power without a constitutional mandate, popular legitimacy, or a full parliament, with the terms of its last elected officials having [expired](#) this year. Evidence has even [surfaced](#) that Henry himself was involved in Moïse's assassination. While Henry has ostensibly requested foreign intervention to deal with the gangs, his pleas were also triggered by a wave of popular unrest against his September 2022 [announcement](#) that the government would no longer subsidize fuel.

At the same time, Washington and its partners have ignored alternative, Haitian-led proposals for resolving the political crisis, which has wound up allowing Henry to stay in power and prolonged Haiti's state of lawlessness, which in turn gave the gangs more time and ideal conditions to establish their control over the country. Most prominently, more than 650 Haitian organizations and figures — including its major political parties, labor unions, human rights and activist groups, churches, and even businesses — backed the August 2021 Montana Accord, which laid out the timeline and structure for a two-year-long democratic transition; a way out, in other words, from the current impasse.

The US government has simply [ignored](#) it, [choosing](#) instead to offer unquestioning [support](#) to the hated Henry. As no less than the Council on Foreign Relations has [put it](#):

"A lack of robust support for the most credible Haitian plan on the table promotes the

belief that foreign actors support an interim and future government only with Ariel Henry in the lead, rather than one led by civil society through its transition plan.”

In fact, Washington and the UN have [backed](#) an alternative, government-proposed accord from last December, which most of the country’s major parties [did not sign](#), and which has been [criticized](#) as simply propping up the prime minister.

Foreign Fingerprints

Several of the crises making up Haiti’s perfect storm have been exacerbated or were directly caused by past US policy choices. Take Haiti’s crippling fuel shortage. For years, Haiti was one of a number of poor Caribbean countries benefiting from Venezuela’s Petrocaribe program set up under the late president Hugo Chávez, which allowed them to [purchase](#) cheap oil on an extremely low-interest, twenty-five-year-long payment plan. The collapse in oil prices in the first half of the 2010s that dented the Venezuelan economy undermined the program, and then it was [killed entirely](#) by the Donald Trump administration’s sanctions, all of which fed into Henry’s decision last year to [hike fuel prices](#), as well as the government’s inability to overcome the gangs’ blockade on fuel sources.

The foreign fingerprints are especially visible when it comes to the ongoing cholera [outbreak](#). Cholera was first introduced into Haiti in 2010 by UN peacekeeping forces sent into the country as part of an earlier foreign military intervention. That legacy, along with the [rampant sexual assault](#) committed by UN forces, is among the reasons why many Haitians, even now, fiercely oppose more overseas military meddling. They fear, very credibly, that a foreign intervention won’t make things better, but rather the exact opposite.

As Amnesty International has [pointed out](#), Kenyan forces don’t exactly carry a sterling record of safeguarding human rights, having been accused of excessive force, arbitrary arrests, and the killing of protesters and children, among other things. The fact that they [don’t speak](#) the local language in Haiti makes confusion and misunderstanding all the more likely, raising the risk that forces will fail to distinguish between gang members and ordinary civilians.

This is [among the concerns](#) listed by former US ambassador to Haiti Daniel Foote — who resigned in protest from the Biden administration on September 21 — alongside the possibility that international military force will end up being viewed as foreign invaders entrenching Henry’s rule, which could spur violence against the UN-authorized troops. Foote [argues](#) that, like previous interventions into Haiti, the present one will at best stabilize the situation in the near term, while leading to much worse circumstances in the long term. Haitian-American groups have [called](#) on Joe Biden to instead withdraw his support for Henry to force him to seriously negotiate with the political opposition.

Maybe the worst fears of Foote and other detractors won’t end up coming true and the pattern will be broken. But whatever happens, keep in mind that what we’re seeing now in Haiti was far from inevitable, and that the road to the place where foreign intervention appears the only viable solution is paved with countless decisions that much of the public probably never heard about — which is exactly the point.

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