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WEBINAR

HAITI ON THE BRINK: THE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE  
KENYAN-LED MSS INITIATIVE

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PANEL DISCUSSION:

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**FELBAB-BROWN:** Good morning. Thank you very much for joining us. I am Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution where I direct the Initiative of Non-state Armed Actors and Co-direct our Africa Security Initiative. I'm delighted that you are joining us today for our conversation on the political and security situation in Haiti and the deployment of the Kenya led international security support mission to Haiti. And this is, of course, taking place at the time when the president of Kenya, President Ruto, is visiting in Washington, D.C., where he has received state honors and where Kenya was just designated as a major non-NATO, US ally.

The issues that we are about to discuss are very complex, but they are also very profound and they profoundly affect the lives of people in Haiti, people who have been suffering through very intense violence as well as very intense food insecurity and that are looking both to the new political governing body in Haiti, about which we will hear much more, as well as to the international Kenya-led security assistance mission to have their lives significantly improved. People who have been dealing with great insecurity, grave suffering, great economic hardship. The stakes for the international community are also high and multifaceted, as we will be hearing today. So we'll be looking at a set of intertwined and dramatic and political and security crises that have also been severely impacted the economy in Haiti over the past several years, particularly prominently so after the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021.

When that happened, Prime Minister Ariel Henry assumed power, and since, or between January 2023 and the spring of this year, April of this year, he was the governing body and the governing sole actor at various points in Haiti. Since January 2023, there were no, there today, still, there are no elected government officials. Its mandate of elected officials expired. This lack of political, legitimate, politically legitimate body, also coincided with a dramatic increase in insecurity, as gangs that have existed in Haiti for many years, frankly, many decades, have grown very powerful and very ambitious. Between the years of 2004 and 2017, a United Nations stabilization mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH, kept the lid on the violence of the gangs, but it did not succeed in undoing or structurally weakening them. And the moment MINUSTAH left, their power and ambitions, their effects, became dramatically visible and very much increased in their impact.

And in the last year, two years, we have seen gangs seizing critical infrastructure, destroying critical infrastructure, paralyzing humanitarian access to the country where 5 million people, half of the population, are food insecure. We have also seen the gangs committing grave crimes, rapes, murders, kidnapping on a daily basis with people not sure, when they leave their home for work, not being sure about whether they will return home alive. We have seen significant displacement as the police have been overwhelmed. Many have left the country but are also deeply intertwined with and infiltrated by the gangs. It is often said that some 90% of the capital of Port au Prince is under the control of the gangs in one form or another. And the gangs have been expanding into other departments, other parts of Haiti, including areas at the border with the Dominican Republic. And yet there are parts of Haiti do not experience the same presence or, in fact, any presence of the gangs.

Now the challenge of the gangs and the challenge of the political system that we will be discussing in great detail is further complicated by the fact that as much as the gangs have slipped the leash of politicians, they have long been a tool of political actors, just about all governing actors in Haiti. And this intertwining of crime and politics, of the use of crime for political purposes, has been a defining feature of Haiti, as has been the fact that oftentimes the government has stood against its people. The government has been exclusionary, serving a small set of privileged business and political elites at the expense of a much larger population. In the most dramatic forms demonstrated often in the poor neighborhoods from which the gangs come, where their prospects for any kind of economic opportunities, any kind of advancement, even educations, are nonexistent in the absence of crime and criminal behavior. And frankly, the gang structures are the only forms of government, governance very frequently.

So the international mission to Haiti, abbreviated as MSSM, led by Kenya, is deploying to Haiti to be responding to the situation, backing up the Haitian National Police and the Haitian government. The mission originated in 2021, when at the time Prime Minister Henry requested an international intervention, something that was very controversial with Haiti. And it was controversial because of the legacies, sometimes problematic, of the prior U.N. led MINUSTAH. For a long time, there were no takers as to who would leave the mission.

And today, as we are speaking, with President Ruto in Washington, D.C., Kenya is the lead actor, deploying about 1000 police officers. And there are several other countries joining with smaller deployment, countries such as Bahamas, Jamaica, where the force that might amount to some 2000, 2500 men. What this means for Haiti, what this means for shoring up the Haitian security response, how this will interact with the new governing structure are the themes of our presentation of our event today. And I'm absolutely thrilled to introduce three enormously knowledgeable speakers. Those include Professor Jacky Lumarque, who will speak first speaking about the political situation. I'll then make a few remarks specifically on gangs and the Kenya-led security mission. Keith Mines will then be speaking about US policy toward Haiti, and finally, Sophie Rutenbar will provide her insights on the international support, on the U.N. support and international community's role in the intervention.

So let me first start with Professor Jacky Lumarque, who has been the president of Université Quisqueya, which is the private university in Haiti since 2007. He has also been a board member and vice president of Agence universitaire de la Francophonie, a consortium of more than 1000 universities from over 100 countries from 2008 to May 2017. He has also served as the president of the Conference of Rectors and Presidents of Caribbean Universities from 2012 to 2019. Professor Lumarque has a very distinguished career in both Haiti and other scientific institutions around the world. He has also served in various consulting capacities with international organizations such as the World Bank and IMDB, as well as assisted the Haitian government in deciding crucial policy reform and has been very much involved in the thinking of how to take the current political and security situation and move it forward. And I should also mention that Dr. Lumarque is has had a distinguished academic career as a mathematician. So let me Jacky, please start with you. Tell us where we are in the politics. What is the current government, the governing body, the government body, the transitional, the Presidential Transitional Council? And what are the key agendas for the council?

**LUMARQUE:** Thank you, Vanda, for this remarkable introduction. I'm here to speak to you from Haiti. To begin with, I can confess to you that all Haitians, really all Haitians today eagerly expect the Presidential Council to resolutely and diligently focus energy to tackle the cancer of insecurity. It's true we have had some glimmers of hope recently. The airport welcomed its first flight on Monday after almost three months of forced closure. The main ports of Port au Prince were able to operate. A six

member delegation of security officials from Kenya arriving in Port au Prince to assist the planning process for the mission. In addition, the council itself appears to be in the final stages of choosing a prime minister. The Council of Ministers also approved yesterday evening the rules of engagement and behavior for the multinational security force. And this is one less pretext for the Republicans to continue to tighten the purse strings. So some good news on our planet.

However, gang violence hasn't abated. They are still in control of 80% of the metropolitan area, and they continue to openly and quietly demolish police infrastructure. Four police stations during the last week. Faced with these emergencies we can be concerned, and we are concerned, that the council is spending more time discussing its mode of operation rather than focusing on challenges that really cannot wait any longer. Until today, we still don't know who is formally and officially president of the country. We don't know according to which majority rule that decisions are made, in a simple majority of four to three or qualified majority, five to two, because they could not agree yet and the publication of the expanding official act in the official [French]. And yet the agenda of this council for the 20, 20 months that remain is extremely heavy.

Let's go over the most important aspects, some of them. First, the National Security Council, NSC. The NSC is in charge of defining and supervising the arrangements relating to the deployment of the MSSM, according to Resolution 29, 26, 2699 of the UN Security Council. Let's do that. The NSC had already been created by Jovenel Moïse at the same time as the National Intelligence Agency in January 2021. There are two set of sensitive questions, according to me, for your consideration. First. The new NSC is supposed to be chaired by the president. While the existing Conseil Supérieur de la Police Nationale, CSPN, is chaired by the prime minister, assisted by the police director, the minister of interior, the minister of justice. What is the relationship between these two bodies? It as the scope of the NSC is broader than that of the CSPN. So why continue to maintain the CSPN? That means the president himself would be called upon to intervene in the field of operational governance, which is constitutionally reserved for the prime minister. Second, the new NSC provides for the participation of the Army chief of staff. In our Constitution, the president is not the effective commander in chief of the Army. Unlike your case, unlike the case of the many democracies where normally military power is subject to civil power. This is a source of potential conflicts.

Second the establishment of the OCAG. The OCAG is the Organe de Contrôle de l'Action Gouvernementale, that means the body responsible for controlling government action. Look, since January 2021, when the term of the last third of the Senate ended, the executive branch with Jovenel Moise has been operating without any balance of power and after that again Henry led the government without the contoured body provided for in the September 11th agreement. As an independent body, which is a central piece for the balance of power, this control body should have been in place before, before or at the same time as the Presidential Council and be consulted in the process of selecting the Prime Minister. Now to us, we, the mission to establish the OCAG, the Organe de Contrôle, the Presidential Council can be naturally reluctant to create a statute that limits its value. A statute that which controls it and to which it is accountable. This we run the risk of seeing the Council complete its mandate before having put in place the Organe de Contrôle, like for Ariel, which would be bad for democracy, bad for the rule of law and bad for our public finances.

Third question. The adoption of a new constitution, the 1987 constitution is really complex, ambiguous, contradictory, and its strict application can be very costly for public finances. However, it is one of the constitutions that has lasted the longest among the 22 constitutions that the country has known since its creation, not because of its perfection, but for two reasons. First, it is what I call a bolted constitution. That means the process of amending it is so long, so complex, so laborious. And second, the political regime it conveys is a semi-parliamentary regime which gives the parliament greater powers than previous parliaments. Consequently, do you think that the parliament would voluntarily vote to limit the power given to them? It's like going, [inaudible] to the advantage of the executive branch. For this reason and for this reason and some paradoxically, the best time, the best moment to change this constitution is a moment of crisis like this when the country does not have a parliament. Well, other technically feasible, it's not really that complicated. The process is, above all, political, not technical. The main obstacle is the lack of confidence of society in our leaders. And once again, we risk losing the opportunity to make changes on which there is a broad consensus within the political class and the civil society.

Finally the elections. this is perhaps the most important and difficult part of the council's agenda. It is also the main reason, the main reason for the power struggle that we observe within the council now. All sectors, all sectors represented within the council have only one obsession. Direct the next elections to the advantage of their candidates. For this reason, they would seek to control the government apparatus and the Electoral Council. They would seek to place their supporters in the most strategy positions. They would seek to have access to public resources to finance their electoral campaigns. This is the real issue. And the main floor, the main floor of a presidential council made up of representatives of political parties. This also one of the reasons why a government oversight body like the Organe de Contrôle, the body responsible for control of the government, is essential to it.

I'm stopping here my evaluation. We can get to debate other important questions of the agenda, such as for example the response to this gigantic humanitarian catastrophe, which already affects mostly almost 50% of the population. Or the need to resuscitate an economy that has been entirely decapitalized and which has not the springs to bounce back, any soon, two areas where I think the international community is expected to play a smarter and more effective role compared to past experiences. But this is questions for [inaudible]. Thank you very much for your patience.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Well, thank you so much, Professor Lumarque, this was really remarkable. And what you are conveying is the moment of deep crisis and the absolute need to regenerate legitimacy in Haiti, both for the existing body, but more broadly for a system, a system that has been both illegitimate in the short term over the past two, three years, but it has been more profoundly illegitimate in how it deals with its people. And the enormous expectation, amidst, from the people of Haiti, of the Presidential Council, the Transitional Presidential Council, amidst unprecedented challenges. And you spoke about the fundamental one, the one that everyone is most concerned about, which is, of course, the security issues. So let me add some thoughts to your remarks and to what the expectations and opportunities are regarding the Kenya-led MSSM.

The gangs don't control everything in Haiti, but they control a tremendous amount. And I mentioned that Prime Minister Henry that was in power until the spring and it was through the actions of the gangs that he has lost power. We really witness a dramatic moment and in some ways

unprecedented moment where gangs, often disparate, often competing with each other, have pushed out the prime minister of a country. There are some 200 gangs in Haiti. Some are very small and disorganized. Some are much larger and more powerful. They coalesce into two broad groups, the Gpèp and G9. But there are very many fragmentation issues within those groups.

And it is often argued that the gangs are relatively weak, that they will be easier to defeat and that they are not the Taliban, they are not the Shabab. I very much agree they are not the Taliban and they are not the Shabab. But I also wonder whether those are appropriate comparisons. In fact, I would suggest that the gangs have shown far more tactical potency and capacity than had been expected. And if one studies the level of operations in the March period, when they encircled the airport, came close to encircling the presidential palace, demolished police stations, the way they not only mounted the political pressure to get rid of Prime Minister Henry, but the tactical operations they deployed, the way they integrated the drones in their operations, for example, we have seen a significant leap in tactical potency and skills. Which in my view has only become greater when they demolished the key, the most important, the largest, the only if you would like, prison in Haiti from which several thousand prisoners escaped. Some of them joined the gangs. We don't know how many, but it's it is very well possible that we have in the thousands of gang members right now that will be squaring off in some form with the Haitian national police that is on paper numbering some 9000 members, but in practice might be considerably smaller in size, perhaps only 3000 active men, of which not 3000 are deployed on the street at any one point. And an international force that is yet to firm up in its full body size, but probably is not going to be any larger than 3000 police officers and perhaps military members of the deployment from Benin also joins the force. That will be part of it.

I only mentioned that the gangs have started behaving very brutally toward local populations, yet at the same time they are not separate from the populations. They are often the only providers of some sort of income to local communities, even if the income comes from kidnapping and from ransom. Some of the more established gangs that have existed in places like Cité Soleil for two decades have been running their foundations that are brokerage places to take money from businesses through illicit activities or donations from politicians and in some form distribute them in communities. So the gangs often operate with some degree of political capital, and they often have profound connections to



political actors in Haiti. The international community, the United States, and the United Nations have sought to sever those connections through sanctions being placed on Haitian politicians. I would posit that those sanctions have not really severed the connections. They might have introduced more intermediaries between the sanctioned politicians and the gangs, but really not gotten us to the state where politics and crime would be separate in Haiti.

And Jacky was speaking about one of the core functions of the council being to bring Haiti to elections. My expectation would be this will generate significant new interest by political actors in Haiti to use gangs for political purposes, such as controlling neighborhoods, controlling access to polling stations, controlling bloc votes in exchange for payments. Now before we have elections, is it possible that a combination of the national police in Haiti, the small leftover of the Haitian military and the deploying international force led by Kenya, will be able to contain the gangs? Well, I'm skeptical that significant structural weakening of the gangs can take place with the force that is arriving.

So let's just take the Kenya component that will be coming in in stages and installment at the level of about 1000 men. Say those full 1000 police officers from Kenya are deployed. Well, they will never serve as 1000 police officers at once. We don't know the tooth to tail ratio. But even if we have 600 men being the tooth in support of the Haitian National Police, we know that the police is to be on the forefront of operations. That means that any one moment only 300 police officers are deployed on the street. That is, as a force, minimal enough to perhaps control the port and terminal, perhaps control parts of the road and secure the airport. Those are all important for humanitarian access, for economic functionality. But they don't change the structural balance of the gangs.

It is also tempting to assume and the strategy or tactic that's frequently thought about is that all that is sufficient is to decapitate some of the more powerful gangs, to remove the leadership. Well, I would posit that high value targeting decapitation, first of all, it's more challenging in practice than is assumed, but often really does not lead to weakening of the gang. And we have seen in Haiti several times decapitation taking place, not because of the actions of the state, but because of the actions of rival gangs. And just from August 2023 through the winter of 2023, there have been several significant leaders eliminated. Whether it was the leader of 400 Mawozo, afterwards Isca from the G9 Alliance,

Tyson, and Ti Junior, none of which had implications on the power of the gangs. They have reshuffled alliances, they reshuffled local terms and opened spurred violence at the local level, but not significantly weakened the gangs.

Let me make one comment and I'll then hand over to Dr. to Mr. Keith Mines, who I will introduce, and that's about the another possibility that instead of confronting the gangs, we would approach the gangs through negotiations. This is enormously controversial in Haiti, with good reason. People both want accountability. They don't want leniency. They don't want forgiveness. And they want to get out of the pattern of few decades in Haiti where gangs would generate intense violence in order to be paid off with some material pays off to turn violence down. This is the only condition the gangs to engage in more violence and taught them to use violence as a tool of concessions, as a tool of blackmail at the national level. Ideally, negotiations would be structured in a way that they would offer some leniency in exchange for dismantling of the gangs, and the leniency would amount to not giving the gangs political power, not giving them political appointments, for example, maybe perhaps only agreeing to more limited prison sentences, at least for the gang leadership. However, such negotiations require a force that is capable of significantly punishing the gangs, that is capable of delivering rule of law based law enforcement action. And it is very much remains to be seen whether the combination of the Haitian police that needs to go through very complicated reform and the Kenya-led force will be able to generate such incapacitation and deterrence effects, to have negotiations from a position of strength and not the same positions of weakness and moral hazard and problematic payoffs that we have seen.

Well, there's much more to be said about the gangs. But let me now turn to Mr. Keith Mines to talk to us about the role of the United States. Mr. Mines is vice president of the Latin America Program at the US Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., and a well-known expert on Haiti, a leading voice on Haiti. Keith joined USIP after a distinguished career in the State Department, where he was among various other positions, director for the Andean and Venezuelan affairs. His career in diplomacy and military spanned three decades, and he has worked on a wide range of governance institution building, stabilization issues in the Americas, in the Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan, in Haiti itself as well as Mexico and many other places. And he has written extensively on peace building negotiations, post-

conflict stabilization, including an absolutely terrific book that I recommend to anyone interested in any of these matters, "Why Nation-Building Matters: Political Consolidation, Building Security Forces, and Economic Development in Failed and Fragile States."

Keith, US policy has been very important in Haiti for a very long time. Often it's been perhaps preponderant and perhaps arguably not helpful. Yet actors in Haiti continue to look to the United States as a critical influence on policy. Please explain to us where we are with US policy today and what kind of engagement is taking place and should be taking place, would be particularly productive.

**MINES:** Terrific. Well, thanks, Vanda. It's great to be here with everybody. I'm glad to have the opportunity to share a few thoughts about Haiti, which I do care passionately about. So I think when I look at US policy towards Haiti, there's two major hurdles that one immediately confronts. The first one is why care at all? And the second is, if you care, what to do about it. So I throw out a couple of things. On the why care, there is what I would call secondary national interests. None of them are at the front of the pack, but I mean a secondary national interest as they add up across a hemisphere like ours, they do start to impede our ability to function, and they start to just, I think in some cases make the United States look weak. But if you add up between migration, the drugs and organized crime that that is flowing at different times through Haiti, and the collapse of the rule of law and governance in a state so close to our shores, I think it's something that we often dismiss. But it's certainly not a very good example to the Chinese and any of our other adversaries that we are not really capable of even helping a state to reset that's at this level of desperation. And then the humanitarian interest, I think, is something we often dismiss. But I think Americans at their heart do care about other countries. And I think there's a certain level below which we don't really want to see nations fall. And I think Haiti has reached that point.

And then the other thing to think about is a bit of the US legacy. And we often, I think, dismiss this. We were very pleased to end the Cold War, as we considered it. But there is a bit of a debt to nations like Haiti from the Cold War, where we did support a very brutal dictator that frankly set a lot of the conditions that we're now in this very long, decades long process trying to dig out from. But the Duvalier dictatorship, I think we often dismiss that as just another one of the dictators, and once they

were gone, they were gone. But there was really a long legacy that that the Duvaliers left. So I think there's a bit more of a connection to Haiti and there is a certainly a citizen to citizen connection. There's no place where there's more Haitian Haitians than in the United States outside of Haiti.

I would couch US policy, it's actually been fairly consistent in some ways towards Haiti since the 1990s, and that has been to do just enough to stabilize the country without getting too involved. We've never liked this sort of mission. We've always been reluctant to do it. If you look back on the biggest intervention, the one in 1994, it was actually numerically very large, but it almost immediately drew down to almost nothing as we tried to turn it over to the U.N. And there was parallel political and economic and humanitarian development work. But the latter, the development in economics were frankly modest compared to the size of the country. So lots of ups and downs. But the US has always tried to avoid getting too involved over too long a period of time. I think the situation is very similar today, an effort to stabilize Haiti without getting too vested or too bogged down.

This time, of course, the U.N. option, a U.N. mission, is not an option. So the international community, in partnership with Haiti, pushed a bit by the United States, is doing something that's never really been done before by enlisting Kenya to lead the mission. Not just the Kenyans never done this before, but nobody really on this, on this level has done something like this. So Kenya needs to be commended for doing it. It's quite bold, frankly. We all wish them success. They're very determined and very well prepared. But there's a lot that they're going to need from everybody else. I think that is the main thing that everyone ought to walk away with, whenever we think about Haiti is, this is not just winding the Kenyans up and sending them on their way. They really are going to need a lot of help. They're effectively taking on what is a, would normally be done by a U.N. mission or a coalition led by the United States or another NATO ally. So again, at this level, it's really something unique.

But I wanted to refer just very briefly, and you can watch this online and we've got a white paper we'd be happy to share as well that captures the main points. But we did a session in December with four of the previous special representatives to the U.N. and just ask them that question: if someone is effectively going to replicate a U.N. mission, consider what you had as a U.N. special representative. What are they not going to have that they're going to need? And it was a very revealing session. We

had, and it covered all 24 years of peacebuilding in Haiti. So it's ter Horst, Mulet, Valdés, and La Lime. So very, a very compelling session. So the first thing they said was, look, the current security and socioeconomic environment is worse than anything Haiti has experienced in the past 40 years and possibly even longer. But the resources that are planned are less than most of the previous missions. So on the mission itself, they just very quickly went through some of the things that they would have had. They had a very good intelligence component, both through the mission itself and then to start to build into the Haitian forces that were being developed. They had a heavy component that could provide both deterrence upfront and also a rapid reaction force. They had a way to rapidly scale the HNP's train and equip mission that would make them a force multiplier much quicker. Ter Horst was the one that mentioned the human rights monitors, and I think a lot of us had thought about that. But it was a way also, again, without a full UN mission, to get contingents out into the height and breadth of Haiti in a way that could at least provide a presence that would be effective in helping the force. From there, they went on to just make a few points. They talked about how politics and security need to go hand in hand. The new transitional government needs a lot of help. Again, not all of that seems to be forthcoming. The question of how it's delivered and by whom, but the staff and advisors internal to Haiti and also some from outside, I think is really something that's going to be important and that's going to be, again, it's just a force multiplier because the loyalty of citizens to this new government is going to be so important to anything this force does. And if there, if it's being dragged down, if the force is out trying to help restore law and order and the HNP P is trying to get effective, but the council is dragging it down, it's really going to be difficult.

Now, there's a trick to doing that. And in Haiti, of course, it has, people have to be helpful without being too visible, and there's a real dance about how to deliver that. But there's many that know how to do that. The second one was planning. There needs to be really good planning and that needs to be solicited from communities. There's something, if you think about our Global Fragility Act, which was a kind of a, it hit and then it kind of went away, but it's still there in a tangible way of trying to get the United States to be much more local in the way that it delivers assistance. Vanda talked very effectively about the gangs and gang strategy, not coming in [inaudible], but finding those ways to peel off the gang members. That's going to be a really important one and probably the one that will need not only the most immediate attention, but the most immediate funding.

And then given the paucity of international support, a very strong coordination mechanism is going to be needed. There's been a lot of good efforts at that. The Canadians have really stepped up in Haiti to try to help provide a coordination mechanism for all these different inputs that are coming in. But if you think about the number of actors that are going to be working sort of independently, the US, Kenya, Haiti, the U.N., the OAS, all these bilateral actors, it's going to be something that's really going to be critical to have tight coordination between them. And then the other, the other thing that they mentioned was a development strategy. Again, it's kind of a force multiplier that as the police start to reestablish themselves, that they need to have development funding to go along with them.

So to close, look, whatever we're calling this, whatever formulate it is, it's nation building, whether you like it or not. And it's trying to help develop a nation in Haiti that is that is strong enough and capable enough to manage security and also take care of the needs of its people. I would just say that there there's a tendency in Haiti, from what I see, that many people know just enough about it to be afraid of it, but not enough to know what to do. It's also the place where many consider that assistance goes to die. But really, looking at it over the past 25 years, there's so many examples of where things have worked, and there's a lot that we have to work with inside Haiti. Thanks.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Keith, you made a really fundamental point, and that is this is state building. And ultimately, if the mission ends up being anything less than state building, it'll only manage to accomplish very, very limited goals and the structural issues will persist. Yet at the same time, in terms of resources, it is the least resourced mission. There is even significant questions as to the funding for the Kenyans alone, from the United States as congressional funding is uncertain, and from the international community more broadly. And most of the greatest, most severe challenge politically, most severe challenge, economically, most severe challenge security-wise, and the least funded mission with very complex structures, including how they will relate to the United Nations, the international community, CARICOM.

And I can hardly think of a better person to explain to us the role and complexity of the international community than my wonderful colleague at Brookings, Sophie Rutenbar. Sophie is a visiting fellow at Brookings. She comes to us from a career in the United Nations, including specifically in Haiti. She joined us as a Council on Foreign Relations international affairs fellow in the visiting fellowship, and she's also, through that same program, a visiting scholar with the New York University Center on International Cooperation. She spent more than a decade at the United Nations and various agencies, including in the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti between 2019 and 2023. Sophie, let me turn to you to speak to us about the broad international community dimensions, the role of the U.N., its connections or lack of to the MSSM and other actors.

**RUTENBAR:** Yeah. Thank you so much, Vanda, and thank you to my fellow panelists. It's really a pleasure to be alongside two people who know so much about Haiti and have been involved with Haiti so much longer than I have, even with my few years in Port au Prince. So first of all, to kind of set a little bit of a stage for kind of understanding the U.N. role in Haiti, the U.N. has been involved in Haiti for something around 25 of the last 30 years. And this has taken various forms, peacekeeping missions. There is currently a small political presence in Haiti. This political presence was established, which I formerly worked with. I no longer work with them, was established in 2019 as a way of, with the intention of supporting the Haitians to hold elections and complete sort of a transition to what was hoped to be normalcy at that time, after a long drawdown of the kind of large peacekeeping force called MINUSTAH that was deployed between 2004 and 2017.

Obviously, that was overoptimistic. The security situation was degrading even before BINUH was deployed and has continued to degrade over the last few years, including especially after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in 2021. So just to be clear, the multilateral support, multinational support mission is not a U.N. mission. It is authorized by the U.N. Security Council, but it is not sort of backed by the U.N. or housed in the U.N. It is an independent mission, and it's part of a little bit of a wave of kind of new approaches to peacekeeping that we've seen emerge over the last few years. We've seen sort of different approaches to regional peace operations in Africa and with the African regional organizations. So this is sort of in some senses, this this mission is kind of unprecedented. In other senses, it's kind of part of a new curve of missions that, you know, I think the

international community is experimenting with in order to kind of see what can be more effective in kind of bringing support to countries like Haiti that are in really difficult circumstances.

So the role of the U.N. and the U.N. Security Council, the U.N. being kind of this much larger sort of body of agencies, funds and programs and other actors and not just kind of the legislative arm of the U.N., with the U.N. Security Council. So the UN's role in the mission is really just administering this trust fund that has been set up, that's been mentioned in the media as having only, at this point about \$21 million. There is, however, kind of a I think, you know, to be quite frank, the U.N. wants this mission to succeed. The U.N. wants Haiti to, the situation in Haiti to improve. If the mission does not succeed. I think there's consensus that things are only going to get worse and the gangs are only going to be emboldened. So there has been additional, even though it's not requested in the, formally by the U.N. Security Council in mandating resolution, there has been other assistance provided. There's been advice provided to the Kenyans and to the other actors who are involved in preparing to deploy and helping kind of deploy the mission. The U.N. does have an extremely long history of kind of mounting missions like this. So over 75 years, 71 different peacekeeping missions with sort of around 2 million peacekeepers deployed in different places. So there's been information provided to the Kenyans and others about planning, about protecting human rights, about creating kind of fundamental frameworks like concept of operations and rules of engagement and kind of compliance to support kind of the human rights of Haitians living on the ground.

So and there have been a few other kind of things that have been provided, but it is important to kind of note that this, the MSS and the rest of the U.N. are at this point operating fairly separately. I think this is partly kind of out of concern to protect the U.N. The U.N. has run into challenges in other situations, particularly in Mali and Somalia, where there have been other military forces or regional peace operations deployed on the ground. And, you know, it can get just very, very confusing. So but at the same time, I think it can be argued that, you know, we are all in this together and it is and we are all on the ground together alongside the Haitian National Police. And so it's important to consider what can be done to support the MSS, even given the huge challenges it faces and sort of the limited resources it has. Is to ensure that it's able, as best possible, to confront the gangs and return some semblance of order to the streets of Port au Prince.



So I mentioned a kind of handful of areas where the U.N. had kind of, you know, sort of upon request provided assistance, including providing advice, helping with coordination mechanisms, support with training support, support with setting up coordination mechanisms. But most of all, the most important role and I will end this so we can have a conversation and hear questions from the audience. But the most important role for the U.N., as well as for the other members of the international community who are paying close attention to Haiti, is supporting the political role of the Presidential Transition Council. So the Presidential Transition Council, you know, it isn't perfect. Jacky did a great job of laying out kind of the challenges that it faces and, you know, some of the concerns around it. But, you know, at this point, we need it to succeed. All the Haitians on the streets who are, you know, dealing with really horrible things day after day, are, need this to succeed, need to kind of be able to live in quiet and peace and, you know, and be able to go to the market and just other fundamental things like that. So and in order to do that, we need to kind of political progress forward. We have found, as the United Nations, that, around the world, securitized missions, interventions that focused only on security have a pretty poor track record for a whole load of reasons. But where we have found success around the world is where security interventions are married with and run in parallel with and intertwined with political interventions. And so that political progress is made. So the key thing for Haiti at this point, for the U.N. at this point and for kind of all the other international actors engaged in Haiti, is to provide support to the Presidential Transition Council and also to provide accountability on behalf of all those Haitians who want progress. So, like Jacky mentioned, the Organe de Contrôle, this is what we should be involved with. This is, you know, encouraging the Presidential Transition Council to live up to its responsibilities and to move forward the way it needs to do for the Haitian people. So thank you very much.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Well, thank you very much, Sophie. Certainly the theme of accountability.

Accountability, I think, is really that should be the baseline of behavior, judgment and support for a wide variety of actors from the deploying force to the international community's engagement, do no harm and do positive things to, of course, most importantly, political actors in Haiti. And the human perspective. You emphasized again, so that people can be safe in going about their everyday business, where today we have half the population in food insecurity, several hundred thousand

people displaced, and the majority, the vast majority of people in the capital not being sure whether they'll come home alive when they just go to work in order to feed their family.

We have received many terrific questions from the audience. I'm going to bundle three themes. We only have ten minutes, so I will go to each of our speakers, starting with the Jacky for about three minutes of remarks. Jacky, feel free to pick any of the questions that appeals to you or answer briefly several. So one question that has come up with multiple different phrasing goes from many of our audience members is what is the exit for the Kenyans? What's the exit strategy? And I would broaden it perhaps to say, at what point is exit useful? What would it look like? What conditions needs to be met on the ground in Haiti? A second question that's on the table is, what are the consequences of this mission, of the Kenyan admission of this transition process failing? If this doesn't work, as previous transition, previous efforts have not worked, what next? And the third question, and again, feel free to engage just with one or few is, what are the absolutely critical elements in the transition process or in the security process that need to happen for success to be possible or to reverse it? What are the most important elements of failure, that would be the trigger points of failure? Jacky, let me start with you, please. About three minutes. Jacky, your phone is mute. Do you feel like responding to any of the questions? Your mic is mute. Do you feel like responding to any of the questions?

**LUMARQUE:** Sorry, okay. About the mission, the Kenyans. We have had missions in the past. And the lessons are very bad. And I think it's because there is some kind of mistrust in positions toward the international community. For example, [inaudible] three years like in hell. And while we see many meetings, five foreign ministries meetings and many meetings at the UN Security Council, resolutions 1, 2, 3, and nothing happened. And that leads, most of us thinks that, I used to say we are alone in the world. And many of others think if it were for another country like D.R., like Israel, or the international committee, it would not be surprising we're getting Haiti. And so there's some kind of a mistrust.

And regarding the Kenyan, now, the issue is, as I can see from the discussion within the council. You still have within the country people that don't believe we need an international force to help us target

the insecurity. Many of them think that with proper assistance through the national police, we would have, it would have been possible to build the capacity. And when you look at the state of the police now as compared to the gangs in terms of firepower, in terms of capacity to have access to arms and munitions, we don't understand why this component has been so neglected. So there's the question of mistrust regarding the international community. Mistrust also in the political processes. Most of the time when they intervene, it's not for the good of Haitians. They influence elections not in the direction of the majority, and after that, the consequences are very bad for. And so we need now to create trust. And for this reason, maybe the assistance should be global.

During the last 20 years when we assisted Haiti with peace missions, with peacekeeping missions, we failed on the economic agenda. We could estimate that because of the presence of the missions, you know, we are spending like half billion dollars a year. But most of the resources go, benefit the Dominican Republic because we had to outsource resources, for the Dominican Republic services in terms of marketing, of services. And so no synergy to the Haitian economy. And now I think that we didn't have to discuss this today, but I think we need to couple the intervention with this solid economic recovery plan. The Haitian economy has been completely decapitalized at all levels, informal sector, all sectors in the business. And so there is no way that this economy can reverse by itself if you don't have proper assistance. Another also aspect: Haiti doesn't have any foreign investment and we question the stability as a as a reason for that. But development is more complicated. I think that direct investment also help create stability as the case for the Dominican Republic. And I can tell you that the level of stability and good governance that we can see is a consequence of the level of direct investment, foreign direct investment. And so now we have to, we don't want to miss this opportunity to have a more global push in terms of how do we how do we help Haiti get out of this mess.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Thank you very much. Jacky, you spoke about the importance of the economic dimensions, of economic development. I will say of equitable economic development, that comes down to people that have historically been excluded. I will not, I want to make sure that Keith and Sophie have a chance. I would just add one element that I think is important in creating trust, creating trust for the mission and creating trust for the transitional council, and that some early successes,

even if those early successes are low hanging advancement in security that are insufficient of themselves but that are important in creating the bank of trust that will be necessary. So the council needs to deliver quickly on something important, and the security force needs to deliver quickly on something that's important and achievable, in my view. Keith, please, your thoughts on those issues?

**MINES:** Yeah. Let me take the second one first. I think that was a great question. What are the consequences of failure? I had a clever thing I was going to deploy earlier, but I'll use it now. But you know, this is not Ed Harris in Apollo 13 saying failure is not an option. Failure is an option. And frankly, the way this is designed with such a small force going in to do, to confront such a large series of gangs, failure is something that we have to be cognizant of. It could happen. I mean, this mission could be tied down at the airport, not be able to move. It could there could be a catastrophic kind of a Black Hawk Down incident that that frankly unravels the whole thing. I think we need to be conscious of that and again, build in the things that are needed for success.

The consequences are really quite high, I think, because you're you know, there's a big difference between a failed state and a fragile state. Fragile state, you still have a lot to work with. You have a government, a flag, currency, a port, an airport. A failed state, and I was in Somalia long enough to see that, wow, this is really a different order of magnitude. So I think we should be, you know, at the point now at really shoring up what we have to work with, which is still considerable. So that's something that I think we ought to be maybe a little bit more sensitive to than we have been. The gangs would be so emboldened at that point that everything would be harder. And frankly, at some point there would be nothing left but a major U.N. peacekeeping mission.

And then just real quick on the first one, the exit strategy for the Kenyans. You know, everyone goes into Haiti like the day they get there, like they're like, what's my exit strategy? How the heck do I get out of here? I think we need to be looking - and it's not about the Kenyans, they're going to come in and do their part of this. But they you know, they're not buying into a 20 year mission. But somebody needs to I mean, this is still the work of at least a decade, maybe two decades. And that doesn't mean that it's going to be expensive, with casualties every year. There's very few casualties that anyone has taken in Haiti. It's not that kind of a mission. So it's not a place where there's a lot of bloodshed on

those that are helping, but it is a place where they need to be in the right, the right places at the right time to make that difference, to bolster the Haitian security forces and government and all those that are trying to make all this work. And the ups and downs have really been, made everything in Haiti harder. It's just really made it difficult because of the coming and going. So I think a long-term commitment is really what the United States needs to consider and the international community together, And one very weird thought the other day. But you know, what if the United States had a Coast Guard base in Haiti? And to have just a presence somewhere out of the way, but just to show that we really are committed to this over the long term. And frankly, geographically, it's not a bad place for a base. Thanks.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** That's a very interesting call that I think is a lot of merit to it. And Keith, I have been learning from you on Haiti for about two years and I have seen you making a point: the longer we wait, the more difficult it will get, the closer we are to a failed state. And I have seen your prediction materialize incrementally and in jumps over that period, including, of course, very, very dramatically so in March, a situation that is dormant but hardly finished. Sophie, last three minutes to you and then we will need to wrap up. I am fully cognizant of the fact that we are just scratching the mere surface of issues that are Haiti that need to be addressed. But unfortunately, that's the time that we have today. Your concluding thoughts, please.

**RUTENBAR:** Yeah, I'll make two very quick points. Just building on what Jacky and Keith have said. One is I think Keith is absolutely right about kind of needing to sort of think in the long term and, you know, the potential for failure of the mission. And there are key points coming up where that we can take stock of the multinational support mission and make adjustments if necessary. There is one mechanism built into the resolution for the U.N. to provide kind of greater support to the multinational support mission through the provision of logistical support packages. And then there're, of course, kind of the mandate renewals upcoming of the integrated office in Haiti, as well as the multinational support mission itself back in, upcoming in October. So I think we need to not just sort of throw this at the problem and then hope it sticks. We need to kind of be continually thinking about sort of how is it going, what else can we do differently?

And then the last point that I'll make is that at the same time, we need to kind of have a long term and kind of long term thinking commitment to Haiti. That's essential. But we also need to kind of allow Haitians to take the lead in terms of creating their sort of, like a political framing that works for them and their, and Mr. Lumarque is far more placed to speak to this than I do. But there is, to some extent, kind of a fairly zero sum approach to Haitian politics among different Haitian political actors. And I think this is really the time to think about how, you know, how do we shift that culture. And like Keith said and Jacky has said, how do we focus on the successes in the areas of Haitian society where compromise can be found and progress can be made? And how do we encourage political actors in Haiti to come together to, you know, as Jacky said, kind of pursue that sort of supermajority of five votes out of seven rather than sort of the lowest common denominator kind of approach to moving forward? So this is a point where the Haitians really need to come together and we in the international community need to come together to support them. So thank you so much.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Well, thank you. Sophie, you've also just done a brilliant job in hitting some of the key themes and connecting them. I've been learning from Jacky and from you as well as Keith from Haiti and continue learning so very much today in our webinar. Let me just underscore one point that Keith and I have seen across different missions, different efforts that you have seen in your role at the U.N. in Sudan and elsewhere. Just having the capacity to update and learn from the challenges that will come in the mission and having some sort of – or for the council, for the council, for that matter, having some capacity to translate the challenge in into adapted behavior that is better able to meet them. It's not easy. In some missions like in Afghanistan, you never achieve that stage. And places like Somalia, you have never truly achieved that place. But it is fundamental for success because success will not be overnight. There might be flash of success overnight. That is important, but there will be very many challenges for Haiti, for the transitional council, for the structures that are going to emerge, as well as very much for the Kenya mission.

With that, I want to very much thank all three of you for your excellent remarks, for your great insights and great work on Haiti for a very long time, your commitment to the country. I want to very much thank our audience for engaging with us, for submitting your questions. I realize fully there are very many that we were not able to touch, but please stay engaged. The Initiative of Non-State Armed

Actors and the Africa Security Initiative will have other events coming up. In the most immediate future, it will be an event on South Africa, its elections and its gangs, and the relationship between politics and crime in that country. See you next time. And thank you.