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HAITI GANG VIOLENCE





Executive Summary

Haiti is experiencing a severe escalation of gang violence, with armed groups expanding their control from urban centers into rural areas, leading to increased instability and conflict. The international community, through the Multinational Security Support mission, has pledged assistance, but deployment remains inadequate and under-resourced. To effectively address the crisis, it is crucial to enhance humanitarian relief efforts, curb arms smuggling, and strengthen local institutions, including the intelligence service, to disrupt the power of these gangs and restore order.





Introduction

The recent attacks in Haiti occur within the broader context of widespread gang violence and have resulted in mass killings and significant internal displacement.

Haiti has reported extreme violence for more than three years since the assassination of its president, Jovenel Moïse.

This report aims to offer deep insights into the conflict's origins, the strategies employed by various parties, the impact on local and international levels, and potential pathways to resolution.





Conflict Background

Haiti, a Caribbean nation located on the island of Hispaniola, has struggled with political instability and economic hardships since gaining independence. The devastating earthquake in 2010 and the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021 further deepened the country's instability. It is reported that Haiti is home to approximately 200 armed gangs, around half of which maintain a presence in the capital, Port-au-Prince.

The phenomenon of armed gangs has been a part of the country's history for a very long time. It can be dated back to the dictatorship era of President François Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude Duvalier, who used armed gangs to suppress the opposition. In the 1950s, Haiti experienced a rise in widespread gang culture, with 1958 marking the establishment of the Tonton Macoutes, an armed militia created to suppress opposition to Duvalier's rule.



The country has since undergone multiple coups d'état aimed at removing democratically elected presidents from power, severely undermining its democratic institutions. The 2010 earthquake also did considerable damage to the country. The post-disaster era in Haiti saw a rise in the proliferation of armed gangs. In 2021, the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse further destabilized the country.

Currently, Port-au-Prince is largely dominated by two prominent gang coalitions—the G9 Family and the G-Pep Gang. In 2023, these coalitions united in response to the multinational security support (MSS) mission in Haiti by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Several other gangs, alarmed by this foreign intervention, are strengthening their hold by expanding territorial control. Such coalitions were successful in forcing the resignation of their Prime Minister, Ariel Henry, and power was transferred to Garry Conille through a Presidential Transitional Council (PTC).



The attack conducted by the Gran Grif Gang on October 3, 2024, in the town of Pont-Sondé, located in Haiti's Artibonite department, reflects the growing anxiety among gangs about losing their influence. The Artibonite region is strategically significant, as it hosts a major road connecting the capital, Port-au-Prince, to the northern city of Cap-Haïtien. Additionally, it is an important agricultural area.

Gaining control over this region enhances a gang's influence by securing vital transportation routes and access to key agricultural resources, further consolidating their power. The attack was primarily a response to "The Jean-Denis Coalition," a self-defense group formed by local residents to counter the criminal activities of the Gran Grif Gang and prevent them from enforcing a recently established toll on the national highway. The gang accused the locals of supporting the Coalition and retaliated by massacring the town. The current death toll stands at 109, though it may increase, as entire families were slaughtered, leaving no one to identify or count the bodies. The attack is considered to be the worst in many years, surpassing the 2018 slaughter in Port-au-Prince.



High unemployment and a lack of alternative opportunities significantly contribute to the rise of armed gangs in Haiti. Widespread hunger and displacement caused by ongoing violence further exacerbate the situation, creating a cycle of poverty, desperation, and criminal activity that fuels the growth of these gangs. The new government, formed three months ago under Prime Minister Garry Conille, has made little progress in addressing the prevalence of armed gangs in the country. This inaction has further fueled the growth of violent activities.

Key Actors: Gran Grif Gang, Luckson Elan (Leader of Gran Grif Gang), Ti Pay (a well-known local and a member of Gran Grif), UN Security Council and its MSS, Presidential Transition Council (PTC), and the new government led by Garry Conille.



Conflict Dynamics

Timeline of Events:

2021 - Assassination of President Jovenel Moïse

October 2023 - UNSC adopted a resolution authorizing a non-UN multinational security support mission to Haiti.

2023 - The formation of coalitions among various gangs, particularly the alliance between the G9 Family and the G-Pep Gang in Port-au-Prince known as 'viv ansanm' or 'live together' in Haitian Creole.

August 9, 2024 - Members of the Coalition of Jean Denis self-defense group intercepted a vehicle coming from Port-au-Prince, which was carrying several crates of arms and ammunition destined for the Gran Grif Gang.

April 24, 2024 - Forced resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry.

June 3, 2024 - Garry Conille assumed power as the acting Prime Minister.

September 2024 - Establishment of a toll on National Road No. 1 by the Gran Grif Gang in Artibonite.

December 3, 2024 - Mass killings by Gran Grif in Pont-Sondé town of Artibonite department.

December 10, 2024 - Fresh attacks by the Canaan Gang in the coastal town of Arcahaie, Haiti.



Strategies & Tactics

The gangs are engaged in a violent campaign to assert dominance over key strategic locations that provide both territorial control and economic leverage, particularly in response to the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission. To achieve this, they employ a range of tactics, including targeting critical infrastructure such as highways, ports, coastlines, and agricultural regions.

Once they seize control of these areas, they impose tolls, often through coercion and violence. Those transporting goods along these routes are frequently forced to pay extortion fees to the gangs, which strengthens the gangs' economic base. They also resort to kidnapping for ransom, drug trafficking, and smuggling of small weapons to enhance their economic resources.





The gangs have formed coalitions and employed violent tactics, including attacks on hospitals, police stations, and prisons, to pressure authorities and meet their demands. These actions were instrumental in forcing the resignation of the former prime minister.

In an effort to curb gang violence, the UN Security Council has authorized a non-UN multinational security support mission in Haiti, led by Kenya, to assist the Haitian National Police. However, the mission remains understaffed and lacks sufficient resources, limiting its effectiveness. Additionally, the UNSC and the US Treasury Department have placed Luckson Elan, the leader of the Gran Grif Gang, under sanctions.

Power Dynamics

Violent gangs have now taken control of 80% of the capital, Port-au-Prince, and are rapidly expanding into rural and peri-urban areas. The Artibonite region, a key agricultural hub, is home to at least 20 gangs. Among them, the Gran Grif and Kokorat San Ras gangs publicly emerged in 2015, with Gran Grif steadily increasing its power and territorial control since then. This region has increasingly become a hotspot for violence, as inter-gang competition to seize rival territories intensifies.

In response to the rise of violent groups, several vigilante groups have emerged to counter their influence. However, these self-defense groups are severely under-armed compared to the heavily armed criminal gangs. Out of the 2,500 officers promised, the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission has deployed only around 400 officers to assist the Haitian police. As a result, there are insufficient personnel to effectively defend against the violent gangs, leaving the security forces overwhelmed and under-resourced.



Impact Analysis

The recent attacks in Pont-Sondé have resulted in a death toll of 109, with the number expected to rise. Many have been severely injured. Several houses, vehicles, and checkpoints were set on fire, resulting in internal displacement. Hundreds of families fleeing the violence of the Gran Grif group have taken refuge at the Philippe Guerrier public square in Saint-Marc.

This year, more than 3,600 people have been killed in gang-related violence in Haiti. The United Nations has verified over 400 grave human rights violations committed against the Haitian population by these armed gangs. Haiti's escalating gang violence and political instability have resulted in a record 578,074 internal displacements in 2024, including over 310,000 women and girls and 180,000 children, many of whom are suffering from severe malnourishment.

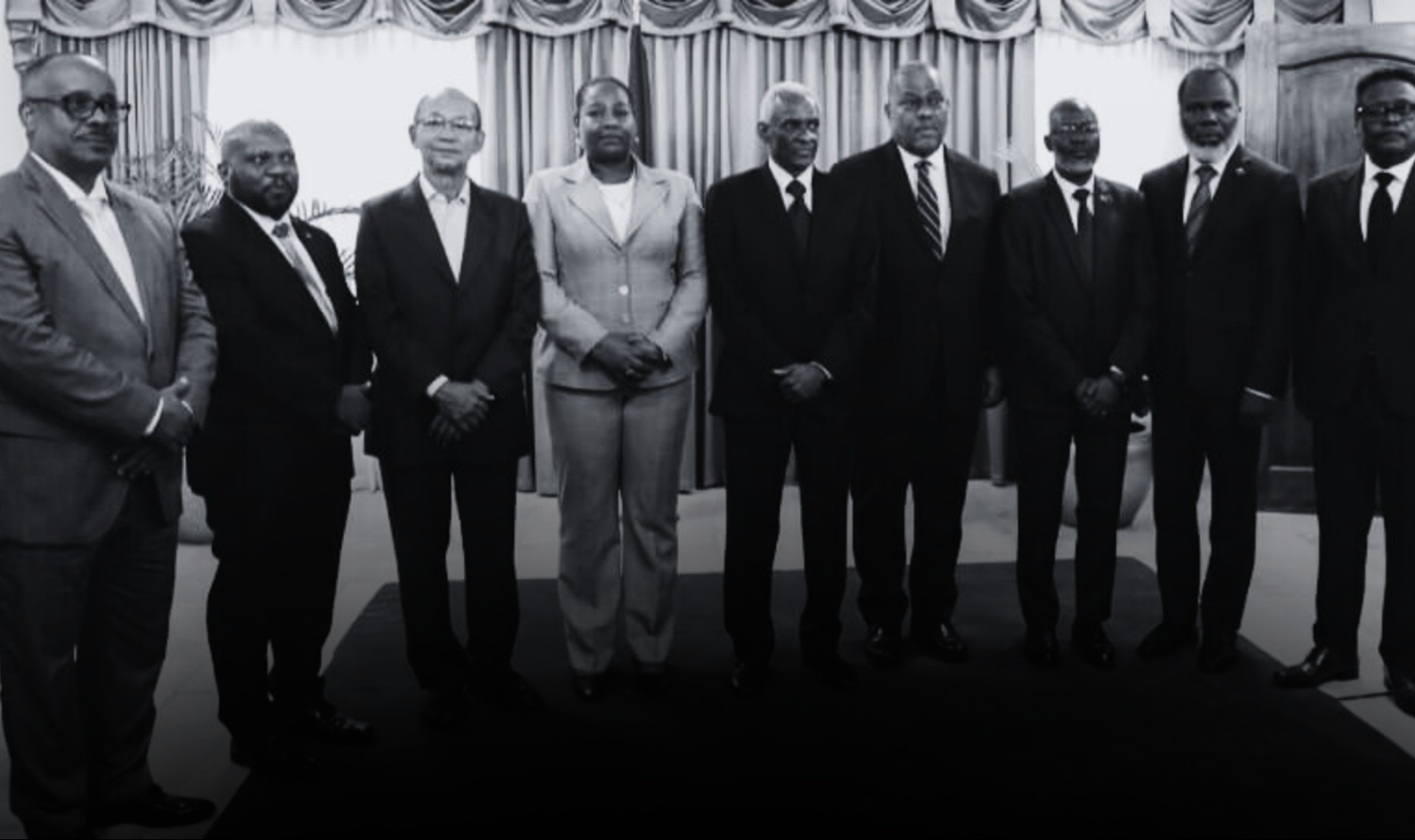
Additionally, sexual violence against girls and women is surging, as gangs increasingly use rape as a weapon of terror.



Economic Impact

Artibonite, a key rice-producing region in Haiti, has seen a growing incursion of gangs into farmland, forcing farmers to abandon their crops and leaving the region with a devastating food insecurity crisis. Approximately 4.9 million people, or 44% of Haiti's total population, are facing severe food insecurity, with millions of children suffering from acute malnutrition.

The Gang Violence Impact Report estimates that nearly 66% of the population requires urgent humanitarian assistance. The rising tide of violence has made it extremely difficult for farmers to cultivate their lands, significantly affecting the country's agricultural output. There is widespread looting of agricultural products and property.



Political Impact

The emergence of the newly formed government under Prime Minister Garry Conille has failed to address the escalating gang violence, further increasing the influence of armed groups. Political instability continues to deepen as violence surges, resulting in local leaders seeking ways to cope. Citizens increasingly turn to self-defense groups, prompting further tensions between these groups and criminal organizations.

The weak response from the government and the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission has eroded public trust in government institutions and foreign interventions, complicating the prospects for restoring order and governance in the country.





Scenarios

Scenario 1: If current gang violence escalates further without an adequate response from the government and international community, it may lead to an even deeper humanitarian crisis, characterized by widespread violence and human rights abuses. The potential for civil unrest may increase as citizens become increasingly desperate for security and stability.

Scenario 2: In the event that the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission can effectively deploy resources and bolster local police capacity, this may lead to a gradual stabilization of the security situation. Increased humanitarian assistance and investment in local institutions could pave the way for rebuilding trust and governance.

Scenario 3: Continued ineffectiveness of government institutions and international interventions could foster the emergence of alternative governance structures, including self-defense groups gaining authority over territories. This would result in a fragmented state where non-state actors fill the void left by ineffective governance.



Conclusion

Haiti's ongoing gang violence presents an urgent challenge requiring coordinated efforts from the local government, international community, and civil society. The current situation highlights the need for sustained engagement to strengthen local institutions, enhance humanitarian assistance, and effectively combat armed gangs. Without immediate and decisive action, Haiti risks descending further into chaos and instability.



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