ORION FORUM

The Security and Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti and Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy

AUGUST 7, 2025

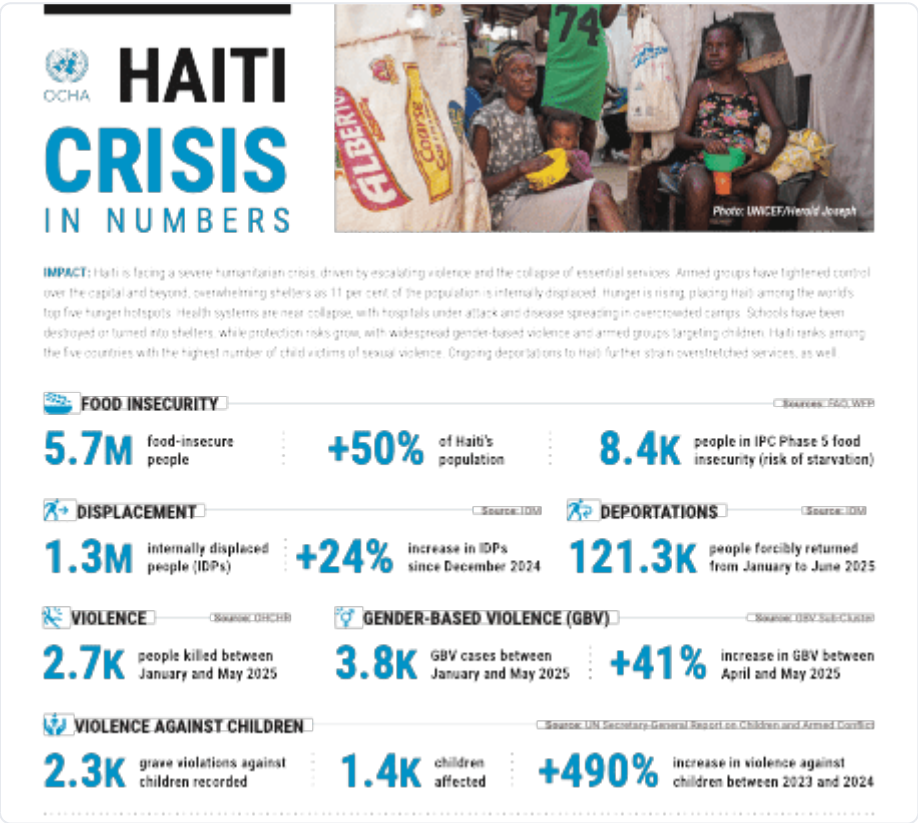
Haiti is on the verge of a total institutional collapse, with only 10% of the capital in control of the Haitian government—a government entrenched with corruption.[i] Instead, Haitian gangs are nearing total control of the capital and Haitian authorities can no longer combat the escalating violence.[ii] The current crisis goes beyond a scourge of gang violence as the gangs operate in parallel to the state, enabled by political instability, corruption, and weak institutions.[iii] Yet, international efforts have found little success in defining the reasons behind the current crises, which only further contributes to an inability to find an effective response. The U.S., and other international partners, need to recognize that an effective response does not involve sweeping political reform, but instead must focus on supporting local level security, access to humanitarian aid, and regional cooperation.

Map Sources: Natural Earth, OCHA, UNGIS.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Map created in Mar 2025.

When I first visited Haiti in 2019 with Parakaleo International, we flew into Port-au-Prince and were able to drive through the capital to Jacmel without issue. However, by the time I traveled to Haiti in January 2021, security issues had escalated to the extent that we could no longer safely travel through the capital and instead had to fly in a private plane to Jacmel, only a

fifteen-minute flight.

The assassination of President Moïse in July 2021 plunged the country into further turmoil, evolving into a full-scale security and humanitarian disaster.[i] Violent gangs have not only amassed control over most of the capital, but over illicit markets.[ii] In 2024 alone, gang violence contributed to the killing of more than 5,600 people.[iii] In addition, 5.4 million Haitians face acute food insecurity, with 1.64 million of those in emergency levels.[iv] Gangs have shut down hospitals or rendered them unusable, blocked roads, and imposed illegal taxes.[v] The below graphic shows a representation of the crisis as of June 2025.



These challenges have been further compounded by a history of vulnerability to natural disasters. Most notably, in 2008, the country was hit by four hurricanes, decimating agriculture and infrastructure critical to public health, education, and business. Then, in 2010, the country was hit by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake that directly impacted Port-au-Prince.[i] As a result, vital infrastructure remains fragile or nonexistent, with little hope of rebuilding.

The United States has long played a critical role in Haiti's political and security landscape. Since the early 1900's, there have been at least three direct interventions in Haiti, including a long stint of occupation by U.S. forces from 1915 to 1934.[i] While the U.S. and other international partners have continually intervened with rebuilding and responding to the ongoing humanitarian crisis, there has seemingly been little impact. In 2024, a Kenya-led, UN-authorized Multinational Security Support (MSS) Mission, that the U.S. helped to train and equip, was deployed. Yet in 2025, the security and political situation in Haiti has continued to deteriorate, with 2,700 killings between January and May alone.[ii] While the Biden administration sought to support Haiti by helping fund the MSS to address gang violence and promote security, more needs to be done.

However, because so many interventions by international partners have been unsuccessful, there is a hesitancy among U.S. politicians to lead a new international mission to Haiti. Yet, the Haitian government is in disarray, violence is rampant, and people are beyond starving.[iii] One of the foremost human rights defenders in Haiti, Pierre Esperance, said that Haiti needs "a functional government. An international force will not be able to solve the problem of political instability. At the same time, Haiti cannot wait. We are in hell".[iv] OCHA's country director for Haiti told the United Nations that "the rise of armed groups in Haiti and their increasing control of strategic locations, particularly major roads and ports of entry into the capital, is a major obstacle to the safe and efficient delivery of humanitarian aid".[v] Long-term stability in Haiti has never been achieved without security and security has never been achieved without international intervention.[vi]

The current crises plaguing Haiti offer an opportunity for the U.S. to reconsider its approach to interventions in Haiti. While past interventions offer lessons about the risks of overreach, the consequence of ignoring the present situation encourages a continued humanitarian crisis that worsens with each passing day. Where violence carried out by theses criminal organizations was once primarily within the capital, they are now spreading beyond the capital, where they "kill, rape, set fire to homes, and infiltrate all spheres of society", with over a million citizens now displaced.[vii]

High-level policy reforms will continue to fail if they are not grounded in the reality of the current state of Haiti. First and foremost, little can be achieved without an improved security situation. The absence of security, functional infrastructure, and a cohesive local government have made it nearly impossible to distribute foreign aid. Criminal groups control key roads and ports and reaching those in need is nearly impossible without increased security and trusted local actors. Therefore, effective policy must first focus on rebuilding foundational systems that allow aid, safety, and governance to take root.

Recommendations

1. **The U.S. should, with the support of key partners, implement the Organization of American States in support of the humanitarian crisis in Haiti and continue to provide financial support to the Multinational Security Support (MSS) Mission.** In October 2022, Haiti requested the deployment of an international force to help the Haitian National Police quell insecurity and facilitate humanitarian aid. Then, in July 2023, Kenya agreed to, upon approval of the UN Security Council, lead a multinational force in Haiti, sending up to 1,000 police. In October 2023, the UN Security Council authorized this multinational force, financed by voluntary contributions for 12 months. Deployment began in June 2024 and was extended through October 2, 2025. In February 2025, Secretary of State Marco Rubio agreed to distribute $40 million to the MSS mission despite the administration's foreign assistance pause. In May 2025, Secretary Rubio suggested that the MSS alone will not solve Haiti's problems and suggested that the Organization of American States play a larger role in coordinating a security mission in Haiti.[viii]
2. **The U.S. should invest in and support local law enforcement.** In April 2025, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) released a statement condemning criminal gangs and their plans to continue to use violence to seize power and compel a change in the government of Haiti. In response to this threat, CARICOM sought further assistance from international partners to urgently provide security assistance to Haiti. In support of this request, the U.S. should support local law enforcement through training and equipping the local forces. However, the U.S. should seek a more direct approach than routing assistance through non-governmental organizations, as much of this funding never reaches local

organizations. For example, since October 2023, the U.S. obligated more than $368 million in contracts and grants for activities in Haiti, but only 7.6% of this funding went directly to local organizations.[ix]

3. **The U.S. and international partners should establish third-party monitored systems for distributing aid and use technology to provide oversight and assistance.** To ensure aid reaches Haiti's most vulnerable populations and is not being diverted by corrupt individuals or members of violent criminal organizations, the U.S. should temporarily support the creation of humanitarian corridors[x], modeled after other conflict-affected areas like Yemen and Syria. These humanitarian corridors or safe passages are essentially agreements between parties of the armed conflict to allow for safe passage for a limited time in a specific geographic area. They can allow civilians to leave, humanitarian assistance to come in, or allow for the evacuation of the wounded, sick or dead.[xi] Once aid has been distributed to vulnerable populations through these temporary corridors, the U.S. should seek to establish a continuous, resilient network for aid delivery. These aid networks should be built to operate in fragile environments strife with insecurity and high risk of corruption. The networks for aid delivery should include protected access routes, actively secured by MSS and partner forces. Where implementing networks for aid delivery at ports or by land is not feasible, the U.S. should consider air drops, as was successfully used in South Sudan, Syria, and other conflict zones. In addition to using MSS and partner forces, the U.S. and international partners should consider the use of drones and satellite imagery to map the current environment of specific locations, identify both accessible and inaccessible areas that could be used for aid distribution, monitor choke points, and maintain a level of adaptability to ensure streamlined, uninterrupted aid distribution. Because aid in Haiti is often blocked or redirected by gangs or corrupt government officials, the U.S. and international partners should consider an approach that mitigates the likelihood of this happening, which increases the chance of aid getting to where it is needed when it is needed.
4. **Strengthen and Streamline Ethical International Adoption Pathways for Haitian Children**. Haitian law does not allow for Haitian children to travel to the U.S. to be adopted. Instead, prospective parents must obtain full and final adoption under Haitian law before

the child migrates to the United States.[xii] Haiti's laws prohibit adoptions in which arrangements are made between the biological parents and the prospective adoptive parents. Haiti will not approve adoptions where the child's biological parents or legal representatives expressly decide who will adopt their child.[xiii] "The Department of State continues to strongly advise prospective adoptive parents to reconsider intercountry adoptions from Haiti – particularly those who have not yet selected a country from which to adopt or those who have not yet been matched with a child from Haiti. Adoption from Haiti is a long process in a dangerous environment that impedes processing. Conditions in Haiti include protests, demonstrations, and roadblocks, as well as criminal activity involving firearms, assault, kidnappings, and carjackings".[xiv] Due to complex regulatory barriers and lack of institutional capacity, international adoption from Haiti is currently functionally inaccessible. In the face of the humanitarian crisis, the U.S. should work with Haitian authorities and trusted international partners to restore and streamline international adoption pathways for Haitian children who are legally eligible for adoption. As of 2023, more than 30,000 children in Haiti live in orphanages due to violence or out of necessity because their parents cannot afford to feed or protect them.[xv] However, international adoptions have been severely restricted despite high interest from American families. **The U.S. should also seek to expand emergency humanitarian adoption pathways for at-risk children without safe domestic alternatives.** While current Haitian law focuses on the adoption of children who have no viable domestic placement options, in light of escalating violence and systemic collapse in Haiti, U.S. policy should consider expanding adoption eligibility to include children who face serious risk within their domestic care environments, regardless of whether they have a legal guardian. This should include emergency exemptions to the standard adoption process to those with life-threatening or imminently dangerous situations. This would not undermine Haitian adoption laws or the principle of family unity, but would instead respond to extreme, and likely common, cases where inaction would expose the children to violence, trafficking, or death. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, several countries, including the U.S., have offered humanitarian parole to Ukrainian children. This allows orphans or those separated from their families to enter other countries for protection and care.[xvi] While not a permanent adoption, this

provides a pathway to safety for displaced children. Though the process of adoption is slow and complex, this allows a temporary solution that could potentially lead to adoption in the long-term.

Haiti's security and humanitarian crisis poses a difficult challenge with both regional and global implications. Years of political instability and heightened security issues, made worse by natural disasters, have eroded the country's institutions and displaced millions. Previous interventions by the U.S. and international partners, while well-intentioned, have struggled to address the root causes of the issues. For the U.S., the consequences of inaction are clear: escalating violence, regional destabilization, and a worsening humanitarian crisis. By prioritizing local-level security, ensuring effective and transparent aid delivery, and expanding protections for vulnerable Haitian children, the U.S. can help create the conditions necessary for stability and growth.

[i] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/14/what-is-the-history-of-foreign-interventions-in-haiti

[ii] https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/haiti/haiti-crisis-numbers-25-june-2025

[iii] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/14/what-is-the-history-of-foreign-interventions-in-haiti

[iv] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/14/what-is-the-history-of-foreign-interventions-in-haiti; https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/110326/witnesses/HMTG-116-FA07-Bio-EspranceP-20191210.pdf

[v] https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/07/1165533

[vi] https://www.stimson.org/2024/rethinking-the-international-response-to-haitis-security-crisis/; https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/02/the-world-at-war-the-flashpoints-that-the-west-ignores

[vii] https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/03/1161006

[viii] https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IN12331

[ix] https://cepr.net/publications/a-look-at-usaid-spending-in-haiti/

[x] https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/protection-of-civilians-and-access/nrc-corridors-explainer.pdf

[xi] https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/protection-of-civilians-and-access/nrc-corridors-explainer.pdf

[xii] https://ht.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/child-family-matters/adoption/

[xiii] https://ht.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/child-family-matters/adoption/

[xiv] https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/Intercountry-Adoption-News/the-department-of-state-advises-prospective-adoptive-parents-to-0.html

[xv] https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2023-06-13/30-000-haitian-kids-live-in-private-orphanages-officials-want-to-shutter-them-and-reunite-families#:~:text=Roughly%2030%2C000%20children%20out%20of,trafficking%2C%20forced%20labor%

[xvi] https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian_parole

[i] https://www.unops.org/news-and-stories/stories/building-a-resilient-haiti

[i] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57762246

[ii] https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IN12331

[iii] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667193X25000754

[iv] https://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/en/press/violence-in-haiti-drives-nearly-5-million-people-into-hunger-crisis/

[v] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667193X25000754#bib3

[i] https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/30/haiti-on-the-edge-of-collapse; https://international.ucla.edu/institute/article/285803

[ii] https://apnews.com/article/un-haiti-gangs-capital-violence-government-kenya-c14dd55725e2e415b794ab88b4184e65

[iii] https://warontherocks.com/2025/04/haiti-is-a-political-and-criminal-crisis-that-should-not-be-ignored/

Orion Policy Institute (OPI) is an independent, non-profit, tax-exempt think tank focusing on a broad range of issues at the local, national, and global levels. OPI does not take institutional policy positions. Accordingly, all views, positions, and conclusions represented herein should be understood to be solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of OPI.