

# QUO VADIS, HAITI? CAN THE KENYAN PEACE OPERATION RESUSCITATE A NATION IN CHAOS?

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## Abstract

The state of Haiti has seen several peace operations over the last few decades, yet it remains one of the most dangerous countries in the region. With a negative record in terms of gun violence and political assassinations, coupled with an ailing economy and an egregious healthcare and education system, the international community does not seem able to find an adequate solution to the myriad problems, nor can the state itself remedy the situation on its own. Amid such turmoil, Kenya has volunteered to send a unique police operation to the country that has obtained legal backing from the United Nations, funding from the United States, and support from the Organization of American States as well as CARICOM, along with their constituent member states. However, it is unclear how a relatively novel and small operation run by a country from another continent can alter local conditions. It is also yet to be seen if and how the operation compares to its previous iterations in Haiti, and whether the lessons from the moderate successes and loud failures were learnt.

**Keywords:** *peace operation, United Nations, Kenya, Haiti*

## Introduction

Haiti's name has become a synonym for a constant crisis, terrible conditions, and utter chaos. Earthquakes, economic crises, political assassinations, and gang wars may come to the reader's mind when Haiti came up in the media in recent years. The current situation is particularly troubling, as both the United Nations (UN) and neighboring states in the region have supported efforts to consolidate central power on several occasions, but for some reason, this has not resulted in long-term success. Based on the first year of the new Kenyan-led peace operation, the time is now ripe to draw conclusions about the mission's prospects.

This article is centered around three fundamental research questions. First, to what extent was it necessary to establish the peace operation in its current form and

what were some of the circumstances causing the UN, Kenya, and the United States (US) to decide on venturing into Haiti once again? Second, it needs to be observed how the operation compares to previous UN-lead peace operations on the western part of the island of Hispaniola, as past operations offer a conflicting record regarding the results they could achieve. Finally, based on the current mandate, resources, and overall situation, what can be realistically achieved by the operation in the following years? To address these questions, this study uses a historical introduction to depict the key events that have led the country to its current chaotic situation. This is followed by a short analysis of the three previous UN peace operations on the soil of Haiti with the goal of ascertaining where these missions went awry and what were some of the factors that have contributed to their limited successes, as well as reflecting on some of the shortcomings. In the last chapter, SWOT analysis is used to examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of (and faced by) the current Kenyan-led peace operation. Therefore, the methodology is historical, comparative, and SWOT, based on academic literature, a close examination of primary sources (in this case UN Security Council resolutions), and recent news outlets due to the highly volatile and rapidly changing nature of the events taking place in Haiti.

## **Brief Historical Overview**

To understand why Haiti is in such a position to seemingly always rely on international aid, it is necessary to observe how the country was transformed from one of the richest colonial domains into a state rife with strife and internal conflict. Some key components will be pinpointed here, which have directly affected the results that can be obtained during peace operations.

Located in the western half of the island of Hispaniola, the main French-speaking Haiti possesses a colorful history. In the War of Independence between 1791 and 1804, it obtained freedom from France as a result of heroic battles fought and won by slaves against their oppressors, but it still failed to win complete economic and political independence (Gonzalez, 2019). France carefully maintained Haiti's financial dependence, undermining the country for many decades, expecting – and extorting – a large amount of compensation due to the expropriation of plantations and liberation of slaves. Consequently, due to the persistent financial imbalance, the main political and administrative institutions have not solidified, so it was not possible to build public trust in them (Girard, 2010). The role of the United States cannot be ignored. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, President Theodore Roosevelt began to expand the influence of the USA via the "Big Stick" policy, and when Haiti resisted, the USA occupied Haiti for nearly two decades between 1915 and 1934 (Girard, 2010).

The following two decades saw and attempted coups until François Duvalier seized power in 1957 (Lundahl, 1989). After the death of the dictator known by the amicable epithet "Papa Doc" in 1971, the title of president remained in the family, with his son Jean-Claude Duvalier taking over the baton until his ousting in 1986. The rule of the Duvalier family could best be characterized by disabling any veritable opposition, blatant disregard of human rights, sky-high national debt, and further weakening of already weak institutions (Coupeau, 2004). By embezzling significant sums, the Duvalier family acquired a fabulous fortune, which they parked into foreign bank accounts, while more than half of the country's population continued to live in deep poverty (Nicholls, 1986). This is how the country, groaning under long foreign influence, but also exploited by its own dictators, turned from the richest colony into one of the poorest states in the Western world (Girard, 2010).

The first free elections were held in 1990, during which Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a former Catholic priest, managed to triumph. However, he could not enjoy his victory for a long time; as a year later, he was removed from power in a coup. Nonetheless, he returned to power in 1994, thanks to effective American support in this context, though US military interventions (Judson, 2001). Aristide also won the 1999 election, although the results were disputed by several observers. He was finally overthrown in 2004, but by then the country had descended into an anarchy: street violence and subsequent police abuse became commonplace, and the justice system was essentially non-functioning (Carey, 2005). In the following six years, it was not possible to establish a stable state apparatus, and in 2010, the country was hit by an earthquake of magnitude that was not seen before. The 2010 earthquake buried most of Haiti infrastructure. The international community has tried to rebuild the country via unparalleled cooperation, but some international actors have caused many problems along the way (Pierre-Louis, 2011). The most unfortunate example is the cholera strain brought into the country by Nepalese peacekeepers, which swelled into an epidemic that took the lives of nearly 10,000 people. Simply put, the peacekeepers deposited the waste to the Artibonite River, while tens of thousands of people have been relying on the river as a "fresh" source of water, thereby becoming infected. While the UN apologized for what happened almost six years later in 2016, the victims and their surviving family members had not been compensated or had the UN acknowledged its responsibility to this day (Hárs, 2023, pp. 79-83).

The situation was further complicated by the fact that, in 2011, Jean-Claude Duvalier returned from his exile in France and wanted to get involved in politics again. Although he was immediately indicted, he eventually died in 2014 without any court finding him guilty of his crimes against the civilian population (Dubois, *The New Yorker*, 2014). By the end of the 2010s, after a cavalcade of coups, not having a proper government, and disputed election results, Jovenel Moïse came to power in 2017. Moïse went from being a businessman dealing with banana exports to the velvet chair of the president as a firm-handed leader, but during his tenure, he was also

known for his authoritarian tendencies (Hauge, 2021). However, when he wanted to further concentrate power, he became the victim of an assassination attempt, in which his wife and his closest confidants and ministers were allegedly involved (Coto & Sanon, APNews, 2024).

Moïse's 2021 assassination plunged the country into a total anarchy (Djems, 2023). By 2024, Haiti was among the 10 most fragile states worldwide (Fragile States Index, 2025). This means it is in one of the worst conditions, where public security, human rights, or, simply put, public services are the least guaranteed – roughly on par with Yemen and Somalia. The political system has essentially fallen apart, as can be seen by the fact that 25 parties were represented in the last elections, fragmenting the political system of the country of approximately 11.5 million people to the extreme (Freedom House Country Report, 2024). It was quite telling of how conditions in the country have regressed that in March 2024, Jimmy Chérizier, the gang leader with the *nom de guerre* "Barbecue," called on acting president Ariel Henry to resign, to which he eventually complied (Phillips & Borger, The Guardian, 2024). During this spring, more than 53,000 people were forced to leave the capital, Port-au-Prince, and the number of children who fled internally or across borders reached 180,000 since the outbreak of gang violence (UNSC/15674, 2024).

The internal turmoil and wave of refugees maintain the region in a state of uncertainty, which is why several states in the region, such as Mexico (Statement of Mexico, 2024) and Brazil (Statement of Brazil, 2024), which have a significant history, interest, and experience in the Caribbean area, urged a solution, and the USA also offered its support (Avezov, 2013). It is worth returning to the geography of the island of Hispaniola, on the eastern side of which the Dominican Republic is in a much better position than Haiti. The reasons for this can be explained in terms of historical, economic, environmental, and investment backgrounds, but one thing is certain: it is vital for the Dominican Republic to resolve the situation as soon as possible, since the crisis in Haiti can easily spread to the eastern part of the island (Diamond, The Globalist, 2010). As a result of the rapidly worsening domestic situation, coupled with the interest of international actors in resolving the issue of Haiti, the time was ripe for a new form of international response, which took the form of a unique peace operation. Before examining the operation itself, it is essential to look into how peace operations in the past fared on Hispaniola Island.

## Previous peace operations in Haiti

To date, the UN has participated in three major operations to support Haiti and improve the security situation. Between 1993 and 1996, the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) was conducted. Between 2004 and 2017, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) took place, and between 2017 and 2019, the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti

(MINUJUSTH) was established to aid the country. Considering the current conditions and the continuous political, economic, and societal chaos, we could immediately conclude that the operations certainly could not have been successful, since if they were, the country would be in a better state. However, reality is, by no means, purely black or white. Even if the first three UN operations were not entirely successful, we do not know how much worse Haiti's situation would have been if international aid had not arrived.

### ***UNMIH (1993-1996)***

The first operation, UNMIH, was established in 1993 by the Security Council Resolution 867 (UNSC Res. 867/1993). At first glance, the operation retained traditional, observer roles similar to first-generation peace operations such as Cyprus (UNFICYP), India-Pakistan (UNMOGIP), and the Middle East (UNTSO) (Kenkel, 2013). However, the increased number of personnel was a novel element: the operation, which was maximized at approximately 1,330 people, already exceeded the average of 100-400 people both in terms of tasks and in the number of teams, which shows a greater degree of participation and commitment on the part of the UN. Later, this number increased significantly, and at its peak, the number of operations employed was close to 7,000. The operation was able to show limited success in the field of training the police forces, which was also proven by the peaceful 1994 elections, but it did not result in deeper institutional and political reforms. This can be attributed to the fact that the operation was not created to carry out reforms. In addition, Haiti's leadership did not show any serious inclination towards more comprehensive political and institutional changes. The three-year period was followed by a transitional year between 1996-1997, when the UN gradually scaled back the operation and acknowledged partial successes as well as the relative calmness of the political situation, withdrawing its forces step-by-step from the territory of Haiti.

### ***MINUSTAH (2004-2017)***

The operation with the largest number of peacekeepers in terms of the maximum enabled by the Security Council and the longest operating period in the history of Haiti was MINUSTAH, which was operated between 2004 and 2017. It was established with a wide mandate and scope of tasks befitting a true, third-generation peace operation (Michael, 2011). Security Council Resolution 1542, which established the mission, maximized the number of international forces at 8,322, which was well beyond available or prior resources. This number was further augmented after 2010 when around 13,000 peacekeepers were tasked with aiding local police in the maintenance of Haiti (UNSC Res. 1927/2010). It should be noted that like

other operations, the mission was never fully staffed with civilian and military personnel. In terms of tasks, MINUSTAH had its work cut out. In addition to supporting the political process, training the police force and the coast guard, and protecting the civilian population, it was entrusted with ensuring the protection of human rights. It is obvious that a few thousand peacekeepers are not able to fulfil all these tasks alone, even if the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of American States (OAS) also stood behind the operation, and Brazil applied to lead the military component of the operation and provide most of the armed military component (Kenkel, 2010). At this point, it would be almost cliché to refer to a lack of resources, which nevertheless proved to be an important factor, but the biggest problem was the lack of a stable central authority based on political agreements, with which effective, long-term results could be achieved in cooperation (Ciorciari, 2022). In addition to governments following one another in quick succession, street riots, and deteriorating economic indicators, there was little room for maneuvering for the international forces participating in the operation. The 2010 earthquake had catastrophic consequences, and most certainly the cholera epidemic brought in by UN peacekeepers as well as the sexual crimes committed by aid workers did not help either (Pardy & Alexeyeff, 2023). This led to the civil population completely losing trust in international actors (Daugirdas, 2015). Since both foreign and domestic politics were dominated by disillusionment among locals, it was difficult to restore cooperation, hope, and faith in a positive future (King et al. 2021). In 2017, after successful democratic elections, the Security Council decided that it was time to close the gates and scale back the operation. Finally, the situation in Haiti seemed to stabilize. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case.

### *MINUJUSTH (2017-2019)*

Operation MINUJUSTH was established for a short-term, transitional, 2-year period. The Security Council deemed the operation of MINUSTAH to be a success (at least officially), arguing that the mission had in fact managed to avoid a civil war and that reconstruction after the 2010 earthquake was proceeding at an appropriate pace (UN Press Release, MINUSTAH, 2017). However, the handover was far from being smooth. Many uncertainties arose regarding the exact tasks of the new operation, as the Security Council defined the content of the mandate broadly in many cases (UNSC Res. 2350/2017, Art. 5, 11, 13). The primary goal was to ensure the rule of law, but there were no concrete steps to achieve this, which led to the fact that the peacekeeping team, which had now been maximized to 1,300 people, had to figure out what to do on the spot. Another issue was that the two-year period was particularly short, given that it included the handover period in connection with the previous mission, as well as the complete withdrawal of the troops by 2019. In the slim, one-year time period in between, there was no real opportunity to carry out



comprehensive reforms. The third major problem was the lack of cooperation with the host state caused by the Haitian government's lack of interest in making deep-rooted changes. Despite the fact that the mission advocated steps to curb corruption in the police force and efforts to guarantee the independence of the judiciary, their proposals fell on the deaf ears (Razza, 2018). However, there is a consensus both internationally and in the literature that peacekeepers alone cannot build a state or reshape the relations of the host state but merely provide a background, framework, and safe environment in which the state can make the decisions that it deems necessary to secure its future.

The key to lasting peace in Haiti and in the case of other peace operations is, on the one hand, adequate resources and international support, and on the other hand, gaining the trust of the local population and central government. It also helps substantially if the mandate contains precisely formulated goals. During the first three operations, these conditions, which appear simple in principle but are often difficult to implement in practice, were not fulfilled.

### **The Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti (MSS)**

In September 2023, Haiti's transitional government appealed directly to the UN for help. By then, there were only 9,000 active police forces left, which is extremely small in a country with 11.5 million people. The mandate was created by Security Council Resolution 2699 (UNSC Res. 2699/2023), and lately, it was reinforced by Security Council resolution 2751 in September 2024 (UNSC Res. 2751/2024). The MSS is fundamentally different from previous operations. Although there have been examples of cooperation with certain states or international organizations (for example, with the EU in connection with Kosovo or with the African Union in the case of Somalia), "outsourcing" to a state, especially in the case of a police operation, is by no means considered standard practice (Coleman & Nyblade, 2018, p. 737). In the 2010s, when the UN and the host state saw a significant police component as justified, the military and civilian sides of the operation were supplemented; however, the creation of an entirely new, non-UN-led mission was not considered. However, this new solution is a double-edged sword, as both the possibility of change and the glory of success, as well as the responsibility and burden of failure, rest on Kenya's shoulders.

The focus of the mandate cannot be narrowed to police activities and strengthening public safety. A much more thoroughly delineated range of tasks falls on the shoulders of peacekeepers than during previous missions (see MINUSTAH). We see two main areas of activity: on the one hand, direct cooperation with police forces (operational support) and on the other, the delivery of humanitarian supplies to their destination. The mandate clearly calls for the protection of the civilian population, observance and enforcement of human rights, and prevention and punishment

of sexual crimes. However, the question is how much the latter will be emphasized in addition to the main objective of the elimination of armed gangs. A potential disadvantage is that it does not have the same unquestionable international legitimacy as a UN-led operation, even if the mandate was issued by the UN. Seeing the resentment of the population towards the UN, which was caused by the side effects of previous missions, it is possible that this is not even a problem, but rather can be seen as positive. We see a very interesting division of labor: Kenya provides most of the manpower, some organizations in the region, such as the Organization of Caribbean States and the Organization of American States, support it, and the USA covers the costs estimated at 600 million US dollars annually, of which 85 million USD was received by the UN-administered trust fund by the end of 2024 (Stimson, 2024). The first 400 Kenyan peacekeepers arrived in the country by the end of June 2024. The reason for this is that the Kenyan opposition tried to put the government in crosshairs through the courts and challenged the government's decision to order the mission in the higher courts. Thus, the anomaly arose that there was a valid and effective resolution ordered by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the Charter. This means that all 193 states of the UN are obliged to cooperate with regard to the implementation; however, it was not possible to implement the provisions of the mandate for more than half a year because the decision of a domestic court had delayed deployment until the end of the constitutional review of the government's decision.

The question arises as to why Kenya does so? Is it worth sending hundreds, and hopefully thousands, of police officers to a state located on another continent that has negligible economic relations in the region, while the government's decision to join the operation causes significant tension in its internal politics? From a financial point of view, the answer can be found in the fact that participation in a peace operation is, in most cases, very worthwhile for the so called 'contributing state' to send peacekeepers. Participants in the operation receive their salary from the UN, a smaller or larger part of which is skimmed by the state under costs, expenses, and other headings. This situation is somewhat different however, as the US bears the expenses, which does not change the essence: the peacekeepers earn more than if they were acting as "field" policemen at home, and the state also shares directly in the profit. In addition, owing to limited spending options, peacekeepers usually spend most of their salaries in their own country. From the point of view of international relations, Kenya commits to the US, which in itself is a significant advantage, as is the defense agreement concluded by the US and Kenya, in which the US undertook to support the African country with weapons and money in the fight against Al-Shabaab, among other things. Furthermore, Kenya can form a favorable image of itself in the states of the region, which can be very useful for later diplomatic maneuvers (e.g., campaigns to obtain non-permanent membership in the Security Council). The current position is also favorable for the US, as the latter does not



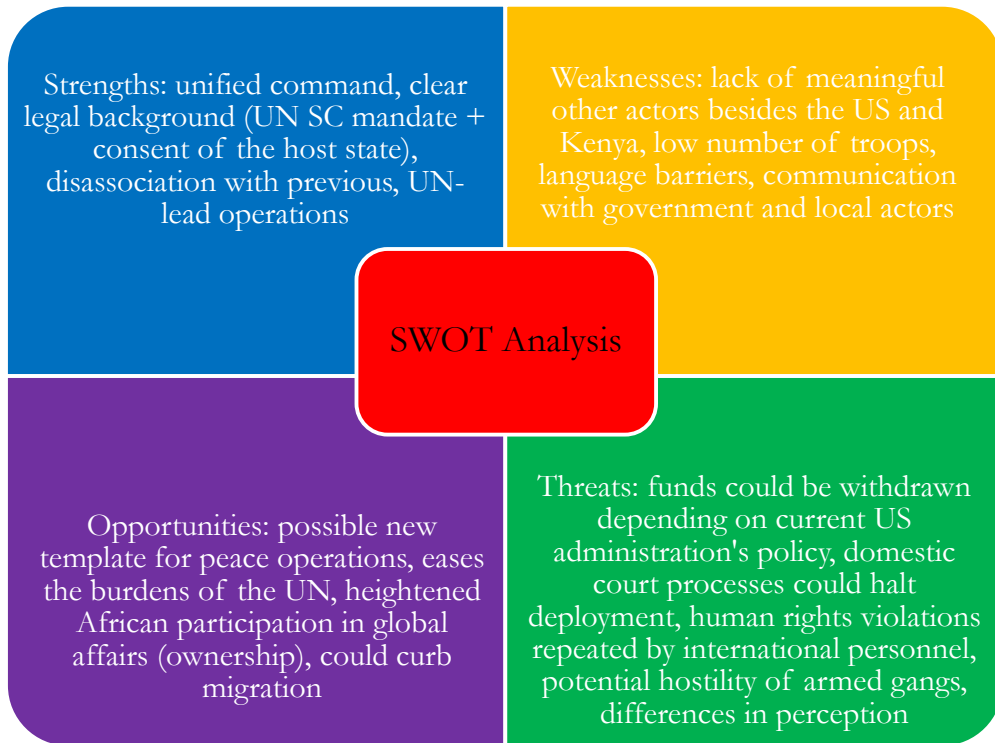
risk the lives of its own people, but it can still make its influence felt in the region with a financial expenditure that is not exactly debilitating for the number one economy in the world. In addition, this subtle exercise of power is less irritating to states in regions that are sensitive to American influence, such as Cuba.

Another aspect of the mission worth noting is the time factor: the expected lifetime of the operation. While it is common knowledge that peace operations will obtain their mandate for a year or half a year, the 'life expectancies' of operations can and do differ. This is a technique on the part of the Security Council, which is used at least once a year to assess whether there is still a demand for the operation on the part of the host state, and on the other hand, whether there is support from the side of the international community. Of course, the UN also has the opportunity to refine the mandate, increasing or decreasing the authorized number of peacekeepers, and changing the goals with which it responds to the changes that have occurred in the field during the last year. Overall, it can be said that operations shorter than 3-4 years are rare; they were mostly typical of second-generation peace operations in Angola, Mozambique, and Cambodia in the 1990s and the 2000s, where the democratic transition aided the UN blue helmets. Modern third-generation operations usually operate for 10-15 years (Mali: 10 years, Sudan: 13 years, Ivory Coast: 13 years, and Liberia: 15 years). In connection with Haiti, we saw a shorter mission (MINUJUSTH = 2 years) and a longer mission (MINUSTAH = 13 years). However, it is not clear how local conditions will develop, and to what extent the support of the international community (especially the USA and Kenya) can be maintained, both in terms of human and financial contributions. For Kenya, continued support depends heavily on domestic political conditions and also on losses suffered during the operation. If more police were to lose their lives, the voices advocating for them to come home would intensify, as we saw in 1992-1993 after the involvement and sacrifices of the US in Somalia.

## Perspectives

Although it could appear as an alien tool to international relations, in this particular instance, SWOT analysis could serve as the best method for analyzing the prospects, dangers, and opportunities that lie with the MSS by categorizing and presenting the most convincing arguments in a logical and consumable manner.

**Table 1. SWOT analysis on the MSS**



Source: author's own compilation.

### ***Strengths***

A major strength of the Kenya-led peace operation is its unified command structure. Traditionally, the UN needs to balance not only the leadership style of various contingent commanders, but also the distinctly different training and divergent national interests of contributing states. Having a singular leading state can be beneficial in this regard by reducing intraoperational squabbling. In other words, having a single leading state can also be detrimental if the state contradicts the provisions of the mandate. In some cases, this can lead to disasters, as was seen with the catastrophic intervention of the Dutch government in the protection of civilians' mandates in Bosnia, which led to the massacre in Srebrenica in 1995 (Dannenbaum, 2012). This is a different scenario; however, at this time, there is no overarching UN authority with Kenya essentially given free rein to interpret the formative UN Security Council resolution, as it deems fit.

The legal background is also clear by the operation having distinct UN Security Council authorization. The 'source and oversight' role of the Security Council is also kept by the regular reviews of the operation, which in practice can mean that the Security Council could terminate the operation or change the contents of the

mandate on a whim. On the one hand, as with other operations, it enables the Security Council to adapt the mandate in case circumstances on the ground change or if the consent of the host state is withdrawn. On the other hand, this *modus operandi* ensures that other permanent members can curb any possible excess by the US. Disruption can work in both ways; however, because of how the veto works in the Council.

Consent is the other cornerstone here and, at first glance, it is in order as previous governments, such as the one led by Ariel Henry, have repeatedly asked the UN for support. The acting government has raised no objections in this regard; however, whether an un-elected, acting presidential council can legitimately provide consent to the deployment of foreign troops in its territory is another matter entirely (Passmore et al., 2022).

It is also a substantial boon for the MSS to distance itself from and disassociate from previous operations that have not been deemed successful by the local population. Indeed, the UN's eroded reputation on the western half of the island of Hispaniola did not offer much in terms of prospects for a UN-led peace operation, and the UN itself has consecutively ruled out 'direct' engagements of blue helmets in the country, providing the MSS with a clean slate. Nonetheless, the establishment of a support office was put forward in February 2025 by UN Secretary-General António Guterres (Besheer, VOA News, 2025).

### **Weaknesses**

The most obvious weakness of the operation is the low number of troops. Four hundred Kenyan personnel deployed over a year can feel like a drop in the ocean. Let us not forget that a country with an estimated population of 11.6 million where 6 thousand peacekeepers have been insufficient for decades in an arguably safer situation and lower rate of gang violence now receive a few hundred troops to eliminate the gangs and restore law and order. The very same gangs that have been armed to the teeth and with former police leading them and who possess considerable knowledge on how to preserve their illegal, clandestine operations, while Kenyan forces with limited knowledge of the local environment may not have sufficient reach or impact (Mohor et al., The New Humanitarian, 2025).

Other actors besides the US and Kenya have not been keen to turn statements of support into actual support in the field. CARICOM has been one such actor that continues to attempt to encourage its members to act with limited success, which can be felt by the fact that only six of the 150 personnel pledged by the Bahamas have arrived (Le Nouvellist, 2025). Meanwhile, a promising development could be seen in January and February 2025, as 150 Guatemalan forces and 70 from El Salvador arrived in Haiti to begin assisting the Kenyan forces stationed in the country (ICTJ, 2025). Needless to say, the operation would require thousands more to stand

a chance at eliminating armed gangs destabilizing the country. The optimistic pledge by Kenyan President William Ruto that Kenya will send 2500 peacekeepers by the end of 2025 appears to be unrealistic given the pace of deployment over the last one and a half years (Mohor et al., *The New Humanitarian*, 2025).

Other actors, such as the European Union, could have a pivotal moment by showing that the EU is an international player to be taken into consideration. EU-LEX Kosovo's experiences could prove to be a valuable asset in consolidating public administration and judicial apparatus (Zupančič et al., 2018). However, that know-how is much better suited to be applied after armed hostilities have ceased, that is, if and after the peace operation is successful in eliminating gang control and influence. Second, even though the EU (European Commission White Paper, 2025) and Germany (Euronews, 2025) have both announced additional investments in invigorating the military-industrial complex, it is undeniable that these initiatives are aimed at securing the European continent itself from Russian aggression, especially in light of US hesitancy towards NATO commitments. Therefore, the EU is unlikely to engage in any venture in Haiti for the time being.

Language use can also be an issue, as the primary languages spoken in Haiti are French and Creole. However, this is not understood by the majority of Kenyan peacekeepers who mostly speak English and Swahili. Therefore, communication with the local population – at least initially – is difficult; the problem can only be partially remedied by involving interpreters, as it is not expected that an interpreter will accompany the peacekeepers on each patrol. However, in the age of artificial intelligence, even a simple Google translator can help substantially, provided peacekeepers have the right communication technology. Still, the UN has considerable expertise in dismantling the language barrier in multinational peace operations, and the possible establishment of a support office in 2025 can help the MSS bridge the gap efficiently.

Communication with the central government and the local population also deserves mention, as this is the only way to avoid a situation such as the cholera epidemic caused by Nepalese peacekeepers polluting the Artibonite River. Concurrently, contact and cooperation also affect information security. The peacekeepers cannot know which of the local police forces are 'whispering' to the gangs, that is, who collude for financial gain with the forces interested in maintaining anarchy. If peacekeepers share information with the locals, they can undermine the success of the operation. On the other hand, if they withhold information and do not coordinate with the local police, it can have negative consequences, as was the case in the past when peacekeepers attacked the armed gangs, but as an additional loss, several civilians lost their lives, a total of about 20 during the 13 years of MINUSTAH. It should be noted that 187 peacekeepers also lost their lives during this time, so Haiti cannot be called a safe place. Prior knowledge of local conditions and continuous communication with locals are essential for the success of the mission.

## Opportunities

Despite the potential weaknesses, as seen above, and the looming threats described below, if the Kenyan peace operation is successful, it can open a new chapter in the history of peace operations. By serving as a new template in which the UN provides a legal background and oversees financial contributions by member states, it can reinvigorate an aging structure. It is worth remembering that besides the MSS, there have not been any new peace operations for almost a decade due to a general lack of interest by member states (such as EU members), lack of consent by the host state (e.g., Venezuela), or because other crises have diverted the attention of states (the Covid-19 pandemic, Russian aggression in Ukraine, or Israeli-Hamas conflict in the Middle East to name a few). A prolonged Kenyan presence in the Caribbean region would mean that a major African country is stepping up on its commitment to international peace and security at the global level. In turn, this could lead to what we call 'ownership' of responsibility for resolving a situation. In the long run, a substantial engagement in Haiti will mean that Africa is no longer just the main host continent of peace operations, but can meaningfully contribute to conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction in other continents as well.

**Map 1. Migration patterns and resulting Haitian population in the wider American region.**



Source: Migration Policy Institute, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/haitian-migration-through-americas>, last accessed on 09.11.2025.

Migration is a major phenomenon that is a direct result of instability and gang violence in Haiti. By stopping armed gangs and providing a safe and secure environment for the civilian population, a portion of those who have fled the country could be convinced to return, and future migration could be significantly reduced. This was a palpable and proven side effect of successful peace operations, such as those in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia (UNHCR, 2022). Since most refugees are taking on either the northern route which consists of 'island hopping' with self-tinkered rafts towards the US or taking the land route via Mexico or refugees would take the southern route which has as its most preferential destinations Brazil (Dias et al., 2020) and Chile (Thomázy, 2021). It is worth noting that either route is deadly for refugees themselves, and even if they reach their desired destinations, integration into local society is often not without problems (Uebel & da Silva, 2019). States along the route of Haitian refugees would also benefit from a reduction in the number of refugees, which, in turn, would reinforce the security of the countries in question (Thomázy, 2021).

### *Threats*

In the strengths section, it was proposed that the legal status of the operation is clear because of the firm mandate and consent of the host state. However, it is noteworthy that consent was not given by the armed gangs themselves who control many major chokepoints in the country. On the one hand, this is not a problem, as the goal of the operation is to eliminate or at least reduce the stranglehold on Haiti. Parallels could be drawn with Mali, where the goal of the operation was to cause Ansar Dine to withdraw from the area and their consent was not requested or required (UNSC Res. 2100/2013, Art. 4, 29). On the other hand, if these armed gangs look at Kenyan and Caribbean peacekeepers as enemies, there is a palpable outcome that they will be shot at, similar to how in Somalia in 1992-1993, where not all of the local warlords have given their consent and blessing to the US-led operation (Recchia, 2018). There, the results were a large number of dead peacekeepers, which is not an outcome that the US, UN, and Kenya wish to see repeatedly.

The most prevalent threat faced by the operation came from within the US and Kenya, respectively. On the US side, the second Trump administration was quick to eliminate foreign aid and halted the work of the USAID (Steakin & Bruggeman, 2025). While financial support for the MSS is currently not threatened, there is no indication that the US would be committed to long-lasting financial support in the current environment (Wasike, 2025). Indeed, it highlights the fragility of the operation in that the ebb and flow of financial contributions from the largest donor can make or break the mission. From the Kenyan side, it is unheard that troop deployment sanctioned by the Security Council is halted by a domestic court, even if it is done at the highest level, which illustrates how local processes and the hostility



of the opposition towards the operation can stymie the mission at any point (Blaise, 2025).

By taking reins from the UN's hands, Kenya also assumed responsibility. In other words, if, as in previous operations, sexual abuse occurs, the burden of investigating it and punishing the perpetrators rests with Kenya. However, it is a fact that the local civilian population has little chance to enforce their demands of this kind. This would only be possible if Kenya created the appropriate channels for reporting abuse and if there was a political will to hold perpetrators accountable. However, according to our current information, we cannot establish this, especially because no report has been received from either the UN or Kenya, and there has not yet been a scandal of such magnitude that the media would have picked up.

However, it is important that the Kenyan police force, which is not exactly known for its subtle methods and integrity, only uses armed violence as a last resort and only when it is not civilians but gang members. The complexity of the situation is shown by the fact that Jimmy Cherizier, who advanced from the police to gang leaders and was put on the UN Security Council's sanctions list, threatened the peacekeepers in August of this year, and if they violated the human rights of the civilian population, he and his gang would act against them with weapons. Success is highly doubtful; if we consider raw power alone, especially since, by some estimates, the gangs control significant portions of the country's territory, number in the tens of thousands, and possess weapons that give them much more firepower than peacekeepers. However, it can be advantageous that peacekeepers are currently under the command of a single state, as this enables them to coordinate their activities effectively. Meanwhile, gangs compete with each other and operate in dozens of smaller and larger groups.

The last thing to contemplate lies in how the operation is perceived by locals, the international community, and Kenya itself. While it was the government of Haiti itself that appealed to the UN in the first place, based on what happened in previous operations, long-term support of the government can prove to be elusive. A threat emerges when we contrast how the Kenyan government and international community observe the current status of the operation. From the Kenyan side, according to the *note verbale* submitted by the Kenyan government to the UN Security Council on July 10, 2025, the operation has succeeded in – inter alia – “holding the government together,” “training of 750 at the re-opened Police Academy,” “arrests, interception and recovery of arms and ammunition from the gangs,” “re-opening of businesses,” “decreases in cases of kidnappings and extortions” (3<sup>rd</sup> Report on the MSS to Haiti p. 23). Kenyan media has since corroborated these claims in various reports, touting the success of the Kenyan-led operation as an exemplary mission with palpable achievements (Osoro, 2025, Cerullo, 2025). In contrast, international outlets and think tanks have pointed out pitfalls, financial and legal insecurity, and lack of measurability regarding the results and some of the losses Kenya has suffered

(Kiage, 2025, efe.com, St. Kitts & Nevis Observer). This contrast in the narrative poses a threat by itself as the narratives diverge. While it is understandable for political reasons that the Kenyan government is attempting to rally the population behind a successful foreign venture, omitting the negative side of the balance sheet and the international media's overrepresentation of the fault lines remains equally detrimental.

## Conclusion

Re-iterating the answers to the research questions proposed in the introductory part of the paper, it can be safely assessed that this was not only the best but also the very last moment where Haiti can be caught falling into the chasm of anarchy. Whether it was the last moment though or did the international community wait too long before deployment will be seen in the coming months. Compared to previous operations, the mandate is very ambitious, maybe even unrealistic, and taking into account the much lower number of troops, it is indeed questionable how much the UN has learned from the past three operations. However, it could be argued that the organization was not left with many alternatives.

As the saying goes: "a swallow does not make a summer." Using this analogy, Kenya and the few hundred police it sent will almost certainly not be enough on their own to pull Haiti back from the brink. Achieving partial success would already be considered a huge achievement, with which the states of the region could be persuaded to cooperate more and play a more active role. Otherwise, a more effective military intervention would be necessary, as none of the states are currently willing to do so. Alternatively, this is the worst scenario—the international community will leave Haiti alone and thereby perpetuate a crisis situation with its security, migration, and other problems, permanently destabilizing the region. We hope that the first version will prevail in the future. However, the key to resolving this issue lies in continued US funding, rapid deployment of Kenyan forces, and other members of the international community who can meaningfully contribute to the operation by sending troops and providing financial support. Should the "MSS experiment" work out, we can see a new type of peace operation, whereas if it fails, there are not many volunteers to help Haiti and Kenya might be dissuaded from taking part in restoration efforts in other continents for a prolonged period of time.

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