

UN Engagement and the Multinational Forces in Haiti

Haiti (1990-2001 and 2004-present)

Between 1990 and 2004, the UN was involved in a broad range of democracy promotion and state-building activities in Haiti, many of which involved the use of enforcement measures against various Haitian actors. The UN's engagement came in two waves: from 1990 to 2001 and from 2004 onwards. Its activities included electoral monitoring (1990), several peacekeeping and rule of law operations (1994-2001, and 2004-present), the imposition of sanctions supported by a naval blockade (1993-4), and the delegation of Chapter VII powers to two US-led multinational forces (MNF) – one in 1994 and another in 2004 (Morris 1995; Malone 1998; Malone and von Einsiedel 2007). The Haitian case is interesting not least because it remains the only instance of the Security Council authorizing the use of military force to restore democracy within a member state. It is also an important case study for understanding the relationship between the Council and other actors on matters of peace enforcement, notably the United States and the Organization of American States (OAS).

On 16 December 1990, Jean Bertrand Aristide was elected President of Haiti, thus breaking a 186-year period of autocratic rule within the country. Despite securing 67 percent of the vote in UN-observed elections, Aristide was overthrown by a military coup d'état on 30 September 1991. The military junta subsequently conducted widespread political violence (including murders, extra-judicial executions and enforced disappearances) directed primarily at Aristide's supporters.

The initial international response to the coup was mixed. The OAS immediately condemned the coup. This was primarily because earlier that year the OAS Council had proclaimed its Santiago Declaration which committed the

organization to uphold democracy in its region (see Acevedo 1993). The UN General Assembly also condemned the coup and called for Aristide's reinstatement. Faced with Chinese and Indian opposition to direct involvement, the Security Council, however, failed to pass a resolution and instead issued a presidential statement condemning the coup. The OAS first attempted to negotiate a resolution to the crisis and when this failed imposed voluntary sanctions upon Haiti. However, mainly because of Haiti's porous border with the Dominican Republic but also partly because the US government unilaterally declared US-owned firms in Haiti to be exempt, OAS sanctions failed to restore Aristide and helped to further impoverish the poorest Haitians (Morris 1995: 395). The General Assembly proved similarly ineffective and in June 1993 the Security Council was persuaded to take action by the Secretary-General, his Special Envoy and the so-called Group of Friends (initially Canada, France, Venezuela and the US, and after 1994, also Argentina and Chile).

For its part, the Security Council initially imposed an oil and arms embargo against Haiti under resolution 841 of 16 June 1993. It later authorized a peacekeeping force, UNMIH, to modernize the Haitian armed forces and establish a new police force in resolution 867 of 23 September 1993. However, upon its arrival outside Port-au-Prince on 11 October, the peacekeeping force onboard the *USS Harlan County* did not disembark when confronted by a crowd of armed thugs gathered at the harbour. The thugs were reportedly paid by the military junta and prevented the peacekeepers from disembarking by screaming "We are going to turn this into another Somalia!" (Malone 1998: 175; Malone and von Einsiedel 2007: 172). This threat had particular resonance in Washington given that it was just over a week since 18 of its soldiers had been killed in Mogadishu. Instead of deploying UNMIH, the UN re-imposed its oil

and arms embargo and in May 1994 adopted a comprehensive set of sanctions against the country.

The impasse that developed was only resolved by the Security Council's decision to authorize a US-led MNF under resolution 940 of 31 July 1994. This was made possible by three key developments (Malone 1998). First, in early January, Aristide eventually agreed to the use of external military force in his country. Second, Boutros-Ghali's preferred solution was a US-led coalition similar to UNITAF in Somalia. This was primarily because of the difficulties involved with UN blue helmet operations trying to engage in large displays of military force. And, third, the US agreed to a military response in the face of mounting numbers of Haitian refugees and concerted pressure from the Black Congressional caucus not to seek accommodation with the military junta. Although Resolution 940 attracted some criticism, notably from Brazil and China, the Security Council's blessing eased the majority of Latin American fears about US imperialism in the region. Resolution 940 represented the first instance of the Security Council authorizing the use of force to effect the restoration of democracy within a member state. It was also the first time that the US had sought Security Council authorization for the use of force within the Western hemisphere, in sharp contrast to its earlier interventions in Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989-90) (Morris 1995; Malone 1998).

As it turned out, while the MNF was in the process of intervening the *de facto* government was persuaded to step down by a three-man US mission led by former President Jimmy Carter and sanctioned by President Clinton. The 'Carter Mission' generated significant controversy not least because Aristide felt it deprived him of a victory over his military rivals, it was conducted behind the UN's back, and it gave undue legitimacy to the *de facto* junta and its supporters. Nevertheless, it did facilitate

the unopposed deployment of the MNF at a time when casualties, especially US casualties, could have adversely affected the mission's chances of success (Malone 1998: 111-12, 118).

The MNF that conducted Operation Uphold Democracy comprised of 20,000 US soldiers plus another 2,000 troops recruited from 19 other countries. It deployed on 19 September 1994 and was preceded by the dropping of leaflets in Creole and French explaining the purpose of the mission. In part thanks to the Carter Mission, the military deployment in Haiti was relatively smooth with the MNF only encountering one instance of resistance (a fire-fight on 24 September which left 10 Haitians dead). By 12 October de facto President Jonassaint resigned. Three days later Aristide returned and the UN lifted all the measures it had imposed against Haiti. UNMIH formally took over from the MNF on 31 March 1995 to resume its expanded mandate of supporting the legitimate Haitian government fulfil its democratic responsibilities.

The next six years witnessed the deployment of a sequence of UN peace operations which gradually became smaller and more focused in their mandates. These included several policing operations which are discussed in chapter 18. The UN's attempts to promote democracy were, however, plagued by a series of constitutional crises in Haiti as a variety of domestic actors competed for dominance. In the face of a collapsing economy and with little evidence of progress in reforming the country's governance structures, almost all the remaining US soldiers left Haiti in January 2000. Later that year, Aristide was elected president in deeply controversial elections which saw only a 10 percent turnout rate. By the end of the following year, the rest of the UN's personnel had withdrawn, leaving the OAS to take the lead.

It was not long, however, before Haiti once again descended into a political crisis that prompted another series of UN-authorized enforcement measures. In early

2004, after several years of clashes between Aristide's supporters and their main political opponents, armed conflict broke out in the city of Gonaïves. Aristide's decision back in early 1995 to disband the Haitian army left him without a suitable means of defence. (Indeed, many of the militia now facing him were well-armed former members of the armed forces.) The violence thus quickly spread across the country and the anti-Aristide militias soon closed in on Port-au-Prince and threatened to march on the capital. The ensuing turmoil prompted the OAS to call upon the Security Council to take action to address the situation.

On 29 February 2004 two important developments occurred. First, Aristide left Haiti for exile on a US aircraft. After initially arriving in the Central African Republic he moved to Jamaica a few weeks later. Although several Caribbean leaders were angry at what some saw as Washington's 'kidnapping' of Aristide, their efforts to secure a UN-led investigation into the events leading to Aristide's departure were blocked by the United States and France. A transitional government run by an international technocrat, Gérard Latortue, was installed to govern the country until elections were held in 2006. These saw Aristide's former associate René Préal elected to power (Malone and von Einsidel 2007: 185-88). The second key development was the Security Council's decision to authorize the deployment of a nearly 3,000 strong multinational interim force composed of troops from the US (1,800), France (530), Chile (330) and Canada (150). This stabilization force kept order in the capital for three months before being replaced by the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH. Under Security Council resolution 1542 of 30 April 2004, MINUSTAH was given an authorized strength of over 1,600 police and over 6,700 troops. Many of the soldiers were provided by states from within the region, notably Brazil, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina. MINUSTAH's Chapter VII mandate

included providing a 'secure and stable environment,' police reform, DDR measures, assisting in the political transition process, and protecting 'civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, within its capabilities and areas of deployment'.

After the US and French forces had departed Haiti by the end of June 2004, MINUSTAH was forced to grapple with a series of violent outbursts involving a variety of Haitian armed gangs. In late 2004, MINUSTAH responded by conducting raids against militia leaders residing in the slums of Port-au-Prince. Since then, MINUSTAH has been engaged in a constant struggle to bring stability to Haiti, primarily by working with the Haitian National Police force to control the country's gangs and ex-soldiers. Not surprisingly, its tougher stance towards these spoilers prompted greater retaliation against its personnel. By mid-2008, 35 MINUSTAH personnel had died during the operation.

References

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