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The Challenge of Keeping Haitians Safe

Summary

- President Michel Martelly takes office at a time when Haitians are frustrated with the pace and scale of earthquake recovery and insecure about the future.
- Haitians are uncertain what to expect from their new leader who has promised much and who now must address a broad range of immediate needs.
- Progress toward improved personal, social, economic, environmental, political and energy security for Haiti's citizens has been mixed.
- The Haitian National Police comprise an important building block for improving Haiti's personal safety and security environment. A greater effort is needed to deal with Haiti's chronic problems with jobs, education, healthcare and housing.

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Enter Haiti's New President, Michel Martelly

On May 14, 2011, Haiti's presidency was transferred peacefully from René Préval to Michel Martelly. The new president, known as singer and bandleader 'Sweet Micky' for his flamboyant performances or as *Têt Kalé* for his bald head, had traversed a remarkable political path within a year. When his candidacy was announced in 2010, it was not taken seriously. Martelly benefited from his celebrity, however, and from voter frustration with an ineffective and unresponsive political establishment. Martelly campaigned as a political outsider untainted by the flawed leadership and unfulfilled promises of the past despite his well known association with figures from past military regimes. In the November 28, 2010, general election, Martelly was initially excluded in favor of the governing party's candidate, but was reinstated under pressure from the international community. He won a run-off on March 20, 2011 by attracting 67.57 percent of the vote in an election marked by low voter turnout.

President Martelly begins his five-year term at a time when Haitians feel insecure about their future. The country's omnipresent conditions of poverty, deprivation and lack of opportunity that preceded the January 2010 earthquake remain firmly in place. Haiti's recovery from the earthquake's devastation has been slow. Eighteen months later, some 680,000 people remain in squalid tent encampments in and around Port-au-Prince. Few Haitians have experienced tangible benefits from the now almost legendary \$5.3 billion pledged by international donors at a March 2010 United Nations conference for earthquake recovery and new investments in agriculture, manufacturing and tourism. Adding to the insecurity is a cholera epidemic that has infected 300,000 and killed 5,000 people and the impending 2011 hurricane season.

Security Eludes Most Haitians

For most Haitians, security means living free from intimidation and abuse, conflict and violence, and crime and impunity. Minimally, this translates to assurances that basic freedoms of expression, assembly and civic action are protected. Haitians hope for a country where criminals are arrested, judged under law and held in prison and not protected through corruption, ineptitude or dysfunction. For too long, however, the guarantors of personal safety—police, courts, prisons, government bodies, watchdog groups—have been too weak, too corrupt, too dysfunctional or simply inexistently to provide even minimal security assurances.

Haitians are also concerned about threats to their national territory from international narcotics traffickers and Haiti's inability to control its land border or airspace. Haitians are humiliated when Haitian migrants are rounded up in the Dominican Republic or intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard and unceremoniously returned to Haiti. Since deploying to Haiti in 2004, the U.N. Stabilization Mission for Haiti (MINUSTAH) has provided a security blanket for Haiti. Relations between Haitians and U.N. peacekeepers have worn thin over time and have been exacerbated by circumstantial evidence that U.N. troops from Nepal were responsible for the cholera epidemic.

For Haitians, security has important economic and social components, namely that individuals can meet their needs through work, education and other opportunities to develop their talents in order to pursue legitimate aspirations. Discrimination, exclusion and repression have ensured that most Haitians have little or no access to jobs, education, and opportunities to provide for themselves and their families. As a result, they have looked toward external sources for security. In the absence of state capacity, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or for-profit contractors provide education and health care, manage environmental rehabilitation projects, and are first responders following natural disasters.

Issues of environmental insecurity confront Haitians on a daily basis. A landscape so abused that in many places it can no longer produce more than deadly landslides and flash floods is a source of great insecurity throughout the nation. Rehabilitating Haiti's environment, particularly in heavily deforested watershed areas, would yield greater security (and opportunity) not just for farmers, but also for poor people crowded precariously in downstream ravines, on deforested hillsides, in river flood plains and on coastal alluvial mudflats.

Enhancing Security Remains a Primary Challenge

In recent years, some improvements in security have been achieved. The Haitian National Police (HNP) has become increasingly accepted by Haitians as an institution that will protect them. Improved macroeconomic management of public finances has provided some defense for Haitians against the ravages of financial instability. Public sector/NGO partnerships have improved the delivery of health services, particularly in combating HIV/AIDS and cholera. Politically-inspired conflict and violence have diminished considerably. One manifestation of improvement is the precipitous decline in the number of desperate people climbing into unseaworthy boats to flee to the U.S. Another was the remarkable maintenance of public order in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Achievements, however precarious, are building blocks for the future. Areas lacking improvement beg for priority attention. Among international donors and Haitian citizens alike, the HNP has earned confidence and respect as one of the country's most trusted institutions. Its political neutrality is particularly important in view of its potential role in assuming full responsibility for Haiti's public safety when MINUSTAH withdraws. Continued investment in the HNP to fill capacity gaps is preferred by the international community over President Martelly's call for restoring the

Haitian army. HNP effectiveness would be enhanced by a resumption of officer vetting to remove those who are guilty of human rights abuses. The HNP should be enlarged to more effectively tackle such needs as specialized policing—particularly against organized crime—and border surveillance. The recent graduation of the first post-quake class of 877 new police officers is a notable accomplishment.

Matching this noteworthy achievement, however, is the compelling need to improve the still-largely dysfunctional judiciary and prisons. Haiti's overcrowded prisons contain glaring human rights violations. The majority of those arrested languish for months or even years in pre-trial detention under inhumane conditions. Compounding the abusive nature of this situation is the fact that high profile criminals and those with connections readily bribe their way to freedom by having their cases dismissed by corrupt judges.

Haiti's ability to improve food security and food sovereignty can be achieved through modest inputs that can double or even triple food production while concurrently reducing imports from today's level of 52 percent of national food needs. For decades, the agricultural sector has received scant government financing and donor aid. Today's precarious state of dependency on food imports resulted not just from neglect, but also from trade policies that undercut local production. An ambitious, five-year, \$700 million National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP) aims at boosting both productivity and competitiveness. The NAIP's goal is to increase food production through investment in rural infrastructure, agricultural value chain support (seeds, credit and storage), and the provision of farm extension and other public services. Through investment in roads, storage facilities, and access points, the NAIP would chart an important path by underscoring that short-falls in production are not always at the root of food shortages. Lack of access and poor distribution of bountiful harvests also contribute to the problem. Critics of the plan note, however, that by ignoring the issue of land reform and concentrating on the export of cash crops, the plan appears to be putting old wine in new bottles.

Achieving sustained improvements in farm productivity and competitiveness will require heavy lifting from the U.S., the Inter-American Development Bank and Haitian authorities. It will also require re-imagining Haiti's agriculture sector not merely as a vehicle for growing other sectors but as a sector that stands alone as multifunctional and holistic. Greater agreement on production, investment and trade policies among farmers, policymakers and donors is a *sine qua non* for achieving and sustaining food security.

What to Expect From an Uncertain Future

Since assuming office, President Martelly has encapsulated his goals in "the Four E's: education, employment, environment and rule of law (*etat de droit*)."¹ Martelly has called for a renegotiation of his country's heavy dependence on foreign donors and international financial institutions. He has expressed outrage at the failure of the Haitian state and the Interim Haitian Reconstruction Commission (IHRC) to move people from tent camps into permanent housing. Martelly has questioned using NGOs as the prime agents of Haiti's reconstruction and development. He has vowed to make Haiti self-reliant and to confront entrenched problems of social exclusion, rural neglect, wrenching poverty and geographical centralization.

It remains to be seen whether Haiti's new president can fulfill his campaign promises and improve security for Haiti's citizens. With the onset of the annual hurricane season, time is limited. Moreover, Haitians have become deeply impatient with the slow pace of earthquake recovery, poverty alleviation and economic growth. Martelly must deal with a newly elected parliament controlled by the former governing party. The return from exile of former president Jean-Bertrand

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This report is based on views expressed during a May 25, 2011 public forum entitled “The Challenges of Keeping Haitians Safe” hosted by the U.S. Institute of Peace Haiti Working Group. The forum featured panel presentations by Ambassador Thomas Adams, Haiti Special Coordinator, U.S. Department of State; Farid Zarif, Director, Europe and Latin America Division, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations; Dr. Yasmine Shamsie, Assistant Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Canada; and Dr. Robert Fatton, Associate Dean for Graduate Programs, University of Virginia. Professor Robert Maguire, Chairman of the USIP Haiti Working Group, moderated the session and co-authored the report.

Aristide and former dictator Jean Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier has also introduced an unknown element in Haiti’s political equation. Observers are focused on the confirmation process for Martelly’s choice for prime minister to glean clues to the president’s political future.



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