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Anatomy of a Failed State: Haiti

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Introduction

The fall of a nation is instrumented by the challenges that the nation has faced in its past and which remain the same today as well. In my opinion, this sentence is a good representation of a nation like Haiti which has a rich history (of a century-old sovereign republic). The fall of the only nation where the revolt by slaves resulted in the creation of a second independent sovereign state in the Americas is a peculiar story. Through this special brief, the author tries to delve deep into the history and politics of the Republic of Haiti, to find and analyse the factors that pushed this Caribbean Island into its present condition. This special brief analyses all major international and external factors that played a role in the failure of this historical nation on the Island of Hispaniola. In the final part of this special brief, the author also explores various missions that were implemented by the United Nation to rebuild the state and an update about the current position of Haiti with an overall study on the latest Montana Accords.

History and Politics of Haiti

The Mainstream history of the Republic of Haiti starts from the first voyage of Christopher Columbus when he reached the island of Haiti on December 02, 1492. This started the Spanish colonial rule in this region and a change in the nomenclature of this island to Hispaniola. Various sources including that of national geography led to the pre-colonial history of the island when it was inhabited by Indigenous people whose roots are in South America.

The capture of Hispaniola by Spain also led French colonisers to colonise western part of the island. Colonisers used this island to produce sugarcane and coffee which led to the settlements of African slaves on the islands. The first revolt against the French colonisers started at the same time as the French Revolution of 1791 which was led by the former slave general of the French Army, Toussaint Louverture. Twelve years of revolt led to the independence of Haiti from colonial rulers on January 01, 1804. Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the leader of the revolt during the independence formed the empire of Haiti. Later, the Dominican war of independence led to the division of Hispaniola into two republics, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. During this period,

Haiti faced two crucial issues, political instability, which continues in the nation today, and compensation that the French demanded from Haiti for granting it independence.

The sheer amount of compensation demanded by the French, lead Haiti into economic distress resulting in the subsequent US invasion from 1915 to 1934. In the post-invasion period, Haiti also experienced autocratic rule under Francois Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude Duvalier from 1956 to 1986. Then the nation transferred to a democratic rule through coups that often destabilized the government. The 1990 democratic elections after prolonged autocratic rule saw a chaotic government under President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, whose time in office was also affected by numerous armed coups. The 2004 anti-Aristide movement destabilized the nation that led to the deployment of UN peacekeepers under the mandate of the Security Council resolution 1542 under the name ‘The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti’ (MINUSTAH).¹

Haiti has also suffered a lot from natural calamities including hurricanes and earthquakes. The earthquakes of 2010 lead to immense devastation which further pushed the nation into further political and economic crisis. Gang wars, kidnappings and murders have gotten worse, even leading to the murder of President Jovenel Moise in 2021.

A failed state can be generally defined as a state which cannot function in its sovereign capacity. Common characteristics that are given to a failed/fragile state according to the Fragile State Index published by an American think tank ‘Fund for Peace’ includes cohesion, economic, political, and social indicators². According to the Fragile State index of 2021, Haiti was ranked 13th (in 179), similar to its ranking in 2020. As per the index, Haiti has shown an improvement from 97.7 in 2020 to 97.5.³

¹ United Nations Peacekeeping. ‘MINUSTAH’. United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minustah>.

² Fragile State Index Team. ‘Fragile States Index 2021 – Annual Report’. Fun For Peace, n.d. <https://fragilestatesindex.org/2021/05/20/fragile-states-index-2021-annual-report/>.

³ Fragile State Index Team. ‘FSI-2021-Country-Stats -Haiti’. Tableau Software, n.d. https://public.tableau.com/views/fsi-2021-country-stats/DashboardCountryStats?:embed=y&:showVizHome=no&:host_url=https%3A%2F%2Fpublic.tableau.com%2F&:embed_code_version=3&:tabs=no&:toolbar=yes&:animate_transition=yes&:display_static_image=no&:display_spinner=no&:display_overlay=yes&:display_count=yes&:language=en-US&:loadOrderID=0.

Past and Recent Events that lead to the fall of Haiti

Through this session of special brief, the author tries to discuss the international and external factors after independence that resulted into Haiti being a failed state as we have seen from the Fragile State Index.

Compensation to France and Economic Rupture

Though Haiti became independent in 1804, colonial France kept away from recognising the sovereignty and independence of the nation. Later in 1825, France accepted the independence of Haiti through an agreement between the nations. This agreement was made with a provision to pay 150 million francs to France as compensation for the loss of its territory.⁴ According to the Haitian writer Jean Saint-Vil, Haiti continued to pay this amount up to 1945 due to threats from the French. Saint-Vil also shares the situation of the nation during this period, where the state had to shut down public schools, maximise revenue by cutting down large forests and by not making infrastructural development in major parts of the island.⁵

In response to the devastating earthquake of 2010, academicians and civil society leaders from Haiti requested the repayment of the amount by the nation to France as a reparation.⁶

⁴ Cordoba, Jose de. 'Impoverished Haiti Pins Hopes for Future On a Very Old Debt'. *Wall Street Journal*, 2 January 2004, sec. News. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB107300144534788700>.

⁵ Democracy Now! 'France Urged to Pay \$40 Billion to Haiti in Reparations for "Independence Debt"'. Accessed 20 March 2022. http://www.democracynow.org/2010/8/17/france_urged_to_pay_40_billion.

⁶ Ibid.

Political Structure and Political Instability

Though the nation has been independent and sovereign for more than 2 centuries, the nation is still rated as the poorest country in North America⁷. The World Bank in its country overview has cited political instability in the nation as the major cause behind this situation in Haiti.⁸

Haiti, from its independence, has seen many types of government including monarchy, autocracy, and democracy. The Constitution of 1987 which was implemented after a long dictatorship (under Duvalier's or Duvalier dynasty) in Haiti established the present political structure with a unitary semi-presidential republic government system. The President is elected by the people and functions as the head of the state with executive powers. The Prime Minister is appointed by the President who is selected from the majority party in the National Assembly and heads the government. Though Haiti is the only nation that gained its independence from the slave revolution, the nation has also seen around 32 coups⁹ since its independence. This has continued after the establishment of the present system of governance when President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was deposed through the coups of 1991 and 2004.

Corruption in the political system of the nation is another agent leading to the failure of this island nation. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) published by Transparency International, Haiti is amongst the last twenty countries in the list of 180 nations. In the latest ranking according to CPI, which was published in the year 2021 Haiti ranked 164 with a score of 20 in 100.¹⁰

The assassination of President Jovenel Moise on July 07, 2021 again pushed the nation into a political crisis. Though the council of ministers led by the Prime Minister took over the government duties, the stepping down of acting President Claude Joseph who had a UN mandate enlarged the power vacuum in the nation. An investigation led by the United States resulted in the arrest of

⁷ World Population Review. 'Poorest Countries in North America 2022'. Accessed 20 March 2022.

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/poorest-countries-in-north-america>.

⁸ World Bank. 'Overview -Haiti'. Text/HTML. World Bank, n.d.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/overview>.

⁹ World Population Review. 'Haiti Government', n.d.

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/haiti/government>.

¹⁰ Transparency International. '2021 Corruption Perceptions Index - Explore the Results'. Transparency.org. Accessed 20 March 2022. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021>.

those involved in the assassination. At the same time, this political vacuum has aided gangs in the nation to enact brutalities and de facto authorities in many areas. According to recent Reuters reports by Gessika Thomas and Brian Ellsworth, the sheer failure of security agencies has empowered gangs in Haiti to expand their territories along with kidnapping and other unlawful acts.¹¹ Gang activity reached its peak in October 2021 when they intercepted trucks while loading at fuel terminals.¹² This act was done as per the efforts of gangs to force the Acting President Ariel Henry to resign from his position. Unlawful actions by gangs and the increasing drug trade in the nation have severely harmed its economic system.

Ariel Henry took over the charge as Prime Minister (with charges of acting President) on July 20th, 2021, as he was selected by late President Jovenel Moise before his assassination. Though the power transition was done smoothly, Henry faced many challenges ahead including the instability of the nation and high gang activity. Late last September, the Chief Prosecutor of Port-au-Prince accused linkages of Ariel Henry with one of the key suspects in the assassination of former President Moise.¹³ Though this created short instability, later the office of the acting President denied these accusations. In March 2022, the suspected murders of President Moise were handed over to Haiti authorities.

Natural Calamities and their residues

Geographically, Haiti sits near the intersection of two tectonic plates that create the earth's crust. Movements in the Caribbean tectonic plate and North American plate have led to friction that has transformed into major earthquakes¹⁴. This crucial position of Haiti has resulted in frequent

¹¹ Thomas, Gessika, and Brian Ellsworth. 'Analysis: As Haiti Investigation Stalls, U.S. Probes President's Killing'. Reuters, 20 January 2022, sec. Americas. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/haiti-investigation-stalls-us-probes-presidents-killing-2022-01-20/>.

¹² Thomas, Gessika, and Brian Ellsworth. 'Analysis: As Haiti Investigation Stalls, U.S. Probes President's Killing'. Reuters, 20 January 2022, sec. Americas. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/haiti-investigation-stalls-us-probes-presidents-killing-2022-01-20/>.

¹³ Coto, D., & Sanon, E. (2021, September 15). *Haiti faces fresh instability as PM comes under scrutiny*. AP NEWS. <https://apnews.com/article/port-au-prince-haiti-f57d0c530cd01452f357d020b8926324>

¹⁴ The Indian Express. 'Explained: Why Haiti Is Prone to Devastating Earthquakes', 17 August 2021. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-why-haiti-is-prone-to-devastating-earthquakes-7456356/>.

earthquakes like the earthquake of 2010 that recorded a 7.0 magnitude, in addition to aftershocks. As a result, most of nation's infrastructure was ruptured resulting in huge losses which resulted in aid pouring in from various parts of the world. The Cholera outbreak that came after the earthquake pushed the island nation into a much worse situation.

Earthquakes continue in Haiti due to its proximity to the intersection of tectonic plates. In 2021 the nation faced another huge earthquake that recorded a magnitude of 7.2 in August.¹⁵ This earthquake had longer-lasting effects as it occurred at the same time as a political vacuum that was prolonged in the state after the assassination of President Moise.

External Factors

Initially, after the independence of Haiti, France tried its best to regain its lost territory. These efforts were wrapped up with the payment of the compensation as mentioned in the previous part of this paper. Later, American interest in Haiti also led to US occupancy of the island from 1915 to 1934. The US also played a leading role in the reinstating of Aristide as the President after the coup of 1991.

US troops with the mandate of the UN Security Council were deployed in Haiti as a result of the Coup in 2004, which was later substituted with The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti and the installation of an interim government. Several reports and articles, including that of Annabelle L. Torgman, clearly mention the interest of the US in the elections in Haiti from the time after its autocratic regime period.¹⁶ These involvements are made in the name of democratising and building up a secure government, which is considered the main component for the lack of free elections in Haiti by opposition parties.

¹⁵ The Indian Express. 'Explained: Why Haiti Is Prone to Devastating Earthquakes', 17 August 2021. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-why-haiti-is-prone-to-devastating-earthquakes-7456356/>.

¹⁶ Torgman, A. L. (2012). Haiti: A Failed State? Democratic Process and OAS Intervention. University of Miami Inter - American Law Review.

In addition to these interests from the side of the US, The Organization of American State (OAS) has widely worked in the case of Haiti by providing aid and ensuring free and fair elections through Observer Missions.

The US investigation in the assassination of President Jovenel Moise, and the support and aid given by them to following acting presidents also show its interest in Haiti.¹⁷ Opposition leaders have also accused the US of favouritism towards Ariel Henry by backing his neglect of popular demands that called for a transitional government.¹⁸ The latest updates from the US showed the request from seven US members of Congress (led by Shella Cherfilus-McCormick) calling President Biden to withdraw the support to the government led by Ariel Henry.¹⁹ This call was made following the rise of migration from Haiti to the US which is due to the instability in Haiti due to security questions after the assassination of the former president and the takeover by a de facto government. This also included the request to allow the people to select their leaders according to their choice against the intense support of the de facto leader who functions without a clear mandate.

State Building Efforts from United Nations with its Missions

United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)

The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was established on June 1, 2004, with the mandate of the UN Security Council through resolution 1542. In April 2017, the Security Council through its resolution 2350 closed the working of this mission. MINUSTAH formally

¹⁷ Forbes. 'A Failed State In Haiti Is President Biden's Worst Nightmare', n.d.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/rickhelfenbein/2021/07/11/a-failed-state-in-haiti-is-president-bidens-worst-nightmare/>.

¹⁸ Thomas, G., & Ellsworth, B. (2022, February 4). Leader of Haitian advocacy group urges two-year transition government. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/leader-haitian-advocacy-group-urges-two-year-transition-government-2022-02-04/>

¹⁹ Ellsworth, B. (2022, March 17). Seven U.S. members of Congress call on Biden to withdraw support for Haiti's Henry. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/seven-us-members-congress-call-biden-withdraw-support-haitis-henry-2022-03-17/>

ended on October 15, 2017 and was substituted by a follow-up peacekeeping mission to aid the government in needful situations.²⁰ MINUSTAH started its mission after the fall of the Aristide government in 2004, which led to the establishment of an interim government. This peacebuilding and peacekeeping mission also played a crucial role in the recovery of the nation from a natural calamity in 2010. The MINUSTAH mission in Haiti included the mandate to restore a secure and stable government, strengthen the government and its various institutions and work towards promoting and protecting human rights. The UN through this mission also empowered the policing system in the nation by providing training focusing on the justice system, law, and order.²¹

MINUSTAH functioned from its headquarters in the capital city of Port-au-Prince, which was initially criticised. This was in addition to the long-standing accusations against their peacekeeping force for the 2010 cholera outbreak and sexual abuse claims. United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) (2017-2019) succeeded MINUSTAH which was later succeeded by United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) in 2019.²²

Excluding this peacekeeping mission from the side of the UN, all allied organisations of the UN have ensured their presence to support the nation including that of the World Health Organisation. In addition, according to the reports from the World Bank they have also been working for Haitians through various developmental programmes and plans extending from education to digital development, which also include essential skills like health and disaster risk management.²³

Current Situation

February 7th, 2022 marked the official conclusion of the five-year term of late President Jovenel Moïse which began in 2016. Thus, this also ended the appointment period of the Prime Minister

²⁰ United Nations Peacekeeping. (n.d.). MINUSTAH. United Nations Peacekeeping.

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minustah>

²¹ Casares, A. M. (2019, October 15). U.N. peacekeeping mission to Haiti ends after 15 years with a mixed legacy. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-haiti-politics-idUSKBN1WU2SP>

²² United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti. (2014, May 7). United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti. BINUH. <https://binuh.unmissions.org/en/about>

²³ World Bank. (n.d.). Overview -Haiti [Text/HTML]. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/overview>

as the nation follows a semi-presidential system.²⁴ General elections for electing a new president and parliament were scheduled to be conducted on September 26, 2021 but were later postponed to 7th November 2021 due to the assassination of President Moïse. In addition to this, the present head of the government Ariel Henry tried to remove Provisional Electoral Council (CEP), which was established to conduct free and fair elections. A decree that dismissed the Provisional Electoral Council gained much popularity in Haiti including the support for the same from opposition leaders. The support was derived for this act as the council was appointed by the late Moïse, whose actions were even questioned in the apex court of Haiti.²⁵

In addition to the general election, this election has also set the floor for the referendum on changes in the constitution. Former President Jovenel Moïse proposed these changes in the constitution to make it a more President centred system than the present system that is followed in Haiti. Change from a semi-presidential to a president system was considered a method to remove the deadlock that occurs due to the present system of government. This proposal from Moïse even led to the resignation of the CEP²⁶.

This delay in the general election has tilted the system of Haiti towards a more fragile state as the parliament has completed its mandate. As per the latest updates from this failed state, the acting president in February 2022 urged for the reorganisation of elections that will empower Haitians to elect their future²⁷. The comments were put out by Ariel Henry in reaction to the proposal of the Montana Accord which recommended the current government step down for a two-year transitional government.²⁸

²⁴ Thomas, G., & Ellsworth, B. (2022, February 7). Haiti's Henry urges elections amid calls for a transition government. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/haitis-henry-urges-elections-amid-calls-transition-government-2022-02-07/>

²⁵ Haiti polls were postponed after the electoral body is dissolved. (2021, September 28). BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-58706903>

²⁶ Haiti polls were postponed after the electoral body is dissolved. (2021, September 28). BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-58706903>

²⁷ Thomas, G., & Ellsworth, B. (2022, February 7). Haiti's Henry urges elections amid calls for a transition government. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/haitis-henry-urges-elections-amid-calls-transition-government-2022-02-07/>

²⁸ Thomas, G., & Ellsworth, B. (2022, February 4). Leader of Haitian advocacy group urges two-year transition government. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/leader-haitian-advocacy-group-urges-two-year-transition-government-2022-02-04/>

Montana Accord (2022)

Montana Accord was formed by a Haitian advocacy group - The Commission for the Search for a Haitian Solution to the Crisis which included civic leaders, former politicians, economists, entrepreneurs, and journalists. The group produced this accord with discussions that lasted around one year²⁹. The Accord has proposed a transitional government with economist Fritz Jean as the leader and president. This was proposed by the advocacy group considering the hardships that the nation can face in conducting a free and fair election in this situation... Ariel Henry has criticised this act by presenting the Montana Accord as an “unauthorised meet in hotel that decide president and prime minister”.³⁰

Though the accord is against the present constitution of the nation, this move is presented by the group as the most favourable way of resolving the issues in Haiti. In addition to the proposed president, they also selected Steven Benoît as interim prime minister for the transitional government.³¹ Though the majority of nations have called for an inclusive resolution of issues in Haiti through present de facto ruler Henry, none of these nations have made a note or commented on the proposals made through the Montana Accord.

Conclusion: What made Haiti a failed state?

It is hard to understand the failure of a state that gained its independence and sovereignty in the first half of the 19th Century. Despite that, a deeper understanding of political, economic, and social instability in this country helps us to gauge its reality. Political vacuum, disruptive corruption, uncertainty in governance and violent gangs are causes of great political instability suffered by Haitians. Everlasting residues of back-to-back natural calamities that shadows the rebuilding

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Thomas, G., & Ellsworth, B. (2022, February 7). Haiti's Henry urges elections amid calls for a transition government. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/haitis-henry-urges-elections-amid-calls-transition-government-2022-02-07/>

³¹ Fauriol, G. A. (2022, February 18). Haiti: Betting on the Montana Accord. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/haiti-betting-montana-accord>

process has led to its acute failure by rupturing the backbone of the nation in addition to attacks of endemics such as cholera.

External factors such as accusations of election rigging by the USA to maintain its dominance in the Caribbean Island can be also seen as a major challenge to the stability of this nation. According to the opinion of the author following the latest updates that are seen from the US, a huge inflow of Haitian migrants may be forced to take a U-turn to empower Haiti with democracy and self-determination. Otherwise, we may find a dual face of the US in this region where continuous sanctions against Venezuela are made in the name of lack of democracy and free and fair election.

As we have seen in the last part of this brief, the various mission established through various mandates from the UNSC tried to build, maintain, and strengthen peace on this island.

Better and inclusive self-formulated proposals for extensive stability and building the nation back need to be a priority for the government and fellow Haitians. Proposals like that of the Montana Accord should be given a chance for getting popular comments that can strengthen the same against the one-sided authoritative 'Duvalier' acts.

As the basic definition of failed state defines a lack of effective governance and government, in addition to the failure of the state to provide essentials for the citizens which include security. Violence and continuous natural calamities, along with the implementation of programmes for uplifting them without a clear audit have functioned as the extremely toxic mixture that has led to the failure of the Republic of Haiti.

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