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Haiti's Changing Tide

A Sustainable Security Case Study

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Executive summary

Haiti is a country that simultaneously has a rich history and a troubled past. As the first free black republic, it stood as a symbol of hope for those fighting against slavery and colonial oppression in the 19th and 20th centuries. Many of its artists and musicians are world renowned. The indigenous adaptation of Creole and the religion of voodoo underlie a culture that is vibrant, layered, and powerful. It is a country of stark topography and resilient people. Citizens live in a diaspora spread across the globe, but remain continually connected to events at home.

Haiti has also been continually plagued by a variety of intractable problems. Cycles of political upheaval, economic collapse, endemic poverty, rampant criminality, and natural disasters have ravaged the nation since its inception. Pessimistic observers consider it a lost cause with challenges that are too great for the global community to tackle. Yet its proximity to the United States—600 miles south of Florida—makes it impossible to ignore. And developments in the first half of 2009 suggest that Haiti is once again on the agenda of American and international policy makers.

Haiti is currently experiencing one of the best combinations of open political space and physical security that the country has seen in decades. The stability is due in large part to the United Nations peacekeeping force, which has helped maintain order since 2004. Haiti's President René Préval, elected in 2006, is also well regarded by the international community. And the democratically elected government is defined neither by corruption nor predatory behavior, unlike in many previous administrations.

U.S. President Barack Obama has committed the United States to improving its development assistance to fragile states such as Haiti, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is personally interested in helping the country. The United Nations recently named former U.S. President Bill Clinton as its new special envoy for Haiti. And a major international donors conference hosted by the Inter-American Development Bank was held in Washington in April 2009, during which countries pledged over \$300 million in foreign aid to Haiti.

All of these factors make the current situation in Haiti more promising than it has been in a long time. But Haiti has failed before, and it could fail again without the right kind of intervention. As President Preval said when he visited Washington in early 2009, "I believe we are at a very serious turning point. We can either win or lose."¹

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The sustainable security paradigm developed by the Center for American Progress provides a useful framework for examining developments in Haiti and rethinking U.S. policy toward the country. Sustainable security is a view of foreign policy that combines national security, collective security, and human security. It argues that the challenges arising from poor development outcomes can present very real threats to American security. As such, the best way to meet such national security threats is to address the core development problems from which they arise, and to do so in a cooperative manner with the host government and the international community. The core of the sustainable security approach is to use the nexus between development and security as both a means of identifying threats to our interests and a method for dealing with them. The complexity of Haiti's development challenges makes it a highly appropriate candidate for the sustainable security model.

Haiti is a country where the links between development and security are profound. CAP therefore conducted a field-based research mission to analyze U.S. policy toward Haiti using the sustainable security paradigm. The intent was to determine new defense, diplomatic, and development interventions that the United States, Haiti, and the international donor community could take to support long-term stability and economic growth in the country.

CAP researchers conducted extensive pre-mission research in the late spring of 2009 to review relevant policy documents and interview Haiti experts in Washington. The researchers received briefings from the U.S. Southern Command in Miami on June 8, 2009, and then they traveled to Haiti from June 9-17. They met in Haiti with senior members of the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti, or MINUSTAH, as well as members of the diplomatic community, non-governmental organizations, and the Haitian government. They visited sites throughout Port-au-Prince, including Cité Soleil, and the Central Plateau.

This report is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of Haiti's history and relationship with the United States and international community. It aims to examine current conditions in Haiti through the sustainable security lens as a means of searching for fresh policy approaches to the country.

Analysis of the field research suggests that Haiti is experiencing a rare "dual-window" of opportunity in which conditions in Haiti and the United States make substantial change possible. These conditions will not last forever, however, and time is of the essence to take advantage of this rare opportunity. CAP's research confirmed two vital points. The first is that the creation of large numbers of jobs in the near term is absolutely essential for preserving security in Haiti long enough to start a cycle of sustainable development. The second is that the Haitian government needs substantial help to improve its capacity to perform essential services that would stimulate economic growth and improve access to basic services for the population.

To this end, CAP recommends that the United States and international community take the following steps:

- Establish a governance capacity partnership program to strengthen the functioning of the Haitian government bureaucracy in the near term and train the Haitian civil service in the medium and long term.
- Invite the U.N. Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Assistance, in cooperation with the Haitian government, to register NGOs operating in Haiti to coordinate and regulate the provision of essential services.
- Expand MINUSTAH's mandate to promote economic development through repositioning forces to protect commercial infrastructure.
- Encourage the Haitian government to revise laws relating to the Haitian diaspora in a manner that facilitates their involvement in the Haitian economy and government.
- Direct the Department of Defense to reauthorize the Haiti Stabilization Initiative.
- Hold a Review Donors Conference not later than June 2010 to increase donor pledges in support of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and New Paradigm.

The United States and the donor community must seize the rare opportunity to help Haiti onto the path of sustainable development and political stability. Doing so would reflect American values, promote American interests, and prove America's capacity to achieve real results through smart development interventions. The people of Haiti are ready for the partnership.

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

