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A STRATEGIC OPENING

FIGHTING HAITI'S CRIMINAL INSURGENCY

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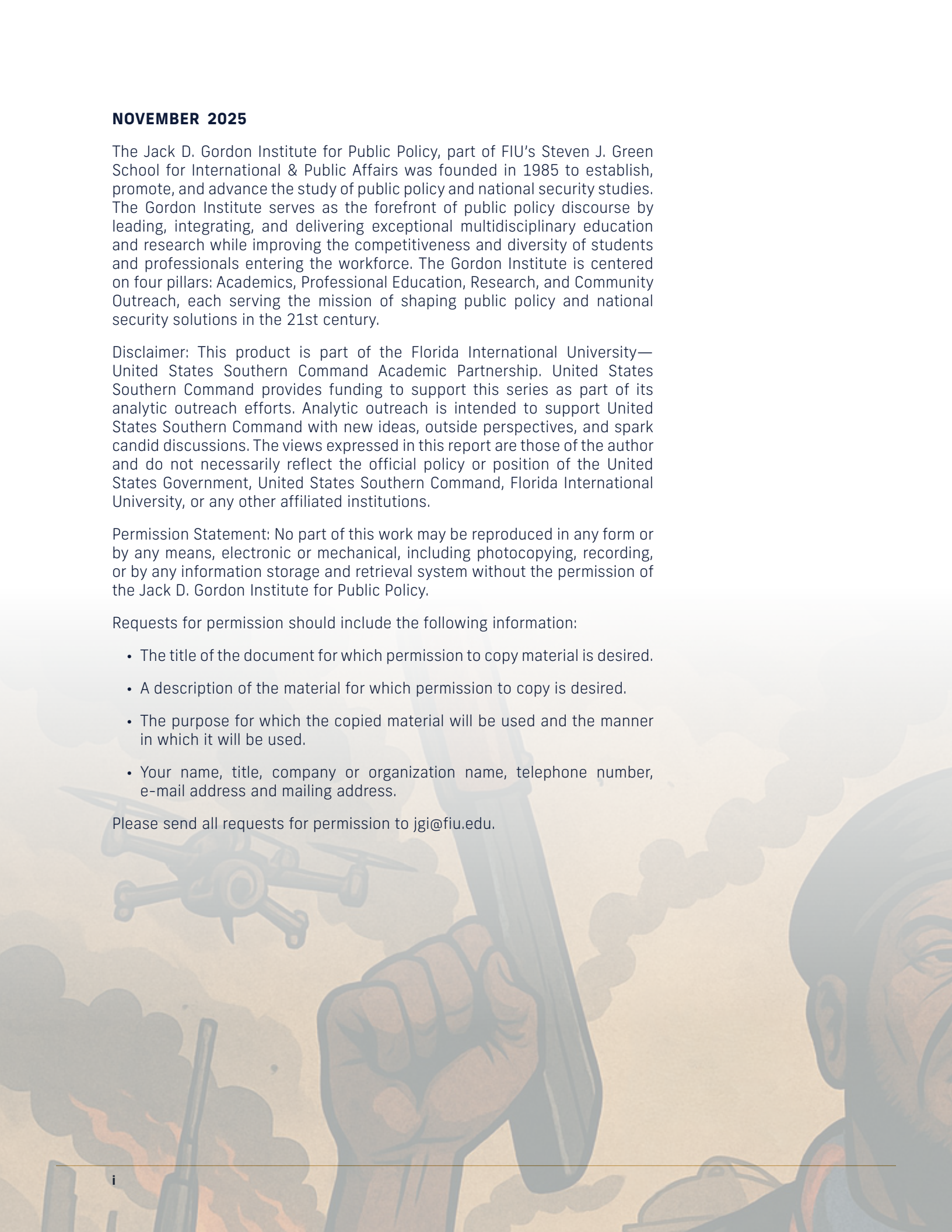

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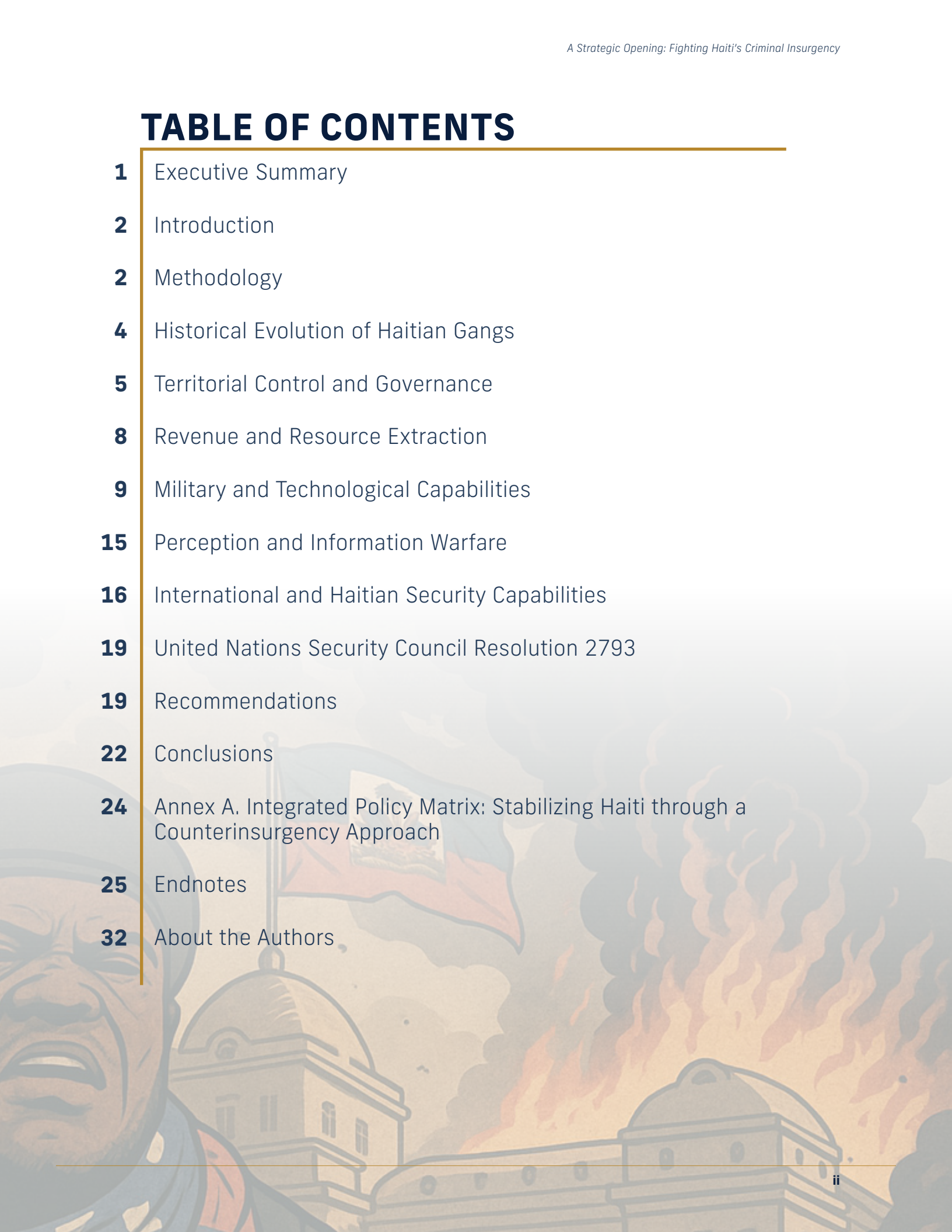

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Haiti is experiencing the most severe security collapse in its modern history with gangs consolidating territorial control, degrading state authority, and evolving into what Max G. Manwaring defines as "third-generation gangs," criminal-insurgent hybrids that challenge the state's monopoly on force. As of September 2025, armed groups control approximately 85 percent of Port-au-Prince, govern critical routes in Artibonite and Centre, regulate economic life through taxation and extortion, and conduct coordinated military-style assaults against state institutions.[1] The result is a de facto criminal state within the state. Haiti's instability now represents an acute threat to regional security, migration management, and U.S. strategic interests in the Caribbean. The crisis exemplifies an irregular warfare environment in which nonstate actors contest the state's legitimacy through armed coercion, economic predation, and information manipulation—blurring the line between criminality and insurgency.

The 2024 Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission achieved limited tactical and strategic gains, retaking key sites and supporting Haitian National Police training but proved under-resourced and undermanned. With only US$113 million of the US$600 million required and fewer than 1,000 of 2,500 authorized personnel deployed, the mission lacked logistical reach, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, and political cohesion to reverse Haiti's slide toward insurgent governance. The deteriorating security conditions prompted the United Nations Security Council to authorize Resolution 2793 on September 30, 2025, transitioning the MSS into a larger, better-resourced Gang Suppression Force (GSF) with 5,500 authorized personnel and expanded military capabilities.

Haiti's security institutions remain critically weakened. The Haitian National Police, reduced to approximately 12,500 officers, struggles with attrition, leadership instability, and inadequate coordination.[2] Specialized units, such as the Temporary Anti-Gang Unit (Unité Tactique Anti-Gang or UTAG) and Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT), have demonstrated operational competence but lack scale. The Haitian Armed Forces (FAd'H) remain in early-stage rebuilding, with fewer than 1,300 soldiers and minimal training capacity.[3] Gangs have transformed into insurgent-like actors through territorial governance, coercive taxation, parallel justice structures, prison breaks, targeted political violence, and sophisticated operational innovations that include drones, encrypted communications, and coordinated multifront assaults. Their financial power rests on kidnapping, extortion, and weapons trafficking, much of it enabled by U.S.-sourced firearms. These networks now exert political influence, challenge state authority, and shape national decision-making. The territorial, economic, and political penetration of gangs has generated mass displacement, deepened humanitarian suffering, and created a permissive environment for malign state actors seeking strategic leverage in the Caribbean.

This report concludes that Haiti is not facing a conventional crime problem but an entrenched insurgency. The country sits at a tipping point: Without rapid, coordinated, and adequately funded international action, Haiti risks fully transitioning into a criminally governed state with profound regional consequences. To reverse this trajectory, the report offers a tiered set of near-term, medium-term, and long-term policy recommendations for the U.S. interagency, regional partners, and the incoming GSF.

Taken together, these measures aim to degrade gang operational capacity, restore state territorial control, protect civilians, and set the conditions required for humanitarian access and credible elections. Without decisive action, the expansion of criminal insurgent governance will further destabilize the region and erode the security architecture of the Western Hemisphere.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the Organization of American States (OAS), and most importantly, the government of Haiti, recognize that the security conditions in Haiti have worsened to the point that Haiti is on the brink of becoming a failed state. They also recognize that unless the gangs' threat diminishes and the country stabilizes, there is no hope of holding free and fair elections.

Despite the best of intentions and noteworthy efforts by the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission in Haiti, UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 2793 acknowledges that this force is not adequately fit to counter the current threat. This is why it authorized transitioning the MSS mission to a larger, more capable Gang Suppression Force (GSF). However, the UNSCR relies on the Standing Group of Partners and other UN members to provide the needed funding, manning, logistical and medical support, and other capabilities outlined in the resolution. The GSF was authorized by the UN but is not a United Nations peacekeeping operation like the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).[4]

The implications of a failed, criminal state, centrally located in the hemisphere and less than 700 miles from the United States, would not only affect Haiti but also the entire region. Such a scenario would create a hub for transnational organized crime, spreading illicit activity beyond its borders and providing an opening for malign state actors to incite further chaos and exploit the conditions to their benefit and the detriment of the Caribbean and the Western Hemisphere at large.

An opportunity exists now with the adoption of UNSCR 2793, but the international community must act and commit the forces, capabilities, resources and financial support required to address the threat posed by gangs.

This report explores the evolution of paramilitary groups and gangs in Haiti from their roots in support of political figures to their development into organized crime structures and their growing autonomy. It focuses on current gang activities that go well beyond criminal behavior and rival those of a government.

This is followed by an assessment of the MSS and Haitian security forces, and it looks at the gaps and shortfalls of the current and proposed GSF.

The report uses the Manwaring Paradigm methodology to define Haitian gang activities as more than just criminal activity and in fact an insurgency. The paper concludes by offering concrete policy recommendations to address the risks.

METHODOLOGY

This research applies Max G. Manwaring's theoretical framework, originally conceived to understand the transition of urban gangs into insurgencies, to the contemporary case of Haiti. The central argument is that the main armed organizations operating in Port-au-Prince and key regions of the interior can no longer be understood solely as criminal groups but as insurgents, defined by Manwaring as "third generation gangs." This approach is especially relevant for fragile states, where institutional collapse creates space for hybrid structures of armed power with political-criminal objectives.[5]

Conceptual Framework and Methods

Manwaring views third-generation gangs as urban insurgents, who contest authority and aim to control or depose the government. This paper seeks to apply Haiti's current gang and political climate through the lens of Manwaring's six key criteria: territorial control, political intent, resource extraction and economic capture, governance functions, external support and operational sophistication.[6] This framework outlines how insurgencies, or third-generation gangs, establish control of physical territory and replace or undermine the state's presence. Manwaring emphasizes that gangs "control ungoverned territory and act as states within a state," including taxing, adjudicating disputes, and policing streets. Regarding Haiti, the gangs hold persistent territorial sovereignty, currently controlling 85 percent of Port-au-Prince and major transport corridors.[7] These gangs have been imposing checkpoints, controlling airport and seaport access, and dictating the movement of goods and civilians.

Manwaring recognizes that insurgency does not require ideological manifestos; rather, political intent can be functional. These gangs will seek freedom of action, immunity from the state, influence over officials, and control of national decision-making. Manwaring notes gangs ultimately aim "to depose or control governments" or "guarantee the political environment they want." Haitian gangs increasingly dictate national political transitions, block or enable governmental access, and influence the appointment of officials. These gangs exert political leverage and veto power, as demonstrated by the G9 gang, under Jimmy "Barbecue" Chérizier, which views itself as a revolutionary security force, demanding governmental resignations since 2020.[8]

The framework emphasizes how insurgents gain strength by extracting resources through taxation, extortion, control of illicit markets, and economic co-optation. Manwaring describes gangs as "multinational corporate-like structures with billions in revenue." Haiti meets this criterion, given that the gangs fund their expansion via systemic, predictable economic extraction. Their illicit extortion economies are around ports, fuel depots, markets, and roadways. The gangs' involvement in kidnapping-for-ransom serves as a quasi-taxation system. In Manwaring's model, an insurgency becomes visible when nonstate actors begin to replace or replicate the functions of government within defined territories.

Third-generation gangs assume responsibilities traditionally held by the state, administering justice, regulating commerce, enforcing social order, and providing (or withholding) security.[9] This is precisely what has occurred in Haiti, where gangs such as Viv Ansanm (an alliance between G9 and G-Pép), Gran Grif, 400 Mawozo, and Grand Ravine act as de facto governing authorities in large swaths of Port-au-Prince. They manage conflict resolution, impose curfews, dictate movement, and tax local businesses and residents. In many neighborhoods, residents rely on gang structures not the Haitian National Police or any state institution for dispute mediation, humanitarian access, and daily security.[10] [11] The delivery of aid and essential services frequently requires direct negotiation with gang leadership, demonstrating that it occupies the functional space of a local authority. Under Manwaring's definition, this level of parallel governance is a hallmark of an urban insurgency.[12]

Manwaring emphasizes that insurgent-type gangs often thrive through external support networks that provide resources, weapons, logistics, and political protection. Haiti's gangs have developed significant transnational linkages that meet this criterion. The majority of sophisticated firearms and ammunition entering Haiti flow through U.S.-based arms trafficking pipelines, especially from Florida, enabling gangs to maintain firepower surpassing that of the Haitian National Police.[13] Additionally, diaspora-based financiers, businessmen, and political patrons provide funding, intelligence, and material support to different gang coalitions. Regional trafficking alliances, particularly along the Dominican Republic border, also facilitate the movement of weapons, goods, and illicit profits. These cross-border networks allow Haitian gangs to expand operational capacity and resilience far beyond what the domestic environment alone could sustain.[14] In Manwaring's framework, the presence of external, transnational support strongly indicates an insurgent-level organization rather than a purely domestic criminal phenomenon.

A final diagnostic marker of insurgency in Manwaring's model is the emergence of coordinated, strategically planned operations that demonstrate command-and-control capacity, intelligence capability, and tactical adaptation. Haitian gangs display this clearly. Coalitions like Viv Ansanm between G9 and G-Pép have executed synchronized offensives, including joint attacks on police stations, coordinated blockades of critical roads, and even the March 2024 assault on the international airport and state institutions.[15] Their ability to mass forces, divide responsibilities, gather actionable intelligence (often through infiltration of state agencies), and sustain multiday operations indicates organizational maturity. The increasing adoption of drones for surveillance, encrypted communications, and complex extortion systems reflects a move toward hybrid criminal-military operations**.** This level of sophistication aligns closely with the behaviors of urban insurgent networks that challenge state authority not only through violence but through strategic operational planning**,** fulfilling the final criteria in Manwaring's model.[16]

Understanding Haitian gang violence requires anchoring the analysis in a conceptual framework that can distinguish between criminality, political capture, and insurgent governance. Existing scholarship such as Vanda Felbab-Brown's crime–governance approach or Ana Arjona's civil-war governance framework

on organized crime and wartime order offers valuable insights, but neither fully captures the Haitian case. When compared side-by-side, Manwaring's "urban insurgency" model emerges as the most empirically accurate and analytically replicable framework for describing Haiti's gang transformation.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF HAITIAN GANGS

Haitian gangs have been involved with political parties and individuals for decades. The origins of this formation and linkage go back to the late 1950s and early 1960s during the rule of François "Papa Doc" Duvalier. Duvalier created the *Tonton Macoutes*, a paramilitary militia, to enforce his dictatorship, terrorize opposition, and control the civilian population. Tonton Macoutes supported Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, who renamed the group to Volunteers for National Security (MVSN), torturing and murdering tens of thousands of Haitians over a 30-year period.[17]

Following the removal of Jean-Claude Duvalier after mass protests and under international pressure, the MVSN was disbanded but not disarmed, and operated informally for years. After the fall of the Duvaliers and particularly after the disbandment of the Haitian Armed Forces in 1994, significant vacuums emerged. Armed actors, including former military and police, created informal networks to remain in power. These groups conducted several massacres and, following the coups of General Raoul Cédras, supported his dictatorship until Jean-Bertrand Aristide returned to power and outlawed paramilitary groups and disbanded the Haitian Armed Forces. Lacking military pensions and retraining for other employment opportunities led to the former soldiers developing into an organized crime structure.[18]

For years, elites used armed groups for voter suppression, territorial control, and intimidation of opponents. Over time, these groups began generating revenue from illicit activities such as extortion and trafficking and gradually gained autonomy. As a result, in recent years, gangs have transitioned from being tools of elites to becoming actors themselves: controlling key supply routes, demanding political decision-making and amnesty, and threatening government structures.[19]

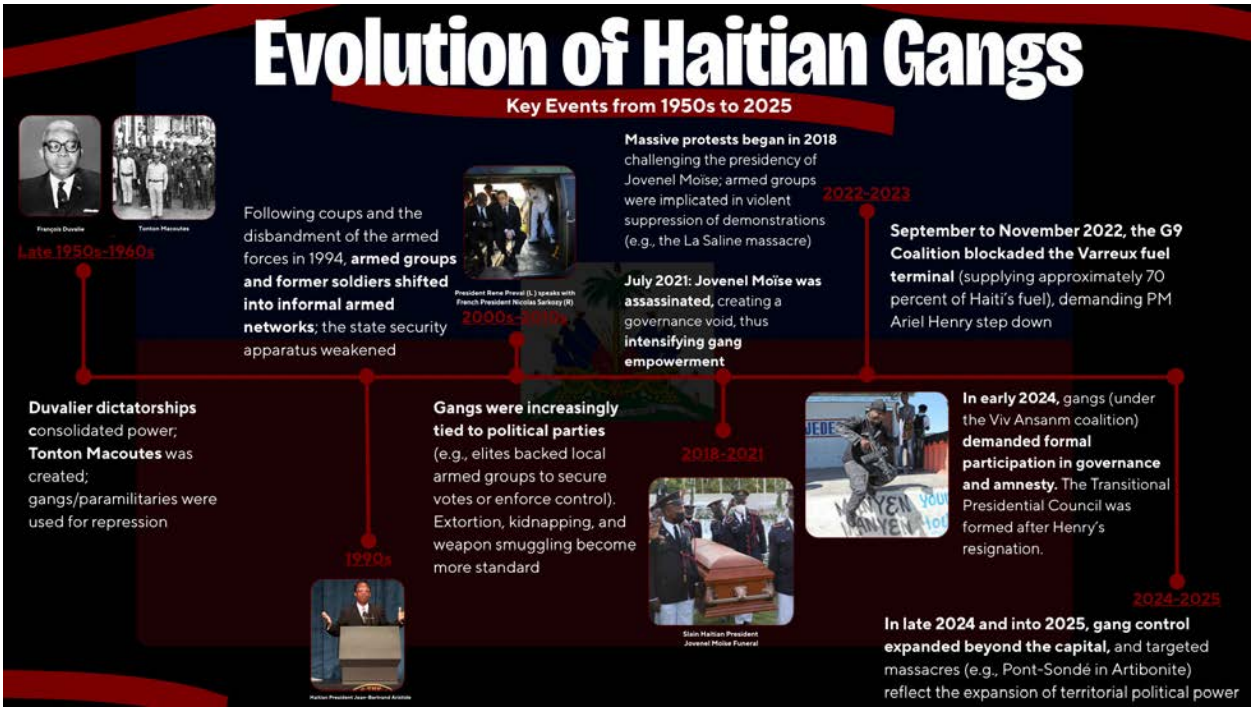

Figure 1. Timeline of Key Events Showing Evolution of Gangs from 1950s to 2025. Sourced from: "Haiti: Evolution of gangs, armed groups and political violence," Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, October 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/GITOC-Gangs-of-Haiti-Timeline.pdf.

TERRITORIAL CONTROL AND GOVERNANCE

Armed gangs have become the de facto authorities across most of urban Haiti, exerting territorial control through sustained, military-style violence. As of September 2025, the United Nations estimated that gangs controlled 85 percent of Port-au-Prince, effectively encircling the national government and confining state authorities to a few fortified enclaves downtown.[20] Only small pockets such as the presidential palace zone and the airport remained under tenuous government hold, and even those were subject to sporadic incursions. Gangs openly manage checkpoints on major roads, enforce curfews in slum neighborhoods, and wage daily gun battles to defend or expand their turf. The capital has thus been partitioned into gang fiefdoms, many of them "red zones" where police or even MSS personnel scarcely dare enter without risking firefights.[21] Entire districts notorious for gang domination, such as Cité Soleil, La Saline, Bel Air, Martissant, Croix-des-Bouquets, Village de Dieu, and others, effectively function as no-go zones where gang bosses exercise coercive control and armed patrols enforce their rule. The result is a patchwork of armed enclaves that has all but dismantled the state's presence in the capital and its surroundings.

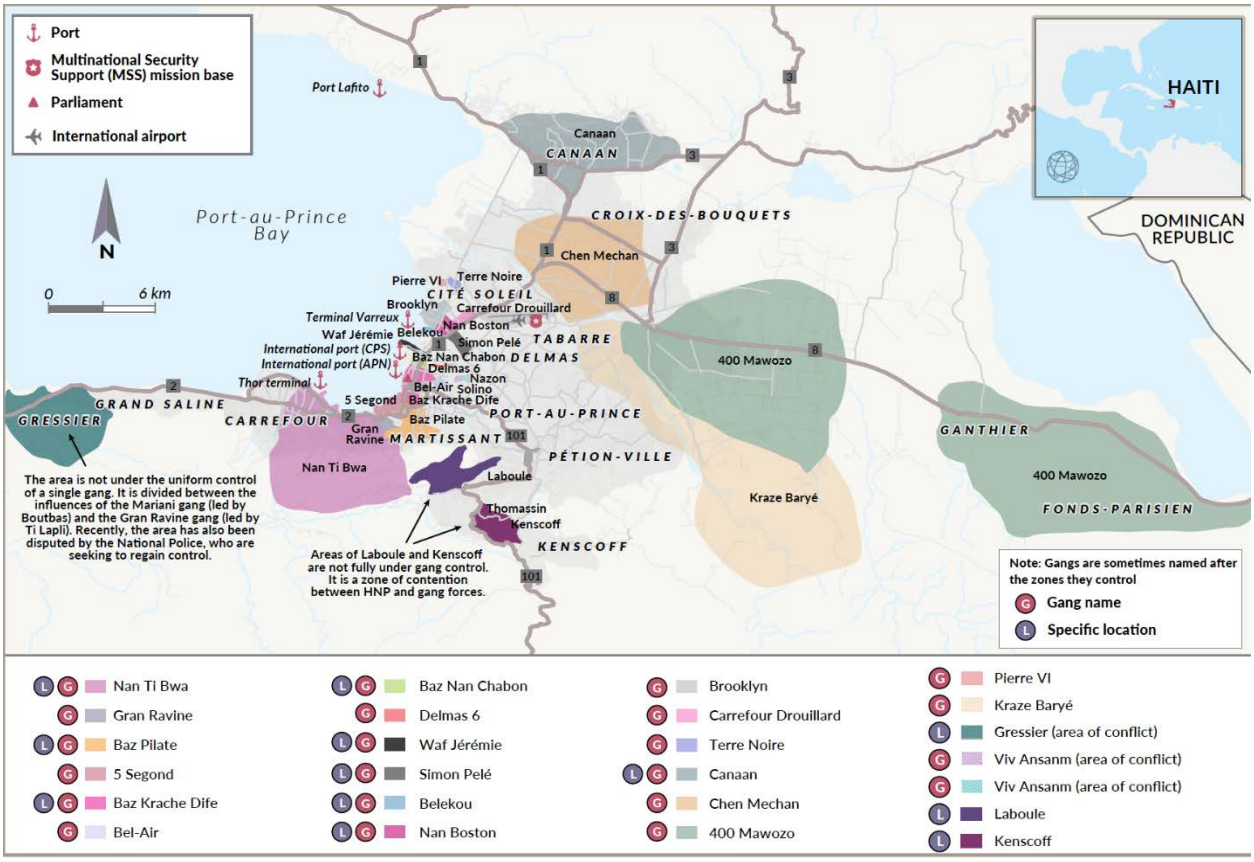

Figure 2. Gang-controlled zones of Port-au-Prince as of January 2025. Sourced from: Last Chance: Breaking Haiti's Political and Criminal Impasse, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, January 2025, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Last-chance-Breaking-Haitis-political-and-criminal-impasse-GI-TOC-January-2025.pdf.

Beyond the capital, gangs expanded along strategic corridors and provincial towns beginning in 2022. In 2023–2024, they pushed aggressively into the Artibonite and Centre departments, seizing key junctions and rural towns and intermittently cutting Port-au-Prince off from the north via Routes Nationale 1 and 3.[22] In Artibonite, **Gran Grif** seized villages (e.g., Savien, Petite-Rivière) and executed large-scale reprisals. In Pont-Sondé (October 2024), gunmen killed over 100 civilians; a December reprisal killed around 70 more. By late 2024, UN reporting attributed the majority of civilian deaths in Artibonite to Gran Grif, underscoring its coercive regional control.[23] [24] In effect, entire rural districts now fall under gang rule, and the Haitian state is absent or too intimidated to intervene in those areas.

Within the capital, the gangs' operations have escalated to quasi-military levels. Coalition structures allow coordination of multifront attacks. Notably, in late 2023, the two largest Port-au-Prince gang alliances, G9 and G-Pép, reached a truce and merged into a united front called **Viv Ansanm** ("Live Together" in Creole).[25] Under the notorious ex-police-officer-turned-ganglord, Jimmy "Barbecue" Chérizier, the Viv Ansanm alliance orchestrated joint offensives that paralyzed the city.

Figure 3. Gang leader, Jimmy "Barbecue" Chérizier, with G9 gang members. Sourced from: Last Chance: Breaking Haiti's Political and Criminal Impasse, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, January 2025, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Last-chance-Breaking-Haitis-political-and-criminal-impasse-GI-TOC-January-2025.pdf.

For example, in February 2024, Viv Ansanm launched simultaneous assaults across several neighborhoods, ambushing police outposts, besieging government buildings, and even attacking civilian infrastructure like schools and clinics in a show of force intended to undermine the remaining state authority. According to UN observers, the level of urban warfare in Port-au-Prince by 2024 had "reached levels comparable to countries in armed conflict," an extraordinary description for a country nominally at peace.[26] Amid this onslaught, casualties and displacement soared: an estimated 5,600 people were killed in gang violence during 2024, more than a 20 percent increase over the previous year's toll, while kidnappings averaged nearly four per day.[27] By mid-2025, the humanitarian fallout was dire; over 1.3 million Haitians (roughly one in eight citizens) had been internally displaced from their homes by gang warfare, many crammed into squalid camps or fleeing abroad.[28] The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned that Haitians were trapped in an "unending horror story" of violence, as gangs subjected entire communities to terror while the state proved unable to protect its people.[29]

Field evidence confirms that this territorial logic has matured into coordinated campaigns. A recent Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) study shows that by mid-2025, gang operations followed a sequenced three-phase pattern: coordination, sustained assault, and consolidation, allowing Viv Ansanm to extend control from the Port-au-Prince basin toward Kenscoff, Mirebalais, and Lascahobas near the Dominican border.[30] This operational maturity reflects a shift from ad-hoc violence to structured territorial campaigns characteristic of insurgency movements.

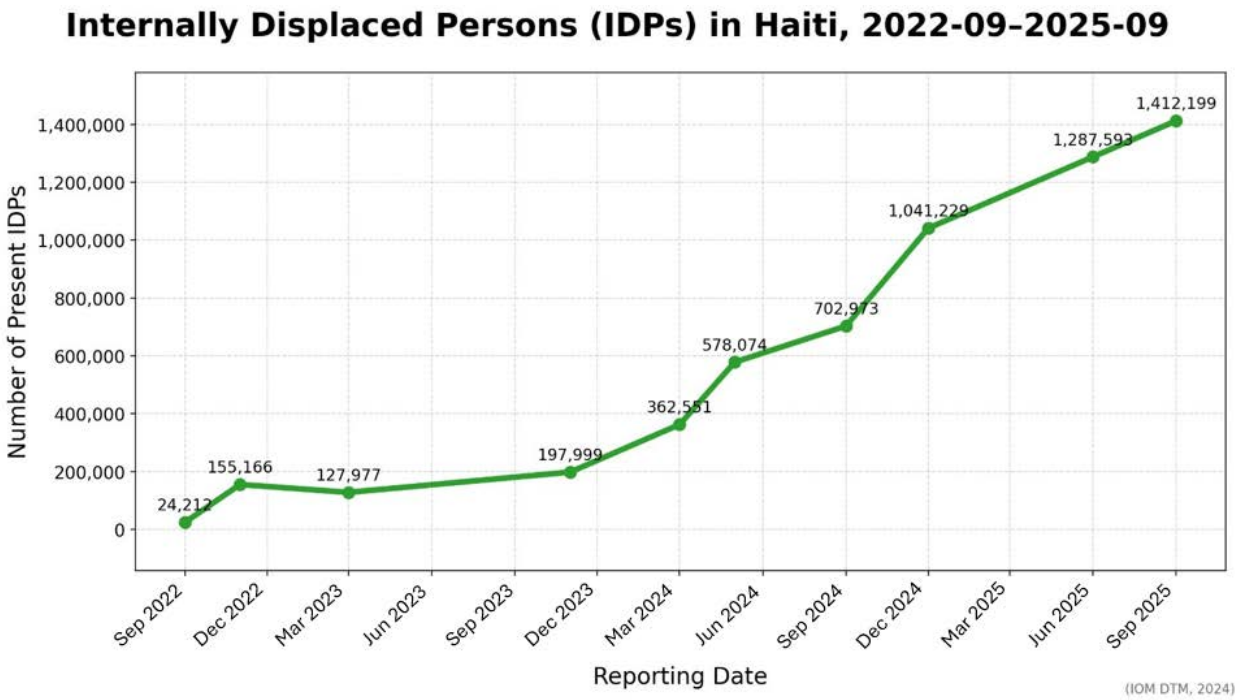

Figure 4. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Haiti, September 2022 to September 2025. Sourced from: Last Chance: Breaking Haiti's Political and Criminal Impasse, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, January 2025, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Last-chance-Breaking-Haitis-political-and-criminal-impasse-GI-TOC-January-2025.pdf.

Gang tactics in these operations show a high degree of planning and boldness. In late 2022, the G9 alliance vividly demonstrated its strategic leverage by blockading Haiti's main fuel terminal at Varreux for nearly two months. Using barricades and trenches, Chérizier's men sealed off the capital's critical fuel depot, strangling the country's supply of gasoline and diesel.[31] The siege triggered a nationwide energy crisis that crippled hospitals, transport, and water systems. Only after negotiations and rumored concessions from the government did the gang lift the blockade.[32] More recently, gangs have periodically attacked ports, airports, and police stations to assert dominance. In late 2024, gunfire from gang battles around Port-au-Prince's international airport forced the shutdown of commercial flights, effectively isolating the capital from air travel.[33]

Gangs have also orchestrated jailbreaks to free their imprisoned members. In early 2025, the gang 400 Mawozo (notorious for mass kidnappings) led an assault on the town of Mirebalais in the Central Plateau, overrunning a prison and freeing hundreds of inmates. This raid prompted tens of thousands of residents to flee the area in panic.[34] Each such operation further erodes public confidence in the government's ability to maintain order. Indeed, in late 2023 and 2024, the gangs succeeded in directly influencing national politics. Chérizier's campaign of violence and his calls for popular revolt contributed to such pressure on interim Prime Minister Ariel Henry that Henry reportedly considered resigning in early 2024.[35] Although he remained in office, the episode showed that gang leaders could effectively veto or destabilize Haiti's political leadership through orchestrated chaos.

Haiti's gangs have transformed large swaths of the country into battlefields or fiefdoms under their command. Everyday life in gang-held zones is marked by fear and deprivation, with barricaded roads, shuttered businesses and schools, and civilians who risk abduction or death if they take a wrong step. Those who resist gang authority are brutalized or massacred, as the example of Pont-Sondé grimly illustrates. In response, vigilante mobs such as the 2023–2024 *Bwa Kalé* movement lynched suspected gang members, a stark sign of the breakdown of formal law and order.[36] The state now wields little practical control beyond a few enclaves; in most parts of the capital and many rural districts, the gangs hold the balance of power. This reality marks the transition from organized crime to a form of protracted, low-intensity conflict engulfing the nation.

REVENUE AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION

Despite their criminal nature, Haiti's gangs have proven highly adept at sustaining themselves financially and logistically, enabling their rise from street thugs to well-armed insurgent forces. Their means of sustenance are multifaceted and entrenched, creating a self-perpetuating war economy in the absence of state authority.

Kidnapping for ransom has become the gangs' single most lucrative revenue stream. Starting around 2020 and exploding in frequency by 2023 to 2024, Haiti experienced a kidnapping epidemic unrivaled in the hemisphere. Nearly 1,500 abductions were reported in 2024 alone, an average of about four per day, targeting people from all walks of life.[37] No one is off-limits. Victims have ranged from poor street vendors and schoolchildren to foreign missionaries, aid workers, doctors, and even police officers. Ransom demands vary from a few hundred dollars (for impoverished victims) to hundreds of thousands or more for wealthy Haitians or foreigners. Certain gangs have effectively industrialized this crime; 400 Mawozo pioneered mass kidnappings by hijacking entire buses of passengers at once to maximize their payout.[38] These ransom profits fund the payroll for gang foot soldiers and purchases of new weapons, creating a vicious cycle with the more money gangs reap, the more firepower and recruits they can acquire to fuel further violence.

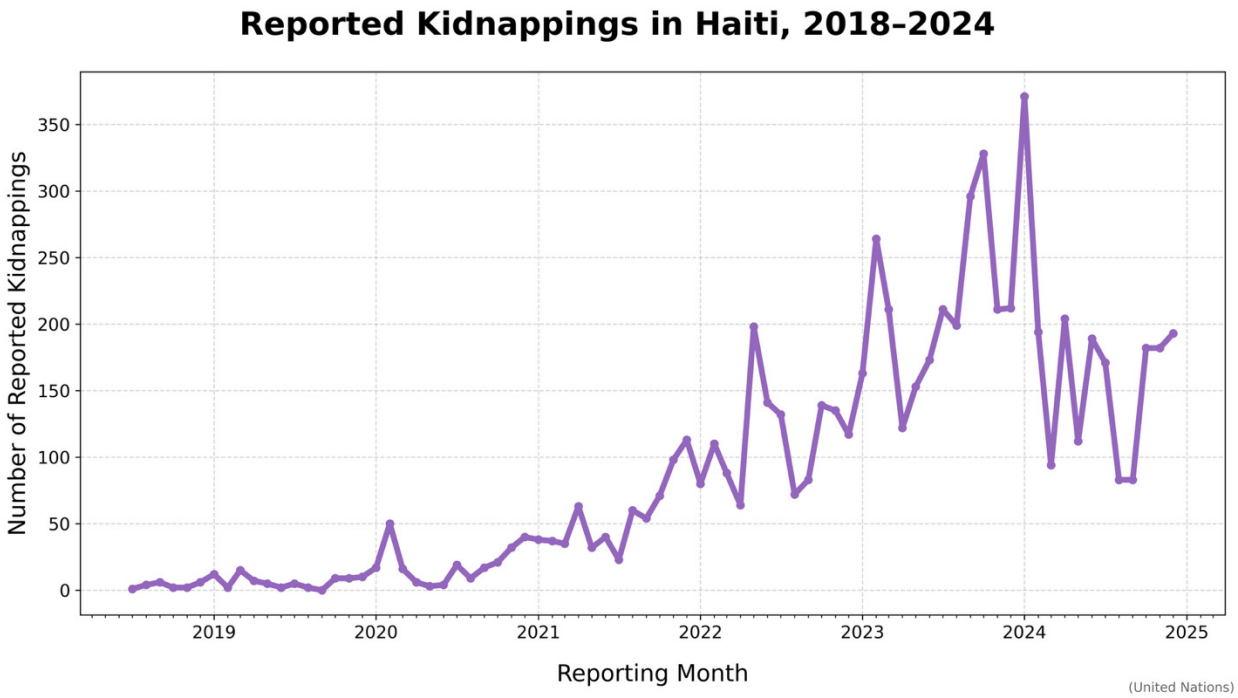

Figure 5. UN: Reported Kidnapping in Haiti, July 2018 to December 2024. Sourced from: Last Chance: Breaking Haiti's Political and Criminal Impasse, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, January 2025, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Last-chance-Breaking-Haitis-political-and-criminal-impasse-GI-TOC-January-2025.pdf.

Extortion is the second pillar of gang finance. In areas under their control, gangs levy what are essentially protection taxes on nearly all economic activity. Recent GI-TOC estimates suggest Haitian gangs now collect between US$60 million and US$75 million annually from road and container extortion alone.[39] Along RN-1, transporters reportedly pay US$6,000 to US$8,000 per day, and fees at the Varreux terminal doubled in 2025 to US$160 to US$350 per truck.[40] This routinization of extortion indicates a bureaucratized "taxation system," consolidating criminal governance and normalizing gang authority in economic life.

Additionally, market traders must pay a part of their earnings; residents in gang-dominated neighborhoods are charged "fees" for security; businesses large and small are forced to pay monthly "rent" to avoid attacks. Everything from local bus routes and street vendors to large shipping containers coming through

the ports is taxed by whichever gang holds sway. For example, gangs that dominate the port zones have been known to extort importers by charging for safe passage of cargo or to divert shipments for resale. In the Artibonite region, the Gran Grif gang has gone so far as to extort peasant farmers, stealing portions of harvests and imposing tolls on the transport of rice and produce.[41] This predation not only enriches the gangs but also exacerbates Haiti's humanitarian crisis, driving up prices and worsening food insecurity in areas already on the brink of famine. The proceeds, however, keep the gang machinery running. Extorted funds are used to pay off collaborators, bribe officials, and maintain the loyalty of gang members with salaries that often exceed those of Haiti's police officers.

Another essential resource underpinning the gangs' power is their access to arms and ammunition. Haiti's gangs are exceptionally well-armed, and their arsenals have expanded dramatically in recent years through smuggling and theft. United Nations assessments in 2024 indicated that between 270,000 and 500,000 firearms were circulating illegally in Haiti, an astonishing number for a nation of 11 million with virtually no legal gun shops; the vast majority of these weapons are in gang hands.[42] The firepower now at the gangs' disposal ranges from handguns and machetes to high-caliber assault rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, and sniper rifles. In some cases, gangs have even deployed improvised armored vehicles ("Mad Max"-style modified trucks or SUVs with metal plating) to bolster their attacks on police or rivals.[43]

How do these arms arrive? A huge proportion is trafficked from the United States, especially from Florida, given the geographic proximity and Florida's permissive gun laws.[44] Weapons smuggling networks exploit Haitian diaspora contacts and lax port security; guns are often concealed in cargo shipments of used cars, appliances, or even falsely labeled humanitarian aid. In one notorious July 2022 case, Haitian customs inspectors opened a shipping container supposedly full of food and school supplies for a church, only to find 18 military-style rifles, handguns, and 15,000 rounds of ammunition hidden inside.[45] U.S. authorities have recently stepped up efforts to interdict these southbound arms shipments, with tougher penalties for "straw buyers" who purchase guns on behalf of traffickers, and new multicountry task forces to crack down on the flow.[46]

Alongside imports, gangs arm themselves by looting local stockpiles. Over the past two years, gangs have raided multiple HNP outposts and armories, carting off firearms, bulletproof vests, and radios. Gangs routinely outgun police units, many of which lack helmets, armor, or heavy weapons.[47] This imbalance has further emboldened gang aggression. Control of arms supply lines is so critical that gangs fight turf wars over coastal smuggling routes and ports and invest heavily in bribing port officials and coast guard personnel to ensure that illicit shipments continue.

MILITARY AND TECHNOLOGICAL CAPABILITIES

While profit remains a core motivator for Haiti's gangs, their rhetoric and ambitions have increasingly taken on political and insurgent overtones. Notably, Chérizier, the most infamous gang leader, who heads the G9/Viv Ansanm coalition, has cast himself not only as a crime boss but also as the leader of an uprising.[48] In videos and press appearances, he rails against the country's tiny elite, the oligarchic families who control the economy, blaming them and the political class for Haiti's misery. He claims his movement's aim is to "overthrow the system" of corrupt governance and to empower the marginalized poor. Chérizier seeks legitimacy by cloaking gangsterism in revolutionary imagery, invoking Louverture, Mandela, and Castro, commissioning murals illustrating himself with figures such as Che Guevara, and framing gangs as a popular uprising against elite predation.[49]

To be sure, these claims ring hollow given the gangs' brutal crimes against those very people. But the political posturing is strategic. In effect, Chérizier and his peers are attempting to rebrand gang violence as a form of social or political insurgency, a fight against the status quo. Indeed, when Chérizier announced a "revolution" in 2023, he warned that if his demands (like Henry's ouster) were not met, Haiti would face "civil war" and even "genocide."[50] This was not empty talk. In early 2024, amid an explosion of gang attacks, Henry (already an unelected caretaker) agreed to step aside for a transitional government after Chérizier's threats and orchestrated chaos made his position untenable.[51]

Other gang figures echo populist themes. Some gangs have political patrons or agendas beyond pure profit. For instance, the G-Pép coalition has ties to certain opposition politicians; at times, its violence has aligned with anti-government protests. In 2022 and 2023, gang operatives allied with protest movements demanding Henry's resignation, essentially hijacking or orchestrating civil unrest to further weaken the government.[52] Gangs have painted themselves as defenders of the people against a corrupt, neglectful state. They have used their control of territory to stage rallies or force demonstrations, blurring the lines between gang action and grassroots protest.[53] In one instance, G9 members reportedly mingled with civilians in anti-government marches, attempting to steer the unrest. Such activities stray into political militancy rather than mere criminality. The gangs intend to position themselves as power brokers in any future political settlement, or at least ensure that no government can rule without accommodating them.

Meanwhile, within areas they dominate, gangs have begun to provide a crude form of governance. Chérizier's G9 has at times enforced its own "laws" in slums, issuing decrees about business hours, mediating local disputes (often through brutal means), and doling out charity to win favor.[54] These criminal groups thus aspire to what security analysts term "criminal insurgency." They simultaneously pursue illicit profits and seek to replace the state's authority with their own. The term "criminal insurgency" has entered the lexicon of Haitian and U.S. officials alike when describing the gangs.[55] It captures the hybrid nature of the threat, which is fundamentally criminal in motive yet employing methods of insurgency, such as controlling territory, terrorizing civilians, confronting the state as an enemy, and even espousing a veneer of ideological justification.

To outside observers, Chérizier's self-portrayal as a revolutionary is brazen hypocrisy. As one international correspondent noted after meeting him, "He sees himself as a revolutionary fighting against the dark corruption of government and oligarch businessmen but make no mistake he is an out-and-out gangster."[56] Gangs may pontificate about fighting injustice, but their victims are overwhelmingly the impoverished civilians they purport to champion. As one Haitian human rights activist observed, "Barbecue may see himself as a freedom fighter, but on the ground he's just a predator terrorizing the very neighborhoods he claims to defend."[57] The reality is that Haiti's gangs exploit grievances only to entrench their criminal agendas. Nonetheless, their growing political audacity signifies that Haiti's crisis is no longer purely a law-and-order problem. It has manifested into an irregular war.

Irregular Warfare: Evidence of Insurgent Tactics

The trajectory of Haiti's gangs increasingly mirrors that of insurgent movements. As counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen describes, modern irregular actors often operate in "hybrid spaces," combining the methods of insurgency, organized crime, and terrorism to dominate populations rather than mere territory.[58] The gangs' actions in Haiti check many of these boxes. They have seized control of territory and population, co-opted or neutralized security forces through firepower and corruption, and established a parallel regime of fear and shadow governance in vast areas. They deliberately attack symbols of state authority, such as police stations, courthouses, and government convoys, to erode public faith in the government. They use terror (massacres, rapes, kidnappings) to intimidate the populace and prevent dissent, which cements their authority where they hold sway.[59] Recent UN reporting vividly illustrates gangs operating like insurgents. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC's) July 2025 briefing to the UN Security Council stated that by March 2025, gangs held almost all of Port-au-Prince under their "grip," and that in coordinated attacks they stormed the Mirebalais prison, freeing 529 high-risk inmates.[60] The same briefing noted that gangs are setting up parallel "governance" in areas they control, including checkpoint systems and extortion on trade routes and are causing economic paralysis, with rice prices spiking 50 percent.[61] These developments reinforce the assessment that gangs in Haiti are not only destabilizing forces but are also supplanting the state in function and force.

This hybridization of criminal and insurgent behavior mirrors patterns seen in other fragile states. In Colombia, for instance, armed groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and later narco-paramilitary successors, blended illicit economies with governance functions, taxing local populations, adjudicating disputes, and enforcing social order where the state had withdrawn.[62] Similarly, in Nigeria, terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and various Niger Delta militias have oscillated between political insurgency and profit-driven criminality, using resource extraction and extortion to sustain quasi-political

control. Haiti's gangs now exhibit these same characteristics: fusing economic exploitation with social coercion to replace formal governance structures and legitimize their authority through violence and necessity. In effect, the gangs have eclipsed the Haitian state in its most fundamental duties within those areas; they control the streets, decide who lives or dies, and regulate daily life. The government's writ, by contrast, often stops at the limits of the gang-controlled zones.

This analysis aligns with the paradigm described by Manwaring in 2005 that warned that Latin American "street gangs" could morph into new urban insurgencies under certain conditions.[63] According to Manwaring's model, modern cartel-like groups aim to erode the government's legitimacy and ability to govern, gradually take control of territory and communities, and essentially replace the state at the local level, all while profiting from illicit enterprise. The Haitian case exemplifies this model. What began as fragmented criminal outfits involved in drug trafficking or kidnapping has mushroomed into a nationwide challenge to the state's monopoly on force. The gangs' motives may not be ideological in the traditional sense (they are not fighting to install a new political doctrine), but functionally, they behave like insurgents, waging a war against the state and society to entrench their power and economy.

In May 2025, the U.S. government designated two of Haiti's largest gangs, Viv Ansanm and Gran Grif, as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), grouping them with the likes of the Islamic State and al-Qaida.[64] Sanctions were simultaneously imposed on those groups' leaders, as well. The FTO designations signaled that Washington views these Haitian gangs as more than just criminal enterprises; they are considered terrorist insurgents that pose a threat to regional stability. The practical effect is to freeze any U.S.-linked finances, ban material support, and allow U.S. prosecutions of anyone aiding the gangs under terrorism laws.

While it is unclear how much this will curb the gangs' activities on the ground, it underscores the shift in perception, Haiti's gang crisis is viewed as akin to an insurgency. Debates have even arisen about humanitarian implications. Nongovernmental Organizations worry that treating gangs as FTOs could complicate negotiations for access, since paying gangs for safe passage might be construed as material support to terrorists.[65] This debate aside, the FTO designations and growing calls for a robust international intervention (spearheaded in late 2023 by Kenya's offer to lead a police-assistance mission) all point to recognition that Haiti is facing an insurgency-style emergency. Indeed, Haiti's UN envoy and other officials have explicitly used the term "criminal insurgency" to describe the situation.[66]

Manwaring's paradigm emphasizes that such nonstate threats seek to perform functions of the state to legitimize their rule. In Haiti's case, gangs do this mostly through coercive governance. They hold territory and population under duress, and occasionally through populist outreach, as mentioned earlier. They have not won hearts and minds in any broad sense, but through fear and necessity have become the governing force in many localities. The outcome is a form of warlordism where the state's laws no longer function. For example, when gangs in Port-au-Prince set up "courts" or dictate that businesses must follow gang rules, it directly displaces the legitimacy of the state's institutions. And when gangs in Artibonite assassinate local mayors, judges, and community leaders (as Gran Grif did in 2024, killing prominent officials and lawyers), they are decapitating any alternative authority that could rival them.[67] All of these actions align with insurgent strategies to dominate a region.

Haiti's gangs derive strength from sociopolitical dynamics that serve as force multipliers. The gangs' local roots allow them to exploit social networks. For example, gang leaders sometimes provide handouts or charity in the impoverished neighborhoods they rule, attempting to pose as benefactors for the poor.[68] Such gestures, though sporadic and self-serving, help gangs cultivate an image of being an alternative government for marginalized communities long neglected by the actual state. Gang members also intermarry or cohabit with local women, embedding themselves into the social fabric of slums. Schools in gang-held areas have seen teenage boys drop out to join gang ranks, lured by promises of income or coerced through threats. These dynamics blur the line between gang and community, making it harder for authorities to uproot criminals without harming civilians.

Perhaps most disturbingly, gangs have integrated children and youth into their operations. Impoverished minors from slum districts are recruited as lookouts, couriers, and even frontline fighters, effectively becoming child soldiers in an urban insurgency. By 2025, UNICEF warned that up to 50 percent of armed gang members in Haiti might be minors, some as young as 10 years old.[69] The gangs exploit Haiti's youth bulge and lack of economic opportunity. For many destitute boys in the slums, joining a gang (with the allure of instant power, money, and a sense of belonging) appears the only viable path out of extreme poverty. This pipeline of disaffected youth provides gangs with a steady stream of recruits to replace losses. It also means that entire generations in certain neighborhoods are growing up under gang influence, knowing little else. Community leaders lament that an "epidemic of lost children" is underway; teenagers who have committed atrocities at gang behest and are on a trajectory to remain in criminal life indefinitely.[70] The presence of these child combatants further complicates any law enforcement or military response, as clashes risk high civilian collateral damage when juveniles are on the front lines.

It bears noting that Haiti's insurgency is fueled by profound social ills that the gangs exploit, including poverty, youth unemployment, corruption, and a political vacuum. In classic insurgency theory, these are the grievances insurgents leverage to gain support. Gangs like Chérizier's do exactly that; they justify their war by pointing to the Haitian government's failures and the exploitation by elites. This is why a counterinsurgency lens is useful. It suggests that forceful crackdowns will not suffice unless coupled with restoring governance, providing services, and addressing the grievances that allow gangs to embed in the first place. Unfortunately, the Haitian government lacks the capacity to do so, meaning the gangs' pseudo-legitimacy goes unchallenged in practice. The situation is thus a protracted irregular conflict, one that could persist or even worsen if not met with a comprehensive strategy.

Haiti's gangs today function as an insurgency, making the crisis much more complex than an anti-crime operation. They have morphed into paramilitary actors with political and territorial sway, and the conflict with them resembles low-intensity conflict for the future of Haiti. This demands that any response from Haitian authorities or international partners incorporate counterinsurgency principles and treat the gangs as formidable insurgent foes, not just mafias. The catastrophic collapse of state authority and the emergence of a "criminal state within the state" is the defining characteristic of the threat. As one U.S. intelligence brief said, Haiti has become a "security black hole" in the Caribbean, a lawless zone where gangs run rampant and even foreign peacekeepers or police units would face an environment as hostile and challenging as any insurgency theater.[71]

In Kilcullen's terms, Haiti represents an urban ecosystem of irregular warfare—a "hybrid zone" where criminality, insurgency, and state failure coalesce.[72] The challenge for Haitian and international actors is not merely to fight gangs but to reassert governance, legitimacy, and control of the population. Without restoring the state's ability to compete for that control, Haiti will remain trapped in what Kilcullen calls the adaptive cycle of irregular conflict, with each state response breeding a smarter, more entrenched adversary.[73]

Operational Innovations and Tactical Evolution

Confronted with both opportunities and occasional pressures, Haitian gangs have continuously adapted their tactics and adopted new technologies, making themselves an ever-moving target. In the past two years, especially, their methods have grown more sophisticated and lethal, borrowing tools from global insurgents and narco-cartels—from drones to encrypted communications—while also leveraging the raw brutality that has long been their trademark.

Weapons: One notable trend is the upgrading of gang arsenals and tactical gear, as already discussed. Reports in 2024 through 2025 indicate that gangs are not only amassing more guns but also increasing the caliber and range of their weaponry. UNODC observed that Haitian gangs were procuring larger-caliber rifles and heavier ammunition than before, enabling them to inflict greater damage even against hardened targets.[74] Where a few years ago a typical gang member might carry a rusty revolver or a machete, it is not uncommon in 2025 to see gangs equipped with military-grade firearms (e.g., AR-15s, AK-47s, FN FAL battle rifles) and plentiful ammunition.[75] [76]

Some gangs have acquired night-vision equipment and bulletproof vests, giving them an edge in night operations or against poorly equipped police. At least a few gangs have demonstrated the use of armored "technicals," pickup trucks with mounted machine guns or with improvised armor plating, which echo the tactics of insurgents in conflict zones who create mobile fighting platforms to intimidate and overpower lightly armed police. This escalation forces any responding force to treat gang encounters as combat operations rather than policing, requiring armored vehicles, helmets, and possibly heavier weapon support, assets the Haitian police largely lack.

Drones: Perhaps the most striking innovation has been the gangs' embrace of drones. In an ominous development, Haitian gangs have started employing commercial off-the-shelf drones for reconnaissance and propaganda purposes.[77] These are typically small quadcopter drones (the kind available to hobbyists), but in the hands of gang lookouts, they become aerial scouts, flying over police positions or rival territory to gather real-time intelligence. In late 2024, UN officials noted instances of gangs using drones to coordinate the timing of attacks, essentially acting as forward observers to direct gang shooters when targets are in sight.[78]

Beyond reconnaissance, gangs have weaponized drones in the information war. For example, during the Christmas Eve 2024 attack on Port-au-Prince's General Hospital, the gang leader "Izo" (Johnson André) of the 5 Segond gang allegedly used his personal drone to film the assault as it unfolded; this footage was later posted on social media to boast of the gang's strike. (That attack, which killed several people, including two journalists, was a brazen attempt to instill fear, coming on the day of the hospital's grand reopening after gang threats had kept it closed for months).[79] In another case, the Village de Dieu gang (an affiliate of G9) has regularly posted aerial drone videos of downtown Port-au-Prince online, showcasing the gang's control and the police's impotence.[80] The gang's leader appears in some videos flaunting sophisticated rifles and tactical gear, turning these posts into propaganda intended to intimidate the public and rivals.

While so far, the drones used by gangs are "ordinary" commercial models with limited payload capacity, their deployment is cause for concern. Security experts warn that it's unclear "how far the bandits can go" with drone technology if they acquire more advanced models or attempt to arm them.[81] Around the world, we have seen nonstate actors retrofit drones to drop grenades or surveil targets; Haiti's gangs could attempt the same if the conflict drags on. Even basic drones, however, give gangs a new force multiplier, a bird's-eye view in urban combat and a psychological edge by demonstrating tech prowess. It also complicates any international intervention, as peacekeepers or police units might have to contend with hostile eyes in the sky revealing their positions.

Communications: In terms of communications, Haitian gangs have proven resourceful in exploiting technology to their advantage. Most gangs maintain off-the-grid radio networks or use encrypted messaging apps to coordinate. They are well aware that phones can be tapped, so they often rely on prepaid cellphones, WhatsApp, or Signal to convey orders in code, making it hard for law enforcement to intercept their plans. Notably, gangs have also hacked into police communications. Haiti's National Police radio system is not encrypted, allowing anyone with the right equipment to listen in on police operational chatter.[82] Gang members, some with the help of tech-savvy accomplices, regularly monitor police radio frequencies to get early warning of raids or patrol deployments.[83] This means the gangs can often ambush police or relocate before police arrive, nullifying the element of surprise. Haitian officers have expressed frustration that the gangs seem one step ahead, which in part is due to this signal interception. The police, for its part, lacks resources like a secure digital radio system, an example of how technological inferiority is costing the state dearly. Moreover, gangs leverage basic digital tools like monitoring social media to identify and threaten activists or officers.

On the flip side, gangs are highly active on social media themselves, using it as a tool of fear and recruitment. Even as platforms ban obvious criminal accounts, gang members find ways to disseminate videos and messages. In one infamous instance, the 5 Segond gang's leader Izo delivered a rant on TikTok (to tens of thousands of viewers) vowing to kill 30 people for each of his men slain, effectively issuing a terror threat on a global platform.[84] Gang members have posted graphic images of corpses

and atrocities in WhatsApp chats and Facebook videos, both to boast and to terrorize.[85] They also use Facebook Live or YouTube interviews to broadcast propaganda as Chérizier has done, painting himself as a champion of the people. This savvy use of modern communications lets the gangs amplify their terror beyond immediate victims. A video of an execution in one neighborhood, when circulated online, can instill fear in communities miles away that they might be next. It also draws in recruits: disaffected youths seeing gang leaders flaunt wealth (guns, cash, cars) on Instagram or YouTube may be enticed by the only "successful" role models they know. In essence, the gangs are waging an information war alongside the physical war, a hallmark of insurgent strategy.

Psychological Warfare: Haitian gangs have also evolved their tactical brutality in ways that serve strategic ends. For example, sexual and gender-based violence has been weaponized by gangs to terrorize and punish populations. Rape has long been a tragedy in Haiti's turmoil, but gangs now use mass rape and mutilation of women in targeted communities as a deliberate tactic to instill maximum fear. Survivors and human rights groups recount how gangs will enter a resistant neighborhood and commit collective sexual violence, effectively weaponizing these acts as a form of psychological warfare.[86] The sheer horror of these acts often forces whole families to flee immediately, allowing gangs to cleanse and claim new territory without further fight. This gruesome modus operandi parallels tactics used by certain terrorist groups to intimidate locals.

Furthermore, gangs increasingly target civilians perceived to be aligned with enemies. For instance, if a vigilante mob kills a gang member, the gang may retaliate by massacring innocent residents of that area (as Gran Grif did in reprisal in December 2024).[87] This is a collective punishment strategy. It makes the cost of opposing the gang so unbearably high that civilians themselves shun resistance. Another evolving tactic is the deliberate targeting of journalists and media outlets. By 2024–2025, gang bosses like Chérizier were explicitly branding journalists as enemies; radio stations that reported on gang crimes were attacked and burned.[88] In March 2025, three radio stations in Port-au-Prince were set ablaze by gang operatives, and multiple journalists have been assassinated or kidnapped.[89] The aim is to silence independent information and ensure that the gangs can control the narrative and operate in darkness. This suppression of the press further undermines accountability and is a strategy often seen in conflict zones where militias threaten reporters.

Adaptability: Some gangs have shown adaptability in the face of community backlash. When the Bwa Kalé vigilante movement emerged in April 2023, when mobs of citizens began hunting down gang members, the gangs reacted by altering their profile.[90] Many gang members stopped openly brandishing firearms in public unless in large groups, to avoid being singled out. Some hid among refugee flows or migrated to different neighborhoods to lie low. In response, gangs also redoubled their terror tactics (e.g., public executions of anyone suspected of leading vigilantes) to snuff out that grassroots resistance. This cat-and-mouse dynamic shows that gangs are learning and responding to new threats and are not merely brute-force actors. They have even adjusted to international pressure. After several leaders faced sanctions and indictments, some gangs changed their names or restructured their alliances, such as rebranding the G9 coalition as "Viv Ansanm" to present a moving target and confuse outside observers.

Haitian gangs today present a far more complex and capable threat than they did just a few years ago. The melding of high-tech and low-tech tactics is characteristic of modern hybrid conflicts. For the security forces and international partners trying to address the crisis, it means that solutions must account for technological countermeasures (e.g., anti-drone equipment and secure communications) as well as traditional counterinsurgency training. The gangs' adaptability also suggests they will not be easily eliminated. If pressured in one domain, they shift to another. Any intervention will have to continuously anticipate and neutralize new tactics as the gangs evolve.

In sum, the Haitian gang phenomenon has escalated into a full-fledged irregular warfare scenario with the combatants constantly innovating. The threat is characterized not only by the territorial and political dimensions discussed earlier but also by this dynamic tactical evolution, which has allowed the gangs to stay one step ahead of a weakened state and keep Haiti in a spiral of violence.

PERCEPTION AND INFORMATION WARFARE

How disinformation, sanctions politics, and corridor control raise the political cost of intervention and normalize criminal governance

Perception and information warfare play critical roles in Haiti's irregular conflict. Alongside territorial, economic, military, and governance instruments, control of narratives now determines legitimacy and freedom of action. Competing players (e.g., gangs, foreign influencers, and even state actors) conduct information operations to delegitimize intervention, distort public perception, and normalize criminal governance.

External actors have treated Haiti's crisis as a perception-war battlefield, reframing assistance through sovereignty tropes ("occupation," "neo-colonial project"), Kenya-centric spin, and anti-U.S. talking points to raise the cost and question the legitimacy of international action. A fabricated, CNN-branded "D-Day invasion" graphic seeded on fringe forums was repackaged into anti-MSS mission narratives, while pro-Russia–aligned pages and some accounts amplifying Bolivarian talking points laundered similar claims through hashtags such as #Souveraineté, #abaokipasyon, and #Russie.[91] Gang leaders (e.g., Jimmy Chérizier; "Izo" of 5 Segond) leveraged social video to terrorize, recruit, and cast themselves as "popular resistance."[92]

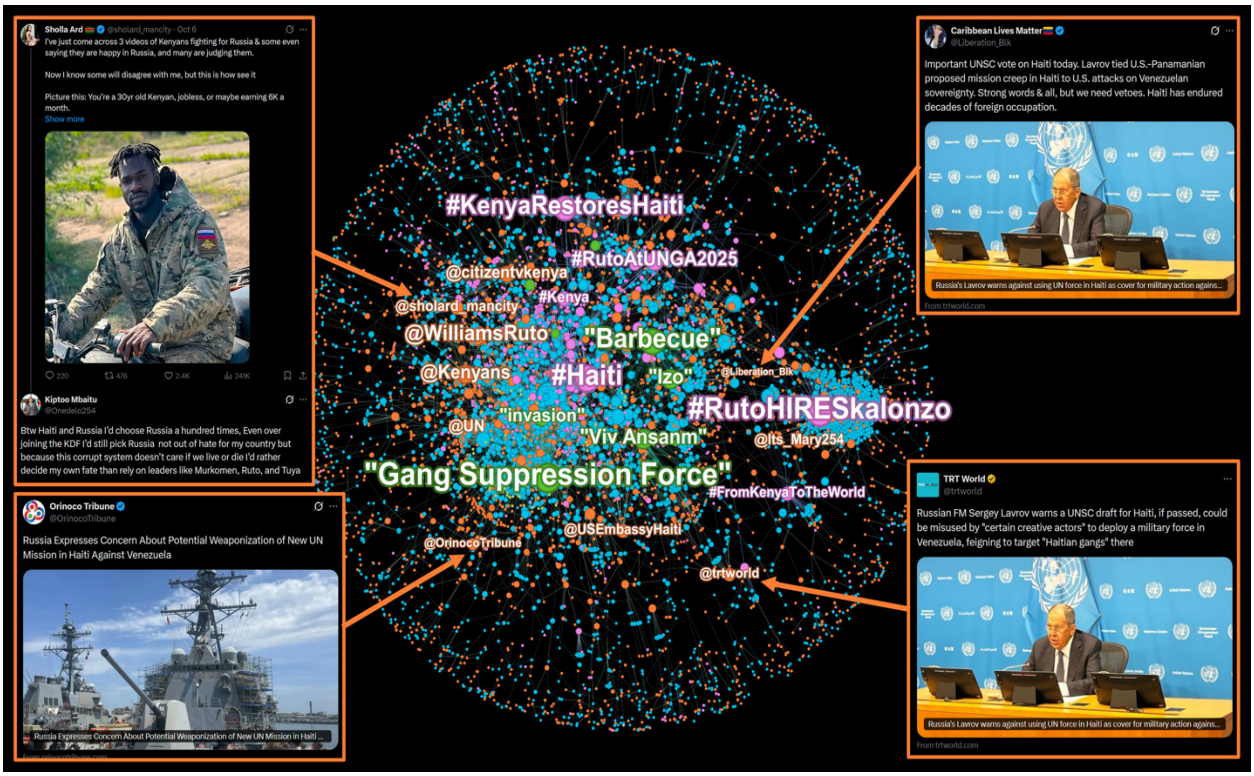

Figure 6. Haiti MSS Discourse on X, Hashtag/retweet network highlighting Kenya-centric, pro-Venezuela, and pro-Russia narratives, (September 22-October 26, 2025).

The network shows densely connected clusters around #Haiti, #RutoHIRESKalonzo, and #KenyaRestoresHaiti, with narrative bridges referencing "Gang Suppression Force," "Viv Ansanm," "Barbecue," and "Izo." Callouts illustrate how media and influencer accounts (e.g., *TRT World, Orinoco Tribune*) injected frames that were then laundered across activist and regional accounts. Node size reflects in-degree (visibility via mentions/retweets); colors indicate Louvain communities; and ForceAtlas2 is used for the layout.

The tactic is less about flooding the information environment than agenda-setting. For example, plant a striking falsehood, wrap it in nationalist language, and aim it at targeted accounts and media to compete with fact-based reporting on gang violence and the mission mandate. Even limited volumes of disinformation and misinformation can create challenges for governmental and intergovernmental messaging to compete in mainstream coverage.[93]

Strategically, these narratives work to delegitimize U.S. and multilateral responses, complicate mandate renewals, and fracture coalitions, preserving permissive space for criminal governance. At the UN, Russian and Chinese opposition to expanding or transforming Haiti-related measures has repeatedly constrained consensus, shaping both mandate design and the pace of sanctions additions under the Haiti (2653) regime.[94] [95]

In Haiti, gangs complement their actions with robust messaging on social media. In addition to the previously mentioned example of 5 Segond's use of video to show the gang's power and the government's impotence, gang leaders actively use TikTok. They use some TikTok live sessions with Haitian influencers to promote their criminal activities as a revolution or social contributions. In some cases, they provide gifts which the influencers can cash in for money. This messaging can be effective in intimidating the public and recruiting youth. [96]

This playbook is consistent with Manwaring's paradigm of contemporary insurgency that describes war as a political-psychological struggle for legitimacy and control of populations with armed networks replacing state functions and information operations as decisive, not peripheral. In Haiti, where gangs already challenge and, in places, replace state authority, external disinformation amplifies that replacement by eroding the interveners' legitimacy and rebranding coercive taxation as sovereign self-help. Manwaring's prescription—cut off insurgents' financing and logistics—implies counter-information operations must be tied to chokepoint enforcement (ports, fuel, corridors) and sanctions coherence. Otherwise, tactical "clears" merely displace the problem without dismantling the corrupt political-economic system that the gangs' propaganda upholds. Neutralizing informational lines of operation is inseparable from disrupting material ones if the United States intends to restore authority rather than merely contest ground.[97]

INTERNATIONAL AND HAITIAN SECURITY CAPACITY

Multinational Security Support Mission

The United Nations adopted UNSCR 2699 on October 2, 2023, authorizing a Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission for up to 2,500 police. The Kenya-led effort provided hope to Haitians that it could restore security and set the conditions to enable democratic institutions. Despite the challenges of the previous UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) that operated there from June 2004 to October 2017, many Haitians supported the idea of a mission to counter the rising gang activity and violence following the assassination of President Jovenal Moïse in July 2021.[98]

The MSS mission focused on reinforcing security and building the capacity of security forces in Haiti. Its primary objectives included restoring law and order by working with the HNP to address gang violence and restore government control of Port-au-Prince; strengthening HNP through training, advising, and logistical support; facilitating humanitarian aid by establishing safe corridors to reach vulnerable populations who have been displaced and suffer from shortages of basic needs such as food and water, and supporting political stability by helping to reduce violence.[99]

The mission was supposed to begin with the deployments of Kenyan police in February 2024, but was postponed until the first contingent arrived in Haiti in June 2024, due to questions of the constitutionality of the deployment by the Kenyan High Court, as well as funding and logistics delays.[100] In September of the same year, UNSCR 2751 extended the MSS mission until October 2. As of mid-2025, the MSS mission in Haiti included personnel from Kenya, Guatemala, El Salvador, Jamaica, and the Bahamas. The United States has contributed logistical, financial, and medical support. In addition to the United States, other major financial contributors to the MSS Trust Fund include Canada, France, and Spain.

Country	Number of Personnel	Contributing Force
Kenya	732 police officers[101]	Kenya Police
Guatemala	150 military police	Guatemalan Army
El Salvador	78 airmen	Salvadoran Air Force
Jamaica	23 uniformed personnel	18 soldiers and 5 police officers
Bahamas	6 soldiers	Royal Bahamas Defence Force

Table 1. Contributing countries to the Kenya-led MSS mission in Haiti (2024–2025). Sourced from: United Nations, "Letter dated 27 August 2025 from the Permanent Representative of Haiti to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council," United Nations Security Council, August 27, 2025, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4087773?v=pdf.

Multinational Security Support Mission Assessment

The MSS has achieved some success during its deployment. Its positive response to the call for action, serving as the largest and core component of the mission, inspired support from other nations. Although limited, the MSS forces with the HNP retook control of key facilities that gangs had seized, including the international airport and the main seaport. They also established forward operating bases outside the capital in the Artibonite department. By securing key infrastructure, the MSS has facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to millions of Haitians. Finally, the MSS supported the HNP in training and graduating some officers, helping to build capacity.[102]

Despite answering the call to support Haiti, the MSS mission has failed to achieve its stated objectives, and conditions in Haiti have worsened since its arrival. Four primary challenges have hindered its effectiveness:

1. Funding shortfalls. The mission identified an annual requirement of US$600 million but had received only US$113 million at the time this paper was published.

2. Personnel shortfalls. Although the MSS authorized a force of 2,500 police officers, it has barely reached 1,000.

3. Inadequate police support. The Haitian National Police lacks the personnel needed to conduct operations and hold territory effectively, with only about 12,500 officers, roughly half the required number.

4. Political rivalries and disputes. The Transitional Presidential Council has failed to produce a strategy for advancing toward elections in 2026, and internal rivalries among Council members, the prime minister, and the HNP director general have further impeded progress.[103]

A number of strategic and operational issues severely impeded the MSS mission. For starters, the other partner nations that committed to send forces sent less than 40 percent, forcing the Kenyans to take a heavier share of the mission. A shortage of money in the UN Trust Fund means Kenya likely would not be reimbursed the US$35 million for its deployment, and in March, two Kenyan police officers were killed and another taken hostage.[104] The Logistical Staging Area (LSA) at Toussaint Louverture International Airport in support of the MSS is isolated as a result of gangs controlling 85 percent of Port-au-Prince and routes throughout the capital.[105] The conditions prevented extending the LSA for more police, resulting in at least 261 additional Kenyan police unable to deploy to Haiti.[106]

Additionally, a significant portion of Kenyan equipment is broken or unsuitable for operations in Haiti. In a letter earlier in the year, the UN Secretary-General indicated that 50 percent of the MSS armored vehicles were not functional, and the force lacked the high-caliber weapons and ammunition to effectively engage the gangs. In his letter, the Secretary-General suggested the formation of a UN support organization like the one used in Somalia in 2009 could help remedy the restricted life support, medical capability, mobility, engineering, communications, and basing.[107] The MSS also lacks adequate radios to communicate, and the language barriers with Haitian forces create another obstacle in communicating. Finally, they do not possess intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance or drones for early warning or to gather, analyze, and distribute information in support of operations.

The current structure for the MSS and the capabilities of the police hinder command and control of the force. The unit cannot maintain a command-and-control center that collects and analyzes intelligence, tracks friendly forces, and plans future operations with the HNP and the Haitian Armed Forces (FadʹH). Joint patrols between the MSS, HNP, and FadʹH are not well coordinated, resulting in delays in securing and delivering aid and joint efforts, which undermines trust. The combination of the small number of MSS police, the uncoordinated operations with their Haitian counterparts, and the lack of forward operating bases within the capital has resulted in a very low MSS presence in Haiti.[108]

Haitian Security Forces

The Haitian National Police (HNP) was established in 1995 by then-President Aristide and serves as the primary police force within Haiti. The force stood at approximately 12,500 police officers as of June 2025, but has declined throughout the year due to resignations, dismissals, and deaths.[109] The HNP is overstretched and undertrained. It has roughly one officer per 1,000 inhabitants, and less than half of the 570 precincts maintain a persistent presence.[110] The force suffers from poor structure and questionable leadership. Inspector General André Jonas Vladimir Paraison serves as the director general and leads the HNP. He previously served as the head of security at the National Palace. Despite years of experience, he has been embroiled in scandals throughout his career and was on duty during Moïse's assassination. He was appointed in August 2025 to replace Normil Rameau after just a year in the position due to his poor performance in addressing gang violence and his rivalry with the prime minister.

Rameau previously served as director general in 2019-2020 and was removed for incompetence.[111] The HNP lacks basic equipment to perform its duties, such as protective gear, patrol vehicles, and reliable radios. Gangs easily intercept messages from the two-way radios possessed by police, and a key communications site was seized by gangs earlier in 2025, cutting off the internet and disrupting the network. Poor communications hinder HNP coordination between headquarters and precinct leadership and across geographic zones, creating a lack of unified action. Additionally, the HNP has no internal medical capability, contributing to HNP fatalities. However, in August 2025, 60 HNP officers completed a three-week tactical medical training course, designed to enable them to train an additional 1,500 officers.[112]

In addition to a shortage of equipment, police have to contend with living in neighborhoods controlled by gangs.[113] Despite their challenges, the HNP possesses a small number of capable units. The Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) and the Temporary Anti-Gang Unit (UTAG) are specialized forces within the HNP and are the most effective at engaging gangs. On August 25, 2025, the SWAT unit successfully retook control of the Teleco communications site, a critical telecommunications hub overlooking Port-au-Prince, and evacuated more than 200 orphaned children to safety. SWAT conducted the joint operation with MSS, FadʹH, and contractors from Vectus Global, who operated explosive drones in support of the attack.[114]

The Haitian Armed Forces (FadʹH), which had been disbanded in 1995 by Aristide, was reestablished on November 18, 2017, by Moïse as MINUSTAH stood down. Located at the old MINUSTAH base, Base Vertieres, the primary missions of the FadʹH are to support static infrastructure, portions of the port, half the airport, and critical communications sites. The FadʹH is still in the rebuilding phase. There are fewer than 1,300 soldiers, with almost half over the age of 40. They lack training capability, relying on other countries for training in their countries, but believe that if Base Vertieres were rehabilitated, they could train 360 soldiers every eight weeks. In recent months, they have sent 150 soldiers to Mexico for training.[115]

Private security and private military companies (PMCs) have been operating throughout Haiti for years in various capacities. Many are U.S. or internationally owned, and some, like Professional Security Services, are Haitian-owned. These companies provide a range of services from risk consulting, training, infrastructure security, and personal protection. They provide services to nonprofits, individuals, companies who can afford them, and the government of Haiti.[116] Many of the PMCs who seek to perform work for the Haitian government, such as Studebaker Defense Group and Vectus Global, employ former high ranking U.S. military and government officials.[117]

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2793

On September 30, 2025, acknowledging the MSS mission's shortfalls, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2793 to transition the mission into a larger Gang Suppression Force (GSF). In a letter to the UN Security Council on February 24, 2025, the Secretary-General recognized the efforts of the MSS, particularly those of the Kenyans to step up and assume the mission; however, despite the intentions and efforts of the MSS in support of the HNP and FadʼH, the security conditions in Haiti had worsened with violence at all-time highs and gangs controlling 85 percent of the capital.[118] UNSCR 2793 accepts that to meet the gang threat, the mission would need to be increased in size and bolstered with military forces, capabilities, and equipment. Notably, the body determined that the situation in Haiti represents a threat to peace, security, and stability in the region.

UNSCR 2793 approves the GSF for an initial period of twelve months and increases the authorized personnel ceiling to 5,500 uniformed personnel (a combination of military and police) and 50 civilians. The likely contributors of forces and resources for the GSF are expected initially to come from the Standing Group of Partners for the GSF, which includes the permanent representatives from Canada, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Kenya, The Bahamas, and the United States. Although, more countries will probably be needed to reach the required numbers. Key tasks the GSF will conduct include supporting HNP and FadʼH with intelligence-led targeting, counter-gang operations, and security for critical infrastructure, such as the airport, ports, hospitals, detention centers, and electricity grids. The GSF will also address illicit trafficking and will seize and dispose of illicit arms and ammunition. Finally, the GSF is intended to assist the HNP and FadʼH in creating adequate security to allow the population safe access to humanitarian aid and to hold free and fair elections.[119]

In addition to the GSF, UNSCR 2793 established the UN Support Office in Haiti (UNSOH) based in Port-au-Prince. The office is intended to provide logistical and operational support to the GSF and the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), the HNP, and FadʼH on joint operations with the GSF. Establishment of the UNSOH, modeled after the UN Support Office in Somalia, provides a delicate balance of providing the necessary logistical support for a mission in Haiti but avoiding a U.S.-led intervention as in 1994 and 2004. Unlike MINUSTAH, however, the GSF is not a UN peacekeeping mission that provides a greater legally binding authority, more secure funding, and stronger planning and execution capabilities. The GSF will rely on financial support from the UN Trust Fund, which requires voluntary donations from members.[120] Funding for the UNSOH will be collected by the UN through assessed contributions from UN member states.[121]

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are organized into three operational tiers to guide policymakers through sequential phases of stabilization. Tier I addresses immediate security imperatives to contain Haiti's insurgent gangs and secure the conditions for humanitarian access and credible elections. Tier II focuses on consolidation, strengthening judicial and institutional capacity to prevent relapse. Tier III emphasizes strategic enablers and long-term resilience, aligning Haiti's stabilization with broader U.S. and regional security objectives.

These recommendations are for U.S. Southern Command, the broader U.S. interagency, and in partnership with regional governments, international organizations, and the Gang Suppression Force. Each recommendation corresponds with Manwaring's framework of third-generation gangs as urban insurgents, requiring synchronized action across diplomatic, developmental, and security instruments of power. The ultimate goal is to shift Haiti's conflict from reactive crisis management toward a coordinated campaign of state restoration, restoring legitimacy, governance, and control of the population.

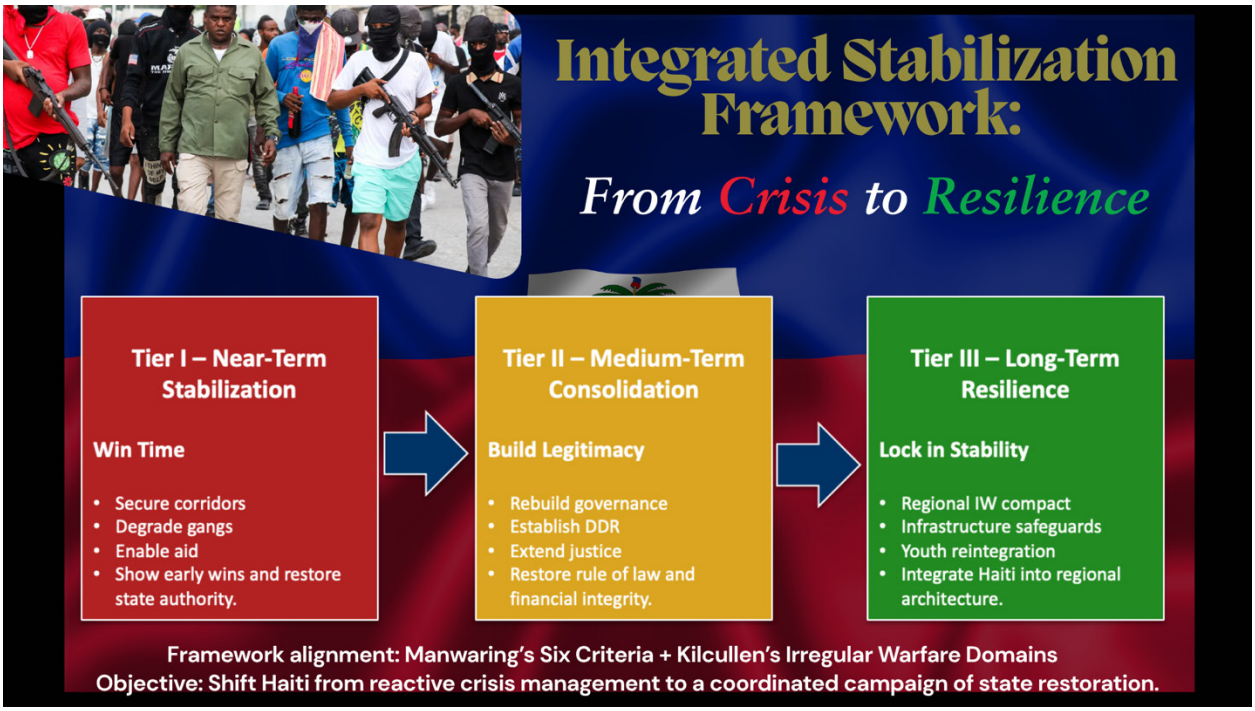

Figure 7. Integrated Stabilization Framework. Created by the report's author.

Tier I – Near-Term Stabilization (0–12 months)

Objectives: Degrade gang capability, secure population centers, and enable humanitarian operations.

1. Disrupt the flow of weapons and ammunition.

To effectively degrade gang capacity, interdiction must occur at the source, transit, and destination. U.S. government agencies should expand operations targeting southbound weapons flows from Florida, the Bahamas, and Turks and Caicos, which remain the primary conduits. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime has identified four key trafficking routes to Haiti; U.S. and regional coast guards should intensify joint patrols and container inspections. Within Haiti, the GSF and UN Support Office in Haiti must institutionalize procedures for seizing and safely destroying illicit arms to prevent recirculation.

2. Establish joint fusion and targeting cells.

Create operational cells that integrate GSF and partner intelligence, Haitian National Police liaison elements, and SOUTHCOM reach-back analysts to produce fused intelligence, financial, and information targeting products. These cells should prioritize high-value targets, financial nodes, and smuggling routes, serving as the intelligence backbone for GSF operations.

3. Launch urban "clear–hold–build" pilot zones.

Concentrate stabilization efforts in key corridors, such as the Varreux fuel terminal, Route Nationale 1, and downtown Port-au-Prince, combining kinetic clearing operations with humanitarian corridor protection and immediate reestablishment of police and administrative posts. These pilot zones will demonstrate visible state return and set the conditions for broader replication.

4. Integrated information operations cell.

Create a GSF-BINUH-HNP media coordination hub to synchronize messaging, counter gang propaganda, and highlight early mission successes. Information dominance is critical to reversing narratives of foreign occupation and legitimizing international assistance.

5. Humanitarian access guarantee mechanism.

Embed UN logistics officers and WFP personnel within GSF command to secure key aid routes to internally displaced person centers. Visible humanitarian gains will reinforce public trust in Haitian authorities and international forces.

Tier II – Medium-Term Consolidation (1–3 years)

Objectives: Restore governance, justice, and institutional legitimacy to prevent a relapse into insurgency.

1. Reestablish the National Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Center.

Building on the earlier Community Violence Reduction model, the Standing Group of Partners and donors to the UN Trust Fund should ensure sustained funding for reintegration programs offering vocational training and youth employment. The DDR Center should be embedded within Haiti's transitional authority to provide consistent oversight and accountability.

2. Specialized judicial and financial crime units.

Establish a hybrid Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Task Force, combining earlier "specialized judicial units" with counter-threat finance expertise. Supported by the Organization of American States, the UN, and the U.S. Department of Justice's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau, this unit would investigate high-level financial crimes, extortion networks, and money laundering linked to gangs and their political patrons.

3. Provincial stabilization hubs.

Extend GSF and HNP presence beyond Port-au-Prince by deploying joint detachments in Artibonite and Centre departments, areas where gangs have displaced governance entirely. Each hub should include a mobile court, humanitarian coordination cell, and police-military liaison team, restoring state authority through daily contact with local populations.

4. Institutional mentorship program.

Train, advise, and assist teams should be embedded not only within HNP and FAd'H units but also within Haiti's Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Finance. Strengthening financial governance will constrict gang revenue streams, while judicial mentorship will accelerate case management and improve rule-of-law capacity.

5. National communications grid restoration.

The MSS mission revealed crippling communication gaps; the GSF learned from this failure. Establish a secure national radio and digital network linking police precincts, mayors, and GSF command centers. This can be implemented through public–private partnerships, supported by the United States, international partners, or regional telecom providers, to ensure operational coordination and early warning across districts.

Tier III – Strategic Enablers and Long-Term Resilience (3–5 years and beyond)

Objectives: Lock in progress, prevent resurgence, and integrate Haiti into regional security architecture.

1. Regional irregular warfare compact.

Working through CARICOM, establish a standing mechanism similar to a mini Combined Joint Interagency Task Force that integrates intelligence, finance, and maritime interdiction efforts against transnational criminal-insurgent networks in the Caribbean. Haiti can serve as the pilot case for a Western Hemisphere model of criminal-insurgency deterrence.

2. Private sector and infrastructure safeguards.

Mobilize U.S. and partner development finance institutions like the Development Finance Corporation, Export–Import Bank, and Office of Strategic Capital to invest in Haitian port, energy, and customs modernization projects conditioned on transparency and anti-corruption benchmarks. This will reduce opportunities for gang taxation and create legitimate revenue flows for the Haitian government.

3. Information resilience initiative.

To counter both gang and foreign disinformation, launch a regional program through U.S. and international partners and BBC Media Action to train Haitian journalists, establish fact-checking nodes, and secure community radio stations. This initiative would strengthen informational sovereignty and inoculate the population against malign influence.

4. Youth rehabilitation and civic reintegration program.

Partner with UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration, and Haitian NGOs to demobilize and rehabilitate child and adolescent gang members. Programs should combine trauma counseling, education, and vocational training. Targeting Haiti's youth bulge is critical to preventing the next generation of recruits from perpetuating the cycle of criminal insurgency.

5. Regional coordination and policy coherence.

Ensure that future iterations of the GSF and UN Support Office transition into sustainable Haitian-led architecture by 2028. This requires clear milestones for force drawdown, integration with CARICOM's Regional Security System, and continuous policy synchronization between the United States, Canada, France, and the OAS.

If implemented sequentially, this strategy could degrade gang capacity and restore Haiti's sovereignty, reestablish the state's monopoly on force, and prevent malign actors from exploiting instability in the Caribbean basin.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that Haiti's crisis, often summarized as "institutional collapse" or "urban violence" demands a far more rigorous analytical framework. Through the lens of Manwaring's paradigm, the armed factions that dominate Port-au-Prince and key regions of the country are no longer criminal gangs; they are *third-generation hybrid insurgencies,* armed political actors with territorial dominance, coercive governance, superior firepower, and explicit strategic objectives.

Haiti has developed and now exhibits all the hallmarks of an entrenched insurgency:

- **A political economy of violence**, sustained by systemic extortion, ransom, and control of trafficking routes;
- **Parallel governance** over most of the capital, enforced through extrajudicial violence and social coercion;
- **Organized political-military coalitions** like Viv Ansanm, coordinating operations and shaping national politics;
- **Military and technological superiority** over state security forces, enhanced by foreign-sourced arms and urban warfare tactics; and
- **A regional spillover effect**, fueling migration, trafficking, and strategic interference by revisionist powers such as Venezuela, Russia, and China.

This reality places Haiti beyond the realm of peacekeeping or humanitarian management. It is an insurgency at the heart of the Caribbean that undermines regional security and challenges the credibility of the Western Hemisphere's collective defense of democracy. The emergence of a criminally governed state so close to U.S. shores threatens to export instability northward through transnational crime, migration, and malign influence.

The path forward is not another temporary deployment or isolated policing effort. It demands a sustained campaign with the coordinated application of security, governance, and information power designed to restore the state's ability to compete for its citizens. Haiti sits inside an adaptive cycle of irregular conflict; breaking that cycle requires unity of effort, consistent funding, and the political will to treat the problem as warfare, not crisis management.

For the United States and its partners, Haiti is both a warning and an opportunity: a test of whether it is possible to apply counterinsurgency doctrine close to home. Success will mean more than stabilizing Haiti. It will demonstrate that the Western Hemisphere can still defend its democratic order against those who rule through fear and coercion.

APPENDIX A. INTEGRATED POLICY MATRIX—STABILIZING HAITI THROUGH A COIN CAMPAIGNING APPROACH

Operational Tier	Primary Focus	Representative Recommendations	Manwaring Criteria Addressed	Kilcullen IW Domains	Lead / Supporting Actors	Intended Strategic Effect
Tier I – Near-Term Stabilization (0–12 months)	Degrade gang capacity, secure population centers, reestablish state presence.	• Disrupt weapons and ammunition flows. • Establish joint fusion and targeting cells. • Launch "clear–hold–build" pilot zones. • Create integrated information ops cell. • Guarantee humanitarian access corridors.	Territorial control/ Operational sophistication / External support	Military / Informational	GSF, HNP, UNSOH, USSOUTHCOM, WFP	Restore urban security corridors, enable humanitarian aid, and demonstrate the reemergence of legitimate state authority.
Tier II – Medium-Term Consolidation (1–3 years)	Restore governance, justice, and institutional legitimacy.	• Reestablish DDR Center and CVR programs. • Create specialized judicial and financial-crime units. • Stand up provincial stabilization hubs. • Institutional mentorship (justice and finance) • Restore national communications grid.	Governance functions / Resource extraction / economic capture	Political / Economic / Military	Transitional Presidential Council, Ministries of Justice and Finance, OAS, UNDP	Rebuild rule of law and financial integrity; cut gang revenue streams; extend legitimate governance beyond Port-au-Prince.
Tier III – Long-Term Resilience (3–5 years and beyond)	Lock in progress and integrate Haiti into regional security architecture.	• Establish regional counterinsurgency plan. • Implement infrastructure and private-sector safeguards (DFC, EXIM, OSC). • Launch Information-Resilience Initiative. • Develop youth rehabilitation and reintegration programs. • vCoordinate regional policy coherence and drawdown plans.	Political intent / External support / Governance functions	Informational / Political / Economic / Diplomatic	CARICOM, OAS, U.S. Department of State, SOUTHCOM, DFC, UNICEF, IOM	Institutionalize stability, deter malign external influence, and ensure regional burden sharing and sustainability.

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