

**Testimony of Henry T. Wooster, Chargé d’Affaires,
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Before the
United States Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
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The hearing is titled: “Haiti 2026: Security and Foreign Assistance Priorities”

Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Schatz, distinguished Members of the subcommittee: I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about Haiti.

WHY IS THE UNITED STATES IN HAITI?

The U.S. objective in Haiti is baseline stability. We define that as a) no state collapse, and b) no mass illegal migration to U.S. shores. Everything we do to implement the President’s foreign policy in Haiti anchors to this objective.

Today, I will share three updates from the field. First, I will explain how we are countering Haiti’s major destabilizers. Second, I will detail U.S. efforts to support the deployment of a new, UN-authorized international force. Lastly, I will report on U.S. government investments, as well as emerging opportunities, to advance our interests, and those of Haiti’s neighbors in the region, including our close ally, the Dominican Republic.

Update #1: HOW WE COUNTER HAITI’S DESTABILIZERS

Let’s establish a common operating picture. Haiti is a nettlesome foreign policy problem. Chronic political, economic, and governance dysfunction hinders stability. Yet setting security conditions that can put Haiti on a path to baseline stability is an achievable policy objective.

The Threat

The immediate threat to the Haitian state's survival is a coalition of armed, hostile organizations misleadingly called "gangs," that, as the Secretary stated in his 28 January testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, threaten systemic collapse and the formation of a government. In 2024, some 20 gangs allied under the umbrella "Viv Ansanm" to coordinate efforts against the state. In 2025, the United States designated Viv Ansanm and Gran Grif as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs). By mid-2025, gangs dominated Haiti's physical and information space, with some functioning as a proto-insurgent movement, combining armed violence with manipulation of public perception. Cooperation between these groups – some engaged in terrorism, some in criminal activity like rape, kidnap for ransom, robbery and pillaging, and others in efforts to overthrow the state – ebbs and flows depending upon the interest of their leaders. Early 2026 estimates put the size of the gang population around 12,000, of which approximately 3,000 are well-armed and experienced, and pose the greatest threat. By contrast, the Haitian National Police, or HNP, has approximately 6,000 personnel on the books, of whom maximally 400 – and often, less than half that – do most of the fighting.

Inflection Point

Today – for the first time since 2021 – Haitian security forces have gangs, including those designated as FTOs, on the defensive, resulting from efforts by the HNP, the Armed Forces of Haiti, also known as the FAd'H, the UN-authorized Gang Suppression Force, or GSF, and a U.S. private military contractor employed by the Haitian Government. The Haitian Task Force introduced aviation assets and advanced weaponry that altered the momentum and geometry of the fight, pummeling gangs with a handful of determined ground forces. These scalable gains – made possible by U.S. assistance for the HNP and GSF – support our objectives. Yet they remain fragile. Lasting progress requires consolidating gains – impossible without sustained "hold forces."

The State

Good governance – accountable leaders, ensuring security, delivering services – is essential for stability. A predatory political culture which impedes governance and the provision of essential services is another debilitating factor. It's been a decade since Haiti's last elections, and five years since President Jovenel Moïse's assassination. Successive unelected "transitional" authorities have failed to deliver elections. The latest experiment – a nine-member Transitional Presidential Council (TPC) – concluded just 72 hours ago, when their mandate expired. Laurent Saint-Cyr, the TPC's final Chairman, and Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aimé have been indispensable partners in advancing our shared interests in the security and stability needed to prevent state collapse, avert mass migration, and enable Haiti's governance transition. Both withstood death threats, blackmail, and numerous attempts by corrupt officials to oust them. Our results-driven diplomacy – including law enforcement, sanctions, and visa restrictions – are helping end an era of impunity for the country's destabilizers. Under Laurent Saint-Cyr's leadership, the Council approved a decree setting elections for 2026. We must work to help Haiti have an elected government. Unelected and unaccountable politicians and gang leaders have undermined Haitians' security and governance for far too long.

The Economy

Haiti's gangs thrive on necessity, not ideology. With seven consecutive years of economic contraction and more than 1.4 million people displaced, the formal economy has all but disappeared; younger generations view gangs as the only reliable source of income. According to the U.S. Department of Labor in 2024, over 34 percent of children aged 5-14 are forced to work, including for gangs. Haiti must create job opportunities to outcompete gangs for the long-term. The workforce of Haiti's garment manufacturing industry has decreased by approximately 65 percent – from roughly 60,000 in 2021 to roughly 20,000 in 2024, in part due to the deteriorating security situation. Additionally, the expiration of Haiti HOPE/HELP in September of 2025 and economic destabilization disincentivized investment and economic engagement from foreign businesses. Congress's reauthorization of Haiti

HOPE/HELP trade preference programs was one action to address these issues and vital in ensuring the continuity of Haiti's textile and apparel industry, which is Haiti's largest formal employment sector. It is estimated that for every one Haitian employed in the textile and apparel sector, approximately 7-12 family members are supported, providing an alternative to gangs and reinforcing U.S. interests.

Update #2: U.S. SUPPORT FOR NEW, UN-AUTHORIZED FORCE

Last September, U.S. diplomacy led to the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2793. This resolution authorized transitioning the U.S.-funded Multinational Security Support mission to a UN-supported GSF. The UN mandate authorizes deployment of 5,500 uniformed military and police personnel to conduct intelligence-led, targeted, counter-gang operations to neutralize, isolate, and deter gangs; to secure critical infrastructure; and to enhance the operational capacities of the Haitian security forces.

The United States coordinates generation of the GSF as chair of the Standing Group of Partners. Fifteen countries pledged over 11,000 personnel for the GSF. Last week, the Standing Group of Partners approved the slate of 5,500 personnel. The first units will deploy in April. Clearing operations commence in May. We thank all of our partners, including Congress, for making this Administration priority a reality.

Update #3: U.S. INVESTMENTS: PROGRAMMING, EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

The GSF will work from Day One to put itself out of business as Haiti builds its own security. Continuing to invest in the HNP enables our policy objective of baseline stability. Thanks to funds appropriated by Congress, State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) is transforming Haiti's capacity to fend for itself. INL's "P-4000" initiative is boosting the HNP by 4,000 new officers in 16 months. Nearly 900 cadets graduated in January.

That notwithstanding, police alone cannot secure Haiti. We appreciate Congress' authorization of non-lethal support for Haiti's nascent military – the FAd'H. A trained, equipped, and modernized FAd'H is vital for Haiti's

sustained security. Military service provides youth an alternative to joining gangs. Haiti needs FAd'H support in engineering to rebuild devastated infrastructure and disaster response. Our objective here, again, is straightforward: consolidate these gains so Haiti does not export instability and terrorist threats to U.S. borders, or into the wider hemisphere.

Security gains will be fleeting without improving economic conditions to sustain Haitian society. Other nations and organizations must lend efforts to the solution. We invite you to engage humanitarian and business groups to create jobs, invest in promising enterprises, and rebuild Haiti.

And economic and security progress will be sustainable only when Haiti has a government that is chosen by and beholden to the Haitian people, as provided for in the election timetable adopted by the transitional government.

It is true: Haiti's problems are grave. But progress is achievable, as we counter the destabilizers, deploy a military coalition through the aggregate UN, and invest strategically to enable Haiti to regain capacity to secure its own homeland and people, benefiting U.S. interests and the region.

Thank you.