

**Testimony of Michael Kozak, Senior Bureau Official,
Western Hemisphere Affairs Bureau
Before the
United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs
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**“Confronting Haiti's Terrorist Gangs: The Gang Suppression Force and the
Path Ahead”**

Chairman Mast, Ranking Member Meeks, distinguished Members of the committee: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about Haiti.

The United States’ overarching objective in Haiti is baseline stability. The immediate threat to the Haitian state’s survival, as well as regional stability, is a network of armed groups, including U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations, which threaten to take over the Haitian state while destabilizing the region through narcotics and arms trafficking. We estimate the gang population at around 12,000, approximately 3,000 of whom are well-armed, experienced, and pose an existential threat to Haiti.

The Trump Administration took immediate steps to develop a fit-for-purpose international response. The former MSS mission cost U.S. taxpayers over \$1 billion but supported only 1,000 security forces, predominantly police, that had no clear mandate to act unilaterally. That’s a cost of over half a million dollars per person a year.

We took the lessons from that previous mission and designed a fit-for-purpose, joint police and military intelligence driven force.

Last September, the United States and Panama led the UN Security Council's adoption of resolution 2793. This resolution immediately transitioned the Multinational Security Support mission to a novel hybrid approach. With this new mandate, the United States and five other regional countries, namely Canada, The Bahamas, El Salvador, Jamaica, and Guatemala, making up the "Standing Group of Partners," have recruited qualified participating states on a voluntary basis to deploy as a Gang Suppression Force (GSF). The Council authorized UN logistics support to the GSF – a burden previously incurred almost entirely by U.S. taxpayers – under a new "UN Support Office in Haiti," or UNSOH. The United States chairs the Standing Group of Partners, which provides the new GSF with strategic direction and oversight, while UNSOH handles the supply and logistics of the participating forces.

This UN mandate authorized the deployment of up to 5,500 uniformed military and police personnel to conduct intelligence-led, targeted operations to neutralize, isolate, and deter gangs; to secure critical infrastructure; and to enhance the operational capacity of Haitian security forces through joint planning and operations. In fact, we were only able to accept a third of the troop pledges received, we ensured that the forces deployed have the capability and equipment required to respond to the urban proto-insurgency plaguing Haiti. Unlike the former mission, contingents deploy with their own

equipment and receive reimbursement from the UN, ensuring personnel are fully trained and familiar with the equipment on the ground. And ensuring that the United States does not unilaterally foot the bill.

The civilian staff component led by the GSF's Special Representative Jack Christofides provides on-the-ground support, oversight, and accountability for the force, including working to prevent and respond to accusations of any sexual exploitation and abuse. This civilian component will make the force more efficient and more accountable.

The Organization for American States is involved as the key regional stakeholder body. The OAS provides necessary privileges and immunities to the Special Representative and his civilian team and hosts a donor-funded account to support the SR's mandate.

In the coming weeks, more troops and their equipment will arrive. GSF operations will expand geographically to clear and hold more territory. UNSOH is pressing to expand the GSF footprint by supplying new forward operating bases at strategic locations. They are working to keep pace with GSF logistics demands. The Department is working with UN professionals to ensure the right pieces are positioned for success. This new model ensures the UN membership cost-shares the price tag of logistics and sustainment with the United States, while donors cover certain personnel costs through a UN Trust Fund, which now has over \$100 million in its coffers.

We have enlisted our regional partners in the formation of the Standing Group of Partners, tied the mission's civilian component to the Organization of American States, and expanded our coalition of support to countries ranging from Mongolia to Qatar. Growing voluntary contributions to the GSF reflect a shared global recognition that Haiti's crisis carries severe consequences for 12 million people and implications for the hemisphere. We are encouraged by the progress made thus far as the new entities forge stronger coordination among Haitian authorities and key international partners.

As the GSF helps Haiti retake and secure key terrain, strategic infrastructure, and vital supply and transit routes, the force is working to “put itself out of business.” One of the first tasks of the Special Representative was to define an exit strategy with measurable objectives, performance indicators, and an implementation timeline, which he submitted to the SGP and UNSC on June 29.

Perhaps most significantly compared to the litany of past international forces supporting Haiti, this time Haiti's leadership is intent on rebuilding its own capacity. This includes a 40% expansion of the Haitian police this year and reconstituting a military for the first time in decades. To this end, GSF forces work with vetted Haitian security forces as they re-establish and grow their national capacity. The United States supports the expansion and professionalization of the Haitian National Police to strengthen their ability to

hold territory once they and GSF have established baseline security and counter Haitian gangs.

To achieve baseline stability, the Haitian government sees holding elections as a critical step given that the country's political instability underlies much of the security crisis. It is not just that the gangs got stronger; the government got weaker. July 7 marked the fifth anniversary of the assassination of Haiti's last elected president, Jovenel Moïse. Haiti's interim government is in the process of preparing for national elections, paving the way for an elected government by next year – absolutely essential to stabilizing Haiti in ending chronic crisis.

Economically, Haiti's priority is creating jobs as an alternative to gang enlistment. U.S. trade preference programs, including HOPE/HELP, support a significant number of jobs in Haiti's formal economy by providing duty-free access to U.S. markets for most Haitian manufactured textile and apparel goods. With Congressional reauthorization of these programs set to expire December 31, Haiti's economy depends on a multiyear reauthorization. Absent a multiyear authorization, investors will continue to pull up stakes – already resulting in layoffs as businesses lose the time horizon to turn initial costs into profitable enterprise over multiple years and recoup their significant initial costs. We share the Haitian government's interest in strengthening alternatives to gang membership for Haitian youth and reigniting the power of private investment through a multi-year reauthorization of HOPE/HELP.

Haiti's problems are grave and fueled by narco-terrorists seeking to destabilize the region. But progress is achievable this year with sustained attention and investment to advance U.S. interests in stabilizing Haiti and preventing mass migration to the United States. The GSF will ramp up to full operations in coming months. The Haitian people and their interim government are determined not to squander this opportunity to invest in their own future security, regain military and police capacity to protect their own homeland, and close a dark chapter of mass suffering. Now is the time to solidify the path for Haiti's future – for their benefit, as well as for the United States and the broader region.

Thank you.