

# CONFLICT TRENDS

ISSUE 4, 2009



# UNITED NATIONS PRESENCE IN HAITI: CHALLENGES OF A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PEACEKEEPING MISSION

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Map No. 3855 Rev. 4 UNITED NATIONS  
June 2008

Department of Field Support  
Cartographic Section

## Introduction

Haiti has had a very complex and dynamic history, from its role as the “Pearl of the Antilles” in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to its label as the poorest country in the western hemisphere in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the last 60 years or so – despite gross violations of human rights, lack of security and poor or no delivery of basic services to the population – Haiti remained out of the United Nations (UN) security agenda because of its political inclusion

under the United States (US) zone of influence. It was only after the end of the Cold War that the UN Security Council (UNSC) was involved with Haiti for the first time. From 1993 to 2004, six UN missions were approved and deployed to Haiti (the first one being a joint mission with the Organisation of American States). The last and current mission, deployed in June 2004 and still on the ground, is the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), and is the only one that has a truly



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**Haitian children, standing in garbage outside their homes in Port-au-Prince, highlights the extreme poverty found in Haiti.**

multidimensional mandate. This seems to render it more able to provide stability, and (eventually) promote sustainable peace in Haiti. This article aims to provide an overall and introductory discussion of the UN's recent involvement in Haiti, with special attention to MINUSTAH and its multidimensional nature, highlighting some of its features and main challenges.

### **Background**

Haiti is now considered a "failed state".<sup>1</sup> Although this is a controversial statement, it basically refers to a country whose government is not capable of providing basic security and development needs, and does not hold the monopoly over the use of force in its own territory.<sup>2</sup>

Since its independence in 1804, the Republic of Haiti (*Republik Dayti*, in Créole) has continuously faced problems and challenges in providing political stability, economic growth, basic infrastructure and a minimum

level of security for its people. A large number of *coups d'états*, together with self-referent political elites, provided the basis for a non-functioning country for about 200 years.

More recently, in the mid-1950s, the Duvaliers regime (1957-1986) began to use the existing structure under its control to persecute and kill political adversaries or whoever would pose a threat to the regime. It is widely recognised that tens of thousands of people were either assassinated or exiled by "Papa Doc" (Dr François Duvalier), who was followed in power by his son, "Baby Doc". For 30 years, Haitians faced repression, arbitrary detentions and active violations of human rights, trying to resist through some level of armed violence – but also with waves of demonstrations and mobilisations that only gained international support in the mid-1980s, especially in the US. In the 1990 elections, amidst deaths and other violent incidents, Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide



**The government of Haiti is not able to provide people with basic security and development needs and the country has been considered a “failed state”**

rose to power, and formed a government with Prime Minister René Préval. This is commonly referred to as the first free election in Haiti. A few months later, however, another *coup d'état* occurred, headed by General Cédras, who remained in power until the end of 1994, despite oil, arms and general trade embargoes imposed by the UN.

During the coup regime in 1993, the then exiled Aristide, with the support of the US, negotiated the first involvement of the UN in Haiti through the International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH). This was a joint mission between the UN and a regional organisation, the Organization of American States (OAS) – created in February 1993 with a limited mandate to monitor the human rights situation in Haiti. Once Aristide returned to power at the end of 1994, MICIVIH’s mandate was expanded also to include the more active promotion of human rights and institution building.

Throughout the next 10 years, a series of UN missions with very limited mandates followed. For several reasons, the UN could not negotiate a more robust mission, and the simple fact of authorising and

deploying a mission every two years – on average – negatively affected the UN’s legitimacy and capacity of dealing with Haiti seriously.

A more comprehensive initiative was established by the UNSC on 30 April 2004, when resolution 1542 created MINUSTAH.<sup>3</sup> From the beginning until its current format, MINUSTAH was founded on three main pillars:

1. secure and stable environment;
2. political process; and
3. human rights.

This structure allowed MINUSTAH to be categorised as a “multidimensional peacekeeping mission”, with an intricate institutional arrangement in which the military, police and civilian components all fall under the responsibility of a civilian appointed by the UN Secretary-General (the Special Representative of the Secretary General – SRSG).

The idea of creating and deploying multidimensional peacekeeping missions is a (late) response by the UN to the complexity of contemporary armed conflicts, especially after the end of the Cold War. Although the

concept already existed in the UN by the time the first (joint) mission was deployed to Haiti in 1993, it took some time before the multidimensional structure was consolidated within the UN itself. MINUSTAH is the first UN mission in Haiti that truly integrates civilian, police and military components – at least at the strategic and operational levels. This increases expectations in terms of the delivery of stabilisation, security and development to the country.

### **Multidimensional Peacekeeping Missions**

Historical records show that most armed conflicts are intrastate in nature, at least since the end of the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it was only after the end of the Cold War that the UNSC acknowledged the challenges of armed conflicts as a threat to international peace and security. The late recognition brought several consequences to the type of solutions that the UNSC would propose to deal with these threats. Solutions such as peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations suffered several legitimacy crises, as they were not able to deal effectively with the situations that they were sent to control.

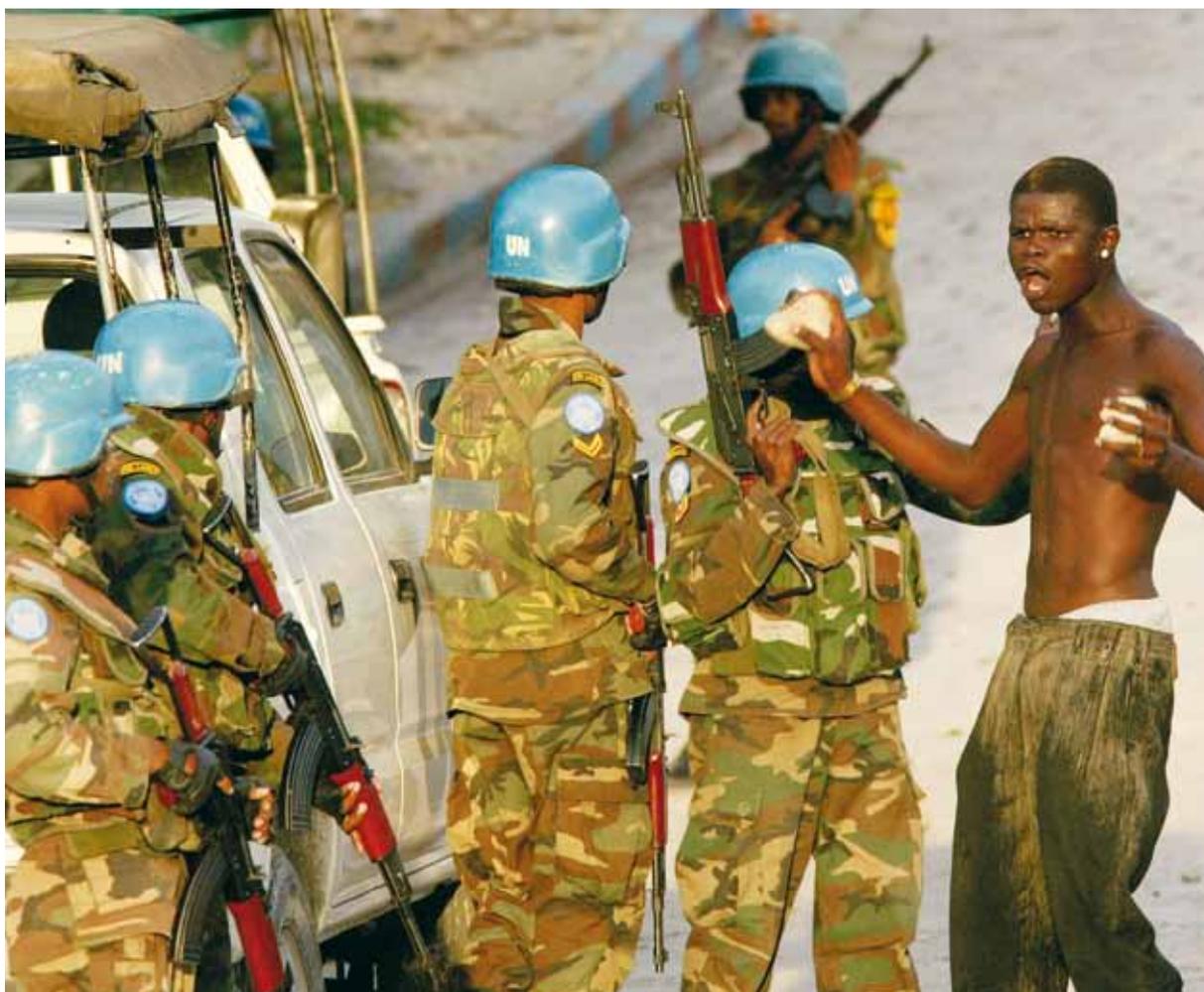
There are several differences when comparing the first peacekeeping mission in 1948 (or the first peacekeeping mission *with troops* in 1956) and the ones that were authorised by the UNSC after the 1990s. Three main factors seem to be quite relevant: the features of the conflict, the nature of the response by the UN, and the evolution of the situation within the life cycle of the conflict. The first type of missions would traditionally involve states as the main actors, would be somehow static in terms of the conflict cycle, and would depend highly on military tasks, such as monitoring ceasefires and patrolling buffer zones. They would not include humanitarian assistance or development aid, nor would they deal with other aspects of the conflict that would go beyond traditional military tasks. In the 1960s, the UN started to recognise the relevance of the conflict cycle and some intrastate issues and, when designing new tools for peacekeeping, the UNSC started deploying the first few police officers on the ground, with civilian agencies following shortly.

From the beginning of the 1990s, with the recognition that intrastate issues were definitely relevant to international peace and security, and with the need to integrate peacekeeping and peacebuilding into one



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**The United Nations multidimensional peacekeeping mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was established in April 2004.**



**MINUSTAH has been able to successfully provide a minimum level of security in several cities in Haiti, especially in Port-au-Prince.**

single mission in specific cases<sup>5</sup>, a multidimensional framework finally became part of the UN agenda. The military remains the key component of UN personnel in peacekeeping missions but, at the present moment, alongside the 80 500 troops and 2 200 military observers deployed to all 15 UN peacekeeping missions, there are also nearly 12 000 police officers and 18 000 civilians (both international and local personnel).<sup>6</sup> These numbers demonstrate the inevitable multidimensional aspect of most contemporary peacekeeping operations, which highlights the need for the coexistence of several actors on the ground.

Thus, there is now a clear acknowledgement that international security problems are complex and that their causes and consequences have multiple layers and, as such, complex and multilayered responses would have better chances of achieving stable and sustainable solutions. This need for a multidimensional solution, however, is not reflected in every peacekeeping

mission, since its mandate and structure largely depends on political negotiations<sup>7</sup>. When considering the UN involvement in Haiti, it is only with MINUSTAH that the multidimensional aspect was finally included as a tool for conflict resolution. MINUSTAH definitely integrates peacekeeping and peacebuilding within its structure, which increases the expectations and the chances for success, as compared to the lack of comprehensive solutions within the preceding UN missions in Haiti.

#### **MINUSTAH and its Main Challenges**

There are significant advances and small successes in Haiti. In less than six years, MINUSTAH was able to promote a certain level of stability that the preceding missions did not achieve. Every former violent neighbourhood in the capital city, Port-au-Prince, is now virtually under control of a military contingent of MINUSTAH. The relative success of the military pillar lays the ground for higher expectations in terms of achieving what has



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**As part of its multidimensional mandate MINUSTAH also has police officers on the ground in Haiti.**

been promised in the other two pillars of the mission's mandate. A multidimensional peacekeeping mission cannot be oversimplified to its military component, which means that the overall success of MINUSTAH should be assessed and measured together with the performing tasks of its other components. In other words, once the situation is relatively stable, the tasks that immediately gain importance are the ones related to development, and this is where any multidimensional peacekeeping mission – including MINUSTAH – would face major challenges to its success.

First, the lack of integrated planning and training among the three main components of a multidimensional mission makes it very difficult to think of an integrated action of any type. Some tasks are truly multidimensional – such as the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former-combatants<sup>8</sup>, promoting rule of law and institution building, and working for the protection of civilians. It is not impossible to implement these tasks

together, but it is rather difficult to do so without previous integrated planning and training, considering time constraints, limited resources, institutional biases, and the like. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations is trying to tackle this problem and has just launched new training materials, which aim to provide a platform for training civilians, police and military officers together. It remains to be seen whether these materials and training will facilitate interaction among the multiple players on the ground, since they explicitly include information only at the strategic and operational levels.

Second, it may be hard to assess the success of the multidimensional mission in Haiti, because of the hidden agendas of actors in the field and at high political levels (in the Haitian elite and in the UN). It seems that, apart from traditional spoilers to any peace process, some individuals and groups usually included among the “good guys” or constructive groups would also benefit from instability and from promoting a



**Former United States President, Bill Clinton (left) and United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon (right) with Haiti's President, Rene Preval (center) during Clinton's and Ban Ki-moon's recent visit to work on an "action plan" to tackle the grinding poverty in Haiti (October 2009).**

"victimised face" of Haiti. These groups could eventually become "spoilers" – even if they are included among the constructive parties. It is possible to identify certain groups in Haiti who benefit from a non-functioning state, from corruption and from a lack of surveillance, while others want to explore cheap labour and benefit from the lack of regulations. There are some, too, who would lose their jobs if the mission effectively achieves its goals and is destined to end. These groups do not use firearms and they are not a direct challenge to the conventional military component, but there is a similar result of undermining the political and peace processes. This is why such groups should also be perceived as spoilers, even if they are not commonly perceived as traditional troublemakers. This raises at least two questions: does the UN have the mandate to deal with these internal and protracted problems and, if so, how will expectations be managed in such overestimated missions? On the other hand, if MINUSTAH does not suggest anything to deal with internal corruption in a more effective way,

how will it ever achieve its broad mandate of promoting sustainable peace?

A third challenge would relate to the development period itself. The mission in Haiti has clearly achieved its military goal and, although the situation is not sustainable – or *because* it is not sustainable – it is necessary to strengthen the development aspects of the process. However, levels of corruption are extremely high in Haiti<sup>9</sup>, and this is a major problem for political and institutional stability that ideally precedes development efforts. How can Bill Clinton, recently appointed by the UN Secretary-General as special envoy, succeed in his tasks of attracting foreign investments to Haiti in an economically sustainable and healthy way? Is it too soon for foreign investment, when considering the high risks on the ground? How is political corruption in a country that had, until recently, one *coup d'état* after another, overcome? And how far can a multidimensional mission go in terms of expanding its own mandate and consequently expanding its own institutional capacity?

On the other hand, it is widely understood that foreign investments will help the current situation in Haiti to become more stable. History shows that countries take decades to build healthy financial and economic systems; can the UN really help Haiti start this process in just a few years?

Last, but not least, a multidimensional mission also faces challenges posed by the local population. After achieving some degree of stability in the security dimension, the population itself will replace its survival concerns over being killed or violated (either by the government or by armed groups) with new demands, such as socio-economic human rights – especially food, education, health (water and sanitation) and employment. Environmental issues in Haiti are also a major challenge for the country and for the population's survival and, besides the lack of fertile soils, tropical storms continuously destroy its fragile infrastructure. These and many other problems directly affect reconstruction and further development. This is not only the case in Haiti, but also in several other developing and underdeveloped countries, and is another significant challenge faced by multidimensional peacekeeping missions.

When analysing whether and how to expand the mandate of MINUSTAH in October 2009, the UNSC will likely need to consider some of these challenges, if the chances of mission success are to be increased.

### Conclusion

It was only by the end of the Cold War that the UNSC started authorising multidimensional peacekeeping missions. However, even when the situation on the ground requires such missions, the UNSC depends on political negotiations with its member states in order to authorise and to deploy such missions effectively. This explains why the missions sent by the UN to Haiti throughout the 1990s were not multidimensional. MINUSTAH, the first multidimensional peacekeeping mission in Haiti, established in 2004, is considered to be a step forward. In less than six years, MINUSTAH managed to provide a minimum level of security in several cities, especially in Port-au-Prince, and this is perceived as a clear success of the military component of MINUSTAH. However, providing security is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the overall success of a multidimensional mission. Presently, with some stability established, MINUSTAH now faces increasing challenges to promote sustainable development, which needs to be stimulated and delivered with the assistance of its civilian and police components, together with Haitian authorities, the local population and other parallel efforts by the international community. 

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### Endnotes

- 1 Foreign Policy and The Fund for Peace. In *The Failed States Index 2009*, Available at: <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/2009\\_failed\\_states\\_index\\_interactive\\_map\\_and\\_rankings](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/2009_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings)> Accessed on: 10 October 2009.
- 2 The definition used by the Crisis States Research Centre since 2006, available at: <<http://www.crisisstates.com/download/drc/FailedState.pdf>> Accessed on: 10 October 2009.
- 3 It is relevant to note that, before MINUSTAH took charge on 1 June 2004, a multinational force (MNF) was created by the UNSC in the same year, as a deterrent mission. The MNF was able to prevent the armed movement from entering the capital city, Port-au-Prince, and it also laid the ground for MINUSTAH. The MNF was perceived to be a military mission, and not a peacekeeping one. For more information on MINUSTAH, see <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/minustah/index.html>> Accessed on: 9 October 2009.
- 4 Gleditsch, Nils Petter; Wallensteen, Peter, Eriksson, Mikael, Sollenberg, Margareta and Stand, Håvard (2002) *Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset*. In *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 39, n. 5, p. 624.
- 5 For example, see *Agenda for Peace* (1992) and its supplement (1995), both by then UN Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros Ghali, and the *Brahimi Report* (2000), which is the resulting paper of a panel of experts convened by then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to discuss the adaption of peacekeeping missions to a new environment.
- 6 DPKO (2009) *Background Notes on Haiti* (31 August 2009), Available at: <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/bnote.htm>> Accessed on: 10 October 2009.
- 7 The UNSC tailors the missions according to the problem it faces, but it also needs to take into consideration the political will of member states and some capability limits (related to the actual commitment of member states to engage their own human and political resources to the mission, once it is approved), since the UN does not have stand-by armed forces to deploy.
- 8 By the end of 2005, the UN DDR efforts failed because they did not fit the dynamics of armed violence in Haiti. The DDR project within MINUSTAH was then reframed by the UNSC, and it is now called "Community Violence Reduction".
- 9 According to Transparency International, in its yearly publication *Corruption Perception Index*, Haiti is in 177<sup>th</sup> place, out of the 180 countries analysed in 2008. For more information, see: <[http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2008](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2008)>.