



Home ► Research & Analysis



Four Ways the U.S. Can Help Advance Haiti's Progress

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Establishment of the Kenya-led security mission and transitional government are important milestones.
- Broadening multinational support is critical to building on these successes.
- More robust U.S. engagement can be achieved through existing U.S. programs and coordination with Haiti's diaspora.

Thursday, September 5, 2024 / READ TIME: 9 minutes

BY: Georges Fauriol

Share This

Print the Page

Since Haiti reached a political agreement in early April to push ahead with an “orderly transition,” much progress has been made. Mediated by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), that [deal](#) has a February 2026 timetable for an elected government and parliament. Although politically and administratively wobbly, a transitional governance structure is in place, led by a Transition Presidential Council (TPC) and Prime Minister Garry Conille. A Kenyan-led Multinational Security Support mission (MSS) is now [active](#) in the country and working to stabilize the security situation. Working with Haiti’s political and civil society leadership, the country’s diaspora and key international actors, the U.S. can help build on these milestones and pave a sustainable path out of Haiti’s long-running crises.

The United States [signaled its commitment](#) to that endeavor this week, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken visiting the country to assess the work of the MSS. Amid a host of global challenges that Washington is tangling with, Blinken’s visit is the first by a U.S. secretary of state in nearly a decade.

Conille, the new prime minister, is a visible, dynamic and a reassuring personality in the wake of the ultimately abysmal tenure of his predecessor, Ariel Henry. Less reassuring are the political tensions within the TPC. Some of this is the result of it being composed of Haiti’s diverse, if not fractured, political community, and operational tensions with Conille, in addition to the challenge of delivering clear, timely and sustained policy messages to the average Haitian citizen. At this point, none of these political concerns are insurmountable — in part due to the deployment of the MSS.

For most Haitians, these developments suggest a more hopeful shift regarding their immediate future — moving from generalized mayhem to a sense that someone cares. However, the daily reality for many in the Port-au-Prince region, in particular, has not changed that much and some of the initial joint Haitian National Police- (HNP)

MSS operations have had the [unnerving result](#) of highlighting the disjointed character of the international response to Haiti's security crisis.

“For most Haitians, these developments suggest a more hopeful shift regarding their immediate future — moving from generalized mayhem to a sense that someone cares.”

Part of the problem here is one of perception and confused messaging. The issue is not just that the Kenyan contingent at its fullest (1,000) will be insufficient to address the full range of security challenges, but that the MSS is perceived by too many as replicating previous U.N. peacekeeping missions. Although the U.N. Security Council [approved](#) the MSS in October 2023 (and needs to renewed it by October 2), it is not a conventional U.N. peacekeeping operation. Instead, it is designed primarily to support the depleted capacity of the HNP as it eventually moves toward an effective law enforcement arm of the government. Beyond clarity about its mission, the MSS also needs to devise and synchronize logistical, intelligence, medical and other basic military operational support functions, as well as the legal/human rights monitoring capacity. On top of that, is the often-delicate management of relations with the host government and local community relations.

Haitian Civil Society Is Ready to get to Work

Many of these challenges can be addressed by Haiti's transitional government. And contrary to the public perception of Haiti as a lost cause, the country retains a robust civil society community likely to play key roles in the transition process and follow-on consolidation. For example, the recent formation of a monitoring committee (*Comité de Pilotage*) for the National Conference — the latter a key component of the April political accord — is encouraging. It represents the first step toward the key milestones needed to achieve a democratic transition in February 2026: adopting consensus and operational language framing revisions to the 1987 constitution, redefining the societal compact between the state and civil society and political parties, and identifying key reforms to the nation's judicial system.

Likewise, a civil society-led undertaking, the *Groupe d'Assistance à la Transition* (GAT), was launched recently in response to requests from the TPC and Conille. They both face the practical implications of a complex decision-making agenda while the transition clock is ticking. The GAT's mission includes mobilizing the participation of social, economic and political stakeholders, as well as providing a potential interlocutor to the international community's engagement in transition-related efforts.

But Haiti Still Needs a lot of Help from Its Friends

Another encouraging move was Conille leading a government delegation to the northern port city of Cap-Haitien the last week of August, along with a large group of diplomatic representatives from the U.S., Canada, France, Spain, Mexico, Chile, Switzerland, the U.N. and the EU. Not only was he reaching out beyond Port-au-Prince but he used the opportunity to confirm his governance priorities: addressing the security and humanitarian crises, strengthening the judiciary, reenergizing the economy, and moving ahead with a constitutional reform and national elections. Critically, he did so by underscoring the key role that international partners will have to play to achieve these goals. One can interpret this as a direct appeal to

Washington and other key capitals that the reversal of Haiti's downward trajectory can only be sustained with more energetic international support.

Even amid a host of competing global crises, the upcoming U.N. General Assembly provides a useful multilateral platform to focus on Haiti. But getting that focus requires additional actions by the U.S. government. Although pre-occupied with other domestic and foreign policy challenges, Washington should be reassured by the fact that the U.S. has played an important role in advances made so far, including the deployment of the MSS and CARICOM's successful mediation of the April 2024 Haitian political agreement and ensuing establishment of the TPC. But to be sustained, these achievements now require a second act.

What Washington Can Do

Over the next 90 days, Washington's diverse decision-making centers and networks need to pursue specific actions:

- 1. Keep up with security challenges.** While the Kenyan MSS is being deployed, there remains a lack of clarity as to how and when other contingents will deploy. Although the U.S. does not have to be the sole funder, it is nonetheless the chief fundraiser and needs to do more diplomatic heavy lifting to get others, especially in the hemisphere, to ante up. Blinken's visit should help in this regard. Supporting the MSS can go beyond funding, including training, logistical support and medical services. The painful reality on the ground is that the longer the currently limited Kenyan MSS deployment appears to flounder, the more Haiti's gangs will expand their violence geographically and be emboldened to assume they can graduate to a political role in national politics.
- 2. Economic recovery and infrastructure resilience.** Two existing U.S. Haiti-related initiatives could make a significant difference, but require action:
 - *Provide employment:* The most immediate are the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement (HOPE) and the Haiti Economic Lift Program (HELP) acts, which allow U.S. duty-free access for apparel and textile products

produced in Haiti. HOPE/HELP is due to expire September 2025, and its uncertain prospects imply that long-term production contracts are already being diverted away from Haiti. For a program that has represented over 80% of Haiti's total exports, its [demise would be catastrophic](#).

- *Ensure Longevity of Assistance:* The other longer term U.S. policy initiative relates to [Haiti's inclusion under the Global Fragility Act \(GFA\)](#), renamed the [Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability](#). Its virtue lies in its 10-year timeframe, unified conceptual approach and locally led assistance vision. Significantly, it is designed to go beyond addressing insecurity by building ways to mitigate future crises through constructing institutional resiliency by empowering a cross-section of Haitian public, private, and civil society institutions. Although some preparatory work is underway, operationalizing the GFA now would merge with a critical need in Haiti today — ensuring that key institutions remain viable and capable of contributing to the rebuilding of a resilient society.

This support would be timely for Haiti's struggling and overwhelmed transitional governance apparatus. Another example could be to provide direct support to Haiti's few institutions of higher learning, whose student body constituency is disappearing due to insecurity — affecting not only the financial viability of those institutions but also the ability to generate home-grown policy solutions to Haiti's crises. This will be a factor in reversing the emigration of Haiti's talent pool.

3. Mobilize the diaspora. During Conille's visit to Washington in July, he sought to [energize the Haitian diaspora](#) toward a more active role in restoring Haiti's governance, security and development. In doing so, he highlighted the diaspora's potential as an asset to U.S. efforts to address Haiti's crises. But unlike other established diaspora communities, Haiti's lacks a unified voice and strategic focus. That needs to change quickly. Whether it is encouraged through Haitians diaspora initiatives, lessons learned from other Caribbean diaspora policy efforts, an extra push from Haiti-related U.S. advocacy groups, or even Capitol Hill's limited Haiti-related constituency, the time is now to translate initial success into sustainable initiatives capable of making real change.

4. Unify and clarify U.S. strategy. In fact, the near-term successes of U.S. policies on Haiti are linked to a global agenda of relationships: Washington's close-in Caribbean context; key Latin American actors; support from traditional Haiti-policy allies like Canada, France and the EU along with other supporters like Japan and South Korea; multilateral donor diplomacy, particularly at the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank; as well as diplomatic forums like the U.N. and Organization of American States. These are critical to the international community's engagement in Haiti and their ability to row in the same direction will be key to success. Many look to the U.S. to help provide a unifying strategy.

Cumulatively, the above actions can clarify the various strands of U.S. strategy. The operating term here is "clarify"; the challenge is not so much the absence of a strategy as its disaggregated character. This points to the expanding demands that U.S. engagement toward Haiti is making on layers of U.S. government capabilities and resources, let alone the global complexities of productively managing the diplomacy of U.S. Haiti policy.

On the outer edges of all the work to address Haiti's crisis — exemplified by Kenya's engagement — is the need to conceptualize the global context of Haiti's crisis and how the U.S. cultivates a diverse environment increasingly being characterized as the Global South. Much of the needed energy can feed on the measurable achievements of the last 90 days, as well as a necessary engagement of international civil society networks including Haiti's own U.S.-based diaspora. To be sustainable, this requires follow-on actions.

PHOTO: The Haitian police patrolling the mostly empty streets of Pétionville, Haiti on Monday, Oct. 18, 2021. (Adriana Zehbrauskas/The New York Times)

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s).

PUBLICATION TYPE: Analysis

How to Break Gangs' Grip on Haiti



Ki Sa Siksè Politik Etazini ta Dwe Sanble an Ayiti?



À quoi ressemble le succès de la politique américaine en Haïti?



What Does U.S. Policy Success Look Like in Haiti?



[View All Research & Analysis](#)

COUNTRIES



Haiti

STAY INFORMED

USIP has a variety of newsletters and announcements with the latest analysis, publications and events.

Sign up!



UNITED STATES
INSTITUTE OF PEACE

2301 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20037

Tel: +1.202.457.1700

About USIP

Countries & Regions

Research & Analysis

Gandhi-King Global Academy

Connect

Press

Projects

The Olive Branch Blog



The United States Institute of Peace

Legal and Privacy Information | FOIA Inquiries