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# Adapting BINUH to Meet Haiti's Evolving Challenges

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# 1. Introduction

**The UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) is struggling to remain relevant amid major shifts in Haiti’s political, security, and humanitarian landscape, including the deployment of a Security Council-mandated multinational security support mission to assist the National Police. The renewal of BINUH’s mandate represents an opportunity to realign its role and resources to better address Haiti’s evolving challenges. By enhancing political engagement, coordination, and thematic expertise and mitigating risks associated with the Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS), BINUH can play a more effective and relevant role in supporting Haiti’s path to stability and development. The next few months are critical, and the UN must be agile and responsive to ensure the success of the MSS and the broader international efforts in Haiti.**

A year ago, in July 2023, the political stalemate between former Prime Minister Ariel Henry and the opposition was [continuing to deepen](#), while the security situation was also continuing to worsen. The Security Council-authorized Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS) had been approved nine months prior, in October 2022, but remained in [suspension](#), searching for a lead intervener. The mandate for the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (known by the French acronym BINUH) remained similarly in stasis, with little change from the previous year, 2022, when a worsening of the security situation led to a bolstering of BINUH security and an increase in BINUH police capacities.

Now, as the July 15 deadline for renewal of the BINUH mandate approaches, the mission sits in a substantially changed landscape. Intense and coordinated gang violence beginning in early March in the capital Port-au-Prince led to an effort by a collection of regional states to encourage [Prime Minister Henry to resign](#) in favor of [a new transitional presidential council](#) that was sworn into office in April, the appointment of a new [prime minister, Gary Conille](#), and the transitional government in June.

The coordinated gang violence in March and April resulted in Haiti's [worst security crisis in recent history](#), with dozens of official buildings and institutions damaged, destroyed, or looted, leaving the Port-au-Prince health sector on the verge of collapse, [half a million Haitians displaced](#), and tens of thousands of children once more out of school for months. The violence has resulted in at least [2,500 deaths or injuries](#) in the first quarter of 2024, half as many as were recorded for the whole of 2023, continuing an almost exponential acceleration of violence in recent months. Furthermore, the attacks in March and April substantially increased the power and control of the gangs and further devastated the capacity of an already embattled and weakened Haitian National Police (HNP).

Internationally backed efforts to address the security situation are finally in progress. The much-delayed deployment of the UN-authorized, Kenyan-led multinational security support mission (MSS) finally began with the [deployment of several hundred Kenyan police officers](#) in the last week of June. The Kenyans have deployed highly specialized and trained personnel, but the coordination and effectiveness of the MSS, in the complex Haitian context, is by no means assured, particularly if BINUH, the UN country team, regional countries, and other stakeholders do not play their part.

## 2. BINUH and the Multinational Security Support Mission to Haiti

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In the current changed circumstances, the UN must take seriously the implications of the MSS deployment for the UN presence in the country. Success by the MSS, working with the HNP and the Government, defined as providing the security and political space for a credible election, will require an engaged and responsive UN, particularly in providing support for transitions between the present crisis, the holding of elections, and a post-election quest for sustained security and rule of law.

### How BINUH can enhance the chances of success for the MSS

The UN has a long history of involvement in Haiti, with a peacekeeping or political presence in the country for 25 of the past 30 years, including, since 2019, BINUH. The MSS is not a traditional UN mission: the [UN Security Council authorized](#) it, but it is not a blue helmet operation with access to dedicated UN peacekeeping backstopping resources at headquarters, including the coordination capacities, processes, structures, and expertise that have facilitated the deployment of and, in turn, been developed by dozens of missions over the past 75 years.

Under the Security Council [mandate for the MSS](#), the mission is being deployed with the ultimate aim to “re-establish security in Haiti and build security conditions conducive to holding free and fair elections,” as well as to “help ensure unhindered and safe access to humanitarian aid for the population receiving assistance” through its support for the HNP.

In the resolution, the UN only has one formal role—establishing and running a trust fund in support of the mission. However, informally, the UN is well-placed to offer substantial advisory support to the MSS, given its institutional memory in Haiti and further afield. While this has happened to some extent, by and large the bulk of the operational and logistical planning for the MSS has been taking place outside the UN.

Other areas of the resolution directly encourage or seem to imply support to the MSS by BINUH or other parts of the UN and could contribute to the mission’s success. Critically, delivering on these other areas of the mandate will require strong

operational linkages between BINUH and the UN country team, which should together reflect the necessary capabilities and resources to contribute to what could broadly be defined as a stabilization mission.

For example, the Security Council encourages the MSS to cooperate with the UN in the country, including BINUH and relevant UN agencies, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the UN Human Rights Office, to support the HNP in re-establishing security in Haiti. This will likely require engagement with, among others, the UN police advisers fielded by BINUH and collocated with many parts of the police, for example, to develop the national security strategy referenced in the transitional presidential council's foundational political accord.

BINUH and the UN, more broadly, also have unique expertise relevant to implementing the mandate's authorization of "urgent and temporary measures," i.e., powers of detention and arrest intended to help the HNP maintain basic law and order and public safety.

Furthermore, the resolution calls on the MSS to incorporate capacities in key areas, including "anti-gang operations, community-oriented policing, children and women's protection, and preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in a victim-centered manner," all areas where the UN has robust bodies of expertise and where BINUH has increasingly been active. Providing advice and expertise in these areas could help the MSS more effectively tackle them, but BINUH and the UN country team need to be fit for purpose to deliver in these areas.

## **How BINUH can mitigate the risks of the MSS**

Even as the UN works to help ensure the success of the MSS, it must also work to guard against some of the potential risks and challenges posed by the mission's deployment. The deployment of an intervention poses risks to all parties on the ground, from civilians to the transitional council to MSS personnel. Like many peacekeeping operations frequently deployed under robust Chapter VII mandates, the UN Security Council has authorized the MSS to "take all necessary measures" to fulfill its mandate. [Recent statements](#) by members of the Haitian presidential transitional council indicate that, for now, they view the Kenyan-led force as a supplement for the HNP, an enabler meant to take over static responsibilities like protection of the airport and other critical infrastructure to free the Haitian police for more robust operations.

However, if the MSS ends up taking a more forward-leaning role in anti-gang operations, the risks to all parties will increase. [Securitized interventions can often be counterproductive](#) and have been known to exacerbate violence. The worst-case scenario would be that the actions of the MSS end up exacerbating the country's already horrendous security conditions, whether by triggering expanded gang violence, destabilizing gang dynamics, or resulting in civilian casualties.

Managing these risks will likely require more robust BINUH engagement with the MSS, not less. If BINUH distances itself from the MSS, this will likely lead to the mission being cut out of the loop and less able to influence MSS and HNP operations for the better.

Some might argue that there is a risk that the UN could be perceived to be aligned with the MSS. Given that the MSS is a UN Security Council-mandated mission, it is already difficult, if not impossible, to divorce BINUH and the MSS in the minds of Haitians. The UN in Haiti, therefore, faces a delicate balancing act between, on the one hand, defining itself in relation to the MSS while also ensuring effective coordination with the mission. Walking this line will require robust strategic communication and political engagement with Haitian interlocutors and Haitian communities to inform them about the roles of the various organizations, in addition to strong civil-military or civil-police liaison and coordination efforts between BINUH and the MSS, as discussed in the next section.

In addition, the MSS is still working to establish its compliance mechanisms, particularly for preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, protecting human rights, as well as for conduct and discipline and environmental protection. The UN is already sharing information with the MSS about its accountability mechanisms in these areas. The MSS should particularly take lessons from the UN regarding what not to do, lest it inadvertently repeat the worst mistakes of previous UN deployments in Haiti, which led to the reintroduction of cholera in 2011, killing 10,000 Haitians and dozens of children produced as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers serving in the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).



## A potential UN role in longer-term support for the MSS

Financing of the MSS remains a major issue. The trust fund managed by the UN in support of the MSS, which is overseen by an advisory council that includes Kenya, so far has [only about \\$21 million in it](#), a fraction of the \$600 million that some estimate will be required for a year of operation.

The Security Council resolution provides an option for the UN to expand support to the MSS. OP17 of the Security Council resolution allows MSS members or donors to request the UN to provide a support package but through funding from voluntary contributions. However, UN experience has shown that effective logistical support requires [predictable, sustainable, and adequate funding](#). Without sufficient financing and established sustainment mechanisms, supporting the mission through its expected February 2026 end date will be challenging. To improve the chances of success for the mission, the Security Council may wish to amend OP17 to include an assessed funding mechanism, not only voluntary funding. However, such an amendment is likely only possible on the back of tangible successes by the MSS in its work with the HNP.

At the moment, the MSS continues to operate through an ad hoc operational and logistical framework. Longer-term efforts will require, subject to funding, the establishment of systems for tasks including the procurement of mission requirements, like water and rations, assistance with technological set-up and maintenance, management of facilities, or administration of payments and requests. There are many options for [providing this support to the mission](#) in the longer term. Providing assistance through an expanded and upgraded BINUH or a stand-alone UN support office, like in Somalia, could help standardize and streamline logistics and help enhance the mission's likelihood of success.

# 3. So what is to be done? BINUH and the security response

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## Enhancing coordination with the MSS and HNP

To mitigate the risks outlined above, ensuring a minimum level of coordination between BINUH and the MSS is crucial. Haiti is not the first place where the UN has been deployed alongside non-UN forces; other examples include Mali and Somalia. Among other examples, BINUH may wish to look at the [instance de coordination militaire du Mali](#) for a model for coordination between critical actors on the ground.

Of course, Mali and Haiti present important differences. Instead of the force commanders of the different military forces deployed in Mali, it might make more sense to establish a tripartite coordination mechanism between the BINUH Police Commissioner, the head of the MSS, and the Director-General of the HNP. A strategic-level coordination mechanism like this one, which in Mali met formally every three months, would likely need to be supported by a working-level coordination mechanism, discussed in the next subsection.

However, coordination cannot remain only at the strategic and operational levels. The political implications of police operations call for cooperation at a political level and efforts to coordinate and align the different political and operational aspects. The MSS will likely have a role in supporting or bolstering the Haitian transitional government's work—or at least not undermining their efforts. For example, ensuring that operations consider the risks to civilians and are politically sensitive in their timing will be vital to ensuring that the efforts of the fragile transitional government are not undercut. As a result, a BINUH whole-of-mission approach to coordination should incorporate political, police, and human rights capacities and considerations into engagement with the MSS.

An additional way to ensure a holistic approach to coordination could be by providing a Security Council-mandated [UN logistical support package to the MSS through BINUH](#), necessitating deep and expansive operational coordination. Greater coordination in this regard would help enhance the alignment of the activities of the MSS with the broader political process.

## **The need for a dedicated BINUH coordination and situational awareness capability**

Since the departure of the last peacekeeping mission, the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti, MINUJUSTH, in 2019, the UN in Haiti has not possessed a consolidated capacity for coordination and situational awareness—the types of capacity enshrined in Joint Operations Centers (JOCs), which are standard features of peacekeeping operations. While BINUH has experimented with some internal, ad hoc mechanisms for coordination and situational awareness, these efforts have not proved sustainable. At the same time, political missions, including the UN Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC) and the UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), have JOCs that serve as a central coordination and analysis capacity.

Establishing a central information-gathering and coordination capacity in BINUH, similar to a JOC, would help enhance the mission's effectiveness. Coordinating and information-sharing between entities is time-consuming and labor-intensive, requiring specialized expertise and dedicated capacity. To establish this capacity, BINUH will likely require a small amount of additional staff resources, as few as two or three staff members with expertise in coordination, situational awareness, and civil-police or civil-military liaison. This capacity could help organize and oversee regular working-level coordination with the MSS on behalf of the tripartite coordination mechanism. It could also lead the coordination of situational awareness inputs at the working level from various BINUH units, including Human Rights, Police, Political, and Community Violence Reduction, and from other parts of the UN, in particular, UNODC and the UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), to develop and present a common picture to senior decision-makers. The unit could serve as a central funnel between the MSS and the rest of the UN via BINUH, ensuring that the MSS has a single point of call to share information with, consult, and access the resources of the UN while the UN is able to share consolidated and coordinated information with the MSS.

Moreover, standing coordination and situational awareness capacity would make the UN more effective and nimbler in responding to developing situations in Haiti's volatile context. During multiple crises over the last several years, the lack of a central convening and analysis capacity has led to a fragmentation of narratives and demanded the devotion of substantial amounts of time at the beginning of each crisis to developing a common understanding of the situation and identifying

appropriate internal and external responses. When adequately carried out, situational awareness is key to effective coordination, ensuring that coordination efforts reflect and arise from up-to-date information and analysis. Given that Haiti is moving into a critical and potentially fragile time, particularly ahead of planned elections, establishing a centralized coordination and situational awareness capacity would make a substantial difference in the mission's preparation, flexibility, and responsiveness.

## 4. Ensuring robust BINUH support for Haiti: considerations for the BINUH mandate renewal

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Given the deployment of the MSS and the changes in the Haitian context, it is critical to take stock of BINUH's role and identify ways that the mission might adjust its work to be more effective. Compared to past peacekeeping missions, BINUH is small, but in the broader Haitian landscape, it remains an important actor with strengths in human rights monitoring and advocacy, police capacity-building, and advisory support for justice, corrections, and community violence reduction. In the current situation, a handful of key changes to the mandate could ensure that BINUH is well positioned to support Haitian authorities in responding to the evolving situation, including revitalizing its political good offices, bolstering its support to Haitian authorities in the areas of elections and justice, and increasing its ability to work in and deliver advice and good offices to outlying regions of Haiti.

### Reinvigorating political engagement and support

The most important contribution that BINUH can make to the success of the MSS will continue to be through implementing its mandate, particularly for political engagement. BINUH's primary mandated role, as laid out in [Security Council resolution 2476 \(2019\)](#), is the provision of political advice, advocacy, and good offices, particularly regarding promoting and strengthening political stability and good governance.

On the other hand, the Security Council mandate for the MSS does not include a link to an ongoing political process. Yet UN peacekeeping missions around the world have found that security-focused interventions without a link to a political process have [a poor record of success](#). At best, the MSS may be able to create some space to allow the country to regain its footing and allow the political process to move forward. But if the MSS has any chance of success, it will be because the Haitian people, first and foremost, supported by the UN and the international community, ensure the Haitian transitional council and appointed Haitian government remain on track towards the goal of reconstituting the Haitian state.

However, recent political engagement has been led mostly by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), with BINUH on the sidelines. Given the challenging legacy of the UN in Haiti, some might argue this is for the best, but BINUH continues to have a political mandate from the Security Council, as well as a political coordinating and convening role. And there remains a considerable amount to do, politically speaking, if BINUH is able to step up to the plate.

Even if many of the main parties have managed to come together in the seven-member transitional presidential council, Haitian political dynamics remain highly fractured. A concerted effort to engage directly and deeply with all actors, including Haitian civil society, the private sector, business elites, youth, and rural organizations, as well as political actors, is critical to developing a sense of consensus around the way forward, around a vision for what a recovered Haiti could and should look like.

More importantly, getting a transitional arrangement up and running may be easier than keeping it going. A winner-take-all approach has historically infused Haitian politics, and while the transitional presidential council and its prime minister, Gary Conille, have so far managed to weather some initial ups and downs, their job is only beginning. Over the next eighteen months, before the expiry of the agreement in February 2026, they must still appoint an electoral council and organize elections, a highly fraught set of tasks even in better times. Moreover, the political agreement that established the transitional government also calls for a reform of the constitution, a much-needed but potentially divisive process.

Moreover, now is the time for political engagement and capacity-building at the national and sub-regional levels and support for political party development. Haiti is notorious for its [large number of political parties](#), most based around individual personalities rather than sets of political and developmental policies and priorities. If BINUH and other national and international actors begin soon, they could develop and roll out a joint political development and capacity-building program in many towns and districts across the country, where security is much better than in the capital.

To encourage steps in one or more of these directions, the Security Council might wish to consider requesting BINUH to prepare and implement a political strategy to support the transitional government's efforts. Another option could be encouraging BINUH to conduct an internal review of its political engagement and further options for good offices across the country.

## **Strengthening BINUH thematic expertise in key areas**

### **BOLSTERING ELECTORAL CAPACITY**

In previous elections conducted during the time of MINUSTAH and MINUJUSTH, the UN played an essential role in supporting Haitian electoral management structures. Similarly, the UN made substantial investments during the presidency of Jovenel Moïse in preparation for elections and a constitutional referendum, polls that were never held, in the wake of his assassination. Given the deterioration of the government's capacity and infrastructure, the Haitian transitional council is likely to look for similar support from the UN as it prepares to hold local, legislative, and presidential elections and potentially a constitutional referendum in the next eighteen months.

Providing appropriate support to Haitian electoral institutions would require a modest scaling-up of BINUH elections capacities, including facilitating the deployment of these capacities to outlying regions of Haiti. The UN system-wide Elections Task Force, comprising capacities from the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and others, can help ensure that the comparative advantages of the various UN and development system partners can be coordinated and applied effectively to support Haitian government elections efforts.

### **SUPPORT FOR GANG-AFFECTED AREAS**

Finally, police operations by the MSS alone will not be sufficient to restore security. The HNP has had some success in fighting gangs and preventing their territorial expansion. Still, it has been unable to restore, much less maintain, security in many neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince. Assuming the MSS can provide sufficient assistance to the police to improve security in key gang-affected communities, BINUH and the UN country team should be ready to support the Haitian government with engagement in these areas.

Establishing security in gang-affected neighborhoods will be a long and challenging process. Still, it should, among other things, involve providing much-needed and long-absent services to these areas, as well as establishing or reestablishing state institutions in gang-dominated neighborhoods, ensuring the provision of humanitarian aid, and working with communities to build resiliency and strengthen

livelihoods. Moreover, efforts should ideally involve support for gang members who wish to disengage, disarm, and reenter society. Reportedly, up to [half of all gang members are children](#), while many gang members have reportedly joined gangs as a result of coercion or because they are otherwise unable to obtain food and shelter.

The results of past efforts in gang-dominated neighborhoods have been mixed and were mostly suspended as security worsened. As a result, renewed efforts should commence by consulting and engaging with community members, as best permitted by security concerns, in genuinely participatory consultations with community members to develop approaches from the bottom up. These consultations, in turn, can feed into efforts to reconceptualize overall strategies for community violence reduction. While many of these steps are contingent on effective security and political progress, BINUH and the UN agencies, funds, and programmes can work with government and civil society partners to define a strategy and take initial steps to engage in these areas.

Enhanced support and engagement from the UN country team will be essential in this area. As a model, the country team could look at [community stabilization programming in north-east Nigeria](#), including coordination mechanisms between the UN, in particular UNDP, the state governments, security agencies, and civil society. The UN country team will need to ensure adequate resourcing and staffing to play its role effectively in a coordinated surge to take and hold ground from the gangs.

## **Expanding BINUH presence and reach**

In connection with the above-mentioned needs, it would also be helpful to enhance the ability of BINUH to engage in parts of the country outside Port-au-Prince. The presence of BINUH is currently confined to Port-au-Prince, and with increased gang control of the capital, UN staff members, like most Haitians, have found themselves largely trapped in the city in what some have described as [an “open-air prison.”](#) Even in better times, BINUH travel to the country’s various regions was infrequent, occurring only when security permitted and when sufficient armored vehicles were available, two circumstances that did not often align. These missions to other parts of Haiti are now on hold indefinitely, given the fact that gangs control all routes leading out of Port-au-Prince.



If BINUH is to maximize its support to the new Haitian government, consideration should be given to expanding the effective operational range of BINUH. The easiest way to expand the mission's reach would be to increase its capacity to move safely through dangerous territory by bolstering the number of armored vehicles in the BINUH fleet, which is currently insufficient for even regular operations in Port-au-Prince, once they resume. As an alternative, expanding a limited BINUH presence to the provinces could be a cost-effective way of ensuring BINUH business continuity by maintaining regional bases for activity in the face of continuing volatility in the capital. Small satellite offices in Haiti's largest cities in the northern and southern peninsulas, Cap Haitien and Les Cayes, could piggyback on existing UN agency infrastructure, including regional liaison offices for UNDSS. Through these small satellite offices, BINUH could more effectively carry out mandated activities at the regional level, in particular political engagement, police capacity-building, and human rights monitoring, while helping coordinate the delivery of interagency efforts like support for election preparations.

## 5. Conclusion

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While the deployment of the MSS is the most salient change in the BINUH operating environment since last year, the BINUH mandate renewal must consider all key shifts, including the deterioration of the security situation, the installation of a new transitional council and transitional government, and a substantial worsening in the already severe humanitarian crisis. The degradation of the situation in Haiti, the current level of despair, and displacement in the country mean that it will not be a quick process to return Haiti to the place it was even four or five years ago. To help the UN ensure that the situation in Haiti does not worsen even further, the UN must be given and employ all necessary tools to enhance its political engagement, coordination, and thematic expertise, as well as to mitigate the risks associated with the MSS.

Furthermore, much work remains to ensure the fitness of the MSS, especially if it is to remain in place through the swearing-in of a newly elected government in February 2026, as some propose. The UN should provide what support it can to help reestablish security and create a foundation for rebuilding the Haitian state.

The next few weeks, as the MSS deploys, will be crucial. The UN will need to continually assess the evolving security situation and deployment dynamics to mitigate risks and enhance chances for success. The UN should also continue to take advantage of upcoming opportunities to examine and adjust the UN response on the ground, including in early October 2024, when the mandate for the MSS will be up for renewal.

In the meantime, the UN needs to surge in ambition and political boldness to avoid irrelevance. Over the next few critical months, the UN must be flexible and responsive to ensure the success of the MSS and the broader international efforts in Haiti. The risk is great that the UN will be consigned to the sidelines as some level of success is recorded—even if this success is difficult to sustain—which will cement the sense of the organization as failing across multiple fronts. Real success will require the UN, but first, the UN needs to re-establish its footing and reengage.

## 6. Summary of policy recommendations

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In the coming weeks, BINUH should:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive political strategy to support the transitional council and government, with a focus on fostering consensus and stability.
- Develop clear communication strategies to delineate BINUH's role from that of the MSS while ensuring effective coordination.
- Be allocated additional staff with expertise in coordination, civil-police/military liaison, and situational analysis.
- Share best practices and accountability mechanisms with the MSS to prevent issues like sexual exploitation and abuse, drawing on lessons from past UN missions in Haiti.
- Work with the Haitian government and MSS to re-establish state services and institutions in gang-dominated neighborhoods.
- Engage in community consultations to develop bottom-up approaches for violence reduction and community resilience.
- Receive expanded capacity in key areas such as electoral support, community violence reduction, and human rights protection.
- Deploy these capacities to regions outside Port-au-Prince to ensure broader reach and impact.