

Haiti Appeals for Armed Intervention and Aid to Quell Chaos

Prime Minister Ariel Henry and his government asked the international community to step in, largely to control gang violence that has ravaged the capital.



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With unchecked gang violence rocking Haiti’s capital and a cholera outbreak spreading, Haiti’s government said on Friday that it was calling for a foreign armed intervention to stabilize the country, one of multiple pleas it made this week for international aid to pull it back from the brink of a humanitarian disaster.

In a written resolution, Prime Minister Ariel Henry’s government said that it was seeking “a specialized armed force” from other countries to quell the chaos.

Circumstances in Haiti have become particularly dire in recent weeks, even for a country often plagued by violence and hunger — and a government that seems unable to help. The worsening gang warfare has only deepened in the 15 months since the assassination of Haiti’s former President Jovenel Moïse, a crime that remains unsolved but in which officials in the current government have been implicated.

“I ask the entire international community, all the countries friendly to Haiti, to help us, to help us to fight this humanitarian crisis,” he said on Wednesday in a speech. “We need them to give all kinds of support to prevent a lot of people from dying.”

A battle for control among gangs has ravaged the capital, Port-au-Prince, where the criminal groups operate in 90 percent of the city and its suburbs, according to the National Human Rights Defense Network, a local human rights group.

Now, the country is threatened by an outbreak of cholera, which has killed seven people since Sunday and likely infected more than a hundred others, the United Nations said.

Still, Haiti, a small Caribbean nation, has not been at the top of the priority list in Washington and other world capitals focused on war in Ukraine, the global energy crisis, the risk of recession and escalating protests in Iran.



Antigovernment protesters this week in Port-au-Prince. Credit...Johnson Sabin/EPA, via Shutterstock

But as more Haitians migrate to the United States, often on dangerous journeys in boats known to capsize in rough seas, the violence and poverty that have consumed the country have grown ever more concerning to American officials.

Some are worried that what for months has been a slow-moving descent into lawlessness may have accelerated into all-out chaos, requiring more urgent attention from the international community. The news of the prime minister's request for security assistance was reported earlier [on Friday by the Miami Herald](#).

A senior official of another Caribbean nation said that members of Mr. Henry's government have been discussing for several months now the need for an international peacekeeping force, but without directly requesting assistance. The official added that while many countries in the region acknowledge that Haiti is slipping out of control and its problems will likely ripple across the Western Hemisphere, they are already stretched thin economically and would be deeply reluctant to commit resources abroad.

It is not clear how an international security force would be received by Haitians, who might see it as meddling in their affairs. United Nations peacekeepers who were in the country between 2004 and 2017 committed sexual abuse and introduced cholera to the country, starting an outbreak that killed nearly 10,000 people, according to the World Health Organization.

"There is a lack of will from our leaders," said Reginald Delva, a Haitian security consultant. The request for outside intervention, Mr. Delva said, "confirms that they have no will to address the problem, because in fact it is a problem which can be solved from local resources."

There is little appetite for Washington to intervene in another foreign country, after the withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan, amid increased troop commitments to Europe, and with midterm elections looming.

In recent weeks, gangs have been blocking access to the main fuel terminal in Port-au-Prince, aggravating widespread fuel shortages, forcing hospitals to close and affecting water distribution, further hampering efforts to control the cholera outbreak. Bruno Maes, UNICEF's representative in Haiti, warned that the insecurity was preventing Haitians from buying soap and collecting garbage, creating ripe conditions for the disease, which spreads primarily through fecal contamination of water.

"With the rising violence and insecurity, many of the poorest Haitian families have no option but to drink and use unsafe water," Mr. Maes said in a statement this week. "Cholera can easily spread like wildfire throughout Haiti if people continue to have no or limited access to basic health, water and hygiene services due to insecurity." On Thursday, the United Nations called for the opening of a "humanitarian corridor" to allow for the flow of fuel, with the U.N.'s deputy special representative to the country, Ulrika Richardson, telling reporters that "the conditions are there for a perfect storm."



Demonstrators this week demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry. Credit...Richard Pierrin/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

One of the questions facing the Biden administration is what threshold Haiti must cross in order for the United States to consider pushing for a deployment of a U.N. peacekeeping force, a senior administration official said.

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met on Thursday with the head of the Organization of American States, Luis Almagro, and other officials to discuss the problems in Haiti. After the meeting, Mr. Almagro said on Twitter that Haiti “must request urgent assistance from the international community to help resolve security crises, determine the characteristics of an international security force.”

Mr. Blinken did not mention a possible intervention in remarks made before the meeting, nor did a State Department readout released afterward.

“We strongly condemn the acts of violence, the looting, the destruction of the past weeks, including the gangs’ continuing fuel blockade, which has had a devastating impact across Haiti,” Mr. Blinken said before the meeting.



For months, Haitians have faced a lack of gasoline and have been paying exorbitant prices on the black market. Credit...Johnson Sabin/EPA, via Shutterstock

Sending international troops to stabilize the country could bolster Mr. Henry's government, which many Haitians view as illegitimate. The prime minister had [ties to a prime suspect](#) in the assassination of Mr. Moïse, who was murdered in his home in July 2021, and Mr. Henry has come under suspicion of [protecting and coordinating with the suspect](#).

Any U.S. involvement in a peacekeeping force could be seen as contradicting Washington's promises to stay neutral in Haiti's domestic politics. Over a dozen members of Congress signed a letter on Thursday calling on the Biden administration to avoid appearing to support Mr. Henry, as he has "no constitutional and popular mandate."

In the 1990s, the United States and the United Nations sent peacekeeping forces in an attempt to stabilize Haiti, and the United Nations did again starting in 2004. The country last requested international troops in the aftermath of the killing of Mr. Moïse last year.