

Haiti: Geopolitical Turmoil in the Wake of the Earthquake (ARI)

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Theme: What are the international and domestic implications of the Haiti earthquake?

Summary: As well as being one of the worst natural disasters in history, the earthquake in Haiti in January exposed the developmental shortcomings of the poorest country in America and had repercussions on its foreign relations and internal policy. As the damage is still being assessed and the debates carry on regarding the reconstruction agenda, this ARI looks at the international response to the humanitarian catastrophe and its effects on the country's domestic political agenda.

Analysis: The earthquake changed many things, both inside and outside Haiti. International relations with the country are changing. The United Nations continues to lead the humanitarian aid efforts and the reconstruction, but new and old donors are vying with each other to gain leadership and play a prominent role.

Latin America is emerging as a region of strong commitment, with its heterogeneousness, in both bilateral and multilateral terms. The Dominican Republic is playing a new supportive role. The traditional allies of the north are taking a predictable approach: the US, ambiguous in its intentions but with a considerable military presence, and Canada, very stable and constant in its relationship with Haiti. Meanwhile, the EU, and in particular Spain, has reacted in line with its role as provider of aid in the region. France has been the surprise: President Sarkozy was the first French head of state to visit Haiti and has promised to donate €326 million, partly by cancelling Haiti's debt to France, a legacy of its independence in 1804.

Solidarity with Haiti

The earthquake of 12 January 2010 shocked the world. The large number of victims and the images of the capital razed to the ground, broadcasted live by the media, had a strong impact on international public opinion and unleashed a global movement of solidarity towards Haitians. From Canada to Chile, from Rwanda to East Timor, more than a hundred nations responded to the tragedy with some form of help, sending rescue teams and aid, food or medicines.

The huge devastation caused by the earthquake has brought to the fore the relationship between the impact of natural disasters and development levels. The comparison with the subsequent earthquake in Chile, which was of a greater magnitude (albeit in a less populated area) but much less destructive than that of Haiti, evidenced just how defenceless the Caribbean country is against hurricanes or earthquakes. The blatant lack of development has stirred up spectres from the past –such as the unjustified debt to France for recognising its independence– and has revived the feelings of solidarity among

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creditors from developed countries and international financial institutions. The support and debates that followed the earthquake did not emerge solely because of the tragic event itself that left more than 220,000 people dead, 300,000 wounded and 1.3 million people affected, but also because of the long-standing 'injustice' towards countries that are the victims of international policies that hamper their development. 'Haiti is a creditor, not a debtor' according to Haitian economist Camille Chalmers.¹ Although the countries with which Haiti had bilateral debts have cancelled them, international financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have yet to do so. According to the President of Brazil, cancelling the US\$1.3 billion debt is a more real way of translating political discourse into actions that will help Haiti.² As of 4 March, US\$2 billion in contributions to Haiti had been registered, and another US\$1 billion had been pledged.³

The losses are mind-boggling. The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) estimates that they total between US\$8 billion and US\$14 billion, although the Haitian government puts the figure at a much lower US\$5 billion, as well as 90,000 jobs lost. Haiti will be a reconstruction zone for the next 10 years. Just removing the rubble from the city and demolishing those buildings that were affected by the earthquake and are still in danger of falling down could take three to four years.⁴ If the task of rebuilding Chile is colossal, in Haiti it will put development back by around 10 years. Without resources, machinery, architects and engineers of its own, Haiti has become even more dependent on the international community.

The International Response

The UN, which was directly affected by the earthquake, has had to take on the role of leader. Although it was internally criticised by the head of United Nations Humanitarian Affairs, it should be taken into account that in the earthquake the UN lost its Special Representative to the Secretary General and its second-in-command in the country, as well as 100 other people who worked at its headquarters in Haiti.

The United Nations still has legitimacy to lead, but the speed with which the US deployed 20,000 military and civilian personnel in the first few days after the earthquake put various Latin American countries on the back foot, as they interpreted this response as a reflection of old imperialist interests. The deployment of marines before the delivery of provisions or tents was a striking move by the Obama Administration. Patrick Ellie, former Defence Minister of Haiti, said 'We don't need soldiers; there's no war here' and criticised the US for having taken control of the airport and deciding which aircraft had priority to land, when decisions about priorities should have been left to the Haitians.

The US has no particular interest in turning its attention to Haiti; it has enough on its foreign affairs agenda with Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East. In fact, of the 20,000 people deployed to Haiti, less than half now remain there, but in this case it did not miss the opportunity to raise the US armed forces' standing in humanitarian efforts. After pressure from France and Brazil, the US agreed its troops to be coordinated by the United Nations, an exceptional move but one which some observers think should have been made sooner. Inside the US, the Obama Administration asked former Presidents George

¹ Naomi Klein (2010), 'Haiti: a creditor not a debtor', *The Nation*, 11/II/2010.

² 'Déclaration de presse du président de la République Fédérative du Brésil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, conjointement avec le président de la République d'Haïti, René Préal. Port-au-Prince, Haïti, 25 février 2010'.

³ 'Table A: List of all commitments/contributions and pledges as of 4 March 2010 (Table ref: R10)', <http://www.reliefweb.int/fts>.

⁴ William Booth (2010), 'Haiti faces colossal and costly cleanup before it can rebuild', *The Washington Post*, 7/III/2010.

W. Bush and Bill Clinton (the latter already appointed UN special envoy to assist in economic and social development in Haiti) to coordinate the US aid effort, showing a clear political commitment.

The US has contributed more than US\$500 million in development aid to Haiti in the last six years and is one of the main actors in all areas of strengthening the Haitian State. However, Haiti has never been a priority for the US, especially during the Bush Administration, and its political representation in Port-au-Prince has traditionally not been very active. The appointment of expert Paul Farmer as Ambassador shortly after Barack Obama's inauguration as President afforded greater credibility to the US presence in Haiti. Following President Préval's visit to the White House on 10 March, Obama will ask for US\$3 billion to help the country rebuild.

The US has always been an ambivalent actor with government- rather than State-based policies towards Haiti. All US Presidents have had issues to resolve and problems with Haiti.⁵ During the last 24 years since the exile of Jean-Claude Duvalier and the end of the dictatorship, Bill Clinton led Operation Restore Democracy and negotiated the Governor's Island Peace Agreement of 1994 which reinstated the exiled Jean-Bertrand Aristide following the deployment of 20,000 marines. Since then, the US approach has fluctuated between total backing, embargo, conditional aid and the de-legitimisation in 2000 of the government and President Aristide. A policy that fluctuates between strong support, the imposition of military presence and lack of interest hampers Haiti because of its strong dependence on the US.

Latin America in Haiti

Since 2004, a number of Latin American countries have been involved in the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) by deploying armed forces, and they have been providing humanitarian aid at times of crisis and in the aftermath of natural disasters (Hurricane Jeanne in 2004, the food crisis in 2008 and Hurricane Ike in 2008). Although each country has responded differently in line with its capabilities, Brazil, Chile and Argentina have been the three most important contributors, and have deployed a large number of the peacekeeping troops ('Blue Helmets') involved in MINUSTAH. Another six countries (Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, Paraguay and Uruguay) have also sent troops and teams of engineers.

But Latin America's contribution to MINUSTAH is more than the involvement in a classic peace-keeping mission, such as Argentina's involvement in Cyprus. Brazil is in charge of the 7,000 Blue Helmets and Chile is second-in-command. Military cooperation between Chile and Argentina has been stepped up as a result of their involvement in MINUSTAH, despite their traditional border tensions. The 2-by-9 meetings (Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministers of the nine countries) show a certain interest for regional coordination and a shared sentiment of responsibility towards Haiti. In the last few years, a number of joint initiatives have been implemented for military training in peace missions.

One of the latest measures under the umbrella of the Organisation of American States (OAS) was the coordination and specialisation of civilian security training centres. What is interesting about these centres, aside from participating in the training the Haitian National Police, is that they pool experience and know-how concerning shared problems, such as drug-trafficking and juvenile crime, as well as more specialised areas like Colombia's anti-kidnapping division. The presence in Haiti has boosted cooperation between Latin

⁵ Terry F. Buss & Adam Gardner (2008), *Haiti in the Balance, Why Foreign Aid has Failed and What We Can Do About It*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, p. 69.

American countries and has fostered regional integration in terms of security which extends beyond military cooperation to civilian security, as evidenced by the desire to increase participation in the reform of the Haitian National Police.

Furthermore, Latin American countries, in particular Brazil and Argentina, are contributing to development via south-south cooperation, and triangular (north-south-south) cooperation. Many southern countries have endured the negative impact of the structural adjustment programmes at international financial institutions and conditioned aid from countries in the north. At the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) Summit, chaired by Brazil, the delegates agreed to raise US\$100 million to help rebuild Haiti. As well as this financing, Latin America has approved an Inter-American Development Bank loan of US\$200 million. Following the UNASUR summit (8-9 February) a further meeting was held in Cancún between Latin American and Caribbean Countries (19-22 February) to which neither the US nor Canada were invited.

The outcome of these summits shows a subtle but firm rejection of traditional donors and their possible interference in Haiti's sovereignty. The countries in this region assert that they support Haiti by helping the government directly, listening to its needs and its priorities, unlike traditional donors whose aid is channelled mainly through NGOs.⁶

In short, through cooperation in security (military and civilian), humanitarian aid and aid to development, the Latin American countries present in Haiti are becoming major players in the country, constructing their own experience of peace-building and seeking to improve cooperation for development. Latin America has vast experience as a receiver of aid, but also providing technical aid to other countries, dating back many years. While south-south cooperation is promising, it is still limited and sometimes appears to compete with NGOs.⁷ How have some Latin American countries boosted economic development? Which policies have been successful in improving social development, education and healthcare? How did they stimulate the economy and employment? The answers to these questions, in the most recently developed continent with similar experiences, are those that can help Haiti.

Lastly, Canada and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) are supporting research in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Mexico to study social, economic and political problems in Haiti and are nurturing debate in Latin America concerning the strengthening of the State and the prevention of conflicts. This network has been highly active in promoting debates on how to help Haiti, involving representatives from government and civilian society, as well as experts.

Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico and the Dominican Republic, despite not being militarily involved in the UN mission, are working to help Haiti in different forms. The most surprising case is that of the Dominican Republic, which showed great openness after the earthquake, opening its airports, ports and roads to allow humanitarian aid into Haiti. When the crisis hit, this neighbouring country put aside their normally tense relations and sent in rescue teams, tents and provisions, admittedly partly also to stem the flow of immigration from Haiti. The neighbours on the Island of Hispaniola have a common future and perhaps the earthquake will signal a new chapter in relations between these two countries.

⁶ 'Haiti Progrès', http://www.haitiprogres.com/suite_francais2.php.

⁷ Philippe Rouzier (2009), 'Development Cooperation in Haiti', conference held in Mexico City in September.

The European Response

The EU and its members, most notably Spain and France, responded strongly to the earthquake. Spain deployed the vessel *Castilla* with 423 troops on board to the south of Haiti, where Canada also has a ship and troops to support the victims in the town of Jacmel.

Spain is one of the most important donors to Haiti, which is a priority country for the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (*Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo*, AECID). Spain's interest in Haiti is due mainly to its economic interests in the Caribbean region, which focus on Cuba and the Dominican Republic. In the case of Haiti, which was thrown into turmoil in 2004 by the ousting of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the widespread violence that ensued, Spain initially contributed troops to the UN mission and then sent police personnel.

With his visit in February, President Sarkozy aimed to 'put an end to 400 years of solitude'.⁸ After the defeat of General Leclerc, Napoleon Bonaparte's brother-in-law, by the slaves in 1804, France turned its back on Haiti. In 1915, when the US occupied the island, the Haitian Prime Minister said 'Our bond of love with France is impossible, we need a bond of reason with the United States'. Although Sarkozy only visited for a few hours, he promised €326 million, partly to reimburse the compensation which France had demanded from Haiti in return for its independence.

Many countries have sought to lead the reconstruction efforts. The US, Brazil, Canada, Spain and France all competed to host preparatory meetings before the donors conference in New York in March.

Internal Haitian Policies

2010 was set to be an important year for Haiti because of a series of legislative, presidential and local elections. Elections are never easy in Haiti, when a position in government means getting rich, according to the popular saying 'stealing from the State is not stealing'. Elections are often synonymous with violence, and the losers usually refuse to recognise the outcome. With the support of the United Nations and the OAS, the first legislative elections were scheduled for 28 February 2010 to choose all members of the country's Lower House and a third of its Senate. Préval's mandate was due to end on 7 February 2011 and both the Haitian political parties and the international bodies were gearing up for presidential and local elections on 28 November, in accordance with the Constitution.

The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate have been quick to criticise the scant actions of Jean-Max Bellerive's government in the wake of the earthquake. A group of deputies met to discuss pressure measures and ask for the government to be deposed. However, the Constitution does not provide for a government's removal in less than one year, and the government of Michèle Pierre-Louis left office at the end of October 2009.

It is not yet clear what will happen with the legislative, presidential or local elections. There are many political parties, more than 50 registered, and the race to the presidency will be a fierce fight. The body that oversees the process, the Provisional Electoral Council (PEC) lost credibility by banning the Aristide's former party, Famni Lavalas, and Préval's party, Fwon Lespwa. Edmond Mulet, the new UN Special Representative to the Secretary General, has been openly in favour of holding elections in November according to plan.

⁸ Interview with Regis Debray in *Le Figaro*, 'Cette visite en Haïti vient combler 400 ans de solitude', published in Haitian newspaper *Le Nouvelliste*, 17/II/2010, <http://plus.lefigaro.fr/tag/regis-debray>.

However, a group of non-State associations (*Conseil Haitien des Acteurs Non Étatiques*, CONHANE) has insisted that it would be irresponsible to think about elections. Due to the trauma of the earthquake, there are still huge logistical problems, changes must be made to the electoral rolls and the priority is to rebuild the country.

In a way, René Préval has been a President who has ensured the *status quo*, backed by the UN mission and the international community, for the sake of the country's political stability. He has not been a particularly active, charismatic political leader, and has been little inclined to introduce reform. Affording priority to the demands of donors and confining himself to protecting the private sector, Préval has been absent at times of crisis (his personal reaction to the earthquake was, to say the least, disappointing). Many observers say they do not know what will happen after Préval's mandate (he cannot stand for re-election according to Haiti's Constitution). Michèle Pierre-Louis, who was the Prime Minister between September 2008 and October 2009, would be a perfect candidate for the international community, but she must first convince the people, the private sector and the elites. In a country where money is more important than a vote, voters can be easily bought. A non-violent democratic transition from one administration to the next is crucial to the country's state-building process.

Conclusions: All circles close to Haiti are analysing how the country should be rebuilt. A number of consultation mechanisms have been launched, both locally and nationally, and the debates are discordant, evidencing the complexity of Haitian society. During the recent visit by Haiti's president to Washington, Obama insisted that future crises must be averted as the rainy season approached, while Préval said they did not need more food or tents, but seeds and tractors to promote the agricultural sector. At the UNASUR summit the government said that the three priorities are to rehabilitate infrastructure, healthcare and education.

The role of the Haitian government is vital in spearheading efforts. Latin American countries are aiming to place the government centre-stage and at the helm of reconstruction, as part of their vision for Haiti, which is different from that of traditional donors. However, the Public Administration was terribly weak even before the earthquake. A study on how ownership in peace-building measures shows that a major obstacle to the Haitian government really being the main player in reforming the Rule of Law is its capacity to compile, analyse and use data to devise and implement better policies and enhance management.⁹ In order to do so, there is a shortage of human resources on all levels. It was already well known that there were almost no intermediate classes 'between minister and chauffeur'. Now, there is a lack not only of human capabilities, but also of the physical places in which to conduct the work that is needed. It is important that efforts are all focused in the same direction, avoiding the traditional in-fighting in the country as well as disputes among the donor community.

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⁹ Amélie Gauthier & Madalena Moita (2010), *Ownership and Everyday Peacebuilding, the Case of Haiti*, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Norway, forthcoming publication.