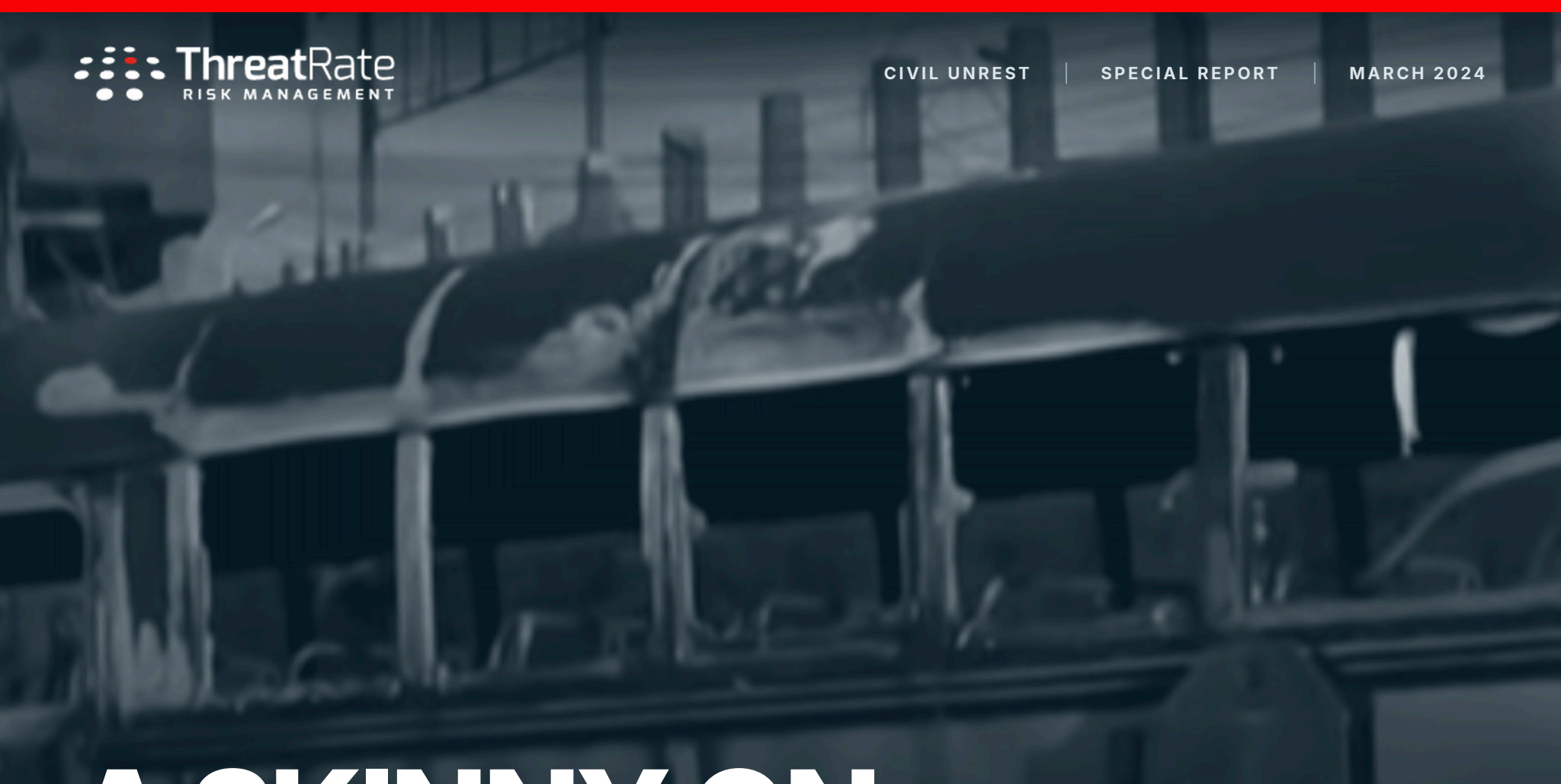


A SKINNY ON HAITI'S SECURITY

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A Skinny on Haiti's Security

The devastating earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010, was a defining moment in the nation's history. With a magnitude of 7.0, the earthquake caused unprecedented destruction, claiming the lives of over 200,000 people and displacing millions more. The disaster shattered infrastructure, including government buildings, hospitals, and schools, exacerbating Haiti's vulnerabilities.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, Haiti faced significant security challenges. The collapse of law enforcement and judicial systems, coupled with widespread looting and violence, created a chaotic environment. Humanitarian aid efforts were hindered by security concerns, further complicating the response to the crisis. The lack of effective governance and institutional capacity hampered recovery efforts, leaving many Haitians vulnerable to exploitation and neglect.

The international community responded swiftly to the humanitarian crisis, mobilizing resources and personnel to provide assistance. However, the influx of foreign aid organizations and military forces raised concerns about security risks. Instances of violence and clashes between different groups underscored the fragile security situation, impeding relief efforts and exacerbating tensions among affected communities.

Moreover, allegations of misconduct and abuse by some members of the international forces tarnished their reputation and strained relations with the local population. The presence of foreign troops also raised questions about Haiti's sovereignty and long-term security implications. Despite the well-intentioned efforts of the international community, security concerns remained a persistent challenge throughout the recovery process.

Haiti's security landscape was further complicated by political instability and governance challenges. The country experienced a series of political crises, characterized by disputed elections, power struggles, and allegations of corruption. Weak governance and institutional fragility exacerbated social unrest, while criminal organizations and armed gangs exploited the power vacuum to expand their influence.

The failure to address underlying socio-economic disparities and meet the basic needs of the population fueled widespread discontent and protests. Demonstrations often turned violent, leading to clashes with security forces and further destabilizing the country. The lack of trust in government institutions and the judiciary undermined the rule of law, perpetuating a cycle of insecurity and impunity.

The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) played a crucial role in maintaining security and stability in the post-earthquake period. Deployed in 2004, MINUSTAH's mandate included promoting security, supporting the rule of law, and facilitating humanitarian assistance. Despite initial successes, the mission faced criticism over allegations of misconduct and its long-term effectiveness in achieving sustainable peace.

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In 2017, MINUSTAH transitioned to a new phase, gradually drawing down its military presence and shifting its focus to capacity-building and institutional reform. The transition highlighted the importance of empowering local security forces and strengthening Haiti's own institutions to address security challenges. However, the withdrawal of MINUSTAH also raised concerns about the government's ability to maintain stability and security independently.

Jovenel Moïse assumed office as Haiti's president in 2017, pledging to tackle corruption and promote economic development. However, his presidency was marked by controversy and allegations of mismanagement. The government's failure to address pressing issues such as poverty, unemployment, and access to basic services fueled widespread discontent and protests.

Social unrest escalated in the years leading up to Moïse's assassination, with demonstrators calling for his resignation amid allegations of authoritarianism and electoral fraud. The government's heavy-handed response to protests further inflamed tensions, leading to a breakdown in law and order in some areas. The deteriorating security situation highlighted the fragility of Haiti's political system and the challenges of governance in a context of deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities.

The assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on July 7, 2021, shocked the nation and sent ripples of uncertainty throughout Haiti and the international community. The brazen attack exposed the vulnerabilities within Haiti's security apparatus and raised serious questions about the rule of law and political stability. Investigations into the assassination revealed a complex web of domestic and foreign actors, highlighting the extent of the challenges facing Haiti's security forces.

In the aftermath of Moïse's assassination, Haiti plunged into a state of turmoil, with competing factions vying for power and escalating violence threatening to engulf the country. The assassination laid bare the deep-seated divisions and power struggles within Haitian society, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive reforms and national reconciliation.

In late July 2021 Ariel Henry – who designated by President Moïse as his prime minister two days before he was killed--was sworn in as Prime Minister and Interim President. Citing the rampant gang violence, elections which were to take place in February 2023 were postponed. Throughout his tenure, Henry has encountered fervent public dissent, evidenced by persistent demonstrations urging his departure. Under his governance, Haiti's democratic framework has deteriorated significantly. The National Assembly, already debilitated, has remained inactive since January 2023; the Supreme Court is non-operational, and essential services like water, electricity, and medical aid have become increasingly scarce.

In late February 2024, while Henry was out of the country on an official visit to Kenya to sign an agreement that would allow the deployment of 1,000 Kenyan police officers to the crisis-ridden country, gang leader Jimmy Cherizier alias "Barbecue", the leader of the powerful G9 gang and now leads the Viv Ansanm (or Living Together) gang alliance, called on Henry to resign and threatened to launch a civil war in case he refuses.

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The Viv Ansanm coalition carried out coordinated attacks on governmental facilities, prisons, police stations and the Toussaint Louverture International Airport and shuttered hospitals and schools across the capital. Unable to return to Haiti, Henry, landed in Puerto Rico. In mid-March Henry announced that he will resign once a transitional presidential council is established, and an interim leader is selected.

Due to the deteriorating security environment, most Western countries had issued calls for their nationals to leave the country and foreign organizations operating there have suspended their operations.

Conclusion

Henry's successors are poised to inherit an escalating security crisis that will continue to impede the Haitian government's capacity to deliver even fundamental services. The transition council will assume office amidst a rapidly deteriorating security landscape. The interim prime minister and council's endeavors to coordinate and strategize the deployment of the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission to Haiti is likely to encounter formidable obstacles, given the extensive control exerted by gangs over significant portions of the capital city. Additionally, conflicting motivations and electoral aspirations within the council may breed internal discord, potentially stalling decision-making processes. Moreover, with Henry stepping down, gang leaders may resist the establishment of the transition council, particularly as negotiations involving the United States have taken place, possibly prompting heightened assaults on crucial Haitian institutions. Should gang violence escalate subsequent to the formation of the transition council, Haitians may lose faith in the new interim government, eroding its perceived legitimacy and constraining its ability to enforce security measures.

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