

THE FUTURE OF HAITI: NOT SIMPLY A MATTER OF MONEY

The reconstruction of Haiti following the January 12 earthquake involves much more than money. If governance in Haiti lacks legitimacy, is not rights-based or at the service of its poorest citizens, it will remain steeped in poverty, and extreme violence may once again reign in the capital Port-au-Prince.

In the days following the catastrophe, many major European newspapers had recourse to the same caricatured picture of a woman covered in white dust, reminiscent of those American zombie images of the 1930s. Beyond immediate emotion however, the international community must urgently react to the Haitian tragedy in a rational manner and ensure that the reprehensible rhetoric that featured in media coverage - such as interracial clichés and the centuries old caricature of black Haitians inhabited by evil voodoo spirits - does not shape the broader political conversation. The same applies to the American fundamentalist Christian rhetoric that refers to Haiti as a 'damned nation'.

Haiti had been following a promising path since 2006. Up until tragedy struck last week, Port-au-Prince was struggling to build some form of statehood, not to speak of those provinces where state structures were still, despite UN efforts, almost empty shells. The most threatening gangs in Bel-Air, Cité Soleil and Martissant had been imprisoned or weakened, donors were becoming more confident, and development projects and infrastructure programmes were getting off the ground, albeit sometimes too slowly. Political stability was maintained by a skilful president, despite the worrying turnover within government ranks and entrenched state fragility. It is difficult to imagine how



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US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton meets with Haiti's President Rene Preval to discuss conditions in the country following Tuesday's deadly earthquake in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 16 January 2010.

Haiti's leadership will now manage the recovery and reconstruction process. Aid efficiency and its coordination are immediate challenges. Humanitarian relief will be an absolute priority for those who have a good chance of survival. However, the whole social fabric - already highly fragmented and traumatised by years of urban violence - is forever changed. But even in such dire circumstances, the resilience of the people is often underestimated.

The international conference on Haiti to be convened in the next few weeks will be a new test for global governance, despite Haiti being a highly regional issue dominated by the respective roles of the US, Latin American troop contributors to MINUSTAH, the Organisation of American States and the UN. How will the US under Obama be perceived in the eyes of regional powers like Brazil and Venezuela, and UN contributors like China?

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The main impetus for the swift reaction of the US is - apart from international solidarity towards a weak neighbour who is the second-poorest country in the Western hemisphere - closely linked to its national security interests and immigration control. Haitians did not wait for the earthquake to regularly try to immigrate to the US, legally or not. In the absence of the disincentive posed by a strong US military or coast guard, the flow of those who will try to reach Florida by sea promises to peak again, as it did in the early 1990s under the junta or in the last years of Aristide.

Secondly, from a geo-political point of view, Haiti matters in the Caribbean. It is the most populated country in the archipelago and its closeness to Cuba makes it an appropriate place to launch operations or to monitor its anti-US neighbour. In short, cynics will say that sending marines to Port-au-Prince probably serves several purposes.

Should the US intervention last more than several months, it will have to coordinate closely and humbly with UN military troops from Latin America and with UNPOL. So far, the US attitude is rather promising in that respect. One mistake to avoid however would be to compare Haiti with war-torn countries where other multilateral forces are deployed. There are a limited number of arms circulating in Haiti and the country is not at war. Indeed, local violence has the potential to reach unimaginable peaks in lawless areas, such as geographically isolated or densely populated slums, but this situation is not unavoidable. It can easily be eradicated and replaced by rights-based policing ensuring order and justice, as long as foreigners work hand in hand with Haitians, behave appropriately and respect its citizens - might they be poor, black and sometimes provocative.

For any protracted US intervention to have legitimacy, it will also need to coordinate with MINUSTAH, even though its leadership in Haiti collapsed when the Mission's Chief and his Deputy were killed in the earthquake. Edmund Mulet, from Guatemala, who led MINUSTAH for several years, is extremely competent, attached to the country and very well-respected by the government and the people. He is certainly the right person to take the lead. It is hoped that he will be supported politically by New York to claim a leadership role in the temporary protectorate that is taking shape. In any case, the UN alone will not be able, in the short term, to cope with the challenges: it needs to be flanked by a strong US military and logistical presence for a limited period of time with a clear exit strategy. A timetable for withdrawal must be negotiated so as to avoid a second major mistake in Haiti: a perception among Haitians of a repeat of the 1915-1934 US occupation that left painful memories in the minds of the Haitian people.

At the regional level, other powers will want to demonstrate their ability to be useful, generous and efficient in the Caribbean. Brazil, who as leader of MINUSTAH's military component has played an essential role in Haiti since 2004, will continue to emphasise its special responsibility vis-à-vis Port-au-Prince especially now that it has acquired significant experience in managing security and governance challenges in the country. The role Brazilian peacekeeping troops played in 2006 to extirpate the cruellest gangs based in Cité Soleil and surrounding slums was key to launching a reconstruction phase in the capital. Now that the national penitentiary has collapsed, many detainees have escaped and the Haitian National Police is disorganised and weakened, the help of the Brazilians will be as crucial as ever.

The experience of other MINUSTAH troop contributors such as Chile, Argentina and Uruguay - particularly in maintaining urban order and community patrolling - will also be instrumental in ensuring that the capital does not descend into chaos.

In its immediate neighbourhood, Haiti can also probably count on motivated - but limited - support from the Dominican Republic. This country will certainly fear massive Haitian immigration, already a bone of contention between the two countries. It would not be surprising to see strong border control military measures taken in Santo Domingo to prevent Haitians from reaching their urban centres. Whether such measures are successful or not, tensions between Dominicans and Haitians in the Dominican Republic and along the border will have to be taken seriously, and diminished or managed through mitigation measures.

Canada's role in and policy towards Haiti has for several years suffered from one fundamental contradiction: while being one of the main donors in Haiti, Canada is also the country most responsible for its brain drain. Giving dollars with the left hand has so far failed to compensate for the loss of talented doctors, technicians and managers due to a more welcoming right one. Unless this policy is addressed, Canada will suffer from a credibility gap.

Any EU offer to send a police mission will have to seriously consider to what extent it can add value to the MINUSTAH presence. Until now, European staff had been sent to UNPOL doing exemplary work within the UN mission, for instance in Gonaïves when some French Gendarmerie staff courageously conducted a successful anti-gang operation in 2007. A possible EU mission should also meet clearly identified collective strategic priorities for the Union and realistically reflect Haiti's status as an EU political priority.

The EU is still testing its natural disaster response capabilities and will need to draw lessons from the Haiti case. The commitment of over 400 million Euros for the country is a positive step. Again, money alone is not enough. What is necessary at this stage is continued investment in the long-term plan that was being pursued before the earthquake to strengthen governance capabilities in key areas such as infrastructure and justice. In relation to the former, EU-funded long-term programmes should be maintained, such as roads in the north of the country that serve sustainable development prospects. Indeed, damages need to be assessed and adjustments or refunds will have to be decided. However, previous commitments should be maintained or supplemented where necessary.

In relation to policing, the United Nations has also performed tremendously in loyal cooperation with the government and the national police led by Head of the Haitian National Police Mario Andrésol and Luc-Eucher Joseph, Secretary of State of Justice and Public Security. Successive UNPOL commissioners - and in particular their deputy, Australian national Richard Warren, who had previous experience in Kosovo - proved that international cooperation can be efficient whilst also respecting local leadership. Warren's work should be recognised and lessons from his record will have to be taken on board and any international police cooperation should be pursued along the same strategies and mindset.

In short, the effective management of Haiti by outside forces will hinge on one key factor: legitimate governance. To be successful and legitimate, international assistance needs to meet two essential conditions. It must respect local leadership and promote the role of the diaspora, and avoid ruining reconstruction opportunities.

In relation to local leadership, careful attention must be paid to any requests by President Préval now and in the lead-up to the international donors' conference. In the current circumstances, the Haitian government is unable to coordinate emergency relief itself and the US and OCHA in particular are thus essential in this regard. However, in the longer term, only the Haitian government will be able to implement its own reconstruction plan. This is when key decisions will have to be made. If all public buildings are down, Préval will have to balance the need for a temporary re-location of the government - to Cap Haïtien, the first Haitian capital, or elsewhere - against the requirements of co-ordination efficiency.

Before the earthquake, Haiti was already a fragile state dramatically lacking the human capital to absorb aid and the ability to efficiently coordinate its development. Promoting the role of the diaspora will therefore be as crucial as ever. There is Haitian potential in the

US, in Canada, in the Caribbean, and in France. In 2007 I conducted a study for the International Crisis Group on the ways in which the diaspora could contribute to Haiti's development. The conclusions and recommendations of that report are still valid.

The promising role of the diaspora has already been articulated by Haitian geographer Georges Anglade who died last week in Port-au-Prince. A prominent thinker in Canada, he spent some of his retirement in Haiti as a columnist for one of the main Port-au-Prince newspapers *Le Nouvelliste*. His work on the diaspora's potential should now be revived and applied. Again, now that funds are being committed, it is not a matter of money in itself. Mobilising the Haitian diaspora requires some political will and international encouragement. It is a matter of management and governance.

The Haitian president has never been too fond of the idea of attracting Haitians from abroad, not least because he is aware of strong Haitian nationalism within the political elite. But the development of the country can no longer continue to be driven by the near-exclusive reliance on international personnel taking the place of Haitians. This situation entails significant risks that are well known to observers of Haiti's development aid market. The experience drawn from the 2004 Gonaïves hurricane, in particular the mismanagement of aid and the overcrowded NGO scene, has demonstrated how counterproductive aid can be, however well-intentioned. Without the large-scale return of expatriate Haitians, a high turn-over of international staff will result in millions of piece-meal, overlapping, repetitive and unprofessional projects.

Before becoming a cemetery itself, Haiti was once described to me as an "aid projects cemetery" by Gerardo Le Chevallier, the well-informed, realistic and dedicated MINUSTAH head of political affairs who died last week. Without efficient governance and co-ordination, and in the absence of long term commitment from Haitian nationals to ensure sustainability in reconstruction and development endeavours, there is little chance of transforming the Haitian catastrophe into an opportunity.

International efforts must also avoid ruining reconstruction opportunities. The worst case scenario would be to see Haiti used as a recycling centre for US, Canadian and European contractors looking for new markets, in conjunction with a lasting military presence doing more harm than good due to a lack of 'situational awareness' and a 1918 'amnesia'. In that context, the imposition of large-scale reconstruction schemes without domestic buy-in and without the appropriate community and governance measures aiming at people's compensation and approval will risk violent popular discontent fuelled by social frustration.

Careful attention must also be paid to the economic effects of emergency food delivery. Chantal Laurent, a French-Haitian architect and expert in emergency and reconstruction, aptly described food delivery as a 'double-edged sword': while it will relieve the stomachs of thousands in Port-au-Prince, it will soon prove distortive for local markets and non-Port-au-Prince production which were supplying the capital before the earthquake. It is therefore essential to conceive of an exit strategy now for emergency food supply, having regard to the capacity of local agricultural markets to supply Port-au-Prince.

A viable option would be a hybrid Haitian and international leadership making the best use of the readiness of the US, the UN, Latin American and other like-minded powers to help without hidden geo-strategic agendas. In that case, the US military presence should be limited to one year, enough time for the UN to reinforce its security presence.

In the current circumstances, it is doubtful the electoral agenda - general and presidential elections in 2010 and 2011 - will be kept on track and one may expect it to be slightly postponed. However, it would be the wrong approach to question the very principle of elections being held as soon as possible.

The efficient use of EU financial aid will depend on the local capacity to manage and coordinate it. Until last week, this ability depended on a limited number of individuals. For instance the politician Micha Gaillard, who died in the earthquake, had been requested by President Préval to coordinate a commission on justice reform. Who will be talented and dedicated enough to be his replacement?

The same question will need to be raised in all policy areas and the pace of reconstruction in Haiti will be highly dependent on who remains and who among the diaspora will be convinced to return.