
Research
Paper

Latin America Initiative

January 2026

A roadmap for security and governance reform in Haiti

How to address multilateral breakdown and state collapse

Roberta Maggi, Christopher Sabatini and Alexandra Farsari



Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, is a world-leading policy institute based in London. Our mission is to help governments and societies to build a secure, sustainable, prosperous and just world.

Summary

- This paper proposes a three-year roadmap that can help to start addressing Haiti's interlinked security and governance crises. It outlines a sequence of reforms that Haiti's transitional administration – in whatever shape this remains – and any future elected government should develop in cooperation with the UN, other multilateral partners and a potential voluntary coalition of external governments. The proposed measures are needed to curb gang rule and violence, enable humanitarian access, strengthen the judicial system, and professionalize and rationalize the country's chaotic security sector.
- The urgent need for on-the-ground stabilization measures and more effective international support is underlined by the severity and extended duration of the country's political, security and humanitarian challenges. Haiti still has no elected president or legislature. Since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on 7 July 2021, executive power has essentially been exercised by unelected transitional figures – notably, since 2024, by a Transitional Presidential Council (TPC). With the TPC's time-limited mandate set to expire on 7 February 2026, and with the security situation too unstable to permit the holding of elections that should have delivered the TPC's successor, Haiti faces a worsening of its political vacuum at a moment when legitimate, capable and accountable government is more critically needed than ever.
- A weak or non-existent state, combined with the lack of a government that can command popular legitimacy, has accelerated the collapse of security and strengthened the hold of armed gangs and militias. These groups and their associates now control large areas of Port-au-Prince and key transport corridors. Kidnappings, extortion and targeted killings are often used as tools of economic predation and political leverage.
- The multilateral response has struggled to match the pace and complexity of these challenges. Since 2022 the UN Security Council (UNSC) has relied on a sequence of ad hoc measures – initially the use of sanctions targeting gang leaders and their enablers,¹ followed in October 2023 by the creation of a Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission requiring voluntary contributions from member states for financing and providing equipment and security forces. However, that mission failed to generate sufficient funding and troops to re-establish stability and development in Haiti. In response, in September 2025 the UNSC approved a resolution establishing a new operation, the Gang Suppression Force (GSF), that supersedes the MSS. Like its predecessor, the GSF will require voluntary contributions to pay for troops; but unlike the MSS, the new effort will count on UN support for logistics and operational oversight.²

¹ United Nations Security Council (2022), 'Resolution 2653 (2022)', adopted 21 October 2022, <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/sres2653-2022>.

² Mohor, D. (2025), 'Haiti in-depth: The new Gang Suppression Force and what it means for Haitians', *The New Humanitarian*, 3 December 2025, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2025/12/03/haiti-depth-new-gang-suppression-force-what-it-means-haiti>.

- In light of these developments, this paper sets out what the authors believe are realistic options for transforming today's ad hoc, emergency-focused responses into a coherent strategy for security and governance reform. The paper assesses options for: implementing security and state reform; facilitating disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of gangs and associated armed actors; reclaiming territory and key infrastructure from illicit groups; rebuilding communities and restoring public trust in government and security providers; and enabling the justice system to respond effectively and appropriately to the activities of gang leaders and their political and economic sponsors.
- The paper's top-line, priority recommendations are as follows:
 - Any comprehensive, Haitian-owned security reform process must begin with a time-bound strategic vision. In the first instance, a technocratic planning commission should be established, tasked with drafting a clear and concise document that Haitian and international decision-makers, security practitioners and communities can use as a shared set of guiding principles.
 - Another crucial preliminary step is to conduct a structural review of existing Haitian security sector institutions: the Haitian National Police (HNP), the Haitian Armed Forces (FADH), the National Intelligence Agency (ANI) and the country's correctional services. This review should clarify each institution's role, identify overlaps in agencies' remits and activities, and resolve institutional inefficiencies across the four domains: policing, defence, intelligence and corrections.
 - In the absence of a functioning legislature, Haiti is unable to modernize the legal framework governing private security, asset forfeiture, procurement, arms control and the use of force. In the near term (0–12 months), efforts should therefore focus on issuing targeted interim regulations – decrees, internal regulations and memorandums of understanding – on a limited number of issues critical to Haiti's security. These regulations should be explicitly framed as transitional in nature, however.
 - Rebuilding the legitimacy of the security services requires a system-wide approach to integrity, ethics and professional conduct, rather than episodic purges of delinquent or partisan personnel. Haitian authorities and their international partners should define common eligibility and conduct criteria for personnel across the police, defence, intelligence and correctional services. Guidance should initially be accompanied by the introduction of independent vetting of security sector personnel and contractors, and by reforms on the use of force by Haiti's security services.
 - The TPC (or its interim successor) and any future elected government will need to move quickly to reassert control over key transportation hubs. In the near term, the priority must be to improve security and access at ports (for example, Cap-Haïtien and Port-au-Prince) and land crossings (such as Ouanaminthe and Malpasse). Pilot schemes should be introduced at these sites, so that customs officers, HNP personnel, immigration officials, Anti-Corruption Unit (ULCC) staff and prosecutors can work side by side on interdictions of weapons, narcotics and other illicit goods.

- Efforts to dismantle gangs and reduce their hold on the country should focus not only on armed groups themselves, but also on facilitators and enablers who control logistics, financing and access to state services. Operations at ports, fuel depots and customs posts, along with management of public works contracts, all provide opportunities for mid-level criminal elements in Haiti's conflict economy to shield themselves and their networks from scrutiny while enabling gang coalitions to operate. Addressing this culture of impunity would improve security and reliability of basic service provision.

Background

The assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on 7 July 2021 marked the tipping point in a long-running governance crisis in Haiti, and deepened the country's constitutional vacuum. In April 2024, a Transitional Presidential Council (TPC) was sworn in to restore security and organize overdue elections, but it inherited an eroded state apparatus and limited territorial control. Even today, Haiti still has no elected president or legislature, and executive power is exercised by unelected transitional figures.

This vacuum of governance and government legitimacy has accelerated the collapse of security. Armed gangs and militias now control large areas of Port-au-Prince – the Haitian capital – and major transport corridors. These groups often use kidnappings, extortion and targeted killings as tools of predation and political leverage. Their hold over infrastructure and neighbourhoods allows them to act as *de facto* governing authorities: imposing rules, offering selective protection to residents and businesses, and negotiating with the political and economic elites. Vigilante movements have emerged in response to this situation, adding yet another layer of violence to Haiti's security crisis.

The multilateral response has struggled to match the pace and complexity of Haiti's challenges. In 2022 the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted a sanctions regime targeting gang leaders and their enablers.³ A year later, in October 2023, the UNSC authorized a Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission⁴ – made up principally of non-UN, Kenyan-led security forces – to assist the Haitian National Police (HNP) and establish sufficiently secure conditions for elections to be held. Those conditions have not been met, however. Security is still tenuous in the extreme. International engagement with Haiti has for too long remained cautious and dependent on voluntary contributions in funding and forces. All the while, gangs have evolved into more entrenched economic actors and are increasingly asserting themselves politically too.

³ United Nations Security Council (2022), 'Resolution 2653 (2022)', adopted 21 October 2022, <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/sres2653-2022>.

⁴ The MSS was authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 2699. See United Nations Security Council (2023), 'Resolution 2699 (2023)', adopted 2 October 2023, [https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2699\(2023\)](https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2699(2023)).

This paper is published at a moment when Haiti stands on the cusp of a period of heightened uncertainty. An attempt to mobilize UN member states under a new 2025 resolution⁵ means that the MSS – widely acknowledged as unsuccessful – has been superseded by the Gang Suppression Force (GSF). The GSF, unlike its predecessor, is designed to be supported through UN-managed funding mechanisms for its operations and logistics, allowing for more direct and sustained international action. At the same time, significant political change is looming as the end of the TPC’s mandate on 7 February 2026 approaches. Amid all this potential for turbulence, the UN and its international partners face the challenges of planning for the restoration of constitutional order through elections, and of mobilizing international funding and forces to support the new GSF security commitments.

Publication of this paper is deliberately timed to inform policy discussions between Haitian authorities and their international partners in the run-up to the expiry of the TPC’s mandate, and in the initial months thereafter. Rather than set out a fixed blueprint, the paper outlines a set of analytically grounded options for reaching the first phase of stabilization, and presents a detailed, three-year roadmap designed to be a Haitian-led endeavour. The presented options draw on the findings from a forthcoming, longer research paper – based in part on focus groups and interviews with security experts, multilateral officials, diplomats, and members of Haitian civil society and government – that is due to be published for limited circulation in mid-2026. In addition to briefly analysing gang dynamics in Haiti, and their impact on the broader social and state security infrastructure, we aim in this shorter summary document to sketch out options for transforming today’s emergency responses into a coherent strategy and foundation for security and governance reform.

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Haitian citizens and community leaders consistently identify insecurity as the primary barrier to sustaining livelihoods.⁶ This is unsurprising: violence and the threat of violence shape people’s everyday mobility, access to employment and ability to carry out basic economic and social activities. To understand this reality

⁵ Stepansky, J. (2025), ‘UN Security Council approves ‘Gang Suppression Force’ for Haiti’, Al Jazeera, 30 September 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/30/un-security-council-approves-gang-suppression-force-for-haiti>.

⁶ Between August and October 2025, Chatham House held several key informant interviews and focus group discussions with Haitian experts and civil society leaders based in Haiti, with the objectives of unpacking the key barriers to citizens’ ability to sustain livelihoods and of identifying the root causes of the present-day crisis in Haiti.

it is necessary to begin at the non-state level – that is, with the system of gangs and their associates, as these actors have effective control over key territory and thus most impact on ordinary citizens’ safety and freedom of movement.

In Haiti, the provision of security is transacted through a dense marketplace in which public authority is fragmented and protection is priced, brokered and frequently weaponized. The reorganization and consolidation of large gang coalitions and the systematic outsourcing of protection by households, firms and even public bodies to security groups – including private security agencies and gangs – have resulted in effect in the monetization of the public’s access to roads, ports and basic services. In this marketplace, security functions more as a negotiable commodity than as a public good enjoyed by all.

In the ecosystem of Haitian gangs, the central actor operating at present is the Viv Ansanm coalition. Formed in September 2023 through the fusion of former rivals G9 and G-Pèp, it has emerged as the primary price-setter in Port-au-Prince’s parallel economy. The coalition controls or heavily influences an estimated 80 per cent or more of the metropolitan area and its immediate periphery, a dominance repeatedly demonstrated through coordinated attacks on prisons, police stations, transportation hubs, the international airport, and fuel and port facilities.

Viv Ansanm taxes movement, rations services and adjudicates in disputes. These *de facto* powers allow it to determine the selective distribution of food, cash and ‘public order’ instrumental in consolidating its local legitimacy while stabilizing rent streams from corridor tolls and logistics chains.⁷ Recent human rights reporting underscores the heavy toll this model takes on civilians: many of those recruited or coerced into working for gangs are reported to be children, while evidence suggests women and girls in gang-controlled neighbourhoods face sexual violence, exploitation and forced pregnancy.⁸

The coercive power of Haitian armed groups rests increasingly on a combination of military-grade weaponry, commercial drones and siege-style operations. Reporting by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) points to frequent use of assault and battle rifles, alongside a growing fleet of commercially available drones, by armed non-state actors. Gangs have reportedly deployed drones for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and for real-time coordination of attacks, including on prison facilities.⁹ This combination of capabilities and tactics has raised the risks and costs associated with ground operations by the HNP and the MSS mission, in turn increasing private demand for armed convoys and static protection services.

⁷ United Nations Security Council (2025), ‘VIV ANSANM’, 8 July 2025, <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/viv-ansanm>.

⁸ Amnesty International (2025), ‘Haiti: Children suffering gang recruitment, attacks and sexual violence amid escalating crisis – new report’, 12 February 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/haiti-children-suffering-gang-recruitment-attacks-sexual-violence>.

⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023), *Haiti’s criminal markets: mapping trends in firearms and drugs trafficking*, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/toc/Haiti_assessment_UNODC.pdf.

Tactically, gang coalitions have moved from the use of fragmented hit-and-run attacks towards more deliberate siege warfare and urban envelopment. The January 2025 attacks on the commune of Kenscoff near Port-au-Prince,¹⁰ for instance, illustrated the more organized, offensive approach gang coalitions are deploying to seize territory; this approach includes multi-axis advances (involving, worryingly, the apparent deployment of minors in lookout functions) to cut off access routes and service nodes, and the systematic burning or overrunning of police outposts. Beyond the capital and its environs, similar territorial advances in Haiti's central region, particularly in Artibonite, have disrupted agricultural production and food supply chains of national importance,¹¹ underscoring the direct link between gang expansion, territorial control and worsening food insecurity.

Policy recommendations: a sequenced roadmap towards reform

The recommendations that follow draw on our above-mentioned research – to be presented in the forthcoming longer paper – detailing the organization, political economy and strategies of Haitian criminal gangs and mapping the country's broader 'security marketplace'. That document will also analyse in greater depth the institutional capacity, professionalism, organization, top-level political support, international backing, and political and economic connections of Haitian state security forces – including the HNP, the Haitian Armed Forces (FADH), and judicial and corrections systems.

What follows below is a summary set of recommendations for strengthening, professionalizing and managing Haiti's security institutions in the short and medium term (meaning 0–3 years). This 'roadmap' proposes timeframes for each policy element, in recognition of the importance of sequencing. We have also deliberately proposed objectives that both acknowledge the disruptive role of potential 'spoilers' (such as gangs, their associates and other vested interests) and accurately reflect what international engagement can realistically achieve. (Note: the proposed timings are approximate, with the sequencing and starting dates of different steps contingent on the commencement or completion of earlier steps. Roughly speaking, however, we envisage the entire roadmap covering a period of three or so years following the end of the TPC's mandate.)

Foundational principles

A first principle underpinning the plan detailed below is that any international/multilateral interventions must be led by Haitians. International partners have an important role to play in providing technical expertise, convening space, monitoring and financial support. But broad-based Haitian ownership of the

¹⁰ United Nations Security Council (2025), 'VIV ANSANM', <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/fr/content/viv-ansanm>.

¹¹ See the ReliefWeb infographic on food security in Haiti. ReliefWeb (2025), 'Haiti: 5.7 million people face high levels of acute food insecurity as gang violence tightens its grip across the country – IPC Acute Food Insecurity Snapshot | September 2025 – June 2026', 13 October 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/haiti-57-million-people-face-high-levels-acute-food-insecurity-gang-violence-tightens-its-grip-across-country-ipc-acute-food-insecurity-snapshot-september-2025-june-2026>.

process is essential. Participation and consultation need to be actively sought not only from Haitian security institutions and civil authorities, but also from civil society, human rights actors, women's organizations, youth organizations and communities affected by violence. The process needs to be supported by clear accountability standards and recognition of the rights and obligations of different stakeholders.

International partners have an important role to play in providing technical expertise, convening space, monitoring and financial support. But broad-based Haitian ownership of the reform process is essential.

Second, compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights principles needs to be fundamentally embedded throughout the security reform process, rather than bolted on at the margins.

Third, our roadmap prioritizes early, visible gains in security and compliance at 'revenue concentrators' such as ports, fuel depots, key road corridors and critical warehouses. It treats progress in these areas as a confidence-building step that can improve relations between Haitian citizens, law enforcement and Haiti's civil agencies. Although such measures alone will not transform the system, a small number of well-chosen pilot schemes focusing on the interdiction of illicit activities and goods, and on enhancement of ordinary citizens' mobility, can in fact demonstrate that the state is capable of protecting movement and contesting rent-seeking behaviour. Such pilot programmes can also build the state's own capacity – provided they are backed by prosecutorial follow-through and basic oversight.

Finally, achieving follow-through by the justice sector will be crucial for building the rule of law, reducing impunity, and creating social peace and trust. Arrests, joint operations and seizures of weapons and illicit goods will only shift the incentives of armed groups and their associates if interdictions regularly lead to legal cases against the higher-level facilitators and enablers of gang violence – not just armed groups' foot soldiers – and are accompanied by credible responses to abuses allegedly committed by state agents. This implies a need to establish differentiated channels for addressing, respectively, alleged violations by public officials and criminality by gang coalitions. At the same time, it is critical that there should be no amnesty for grave abuses, regardless of the category of actor involved. Transitional justice-type mechanisms may be appropriate for certain categories of state abuse; however, gang atrocities will require robust criminal accountability and survivor-centred support, not an equivalence between state and non-state violence.

There are, to be sure, severe gaps in judicial and penitentiary capacity. These will present obstacles to providing a fast, sustainable resolution of local violence and insecurity. For this reason, priority should be given to investment in building law courts and humane, safe prisons, and to paying judicial officials fair

salaries. One option for filling the operational vacuum while courthouses and judicial infrastructure are being rebuilt could be to use mobile courts that can travel to communities to conduct investigations and trials, a practice employed in Chile in the 1990s.

A Haitian-owned security and justice strategy (initial five months)

Any process for bringing change in Haiti needs to start with development of a strategic vision. Ideally, that process should produce a concise document that decision-makers, security practitioners and communities can use as a set of guiding principles. Although institution-focused, our proposed roadmap is intended to complement broader policy and development work to address the political, economic and criminal enablers of insecurity, including corruption, organized crime and impunity.

In the near term, the priority focus for Haitian policymakers engaging with the international community should be on designing a reform strategy, in cooperation with Haitian stakeholders, and ensuring its implementation. First, a time-bound, technocratic strategic planning commission should be established by the transitional or interim authorities following the end of the TPC's mandate, in consultation with the prime minister's office and relevant ministries (justice, interior, defence, economy). This commission should comprise Haitian practitioners and technocrats drawn from the law enforcement, defence, justice, corrections and customs authorities, as well as from public administration. The commission should be supported, in an advisory capacity, by a limited number of security sector reform experts and international partners.

Eligibility criteria (experience, integrity, technical expertise) should be defined in advance, and the process for nominating appointees to the commission should be overseen by an independent Haitian body (such as the ombudsperson's office or a designated judicial or auditing institution); again, international partners should play only an advisory role. External partners such as the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) could be mandated to observe the nomination process to check that agreed criteria are applied, but should not select members themselves.

Once created, the strategic planning commission should institutionalize structures for providing feedback to, and receiving feedback from, society. The commission should be required to hold regular consultations nationwide with civil society, including with women's organizations, human rights groups, youth representatives, business associations and displaced communities. Given constraints on mobility in many parts of Haiti, in-person consultations may not always be feasible. Remote formats should be made available where needed; these could include the use of written submissions, radio call-ins, reporting by trusted local intermediaries, and partnerships with national civil society networks. These consultations should provide a core part of the evidence base needed to inform strategic planning.

The output of this process should be a national security and justice sector reform strategy that establishes overarching objectives and priority reforms for the following three to five years. The strategy should be complemented by an action plan covering practical implementation steps, and by clear metrics for monitoring and evaluation of progress over the implementation period.

The focus of medium-term efforts (following adoption of the strategy and its action plan) should be on implementation and review. Annual public reviews of the strategy and action plan should be led by designated Haitian institutions and based on international best practice. These exercises can be used to assess progress and adjust priorities as results and circumstances dictate. Where appropriate, external partners with recognized monitoring and evaluation expertise – such as UNODC – can support the design and independence of these review mechanisms, in collaboration with the Haitian leadership.

Returning to the principle that reforms should be Haitian-led, it will be important that international partners align their security and justice programming with the work of Haitian institutions, rather than vice versa. External stakeholders should adapt their metrics and objectives to those enshrined in the Haitian strategy. Put another way, the imposition of separate, donor-driven metrics should be avoided. A timeline and benchmarks for achieving and monitoring policy advances should be mutually agreed between Haitian authorities and international partners.

Clarifying roles across Haiti's security sector agencies (year 1)

As mentioned, the overlapping remits and ill-defined roles of Haiti's multiple institutional security actors – the HNP, FADH, National Intelligence Agency (ANI) and correctional services – present significant challenges for governance and security. A crucial part of the national strategy should therefore be a structural review of existing Haitian security sector institutions, and the identification of all mandate overlaps, inconsistencies or inefficiencies to be resolved in the years to come.

Mapping and basic demarcation of the responsibilities and permitted scope of operations of each service should be a focus of effort in the near term (0–12 months). Haitian executive authorities should produce, by consensus, a detailed organizational architecture setting out the roles of, and relationships between, security institutions at both national and departmental levels. In the authors' opinion, this structure should (a) confirm that the HNP should lead on public order, investigations and everyday policing; (b) define the FADH's role as limited to perimeter security, logistics, engineering support and border surveillance (and specifically excluding routine policing and crowd management); (c) clarify the intended function and oversight of the ANI, and of the intelligence units within the HNP and FADH; and (d) specify which ministry or oversight body is responsible for correctional services (and for compliance with international standards¹² on detention, detainees, rehabilitation and coordination with law courts).

The national strategy document can be used as an interim means of minimally codifying key features of a revamped Haitian security architecture – including, *inter alia*, role demarcation and minimum standards of accountability. When institutionally feasible, however, this semi-formal definition of roles and responsibilities should be more fully underpinned by legislation. These steps are

¹² These should include the Nelson Mandela Rules, Bangkok Rules and Tokyo Rules, as well as the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

crucial for laying the groundwork for professionalization of Haiti's security services and for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of gang members and associated armed actors.

Oversight of new roles and operations (years 2–3)

Once the structure of the new security institutions has been established and reform and training are under way, robust oversight will be necessary over the medium term (subsequent two years). All security and justice sector agencies and services should begin to institutionalize human rights compliance mechanisms to prevent and/or punish abuses by personnel in these services. Mechanisms will need to include training on human rights, detainee rights and the use of force, internal monitoring of alleged rights violations by security service personnel, and transparent public reporting on serious incidents (such as deaths in custody, use of lethal force, mass escapes) and associated disciplinary measures taken. In parallel, the HNP should strengthen its general inspectorate and professional standards units, while the Ministry of Justice and other relevant bodies should reactivate and/or increase resources for external oversight committees that have historically remained dormant or existed largely in name only. Such safeguards are necessary to reduce political interference in police management and accountability processes.

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Depending on the security architecture that is agreed, Haitian leaders should look to establish interoperable planning cells where HNP officers, FADH personnel, intelligence representatives and corrections officials can coordinate operations in accordance with their respective mandates. Cooperation of this kind should be underpinned by clear decision-making protocols and accompanied by a standing system of liaison with prosecutors and relevant government ministries.

Establishing a 'statute package' for security and justice (years 1–3)

Issuing targeted interim regulations (year 1)

In the absence of a functioning legislature, Haiti cannot modernize the legal framework governing private security actors, asset forfeiture, public procurement and security sector contracts, arms control and the use of force. Yet given the transitional administration's failure to deliver conditions to enable the holding of elections, and given the continued uncertainty about when Haiti's political vacuum may end, merely waiting for parliamentary elections is not an option when it comes to ensuring security sector legislation proceeds. High-risk domains such as private security and port oversight require interim controls now, regardless of whether draft laws are being prepared for potential later adoption.

In the near term, policy efforts should focus on issuing targeted interim regulations – decrees, internal regulations and memorandums of understanding – on a small number of issues critical for Haiti’s security. These measures should be explicitly framed as transitional. They should include sunset clauses requiring each regulation’s legislative reconfirmation or replacement within a defined period after Haiti’s parliament reconvenes. The interim measures should also consider the transnational nature of the security threats Haiti faces, including: the likely continued presence of foreign private security actors operating in or from Haiti on behalf of private entities and the government; and the likely continued presence of domestic gangs and extra-Haitian criminal groups, some of which may use emerging technologies such as aerial drones and digital platforms for, respectively, coordination and propaganda.

The interim regulations should establish at least a basic accountability framework for private security companies, including a mandatory registry of firms and guards, elementary vetting and incident-reporting obligations, a prohibition on ‘moonlighting’ by HNP personnel, and clear reporting lines to HNP oversight units. The regulations should also introduce interim operational protocols on the use of force by members of the HNP, FADH and, where relevant, armed international GSF support units. Such protocols should be aligned with international principles of necessity, proportionality and accountability, and backed by mandatory incident reporting and internal review for all lethal-force incidents.

Ports, land crossings and customs posts should standardize inspection, chain-of-custody and reporting procedures for arms and ammunition, require prosecutors to be notified of major seizures, and mandate digitized logging of such cases, in coordination with the interdiction pilot schemes proposed below (see ‘Interdiction and sanctions pilot schemes’).

Finally, interim regulations should define minimum transparency thresholds for emergency procurement in the security and justice sectors, particularly where this involves purchases of security equipment or contracts at ports, fuel depots and logistics nodes.

Drafting and passing laws (years 2–3)

In the medium term, building on both the national strategy and the interim regulations, elected Haitian legislators will need to focus on drafting a concise ‘security and justice statute package’ composed of a limited number of priority laws.

This package would ideally include: a comprehensive private security company law codifying licensing, vetting, training, reporting, sanctions and oversight; a law on asset forfeiture and beneficial ownership targeted at high-risk sectors such as ports, fuel trade and customs-linked logistics companies; a modernized police law that sets out use-of-force rules, internal accountability mechanisms, disciplinary procedures, and protections for whistle-blowers; and targeted amendments to the criminal and criminal-procedure codes to enable the effective functioning of specialized judicial roles, strengthen witness protection, and support case-building against alleged facilitators of gang crime and related abuses.

The process for drafting this statute package should be socially and sectorally inclusive, with structured consultations involving legal professionals, civil society organizations and representatives of the sectors that will be regulated, so that the resulting texts are technically sound, politically viable and shared. Given past legislative bottlenecks, this one- to two-year horizon should be understood as an indicative target for a prioritized package rather than as a firm prescription.

Rebuilding coercive institutions, vetting and intelligence

The next set of priorities concerns how coercive power is exercised. Without credible vetting, or professionalization of security services and intelligence practices, the above-mentioned reforms in strategy and law will remain symbolic. The focus here should be on three interlinked areas:

- System-wide vetting and use-of-force reform for members of the HNP, FADH and correctional services;
- Vetting and professionalization of personnel in citizen-facing functions; and
- An intelligence architecture that supports joint operations and justice.

System-wide vetting and use-of-force reform (year 1)

Moving towards a more legitimate security apparatus requires a system-wide approach to integrity and professional conduct. In the near term, this means laying the technical and institutional groundwork for a credible vetting process covering both new recruits and existing personnel. Haitian authorities should first define, through a joint process led by the HNP inspectorate and relevant civilian oversight bodies, a common set of criteria for eligibility and conduct for persons holding or applying for uniformed or custodial positions in the HNP, FADH and correctional system. These criteria should cover integrity, disciplinary history and basic interpersonal skills needed for public-facing roles.

In parallel, Haitian authorities should establish verified rosters of all personnel in these institutions, indicating each person's rank, current and past postings, and any pending disciplinary or judicial files. This process should build on existing Haitian administrative records while drawing, where useful, on lessons and data from previous international support for personnel screening processes in Haiti. A precondition for any screening effort should be the systematic updating and verification of personnel files. At the same time, use-of-force policies across the HNP, FADH and correctional services should be harmonized, building on the interim protocols proposed above, and brought into line with international standards and Haiti's legal obligations. This harmonization should include mandatory reporting of all use-of-force incidents, and internal review mechanisms for cases involving injury or death.

Vetting and professionalizing personnel in citizen-facing roles (years 2–3)

Medium-term efforts can then focus on implementation of vetting and on consolidation of a culture of accountable use of force. Independent vetting should be conducted across the HNP, FADH and correctional system. The process should

apply common criteria to both serving personnel and new recruits, and should draw on criminal, financial and personal history checks, as well as on carefully managed peer input where appropriate.

Clear criteria for the exclusion of individuals from security sector roles need to be defined in advance. Such criteria should include past or present involvement in grave human rights violations, organized crime or serious corruption. For persons who do not meet minimum standards, authorities should develop ‘off-ramp’ pathways into non-security public administration or civilian employment to limit incentives for spoiler behaviour or further drift into criminal networks.

Basic professionalization of citizen-facing functions should prioritize community-oriented training modules for frontline personnel – such as officers in patrol units, crowd-control teams and prison wings – who have frequent public contact. The emphasis of training should be on de-escalation of potentially violent situations, trauma awareness, and the practical application of basic human rights principles in day-to-day policing and custodial work.

Intelligence reform and the HNP–GSF interface (year 1)

In the near term, reform should focus on rationalizing, rather than multiplying, existing intelligence service structures. Instead of creating new agencies, Haitian authorities should clarify the mandates of those that already exist and organize basic coordination between them.

Instead of creating new agencies, Haitian authorities should clarify the mandates of those that already exist and organize basic coordination between them.

Haiti’s National Intelligence Agency (ANI), which is currently in disarray, should be tasked with strategic analysis and early-warning functions. HNP units should concentrate on operational and criminal intelligence. The FADH should focus on border and perimeter threats. This functional demarcation needs to be backed by simple, written arrangements that spell out how these entities should communicate and to whom they report.

In parallel, Haitian institutions and the GSF leadership should agree on minimum intelligence-sharing protocols for counter-gang operations, specifying what information should be shared, through which channels, with which safeguards for sources, and how suspected infiltration is to be handled.

Shrinking the coercive marketplace: mobility, illicit economies and DDR

The next pillar of our proposed roadmap centres on the security marketplace itself: the corridors and chokepoints where illicit activities flourish; the financial and logistical circuits that sustain gangs; and the human capital – including children and adolescents – that armed groups rely on.

Mobility and humanitarian access (years 1–2)

Insecurity in Haiti is experienced first and foremost as a crisis of movement: the inability of citizens and residents to reach school, work, markets or clinics without paying a toll or risking violence. Humanitarian organizations face similar constraints in moving staff, medical supplies and food into the neighbourhoods where needs are greatest. Any reform effort must therefore treat mobility and humanitarian access as early priorities, not secondary benefits of broader stabilization.

In the near term (0–12 months), Haitian authorities should work with local communities in Port-au-Prince and at least one secondary city to map priority routes and locations, including school paths, market access roads, links to health facilities, main public transport lines and key sites for displaced populations. In parallel, authorities should consult humanitarian agencies and local non-governmental organizations to identify supply routes from ports and land crossings to major hospitals, warehouses and high-need neighbourhoods.

On the basis of this joint mapping, the authorities can designate an initial set of protected corridors and safe zones around schools, clinics, markets and key health facilities, with clear geographic boundaries and time bands – for example, school opening and closing hours and the scheduled movements of humanitarian convoys. Joint HNP–GSF teams should be assigned to these routes under written rules of engagement that align with the GSF mandate, with visible identification of HNP–GSF personnel and explicit liaison responsibilities with communities and humanitarian actors, to ensure that the presence of such units facilitates rather than politicizes access to protected corridors and safe zones. Clear protocols should also guide humanitarian organizations negotiating access in gang-controlled areas; these measures should draw on comparative experience¹³ to avoid ad hoc arrangements that risk undermining neutrality (such as paying off gang leaders), and should favour structured engagement models that preserve the independence and accountability of state security officials and agencies. To support this effort, simple reporting channels – hotlines, SMS or WhatsApp numbers, and trusted local focal points – should be set up so that residents and humanitarian partners can report blockages, shootings, kidnappings or extortion attempts in real time.

Medium-term efforts should focus on consolidating and adjusting this first set of protected corridors and safe zones. Incident data and community feedback should be reviewed on a regular basis at local level to refine deployments, adjust patrol patterns and, where performance allows, gradually expand the network of protected routes.

Corridor status – whether open or disrupted – should be communicated publicly through community liaisons, radio and social media so that citizens, service providers and relief actors can plan their movements and see in concrete terms where the state is delivering.

¹³ Different options for engaging gangs to secure safe access have been explored in the academic literature. See, for instance, Lucchi, E. and Schuberth, M. (2023), 'Negotiating humanitarian space with criminal armed groups in urban Latin America', *Disasters*, 47(3), pp. 700–24, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/disa.12569>; and Schuberth, M. (2017), 'To engage or not to engage Haiti's urban armed groups? Safe access in disaster-stricken and conflict-affected cities', *Environment and Urbanization*, 29(2), pp. 425–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247817716398>.

Interdiction and sanctions pilot schemes (years 1–3)

In the near term (0–12 months), Haitian authorities should select one or two key ports – for example, Cap-Haïtien and Port-au-Prince – and one or two land crossings such as Ouanaminthe and Malpasse as pilot sites where customs officers, HNP personnel, immigration officials, Anti-Corruption Unit (ULCC) staff and prosecutors can work side by side on interdictions of illegal goods, including weapons, food, fuel and narcotics. For these sites, standard operating procedures should be drafted and adopted to regulate how inspections are conducted, how evidence is recorded and stored, and which actors must be notified when a major seizure occurs. The pilot programme should also cover major customs posts.

As part of this process, individuals and entities should be systematically checked against UN and key bilateral sanctions lists. Where links to listed persons or entities are identified, coordination should be triggered with national sanctions focal points so that criminal proceedings, asset freezes and international cooperation tools reinforce one another rather than operating in parallel.

Targeting mid-level facilitators of gang crime (years 2–3)

Ports, fuel depots, customs posts and public works contracts all provide opportunities for mid-level actors in Haiti's conflict economy to shield themselves and their networks from scrutiny while enabling gang coalitions to operate.

In the medium term, Haitian authorities should prioritize the resourcing and activation of specialized judicial courts and procedures for dealing with financial crimes, corruption, and sexual and gender-based violence. Authorities should ensure the relevant systems have dedicated investigators and prosecutors, the capacity to work effectively with oversight bodies, and meaningful protection for witnesses and whistle-blowers. These systems should be used to bring cases not only against highly visible gang figureheads, but against suspected mid-level facilitators in strategic sectors – port operations, fuel distribution, customs brokerage, public works and state-linked logistics firms – where criminal activity sustains the wider marketplace of coercion.

Addressing facilitators of illicit activities: linking CVR, DDR and justice (year 1)

Haiti's urban gangs differ from the conventional armed groups for which standard DDR was designed. In the past, generic DDR attempts (2004–07) in Haiti have failed, leading the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) to pioneer community violence reduction (CVR) processes in 2006.¹⁴ CVR targeted at-risk young people via the provision of jobs and community projects, complementing security sector reform efforts.¹⁵

¹⁴ Schubert, M. (2017), 'Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in unconventional settings: the case of MINUSTAH's community violence reduction', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 24, 2017, Issue 3, pp. 410–33, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13533312.2016.1277145>; and United Nations Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI), 'Community Violence Reduction Programme', internal technical guidance.

¹⁵ United Nations Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) (2021), *OROLSI: Department of Peace Operations*, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/orolsi_kit_v.11.2021.pdf; and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Section, OROLSI (undated), *COMMUNITY VIOLENCE REDUCTION: Creating Space for Peace*, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/ddr-and-cvr-creating-space-for-peace.pdf>.

Haitian authorities, with the support of international interlocutors, should build on these lessons through a sequenced, complementary approach to dealing with rank-and-file members of armed gangs. Near-term triage should differentiate the treatment of gang members according to their role and the severity of their criminal activity: children should be treated first as victims entitled to protection pathways; low-level adults coerced into auxiliary roles should become eligible for tailored CVR/DDR reintegration; and serious offenders should be prioritized for justice and accountability. In this design, the parallel security sector reforms mentioned above can serve to address impunity systemically, disrupt patronage networks and restore legitimate security provision.

Haiti's gang coalitions are not amorphous entities. They are structured organizations that rely on a large base of rank-and-file members, many of them children and adolescents, and a smaller cadre of adult commanders, logisticians and enforcers. Any realistic roadmap must therefore distinguish between minors and adults, and between low-level offences and grave crimes, and must link demobilization to credible justice pathways rather than treating DDR as a substitute for accountability.

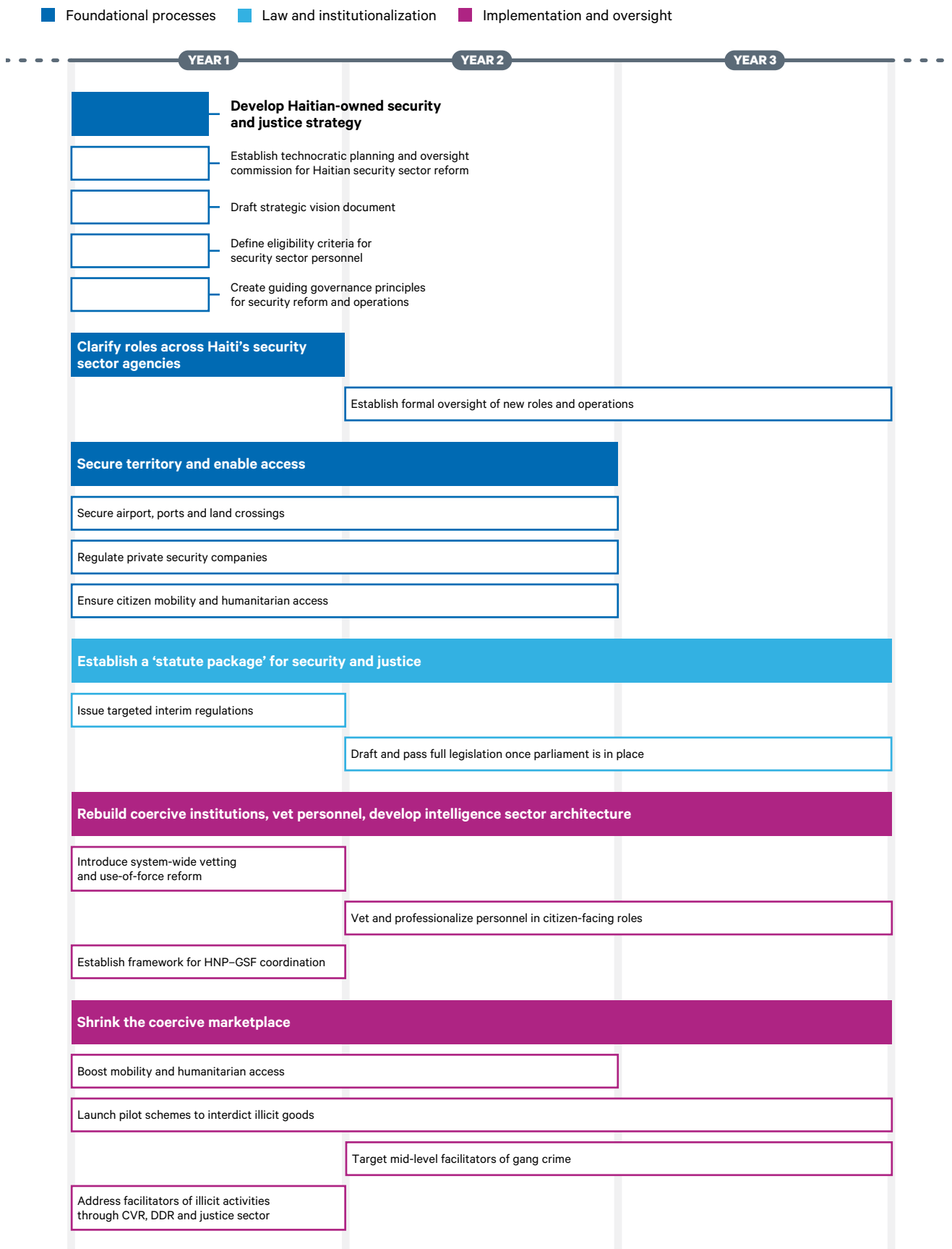
In the near term, the priority must be to stop or prevent harm, and to create basic conditions for differentiated treatment. Authorities should begin by mapping the internal structures of major gang coalitions such as Viv Ansanm, with a particular focus on the ages and roles of gang members and on patterns of coercion or recruitment.

On the basis of this picture, Haitian authorities should issue a clear and public commitment that children associated with gangs will be treated first and foremost as victims entitled to protection, in line with international juvenile-justice and child-rights standards. In practice, that implies an immediate halt to practices that treat children in gangs as indistinguishable from adults. It implies a need to design basic screening procedures at the point of arrest or separation to identify minors, assess their exposure and direct them into appropriate child-protection channels.

In parallel, Haitian justice actors need to begin adapting juvenile-justice procedures so that the small subset of minors implicated in serious offences can be dealt with through age-appropriate processes that respect due-process guarantees and focus on rehabilitation rather than purely punitive responses.

For adults, near-term efforts should focus on establishing a triage framework that links DDR and justice rather than pitting the two processes against each other. Authorities should develop clear, publicly communicated categories that differentiate between the following: individuals involved only in low-level or auxiliary roles, often under economic duress; those who have played sustained roles in extortion, kidnapping or armed enforcement; and those responsible for killings, massacres or systematic sexual violence.

Figure 1. Summary of steps in proposed roadmap for Haitian security sector reform



Why sequencing matters

The sequencing of measures proposed in our roadmap is not a technical luxury; it follows directly from the diagnosis set out in this paper. Starting with a Haitian-owned strategy and governance map is necessary because, in a deeply fragmented landscape, there is otherwise no agreed reference for who is responsible for what, or on what basis international actors should align their support. Without this, every intervention risks becoming another isolated process overlapping or conflicting with other measures.

Prioritizing policy attention on securing chokepoints and protecting citizens' mobility – through trial programmes of interdiction and the establishment of protected corridors and safe zones – would reflect the reality that key transit locations are where money and leverage concentrate. Historically, these same nodes and routes have been weaponized by political actors arming and deploying gangs for electoral purposes.¹⁶ Small, carefully designed interventions at these locations can send signals throughout the security marketplace, but only if coupled with justice follow-through and coordinated sanctions that reach the facilitators and enablers of gang activity, not just easily replaceable foot soldiers.

Prioritizing policy attention on securing chokepoints and protecting citizens' mobility – through trial programmes of interdiction and the establishment of protected corridors and safe zones – would reflect the reality that key transit locations are where money and leverage concentrate.

Embedding vetting, use-of-force reform and intelligence integrity early in the process is necessary to ensure that the same institutions tasked with contesting gangs are not simultaneously reproducing cycles of abuse and impunity. Without this, community trust will remain too brittle to sustain the kind of cooperation and information flow that complex urban operations require.

Placing juvenile and adult gang members into a differentiated DDR and justice framework would acknowledge that Haitians have experienced both predation by gangs and abuses by state agents, and that simplistic amnesties or indiscriminate crackdowns would entrench, rather than resolve, grievances.

Finally, treating elections as the culmination of a governance sequence – with parliamentary reactivation at its heart – is needed to avoid the mistake of expecting elections alone to stabilize a contested and violent environment. Elections can

¹⁶ Schubert, M. (2015), 'A transformation from political to criminal violence? Politics, organised crime and the shifting functions of Haiti's urban armed groups', *Conflict, Security & Development*, 15 (2), pp. 169–96, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14678802.2015.1030950>.

be a governance dividend of reform, but only if they are grounded in minimum conditions that make representation meaningful and reduce the likelihood that armed actors will capture state institutions outright.

In short, the roadmap proposed here seeks to work with the grain of Haiti's political economy, not against it: adjusting incentives at the key points where power, information and rents converge; reinforcing the institutions that can constrain the coercive marketplace over time; and ensuring that Haitians themselves, rather than external actors or narrow elites, shape the choices that will determine the country's trajectory.

About the authors

Roberta Maggi is a development practitioner and consultant specializing in governance and security sector reform in conflict-affected and hybrid security environments. Her work focuses on institutional reform, interim security arrangements, community safety, and oversight and accountability across the Middle East and North Africa. She has designed and managed security sector governance programmes and advised international think-tanks and policy institutions on security and governance. She is an associate fellow at the Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO). She holds a master's degree in international relations/political science from the Geneva Graduate Institute and a bachelor's degree in international relations from King's College London.

Dr Christopher Sabatini is senior fellow for Latin America at Chatham House. He was formerly a lecturer in discipline in the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) at Columbia University and a lecturer of practice at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Chris is also on the advisory board of Human Rights Watch's Americas Division and is an HFX Fellow at the Halifax International Security Forum.

Alexandra Farsari is a consultant and researcher for Latin American studies at Chatham House. She holds a first-class degree in political science and international relations from University College London, with a specialization in social data science. Her research focuses on foreign direct investment in the resource sector of Latin America, examining political risk, regulatory frameworks and the implications for economic development. Her professional experience is in quantitative analysis and business intelligence, contributing data-driven insights to policy-relevant research.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank Alis Martin for her stewardship of the project throughout its life cycle, and the wider Chatham House network of experts on governance, security and peacebuilding in and beyond Haiti for their strategic guidance and peer review. We would like to give a special thanks to Chatham House's publishing department which worked double time to make sure this paper was published before the 7 February 2026 dissolution of the TPC in Haiti.

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Cover image: Residents walk past a police patrol near Bernard Mevs Hospital in Port-au-Prince, December 2024.

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ISBN 978 1 78413 670 3

DOI 10.55317/9781784136703

Cite this paper: Maggi, R., Sabatini, C. and Farsari, A. (2026), *A roadmap for security and governance reform in Haiti: How to address multilateral breakdown and state collapse*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://doi.org/10.55317/9781784136703>.

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The Royal Institute of International Affairs
Chatham House

10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE

T +44 (0)20 7957 5700

contact@chathamhouse.org | chathamhouse.org

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