

GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

A MODEL FOR FUTURE PEACE OPERATIONS?

LESSONS FROM THE GANG SUPPRESSION FORCE IN HAITI

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BINUH	UN Integrated Office in Haiti
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
FADH	Armed Forces of Haiti
GSF	Gang Suppression Force
HNP	Haitian National Police
MIF	Multinational Interim Force
MINUSTAH	UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti
MSS	Multinational Security Support Mission
OAS	Organization of American States
SGP	Standing Group of Partners
UNSOH	UN Support Office in Haiti



SUMMARY

On 18 October 2026, four Salvadoran soldiers serving with the Gang Suppression Force (GSF) disappeared in gang-controlled territory in metropolitan Port-au-Prince while reportedly returning from an errand.[1] At the time of writing, their fate remains unknown. The episode captures the predicament at the heart of this paper. More than a year after the UN Security Council authorized the force to neutralize Haiti's gangs,[2] criminal groups still control most of the territory in which that force operates, shaping and controlling daily life for a large share of the population.[3] One in 10 Haitians is still internally displaced,[4] and more than half the population face acute food insecurity.[5] Elections, first planned for August 2026 and then for 13 December, have been pushed back to 18 July 2027 for the first round, with a run-off scheduled for 4 October 2027.[6]

In this context, the GSF has become more than a security operation. While it is expected to push back the gangs, restore the presence of the state, make elections possible and open the way to social recovery, the force that exists today cannot yet carry that weight. Its mandate is narrow: to neutralize, isolate and deter gangs.[7] Its strength is still partial, with just over 2 000 personnel deployed against an authorized complement of 5 500,[8] and full operational capacity is not expected before December 2026 at the earliest.

The GSF architecture has no precedent. It is authorized by the UN, supported by a UN office (the UN Support Office in Haiti, UNSOH) and staffed in part by former UN personnel, yet it is not led by the UN.[9] Strategic direction rests with a Standing Group of Partners, funding is spread across several mechanisms and the force's legal status has had to be negotiated piece by piece.[10] Building such a force from scratch takes time, but every month of delay gives criminal groups another month to observe it, test it and adapt. That adaptation is already under way while the force's own operations generate responses it cannot always contain. In Gros Morne, gang members massacred around a dozen civilians only hours after a GSF operation killed three of their members.[11]

The gap between what the GSF is expected to deliver and what it can deliver is therefore more than a problem of perception. It places the force under a dilemma: if it holds to its plan, it risks appearing absent when communities come under attack, as the calls for its deployment to Kenscoff in August made clear.[12] If it answers every crisis, it disperses its limited capacity, drifts into areas it was not designed to hold, and delays the build-up on which its impact depends. Its decision to establish a base near Gros Morne after the massacre shows how quickly that second path can open.[13]

Criminal groups have every incentive to exploit this, using violence against civilians as a lever to push the force towards static protection and to turn public frustration against it. The experience of the GSF's predecessor, the Multinational Security Support Mission, shows that the gap will not close on its own. The GSF received a stronger mandate and greater capabilities precisely because its predecessor fell short, yet the promise of a more robust force has only raised expectations. For the GSF, managing expectations has become a condition of operational success.

None of this is intended as an argument against the GSF. Parts of Haiti have deteriorated to such an extent that the country must be pulled back from the brink before durable change becomes possible, and no other instrument is currently available to do so. But a force designed to restore security cannot, on its own, sustain it.[14] Its legacy will depend on what follows it: a national police force able to hold cleared ground, a justice and detention system able to process those arrested, a credible pathway for those who leave the gangs and funding that outlasts the current wave of international attention. On each of these fronts, preparations lag well behind the force itself.[15]

This policy brief maps the institutional landscape in which the GSF operates and examines the four challenges that will shape its trajectory: how to coordinate a crowded, hybrid operational architecture; the logistics of building a multinational force without, but in parallel to, UN machinery; the gap between its mandate and the expectations placed upon it; and the tension between restoring security and maintaining it. It concludes with lessons for future operations of this kind, which, in a constrained multilateral system, are likely to become the default response to crises such as Haiti's.

Key recommendations

Seven measures would help the GSF close the gap between what it is expected to achieve and what it can deliver, and give its gains a chance to endure beyond its mandate. These are outlined in more detail further below.

1. Complete the deployment and sequence it against the criminal threat.
2. Simplify coordination and complete the civilian component.
3. Manage expectations openly and protect communities exposed to retaliation.
4. Invest now in the Haitian forces that must hold ground.
5. Prepare now for what follows each operation: detention, justice and reintegration.
6. Target the criminal economy, not only the territory.
7. Capture the lessons of the start-up for future operations.



BACKGROUND

The Security Council adopted resolution 2793 on 30 September 2025,[16] establishing the Gang Suppression Force in place of the Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS). The first priority in the GSF's mandate is to conduct counter-gang operations to 'neutralize, isolate and deter gangs'. Although the Security Council authorized the GSF, it is a multinational force that is not led by the United Nations.

It is also very clearly a peace enforcement mission, at the far end of the spectrum of how and to what extent peace operations use force.[17] In contrast to the MSS, the GSF mandate gives the force the option to operate independently or with Haitian actors, as it deems appropriate. The mandate also requests the GSF to help secure critical infrastructure, build the capacity of Haitian security forces and help create security conditions conducive to elections.

The GSF is also different from the MSS in several other ways. The GSF was intended to be larger, more robust and more independent than the MSS, with a force ceiling of 5 500 troops, over twice the planned size of the MSS, which only fielded around 1 000 officers. Moreover, while the MSS was a police mission, the GSF will be largely composed of military personnel, at least in its initial deployment stages. And the GSF is being supported logistically by a newly created United Nations Support Office in Haiti, which is funded by UN-assessed contributions.

Key facts about the GSF

Leadership: Special Representative Jack Christofides; Force Commander Major General Erdenebat Batsuuri

Date of authorization: 30 September 2025 (Security Council resolution 2793). Renewed on 29 September 2026 (Security Council resolution 2829) until 31 March 2027

Authorized personnel: 5 500 military and police personnel, and 50 civilian staff, including capacities in intelligence and analysis, joint operations, political affairs, human rights and strategic communications

Contributing countries as of October 2026: Chad, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mongolia, Sri Lanka ■

Although the GSF has the task of restoring security, its long-term legacy is dependent on a range of other national and international actors who are responsible for supporting and sustaining the mission's objectives. As discussed further below, the GSF – such as potential similar future missions – is not designed to address the wider array of problems that threaten peace and stability, which are likely to become an issue as efforts to restore security transition into efforts to consolidate it.



FIGURE 1 Establishment and deployment of the Gang Suppression Force.

The GSF began deployment in April 2026, as members of its first contingent, a 400-strong Chadian infantry battalion, arrived in Port-au-Prince.[37] The main force is currently established at Vertières, a Haitian Armed Forces (FADH) base in the Tabarre area of Port-au-Prince, while other positions have been established in lower Delmas, at Terminal Varreux, and in the Artibonite department. By late October, the GSF's numbers had reached 2 000,[38] making it larger than the MSS ever was. Future deployments are anticipated to include maritime units, a military intelligence unit and a border management company.[39]

The GSF entered its operational phase on 1 June, beginning to conduct vehicular and foot patrols in Tabarre and surrounding areas, including with the Haitian National Police (HNP). GSF troops carried out their first significant operation on 21 June, attacking an alleged gang stronghold and reportedly destroying a large quantity of Molotov cocktails.[40] Other operations have followed, although the force has kept a low communications profile while establishing its footing. Outside of Port-au-Prince, Sri Lankan troops recently established a base in Gonaïves, the capital of the Artibonite department, where they have reportedly begun conducting patrols and operations.[41] Yet the force has continued to lag behind its deployment projections, impacting the political transition by making it difficult to calculate when elections will be feasible while allowing gangs time to assess the force and adapt their activities.



CHALLENGE 1: COORDINATION AND DECISION-MAKING

The first challenge for the GSF is its need to align a wide range of actors for the force to operate like a UN peace operation without being part of the UN (see Figure 2). The GSF is led by Special Representative Jack Christofides and Force Commander Major General Erdenebat Batsuuri,[42] and is supported by up to 50 civilians. But a number of organizations and structures revolve around this core set of actors, helping to set up, maintain and support the mission. Success will depend on coordination with multiple entities at various levels and in a range of domains, in particular around logistics, operations and the political aspects of the challenge.

Principal among these actors is the Standing Group of Partners (SGP), a group of member states that are providing strategic direction and oversight to the GSF. For operational start-up and logistics, the SGP has been supported by a task force called the Tiger Team, which is composed mainly of staff from the United States Department of State and Department of War. The Tiger Team has provided secretariat-type assistance to the SGP, including identifying and helping prepare international contingents for deployment. While the SGP and Tiger Team have managed to pull off the massive task of setting up the GSF and mobilizing the components of the force in what seems to have been a fairly cooperative manner, this has required the secondment of dozens of US and other government personnel. However, UNSOH, which became fully operational on 1 April, has helped take up the administrative burden, and the intention is that UNSOH will serve as a more manageable way to sustain the GSF over the longer term.

The existence of UNSOH represents another key change from the MSS, which struggled to surpass 1 000 personnel largely because of the high cost of its support services, which were heavily borne by the US when the MSS failed to attract sufficient funding. In contrast, UNSOH is a UN support office funded through UN-assessed contributions, meaning that the mission's logistical costs are spread across all of the UN's members.[43] Notably, the GSF is therefore authorized by the UN, supported by the UN and staffed by many former UN staff members – yet it operates apart from UN leadership.[44]

The GSF's funding picture is complex. It receives financial support from different funds that contain contributions from more than a dozen countries. The largest and most important is a UN trust fund, which as of 23 September contained around US$200 million[45] to pay for troop reimbursement at standard UN peacekeeping rates. Separately, Canada pays the salaries for the civilian staff and provides a range of other support. In addition, a fund held by the Organization of American States (OAS) is

available to cover urgent requirements or items that are not handled by UNSOH or the trust fund, for example contracting bulldozers to clear gang roadblocks.

These funding sources, which are focused solely on supporting the GSF, do not include financing to support work meant to complement GSF operations, like disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) efforts. For this and related work, the UN in Haiti is in the process of developing a multi-partner trust fund in partnership with the National Commission on Disarmament, Dismantlement and Reintegration and with the support of different donors.

On top of all of this, the ground is also crowded politically. The GSF must coordinate with the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), the primary external political actor in Haiti, not to mention the Haitian government. Currently, coordination mechanisms include the Senior Leadership Coordination Forum on Haiti, composed of the leaders of BINUH, UNSOH and the GSF, as well as regular meetings between these leaders and the Haitian prime minister.

The OAS and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are also politically engaged in the country, besides providing various types of support for and engagement with the GSF. While the GSF's mandate is security, the implications of its actions for ongoing political and electoral processes mean that engagement with these actors, as well as with various parts of the Haitian government, must be continuous.

In this way, a hybrid mechanism meant to operate in a streamlined, speedy fashion requires a great deal of work on liaising and engagement from its personnel. But the civilian side of the GSF continues to remain below its authorized ceiling; as of the beginning of October, less than 30 of the planned 50 civilian staff members had been recruited, limiting the force's capacity to carry out needed engagement.[46] This makes an already complicated set of mechanisms surrounding the GSF even more difficult to steer, coordinate and manage.

Partner	Mandate/role	Activities and status
UN Security Council	Authorized the GSF deployment through Resolution 2793 (2025)	Receives updates on the GSF in quarterly reporting on Haiti, on operations, indicative financial needs to be funded by voluntary contributions, a force generation plan, and a strategy and metrics for measuring success.
Standing Group of Partners Led by the US with Canada, and composed of UN member states including the Bahamas, El Salvador, Guatemala and Jamaica	Mandated by Security Council Resolution 2793 (2025) to provide 'high-level strategic direction, oversight, and relevant political decision-making for the GSF', including: ■ Securing voluntary financial contributions for personnel reimbursement ■ Facilitating force generation ■ Providing strategic representation and coordination for the GSF	Selected the Special Representative and Force Commander, helped organize a pledging conference, reviews and assesses pledges, and facilitates personnel deployments.
Tiger Team US State Department and Department of War, supported by other partners		Has provided secretariat-type assistance to the Standing Group of Partners, including identifying and helping prepare international contingents for deployment.

Partner	Mandate/role	Activities and status
UN Support Office in Haiti	Mandated by Security Council Resolution 2793 (2025) to provide 'rations, fuel, water, accommodation, and all necessary infrastructure… medical support, mobility support for personnel and equipment to include ground transportation and aviation and troop rotation, strategic communications, information technology, and Geographic Information Systems support', as well as reimbursing contingent owned equipment	Has provided the GSF with a broad range of logistical and administrative support services, including base set-up and management, rations, water and fuel, and ground and air transportation. Became fully operational on 1 April 2026.
Organization of American States (OAS)	According to the OAS Charter: ■ To strengthen the continent's peace and security ■ To promote, by cooperative action, member states' economic, social and cultural development ■ To achieve an effective limitation of conventional weapons to devote the largest amount of resources to member states' economic and social development	An agreement between the GSF and OAS was negotiated to grant the GSF and its civilian staff a legal personality under the aegis of the OAS. Also holds a fund to cover GSF requirements that are not addressed through other funding mechanisms.
Caribbean Community (CARICOM)	The mission of the Caribbean Community is to 'deepen integration and build resilience' to: ■ Respect the rule of law, protect the assets of the Community, and abhor corruption, crime and criminality in all its forms ■ Encourage citizens to accept responsibility to contribute to the welfare of their fellow citizens and to the common good, and practice healthy living and lifestyles ■ Project 'one voice' on international issues	Supports efforts to reach political agreement in Haiti through the Eminent Persons Group, three former Caribbean heads of state who have helped lead political dialogue in Haiti since 2023.
UN Integrated Office in Haiti	As per UNSC resolution 2814 (2026): ■ Utilize good offices to facilitate inter-Haitian national dialogue ■ Support the Haitian authorities on their efforts to organize and hold municipal, parliamentary and presidential elections ■ Coordinate international electoral assistance to Haiti in cooperation with other regional and international stakeholders, including CARICOM and the OAS ■ Support the Haitian authorities in efforts to reduce community violence and assist in the design of a Haitian-led disarmament, dismantlement and reintegration programme ■ In close coordination with GSF and relevant international organizations, assist the Haitian authorities in addressing prolonged pre-trial detention and support the Haitian judiciary ■ Monitor and report on cases of gang violence, criminal activities, and human rights abuses and violations	Leading political engagement with Haitian actors, coordination with the Haitian government on the organization of upcoming elections, assisting Haitian penal system and judicial actors, helping support Haitian disarmament, dismantlement and reintegration and community violence reduction efforts, and monitoring and advising on human rights.

FIGURE 2 Partners and stakeholders of the Gang Suppression Force.



CHALLENGE 2: LOGISTICS AND DEPLOYMENT

The process of building up the GSF to full strength has been slower than anticipated. While the force has ostensibly met all planned milestones – for example the deployment of the first contingent in April and the initiation of operations in June – it remains far below anticipated troop levels a year after its authorization, with just over 2 000 personnel deployed by late October. In comparison, the set-up of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) in 2004 was faster, but understanding how and why requires strong caveats.

On 30 April 2004, the Security Council established MINUSTAH to take over from the 3 800-strong Multinational Interim Force (MIF) deployed in the wake of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's departure from Haiti on 29 February 2004. MINUSTAH was given a military ceiling of 6 700 personnel and a police ceiling of 1 622 officers, with a planned start date of 1 June 2004.[47]

By 25 June, MINUSTAH numbered 2 127 troops. But more than half that number were Brazilian troops that had begun deploying towards the end of the MIF, in advance of MINUSTAH's start date, while 450 others were Chilean troops deployed as part of the MIF who were then transferred to MINUSTAH.[48] By 8 November, six months after MINUSTAH was authorized, the mission had 4 493 personnel on the ground.[49] This means that, following the start of deployment, 2 366 personnel arrived in the mission in about five months – a number not substantially greater than the 2 000 personnel who have deployed to the GSF in a little over six months.

Moreover, the differences between MINUSTAH and the GSF are significant. First and foremost, MINUSTAH was a UN peacekeeping operation, a UN-led and managed mission deploying through established channels within a solid institution. The UN at the time was also accustomed to mission start-up, having set up missions in East Timor, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire in the two years before MINUSTAH.[50] In contrast, the GSF represents something new.[51] As discussed above, it is not a UN peacekeeping mission, but a new operational modality that has required considerable invention on the part of GSF civilian and military leaders and support teams, and UNSOH staff members.

In the early 2000s, MINUSTAH also benefited from the presence and attention of the United States, the dominant power in the region, which provided the lead force of the MIF and, as a Security Council permanent member, was determined to transfer the MIF's security responsibilities to a follow-on mission in a timely manner. Furthermore, the world was a different place, with lower levels of conflict

worldwide, greater agreement in the UN Security Council, a stronger global economy and greater faith in multilateralism.[52]

The GSF's deployment has therefore been relatively speedy, given the much greater challenges its start-up has faced – yet it has not occurred as quickly as various stakeholders had hoped. At the time Resolution 2793 was adopted, the objective was that GSF troops could contribute to stability for elections that were planned for August 2026,[53] although observers expected the deployment to take a minimum six months,[54] if not much longer.[55]

During conversations with GSF and UNSOH personnel on the ground, delays were largely blamed on the challenges of the GSF with establishing itself internationally and in Haiti, carrying out the force generation process – a set of steps that identifies, prepares, vets and verifies equipment and readiness of potential contingents in a multilateral operation – as well as mobilizing contingents to Haiti and finally deploying them.

First, the GSF's status as a new and independent entity led to multiple administrative delays. While the UN has diplomatic status, the GSF did not, an issue that had a wide array of implications, beginning with the fact that GSF civilian staff members could not enter Haiti except as private individuals. Importantly, they were also not protected diplomatically from legal pursuit related to the performance of their duties.

An agreement with the OAS was eventually reached to extend an OAS legal identity to these staff members, but staff had to wait for weeks while negotiations were underway before they could travel to Port-au-Prince. Similarly, the formal agreement between the GSF and the Haitian government to permit the GSF's presence was only concluded at the end of July. But because the GSF is a multinational deployment, rather than a UN operation, individual agreements must also now be concluded between each individual contingent and the Haitian government,[56] as well as between the GSF and many countries around the world, in particular those with universal jurisdiction. A reference to legal identity inserted in the renewal of the GSF mandate will hopefully facilitate this process.[57]

The force generation process also posed some challenges. In recent years, the UN has devoted particular attention to refining this process, to ensure that existing peacekeeping missions are able to draw on a large pool of prepared, equipped and vetted units possessing specific required capabilities.[58] But because the GSF is a non-UN mission, force generation processes had to be developed from scratch. A GSF pledging conference was held in early December, garnering thousands of pledges from different countries.[59] Over the subsequent months, the Tiger Team helped conduct multiple assessment visits and preparatory steps, supported by UNSOH personnel, in order to identify which contingents were best suited for the requirements of the GSF's mission.

Currently, the main challenge facing the GSF's start-up is actually deploying those contingents. To speed up deployment, the idea was that each contingent would arrive with its own equipment, avoiding the need for complicated procurement or logistics processes. However, not all contingents have been able to provide their own equipment, or they have arrived with equipment ill-suited to the mission's requirements – for example, tents not appropriate for the heavy rains frequently experienced in Port-au-Prince. As a result, UNSOH has had to fill gaps in equipment provision, or the GSF has had to wait until contingents have completed the extra procurement processes. Some contingents have been able to benefit from donated equipment, but this has also been slowed by the need to issue end-user certificates for military or dual-use equipment, given existing arms embargoes on Haiti.

After the completion of preparatory steps and following the procurement or provision of equipment, the GSF has also had to handle the difficulty and expense of transporting contingents with their gear to Haiti in a timely manner. The countries deploying to Haiti – developing and middle-income countries, for the most part – do not have their own strategic airlift capacity. To get contingents on the ground more quickly, GSF partners have been seeking airlift support.[60] Yet this is not cheap – moving Sri Lankan assets by air for a recent deployment cost US$30 million, ten times what it would have cost to move the assets by sea.[61] Given the cost and limited availability of air resources, some equipment for upcoming deployments is having to be transported to the destination using maritime shipping routes, a relatively cheap option, but one that can take six weeks or more.

Even once contingents arrive on the ground, additional challenges remain. They must be trained and prepared to deploy in complex contexts, including the urban environment of Port-au-Prince and the rural terrain of the Artibonite and Centre departments. Given contingents' above-mentioned issues with equipment provision, including vehicles, many of them are also having to learn to use and operate unfamiliar machinery. To make sure all contingents possess the necessary skills, each contingent has been undergoing a one-to-two-week induction training session upon arrival, a change from peacekeeping missions, where contingents are expected to undergo training before their arrival.

The GSF's deployment efforts are all aiming towards having the force's entire complement on the ground and able to swing into full action. The longer the deployment takes, the less likely this end state is ever to fully arrive. Instead, the delayed deployment is itself likely to shape the behaviour of gangs – with maritime patrol capabilities arriving later than terrestrial capacities, gangs might try to move more activities to territorial waters, or they might reinforce their presence in the rural areas near the Dominican Republic border while the deployment of the GSF border monitoring company is pending. In this way, rather than proactively taking the fight to the gangs or responding reactively to them, the GSF's actions may fall in between, with the force's deployment shaping the gangs' territorial strategies, which in turn would shape the GSF's response in a circular manner.

Rather than taking the fight to the gangs, the GSF's slow deployment may shape the gangs' strategies.



CHALLENGE 3: MISSION OBJECTIVES VS BROADER EXPECTATIONS

Ahead of the 30 June deadline set by Security Council Resolution 2793, the GSF submitted its strategy to the Security Council, presenting three objectives that it seeks to achieve by the end of 2028:

- dismantling (or decreasing) gangs' territorial control;
- securing critical infrastructure, including through operations with the Haitian National Police and the Haitian Armed Forces; and
- ensuring that 'Haitian authorities have the ability to contain gang violence' including by 'improving the capabilities of the Haitian security and defence forces to fight and prevent gang violence'.[62]

The strategy also lays out a series of benchmarks to assess the GSF's progress in implementing its mandate.[63] Indicators range from the number of independent or joint GSF patrols and the number of Haitian security personnel deployed in areas cleared by the GSF, to the reopening of the Port-au-Prince international airport, to conducting joint planning and operations with Haitian security.

However, expectations for the GSF extend far beyond these goals. For example, many Haitians want the GSF to take action to support the elections. Critically, however, the GSF has only been mandated to produce conditions conducive to elections – not to provide election security, much less support to elections.

Elections, first planned for 30 August 2026 and then set for 13 December, were postponed indefinitely on 6 October, and the Provisional Electoral Council has since published a new calendar setting the first round for 18 July 2027 and the second round for 4 October 2027.[64] The GSF expects full operational capacity – with the deployment of three infantry battalions – in early December at the soonest. The postponement of elections to July 2027 changes this calculus, as it gives the GSF several additional months to translate its deployment into tangible gains, although a meaningful improvement before the first round remains far from guaranteed.

The GSF has recently been under pressure from Haitian actors to estimate when security will be sufficient to allow elections to proceed. In response, GSF representatives have emphasized that

election dates are a sovereign decision, not one for external actors, but this will likely not be the last time that they are asked to step outside their mandate.

The GSF also faces the expectation to restore security more quickly and thoroughly than it is currently capable of doing. For example, after brutal attacks in Kenscoff, a community south of the capital, during the night of 23 August, there were calls for the GSF to consider deploying there. But this would represent a step beyond its operational plans, which left the areas south of the capital to the HNP. Moreover, given its limited state of deployment, the GSF was concerned about sending newly arrived personnel to an unfamiliar area. Instead, the GSF deployed personnel to downtown Port-au-Prince to free up HNP units to provide greater protection to the area.[65] This decision is in line with the GSF's objectives of establishing a coherent, well-trained international force ready to implement a broader strategy to neutralize, isolate and deter gangs. But pressure from the Haitian public may make this type of move more difficult in the future.

The MSS also faced expectations well beyond its capacities. In response, the GSF was given greater capabilities and a stronger mandate, yet the gap between expectations and realities remains – or has even grown – in response to public awareness of the GSF's projected greater capacity.

To succeed, the force needs to obtain the trust of the Haitian population in order to gather information for targeted operations, help protect its contingents from attack, encourage voluntary disarmament by gang members, and help lay the foundation for the return of Haitian security forces and the Haitian state. But unmet expectations can erode public trust, and this is deeply worrisome for the GSF.

To succeed, the force needs to obtain the trust of the Haitian population.

In one concerning recent development, hours after the GSF killed three members of the Kokorat San Ras gang in Gros Morne in the Artibonite department during a confrontation, gang members massacred around a dozen civilians in retaliation.[66] This is the sort of event that Haitians remember, making them reluctant to engage with security forces when they will be left vulnerable after those forces depart. To respond to the massacre, the GSF recently established a base near the site of the attack[67] – yet this threatens to bog down the GSF in holding ground, although this is not its mandate.

The GSF must walk a delicate line: it must somehow communicate the limits of its mandate and capacities while building public confidence, and it must fulfil its responsibilities while avoiding stretching itself too far in an effort to meet expectations.



CHALLENGE 4: RESTORING SECURITY VS MAINTAINING IT

The GSF's short-term focus on improving security can sometimes come into tension with the measures needed to maintain security and rebuild the country in the longer term. This is particularly visible in two areas.

The first area is the GSF's relationship with the Haitian National Police and Haitian Armed Forces. The HNP has been heavily impacted by the challenges of the past several years; it is seen as increasingly corrupt, weak and fragile, and penetrated by or connected with gangs. As for the FADH, it is still early in the process of building itself up beyond a small corps of officers focused on responding to crises and natural disasters.

While the GSF is mandated to conduct operations independently or jointly with the Haitian police and armed forces, GSF representatives have expressed the intention to focus on independent operations at the outset, to avoid potentially compromising actions through leaks. The HNP and the FADH are largely seen as having a role in holding regained territory, especially by securing critical infrastructure – but whether they can do this is not yet clear, given their serious limitations in terms of numbers, capabilities and morale.

Yet the GSF cannot do everything on its own. Representatives have made it clear that the GSF cannot both take ground and hold it – the force is not large enough, and doing so would stretch it in ways it was not designed to handle. So the HNP must somehow continue to grow – for example through programmes like the P4000 initiative supported by the United States[68] – and it must continue to build its capacities. Partnership with the GSF could provide critical support: in the GSF's strategy, its third priority is building the HNP and FADH into entities capable of providing security to the country and population in the longer term. But the GSF's short-term focus on restoring security may mean giving short shrift to its longer-term objective of building capable Haitian security actors.

Second, the focus on restoring security can also be in tension with, if not undermine, the provision of longer-term support for Haiti. With international assistance budgets reduced, donors are selective about where to direct their funds; key funding requests like options for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration are still pending.[69] In addition, reduced funding for UN agencies has increased competition on the ground, with organizations seeking to position themselves to receive whatever funding is available – whether they are well positioned for the activity or not.

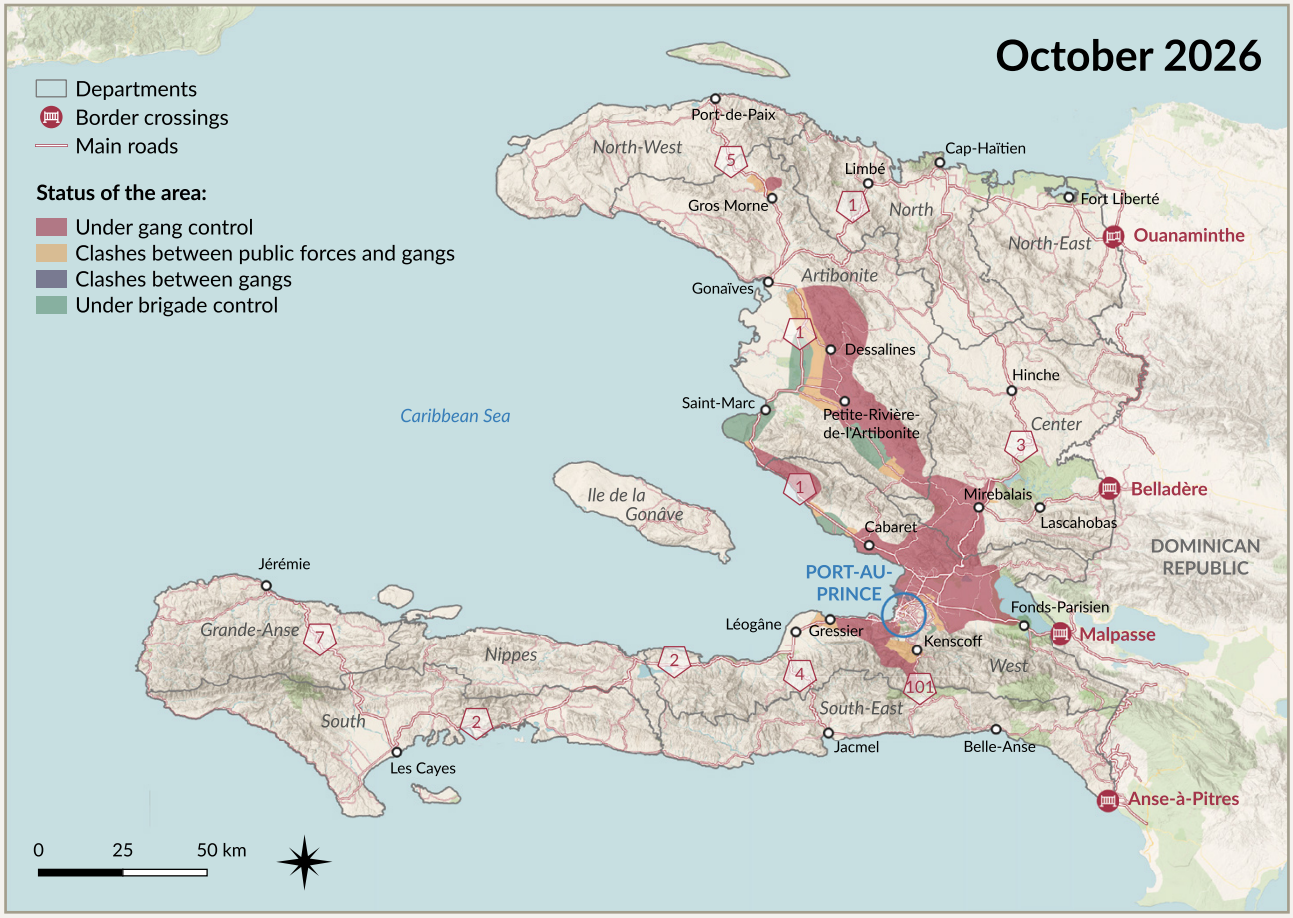


FIGURE 3 Gang expansion in Haiti, October 2026.

In particular, the current financial situation jeopardizes efforts in areas that are vital to determining whether the GSF's impact will last for a period of time. For example, the force will increasingly be encountering large numbers of gang members, and having to figure out what to do with them after an operation is over. Individuals involved in the fighting or suspected of associating with the gang will need to be detained temporarily. To add to this growing pool of detained gang members, some gang-associated individuals may increasingly seek to leave the gangs voluntarily. All of these individuals will need to be detained properly, according to international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and will need to be assessed and triaged into different categories.

Some individuals will need to face prosecution, given their crimes. Yet where to hold them? Haiti suffers from a serious lack of prison capacity and pre-trial detention rates exceed 80 per cent.[70] Plans to build a 160-person modular detention facility for the GSF will be far from sufficient in the medium or longer term. Moreover, the barely functional Haitian justice system cannot handle large numbers of trials of alleged gang members. Although the transitional government issued a decree in May launching judicial units for two areas, financial crimes as well as mass atrocity crimes and sexual violence,[71] this development is likely to have limited impact in the short term, as the units will take time to become operational.

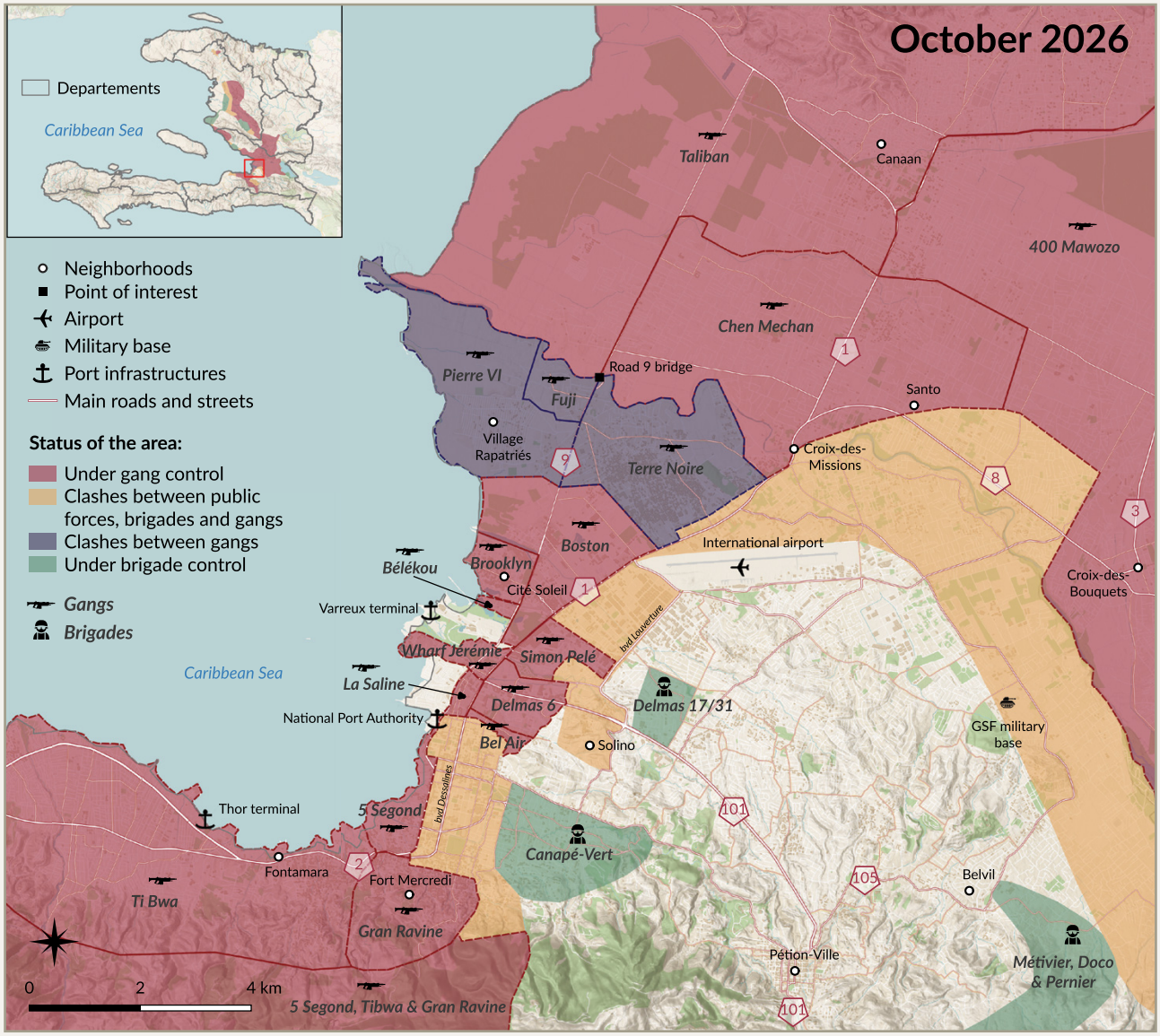


FIGURE 4 Gang expansion in Port-au-Prince, October 2026.

But given that the number of gang members is estimated to be in the thousands, some low-level gang members and associates who have not been connected with violent crimes, including children, will need to be handled through other means. Some sort of demobilization process will be needed, coupled with restorative or transitional justice measures to help them atone for their actions and reintegrate into Haitian society.[72]

However, the plans for DDR are in a very preliminary stage. A letter to the Security Council at the end of May laid out several options for the Council's consideration,[73] but efforts remain in planning. Meanwhile, donors have proposed a variety of programmes that respond to countries' individual priorities but do not represent part of an overall strategy.

There is general agreement that progress on DDR and on support to the justice and penal systems are critical to the GSF's operations, not to mention progress on the deeper organized criminal dynamics fuelling the situation.[74] Yet there is concern that once immediate security issues are stable, reducing pressure and international attention, it will be difficult or impossible to find sustainable funding for these areas. And without progress in these areas, Haiti will be left awash with unemployed, alienated and angry populations whose only skill set is violent criminality. This will make it even harder to address the systems driving Haiti's insecurity, which are key to unravelling the dynamics that fuel Haiti's political economy of violence.



LESSONS FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS

The GSF can be read in two ways, and both matter for the future of peace operations. On one reading, it is a pragmatic compromise: it emerged because it was the only arrangement member states could agree on. A struggling multilateral system, a cash-strapped United Nations and growing scepticism about multidimensional peacekeeping have narrowed the options, while UN peace operations remain ill-suited to robust enforcement and no regional organization in the Americas can mount an operation of this kind. On another reading, the GSF is a template, increasingly seen by some as the direction future responses should take.

These readings are not mutually exclusive. Whether by default or by design, hybrid forces of this kind are likely to recur in crises that combine state collapse and criminal violence. This is why the lessons of the GSF's first year matter well beyond Haiti.

The first lesson is that the hybrid model does not reduce cost or complexity. It moves them elsewhere. Ad hoc missions are often presented as cheaper, simpler and faster than UN operations, but the GSF's experience suggests otherwise. Its build-up has not been markedly faster than that of MINUSTAH two decades ago.[75] A single airlift of Sri Lankan equipment cost US$30 million, ten times the cost of sea transport.[76] And by one US official's estimate, the United States spent close to US$1 billion to mount and support the MSS.[77] The burden has not disappeared – it has shifted to contributing states, to a small group of partners and to a UN support office. Where speed and savings exist, they come from political will, not from the model itself.

The second lesson is that most of the obstacles that slowed the GSF were predictable, and most can be addressed before the next deployment. The force could not bring in its civilian staff until a workaround was found through the OAS, and each contingent must still negotiate its own agreement with the host state.[78] Force generation had to be built from scratch, although the UN has spent years refining this process.[79] The assumption that contingents would arrive being self-sufficient did not hold. Some lacked equipment, others brought equipment unsuited to Haiti's conditions and many required induction training on arrival. Pre-negotiated legal frameworks, rosters of pre-assessed contingents, equipment pools and standing airlift arrangements would not make hybrid missions simple, but they would make them faster.

Third, civilian capacities are most effective when they deploy early. A hybrid mission depends more, not less, on political analysis, liaison and communication, because it must align a crowded field of partners and manage expectations it does not control. The GSF's civilian staff has deployed at roughly the same pace as its troops, with just under 30 of 50 posts filled by October.[80] Deploying these capacities ahead of the military would have helped prepare the ground, establish working relationships with Haitian and international counterparts, and allow contingents to begin operating as soon as they arrive. Future operations would benefit from building this sequencing into their planning from the outset.

Fourth, an enforcement mission is only as durable as what follows it. The GSF can take ground but cannot hold it, and its mandate leaves to others the tasks that determine whether its gains will last: policing cleared areas, detaining and trying those arrested, and offering a way out to those who leave the gangs. In Haiti, these tasks were left to be financed later, in a shrinking aid environment, and they remain largely at the planning stage.[81] The lesson is that a national partner able to hold ground, together with secured funding for detention, justice and DDR, must be built into the design of a mission from the outset rather than treated as a hoped-for sequel.

Finally, criminal groups are a different adversary. Much of the experience of peace enforcement comes from settings where force was used against insurgents or parties to a conflict that could eventually be brought to the negotiating table. Haiti's criminal groups still follow another logic. Their power rests on revenue, on access to arms and ammunition, and on protection from political and economic actors. They respond to pressure by displacing, diversifying and adapting rather than by negotiating.[82]

The GSF's first year already shows how the sequencing of a deployment can shape their territorial strategies, and how violence against civilians can be turned into a lever against the force. Future operations facing similar adversaries will need to target the criminal economy and the networks that protect it – not only territorial control – and to build this analysis into mission design from the start.

None of these lessons weakens the case for the GSF. Forces of this kind cannot resolve crises such as Haiti's on their own, but they can triage them: provide a measure of protection, contain the worst of the violence, and create space for longer-term efforts to rebuild governance and reform the state. For now, many Haitians cannot think beyond the daily struggle to survive. Enabling children to return to school and people to reach markets, jobs and businesses without fear would already be a major step forward, and could in turn make credible elections possible. The GSF can buy time by achieving that. What Haiti and its partners do with that time will decide whether it marks the beginning of a recovery or only another interlude in the crisis.

Recommendations

Seven measures would enable the GSF to bridge the gap between its expected achievements and its actual capabilities, ensuring that its gains endure beyond its mandate.

1. **Complete the deployment and sequence it against the criminal threat.** Partners should secure the strategic airlift, equipment and end-user certifications needed to bring the force to full operating capacity in early 2027. The maritime unit, the military intelligence unit and the border management company should be prioritized, since their absence leaves openings that criminal groups are well placed to exploit.

2. **Simplify coordination and complete the civilian component.** The SGP, UNSOH, BINUH and the Haitian government should strengthen existing mechanisms, such as the Senior Leadership Coordination Forum, rather than create new ones, and agree on a clear division of labour between security, political and electoral tracks. The remaining civilian posts, in particular in political affairs, human rights, strategic communications and analysis, should be filled as a priority, since they carry the engagement on which a hybrid mission depends.

3. **Manage expectations openly and protect communities exposed to retaliation.** The GSF and the Haitian authorities should communicate regularly and publicly on what the force will and will not do, and report on progress against the benchmarks submitted to the Security Council. Operations should be planned with the risk of reprisals against civilians in mind, as the Gros Morne massacre showed, including through coordination with the HNP on protection after the force withdraws from an area.

4. **Invest now in the Haitian forces that must hold ground.** The GSF cannot both take and hold territory. Support for the recruitment, vetting and training of the Haitian National Police, including through the P4000 initiative and other initiatives beyond it, and for the gradual build-up of the FADH, should be treated as a condition of the GSF's success rather than a parallel effort. Joint planning and operations should expand as vetting and information security allow.

5. **Prepare now for what follows each operation: detention, justice and reintegration.** The frameworks are in place: the specialized judicial units created in May 2026, a national DDR strategy and coordination mechanisms under Haitian leadership. The challenge now lies in making them work. Without predictable multi-year funding, clear leadership and continuity over time, these structures risk remaining empty shells, while overlapping programmes and competition among institutions fragment the effort. Donors and international partners should align their support behind existing Haitian frameworks rather than launch parallel initiatives, and work with the Haitian authorities to clarify which institution leads on each component.

6. **Target the criminal economy, not only the territory.** Military pressure alone will not dismantle criminal groups whose resilience rests on revenue, arms supply and political and economic protection. GSF operations should be complemented by intelligence and investigative work on gang financing, on firearms and ammunition trafficking, and on the networks linking criminal groups, political patrons and economic interests, including through the UN sanctions regime and national financial investigations.

7. **Capture the lessons of the start-up for future operations.** Member states and the UN should document the GSF's experience with legal status, force generation, strategic airlift and the support office model. They should also consider standing arrangements, such as pre-negotiated legal frameworks and rosters of pre-assessed contingents, that would allow future hybrid missions to deploy faster.



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