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FEATURED Q&A

What Is Behind the Rise in Gang Activity in Haiti?



Gang activity has risen since the assassination of Haiti's president last July. Authorities in the Caribbean nation this month extradited gang leader Joly Germaine (center) to the United States. // File Photo: Haitian National Police.

Q Dominican diplomat Carlitin Guillén Tatis was released by a Haitian gang after being held hostage for four days in Haiti, Dominican Foreign Minister Roberto Álvarez announced May 4. Gang activity and violent crimes in Haiti have increased since the July assassination of then-President Jovenel Moïse, and authorities on May 3 extradited Joly Germaine, one of the Caribbean country's most powerful gang leaders, to the United States on charges of kidnapping and weapons smuggling. Why has there been an increase in gang activity in Haiti, and what do the gangs want? Do they have any political motivations or affiliations? What is the best way to address the issue, and is the United States taking the correct approach in going after Germaine and other gang leaders?

A Francois Pierre-Louis, professor of political science at Queens College, City University of New York: "Just before President Moïse was assassinated last July, gang activity was already increasing in Port-au-Prince neighborhoods, but it intensified a few months after because gang leaders took advantage of the power vacuum following his assassination. It should be noted that the gangs are paramilitary forces that former Presidents Michel Martelly and Jovenel Moïse supported to terrorize the population and to force it to accept their undemocratic rule. The gangs have political motivations, and they are primarily affiliated with the PHTK party which is controlled by Martelly, his allies and the private sector. They armed the gangs, gave them access to government resources and have maintained good rela-

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

U.S. Eases Some Trump-Era Cuba Restrictions

The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden announced that it was lifting some restrictions on Cuba, including ones involving remittances and flights to the island.

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POLITICAL

Hackers Threaten to Topple Costan Rican Government

The hacker gang that brought down some Costa Rican government computer systems with a ransomware attack threatened to attempt to overthrow the country's government.

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BUSINESS

Peru Sues Repsol for \$4.5 Billion Over Oil Spill

Peru's government has sued Spanish energy company Repsol over an oil spill that damaged parts of its coastline in January. Peruvian official Julian Palacín said the suit could lead to a precedent in cases of oil spills.

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Palacín // File Photo: @JulianPalacinG via Twitter.

POLITICAL NEWS

Biden Administration Eases Trump-Era Restrictions on Cuba

The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden on Monday announced a series of revisions to its policies toward Cuba, easing some restrictions put in place under Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, and also increasing the processing of U.S. visas for Cubans, Reuters reported. The changes are a move to "further support the Cuban people, providing them additional tools to pursue a life free from Cuban government oppression and to seek greater economic opportunities," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement. Among the changes, the State Department said it would lift the limit on family remittances to Cuba, which had previously been set at \$1,000 per quarter; the department added that it would allow remittances to nonfamily members, Reuters reported. The changes will also allow chartered and scheduled flights to locations on the island beyond Havana, the Associated Press reported. The Biden administration also said it would reinstate a family reunification program, which currently has a backlog of 20,000 applications, and added that it would increase visa process-

ing and consular services, the AP reported. However, at the same time, the State Department said it would not remove entities from its Cuba Restricted List, a grouping of companies aligned with Cuba's government and military, which the United States bars U.S. firms and citizens from doing business, Reuters reported. "We are going to ensure that remittances flow more freely to the Cuban people, while not enriching those who perpetrate human rights abuses," an unnamed U.S. official told Reuters. The United States will use "electronic payment processors" for remittances in order to prevent money from going directly to Cuba's government, an official told Reuters. The Biden administration has already discussed "establishing a civilian processor for this" with the Cuban government, the wire service reported. The changes follow a review that the United States started after a series of widespread protests in Cuba last July, the AP reported.

Hackers Threaten to Overthrow Costa Rican Government

The hacker gang that brought down some Costa Rican government computer systems threatened on Monday to attempt to overthrow the Central American country's government,

NEWS BRIEFS

Guatemala's President Reappoints Controversial Attorney General

Guatemala's president on Monday reappointed attorney general Consuelo Porras to a second four-year term despite allegations from the U.S. government and others that she is involved "in significant corruption," the Associated Press reported. President Alejandro Giammattei said the reappointment was "a sovereign decision" and that the attorney general's office was "an independent institution." Critics have accused Porras protecting political figures, including the president, according to the report.

U.S. Authorities Discover Drug Smuggling Tunnel From Mexico to California

U.S. authorities said Monday that they had discovered a major drug-smuggling tunnel running for a third of a mile from Tijuana to an industrial area in San Diego, the Associated Press reported. The tunnel, about six stories deep, has reinforced walls, a ventilation system and electricity, the AP reported. It was found near the Otay Mesa border crossing in an area where more than a dozen other such tunnels have been found over the past 20 years.

High Prices Lead Brazilian Sugar Cane Mills to Shift to Ethanol Production

High global prices for fuel have led sugar cane mills in Brazil to switch from producing sugar to ethanol, raising concerns about a shortage of sugar, Reuters reported today. Brazil, the world's largest sugar exporter, typically ships around 2.2 million metric tons of sugar abroad per month during the peak of the crop, but one trader estimated that, this year, total raw sugar contract cancellations are at 200,000 to 400,000 metric tons, according to the report. Most mills in Brazil are flexible and can partially shift from sugar or ethanol production.

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tions with their leaders to assure that they will deliver elections to their party. There is strong disagreement whether the best way to address the gang issue is to arrest gang leaders and beef up the police force. Although this approach can be helpful, I don't think it will be successful if the political, social and economic issues that gave rise to the gangs are not addressed. If impunity continues to thrive, the justice system is still corrupt and there are no economic opportunities for young people, gangs will continue to flourish in Haiti. Instead of approaching the gang issue as a security problem, the United States should see it as a political

issue by supporting the Montana group, demanding that the current Henry government take concrete actions against politicians and gang leaders who have been accused of gross human rights violations, and by implementing the Magnitsky Act against corrupt politicians and businesses."

A **Georges Fauriol, fellow at the Caribbean Policy Consortium and senior associate at the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS):**

"There is a direct correlation between the scope of gang violence and the expanding disfunction of national

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the Associated Press reported. The Russian-speaking Conti ransomware gang last month attacked government computer systems, including ones at the Finance Ministry. The country's new president, Rodrigo Chaves, declared a state of emergency soon after he was sworn in last week. The gang responded by writing, "We are determined to overthrow the government by means of a cyber attack, we have already shown you all the strength and power, you have introduced an emergency," the AP reported. The gang also increased the ransom it is demanding to \$20 million and encouraged Costa Ricans to push the government to pay it. Last week, the U.S. State Department said Conti is responsible for hundreds of ransomware attacks over the past two years. "The FBI estimates that as of January 2022, there had been over 1,000 victims of attacks associated with Conti ransomware with victim payouts exceeding \$150 million, making the Conti Ransomware variant the costliest strain of ransomware ever documented," the State Department said in a statement. Pierluigi Paganini, CEO of Italy-based Cybhorus told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published May 11 that ransomware gangs use several techniques in order to launch their attacks, such as "exploiting known vulnerabilities in Internet-exposed systems, brute-forcing systems that could give them access to the target networks or by using credentials from a past security breach to gain a foothold in the target organization."

BUSINESS NEWS

Peru Files \$4.5 Billion Suit Against Repsol Over January Oil Spill

Peru's government last Friday filed a \$4.5 billion lawsuit against Spain-based Repsol and other companies over an oil spill in January that damaged coastal areas, Agence France-Presse reported. Julián Fernando Palacín Gutiérrez, executive director of the National Institute for the Defense of Competition and Protection of Intellectual Property, or INDECOPI, said in a statement that \$3 billion of

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

Can the United States and Brazil Expect More From Each Other?

Q **Top U.S. and Brazilian diplomats last month held their first high-level talks since 2019, discussing issues such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, deforestation in the Amazon and Brazil's request to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD. What would be the main benefits of closer cooperation between the United States and Brazil? What have been the most contentious issues between the two countries, and will they be able to overcome them? What is at stake for the countries' relationship in Brazil's presidential election later this year?**

A **Peter Sufrin, independent Washington-based analyst:** "Shifting attention away from the current developments in politics and foreign policy, perhaps nothing better reflects the historical goodwill between Brazil and the United States than the fact that the United States was the first country to recognize Brazil's independence in 1822. Although structures of capitalism and domination have been at the center of American and European aspirations in Latin America for centuries, by and large, Brazil-U.S. relations over the centuries have been friendly. Brazil remains a regional soft power, and the Amer-

ican posture of 'benign restraint' has defined cooperation and competition between the two nations for decades. Granted, there has been some periodic friction. While the 2013 spy scandal under then-President Dilma Rousseff reflects such shortcomings, for the most part, Brazilians view the United States positively, and the shared legacies of slavery, immigration and Manifest Destiny link the countries both socially and historically. Fundamental to the relationship is the legacy of the Monroe Doctrine dating back to the 19th century. With a non-Spanish common identity, economic complementarity and suspicion of European influence, Brazil's and the United States' pan-American proclivities can be characterized as definitive. While either a Bolsonaro or Lula victory in the October election will be pivotal for progress on issues such as Amazon deforestation, trade, China policy and general geopolitics, the historical anchor of shared goals and interests remain rooted in the Brazil-U.S. political and diplomatic relationship. It should endure for years to come."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The comment above is a continuation of the [Q&A](#) published in the May 5 issue of the Advisor.

the spill, Repsol says more than 5,000 people have collected advance compensation related to the incident and that more than 10,000 first response aid vouchers have been delivered. The company said in March that it had made "a 94 percent progress in cleaning the sea and beaches" in the area. Repsol said last month in an earnings statement that it made \$1.45 billion in profit in the first quarter of 2022, with 69 percent of its adjusted net income generated outside of Spain. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Feb. 18 Energy Advisor.]

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governance of the Martelly government and its tragic successor, that of Jovenel Moïse. The Potemkin Village-like character of the current Ariel Henry interim regime has only emboldened gangs into quasi-politicized networks—more extortion and even less governance. This dynamic had seen a decline coinciding with the muscular presence of U.N. peacekeeping operations, which concluded in 2017. But that endeavor never effectively addressed the socioeconomic triggers of gang violence. In tandem, efforts

“**Law enforcement in general is impaired by a barely functioning investigative capacity...**”

— Georges Fauriol

by the international community, notably the United States, to professionalize the Haitian National Police never really achieved their hoped-for objectives. The problem goes deeper to the extent that law enforcement in general is impaired by a barely functioning investigative capacity and a related judicial system to adjudicate cases. Critically, U.S. diplomacy with Haiti needs to transition from hesitancy to purposeful direction. This includes action in key areas, along with assessing the costs of providing political cover to the Henry regime. First, efforts should target Haitian gang leadership and their operational networks, including arms shipments secured from the United States. Second, there should be support for an assessment—shaped by Haitians—of what the country requires to address Haiti’s law enforcement and national security needs, and the national institutions this implies

should be identified. And third, these efforts should be combined into the emerging U.S. policy framework for Haiti, enabled by the Global Fragility Act, whose main virtue is a 10-year funding commitment. This entails determined leadership in Washington and Port-au-Prince.”

A James Morrell, executive director of the Haiti Democracy

Project: “The gangs are the foot soldiers of Haiti’s latest presidential contenders: Michel Martelly, who believes a second term is rightfully due to him, and Laurent Lamothe, who believes he should have become president after Martelly. Standing uneasily at Lamothe’s side is Martine Moïse, the widow of slain President Jovenel Moïse, whom Martelly put in to keep the seat warm for him during the constitutionally required interregnum. But just as Martelly excluded Lamothe from the succession, so Jovenel excluded Martelly, leading to Jovenel’s assassination. The Haitian people are the victims as this violent intra-elite struggle unfolds. The State Department gamely calls for a ‘Haitian-led solution,’ while offering no evidence that the contenders are interested in any solution other than their own complete empowerment. The limits that the thirteen-year U.N. mission imposed have been taken off, and now the issue is addressed, as of old, through assassination and gang warfare rather than elections. The Biden administration’s dispatch of 60 police trainers is a baby step in the right direction, but it will take a full peacekeeping mission to suppress the gangs and protect elections.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at ekuleta@thedialogue.org.

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