

From management to agency: is regional conflict resolution the answer for Haiti?

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Despite the creation of collective security mechanisms, such as some UN responsibilities related to the Security Council (UNSC) and the General Assembly, the international system remains unable to resolve most conflicts (Mekelberg, 2024). There has been a growing disbelief in the capacity of the UN to negotiate an end for recent armed conflicts, exemplified by the cases Ukraine and Gaza (Badache et al., 2022). Although these cases are the ones who, recently, attract the most attention to an UN crisis, the symptoms of its inability to deal effectively with conflicts can be related to the results of peace operations.

Haiti, for example, has been experiencing various forms of UN peace operations over the past decades. However, most of them have been incapable of stabilizing the country, which just shows the limits of a collective security system that only manages the situation (García et al., 2024). Considering the present scenario, this analysis will investigate the failure of traditional multilateral mechanisms in resolving the crisis in Haiti due to its management approach and it will also look to a regional attempt to fill the gap left by the UN.

The crisis of Collective Security and Conflict Management

The post-Cold War international order, which was built around multilateral institutions and collective security mechanisms, is facing a profound crisis (Badache et al., 2022). The UN Security Council, for example, has been repeatedly paralyzed by geopolitical rivalries, vetoes from the permanent members – acknowledged as P5 – and state interests. The result is a prolonged conflict management based on humanitarian aid, peacekeeping missions, sanctions and a series of negotiations that only mitigate the symptoms of the problem (Mekelberg, 2024).

In addition, despite the creation of the United Nations and

other global governance bodies, the international system has repeatedly failed to prevent or resolve conflicts. One reason for that is its reliance on a conflict management approach (Mekelberg, 2024). Thus, this state-centric strategy focuses on ensuring the end of violence, through ceasefires and stabilization missions, instead of addressing its root causes with a societal approach, which can lead to a conflict resolution (Badache et al., 2022).

In that context, Haiti can be considered a representative case of these dynamics. The UN missions in the country have focused on stabilization and crisis management rather than structural reform (García et al., 2024). Notwithstanding decades of international presence, Haiti remains trapped in cycles of political instability, gang violence and humanitarian need. For instance, it is important to better understand why, despite a prolonged international engagement in Haiti, it was not possible to build a lasting peace.

The Haitian crisis: context and failures of traditional multilateral responses

The UN has played a key role in managing the political crisis in Haiti through the deployment of peacekeeping missions since 1993 (García et al., 2024). These missions have sought to provide humanitarian assistance, support the fragile state structure and address political instability, contributing to a degree of stability in the country. However, despite the importance of these operations, the results have not been sufficient to achieve a stable, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Haitian crisis, demonstrating that international assistance, while indispensable, has not been able to resolve all of the country's underlying problems on its own (García et al., 2024).

The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH, 2004-2017), for example, represents both the ambitions and the profound limitations of traditional multilateral responses to crises. While credited with restoring a degree of short-term stability, MINUSTAH's legacy is deeply controversial. Its military-centric approach, including heavy-handed raids in densely populated slums like Cité Soleil, resulted in significant civilian casualties and eroded local legitimacy (Carey; Manukyan, 2024). Furthermore, the mission was marred by catastrophic failures, most notably

the introduction of cholera through poor sanitation practices at a UN camp, which caused thousands of deaths, and widespread allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers (Carey; Manukyan, 2024; Toledo; Braga, 2020).

These traditional multilateral interventions, through peacekeeping operations held in the country for the past decades, failed to create sustainable peace most because they treated the symptoms of violence without engaging its political and economic core. The power vacuum and pervasive corruption were left unaddressed, allowing gangs to strengthen and professionalize, often with the tacit support of political actors seeking to weaponize them against opponents (Oliveira, 2024). Thus, it can be argued that an approach focused more on stabilization than on structural reform, it is only a conflict management response, which further erodes the legitimacy of multilateral institutions, such as the UN. These interventions can even manage violence in a short period of time, but without resolving the root causes of the problem, they will not be able to build long-term peace.

In fact, this managerial logic had perverse long-term effects. By focusing on stabilizing a superficial political order – often through supporting elite factions and prioritizing expedient electoral processes over inclusive governance (Carey; Manukyan, 2024) – the international community inadvertently reinforced a system of patrimonial politics. This approach deepened political fragmentation, as competing elites – lacking a broad social base – increasingly turned to armed gangs as instruments of coercion and electoral mobilization (Carey; Manukyan, 2024). Consequently, the international strategy of managing crises through elite bargains ultimately fertilized the ground for the very non-state armed actors that now paralyze the state, creating a vicious cycle where weakness begets violence and violence entrenches weakness.

Rethinking Conflict Management in the Global South: lessons from Haiti

The limitations of external interventions in Haiti reveal a systemic failure of global institutions in promoting a conflict resolution, which creates a vacuum that regional

actors have begun to fill. In this context, the evolving role of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) represents a significant shift towards a regional approach to lead with the Haitian crisis. Unlike the traditional “Big Three” donors (the United States, Canada and France), whose historical involvement is often politically charged, CARICOM’s engagement is framed within a narrative of regional solidarity and shared identity (Perales, 2011).

While Haitian political actors seek collective legitimization for their governments through CARICOM’s endorsement, the regional body itself leverages its involvement in Haiti to bolster its own international standing and credibility as a relevant diplomatic actor (Santos, 2024). This symbiotic relationship underscores a move from passive reception of global security mandates to active, regional agency.

The strategies employed by CARICOM further illustrate an innovative, although imperfect, form of South-South conflict resolution. Its efforts extend beyond traditional peacekeeping to include high-level political facilitation, mediation between Haitian stakeholders and advocacy on human rights issues, as seen in its response to the political crises of 2004 and 2023 (Santos, 2024). This multifaceted approach combines diplomatic tools with a principled stance on democratic norms, attempting to address both the symptoms and the political causes of the conflict.

For instance, in 2023, CARICOM established an Eminent Persons Group (EPG), composed of former prime ministers from the region, to facilitate a Haitian-led political dialogue (CARICOM appoints..., 2023). Unlike a UN security mandate, the EPG’s role was explicitly that of a neutral mediator, shuttling between fragmented Haitian stakeholders to broker a consensus on a transitional governance framework.

Furthermore, CARICOM has leveraged its collective diplomatic weight to condition recognition and support for Haitian governments on commitments to credible elections and human rights, using its regional legitimacy as a source of leverage that distant global bodies often lack (Santos, 2024). However, this very adherence to a liberal democratic script – such as the persistent prioritization of elections – can sometimes be at odds with Haiti’s complex realities. Thus, even a regional mechanism still has limits to fill in the gap left by the management mechanism implemented by multilateral institutions.

In this context, CARICOM’s engagement faces significant

practical dilemmas that highlight the limits of regional agency. Its operational capacity is constrained by the member states' own limited resources, making it dependent on logistics and funding from extra-regional partners (Halidu et al., 2025), which can subtly reintroduce external agendas. Internally, diverging national interests within CARICOM – between states more affected by Haitian instability and those more cautious of intervention – can lead to fragmented or hesitant responses. In addition, when CARICOM insists on elections as the primary exit from crisis, it risks, like its predecessors, prioritizing a procedural solution that may be unattainable or meaningless in a context where gangs (non-state actors) hold territorial sovereignty. In this sense, despite its regional identity, CARICOM can sometimes replicate the managerial logic of multilateralism by applying standardized political formulas ill-suited to Haiti's fractured reality.

Final remarks

The lessons from Haiti suggest that the future of conflict resolution in the Global South may lie in a more adaptive and enhanced regionalized governance rather than in an external form of intervention based in a management conflict strategy. CARICOM's involvement demonstrates that regional actors can offer a more contextually sensitive and politically legitimate form of engagement than distant global institutions.

However, the Haitian case also serves as a cautionary tale. Without addressing the underlying structural issues and without a fundamental reform of the global security architecture, regional mechanisms risk merely replicating the managerial logic of their global counterparts, managing a perpetual crisis rather than forging a sustainable path to its resolution. The challenge, therefore, is to harness this regional agency and other multilateral mechanisms to transform conflict management from a reactive necessity into a proactive framework focused on societal approach for genuine peacebuilding, redefining security from the South outward.

Looking ahead, the trajectory of Haiti's crisis and the role of regional actors will likely be defined by two tensions. First, the tension between the continuation of security interventions in the country and a long-term need for an inclusive political settlement that CARICOM advocates. The success of any security mission will be ephemeral without the latter. Second, the evolution of CARICOM's role itself,

testing whether it can move from being a primarily diplomatic facilitator to orchestrating a coherent regional framework that synergizes security, political and developmental support in sustained partnership with Haitian civil society. The coming years will reveal if regional agency can catalyze a fundamental shift or if it will be subsumed by the persistent global logic of crisis management.

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