

Introduction

Haiti

Hope for a Fragile State

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In his book *Collapse*, the American biologist/ecologist Jared Diamond ends his chapter on Haiti and the Dominican Republic by asking whether there is any hope for Haiti.¹ Although pessimistic, it is, unfortunately, a fair question. At present, Haiti is a divided country in the midst of a political, economic, ecological, and social crisis. HIV/AIDS rates are among the highest in the Western hemisphere. Violence, bolstered by the prevalence of thousands of small arms in the hands of both state and non-state actors, has sabotaged attempts to establish the rule of law, leading to an overall climate of insecurity. The transitional government lacked popular legitimacy, and state infrastructure is notably absent in much of the country, particularly in the rural areas. In sum, Haiti is—by most measures—a fragile state.

This book is the outcome of a highly successful conference that took place in Waterloo, Canada, in November 2005.² The impetus for the conference was the Haitian insurgency of February 2004 that forced President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to flee the country, precipitating the establishment of a transitional government and prompting members of the international community to intervene militarily for the second time in ten years. The primary purpose of the conference was to discuss how Haiti, with the assistance of the international community, might shed its current distinction as one of the world's failing states. Understandably, the tone of the conference was largely one of pessimism. The challenges that Haiti must overcome are formidable, and there is considerable evidence to suggest that the commitment of outside actors to the tiny island nation will be fleeting.

Nonetheless, the purpose of this book is not to reinforce the popular notion that Haiti is, to quote Diamond, the “modern New World’s saddest basket case.”³ Rather, the aims of the contributors are more ambitious, although perhaps counterintuitive. On one level, they are to shed light on the varied and complex roots of the current crisis, dispel misperceptions, and offer possible recommendations for moving forward. Perhaps more importantly, however, the contributors to this volume suggest that the situation in Haiti, despite evidence to the contrary, is not completely desperate. Without question, the task of building a functioning society is a daunting one, as Haiti’s immediate future appears bleak and full of peril. Its long-term story has yet to be written, however, and it would be premature to write Haiti off as a nation beyond repair. Although the odds seem stacked against Haiti, there is reason to be hopeful.

Haiti as a “Fragile State”

In 1996, in the wake of three-year military coup d’état that interrupted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s first term in office in the early 1990s, Jean-Germain Gros dubbed Haiti an “anaemic failed state,” his assessment being that the state was so “emaciated” that its “archaic structures” and institutions provided the government with little control over the country.⁴ Given the turmoil that followed the coup, his metaphor was not inappropriate. Even so, when assessing states that have either ceased to function altogether or have been plagued by high levels of violence, terminology matters. The most common adjectives found in the academic literature used to describe these states include “failed,” “collapsed,” and “fourth world” states, as well as “failing,” “fragile,” and “weak” states. Although these terms are used to describe similar conditions and ailments—often interchangeably—the distinctions are important, and act as more than an exercise in semantics. Not only are these adjectives vague and open-ended but how they are employed—and to which states they are applied—is a subjective exercise. Subjectivity is evident in the selection of indicators used to measure a state’s functionality and the degree of dysfunction to which a state is believed to have descended. Relying again on a medical metaphor, how a state is perceived, both by its own citizens as well as by the international community at large, reveals a great deal about its “prospects of recovery.” There is a pejorative connotation to the first three terms listed above, the implication being that “failed,” “collapsed,” and “fourth world” states have disintegrated to a point beyond salvation, whereas “fragile,” “failing,” or “weak” states suggest that the degree of dysfunction in a state has not yet reached the point of complete societal breakdown and that the possibility remains of becoming a “stable,” “functioning,” and, in time, “strong” state.

As the title of this book suggests, the authors believe that Haiti's destiny lies not with the former set of phrases but with the latter.

Scholars have pointed to a series of key indicators—and this list is by no means exhaustive—that are present, at least on some level, in “failed” and “fragile” states. For Gros, these are “economic malperformance, lack of social synergy, authoritarianism, militarism, and environmental degradation caused by rampant population growth.”⁵ Included under these headings are related factors such as political parties on the extreme right and left of the political spectrum, state power in the hands of the elite, the absence of a middle class, the ever-pervasive legacy of colonialism, and tension between ethnic and religious groups.⁶ To this list one could add, as Robert D. Kaplan has suggested, the emergence of high levels of scarcity, crime, tribalism, and disease,⁷ or, as Robert I. Rotberg has argued, the inability to “deliver political goods” such as security, education, and health services to its citizens.⁸ More recently, Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff and Ramesh Thakur have argued that the absence of strong judicial institutions and “apolitical bureaucratic structures (civil service, judiciary, police, army) supported by an ideology that legitimates the role of neutral state authority in maintaining social order through prescribed procedures and the rule of law” constitutes a strong indicator of “fragile” status.⁹ Nor should the impact of widespread access to small arms, particularly in the hands of non-state actors, be underestimated.¹⁰ To one degree or another, Haiti has suffered, and continues to suffer, from all of these ailments.

The Roots of the Conflict

What caused the tiny island nation to become so fragile? The answer, of course, is far from obvious or straightforward. One of the aims of this book is to offer insight into the unique political, social, economic and cultural forces that are behind Haiti's current predicament. The first section, “The Current and Historical Context,” examines the current crisis through the lens of Haiti's troubled past. In the opening chapter, Robert Fatton argues that the roots of the insurrection of February 2004 can be found in “the material and historical circumstances of the colonial period.”¹¹ Specifically, it was the plantation economy, which required a disciplined labour force in order to succeed, that reinforced the authoritarian ruling structures left behind by the French. This, along with the fears that the western powers would attempt to retake control of the country and the “class aspirations of Haitian leaders,” has had the effect of entrenching a despotic tradition of rule that all presidents, including Aristide, have perpetuated. Consequently, Fatton concludes that this way of gov-

erning is likely to remain the norm for the foreseeable future, with real change dependent on whether “key segments of the Haitian political class will finally realize that they should accept the logic of democracy.”

For its part, the international community has struggled to promote democracy in Haiti. In surveying past engagements, Robert Maguire notes that Haiti has come to represent a quagmire for policy-makers in both the United States and Canada. Given both Haiti’s geographic proximity, and its significant Diasporas living in North America, officials in Washington and Ottawa cannot ignore the instability that has plagued the tiny island nation. Yet a sustained commitment has been missing, at least at the state level. One reason for this may be that many view Haiti’s problems as irresolvable. Maguire disagrees. However, he warns that there can be no “quick fixes.” Instead what is needed is “a realistic and objective understanding and assessment of Haiti and its challenges.” Among other things, this means that the international community must resist the temptation to exit prematurely; initiate judicial and penal reform in conjunction with police reform; refrain from further weakening state institutions by withholding funds; avoid actions that will exacerbate political schisms; promote peaceful dialogue between factions; and, above all, confront the problems associated with endemic poverty.

It is this last dilemma—tackling the country’s oppressive poverty—that has posed the greatest difficulty for foreign donors to Haiti. In her chapter, Yasmine Shamsie examines the limitations and problems associated with previous efforts to craft economic development policy in Haiti. She argues that long-term peace will hinge on the country’s ability to address the vast inequalities of economic and political power. Her review of past efforts suggests that the economic development model promoted by international peacebuilding agencies has worsened rather than improved these trends. More specifically, development strategies have been plagued by an urban bias, devoting little attention to rural areas, which has increased both poverty and inequality, jeopardizing political and economic stability.

The Limits of Foreign Intervention

Equally challenging when addressing the problem of fragile states is determining the specific measures needed to promote sustainable development and durable peace. Clearly, the idea that there is an approach to state-building that can be applied more or less universally is simplistic, if not naive. There is nonetheless a general consensus that the ultimate goal is to build “self-sustaining indigenous institutions” that allow for “competent democratic governance and economic growth.”¹² How to go about it and who should be respon-

sible are questions where there is understandably little consensus among academics or the international community at large. Some scholars have called for the improved “early warning systems” that allow for preventive responses so that states do not become unstable in the first place. Although a noble aim, it is fraught with problems. As many scholars and practitioners have noted, it often takes a crisis to spur the international community into action. As such, large-scale preventive measures (assuming of course that state breakdown can be predicted) are unlikely to be adopted.

Moreover, international military intervention in the sovereign affairs of fragile states is a contentious issue. The International Commission on the Intervention of State Sovereignty (ICISS), which explored the question of “when, if ever, it is appropriate for states to take coercive—and in particular military—action, against another state for the purposes of protecting people at risk in that other state,” argued in its report, *The Responsibility to Protect* (R2P), that coercive interventions would only be justified in situations involving “large scale loss of life” and “large scale ‘ethnic cleansing.’”¹³ Based on these criteria, it is debatable whether the decisions to intervene militarily in Haiti, either in the mid-1990s or mid-2000s, would have met such a formidable test. Besides, appeals to the conscience of the international community are rarely enough to provoke action. Indeed, since 9/11, the rationales for intervention in failed and fragile states have become increasingly realist in tone, with the bulk of the focus shifting to US-led nation-building efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Francis Fukuyama has argued that “the chief threats to us and to world order come from weak, collapsed, or failed states” because of their dual potential to destabilize their neighbours and act as the nexus that brings together terrorist organizations and weapons of mass destruction.¹⁴ Similarly, Michael Ignatieff, who was one of the ICISS commissioners, has noted that “failing states or failed ones that pose no security challenge to vital interests [of the US and UK] are unlikely to be the target of coercive intervention, even when the human suffering inside them cries out for action.”¹⁵

Given Haiti’s proximity to the United States, prompting the international community to intervene has not been the problem. Even so, when considering the role that the international community—particularly the United States—might play in Haiti, the twin issues of capacity and “political will” stand out. The latter notion, political will, usually refers to the readiness of the United Nations’ (UN) more powerful member states to act in their own interests. More to the point, scholars such as Fukuyama question whether the international community is well-suited for state-building. He contends that the UN and other multilateral organizations lack the “expertise or the resources,

human and otherwise, to run nation-building programs authoritatively.”¹⁶ Similarly, Marina Ottaway of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has questioned whether the international community possesses either the know-how or desire to see state-building initiatives through to the point where indigenous state institutions are self-sustaining and able to provide at least a minimum level of services to their citizens.¹⁷ Taking this idea a step further, Ottaway questions whether establishing a system of democratic rule is a realistic expectation, given that past rebuilding efforts have resulted in a quagmire for donor nations. The implications of this observation are, of course, tremendous. She admits that the alternatives—using aid to entice warring factions into passivity, encouraging regional governments to occupy the area in order to fill the void in governance, or supporting authoritarian leaders who will stabilize the situation—are “unpalatable.”¹⁸ To accept these options is to sacrifice both the rights of the state’s citizens and the potential for long-term stability in favour of regional order and short-term expediency. That being said, given the costs and duration of nation-building, and the fact that UN missions are notoriously vulnerable to budget cutbacks, she may be correct in suggesting that, at least in some cases, the “unpalatable” outcomes listed above are more likely than the emergence of a vibrant, democratic society. Indeed, as Ignatieff notes, “exporters of liberal democracy have essentially severed the liberal from the democracy, putting exclusive emphasis on frequent multi-party elections and putting almost no emphasis on the rule of law, development of an independent judiciary, and training an honest prosecution service.”¹⁹

The second section of the book, “Justice and Security,” examines the challenges involved with any rebuilding effort that makes human security the key priority. Offering a critique of the tenuous place that human rights have had in Haiti over the last half century, Andrew Thompson examines past failures to secure a human rights culture, and suggests that, although difficult, investing in such a culture is necessary for any long-term stability. Col. Jacques Morneau provides an insider’s look into the operational and organizational challenges that the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) has encountered since February 2004. Morneau, the former Commander Task Force Port-au-Prince and Chief of Staff of MINUSTAH, argues that the current UN Mission lacks both the necessary resources and the appropriate authority to provide meaningful security in Haiti. Much of the problem, he argues, rests with conditions on the ground—widespread poverty, high levels of crime, dysfunctional judicial and penal systems, and extensive environmental damage. But he also suggests that the UN Mission has not been set up to meet the

expectations placed on it. MINUSTAH's mandate requires that it work alongside the Haitian National Police (HNP)—a force under-staffed, politicized, and prone to both corruption and to committing human rights abuses—in all matters related to policing, an arrangement that has compromised MINUSTAH's legitimacy. Burdened with an overly bureaucratic United Nations system, poor organizational planning, and insufficient military capacities, the current mission lacks the ability to fulfil its duties and functions. He concludes that the solution, as objectionable as it might seem, could be that Haiti needs to become a “UN protectorate or trusteeship” for a period of ten to fifteen years.

All of the authors in this volume suggest that the international community should neither turn its back on Haiti nor look for easy solutions that will act as the pretense for a premature exit. As this book goes to press, it appears as though international actors have adopted this outlook and committed themselves to staying the course in Haiti, at least for the short-term. On 14 February, one day before MINUSTAH's mandate was scheduled to expire, the United Nations Security Council renewed the mission until 15 August 2006, with the possibility of further renewals if necessary.²⁰

This commitment was prompted in part by the turbulent events surrounding the presidential elections of 7 February 2006. After having been delayed four times due to slow voter registration and infighting within the body responsible for organizing the elections, the Conseil Electoral Provisoire (CEP), the voting proceeded fairly smoothly, as Haitians turned out on mass to cast their ballots for the first time in six years. Although plagued by long line-ups, the day was relatively calm and generally free of violence. Initial results indicated that frontrunner René Préval had received roughly sixty per cent of the vote, well over the fifty per cent that a candidate needed in order to be declared the winner on the first ballot. But counting the votes proved to be a cumbersome and difficult task for the organizers. A week after the vote, with still no official announcement, reports emerged that Préval's lead had slipped to approximately forty-eight per cent, meaning a second round of voting would be necessary despite the fact that no other candidate had more than twelve per cent of the vote. Préval's supporters were outraged. They accused the CEP of manipulating the vote, a charge that was bolstered by the discovery of more than 100,000 unmarked ballots that had been included in the overall tally of the popular vote. Mass protests in Port-au-Prince soon followed with threats of widespread violence if Préval was not declared the immediate winner; unfortunately, the calm of the week before appeared to be all but over. Backed into a corner, the CEP wisely conceded. On 15 February, it decided

to reject the spoiled ballots, a move that boosted Préval's tally to approximately fifty-one percent, making him Haiti's new President-elect. In doing so, the CEP avoided not only a second round of voting, but also a potentially highly violent situation.

While significant, on its own the election has done little to resolve the divisions that currently exist within Haitian society. Haiti's political parties are currently deeply fragmented and polarized (a point that Fatton develops in his chapter). Virtually all are weak, and none offer a truly national voice with a discernible political project. Moreover, there is a strong chance that Préval will not have the support of the Haitian Parliament, a prospect that would mean political paralysis for the new government. Shortly before the election, *The Economist* suggested that "the vote will give [Haiti] the new start it needs."²¹ However, past elections have neither resolved Haiti's problems, nor altered the behaviour of Haiti's political and economic elite, many of whom have never bought into the idea of representative government.

It remains to be seen whether the international community will attempt to scale-back its presence at the first available opportunity. In 2006, the current mood suggests that prolonged support for Haiti is likely not forthcoming. This feeling may stem from failed efforts in the past to strengthen state-institutions in Haiti. Indeed, there is a real danger that governments will develop a case of "Haiti fatigue," a phrase that has been used to describe the general feeling of cynicism within the international community that has come about as a result of past aid projects that have failed to achieve any lasting effect.

New and Emerging Partners

Luckily, donor governments are not the only actors with a vested interest in seeing Haiti become a thriving country. The third section, "Building Haiti through Civil Society," examines the role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both domestic and international, can play in Haiti's development. Carlo Dade of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) suggests that aid officials and organizations are only now beginning to comprehend the impacts of both private sector development and the remittances from the Haitian Diasporas on Haiti's development. Dade notes that, traditionally, aid communities have not had much experience working with either the Diaspora or the private sector and joint initiatives have been ad hoc and slow to come about. Nonetheless, given that the Diasporas and the private sector together invest more money in Haiti than do all the international governmental aid agencies combined, Dade argues that the gains from these types of

public-private partnerships are potentially substantial, and, at the very least, warrant considerably more study from scholars and practitioners.

Still, the activities of NGOs are not without their controversies. At present, the debate surrounding Haiti is plagued by widely divergent voices with differing interpretations of the events that sparked the crisis of February 2004. In his chapter, Jim Hodgson of the United Church of Canada asks the question, “To whom do we choose to listen?” He criticizes certain individuals and civil society organizations on the left, many of whom had been calling for Aristide’s immediate return, which see the current crisis solely through the lens of US imperial aspirations, a lens that he believes provides only a partial understanding of the situation, partly because it does not “take seriously the voices of Haitians.” Hodgson also has words of caution for the Canadian government. He joins with other representatives of Canadian civil society such as the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) and Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives (KAIROS) in reproaching the Canadian government for viewing Haiti through a security rather than a development lens. According to Hodgson, Haiti requires a more sophisticated approach than that advocated in Canada’s International Policy Statement (IPS), which views “fixing the state” as the solution to alleviating security threats to Canada. While “fixing” the Haitian state constitutes a worthwhile goal, Hodgson argues that making it “work better” is not sufficient. Over the long term, the state must function to ensure the protection of human rights and to create greater social justice for all Haitians.

Conclusion: Hope for the Future?

Hodgson’s message regarding the value and desirability of listening to Haitian voices is one that we have attempted to take to heart in planning this volume. This collection of essays therefore concludes with the contribution of Suzy Castor, Director of Haiti’s Centre de Formation et de Recherche Économique et Sociale pour le Développement (CRESFED). Castor is a scholar with a long history of political activism in pursuit of justice and peace in her country. While her chapter thoughtfully traces the historical causes of the current crisis, it is her discussion of the challenges that Haiti currently faces which is particularly noteworthy. Like all who study Haiti, she highlights the challenge of security, and agrees with all the volume’s contributors that disarmament and police reform are essential. She is, however, critical of MINUSTAH’s earlier efforts to address the security situation. The Mission’s lack of success in the slum areas, she suggests, has stemmed from its tendency to view Haiti’s violence as largely socially rooted. Recently, the Mission has acknowledged

that political motives have also been at work. This bodes well for future efforts, she argues. It also speaks to the need for better intelligence gathering, a concern that Morneau also raises in chapter five. Castor also argues that Haitians must resist the impulse to remedy the country's security problems by re-constituting the Haitian army, which was disbanded under Aristide. The political and human rights implications (not to mention the economic burden) of such a move would be disastrous and would represent a colossal step backward.

It is worth noting that this book is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of the unique set of circumstances that make Haiti such a compelling case study; more specifically, there are four areas in particular that do not receive the attention they deserve. The first is the influence of the Dominican Republic on the current crisis. The two countries that share the Island of Hispaniola are connected in a variety of ways, and yet there is much that separates the two peoples; to understand Haiti, one must also understand the influence of its neighbour to the east. The second omission is the importance of religion in Haiti, particularly the voodoo religion; in Haiti, faith is a powerful cultural force, and its appeal as a medium through which life is understood should not be underestimated.²² Third is the impact of HIV/AIDS on Haitian society. According to Harvard physician Paul Farmer, over the course of the 1990s, "HIV surpassed tuberculosis as the leading infectious cause of adult death in Haiti."²³ The problem is further exacerbated by the country's extremely poor socio-economic and health indicators. The fourth omission is the long-term effect of environmental degradation. As many scholars have noted, the country faces substantial environmental pressures from the loss of forests and severe soil erosion. These conditions have substantially reduced the soil's fertility leading to serious implications for rural poverty.

Although a number of chapters point to mistakes that were made in the past as well as aspects of the political and economic systems that are in need of reform, the purpose of the book is not to provide a "shopping list" of solutions for Haiti. When dealing with such questions there is an obvious temptation to be prescriptive; the contributors to this book made a conscious effort not to do so. Haiti's destiny is in the hands of Haitians. While the international community can assist, it cannot assume the burden of governing. Even so, the hope is that this volume will offer some guidance for moving forward, and that it will assist those who are charged with the seemingly overwhelming task of making sure that Haiti's status as a fragile state is as short-lived as possible.

Notes

- 1 Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005), 341.
- 2 The title of the conference was Canada in Haiti: Considering the 3-D Approach. It was co-hosted by four academic organizations, all of which are located in the Waterloo area: the University of Waterloo's Centre on Foreign Policy; the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies (LCMSDS) at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU); the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS), also at WLU; and the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI).
- 3 Diamond, *Collapse*, 22.
- 4 Jean-Germain Gros, "Towards a Taxonomy of Failed States in the New World Order: Decaying Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and Haiti," *Third World Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (1996): 459.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 462.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 462–66.
 On the issue of the role that colonialism has played in state failure, James Maynell has argued that the past "will continue to constrain and shape developments, sometimes in ways that may not be immediately recognizable to the actors themselves. In most parts of the world, language, law, religion and cultural pursuits and pastimes—all those aspects of a nation's life that seem most home-grown and constitutive of a people's identity—will on closer inspection reveal traces of old conquests and long-forgotten foreign influences." See James Maynell, "The Legacy of Colonialism," in *Making States Work: State Failure and the Crisis of Governance*, ed. Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff, and Ramesh Thakur (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2005), 57.
- 7 Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *Atlantic Monthly* 273, no. 2 (1994): 44.
- 8 Rotberg's list of "political goods" includes "security, education, health services, economic opportunity, environmental surveillance, a legal framework of order and a judicial system to administer it, and fundamental infrastructural requirements such as roads and communications facilities." See Robert I. Rotberg, "The New Nature of Nation-State Failure," *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 87.
- 9 Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff and Ramesh Thakur, introduction: to *Making States Work*, 2–3, 8. For further elaboration on the idea of the importance of politically neutral state institutions, see Sebastian von Einsiedel, "Policy Responses to State Failure," *ibid.*, 13–35.
- 10 Rotberg offers a fairly scaled-back definition of a failed state, which he describes as "tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and bitterly contested by warring factions." See Rotberg, "The New Nature of Nation-State Failure," 85.
- 11 For further reading on the historical roots of authoritarianism in Haiti, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti: State against Nation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990); and Michel S. Laguerre, *The Military and Society in Haiti* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).
- 12 Francis Fukuyama, "Nation-Building 101," *Atlantic Monthly* 293, no. 1 (January/February 2004): 159, 162.
- 13 *The Responsibility to Protect*, Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (Ottawa: IDRC, December 2001), vii, xii.

- 14 Fukuyama, "Nation-Building 101," 159.
- 15 Michael Ignatieff, "Human Rights, Power and the State," in *Making States Work*, 66.
- 16 Fukuyama, "Nation-Building 101," 161.
- 17 Marina Ottaway, "Nation Building," *Foreign Policy* (September/October 2002), 20.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 19 Ignatieff, "Human Rights, Power and the State," 71.
- 20 United Nations Security Council, S/RES/1658(2006), 14 February 2006.
- 21 "Haiti: Electoral Mirage: A new start proves elusive," *The Economist*, 378, no. 8459 (7–13 January 2006), p. 34.
- 22 For an examination of the influence of the voodoo religion on Haiti during the Duvalier era, see Elizabeth Abbott, *Haiti: An Insider's History of the Rise and Fall of the Duvaliers* (Montreal: McGraw-Hill, 1988).
- 23 Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 236.