

Haiti

Flash Analysis: Political situation

February 2022



Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry will remain in office, despite renewed CNN reports on his links to the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and calls for him to step down by the Montana Group, leading to further instability in Haiti including sporadic economic protests.

Summary

- Haitian Government rejected the allegations over acting Prime Minister Henry's involvement in the assassination of President Moïse.
- Prime Minister Henry stated he would stay on in office, despite calls by the Montana group to step down.
- Police fired tear gas at factory staff protesting over pay.
- In the short term, it is unlikely that new information or proof of Henry's involvement in Moïse's death will emerge.
- The US would only become involved in a possible arrest of Henry if it directly impacted US national security.
- Henry will therefore remain in office for now.
- However, the Montana Accord and associated political groups will continue to exert and increase their influence within Haitian politics as well as both regionally and internationally.
- The protests will continue – though more intermittently, especially if the police continue to forcefully intervene.

Overview

In a diplomatic letter published on 11 February, the Haitian Government “categorically” rejected the [CNN](#) report from 08 February over further allegations of acting Prime Minister Henry's involvement in the July 2021 assassination of President Moïse.

This came as one of Haiti's well-known local media sites stated in an interview with US press site [The Hill](#) that PM Henry would not leave office, despite calls for his resignation. He reported that in a speech on 07 February "Ariel Henry said “I'm not going anywhere until we've held elections by the end of the year.”

Meanwhile, police fired tear gas, leading to some injuries against factory staff in the capital Port-au-Prince who were protesting for pay increases, in the context of growing inflation concerns.

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Analysis

The claim that Henry was involved in Moïse's assassination is nothing new; indeed in September last year the then Chief Prosecutor Bed-Ford Claude asked for Henry to be indicted (see [Vigil Insight report 30 September 2021](#)), an action that was never carried out as Henry fired and replaced Claude the same day. However, the CNN report goes into more detail providing a covert recording from the former judge connected with the assassination case, Judge Garry Orélien, related to information about a failed raid that sought to obtain phone records and detain a key suspect connected to Henry. However, the report is neither backed or verified by either Haiti or US governments and as it is acknowledged that the phone recordings were carried out furtively, these will be inadmissible in any international court. The US Justice department has reportedly extended its investigation into Moïse's assassination, which included recently extraditing and arresting two suspects. However, so far no further arrests have been made nor have the present arrests implicated Henry in the assassination.

It is likely that Henry's refusal to step down (he was constitutionally obliged to have done so on 07 Feb – [see Vigil Insight report January 2022](#)) is linked to the detailed media accusations over his links to Moïse's assassination and his concerns that this could lead to a deeper investigation by the US / Haitian authorities. If he were to leave office, any verifiable evidence would mean he could be indicted and arrested. By remaining in power, he can influence any outcomes from new evidence if it emerges.

Meanwhile, heated discussions between Henry and the wider opposition coalition, known as the [Montana Accord](#) after the hotel they meet in, continue with Henry stating that the only way to end the political instability in Haiti is through recognized elections. He refutes the Montana Accord's moves to replace him with a provisional interim president ([see also Vigil Insight report January 2022](#)), stating there is no legal or constitutional precedent to do so. The Montana Accord wishes to substitute Henry with their elected leader Fritz Jean and have proposed that under part of the power-sharing agreement, Henry would be invited to join the five-member presidential college. However, in recent days some members of the Montana Accord have called for Henry's removal from office. Although Henry and the Montana Accord met between 11 – 12 February to discuss Haiti's future, so far no details have emerged of what has been discussed, or any outcomes. With Moïse's official office ending on 07 February, Henry in effect is ruling without a constitutional mandate.

Haiti's economy continues to deteriorate, both due to fallout from COVID-19 and the ongoing political insecurity, as well as gang related violence. Indeed, the World Bank stated that [Haiti's GDP](#) fell from 1.5% annual growth in 2018 to a contraction of -3.5% (minus) in 2020. Meanwhile, gang related violence continues. For example, in Martissant on 09 February [three people were killed](#) while 20 passengers kidnapped the previous week in Croix-des-Bouquets were released. Haiti's inflation has increased substantially since October 2021 when it was at 19.7%; by [November 2021](#) it was 24.60%. The protesting factory staff mentioned above are therefore asking for a threefold increase in pay from 500 gourdes (\$5) to 1500 (\$15) due to their concerns over rising inflation, which is also being exacerbated by global inflation, and the impact of the need for most goods to be imported into the country.

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Predictions

- In the short term, it is unlikely that new information or proof of Henry's involvement in Moise's death will emerge. Henry, therefore, is unlikely to be indicted or arrested for now, especially with the Haitian police concentrating on gang violence and the US focused on the situation in Ukraine/ Europe. The US would only become involved in a possible arrest of Henry if it directly impacted US national security.
- Henry will remain in office for now. As also stated in a previous report (see [January 2022 report](#)) a political consensus is highly unlikely in the short term though senate and presidential elections are likely to be held within the next two years. However, the Montana Accord and associated political groups will continue to exert and increase their influence within Haitian politics as well as both regionally and internationally, allowing them to build further political bases from which to pressure Henry and his government backers, including the international community such as the US and EU.
- The protests will continue, though more intermittently, especially if the police continue to forcefully intervene, leading to further violence and injuries. However, the Government is unlikely to step in for now – especially as they continue to be distracted by the current problems over their legitimacy and the dire performance of the Haitian economy.



Mitigation for aid agencies working in Haiti

- See [previous report](#) for practical measures to reduce risk for aid agencies.

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