

## Guided by Experience

### A Comparative Analysis of the U.S. Military Responses to Natural Disasters in Haiti (2010 and 2021)

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**Abstract:** In 2010 and 2021, Haiti was struck by a massive earthquake and both times it left the nation in the grips of a humanitarian crisis. The U.S. military responded to both events with a large-scale, interorganizational relief effort to provide aid to the affected areas. Though the disaster in 2010 created unprecedented challenges, the U.S. Southern Command met those challenges and applied their lessons to its response to the 2021 earthquake 11 years later.

**Keywords:** earthquake, Haiti, U.S. Southern Command, SOUTHCOM, humanitarian relief effort, Operation Unified Response, Joint Task Force-Haiti

### Natural Disasters and Political Instability in Haiti

**O**n 14 August 2021, the old axiom of “history repeats itself” was keenly and painfully felt by earthquake-stricken Haiti.<sup>1</sup> Without having yet fully recovered from the earthquake that hit Port-au-Prince on 12 January 2010, Haiti once again found itself crippled by the same natural disaster less than 80 miles from where the previous one had struck. As this situation 11 years later demonstrates, there is an important caveat that gets left out of that old axiom: when repeating itself, history never performs a precise reenactment. The 2010 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck within 15 miles of the urban capital of Port-au-Prince while the 2021 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck hardest

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against the more rural areas of the Tiburon Peninsula.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, early relief efforts in 2021 were hindered, and the devastation compounded, by Tropical Storm Grace, which made landfall on Haiti a mere two days after the earthquake.<sup>3</sup>

The goal of this article is to provide a comparative analysis of the U.S. military's coordinated responses to the Haitian earthquake disasters of 2010 and 2021. In doing so, it will demonstrate how the U.S. military took the lessons learned from the challenges it faced in 2010, launching the largest humanitarian aid operation the Department of Defense (DOD) had ever undertaken and applied them when a similar event recurred in 2021. This comparison is made using available studies of two events that, while separated by time, are linked by both their location and similar circumstances. As the 7.2 earthquake along the Tiburon Peninsula in 2021 is still a relatively recent event, there are far fewer studies of its coordination and impact in comparison to that of the 2010 Operation Unified Response. As further studies will no doubt come, and with it greater scrutiny of the U.S. military response to the 2021 earthquake, this article seeks to provide a preliminary assessment of what the 2021 operation successfully drew from the experience of 2010.

One important difference in 2021 that made the situation even more problematic than in 2010 was that the natural disasters of the earthquake and Hurricane Grace came during the midst of one of the greatest political crises in Haiti's long and troubled history. On 7 July 2021, Haitian president Jovenel Moise was assassinated in his home by masked gunmen whose motivations and goals are still under investigation.<sup>4</sup> A controversial figure in Haitian politics, Moise's ruling by decree, debates about when his term limit as president ended (or would have ended), and his dissolution of a majority of the Haitian legislature left Haiti in a constitutional crisis with an unclear path of succession to the presidency.<sup>5</sup> Prime Minister Ariel Henry, appointed just days prior to Moise's assassination, has since taken the role of acting president of Haiti, and elections, which were scheduled for November and have since been delayed.<sup>6</sup> As the question of authority has lingered within the Haitian government, overall government authority within Port-au-Prince has progressively eroded in the wake of these political and natural disasters as various gangs in the capital vie for control.

The political situation in Haiti as well as the increasing power of the gangs as the authority in the capital continue to be an ongoing situation without a clear solution. Previous experiences of the United States using the military to restore order in the wake of political turmoil, such as the U.S. intervention in 1915 after the assassination of Jean Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, offer more guidance on how best to avoid past missteps than a course of action in addressing Haiti's destabilization. For problems not related to internal Haitian politics, however, recent history provides clearer advice. Regardless of the problems related to the political situation in Haiti, the U.S. military, in their response to the 2021 earthquake, used lessons learned from previous experience to effectively

respond to a natural disaster. The successes and problems encountered during Operation Unified Response in 2010 provided valuable experience that Joint Task Force-Haiti learned from and applied in 2021.

## **Operation Unified Response**

It was immediately apparent in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake that a natural and humanitarian disaster of that magnitude required a coordinated response across multiple military branches and U.S. aid organizations. Responsible for military-to-military relationships (both among U.S. military branches and foreign partner militaries in the region) in an area encompassing Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) was positioned to coordinate and execute such a response.<sup>7</sup> The U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance was the lead agency of the U.S. whole-of-government response to the Haiti earthquake, but the sheer magnitude of the disaster required the manpower and resources of the Department of Defense.<sup>8</sup> The DOD already had in place the expeditionary emergency medicine units, vertical lift capability, command and control communications, and logistics that Haiti would need to manage the situation.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, Haiti's relief needs were extreme in the aftermath of the earthquake, giving SOUTHCOM the challenge of determining how to respond to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. In a country often given the unenviable label of being the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, home to approximately 700,000 people in a hilly terrain that easily lent itself to post-quake landslides, had just been dealt a knockout punch in the form of more than 200,000 dead, another 300,000 wounded, and massive damage to private residences, government buildings, and infrastructure.<sup>10</sup>

Just as the U.S. government promised the Haitian people a whole-of-government response, SOUTHCOM provided likewise. Operation Unified Response began immediately with resources from every branch of the U.S. military concentrated within Joint Task Force-Haiti under the command of Lieutenant General Paul K. Keen.<sup>11</sup> One of the first challenges that SOUTHCOM faced in responding to the earthquake was access to get personnel and materiel into the city, as the significant damage to Port-au-Prince's infrastructure included the airport and seaport. Nevertheless, within 48 hours after the earthquake, Army paratroopers from the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, were on the ground distributing food, water, and medical care.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, until the Toussaint Louverture International Airport could be made operational again, the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) 623d Air and Space Operations Center (AFSOC) used its proximity at Hulbert Field, Florida, to set up an initial command and control station.<sup>13</sup> As SOUTHCOM took the lead in military operations for Unified Response, the 12th Air Force (Air Forces Southern) became the air component of the operation. Based farther away at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona,

command and control had then shifted to the 612th Air Operations Center (AOC) to manage flight planning and airspace coordination for the incoming aid to Haiti.<sup>14</sup>

As SOUTHCOM assessed the overall situation and how best to address it, it established a series of operational phases to relieve and restore the affected area. Phase I (emergency response) involved search and rescue teams for emergency aid, establishing situational awareness, deploying initial forces, and setting up port operations. Phase II (relief phase) established medical support; distribution of food, water, and aid; and reestablished critical infrastructure and shelters. Phase III (restoration) redeployed U.S. military assets as the need for humanitarian relief decreased, shifting the continuation of relief and infrastructure reconstruction to other government and nongovernmental organizations. Phase IV (stabilization) worked to reestablish legitimate civil authority and provide basic services to the Haitian people, and phase V (recovery) involved long-term support to the Haitian government to rebuild its infrastructure and ability to provide basic services.<sup>15</sup> The direct involvement of U.S. military forces in the relief-based phases I and II successively diminished through the recovery-based phases III–V as they took on increasingly supportive roles, because the ultimate goal in any foreign aid situation is to save lives and provide that nation with the means to regain self-sufficiency. However, as we will see later in this assessment, providing relief to Haiti and Haiti's recovery from this disaster are separate and distinct issues.

Initially reliant on air units to restore the infrastructure to the air and sea ports, additional aid then came by sea. The Navy participated in flying relief supplies to accessible points in Haiti and airdropping supplies in others. The Navy also established field hospitals, provided medical assistance aboard the USNS *Comfort* (T-AH 40), and landed the 22d and 24th Marine Expeditionary Units to carry out amphibious relief missions.<sup>16</sup> Some of the ships involved in the relief effort included USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70), USS *Higgins* (DDG 76), USS *Underwood* (FFG 36), USS *Normandy* (CG 60), USS *Bataan* (LHD 5), USS *Carter Hall* (LSD 50), USS *Fort McHenry* (LSD 43), USS *Bunker Hill* (CG 52), USNS *Grasp* (T-ARS 51), USNS *Henson* (T-AGS 63), USS *Gunston Hall* (LSD 44), USS *Nassau* (LHA 4), USS *Mesa Verde* (LPD 19), and USS *Ashland* (LSD 48). During the course of Operation Unified Response just USS *Carl Vinson's* air wing distributed more than 1.1 million pounds of aid and 19 of its helicopters flew more than 1,000 hours and evacuated 435 patients.<sup>17</sup> With the combined efforts of SOUTHCOM, USAID, and other international organizations, relief efforts were assembled quickly and carried out vital lifesaving and order-restoring missions as Operation Unified Response continued until 24 March 2010. By 17 February, the American Forces Press Service reported that the need for U.S. military forces was diminishing, indicating that conditions for SOUTHCOM's phase III had been met. Lieutenant General Keen had informed Pentagon reporters that the peak of 20,000 U.S. troops that had been deployed to Haiti since the operation began had been reduced to 13,000

(with 7,000 of these being on the ground) as their work thus far had allowed for greater civilian partner capabilities.<sup>18</sup>

## Assessments of Unified Response

In the months that followed after the conclusion of Operation Unified Response, U.S. officials praised the success of the U.S. military in bringing relief to earthquake-stricken Haiti. In *House Resolution 1066*, Congressman Ike Skelton (D-MO) commended SOUTHCOM and Lieutenant General Keen's conduct of the operation as "immediate, focusing on life saving and assessment, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief and evacuation operations" and that "all those involved in Operation Unified Response deserve our utmost thanks and praise for their efforts to save lives and restore hope in Haiti."<sup>19</sup> Additional praise was bestowed on 28 March 2011 when USAID gave its final report on the U.S. government response to the Haiti earthquake. In their independent review, the evaluation team from Macfadden described the actions of SOUTHCOM's Joint Task Force-Haiti as pivotal in saving many lives and that the

vital services such as airport management; seaport repair; road clearance to deliver essential humanitarian material; airlift and sealift capabilities to bring in critically needed relief supplies; organizational capacity to manage the supply chain; aerial reconnaissance; and manpower and equipment to support HADR operations, logistics, and security, could not have been accomplished by any other international or host country agency.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, not all of the assessments that followed were free of critique and, while praise is certainly due for this operation, the assessments require attention as often they—more than accolades—are necessary for greater improvement. Despite the vital relief efforts carried out by the U.S. military in Haiti during the course of Operation Unified Response, the assessment of the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) determined that the operation faced challenges that would need to be addressed for potentially similar events in the future. Simply put, the findings of the GAO were that SOUTHCOM had been unprepared to respond to a disaster of that magnitude. This is certainly understandable as SOUTHCOM found itself in an unprecedented situation of responding to a massive natural disaster in the capital city of a nation among those least equipped to deal with a natural disaster. Operation Unified Response, therefore, represented the largest disaster relief effort that the DOD had ever conducted and required 24-hour, 7-days-per-week operations over an extended period.<sup>21</sup> Among the challenges covered in the report were organizational weaknesses, planning issues, and logistical issues. The critiques of this assessment gain further weight as they were echoed by those central in carrying out the operation. In a self-assessment written by Lieutenant General Keen,

Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Elledge, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Nolan, and Lieutenant Colonel Jennifer Kimmey, they state that the most significant challenge that they faced in the initial stages of the operation was logistics in the form of incomplete situational awareness, absence of a unified and integrated logistics command and control structure, and reliance on the only airport into Haiti through which to funnel all personnel and resources.<sup>22</sup> While the issue of the airport was a factor outside of SOUTHCOM's control, leaders in Joint Task Force-Haiti recognized that they were hindered early on by a logistical system designed primarily for internal support for their own forces rather than on external support for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.<sup>23</sup>

Taking each of the challenges highlighted in the GAO assessment in turn, the organizational weakness indicated in the report was that the Haiti earthquake presented a situation outside of SOUTHCOM's core mission at that time. While SOUTHCOM was organized to meet regional challenges such as building partner nation military capabilities and providing humanitarian assistance, GAO determined that SOUTHCOM had not been organized with contingencies in place for disaster relief efforts and needed to be reorganized for such an event.<sup>24</sup> This in turn leads into GAO's conclusion that SOUTHCOM's response suffered from planning issues. Specifically, GAO determined that the command structure of SOUTHCOM lacked a division to address planning for future operations and had suboptimized some of the core functions that were necessary to respond to a large-scale contingency such as the events of 12 January 2010.<sup>25</sup> One of these core functions included logistics, which presented a series of issues that SOUTHCOM had to quickly overcome. The absence of this core function caused relief effort planning difficulties in the areas of supply, maintenance, deployment distribution, health support, engineering, logistics services, and contract support.<sup>26</sup> With the massive combined response force assembled by SOUTHCOM for this operation, these issues meant that the operation started with a lack of cohesion necessary for a force that size to be effective. Intercommunication across various components was strained as different components, such as Joint Task Force-Haiti, were organized under different structures within SOUTHCOM, and initial organization was further hindered by a lack of augmentation plan to produce the personnel necessary for such a large contingency.<sup>27</sup>

While SOUTHCOM faced understandable challenges in responding to an unprecedented disaster at the onset, it also addressed and overcame these issues with impressive speed. Much of this can be attributed to using SOUTHCOM's core mission successes of building and maintaining partnerships in the region to reorganize and meet its objectives. SOUTHCOM received more than 500 augmentees to its existing approximately 800 personnel, including an entire staff office from U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM), and 40 augmentees from seven agencies and four international organizations were also integrated into the planning and operations through its preexisting inter-agency and international partnerships.<sup>28</sup> Another asset SOUTHCOM was able



to employ to swiftly address these initial challenges was flexibility. Though U.S. military leaders started out Operation Unified Response with little direction and situational awareness, they were given significant latitude in their ability to demonstrate and exercise initiative, which allowed Lieutenant General Keen to determine initial requirements and use verbal orders of the commander.<sup>29</sup> This informal approach streamlined force selection and assignment generation resulting in a high volume of personnel and resources able to respond more quickly.<sup>30</sup> While the absence of organizational preparedness for large contingencies was cited as an initial hindrance, SOUTHCOM quickly turned the hindrance into an asset. Without a plan in place that may have called for a more rigid response, SOUTHCOM adapted as needed to the situation and used its preexisting assets accordingly.

It is perhaps fair to say that the disaster of 12 January 2010 was something for which no one could have been fully prepared. As mentioned earlier, this was an event where a massive earthquake struck one of the world's nations that was least equipped to deal with it. The U.S. military response was swift and effective given the scope of the devastation, injuries, and loss of life that had just been inflicted on a regional neighbor. It is also worth noting that in 2010 the U.S. military was still engaged in combat operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and that resources were swiftly and effectively shifted away from these theaters to support a large, immediate, and unexpected humanitarian relief effort speaks to the versatility of U.S. forces.<sup>31</sup> Though adaptability served SOUTHCOM in the initial organization of Operation Unified Response, it was nevertheless agreed that organizational restructuring to provide for future planning for large contingencies was something that needed to be done. Based on the recommendations of GAO, SOUTHCOM established the future operations division, which was tasked with elevating functions such as logistics and communications between DOD stakeholders that was absent at the onset of the operation. Additionally, this reorganization required an update of SOUTHCOM's organization of functions.<sup>32</sup> Follow-up reporting by GAO confirms that SOUTHCOM completed this update in the form of Southern Command Pamphlet 0103-Organization and Functions Manual as of 15 June 2012.<sup>33</sup>

The U.S. military committed a large amount of personnel and resources to bring relief to Haiti in the aftermath of 12 January that, at its peak on 1 February, consisted of more than 22,000 servicemembers, 58 aircraft, and 23 ships.<sup>34</sup> When Operation Unified Response ended by 24 March, the hope of Haitians and the international community who responded to the disaster was that out of the chaos of the earthquake could emerge a new beginning for the beleaguered nation. Haiti and the United States have shared a troubled history, where chronic political instability in Haiti and U.S. military interventions in response to it have strained relations. Many Haitians were suspicious of U.S. intentions in deploying such a large force once again to their capital, but there were also many who welcomed U.S. assistance as a chance to rebuild better than before. However, the U.S. military leadership in Haiti during the operation was

cautious in its optimism about the long-term impact of its efforts, pointing out the relief is not the same as recovery.<sup>35</sup> While the U.S. military provided vital relief in the form of distributing medical aid, food, water, and rebuilding key points of infrastructure in Port-au-Prince, there were still systemic problems within Haiti that had preceded the earthquake and were only exacerbated by it in the years that followed. Political corruption in Port-au-Prince tied up post-quake foreign aid that was meant for national recovery, and other geopolitical events in the Caribbean in later years brought the political and economic problems Haiti faced to a boiling point.<sup>36</sup> U.S. military and humanitarian intervention in 2010 could not solve these problems for Haiti. What SOUTHCOM could and did do was prepare, based on its experience in 2010, for the other major problem Haiti has over which the U.S. military (nor anyone else) has no control: that Haiti, located where the Caribbean and North American tectonic plates meet, would someday have another major earthquake.

### **Haiti's 2021 Disasters**

When, on 14 August 2021, the nation of Haiti once again suffered an earthquake of a slightly higher magnitude of 7.2, it was the latest in a series of disasters that had recently struck that nation.<sup>37</sup> However, for the most part, the disasters that preceded 14 August had been a result of human actions. While Haiti has a long history of political and economic turmoil, the current crisis finds its genesis in the suspension of the PetroCaribe program in 2019. Beginning in 2005, in hopes of extending its influence and courting potential anti-American allies in the Caribbean, under President Hugo Chavez, Venezuela instituted the PetroCaribe program. Under this program, Venezuela loaned oil to participating nations at a low interest rate and deferred payment on 40 percent of the oil purchased for up to 25 years, which in turn allowed those nations to sell the oil elsewhere to use the proceeds for social programs and development.<sup>38</sup> However, the worldwide price of oil had sharply declined since 2005 and by 2019, Venezuela's economy had collapsed and the PetroCaribe program was suspended. If the suspension of the program, which Haiti had participated in, did not cause enough problems in cutting off the flow of both oil and future revenue from oil sells, by 2019 it became clear that the Haitian government during the course of the program had not been using that revenue as intended.<sup>39</sup> While the Haitian government claimed to have used the \$4 billion raised between 2008 and 2016 for hundreds of post-2010 earthquake infrastructure and health care programs, suspicion over the negligible progress in these areas resulted in a 2017 commission of the Haitian Senate determining that government coffers had been misreported, exchange rates had been adjusted, and more than half of all government contracts for these projects had been awarded outside of official bidding processes.<sup>40</sup>

Then-Haitian president Jovenel Moise's involvement in the PetroCaribe scandal in and of itself had made him a controversial figure. Riots over the resulting fuel shortage and mismanagement of government funds were com-



pounded as Moise's presidential term presented a constitutional crisis. Though the Haitian Constitution states that the president serves a five-year term, which officially ran out for Moise in February 2021, Moise refused to step down on the grounds that an interim government had technically occupied his first year in office.<sup>41</sup> Opponents of Moise accused him of placing himself as a dictator and, as Moise ruled increasingly by decree, fuel shortages persisted, and various factions within the Haitian government and elites used gangs to enforce their will against their opponents. Finally, the added strain of the COVID-19 pandemic in Haiti in the summer of 2021 was a powder keg.<sup>42</sup> Then on 7 July, that powder keg exploded when masked gunman entered President Moise's home in the middle of the night and carried out his assassination.<sup>43</sup>

To make matters worse, Moise's previous actions and assassination left the Haitian presidency with no clear path to succession. Under the Haitian Constitution, the Supreme Court president would succeed the president or, if barring that possibility, the prime minister could be appointed by Parliament.<sup>44</sup> However, the same week of Moise's assassination, the Supreme Court president died from COVID-19, and an official appointment of the prime minister from acting president to president was not possible as Moise had dissolved the Haitian legislature in 2020.<sup>45</sup> After some debate, it was agreed that Prime Minister Ariel Henry would serve in the role of acting president until elections can be held at some currently undetermined point in the future.<sup>46</sup> Political uncertainty, heightened social unrest in the wake of the assassination, and the increasing power of the gangs once used by government members and elites now emboldened to act on their own authority had brought Haiti to the threshold of chaos.

### **Joint Task Force-Haiti, 2021**

The last thing Haiti needed at this point was another natural disaster, let alone successive natural disasters. Just days after a 7.2 magnitude earthquake hit the Tiburon Peninsula, tropical storm Grace arrived to immediately hinder recovery efforts. With the government in Port-au-Prince in an even weaker state than it was in 2010 to deal with a natural disaster, if there was a silver lining in this scenario it was that this earthquake had occurred farther away from the capital, causing less casualties and infrastructure damage. Nevertheless, Haiti still needed outside assistance and the United States once again provided a whole-of-government response to the devastation. Utilizing the future planning lessons learned from 2010 and able to augment force capability based on domestic and foreign partnerships, SOUTHCOM quickly established a new Joint Task Force-Haiti (JTF-Haiti) to provide DOD support to the USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART).<sup>47</sup> JTF-Haiti, led by Rear Admiral Keith B. Davids, consisted of SOUTHCOM units from the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and Air Force in partnership with British, French, and Dutch forces.<sup>48</sup> Additional support was provided by the U.S. Coast Guard, which began rescue operations and aid delivery within the first 24 hours after the earthquake.<sup>49</sup>

The operations of JTF-Haiti lasted from 15 August until 2 September

2021, demonstrating both how swiftly SOUTHCOM responded with a ready relief force and how quickly those relief efforts were carried out. In a total of 671 missions throughout the course of JTF-Haiti's operation, six ships, 19 helicopters, and eight transport aircraft succeeded in delivering a total of 587,950 pounds of food, water, medicine, and supplies to the devastated areas and assisted or rescued 477 people.<sup>50</sup> Especially noteworthy are the contributions of Joint Task Force-Bravo (JTF-B), which delivered 340,740 pounds out of the total aid provided by JTF-Haiti and included food, shelter, blankets, tents, tarps, water purifiers, generators, and an entire mobile medical hospital for affected communities.<sup>51</sup> At the time of this article, less than a year has passed since the 2021 Haiti earthquake and the work of JTF-Haiti in response to it. Fewer assessments have been made as of yet in comparison to the ones made of Operation Unified Response occurring 11 years earlier. While there are likely to be more reviews and analyses of JTF-Haiti in the future, there are preliminary takeaways that are immediately apparent with the information currently in hand.

### **JTF-Haiti Assessments and Conclusions**

In this preliminary assessment comparing the U.S. military response to the 2010 and 2021 earthquakes in Haiti, initial information indicates that SOUTHCOM was able to prepare and execute Joint Task Force-Haiti in 2021 with even greater speed and efficiency than it had in 2010. As stated at the beginning of this article, there is an inherent challenge in making comparisons between two natural disaster events, because even similar disasters are not exactly alike. The 2021 Haiti earthquake resulted in more than 2,000 deaths, 12,000 injuries, and 150,000 homes destroyed.<sup>52</sup> While these losses were certainly tragic, the more rural location of this earthquake did not produce casualties in the hundreds of thousands that its more urban-centered predecessor did in 2010. In the face of the devastation of Port-au-Prince in January 2010, SOUTHCOM's relief response was impressive despite early organizational, logistical, and planning gaps for such a large contingency. In the absence of a clear plan of how to respond to a large disaster, SOUTHCOM relied on its strengths of adaptability and preestablished regional partnerships to quickly assemble the combined force necessary to aid Haiti in its darkest hour. The fact that SOUTHCOM was able to rapidly respond and engage in the largest disaster relief operation ever conducted by the DOD at a time when the United States was engaged in two wars on the other side of the world deserves praise.

In contrast, JTF-Haiti in 2021 did not require as much time, personnel, and resources to provide relief to affected Haitians, but it is clear that SOUTHCOM and JTF-Haiti took the lessons learned from 2010 to produce an even more efficient response. Partnerships with the U.S. Coast Guard, foreign military allies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were immediately called on for a rapidly coordinated response to provide aid to Haiti, the first of which arrived in less than 24 hours. Having addressed its absence in future large contingency planning after 2010, SOUTHCOM was prepared

to respond to such an event when history (imperfectly) repeated itself. While the devastation of the 2021 earthquake was thankfully not as extreme as that of 2010, SOUTHCOM, having already demonstrated its ability to respond to the unforeseen, showed it is even better prepared now that large disaster contingencies are in place. Based on Haiti's geographic position along a fault line and often within the pathway of seasonal hurricanes and tropical storms, such contingency planning will no doubt continue to be tested in the future.

Furthermore, while SOUTHCOM has reportedly made the recommended organizational changes to enhance their ability to render humanitarian aid to neighbors such as Haiti, Haiti has gone through even greater changes since 2010, but not for the better. At present, gangs in the capital of Port-au-Prince arguably exert greater authority than the Haitian government. The future of the current acting presidential administration is anything but clear, and none of the issues Haitians have faced during the last few years have been resolved or even eased by this point. This fact has been reinforced as recently as New Year's Day 2022, when Acting President Henry was forced to flee from the northern city of Gonaives amid a shootout between his security forces and an armed group that had previously warned him against entering the city.<sup>53</sup> As of February 2022, it has been reported that there are currently more than 200 gangs operating in Port-au-Prince, demonstrating exponential growth when compared to the roughly three dozen known gangs recorded in 2004.<sup>54</sup> Of the 2021 disasters Haiti has endured, a natural disaster was the only one that could clearly and cleanly be addressed by a U.S. military response. At a time when Haiti was in an even weaker position to respond politically to a natural disaster than in 2010, the U.S. military provided disaster relief, saving lives and providing aid. But, as stated before, relief is not recovery. Experience obtained from U.S. interventions in Haiti make it unclear what role if any the U.S. military could or should play in response to Haiti's internal political and social disasters, but experience has also provided a much clearer picture of the vital role the U.S. military can play in providing relief from natural disasters in Haiti and elsewhere.

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