



AYITI INTEL | ONE-STOP INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

February 16, 2026

Intelligence for Haiti's Democratic Transition

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Haiti enters a three-day Carnival holiday period with acute security contradictions. While Jacmel celebrations proceed with police deployment and weapons bans, Port-au-Prince faces surging kidnappings across Delmas neighborhoods and gang leader Izo operates openly financing carnival activities with zero government response. The 5th Sectoral Security Table advanced GSF operational planning through Concept of Operations development, signaling movement from conceptual to deployment frameworks. A federal appellate ruling on Temporary Protected Status affecting 350,000 Haitian beneficiaries in the United States is expected this week following Judge Reyes's denial of the administration's stay request.



QUICK SUMMARY FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Carnival period February 16-18 with government offices and embassies closed; resumption February 19.

Kidnapping surge continues in Delmas 19, 31, 33, and 75 with priest, lawyer, and judge among current hostages.

Gang leader Izo seen financing carnival activities in Village de Dieu without official response nine days after CPT dissolution.

TPS appellate decision imminent affecting 350,000 Haitians; Judge Reyes denied federal stay request February 12.

5th Sectoral Security Table convened focusing on GSF CONOPS, legal frameworks, and human rights compliance.

DEVELOPMENT 1

The Carnival holiday period beginning February 16 reveals Haiti's bifurcated security reality where cultural celebrations proceed in some areas while gang impunity reaches new levels in others. Jacmel Carnival activities are underway with police deployment, weapons prohibitions, and ethnographic research teams documenting cultural events without major incidents reported. The Ministry of Culture announced institutional financial support for municipalities hosting carnival festivities scheduled February 15-17, and public administration, commerce, industry, and schools are observing official holidays beginning noon through .

Port-au-Prince presents a starkly different picture. No comprehensive public security plan for the capital's carnival festivities had been officially presented by authorities as of early February. An anonymous police officer warned that managing large crowds without a clear plan and without sufficient resources can expose participants to increased risks including violence or targeted attacks. This warning proved prescient as kidnappings continue rising across Port-au-Prince with Delmas 19, 31, 33, and 75 particularly affected. Current hostages include a priest, a lawyer, and a

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judge. The Kenscoff attack on February 12 by Viv Ansanm coalition demonstrated the group's capacity to strike one of the capital's last safe areas, killing at least one person and burning houses.

The most alarming security indicator is gang leader Johnson Andre's continued operational freedom. Andre, known by the alias Izo and leader of the 5 Segond gang, was seen on video participating in and financing carnival activities in Village de Dieu. No official government statement has been issued regarding his presence. Izo is the same gang leader who masterminded the December 24, 2024 General Hospital massacre using armed drones, killing two journalists. His open participation in public events with zero government response signals the level of operational impunity gangs continue to enjoy even as the PNH conducts San Kanpe road-clearing operations.

The security environment during Carnival operates against the backdrop of Viv Ansanm controlling approximately 85-90% of Port-au-Prince and gangs controlling at least 23 communes across four departments. UNICEF reports a threefold increase in child recruitment for armed activities in 2025, with children making up as much as 50% of gang membership. The destruction of healthcare infrastructure continues with 45% of health facilities in the capital closed or destroyed as of October 2025. This Carnival period tests whether the post-CPT governance structure under PM Fils-Aime can coordinate effective security responses during concentrated public gatherings.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Carnival represents Haiti's most significant cultural celebration period with roots in pre-Lenten traditions. The Jacmel Carnival specifically has maintained cultural continuity even during periods of political instability. However, previous carnival periods have also presented security vulnerabilities with gang violence occasionally targeting large public gatherings. The 2025 violence toll of 5,915 killed represents the highest annual total in recent years.

TALKING POINTS

Jacmel Carnival proceeds with police deployment and weapons prohibitions demonstrating localized security capacity.

Port-au-Prince lacks publicly presented comprehensive security plan for carnival period creating elevated risk.

Gang leader Izo operates openly financing carnival activities without government response nine days after CPT dissolution.

Kidnapping surge continues in Delmas corridor with priest, lawyer, and judge among current hostages.

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Kenscoff attack February 12 demonstrates Viv Ansanm capacity to strike previously safe areas. Child recruitment for gang activities tripled in 2025 with children comprising up to 50% of membership.

RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

Restrict non-essential personnel movement in Delmas corridor during February 16-18 carnival period.

Monitor Port-au-Prince carnival events for any major security incidents indicating escalation.

Assess whether Izo's public impunity signals broader collapse of law enforcement capacity post-CPT.

Evaluate Kenscoff displacement risk if Viv Ansanm continues probing attacks on last safe areas.

Plan operational resumption for February 19 when government offices and embassies reopen.

Track kidnapping trajectory in Delmas to determine if surge represents temporary spike or sustained escalation.



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Moderate confidence based on partial institutional reporting.

DEVELOPMENT 2

A federal appellate ruling on Temporary Protected Status for approximately 350,000 Haitian TPS holders in the United States could be issued this week, representing the most critical near-term development for the Haitian diaspora. On February 2, Judge Ana C. Reyes declared TPS termination null, void, and of no legal effect, protecting Haitian TPS holders. On February 12, Judge Reyes denied the federal government's request to stay her order during a contentious hearing where she rejected Department of Justice arguments that Haitian TPS holders would not be specifically targeted.

During the February 12 hearing, Judge Reyes stated directly to government attorneys: "You think the second this goes into effect, they won't go after the Haitian TPS holders?" The judge emphasized that the Trump administration possesses the home addresses of all TPS beneficiaries from their work authorization applications and could use that information for rapid enforcement actions. Reyes ruled that lifting the stay would cause irreparable harm because deported individuals could not realistically return if courts later deemed their removal unlawful. The judge received death threats but upheld her ruling.

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The Trump administration has filed an appeal arguing the judge lacks jurisdiction. The D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, which has historically been more favorable to the executive branch on immigration matters, will handle the case. The Springfield News-Sun reported February 15 that a ruling could come this week. For now, employers should continue honoring TPS work authorizations until further court action. The appellate court's composition and previous immigration rulings suggest the administration may succeed in having the stay imposed pending full appeal consideration.

The economic implications for Haiti are severe. Remittances from the diaspora remain a critical economic lifeline for a country where 60% of the population survives on less than one dollar per day. Mass deportation of 350,000 Haitians would both collapse remittance flows and overwhelm a country that already received 270,000 forced returnees in 2025, with 98% of those deportations originating from the Dominican Republic. Haiti lacks capacity to assist and reintegrate deportees despite IOM and grassroots organization efforts according to Human Rights Watch's World Report 2026.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Temporary Protected Status for Haiti was originally granted following the 2010 earthquake. The program has been renewed multiple times across both Democratic and Republican administrations due to ongoing country conditions including political instability, gang violence, and humanitarian crisis. Previous attempts to terminate TPS have been blocked by federal courts on procedural grounds. The current case represents the most serious legal threat to Haitian TPS protections in recent years.

TALKING POINTS

350,000 Haitian TPS holders affected by pending appellate court decision expected this week. Judge Reyes denied federal stay request February 12 citing irreparable harm and targeting concerns.

Trump administration possesses home addresses of all TPS beneficiaries from work authorization applications.

D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals historically more favorable to executive branch on immigration matters.

Mass deportation would collapse diaspora remittance flows critical to Haiti's economy.

Haiti received 270,000 forced returnees in 2025, lacks capacity for additional mass reintegration.

RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

Monitor D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals for ruling issuance throughout week of February 17-21.

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Assess economic impact scenarios if TPS termination proceeds affecting 350,000 deportations.
Evaluate Haiti's capacity to absorb potential mass returnees given existing 1.4 million IDPs.
Track employer responses to work authorization validity during legal uncertainty period.
Consider contingency planning for remittance flow disruption if deportations proceed.
Coordinate with diaspora organizations on legal resources and documentation preservation.



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High confidence based on official institutional reporting.

DEVELOPMENT 3

Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aime continues governing as Haiti's sole executive authority in his ninth day since the Conseil Presidentiel de Transition dissolved on February 7. While no new decrees or press conferences were reported in the February 15-16 window specifically due to government offices being closed for the Carnival holiday period, recent governance actions demonstrate systematic consolidation of executive power at both national and municipal levels. The Council of Ministers adopted a decree formally placing executive power under its collective authority, justified by the CPT mandate expiration on February 7.

PM Fils-Aime appointed himself interim Minister of Economy and Finance after dismissing Alfred Metellus, concentrating fiscal authority in the executive office. The new Port-au-Prince Municipal Commission was installed February 12-13 with Yves Andre Salomon as Mayor replacing Youri Chevy, alongside deputies Dorothe Ignace Morel and Esther Cinéas. Municipal commission changes were also implemented in Pétion-Ville with Géralda Nelson replacing Blondibe Beauvert and in Gressier. These appointments represent the first major municipal governance restructuring under the post-CPT framework.

Laurent Saint-Cyr, in his final address as CPT president, told Fils-Aime: "You have no right to fail." This statement captured the political pressure facing the Prime Minister. The Center for Strategic and International Studies assesses Fils-Aime as politically exposed due to the battle over his succession. No consensus has emerged on a successor governance framework among Haiti's 200-plus political parties. Prominent journalist Roberson Alphonse warned that without political dialogue, Fils-Aime risks the same fate as Ariel Henry, who was forced to resign in 2024, describing the Prime Minister as being without a shock absorber against political forces that envy his position.

The governance consolidation occurs as the CEP electoral calendar remains unchanged with

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campaign period beginning May 19, 2026, just one month after initial GSF troop arrivals expected in April 2026. The first round presidential and legislative elections are scheduled for August 30, 2026, with the new president's inauguration set for February 7, 2027, exactly one year after the CPT mandate expired. Key US institutions including IFES, NDI, and IRI appear to be playing little if any role in election preparation, with Trump administration cuts slashing democracy assistance budgets. The campaign period would begin before GSF forces have launched major anti-gang operations, raising questions about electoral access in gang-controlled areas.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Haiti's transitional governance framework was established following Ariel Henry's forced resignation in 2024. The CPT was designed as a temporary collective executive pending elections. The February 7, 2027 date represents the constitutional endpoint for the transition period. Previous Haitian prime ministers have faced removal through combinations of political pressure, international withdrawal of support, and popular protests when unable to build consensus among competing factions.

TALKING POINTS

PM Fils-Aime governing nine days as sole executive authority following CPT dissolution February 7.

Council of Ministers decree formalized executive power under collective authority.

Fils-Aime appointed himself interim Economy and Finance Minister after dismissing Alfred Metellus.

Port-au-Prince Municipal Commission restructured with new mayor and deputies installed February 12-13.

200-plus political parties lack consensus on governance framework creating succession uncertainty.

Campaign period begins May 19, 2026, one month after GSF arrival before major anti-gang operations.

RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

Monitor for new decrees or announcements when government resumes operations February 19.

Assess political faction positioning on governance framework consensus building.

Evaluate electoral feasibility in 23 gang-controlled communes across four departments.

Track international community response to Fils-Aime municipal appointment authority.

Determine whether US democracy assistance funding cuts affect CEP electoral preparations.

Consider whether May campaign launch before GSF operations creates security versus political legitimacy tradeoff.



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High confidence based on official institutional reporting.

DEVELOPMENT 4

The 5th meeting of the Sectoral Security Table convened with a focus on advancing the Gang Repression Force operational planning from conceptual frameworks to concrete deployment preparations. The SST agenda addressed progress of national security forces, establishment of the GSF, preparation for the upcoming SST Conference, institutional strengthening, operational coordination, Concept of Operations development, legal framework, role of the National Security Council, and human rights compliance in operations. This represents a significant operational development indicating the GSF planning process is moving beyond preliminary stages toward executable deployment frameworks.

The Concept of Operations development is a critical prerequisite for the anticipated April 2026 troop arrivals. GSF force structure includes an authorized personnel ceiling of 5,550 covering police, military, and civilian components. Pledges of up to 7,500 troops have been received from Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Bangladesh. GSF Special Representative Jack Christofides and Force Commander Godfrey Otunge from Kenya will lead the mission. The force currently relies on approximately 1,000 MSS personnel, primarily 735 Kenyan police officers, though Kenya announced a drawdown after achieving its primary objective of stabilizing the country.

The 5th SST's explicit focus on human rights compliance in operations represents a positive signal for accountability frameworks. This attention to human rights standards becomes particularly important given the context of PNH drone operations between March-September 2025, which killed 547 people including 527 suspected gang members and 20 civilians including 11 children. UN Human Rights Commissioner Volker Türk assessed most drone strikes as likely unlawful under international human rights law. The SST's institutional strengthening agenda suggests efforts to establish legal and operational frameworks that can withstand international scrutiny.

The operational timeline creates compressed decision windows. GSF troops are expected to begin arriving in April 2026 with full deployment by October 2026. However, the electoral campaign period begins May 19, 2026, meaning campaigning would start before the force has launched major anti-gang operations in the 23 gang-controlled communes across four

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departments. First round elections are scheduled for August 30, 2026, when GSF would still be in mid-deployment. The BINUH mandate was extended to January 31, 2027 via Resolution 2814, with the Secretary-General requested to report within 90 days on options for a Haitian-led Disarmament, Dismantlement, and Reintegration program, establishing a late April deadline for DDR planning.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Gang Repression Force concept emerged following the failure of the Multinational Security Support mission to achieve sustainable gang territorial rollback. Previous international security interventions in Haiti including MINUSTAH and UNPOL faced criticism for human rights violations and limited long-term effectiveness. The GSF represents an attempt to create a more robust mandate and force structure while maintaining Haitian government authority over operations. Kenya's announced drawdown reflects longstanding challenges in sustaining international security commitments in Haiti.

TALKING POINTS

5th Sectoral Security Table advanced GSF CONOPS development and operational planning frameworks.

SST agenda included human rights compliance signaling accountability framework development. GSF authorized ceiling 5,550 personnel with pledges up to 7,500 from six countries.

April 2026 initial deployment timeline creates one-month gap before May 19 campaign period begins.

Kenya announced MSS drawdown despite GSF not yet deployed creating security gap. BINUH 90-day DDR report deadline approaching end of April from January 29 mandate extension.

RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

Track SST Conference scheduling and outputs for GSF deployment timeline confirmation. Assess force generation status against pledged troop commitments from six contributing countries.

Monitor human rights framework implementation given previous drone strike legal concerns.

Evaluate operational feasibility of elections in gang-controlled areas before GSF major operations.

Coordinate with BINUH on DDR program options development ahead of April reporting deadline.

Determine whether Kenya drawdown timeline aligns with GSF deployment to avoid security vacuum.



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Moderate confidence based on partial institutional reporting.

WHAT TO WATCH NEXT

NEXT 24 TO 48 HOURS

Carnival security incidents during February 16-18 Jours Gras period. Any major gang attack during concentrated public celebrations would represent significant escalation and test post-CPT security coordination capacity. Monitor Port-au-Prince specifically given lack of publicly presented comprehensive security plan.

TPS appellate ruling from D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals. Decision could be issued this week affecting 350,000 Haitian TPS holders. Ruling will determine whether Judge Reyes's stay denial stands or administration succeeds in reimposing deportation authority pending full appeal.

Kidnapping trajectory in Delmas corridor. Continued surge in Delmas 19, 31, 33, and 75 with high-value targets including priest, lawyer, and judge suggests either temporary spike or sustained escalation requiring risk assessment adjustment.

THIS WEEK

Government operational resumption February 19. First full working day after Carnival holiday closure. Watch for new PM Fils-Aime decrees, announcements, or municipal appointments indicating continued governance consolidation.

Kenscoff security status. Viv Ansanm's February 12 attack on one of the capital's last safe areas could trigger displacement if probing attacks continue. Monitor for additional incidents or IDP movement from Kenscoff area.

Port security compliance. USCG 90-day compliance ultimatum on port security standards remains active. Terminal Varreux container port standoff awaiting government customs authorization since 2020. Any resolution would signal improved trade infrastructure.

STRATEGIC HORIZON

GSF CONOPS finalization and force generation conference. 5th SST signals active planning

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beyond conceptual stage. Watch for SST Conference date announcement and force generation commitments from pledging countries. April 2026 deployment timeline requires concrete troop pledges converting to actual deployments.

Electoral access in gang-controlled communes. Campaign period begins May 19, 2026, one month after anticipated GSF arrival but before major anti-gang operations. 23 gang-controlled communes across four departments create electoral access challenges requiring security or political solutions before August 30 first round.

BINUH DDR program options report. Secretary-General requested to report within 90 days from January 29, 2026 mandate extension, establishing late April deadline. DDR program success critical for sustainable gang demobilization beyond military operations.

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