Introduction

The nation of Haiti is currently under a state of siege. This action was implemented by current leader Prosper Avril in response to political turmoil and unrest. The State of Siege is affecting the freedoms of speech and movement for Haitians, especially in the heavily monitored capital of Port-au-Prince. The act by the leader has been heavily criticized by the international community and NGOs for being a tyrannical move to consolidate power around Avril and his military government.

A “state of emergency” has been used by governments around the world in order to quell protests and forcefully establish order. The most notable current example is in South Africa where a state of emergency resembling the current Haitian one was declared in 1985 and still remains in effect.

The current state of emergency in Haiti poses a similar scenario and threats to escalate. The humanitarian crisis in the country has been dire over the last decades, but the current state of siege is expected to have dire consequences for the people of Haiti, especially those who are already suffering.

The UN stands for freedom and democratic values, principles and values currently threatened by the state of siege in Haiti. Since Avril took power in a military coup in 1988, the country’s democratic system has been effectively shut down, and the measures instituted by his government directly violate essential freedoms for Haiti’s people. The situation in Haiti is not just about saving people from a potential humanitarian catastrophe, but action by the Security Council could become a benchmark signalling how the United Nations handles future threats to democratic principles, the rule of law, and the denial of basic human rights around the world.

Definition of Key Terms

State-of-siege

A state-of-siege refers to situations in which governments implement restrictions concerning the free movement of people. These restrictions can be put in place in order to limit movement into buildings, public spaces, cities, or even the country itself. Typically, a state-of-siege is implemented in order to
quell protests, prevent civil uprisings, and clear areas. In instances in the past, this measure has been abused in order to fight opposition movements and consolidate power.

**Coup d’Etat (also known as “Coup” or “Putsch”)**

Coup d’Etat, or just coup, is the overthrow of a government by non-democratic means. Usually this action is undertaken militarily (also called a “military coup”) and is regarded as unconstitutional and illegal. A coup can be used to overthrow a democratic government and grant the military governing powers, often resulting in a military dictatorship, or oust a dictatorial regime and implement a new governing system.

**Background Information**

**History of political instability**

The political landscape in Haiti has always been influenced by race and socio-economic divisions. After Christopher Columbus arrived on the Island of Hispaniola (now comprising Haiti and the Dominican Republic) in 1492, the indigenous Tainio people were, as in many other regions of the Americas, brutally murdered or enslaved. Spanish settlers founded cities on the island and the Spanish remained in full control of its colony until 1697 when it formally ceded the western third of the island, what is now Haiti, to France. The French turned Haiti into the biggest, most profitable sugar colony in the Western Hemisphere by employing thousands of slaves shipped over from Africa. This created a gigantic difference in slave vs. white population of ca. 87% to 8%. The disproportionality of wealth was equally extreme, with whites owning over 70% of wealth, including land. This disparity in regard to population and wealth was a key factor in the success of the Haitian uprising of 1791, resulting in Haiti gaining full independence from France in 1804 (although independence was not recognized by most European powers until much later). The disproportionality of wealth continued throughout the early years of the republic and has to this day been a defining factor in the shaping of the political landscape. The most important example of this issue occurred at the beginning of the country’s existence in 1806, when Haiti was deliberately split into black and white sections, in essence creating two separate countries.

Vast differences in wealth along with rampant corruption and endless line of undemocratic governments have plagued the country since its establishment. Allegations of election tampering and fabricated results have led to civil unrest and foreign intervention, most notably by the United States in 1915 which led to a 32 year long “occupation” of the country.

Throughout Haiti’s turbulent history there have been multiple defining factors influencing politics which are still present today. These stark differences within the population have made any solutions to Haiti’s problems incredibly hard to implement, a fact which has destabilized Haiti even more due to a
lack of effective outside assistance and the endemic corruption in government agencies responsible for the distribution of humanitarian aid.

**Major Points of Contention Between Involved Parties**

Multiple parties are involved in the Haitian conflict. These can be split up into three different categories: Internal actors, external actors, and aid organisations. The main internal actors include the military government and opposition parties. The main conflicts between the military government revolve around the current state of siege, corruption, and undemocratic governance. The Haitian opposition does not consist of one party, but rather a collection of opposition groups trying to topple Avril’s government. These opposition groups are political parties and groups, militant organizations and sections of the general public. While these groups do not necessarily work together, many have the same goals. The civil unrest caused by these activists has led the government to implement the current state of siege and curtail basic freedoms.

External actors are also heavily involved in the Haitian conflict. The most influential and powerful of these is the United States and by extension the Organization of American States (OAS). The United States has been involved in Haitian affairs since its invasion and occupation in 1915. This invasion was primarily to protect US assets and in the process establish a democratic system in Haiti. Even after its withdrawal, the United States continues to play a defining role in Haiti. Previous Haitian governments have been strategically useful to the United States for being anti-Communist. Many of these governments have likewise been viewed as anti-democratic and repressive, at times leading to US sanctions and blockades. The OAS has often been the initiator of these sanctions in order to cripple Haiti’s economy and effect regime change. Overall, the United States has viewed Haiti as a strategically important country, supporting, opposing, and even invading it in order to secure its own economic and geo-political interests.

Aid organisations have been instrumental in trying to help Haiti gain a stable footing. The body having had the biggest impact in Haiti is the World Bank (WB). The WB has poured millions of dollars into the country, including loans and aid packages. Along with many NGOs active in Haiti, the international aid community has made Haiti and its stabilisation a key priority, especially on a humanitarian level. Next to this humanitarian aid, anti-corruption agencies are working to end the cycle of corruption in the country and monetary organizations such as the WB and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are helping to rebuild the nation and its economy.

**The Humanitarian Crisis**
Haiti is facing one of the worst global humanitarian crises. Globally, the GDP of the entire country is around $2.7 billion, much of which never reaches the population of 7 million due to corruption and the average GDP per capita is lies at barley $370 (World Bank). The average life expectancy in 1989 was merely 54 years (WB). Poor infrastructure and medical supplies, as well as rampant poverty and a failing economy have made Haiti the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and incredibly susceptible to any natural disaster. Haiti is located along the border of three different tectonic plates, making it vulnerable to major earthquakes, such as the 8.1 magnitude earthquake in 1842 which was followed by a Tsunami. Furthermore, the country is located in the Caribbean, an epicentre for Hurricanes. Overall, the World Food Program (WPF) ranks Haiti as the fourth country most affected by extreme weather conditions. These factors put Haiti in a precarious position and deter new business ventures, thus further crippling the economy. Hunger is rampant throughout the country. An estimated 40% of households are reported to be undernourished (USaid). Internal unrest and external sanctions are further exacerbating living conditions, causing more and more people to be cut off from electricity, clean water, and an adequate food supply.

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

**Avril’s Military Government**

Prosper Avril came to power as Haiti’s president in 1988 after a successful coup of the transitional government led by Leslie Manigat. As a general, Avril uses the Haitian military to legitimize and carry out a dictatorial form of government. Having led the military in the 1988 coup, he has assumed the title as president in an undemocratic way, leading to international outrage and a backlash. The government has been accused of numerous crimes against humanity, including torture, judicially unauthorized executions, and inhuman detention, among other things. Avril and his government are known to suppress the Haitian opposition through intimidation, violence, exile, and imprisonment. These actions, along with the undemocratic seizure of power, are all testaments to the ruthlessness and tyrannical nature of Avril’s rule. Like many previous Haitian governments, corruption allegations are as prevalent as ever. Prosper Avril is accused of using the military to collect large sums of money from civilians and industry alike, bringing Haiti perilously close to economic collapse. These actions are
paired with those of using bribes to eliminate opposition leaders and censoring press to create an undeniable picture of corruption, tyranny, and terrorism.

The Haitian Opposition | The Organization of American States (OAS)

The Opposition to Prosper's government in Haiti is difficult to define. Political parties are under threat and news outlets airing anti-government sentiment have effectively been shut down. The state of siege was officially put in place due to the civil unrest in the country towards the leader. Many of the protesters could be classified as resistance activists who are opposing the current leadership. Official groups or bands of people fighting for the dissolution of the government are nearly impossible to name, but we do know that there are groups of people who have taken advantage of the situation and are directly violating the imposed law and disobeying government forces. Throughout the country, approval for Avril is incredibly low, with many taking to the streets. Overall, the government has lost control over much of its populous, resulting in the use of violence and intimidation to combat the opposition. These acts include the beating and deportation of major political opponents. As a result, the opposition is uncertain how to move forward. One group which has been recognized as a pro-democracy organization, the “Union of Haitian Constitutionalists”, has stated that they are indeed in shock and do not know what to expect, a testament to the fragility of Haitian democracy at this point in time. Another method of silencing opposition in Haiti has been imposed exile. Notable figures who have been deported include Dr. Louis Roy, who was “a principal author of the country’s latest Constitution in 1987 and who has campaigned for free elections” (New York Times, Jan. 1990) and Hubert de Ronceray, a former presidential candidate in elections in November 1987.

The Organization of American States (OAS)

The OAS is a multinational organization of countries consisting of all 35 sovereign American (North, South, and Caribbean) nations. It was founded in 1948 as a bulwark against leftist groups and communism in the Americas, but has since expanded its goals to different topics, most notably the promotion of democracy around the world and especially in the Americas. This was also their justification for placing sanctions and naval blockades on/around Haiti during times of crisis, including this one. The United States, which has heavily invested in Haiti is the main monetary contributor to the OAS and has been criticized for holding too much power and influence, especially with regard to military action and invasions. The OAS has been involved in military operations in the Americas in the past, the most famous and contentious being a military invasion of the Dominican Republic in the 1960s in order to prevent the rise of a leftist party from gaining control. In Haiti, the Organization has been supporting US calls for economic sanctions on the country in order to cripple undemocratic regimes. The union of states
has also been intently focused on the humanitarian crisis in the country, trying to lessen the damage caused by internal turmoil.

**The United States of America**

As stated above, the United States has heavily invested in the country due to its proximity to the US mainland and within its supposed sphere of influence. They have been involved in the country’s political affairs since 1915 when it launched an invasion in order to secure its assets. The occupation that ensued lasted until 1947 and drastically changed politics in the country and the US perception of Haiti’s importance. Haiti has been one of many countries the US has been adamant to “protect” against communism. They have directly and indirectly toppled governments and influenced politics. Currently President Bush has placed sanctions on the country and accepted political refugees, such as exiled Hubert de Ronceray. At the same time, other Haitian nationals are being sent back to the country, actions which have been severely criticized given the repressive political climate in the country. The United States has been and will probably continue to be the most important and influential player on the Haitian stage.

**The World Bank**

The development of Haiti’s infrastructure have largely been funded by a number of international initiatives, most prominent among these is World Bank. Haiti became an official member of the World Bank in 1953. Since then the organization has poured millions of dollars into the country in order to rebuild it. Despite such allocations, the country has not met certain requirements concerning transparency, democratic reform, and socio-economic stability. This has deterred potential enterprises from investing in the country. Another key factor hampering development is related to the costs: any project must be able to withstand an earthquake and the seasonal hurricanes accompanied by severe flooding. Development projects take longer and are more expensive. The World Bank has stated that they are willing to allocate more funds to the country if the political situation improves.

**Timeline of Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1492</td>
<td>- Christopher Columbus lands and names the island Hispaniola</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Spain cedes western part of Hispaniola to France, this area becomes Haiti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1697</td>
<td>- Haiti becomes the first independent nation of the Caribbean; former</td>
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slave Jean-Jacques Dessalines declares himself emperor

- US invades Haiti, believing its property and investments in the country are endangered

- US withdraws troops from Haiti, but maintains control until 1947

- Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier seizes power through a military coup and is elected president a year later

- Duvalier declares himself president-for-life and establishes a Haitian dictatorship

- Duvalier dies and is succeeded by his son, Jean-Claude, or "Baby Doc", who also declares himself president-for-life

- Baby Doc flees Haiti because of increasing discontent for him and is replaced by Lieutenant-General Henri Namphy as head of state

- Leslie Manigat becomes president, but is ousted in a coup led by Brigadier-General Prosper Avril, who creates a military government

- Avril declares a state-of-siege on January 20th in order to quell civil unrest in Port-Au-Prince

### Relevant UN Treaties and Other Documents

**UN Documents**

**UNCTAD Report on “Rebuilding Haiti”**
(Note that this report was written in 2010, but contains valuable information on the economic development of Haiti)

**Other Documents**

(Note that this report was written in 2006, but contains information concerning the state of Haiti and its political system from earlier times)

### Possible Solutions

**International Election Monitoring**

The international community has used election monitoring for decades in order to ensure the democratic process in conflict areas and regions in which the democratic system is questioned. This
does not just include war-zones and usual regime suspects. In the past, election monitoring has been implemented in strong democracies such as the United Kingdom and the United States. In order to stabilize a country like Haiti, a democratic government must be elected which can guarantee the survival of a democratic system.

**UN Peacekeeping Mission in Haiti**

Since its invasion in 1915, the United States has continually had troops present in the country, thus calling into question Haitian sovereignty and complicating peaceful resolutions. An international UN peacekeeping mission replacing these forces and stabilizing Haiti could lead to more productive democratic reform and facilitate lifting the state-of-siege.

**Economic investment in the country**

Haiti is plagued by a failing economy. In order to overcome the adversity it currently faces, the nation cannot solely rely on outside aid. Economic recovery must take place so that the country can be rebuilt. In order to achieve this, outside investments must be made. While this is an incredibly difficult task due to the instability, arguably more difficult situations have been overcome in the past. Two major examples of this are post-war Germany and Japan, in which the United States and other allied powers invested heavily in order to rebuild these broken nations. Today they stand as strong, independent democracies. If the same can be done in Haiti, the country can start to rebuild itself and perhaps become another successful example of change.

**Conclusion**

Haiti has been unstable since the formation of the country. Currently it faces a humanitarian crisis of immense proportions, and it is home to a political struggle which is costing its citizens freedom and security. Haiti is a testament to the international failure to help struggling nations achieve socio-economic stability and break the cycle of violence, chaos, and poverty. Unlike many other conflicts, Haiti’s political and social turmoil has little to do with religion or cultural differences; it is rooted in the endemic poverty and economic disparity found in this island nation. There are voices who argue that the current situation is a further example of another UN shortcoming. While the world's attention is understandably drawn to crises entailing brutal religious conflicts, violent ethnic tensions, and geo-political disputes, especially in the Middle East, Haiti, plagued by corruption, remains less in focus and low on the agenda. The current state-of-siege and ensuing political crisis are indicative of deeply rooted social injustices, corruption on all levels, poverty, and economic inequality.

While attempting to find solutions for this emergency, keep in mind that the international community has been criticized for being interventionist, something which must be avoided if security in
the region is to be permanent. And while it may be simpler on paper, concrete action plans are needed now. Member states cannot ignore their responsibility to the people of Haiti.

**Bibliography**


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