FEATURED Q&A

Do Deadly Protests Threaten Moïse’s Gov’t in Haiti?

Haitian President Jovenel Moïse has faced harsh criticism and violent protests against his government in recent days. // File Photo: Haitian Government.

Q At least 10 people were killed in recent days in violent anti-government protests in Haiti. Opponents have criticized President Jovenel Moïse as inexperienced and incompetent, and demonstrators have aired grievances about government corruption and their country’s economic malaise. To what extent does Moïse deserve the criticism, and do the protests threaten his government? What are the biggest problems facing Moïse’s government, and how should he address them? What is at the root of Haiti’s longstanding economic problems?

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A James Morrell, executive director of the Haiti Democracy Project: “For the pickle that Haiti finds itself in, there is enough blame to go around: to Jovenel Moïse, the man in the driver’s seat, to violent presidential rivals who won’t take the voters’ no for an answer, to the international community, whose attention has wandered. Moïse has proved to be stubborn but not shrewd, care-
less in imposing budget-driven price and tax hikes that showed indifference to the plight of the poor. He was apparently surprised by the backlash. He waited until he became president to unveil an almost Aristidean willfulness, the same ‘je veux et je peux’ even to the point of clearing the locals out of terrain he wanted for a helipad. He’s kept on too many corruptionists from the Martelly days. Of Petrocaribe’s $1.2 billion, perhaps Martelly even bragged to one member of the wealthy elite, ‘I’ll be richer than you by the time I am done.’ As a result, President Moïse has forfeited his popular support and will at best be a lame duck for the rest of his term. At worst, he will be forced out or overthrown, even violently. The loss here is not to one man, but rather to Haiti’s institutions and stability. That instability keeps tourists from getting off their cruise ships, factory owners from risking expansion and farmers from keeping livestock. The United States needs to protect its multi-decade investment in Haiti’s institutions, particularly elections and the presidency, with carefully targeted aid to keep them going until Haitians elect someone worthy of the job.”

“Moïse has proved to be stubborn but not shrewd.”
—James Morrell

$200 million was siphoned off to individual Haitians and Venezuelans during the Préval, Martelly, Privert and Moïse administrations.

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at akuleta@thedialogue.org.