

Washington utilizes rightist terror to effect “regime change” in Haiti

A reporter
25 February 2004

The Bush administration is utilizing an armed rebellion by fascist thugs in the north and center of Haiti to effect a longstanding goal of regime change in the impoverished Caribbean nation.

With armed gangs led by former death squad leaders and ex-military coup plotters having overrun more than half the country, including Cap-Haitien, Haiti’s second-largest city, Washington is attempting to force through a power-sharing agreement in the capital of Port-au-Prince between Haiti’s so-called “nonviolent” political opposition and the country’s elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Essentially, the arrangement put forward last weekend by Roger F. Noriega, the right-wing US assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, grants the opposition all of its political demands save one—the immediate ouster of Aristide, who was elected to a term that lasts until February 2006. It would reduce the former Catholic priest to a figurehead chief executive, with real power relegated to an appointed prime minister and a tripartite commission that would be effectively controlled by US officials. The commission would organize new elections and oversee the reorganization of security forces under different leadership. According to press reports, the State Department has further offered the opposition guarantees that Washington would itself move to oust Aristide if he did not comply with the terms of the deal.

While US Secretary of State Colin Powell intervened personally Monday to ask the opposition to give the US plan further consideration, it appeared yesterday that they were prepared to reject it. “There will be no more delays. Our answer remains the same. Aristide must resign,” said Maurice Lafortune, president of the Haitian Chamber of Commerce, which forms part of the Democratic Platform. He said that a letter was being drafted to Powell rejecting the deal.

The US media has presented the unraveling situation in Haiti as one in which the US administration is attempting to bring together the bourgeois political opposition, led by the Group of 184, and Aristide, in order to avoid a potential

bloodbath should the armed opposition in the north carry out its threat to march on the capital.

In reality, Haiti is confronting two interconnected coups, one in the north and one in the south, both of them led by individuals who are intimately connected to the US government.

In the north, the so-called rebels are utilizing the traditional methods of fascist terror—conducting house-to-house searches for Aristide supporters, looting and burning their homes and, according to some accounts, executing them. Those in charge are well known to US officials.

One of them is Louis Jodel Chamblain, who, together with Emmanuel “Toto” Constant, led the so-called Revolutionary Front for Haitian Advance and Progress during the 1991-94 period of military dictatorship that followed the overthrow of Aristide, who was first elected president in 1990. The group was known by its acronym, FRAPH, which resembles the French and Creole word “to beat.” It carried out the torture and murder of the dictatorship’s opponents and the assassination of several prominent political figures, including Haiti’s Justice Minister Guy Malary and political activist Antoine Izméry.

Constant, it was revealed, was an operative on the CIA payroll, and he was subsequently granted US protection and asylum. When the Clinton administration ordered a US military intervention in 1994 to restore Aristide to power, US forces seized documents from the FRAPH headquarters to conceal Washington’s relations with the right-wing death squad.

The other leading figure in the armed actions in the north is Guy Philippe, a former member of the Haitian army, which was disbanded by Aristide in 1995. He was one of a group of hand-picked Haitian officers who was trained by US Special Forces in Ecuador during the period of the 1991-94 military regime. After the US intervention, he was made a police chief, first in a Port-au-Prince suburb and then in Cap-Haitien.

Meanwhile, in the south, the so-called nonviolent opposition is led by a collection of politicians representing

Haiti's ruling elite, including former supporters of the Duvalier dynastic dictatorship and the military regime of Gen. Raoul Cédras, as well as others who had aligned themselves previously with Aristide. Determined only to defend their wealth and privileges in a country where 70 percent of the people are unemployed and half are malnourished, they have tried to dress themselves up as "democratic" campaigners by seizing on manipulation of the results of the last legislative elections. While such manipulation undoubtedly took place, there is no evidence that, had it not, these elements would have achieved significantly greater political power.

At the head of this coalition, which has received ample financial support from both the US and France, is Andy Apaid, a sweatshop owner and a US citizen. These layers are among the most servile in relation to Washington. Their newfound courage to reject the US State Department's power-sharing scheme stems from their confidence that the armed actions in the north are being carried out at least with the tacit acceptance of Washington and will only increase pressure for Aristide to resign. They are also confident that a Republican administration will not intervene to save Aristide—who has long been viewed by the US right as an anti-American socialist.

The "democratic" opposition's denials of any connection with the armed insurgents appear increasingly suspect. Asked whether he had any connections with the anti-Aristide politicians in Port-au-Prince, Philippe, the former army officer, answered with a smile, "not officially," according to the Associated Press. Significantly, Apaid has embraced one of the principal demands of the armed groups—the reconstitution of the disbanded Haitian army.

Moreover, a somewhat cryptic reference in an article published by the *New York Times* Tuesday indicated that Washington is pursuing a two-track policy, maintaining connections to both the former death squad leaders in the north and their ostensibly more respectable counterparts in the capital. "Over the weekend, Mr. Powell called a leader of the opposition, André Apaid, to urge him to sign onto the agreement, and American diplomats made similar contacts with rebel leaders, officials said," the *Times* reported. 'We told them if they need more time, to take more time,' a senior State Department official said."

While no doubt Washington sees the mayhem carried out by its erstwhile agents from FRAPH and the Haitian army as a useful lever against Aristide, it can hardly welcome a pitched battle in the streets of Port-au-Prince and the kind of massive social crisis that the coming to power of these criminal and fascistic elements would unleash. It is attempting with increasing desperation to patch together a deal that would allow the intervention of some kind of

multinational force to preserve order. US officials have indicated that they are prepared to go the United Nations Security Council to propose such a mission. Stretched beyond its limits by the continuing interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US military has little stomach for the deployment of any sizeable force in Haiti.

Aristide, meanwhile, has been reduced to pleading for a speeded-up foreign intervention. "We need the presence of the international community as soon as possible," he told a news conference on Tuesday. He went further, predicting that continued violence would provoke another wave of Haitian "boat people" heading for US shores, a transparent bid to pressure Washington into intervening.

The fact of the matter is that Washington is already intervening, and Aristide is in such a hopeless position because, over the course of the past decade, he has lost the substantial popular support he enjoyed when he was first elected. Having been restored to power by the US military in 1994, he committed himself and his hand-picked successor, René Préval—whose presidency from 1996 to 2001 Aristide continued to dominate—to the implementation of International Monetary Fund austerity programs that had devastating consequences for the masses of Haitian working people. Having abandoned his earlier pretensions of national reformism, he settled into the traditional methods of corruption, political patronage and repression employed by Haiti's bourgeois politicians.

The failure of the Aristide government to meet any of its promises to provide jobs, social services and adequate incomes to Haiti's impoverished masses has found its finished political expression in the fall of more than half the country to a few hundred well-armed thugs. Aristide's political supporters have thus far proven totally incapable of organizing mass popular resistance to these elements.

In the final analysis, Aristide and his opponents in the Group of 184 represent two opposing factions of Haiti's corrupt ruling class, both looking to the US and France—not the Haitian people—for political support. Whether Aristide is able to salvage his presidency through even more concessions to Washington and thereby bring about the US-backed military intervention he seeks, or is forced out by a US-backed opposition, the result will be a further deepening of the appalling social crisis confronting the Haitian masses.



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