

US and France target Haiti's elected president for removal

Keith Jones
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The United States and France are demanding the political head of Haiti's elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

At a special three-hour session of the United Nations Security Council Thursday evening, US, French and Canadian diplomats brushed aside a plea from Jamaica's foreign minister, on behalf of the 15-member association of Caribbean states (CARICOM), for the deployment of a multinational security force to prevent the overthrow of Aristide's government by fascist gunmen.

A small but heavily-armed rebel force, led by former officers of Haiti's disbanded national army and the FRAPH death squad, have overrun much of the country during the past three weeks and are now threatening to march on the capital, Port-au-Prince.

"Immediate action is needed to safeguard democracy, to avert bloodshed and a humanitarian disaster," warned Jamaica's K.D. Knight. Seconding his appeal was Bahamas Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell: "It is difficult for us in the region to sit by idly, saying we support legal constitutional authority, and yet when the call comes from a member state to support that legitimate authority, we seek to rely on legalisms which amount to inaction."

But US, French and Canadian diplomats were adamant that no force should be sent to prevent the overthrow of Haiti's internationally-recognized government till Aristide and his Lavalas Party government obtain the signature of the opposition Democratic Platform on a "power-sharing" agreement. They know full well such a signature will never be given.

Led by members of Haiti's traditional political and economic elite, including notorious supporters of the Duvalier and Cédras dictatorships, the Democratic Platform has repeatedly rejected any political settlement that would leave Aristide with even a titular role in Haiti's government. Instead it has insisted that Aristide, whose presidential term runs till February 2006, must resign immediately and that the reins of power be placed for all intents and purposes in its hands.

Having rejected the appeals of the Aristide government

and CARICOM, the Security Council gave provisional support to a plan advanced by France that targets Aristide for immediate removal. First advanced by French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin on Wednesday, the plan calls for the UN to authorize the deployment of a multinational "police force" to Haiti, but only after Aristide steps down and a "national unity" government is formed.

Although Aristide agreed only last Saturday to a power-sharing plan sponsored by Paris and Washington—a plan that the opposition scuttled even though it would have stripped him of virtually all power—Villepin pinned the blame for Haiti's political crisis on Aristide. "The regime has reached an impasse," declared France's foreign minister, "and has already shaken off constitutional legality."

On Thursday, US Secretary of State Colin Powell indicated the Bush administration was of a like mind. He publicly urged Aristide to "make a careful examination of how best to serve the Haitian people at this time"—a statement interpreted as a call for Aristide to step down.

Any doubt as to the Bush administration's position was removed Friday, when a "senior US official" told Associated Press, "the best way to prevent armed rebels from taking over Haiti is for President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to resign ..." The official added that President Bush had personally endorsed "the tougher line on Aristide."

At the same time, the White House revealed that plans were in place to send to Haiti a three-ship group, headed by the helicopter carrier USS Saipan, with 2,200 marines from the 24th Expeditionary Unit.

Previously, senior administration officials, from Powell to Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, had poured cold water on suggestions that the US military, which already is overstretched in Iraq and Afghanistan, might deploy a significant force to Haiti. That the White House has now changed its tune would appear to be in answer to widespread media criticism that the Bush administration has ceded too much initiative to France during the crisis in Haiti. On Thursday the *Washington Post* carried a biting editorial, "Minimalist Diplomacy," which chastized the Bush

administration for “neglecting the historical US role in responding to trouble in this hemisphere ... and leav[ing] the hard work to others.”

The great powers’ response to the Democratic Platform’s rejection of the power-sharing agreement underscores their hostility to democracy and utter indifference to the plight of the Haitian people. Like their clients in the Democratic Platform, the US and France are more than ready to use a rebellion of fascist gunman to realize their longstanding goal of toppling the democratically-elected Aristide. According to French foreign ministry spokesman Herve Lasdous, Villepin told representatives of the Haitian government who attended a meeting in Paris Friday, “From now on, each hour counts if we are to avert a spiral of violence.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously explained there are two coups currently underway in Haiti—an armed rebellion mounted by the thugs of previous Haitian dictatorships and an attempt on the part of the Democratic Platform to pave the way for the direct intervention of Washington and Paris by making the country ungovernable.

Behind these events lies the hand of Bush administration—an administration whose personnel has a long bloody record of supporting political terror in the Central American and Caribbean, from the Nicaraguan contras to the death squads of Guatemala and El Salvador.

Both the rebels and the so-called “non-violent” opposition have intimate and longstanding ties to the Republican Party establishment. The Republicans, under Bush Senior, backed the 1991 military coup that toppled Aristide’s first government, opposed his restoration to power in 1994 by the Clinton administration, and has continued to revile Aristide as a socialist firebrand, notwithstanding his implementation of an IMF-dictated structural adjustment program.

Rebel leader and former Haitian army officer Guy Philippe received special training from the US military in Ecuador during the Cédras dictatorship, then was given a string of senior posts in the national police force established under the auspices of the US and Canada.

Philippe’s fellow rebel leader, Jodel Chamberlain, was the second in command of FRAPH, the death squad of the Cédras regime. His boss Emmanuel Constant was on the CIA payroll. Indeed, so sensitive were FRAPH’s relations to Washington, when the US military entered Haiti to restore Aristide to power in 1994 one of the first things they did was to seize FRAPH’s files and ship them to the US.

The Democratic Platform was organized with help from the International Republican Institute and has been sustained by the encouragement given it by the Bush administration, which seized on purported irregularities in the 2000 legislative elections to organize an international embargo on aid to the Haitian government.

With each passing day, new evidence emerges showing the rebels and the “non-violent” opposition are acting in concert. As even the *New York Times* noted, leaders of the Democratic Platform have been hard-pressed to contain their glee at the rebels’ advance.

André Apaid, the sweatshop owner and US citizen, who is the opposition’s principal spokesman has been among the most insistent that there are no ties between the rebels and the so-called political opposition. Yet he openly defends the rebels wielding their weapons till Aristide is chased from office, for “otherwise they would be slaughtered.”

In a not-so-subtle appeal to the rebels and other extreme right-wing elements, Apaid champions the reconstitution of the Haitian army, claiming such a force would be good to instil “discipline” among the youth.

Aristide, his popular support having largely evaporated due to his right-wing economic policies and increasing dependence on repression and corruption to remain in power, has been reduced to pleading for intervention by the very powers, beginning with the US and France, that have subverted his government and now demand his resignation. But it is still conceivable that the attempt to drive Aristide from office will encounter popular resistance. Barricades have been set up across Port-au-Prince.

Whatever the immediate fate of Aristide and his government, there is no question that under the pretext of suppressing the pro-Aristide gangs, known as the chimères, the resurgent forces of political reaction are preparing a wave of violence.

Not for the first time, the Bush administration’s leading personnel have the blood of the Haitian people on their hands



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