

US Marines occupy Haitian capital amid charges Aristide was kidnapped

Keith Jones
2 March 2004

Deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his wife have told several US Congressmen that US military personnel forced him onto a plane and spirited him from the Caribbean-island state as the final act in a US-sponsored coup against his government.

Representative Charles Rangel told CNN that Aristide had said that “he was kidnapped, that he resigned under pressure, that he was taken to a Central African country” against his will. California Congresswoman Maxine Waters said Aristide’s wife had said her husband had been “forced to leave.” A US embassy official had told Haiti’s elected president he “had to go now—that if he didn’t go he would be killed and a lot of Haitians would be killed.”

Randall Robinson, former president of the liberal research group TransAfrica, said Aristide had telephoned him to say that he was being held under guard by French and African soldiers in a presidential palace in the capital of the Central African Republic. “He asked that I tell the world that it is a coup, that he was abducted by American soldiers and put aboard a plane.”

These charges have been denied by top officials in the Bush administration. Presidential spokesman Scott McClellan dismissed them as “nonsense” and “conspiracy theories.” Secretary of State Colin Powell, feigning hurt that he could be accused of such criminal conduct, told reporters, “He was not kidnapped. We did not force him on the airplane. He went on the plane willingly.”

The denials of the Bush administration are unconvincing.

French radio station RTL broadcast an interview with a “frightened old man” whom its correspondent came across when he visited Aristide’s residence and who said he was Aristide’s caretaker. He told RTL, “The American army came to take [Aristide] away at two in the morning ... The Americans forced him out with weapons.”

Monday’s edition of the Montreal daily *La Presse*—which appeared before Aristide’s charges were levelled or at least publicly known—carried a report from its special correspondent in Haiti, Marie-Claude Malboeuf. She says a source told her “handcuffs had had to be put on the ex-president of Haiti before he took the threats of the diplomats” demanding his resignation “seriously.”

Moreover, US officials had bluntly told Aristide that the US military personnel deployed in Haiti would do nothing to protect him, let alone his government, from the fascist gunmen poised to invade Port-au-Prince. Colin Powell personally called Ron Dellums, a former Congressman whom Aristide had hired to lobby

on behalf of the Haitian government, to tell him that the US would not guarantee the Haitian president’s personal safety. And when guards from Aristide’s security team—employees of the San Francisco-based Steele Foundation and themselves presumably ex-US military personnel—contacted the US embassy in Port-au-Prince to ask if they could count on American protection in the event of a rebel attack they were told, no, they would have to fend for themselves.

A Bush administration that came to power through stealing of the 2000 elections, dragged the American people into an illegal war of conquest against Iraq with lies about weapons of mass destruction, and is staffed at its highest levels by persons responsible for countless imperialist outrages from authorizing mass bombings in Vietnam to sponsoring death squads in Central America, is certainly capable of kidnapping Haiti’s elected president. The Republican Party establishment, which supported the military coup that deposed Aristide in 1991 and opposed his restoration to power by the Clinton administration in 1994, has never forgiven nor forgotten the defrocked priest’s denunciations of US imperialism—no matter that when in power Aristide implemented IMF-dictated structural reforms.

But in the final analysis, whether Aristide caved in before US bullying and threats and tendered his resignation or was press-ganged onto a US military plane, does not change the fundamental nature of what has taken place in Haiti: The Bush administration has overthrown Haiti’s elected government. And it has done so in league with a self-proclaimed political opposition dominated by Haiti’s traditional elite and led by notorious henchmen of the Duvalier and Cédras dictatorships and with a rebel militia led by former officers of the disbanded Haitian army and the FRAPH death squad.

That US marines and the fascist rebels simultaneously made their entry into Port-au-Prince over the past two days only underscores that they have been acting in concert.

As the fascist rebels swept across Haiti during the month of February, the US, France and Canada insisted they would not intervene in Haiti till Aristide reached a political settlement with the opposition Democratic Platform. Yet they knew full well the opposition, which they had helped organize and finance, was determined to have the head of Aristide. When the opposition rejected a settlement sponsored by the US and France that would have reduced Aristide to a titular role, Washington and Paris placed the blame on Aristide and started pressing for his

resignation.

Once Aristide was deposed all obstacles to a US intervention disappeared. Within hours of his departure, the first of a force of Marines that could eventually number 2000 began occupying the Port-au-Prince airport and the UN Security Council authorized a US-led “peacekeeping mission.”

So incontrovertible is the evidence of the rebel leaders involvement in bloody repression under various Haitian dictatorships—the *New York Times* headlined a report “Veterans of Past Murderous Campaigns are Leading Haiti’s New Rebellion”—that US Secretary of State Powell has felt it necessary to say, without providing any names, that some of the rebels are “thugs” who should be excluded from a role in Haitian politics.

But there is no question that a deal is being prepared in which the rebel force will be incorporated into Haiti’s government, likely becoming the core of a revived army.

The Democratic Platform has rushed to embrace the rebels, who are styling themselves the *Front de libération—Forces armées d’Haiti* (Liberation Front—Armed Forces of Haiti.) On Sunday Evans Paul, a former mayor of Port-au-Prince and prominent opposition spokesman, told *La Presse*, “We have to improvise an emergency security system. I await Guy Philippe (the principal rebel commander) for discussions.” Meanwhile, André Apaid, the US citizen and sweatshop owner who has emerged as the principal opposition spokesman declared, “The rebels must be part of the solution, because they are Haitians too.”

On Monday leaders of the Democratic Platform met with rebel leaders including Philippe, a US-trained former Haitian officer who according to Human Rights Watch earned a reputation for brutality while serving as a police chief and who in 2001 attempted to overthrow Aristide’s government, and Louis-Jodel Chamblain, the co-founder of the FRAPH death squad.

Emerging from the meeting, Paul again praised the rebels, in particular Guy Philippe. Meanwhile, Chamblain told reporters to he wanted to thank the US, France and Canada “for allowing us to get rid of Aristide.” Chamblain added that he had no fear of being called to account for his role as an organizer of murder and terror under the Cédras dictatorship.

The meeting was preceded by a rebel rally that took place under the watch of US Marines who were posted as guards at Haiti’s presidential palace. According to US Colonel David Berger, head of the US Marine contingent now deploying in Haiti, “I have no instructions to go about disarmament.” The US and French forces have set as their objective securing unspecified “key sites” in Haiti’s capital, meaning the rebels have free rein over most of Port-au-Prince.

Over the past two months, the international media has largely served as a mouthpiece for the Democratic Platform, repeating its grossly exaggerated claims about the level of irregularities in the 2000 elections and ignoring the opposition’s own, far longer and notorious anti-democratic record and its willingness, like its US sponsors, to join with fascists in toppling Haiti’s elected president.

In keeping with this, most reports since Aristide’s fall have focused on the celebrations in the elite and middle class areas of Port-au-Prince. But Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reporter Neil Macdonald admitted that in the slums of Haiti’s capital the

mood is “sullen.”

There also have been scattered, harrowing reports of a bloody settling of accounts, directed perhaps in the first instance at the armed-gangs that supported Aristide, the *chimères*, but which have as their fundamental object reasserting the unfettered domination of Haiti’s elite over the country’s largely illiterate, impoverished and malnourished masses.

The *Miami Herald* quoted a business-owner armed with a machine gun as saying, “Basically, whoever is bringing peace, we’re going to work with.” “There were widespread killings with guns and machetes as the gangs, known as *chimères*, tried to defend themselves against vengeance,” reported Canwest’s Sue Montgomery.

Among the first acts of the rebels on arriving in Port-au-Prince was to release from prison a large number of former military personnel held for their role in suppressing popular opposition to the Cédras dictatorship or conspiring against the subsequent elected government.

The US’s role in toppling an elected president by conniving with, if not organizing, a rebellion led by fascist thugs has drawn criticism from other Caribbean governments. No doubt they fear the readiness of the region’s great powers—the US and France—to brazenly violate traditional democratic norms. Declared Jamaican prime minister and current CARICOM chairman P.J. Patterson, “The removal of President Aristide ... sets a dangerous precedent for democratically elected governments anywhere and everywhere, as it promotes the removal of duly elected persons from office by the power of rebel forces.”

Some sections of the US political establishment have also made criticisms of the Bush administration’s role in the events in Haiti, but mainly from the standpoint that it should not let France take the initiative in the crisis and out of concern that further instability in Haiti could precipitate an exodus of poor Haitians to the shores of Florida. The *New York Times*, in what constituted an apology for Bush’s fomenting of a fascist rebellion to effect “regime change”, criticized the current administration for bad tactics. “Mr. Bush’s hesitation [in deploying troops to Haiti] leaves Washington looking as if it withheld the Marines until Mr. Aristide yielded power, leaving Haitians at the mercy of some of the country’s most vicious criminal gangs.”

Bush, for his part, in a chilling display of his contempt for democracy and disdain for the Haitian people declared Sunday, once Aristide was driven from office and the US ambassador to Haiti had presided over the swearing in of the head of the country’s supreme court as the next president, that “the Haitian constitution is working.” No less foul were the remarks of French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin. He boasted that Aristide’s departure had been “the result of perfect co-ordination” between Washington and Paris.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact