

The division of labor behind the US-made coup in Haiti

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The US government is engaged in a cynical charade to distance itself from the right-wing terrorists and thugs who marched into the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince over the weekend, leading to the forced resignation and exile of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Bush administration officials have adopted a public posture of repugnance toward the so-called “rebels” and declared they can have no place in a new government which the US, with the aid of the French and the sanction of the United Nations, is seeking to impose on the impoverished Caribbean nation.

Washington, these officials declare, will deal only with the so-called political opposition, i.e., the Group of 184 and the Democratic Platform—organizations entirely dominated by Haiti’s tiny wealthy elite—as well as elements from Aristide’s Lavalas movement who are prepared to join a US-sponsored coalition government.

The distinction being drawn by the US between the right-wing political opposition and the former Haitian army killers, police officials and death squad leaders who dominate the “rebels” is largely fictitious. The Haitian financial elite had supported the Duvalier dictatorship and subsequent military regimes as a necessary means of defending its wealth and privilege against the impoverished masses.

The anti-Aristide “political opposition” worked in the closest collaboration with the “rebels” to organize this week’s coup. They formed a common front, and on Monday, after the US had spirited Aristide out of the country, leaders of the Democratic Platform met with “rebel” leaders in Port-au-Prince. Evans Paul, a former mayor of the capital city and prominent opposition spokesman, praised the “rebels,” particularly their principal commander, Guy Philippe.

The Bush administration gave Philippe’s killers a free hand for several days to occupy the city and terrorize the slum communities that form the main base of support for the deposed president. An unknown number of Aristide partisans were hunted down and killed by Philippe’s thugs, while US Marines who had been sent into Port-au-Prince stood by.

The *Haiti Press Network* reported Wednesday that “foreign journalists who were allowed access to the [Port-au-Prince] morgue’s chambers said there were hundreds of bodies piled on top of each other. Many of the dead appeared to be victims

of the violent unrest that has rocked the nation...”

Several US Marines were deployed to guard the residence of the prime minister, Yvon Neptune, but the rest of his cabinet was forced to either flee the country or go underground.

One of the first acts of the armed thugs upon entering Port-au-Prince under the protection of the US Marines was to storm the penitentiary and free six other senior officers of the disbanded Haitian army, including former military dictator Prosper Avril, who seized power in a 1988 coup. Most of these individuals were serving life sentences on charges of murder and torture, at least three of them having been deported from the US to face their punishment.

American officials have openly acknowledged that key “rebel” leaders are killers and drug traffickers, who played bloody roles in the reign of terror carried out by the Haitian Army under the military junta that ruled for three years in the early 1990s. Yet, notwithstanding their so-called “war on terrorism,” they have not even suggested that these known criminals should be arrested and brought to justice.

A cynical division of labor has been worked out, under the aegis of US imperialism, between American military and diplomatic officials, the Haitian “political opposition” and the “rebels.” The armed thugs are covertly equipped and supported by Washington and allowed to do their bloody work, and then relegated to the background while Washington assembles a puppet regime dominated by the Haitian elite. Whatever role the “rebel” leaders officially play in a new regime, or even if they play no role at present, they are to be protected and held in reserve, to be called on again whenever it becomes necessary to unleash a new round of terror and murder on the masses.

On Wednesday, Philippe, a former police chief and reputed drug trafficker, announced that his forces would lay down their arms and abandon positions they had seized in the center of Port-au-Prince.

US officials had insisted that they were “sending a message” to Philippe and other “rebel” leaders that they would not be allowed to seize power. “The fact of the matter is they pledged to lay down their arms when President Aristide resigned, and so we are holding them to their pledge,” declared US Ambassador to Haiti James Foley.

“There is an orderly and constitutional process underway in

Haiti,” said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher. “That process needs to be respected by all Haitians, but we’re glad to see the violence is decreasing. But the rebels have no role to play in this process, and they need to lay down their arms and go home.”

White House spokesman Scott McClellan made the same point somewhat more forcefully on Wednesday: “Our message to the rebels, or the so-called rebels, has been very clear: the rebels need to put their arms down and return home. There is no place for thugs, criminals, and the so-called rebels in Haiti’s political system.”

Yet the commander of the US forces in Haiti, Marine Col. Charles Gurganis, called Philippe “a man of honor” after meeting with him at the US embassy. Similarly, Interim President Boniface Alexandre, in his first address to the nation since being installed in a ceremony organized by the US embassy after Aristide was spirited out of the country, described Philippe and his cohorts as “patriotic men of honor.”

Contrast this approach to the US actions in Iraq, where the Bush administration repeatedly cites human rights abuses by the former Ba’athist regime as a supposed justification for its military intervention. There, US troops were provided playing cards featuring photographs of former members of the regime to be hunted down and imprisoned. Whatever crimes some of these officials may have carried out, unlike their Haitian counterparts from the Duvalier dictatorship and the military regimes of Generals Avril and Raoul Cedras, none of them had ever been convicted.

US authorities have no interest in pursuing Haiti’s convicted mass killers because they have been working intimately with them and will continue to do so.

From the moment it came into office, the Bush administration has been committed to Aristide’s overthrow. The Republican right has long hated the former Silesian priest for his association with the mass movement that toppled the Duvalier dictatorship and for his populist and anti-imperialist rhetoric. No matter how much Aristide groveled before Washington and accepted the dictates of the International Monetary Fund and other international lenders to impose austerity policies upon the already desperately poor Haitian people, it did not assuage this enmity.

Backed by Washington, which provided it financial aid via the National Endowment for Democracy, the right-wing political opposition in Haiti staged one provocation after another, turning a procedural dispute over the 2000 legislative election into an international scandal that was then used as a pretext for denying Haiti international aid and deepening the country’s economic and political crisis.

Despite this crisis and dwindling popular support for Aristide, no amount of backing from the Bush administration could create mass popular support for bringing the wealthy sweatshop owners and businessmen gathered in the Group of 184 and the Democratic Platform to power. Other means were required.

This was why Philippe, Louis-Jodel Chamberlain and the other convicted killers and torturers of the so-called “rebels”—men who had been trained by US forces and worked on the CIA payroll—were unleashed upon the Haitian people.

Throughout the three weeks before Aristide was forced out, the Bush administration rejected any military intervention to stop the killing. It went through the motions of brokering an agreement between Aristide and the so-called political opposition in order to give the “rebels” the time they needed to march on the capital. When the US-backed “democrats” intransigently rejected any compromise, Washington insisted that it was Aristide who had to go.

Speaking before a Congressional panel Wednesday, Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega—a key architect of the coup—cynically claimed that the US failed to act before Aristide’s ouster because it had been seen as too dangerous and would “put American lives at risk.” This, he said, was because Aristide—who acceded to every US demand—was “erratic, irresponsible.” Yet the moment the elected president was removed from office, a waiting US Marine expeditionary force was rushed to the island nation.

There is every reason to believe that the division of labor between US military forces, the so-called democrats and the “rebels” will continue, no matter what the official pronouncements about Philippe and his associates disarming. The former army officer and police chief only said that his gunmen had been withdrawn to an undisclosed location, and no weapons have been turned over.

Whether Philippe and his henchmen will realize their dream of reconstituting the hated Haitian army under their leadership remains to be seen. For now, the “rebels” will be used to continue hunting down and killing Aristide supporters and terrorizing the population so that a regime acceptable to Washington can be installed without popular interference.



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