

# Haiti: US Marines expand operations as Washington assembles puppet regime

Keith Jones  
11 March 2004

Having used a “rebel” force led by thugs of previous Haitian dictators to force the country’s elected president from power, the Bush administration is now trying to patch together a constitutional and democratic façade for a new, US-sponsored government—what the *New York Times* politely calls a “pro-US” regime.

On Monday, the head of Haiti’s Supreme Court, Boniface Alexandre, was sworn in as deposed president Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s successor. This was Alexandre’s second induction as president. On February 29, shortly after American military and diplomatic personnel had hustled Aristide from Haiti, the US Ambassador stage-managed Alexandre’s swearing-in at the home of Prime Minister Yvon Neptune. However, this ceremony was deemed to have lacked decorum, and so Alexandre’s swearing-in was restaged for the television cameras at the National Palace.

The next day, a seven-member committee of “eminent Haitians” that had been set up by the US and French, with United Nations sanction, announced it had selected Gérard Latortue to replace Neptune as Haiti’s prime minister. The committee included just one representative of Aristide’s Lavalas Party.

A lawyer, business consultant, and ex-UN official who served in the brief post-Duvalier government of Leslie Manigat, Latortue has lived in the US since at least 1994. For the past year, he has hosted a South Florida television talk show, which has often served as a soapbox for the right-wing opposition to Aristide.

Latortue has said he will ask retired general Herard Abraham to become his minister of security and defence. Abraham was a senior officer during the dictatorships of both Duvalier *fi*ls and Prosper Avril, then himself briefly held the reins of power in the run-up to the 1991 elections. He had been on the short-list of prime ministerial candidates, but with the so-called “rebels” and much of the anti-Aristide Democratic Platform demanding the resurrection of Haiti’s disbanded army, his selection was considered too inflammatory, according to the *Miami Herald*.

The choice of Latortue was immediately condemned by Aristide supporters. Generally, the international press has parroted the propaganda of the Democratic Platform—a coalition that includes some elements formerly associated with Aristide, but is led by Haiti’s traditional authoritarian business and political elite. Yet some reporters have had to concede that in the slums of Port-au-Prince there is much opposition to the toppling of Aristide, with many viewing the UN-sanctioned, US-led “stabilization” force as enforcers of a coup against Haiti’s elected president. According to the *New York Times*, when a contingent of about 75 marines patrolled neighbourhoods loyal to Aristide Tuesday, “they were taunted by residents,” many of whom shouted “You kidnapped our president!” and “Aristide, five years.”

Since Aristide’s ouster violence has escalated in the capital. The *Associated Press* reports that at least 300 people have died in “reprisal killings” against Aristide supporters. At the same time, there has been widespread looting, with armed gangs loyal to Aristide, the so-called *chimères*, and ordinary slum dwellers storming shops and other

businesses.

Given the business elite’s hostility to Aristide and Haiti’s stark poverty and social inequality—more than half of the population lives on less than a dollar per day and one third are chronically malnourished—such a reaction to the breakdown of government is hardly surprising. But it has only whetted the appetite of Haiti’s traditional elite for a settling of accounts with the masses and a reassertion of its traditional unfettered power.

In response to mounting international criticism over the manner in which Aristide was forced from office and complaints from the Haitian elite over the failure of US troops to stop the looting, US Marine Colonel Charles Gurganus announced Tuesday that henceforth the “stabilization force” would “disarm men who are illegally armed in public.”

Gurganus provided no details as to how the disarmament campaign would proceed, except to say that the force under his command, which now numbers 2,300 US, French, Chilean and Canadian troops and gendarmes, would act in concert with the Haitian National Police. “The disarmament will be both active and reactive, but I’m not going to say any more about it,” he declared.

Previously, Gurganus and his superiors had said that disarming gunmen, whether the rebels or supporters of Aristide, was solely the task of Haiti’s police.

US officials are warning that pacifying Haiti will be a long and difficult process. In testimony Tuesday before the Senate Armed Services Committee, CIA director George Tenet warned of the possibility of civil war. “A humanitarian disaster or mass migration remains possible. A cycle of clashes and revenge killings could easily be set off, given the large number of angry, well-armed people on both sides.”

To date, US forces in Haiti have killed four people. Three of them were reputedly killed in armed exchanges. The fourth, an unarmed worker driving to his home in a poor district of Port-au-Prince, was shot after allegedly failing to slow down at a US checkpoint.

In keeping with the Bush administration’s claims that it neither demanded Aristide’s resignation nor welcomed the overrunning of the northern half of the country by the anti-Aristide gunmen, US officials are seeking to give an “even-handed” impression of opposing both the armed supporters of Aristide and the rebels.

The political purpose of this posturing is to try to lend some constitutional, if not democratic, legitimacy to a regime that is not only unelected and US-created, but which came to power as the result of a multi-year destabilization campaign against Aristide’s government that culminated in an armed right-wing rebellion.

The brunt of any disarmament campaign will be directed at the slums of Port-au-Prince and other Haitian cities. Although senior officials in the Bush administration have condemned the rebel leaders as killers and thugs, none has called for any of them to be arrested.

In large swathes of the country outside of Port-au-Prince, including Haiti’s second largest city, Cap-Haitien, the rebels have been allowed to function as the de facto government. The leaders of the Democratic

Platform—those whom Washington portrays as the vanguard of democratic reform—have themselves demonstratively embraced the fascistic rebels.

The enthusiasm of the so-called democratic opposition for the likes of rebel commander Guy Philippe, who initially declared himself Haiti's new military strongman, has proven something of an embarrassment for Washington. The Bush administration would like the rebels to fade into the background—whether to be incorporated into Haiti's security forces or the numerous private gunmen of Haiti's elite. But much of Haiti's ruling class may resist such an outcome, believing that only through a regime of naked violence, like that it supported under Duvalier and Cédras, can it keep the masses underfoot.

Adding to the crisis surrounding the puppet regime the US is seeking to establish is its lack of international legitimacy. On Tuesday, the African Union added its voice to CARICOM, the organization of Caribbean states, in condemning the “unconstitutional manner” in which Aristide was stripped of his presidency. The African Union communiqué warned that the recent events in Haiti constitute “a dangerous precedent” for all constitutionally elected governments.

Aristide has reiterated before the world press his charge that US diplomatic and military personnel kidnapped him in the climactic stage of a coup against his democratically-elected government. “There was a political kidnapping, I reiterate that,” Aristide told journalists Monday in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic.

Insisting he was still Haiti's president, Aristide called for “peaceful resistance” to restore Haiti's “constitutional order.”

Aristide's press conference was his first public appearance since he was spirited from Haiti on February 29 and brought to the Central African Republic, an impoverished West African state whose dictator has close ties to France, the former colonial power.

There have been repeated reports that Aristide is being held prisoner in the Central African Republic. A delegation of Aristide supporters from the US was not allowed to see him Sunday.

Guards at the presidential compound where Aristide has been staying told representatives from the Haiti Support Network and the International Action Center that they could not enter, nor was Haiti's deposed president free to come out of the compound to see them. The guards also refused to deliver a message to Aristide or allow his US visitors to contact him by phone.

Later the same day, Central African Republic Foreign Minister Charles Herve Wenezouli ordered Aristide's wife not to speak to reporters when she brought them a two-sentence note her husband had scribbled on a postcard.

At Monday's press conference, Aristide was careful not to antagonize the Central African Republic government, which has voiced its displeasure over the criticisms he has leveled in telephone interviews against the US and French governments. “I have never been a prisoner in Bangui, and I am not now,” said Haiti's deposed president.

Aristide has accused Washington and Paris of using threats and lies to get him to leave Haiti and allowing his government to be overthrown by terrorists. At the press conference, Aristide provided no new details of the events of Feb. 28-29. Previously, he said that US officials threatened him and his wife with imminent death, telling them a rebel attack on Haiti's capital was about to begin and that the US would do nothing to prevent their murder. The US government also worked, according to Aristide, to sabotage his personal security detail, which was supplied by a San Francisco based-firm with close links to the Pentagon and the State Department.

Aristide told a Pacifica Radio correspondent, “The 28th of February at night, suddenly American military personnel, who were already all over Port-au-Prince, descended on my house in Tabarre to tell me, first, that all the American security agents who have contracts with the [Haitian] government only have two options. Either they leave immediately to go to

the United States, or fight to die. Secondly, the remaining 25 of the American security agents [hired by the Haitian government] who were to come on the 29th of February as reinforcements were under interdiction to come to Haiti.”

On leaving his residence, Aristide says he was told that he was being driven to a press conference. Instead, as he explained Monday, “I found myself at the airport. The airport was under the control of the Americans.” After he was hustled onto a waiting plane, Aristide claims he was treated like a prisoner. For twenty hours, that is, until only minutes before landing in Bangui, his captors refused to tell him where he was being taken.

The Bush administration has responded to Aristide's charges by effectively ordering him to shut up. “If Mr. Aristide really wants to serve his country,” declared State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, “he really has to ... let his nation get on with the future and not try to stir up the past again.”

Much of the account Aristide has provided of his last hours in Haiti has been independently confirmed. But if Aristide could be bullied and swindled by Washington into fleeing Haiti, it was because he had long since delivered himself into the hands of imperialism, serving as its agent in politically emasculating the mass movement that convulsed Haiti between 1986 and 1991, and then imposing the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

An exponent of “liberation theology,” Aristide first came to prominence as a critic of US imperialism and advocate of social reforms. Yet in 1991, when his eight-month-old government was toppled by the military, he rejected a struggle to mobilize the Haitian and international working class against imperialism and its Haitian agents, and instead urged the masses to join with him in petitioning Washington, the former sponsor of the Duvaliers, to “restore democracy.”

Aristide received the cold shoulder from the administration of Bush senior, which had given Cedras' 1991 coup the green light. But the Clinton administration restored Aristide to power, after extracting from him a commitment to impose the restructuring policies demanded by the IMF, including privatizations, cuts in public spending, and the elimination of tariff barriers to US agricultural exports.

While Aristide was able to win re-election in 2001, his right-wing policies and increasing reliance on patronage and violence to sustain his rule led to a decline in his popular support. Thus, when confronted with an armed rebellion last month, he was reduced to pleading with the imperialist powers to shore up his government. Instead, he discovered that the Bush administration and France—eager to restore friendly relations with Washington—were quite prepared to use the henchmen of past dictatorships and plunge Haiti into further turmoil to effect “regime change.”



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**