

# Spain: Zapatero willing to send troops to Haiti

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Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero said last week that he is willing to send troops to Haiti, as part of a United Nations mission. Zapatero made his remarks at the third European, Latin America and Caribbean Summit in Mexico.

The political crisis in Haiti has drastically escalated since the US-engineered coup in February that violently ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, with the aid of former members of the CIA-backed death squads and former Haitian army that had terrorised the people under the earlier military dictatorship at the start of the 1990s.

By occupying Haiti, the Bush administration is seeking to safeguard the interests of US imperialism as the main economic, military and geopolitical power in the Caribbean by establishing its own puppet regime.

It has been aided in this by the Chirac government in Paris. Keen to shore up its own imperialist interests in the region, the French government supported the coup and has also despatched troops to Haiti.

The US and French military force has now been joined by Chilean troops, and the Latin American nations Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay now have a UN mandate to send 6,700 troops and 1,700 police officers. This force, if it includes Spanish troops, will be commanded by Brazilian General Americo Salvador de Olivier.

The UN in April described the situation in Haiti as “a threat to international peace and stability.” Recently, Haiti has seen large demonstrations against the coup. One crowd, estimated by Reuters at more than 10,000, marched on the US embassy in Port-au-Prince to denounce the coup and demand the withdrawal of US and French troops from the Caribbean island.

The demonstrators chanted “Bush terrorist” and urged that Aristide, who is now in exile in the Central

African Republic, be allowed to complete his five-year presidential term. They further charged that the ex-Haitian army personnel, death squad leaders and criminal gang members that Washington used to oust Aristide—the so-called rebels—are inflicting terror on the slums of Port-au-Prince.

The Latin American governments and Spain have cloaked the sending of troops as a mercy mission and as a force to uphold “democracy,” but it is clear that America’s reckless intervention into Haiti is threatening to destabilise an already volatile area. Any UN force sent to the country would act to quell popular unrest. It would also act as an olive branch to Washington, by easing the latter’s military commitments, thereby enabling it to concentrate on suppressing the national resistance movement against its occupation in Iraq.

In terms of its long-term foreign policy, the Spanish government has said that it would like to “act as a bridge between the European bloc, Latin America and the Caribbean.”

Historically, the Spanish bourgeoisie, especially the Socialist Party, has paid special attention to strengthening Spain’s relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, partly to increase its bargaining power with the US and the other European powers. In the 1980s, the Socialist Party created special assistance programmes in Latin America, through which it made available tens of millions of US dollars that were used to hasten the selling of state properties and their eventual privatisation.

In the 1990s, Spanish economic penetration of Latin America and the Caribbean grew enormously. Spanish banks made substantial loans, including about \$34 billion to Argentina. They now control nearly 20 percent of Latin America’s banking sector. Spain’s

foreign direct investment (FDI) increased from 1 percent of GDP to 10 percent. If Zapatero sends troops, it will be to join the US and France in seeking to defend its own economic and military interests in the region.



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