

WikiLeaks cables detail US military designs on Haiti

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WikiLeaks has released cables from the US embassies in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and Nassau, Bahamas, detailing the US government's interest in forming and maintaining a UN military force for the occupation of Haiti after the February 2004 removal of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Mindful of both Haiti's history as a French colony and the United States' long history of occupying the country militarily, the US government moved to use the UN as a fig leaf and proxy.

In the bourgeois press, MINUSTAH (the French initials for the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti) has been passed off as a peacekeeping force in a country incapable of governing itself. However, in an October 1, 2008, cable titled "Why We Need MINUSTAH Presence in Haiti," then-Ambassador to Haiti Janet Sanderson wrote that "the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti is an indispensable tool in realizing the core USG [US Government] policy interests in Haiti." These interests included suppressing "resurgent populist and anti-market economy political forces" and a possible "exodus of seaborne migrants," while keeping the country open to foreign investment and profits.

While noting that MINUSTAH had cost the US and its allies \$2 billion by 2008, Sanderson wrote that the UN force was "a financial and regional security bargain for the USG." Given the ongoing occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, she argued that "in the current context of our military commitments elsewhere, the U.S. alone could not replace this mission."

In addition to protecting commercial interests, this "security bargain" bought the US a source of information on political developments. A February 2010 cable from Ambassador Joseph Merton described a "series of 145 focus groups (10 persons each)" staged

throughout Haiti by MINUSTAH to measure the popular mood after the devastating January 2010 earthquake. While preparing for those focus groups, the political office director of MINUSTAH warned the embassy that opponents of President Rene Preval might "take advantage of public dissatisfaction to organize protests, weaken the GOH, and seek...access to the control of funds."

MINUSTAH is neither the first nor the last military force to impose US interests in Haiti, as evidenced by the direct involvement of the US military after the 2010 earthquake; it is, however, a part of that long and bloody history.

For example, a report published by immigration attorney Thomas Griffin and University of Miami professor Irwin Stotzky describes some of the activities of the "peacekeepers" during a 10-day period in November 2004. The UN soldiers, always in armored personnel carriers, would accompany the Haitian National Police (HNP) on murderous raids into Port-au-Prince's poorest slums.

"When they are on an operation," according to the report, the MINUSTAH "APCs are mounted with a large, fixed machine gun manned by a soldier. He is surrounded by other soldiers who stand inside the APCs with their heads and shoulders exposed, each holding an assault rifle in the ready position." With such vehicles speeding through crowded and narrow streets, civilian deaths were unavoidable. Because none of the UN soldiers spoke Kreyol, the violence was made worse by their inability to communicate with either residents or the HNP.

Griffin and Stotzky observed a raid into the Bel Air slum: the "operation began with one or two helicopters hovering over the target neighborhood, while HNP

officers gathered in trucks (pickups and SUVs) and on foot just outside. Most officers dressed in black, with black helmets and face masks, all carried large semi-automatic rifles, or fully automatic assault rifles.” Not only did the UN soldiers participate in the violence—shooting a man who was simply walking to work—but they also used their APCs to seal off the neighborhood from reporters. The shooting lasted for hours, and in its aftermath the investigators witnessed a street full of bodies.

In a separate petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Griffin and 13 others describe the results of a June 2005 raid by MINUSTAH into Bel Air: seven dead, including an unarmed man sitting in a wheelchair in his courtyard, who was shot by Brazilian soldiers.

Credible epidemiological reports have also linked MINUSTAH soldiers to the cholera epidemic that has stricken more than 363,000 Haitians, killing at least 5,500 in the past year.

Cables released by WikiLeaks have also exposed other US military operations affecting Haiti. Three cables originating from the US Embassy in Nassau, Bahamas, describe the planning of joint naval operations to keep Haitian refugees away from that country.

WikiLeaks is working with *Haiti Liberte*, a weekly publication sympathetic to Aristide and published by members of the Haitian diaspora, to release the cables. In its articles, *Haiti Liberte* has put much focus on the actions of individuals and the political machinations of the United States government. In releasing the three cables from the Bahamas, for example, the web site focuses on the United States’ search for a pretext for overthrowing Aristide, while the government of the Bahamas was pleading for US help in protecting him.

In April 2003, writes *Haiti Liberte*, the US was trying to use a clause from the “Interamerican Democratic Charter” of the OAS to “find a pseudo-judicial lever to eliminate Aristide.” Later, in February 2004, as the Bahamas Prime Minister Perry Christie pleaded with the US to stop the impending coup, a cable arrogantly boasted that he would “Defer to the U.S. as ‘top dog.’”

For the most part, *Haiti Liberte* misses the broader picture of US military strivings in the region. A

February 23, 2004, cable from the Nassau embassy, for example, describes requests from the government of the Bahamas for US government aid in building a deep-sea port for the Royal Bahamian Defense Force to use as a base while turning back Haitian boat refugees.

A US naval exercise with the Orwellian name “Operation Compassion” was being carried out for that purpose, and the US was willing to offer refueling at Guantanamo Bay if the Bahamas would commit at least three ships to the exercise. Arguing that refueling at Guantanamo would be cheaper than helping to build a port on the Great Inagua island in the Bahamas archipelago, the US embassy refused to provide funds for that effort. The government of the Bahamas had a fallback plan of asking the Royal Caribbean Corporation for help in building the port.

One of the Nassau cables also indicates that MINUSTAH would disguise a renewed French desire to send troops: “[W]hile France has indicated a willingness to send military assistance to Haiti, the specter of French troops in Haiti at this time is a very sensitive issue, particularly as France is the former colonizer and Haiti is currently ‘celebrating’ the 200th anniversary of discarding that yoke. A joint dispatch under the UN banner would be more palatable.”



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