

Imperialist powers prepare to keep UN forces in Haiti

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Amid new controversy, the United Nations is debating renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. Known by its French initials, MINUSTAH, the “mission” is comprised mainly of UN soldiers and police, and has occupied the country since shortly after the overthrow of democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Having gone hat in hand to the IMF and the Clinton Global Initiative for money in recent months, Haiti’s new president Michel Martelly appeared before the UN at the end of last week to seek maintenance of current troop levels. While he made only disguised references to MINUSTAH in his September 23 address to the UN, Martelly told the *New York Times* that he is opposed to any troop withdrawal.

The MINUSTAH mandate has been broad since its inception: not just “public safety” and “public order,” but “to support the constitutional and political processes” and take a direct role in managing Haitian elections. After the January 2010 earthquake, MINUSTAH was also tasked with disaster relief.

In actual practice, MINUSTAH has killed innocent civilians during raids into the Cite Soleil and Bel Air slums and credible epidemiological reports have linked MINUSTAH soldiers to the ongoing cholera epidemic. (See: “WikiLeaks cables detail US military designs on Haiti”)

The latest outrage occurred in July, when five Uruguayan soldiers raped an 18-year-old boy in the southern Haitian city of Port-Salut. While the soldiers have been returned to Uruguay for trial after the release of a cell phone video of the crime, it has been brushed off in public comments by both Martelly and MINUSTAH. In his speech before the UN, Martelly obliquely referred to the rape as a “smudge” on the

UN’s reputation, while asking the General Assembly not to “overlook the forest for the trees.” MINUSTAH offered its “regrets,” along with the possibility of future financial support for the victim.

More generally, the UN forces are in Haiti not to assist the population, but to oversee imperialist interests and act as a bulwark against a popular revolt in a country dominated by unspeakable economic conditions.

During the debate over renewing MINUSTAH’S mandate, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon publicly stated his desire to reduce troop levels to the pre-earthquake level of approximately 9,000. Security Council resolution 1927, passed in June 2010, increased the force to more than 13,300—of whom 8,940 are soldiers and nearly 4,400 are police.

The police component has been training and working with the Haitian National Police, under the guise of giving Haiti “autonomy” once the HNP is strong enough to protect the political and social status quo. From the point of view of the ruling elite, a dangerous vacuum was created when Aristide disbanded the Haitian army (the *Forces Armees d’Haiti*, or FAd’H). Dr. Paul Farmer pointed out in a recent column that this army was never used in a war with an external enemy, i.e., it was used entirely for repression of the Haitian population.

Resolution 1927 also includes the standard claim (or threat) that in every crisis there are “new opportunities.” It is reasonable to assume that one “opportunity” discussed after the earthquake was the forced relocation of Haitians back to the countryside to relieve impossible crowding in the slums around Port au Prince. Martelly, an extreme reactionary, who ran as the candidate of Repons Peyizan (Kreyol for Peasant Response), would have no principled difference with

such a program.

Machinations surrounding the Haiti occupation are not new at the UN. A US Embassy cable from January 2007, released by WikiLeaks and entitled “Preval-Taiwan Relationship: The Love Connection”, described events that led China to threaten a veto at the UN Security Council in regard to a renewal of the MINUSTAH mandate.

Haiti and Taiwan have had diplomatic ties since 1956, because the regime of Chiang Kai-shek supported the Duvalier dictatorship during the Cold War. China accepted that status quo for many years until September 2006, when Haiti offered to sponsor Taiwan’s bid for a permanent UN seat.

Other US Embassy cables released this August by WikiLeaks reveal the close management by that embassy of MINUSTAH, which in turn manipulated Haitian politics and policing in the years following the 2004 coup.

A November 2005 cable, for example, relays a MINUSTAH request for deployment of 11 helicopters during the scheduled presidential elections. The helicopters were ostensibly to be used for transporting ballots and civilian personnel before the vote, but were to be deployed from military compounds at a time when MINUSTAH was involved in suppressing political opposition. A cable from early 2006 details plans to limit the number of polling places in the countryside, mainly because of “inefficiency” and cost.

Complaining that setting up additional polling places “would force MINUSTAH to print, sort, and distribute extra ballots,” former Ambassador Timothy Carney (who also served in Iraq under Jay Garner in 2003) wrote, “the controversy surrounding the location and numbers of voting centers is sensitive, however, and we will take additional steps to ensure that the IGOH [Interim Government of Haiti] and the Core Group stand behind the CEP [Haiti’s Provisional Electoral Council] and MINUSTAH in maintaining the current number of voting centers. Any large-scale effort to revisit the number and location of voting centers would derail the distribution of voting lists and ballots and indefinitely delay elections preparations.”

The right to vote was not the only freedom suppressed by MINUSTAH. After a February 2005 protest by residents of Bel Air led to bickering between the HNP and MINUSTAH’s police contingent, the

Commissioner of the latter complained to US Congressman William Delahunt (D-MA) that “the HNP requirement that demonstrators receive a permit was a standard requisite throughout the world.” The residents of Bel Air had not complied with this “standard” before demanding their rights. The police Commissioner then claimed “in an attempt to provoke the UN and the HNP, demonstrators were refusing to apply for a permit and then demanding to march in the most provocative time and place in order to provoke a response that might discredit the UN, the HNP and the IGOH. He said that over the last few months, despite UN efforts, demonstrators had shown an unwillingness to negotiate and a resistance to cooperation.”

Even these suppressions of democracy were not enough to satisfy American officials. In a June 2005 cable, then-Ambassador James Foley warned that planned elections were in jeopardy because of political instability, and asked for deployment of at least 500 American troops. Putting aside all pretenses about democracy, Foley warned, “a temporary deployment of U.S. forces is the only way to secure the elections and a successful transition and to prevent the kind of sustained instability that would provoke a much longer and costlier U.S. military intervention.”



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