

Haiti: What the Clinton e-mails reveal about US election-rigging

John Marion
24 August 2016

In November 2010, Haiti held a first round of presidential elections in which no candidate received an absolute majority. The leading candidates were Mirlande Manigat, an academic and widow of politician Leslie Manigat; Jude Célestin of outgoing President René Préval's Inite party; and Michel Martelly, a musician with ties to members of the Duvalier regime. Preliminary results showed that Manigat and Célestin would advance to the second round, but there were accusations that Inite, then in power, had committed fraud.

The Organization of American States (OAS) and US State Department intervened, and in an equally suspect count of first-round ballots insisted that Martelly had placed second, ahead of Célestin. Then-US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice threatened a cutoff of US aid to Haiti if Célestin did not withdraw from the second round in favor of Martelly, and also threatened Préval with exile. In the March 20 second round, which saw voter turnout of only 23 percent, Martelly beat Manigat.

Martelly's five-year presidency was characterized by corruption, the reconstitution of the Haitian army, and the *de facto* cancellation of municipal and legislative elections. Mayors were appointed by Martelly's central government instead of being elected, and during his final year, there was no parliament. One of Martelly's final acts, in December 2015, was to create by decree an unregulated offshore banking center on the island of La Gonâve.

The efforts of Hillary Clinton's State Department to manipulate the 2010-2011 elections in favor of the comprador Martelly are shown in the e-mails released by the State Department under the Freedom of Information Act.

Like the e-mails as a whole, they reveal not extraordinary actions, but ordinary, day-to-day discussions among officials doing the business of US

imperialism, in this case, running Haiti like a colonial possession, which it is in all but name.

Many of the e-mails are heavily redacted, but nonetheless reveal maneuvering by Cheryl Mills, then-Ambassador to Haiti Kenneth Merten, his predecessor Thomas Adams, US embassy Political Officer Pierre Antoine Louis, embassy "political counselor" Peter Kujawinski, and others. Among the e-mails is one from Deputy Chief of Mission David Lindwall to Merten and Kujawinski with the subject "Out of the box thinking on elections." The State Department's .pdf of this e-mail thread includes large boxes of blanked-out text and a page marked in bold: "Page Denied."

Merten was an assistant to Condoleezza Rice prior to his appointment as US Ambassador to Haiti by Barack Obama. In an interview this month, he admitted to a reporter from *Le Nouvelliste* that Martelly turned in his US Legal Permanent Residence card at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince in 2011. The Haitian electoral law in effect at the time stipulated that candidates had to have lived in the country for five years before being elected; Martelly was therefore ineligible to be president when he was installed by the "international community."

In a December 8, 2010, e-mail with the subject "Private Sector + Mulet: Celestin Should withdraw," Merten wrote to Mills, Adams, and Lindwall that "I have called Martelly camp telling them that he needs to get on radio telling people to not pillage. Peaceful demo OK: pillage is not."

In an e-mail thread started by a Jean-Lucien Cantave that was forwarded to Merten by Kujawinski, Martelly is said to have declared "that his mission was to get Haiti's people out of misery by bringing in investments and that he did not intend to stir away from his goal." Martelly was later known for his slogan "Haiti is open for business," and one of his prime ministers, Laurent Lamothe, cynically touted the vacations of wealthy

tourists as “a tourism of solidarity.”

A May 2015 article in *Le Nouvelliste*, titled “Edmond Mulet, the Proconsul,” described the OAS and UN machinations after the first round of voting. Mulet, a Guatemalan diplomat, was at the time the head of MINUSTAH, the UN’s occupying force in Haiti. Ricardo Seitenfus, a Brazilian law professor and OAS Special Representative to Haiti, wrote about attending an emergency meeting at Mulet’s house on the day of the election. Seitenfus wrote that the accusations of fraud, which were announced before noontime, “seemed to have been prepared” long before the election. In fact, the room at the Hotel Karibe where 12 of 18 opposition candidates—including Manigat and Martelly—accused Inite of fraud had been rented well in advance of the election.

While waiting for the meeting to start, Mulet told Seitenfus, “I’ve just telephoned Préval to inform him that a plane will be at his disposition for leaving the country” within 48 hours. As the meeting progressed, Seitenfus “realized that the position of Mulet was [also] that of several ambassadors of important countries.” Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive arrived and, before asking whether Préval would be allowed to finish his term, remarked that “it would be interesting if there were at least one Haitian in a conclave that will decide the future of Haiti.”

The clearest indication of the US role is in a January 29, 2011, e-mail from Laura G. (whose last name and e-mail address are not given) to Cheryl Mills. The e-mail refers several times to the “solution” of putting Martelly in the second round and allowing Préval to stay in power in the meantime. The writer tells Mills that she “needs to counter what appears to be a building up and potential unifying of opposition parties,” that “this solution” is “in usg best interest,” and that “IC [the international community] for many here equals USG.”

Laura also states that “confidentially - i met with Mullet (sic) yesterday and...he thinks that somehow the mms [Michel Martelly] solution and RP [Rene Préval] staying will be accepted by all.” She then advises Mills, “I think you need enhance message outreach strategy w Haitian surrogates.”

Mills did just that—“enhanced the message outreach strategy”—by giving Clinton a “message frame” for a speech the next day, in which reality was turned on its head: Clinton was advised to say that “the votes of the people of Haiti must be counted fairly.” In a second thread based on the same original e-mail and available in the WikiLeaks archive, Kujawinski dismissively calls

public opinion “the flavor of the month” and callously asks, “remember when nobody could stop talking about Duvalier? Now, he’s barely mentioned even though he’s still here.”

The second round of presidential elections was held on March 20, 2011, and the Clinton e-mails show how closely the State Department monitored the vote counts afterward. In a March 24 e-mail to Mills, Adams, Merten and others, Political Officer Pierre Antoine Louis included such details as: 34.19% of presidential, 24.02% of senatorial, and 35.53% of Chamber of Deputies procès-verbaux had been counted (a procès-verbal, or PV, is a summary of votes from a polling station). Attorneys were “taking about 5 minutes to review legislative PVs” and 6-7 minutes on each presidential one.

In the same chain, Shamim Kazemi in the State Department’s Office of the Haiti Special Coordinator wrote that a “CEP spokesperson held a press conference today at the CTV: no information unkown to us was presented, but it was a positive step towards having more transparency for the public.” Mills then wrote to Kazemi, Louis, Adams, Merten, and others, asking, “what is our own sense of what should be done?” Louis’s response in the same chain is heavily redacted.

The Clinton e-mails also document the State Department’s and MINUSTAH’s manipulation of legislative election results as votes were counted in April 2011. An e-mail from Merten to Mulet on April 21, for example, expresses anger that Haiti’s Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) had decided in favor of Inite in the vote tallies for 17 seats. Merten coldly writes that “it looks like our friends in the CEP may have made another misstep.” Mulet responds by offering to arrange a meeting of foreign diplomats that same afternoon.

One e-mail that is not redacted is from Mills to the band of conspirators on March 20, as the polls were closing on the second round, gloating that “you do great elections. And make us all look good.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact