

Haitian army general staff appointed amid tensions with the Dominican Republic

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Recent events show that workers and peasants face grave dangers as the ruling elite on both sides of Hispaniola resurrect figures from their violent pasts.

Haitian President Jovenel Moïse announced on March 13 the appointment of six general staff members for the reconstituted Forces Armées d'Haïti. All six held senior posts in the FAd'H before it was disbanded by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1995. Three have blood on their hands from the period of the Raoul Cédras military dictatorship in the early 1990s.

Colonel Jean-Robert Gabriel, a new assistant chief of staff, was convicted in absentia for his role in the April 1994 Raboteau Massacre under Cédras. After his appointment to the new general staff was announced, the Bureau des Avocats Internationaux, which had secured his conviction in connection with Raboteau in 2000, issued a press release noting that not only was he complicit in the massacre, but he also was a torturer under Cédras.

A Haitian court overturned Gabriel's conviction in 2006, using a technicality it had dredged up from a 1928 law passed during the American occupation.

Brigade General Sadrac Saintil, the new army chief of staff, was a Lieutenant Colonel during the Cédras regime and participated in the official whitewash of the Raboteau Massacre.

Another assistant chief of staff in the resurrected army, Derby Guerrier, had his assets frozen by the US Treasury in 1993 because of his role in the Cédras dictatorship. The current acting commander in chief of the FAd'H, Jodel Lesage, served in the military of Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier and was trained by the US military as a member of the Leopard Corps.

In announcing the appointments, Moïse claimed that the army will be used to manage responses to natural disasters and as a coast guard. He undoubtedly views it

as a replacement for the United Nations' hated forces and the US military, which deployed far fewer marines after Hurricane Matthew than after the 2010 earthquake.

The US, France, and the UN view the Haitian National Police, which they helped build up to 15,000 members, as a more effective means of suppressing domestic unrest than military troops. US Senator Marco Rubio had this tactic in mind when he pretended last month to oppose Moïse's military appointments, telling the *Miami Herald*, "I continue to question why, with so many other needs, Haiti would pursue creating an army."

While the reconstituted army has fewer than 200 troops at present, Haitian Defense Minister Hervé Denis plans to recruit 5,000.

Despite his protestations about human rights, Moïse also sees the army as a means of addressing tensions along the border with the Dominican Republic. There is currently no criminal extradition treaty between the two countries, but in March the Dominican military demanded the extradition of a Haitian suspected in the murder of a Dominican husband and wife in Pedernales.

In response, Haitian judge Françoise Morailles told *Le Nouvelliste* that "more than ever it is time for the FAd'H...to get to work on the violent situation with which Haitians find themselves confronted at the border."

Ramfis Domínguez Trujillo, the grandson of murderous dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, has announced his candidacy for the upcoming presidential election in the Dominican Republic. According to a Gallup poll last month, 42 percent of Dominicans support his candidacy while 51 percent are opposed. In order to give his campaign a populist air, Trujillo is

promising to institute anti-corruption measures that would include 30-year jail terms for guilty officials.

More ominously, he is proposing to build a border wall between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic is already monitoring parts of the border with drones and cameras.

On Sunday, according to the *Providence Journal*, Trujillo told a group of Dominican emigrants in Rhode Island that “we need to hold a tough and firm stance before the peaceful Haitian invasion. We need to remove all Haitians who are in the country illegally.”

In the Pedernales case, a Haitian named Edner Noël is accused of murdering a couple on whose Dominican ranch he had worked. He was captured and jailed in Haiti after crossing the border.

After the murders, vigilantes drove through Pedernales in a pickup truck with a loud speaker on March 13 and demanded that all Haitians leave within 24 hours. At least 250 families fled across the border to Anse-à-Pitres. Dominican President Danilo Medina ordered the deployment of 60 soldiers to Pedernales, along with 30 anti-riot police.

There are conflicting reports of whether Haitians had been killed in retaliation, with the mayor of Anse-à-Pitres on the Haitian side of the border telling *Le Nouvelliste* that he had heard reports of deaths. Tensions continued to be high two weeks after the murders, with the international market still closed by Dominican authorities.

In a second incident, a Dominican was murdered on March 19 in Barahona province, with a Haitian co-worker named Jacques Estimphil accused of the crime. The Haitian refugee support group GARR told *Alterpresse* that approximately 100 people had fled across the border to Haiti to avoid reprisals. Dominican soldiers stopped people who were trying to flee and demanded bribes of 150 pesos.



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