

Haiti and the ugly face of Biden's "human rights" imperialism

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The new US administration of Democratic President Joe Biden has pitched its foreign policy as a radical departure from that of Donald Trump, claiming that Washington is back in the business of promoting democracy and human rights.

As Biden put it in a February 4 speech at the State Department, his aim is to "rally the nations of the world to defend democracy globally, to push back the authoritarianism's advance."

That Washington is in no position to preach "democracy" to anyone has been made abundantly clear by the January 6 fascist coup attempt at the US Capitol. In any case, this rhetoric is meant solely as a propaganda cover for US imperialism's pursuit of an even more aggressive policy against China and Russia.

The cynicism and fraud of these "democratic" and "anti-authoritarian" pretensions finds its most damning exposure in the policy being pursued by the Biden administration in Haiti, the most impoverished country in the Western Hemisphere and the victim of over a century of crimes committed by US imperialism.

In its "own backyard," the Biden administration is backing an authoritarian regime in Port-au-Prince. Simultaneously, in a brutal violation of human rights, it is shipping planeloads of refugees, including babies and children, back into the violent and dangerous political situation in Haiti.

Last Friday, the US State Department came down squarely in support of the corrupt and dictatorial government of President Jovenel Moïse against mass demonstrations and general strikes challenging his extra-constitutional bid to remain in power.

Moïse took office in 2017 following rigged elections, announcing at the time his personal affinity for Donald Trump as a fellow "entrepreneur." He succeeded in what Trump attempted to do, consolidating a presidential dictatorship based on the violence and terror of armed gangs, enabling Moïse and his cronies to loot Haiti's devastated economy.

Under Haiti's Constitution, Moïse's term of office ended

on Sunday, February 7, but he has refused to step down, claiming another year in power in which he intends to push through a new constitution that is being drafted solely by himself and his political allies.

Biden is continuing the policy of Trump in backing the US puppet against popular opposition. Moïse's rise to the presidency, however, was engineered under the Obama administration and, in particular, by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her husband, ex-President Bill Clinton, who was named UN special envoy to Haiti. They previously had pushed the 2011 presidential candidacy of Moïse's predecessor, the carnival singer Michel "Sweet Micky" Martelly, a political ally of the right-wing death squads that were the legacy of the US-backed dictatorship of the Duvalier family, which exercised a reign of terror over the country for three decades.

The chief attraction of both these right-wing puppets was their subservience to US imperialism and the profit interests of the clothing sweatshop, agribusiness, tourism and mining sectors extracting wealth from the impoverished country.

Moïse's rule has been characterized by a steadily tightening dictatorial grip over the Haitian state. He not only dissolved the country's parliament—ruling by decree for over a year—but has also stripped the country's local officials of their power. He has employed assassination, massacres and police state repression against his opponents. Armed gangs led by former and current police have been unleashed against neighborhoods in the capital of Port-au-Prince as well as areas of the countryside to crush opposition and intimidate workers and the oppressed rural poor.

Popular opposition grew against the Moïse regime, fueled by his personal involvement in a corruption scheme that saw the outright theft of some \$4 billion in Petrocaribe aid provided by Venezuela in the form of loans and cheap oil that was resold on the world market.

Once oil prices collapsed and the aid dried up, Moïse demonstratively aligned himself with the Trump administration's campaign of sanctions and military threats against Venezuela. At the same time, his government

implemented draconian IMF-dictated austerity measures that drove up fuel costs, devalued the national currency and drastically deepened already intolerable levels of poverty, leading to massive protests in July 2018 demanding Moïse's ouster.

On February 7, the day that Moïse was supposed to leave office, the Haitian president held a press conference at the Port-au-Prince airport, announcing the arrest of 23 people, including a Supreme Court justice, claiming that they were involved in a coup plot that included his assassination.

The arrests were clearly Moïse's response to the State Department declaration last Friday that Washington supported his refusal to step down. The alleged coup plot served as a cover for his own extra-constitutional coup. He concluded his remarks, streamed on Facebook Live, by declaring, unconvincingly, "I am not a dictator."

On Wednesday, the regime stepped up its repression, attacking a large demonstration led by university students in Port-au-Prince with tear gas and gunfire, and singling out reporters and photographers covering the protest for attack, injuring at least two of them.

The State Department's statement backing Moïse's bid to remain in power was couched in sanctimonious recommendations that he "should exercise restraint in issuing decrees," when he is ruling entirely by decree, and that he organize legislative elections "as soon as technically feasible."

While reporting on the events in Haiti in the US media has been scarce, both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* published worried editorials this week on the situation, no doubt concerned that the hypocrisy of US imperialism's democratizing pretensions is too nakedly on display.

The *Post* lamented that "Haiti's chronic hardship and hunger have long been entwined with a long line of corrupt autocratic and brutal leaders who have exacerbated the country's instability," with Moïse "among the worst." One would never guess that Washington had any role in imposing these "brutal leaders."

February 7, the day that Moïse gave his "I am not a dictator" speech at the Port-au-Prince airport, was the 35th anniversary of the downfall of Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, who was flown out of the same airport aboard a US Air Force plane to escape a popular revolt. The Duvalier dictatorship—whose rise followed the domination of the Haitian army, which was forged in a 20-year occupation of the country by the US Marines—began with the coming to power of Papa Doc in 1957. It was responsible for the killing and torture of tens of thousands of Haitians at the hands of the military and the dreaded Tontons Macoute. US imperialism saw the murderous regime as a bulwark against

communism and revolution in the Caribbean.

After the Duvaliers' downfall, US governments, Democratic and Republican alike, sought to reconstruct a reliable client state capable of defending the markets and investments of US firms attracted by starvation wages, as well as the property and wealth of the Haitian ruling elite. This entailed support for two bloody military coups and sending US troops back into Haiti twice over the course of two decades.

As for the *Times*, its editorial board lauded Washington's colonial-style domination of the Caribbean nation, declaring paternalistically that "Haitians tend to look to their powerful northern neighbor for guidance in times of unrest." It went on to offer a prescription for yet another imperialist intervention, with the United States joining with "some combination" of the OAS, the UN or the European Union in cobbling together a "transitional government," i.e., another puppet regime in service of US imperialism.

As if the Biden administration's backing for the hideous regime in Port-au-Prince was not enough, it is simultaneously loading Haitian deportees daily onto Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) charter planes bound from the Mexican border to Haiti. While Biden had supposedly ordered a 100-day deportation moratorium and instructed ICE to pursue only dangerous criminals for deportation, the Democratic administration is expelling an estimated 1,800 Haitians, including infants and young children. They are being sent to a country in deep political crisis, with state-sponsored murder and criminality running rampant. The aim of this cruel policy is to intimidate other refugees and immigrants thinking of crossing the US border.

The pretext provided for these deportations is a 77-year-old public health statute invoked by the Trump administration in response to the coronavirus pandemic. They are being carried out, however, with complete indifference to the catastrophic implications of the spread of the virus in Haiti, a country of 11 million people with a total of 126 intensive care unit beds, 68 ventilators and 25 physicians per 100,000 inhabitants, one tenth the number in the US.

This is the true and ugly face of the Biden administration's "human rights" foreign policy. It is no accident that it finds its most accurate expression in a country where Washington has its longest and most sustained record of bloody imperialist crimes.



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