

US brings new charges against Haitian suspect in assassination of President Jovenel Moïse

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A US federal court last Thursday announced new criminal charges against one of the major suspects in the assassination plot that led to the killing of Haiti's President Jovenel Moïse last summer.

US prosecutors brought charges against Rodolphe Jaar, a Haitian businessman and former drug trafficker who spent three years in a United States prison for trafficking cocaine. Jaar is being charged for his alleged involvement in helping to finance and directing the conspiracy against Moïse. He was taken into US custody on Wednesday following six months in hiding. After being detained in the Dominican Republic earlier this month, he agreed to come to the United States to face charges in the plot, according to prosecutors.

Court documents unsealed during his hearing in Florida revealed Jaar admitted to providing weapons and logistical support for the mission. The former drug trafficker is the second suspect to be charged by US prosecutors in connection with the assassination of Moïse, who was gunned down in his residence on July 7. Mario Palacios, a retired Colombian Army commando accused of taking part in the assault, was charged with the same crime in Miami's U.S. District Court earlier this month.

Upon returning to Haiti in the mid-2010s, Jaar reportedly ended his participation in the drug trade and established a chain of poultry shops in Port-au-Prince, the nation's capital. In an interview with the *New York Times* earlier this month, he asserted that he was recruited into the plot by a former Justice Ministry official and claimed he joined out of political differences with Moïse, who was spearheading an attempt to establish an authoritarian regime before his assassination. He also acknowledged joining in the hopes of getting preferential business treatment from the new government.

Rather than signifying a determination on the part of US authorities to establish the truth behind the assassination, the arrest of Jaar points to an acceleration of the imperialist intervention in Haiti. In fact, the same interview Jaar held with the *Times* raised evidence pointing to the United States being heavily involved in orchestrating the assault against Moïse.

The interview with the *Times* was reportedly held in an empty construction site in Haiti earlier this month while Jaar was evading authorities. The former drug trafficker not only admitted to helping finance and planning the plot but also that he agreed to join the

conspiracy because he was told by other plotters that it had the full support of the United States. "If the US government was involved, then it was safe," Jaar said. This explosive revelation, which has been buried in the international press and in the *Times* coverage, directly implicates the United States in carrying out the assassination.

Jaar asserted that he was unaware that Moïse would be assassinated, which suggests he and other plotters who have been detained could have been used as patsies to divert attention from powerful figures within Haiti's ruling kleptocracy and political rivals of Moïse, whom many believe are responsible for Moïse's killing with the backing of US officials. Jaar told the *Times* he thought the goal of the mission was to depose, not kill, the president and that he was left in the dark throughout the entire endeavor. According to Jaar, the plotters intended to install former Supreme Court Judge Windelle Coq-Thélot as the new president.

The former justice official who recruited Jaar, Joseph Felix-Badio, is also one of the suspected plotters who assured Jaar of US support. Badio has been on the run from Haitian authorities on suspicion of organizing the attack. Haiti's former chief prosecutor, Bed-Ford Claude, revealed in September that phone records showed Prime Minister Ariel Henry had twice communicated with him on the night of the crime and made two calls to him the morning after the assassination.

Two Haitian officials told the *Times* this month that four months after the assassination, Badio went to Henry's official residence twice—both times at night—and was able to walk through without being confronted by the prime minister's security guards.

Claude quickly sought charges against Henry as a co-conspirator in the assassination and declared that the phone records made him a criminal suspect. Shortly after calling Claude for questioning, Henry then demanded Rockefeller Vincent, the country's Justice Minister, fire the prosecutor. After Vincent refused, both of them were removed from their posts days later on completely bogus charges.

The American federal prosecution coincides with the investigation launched by Haitian authorities into the assassination, with Prime Minister Henry overseeing the proceedings. Henry, a neurosurgeon and longtime asset of US intelligence, was the handpicked choice of Washington to head a puppet regime. His installation in the aftermath of Moïse's killing

followed the intervention of the so-called Core Group, made up of diplomats and foreign policymakers from North and South America and Europe, along with representatives from the United Nations.

US officials embraced Henry once Claude Joseph, the current foreign minister, was forced out after unilaterally declaring himself prime minister following the assassination.

This devastated country, whose working class and peasantry face unbearable poverty as a result of decades of US-backed dictatorships and the looting of the nation's wealth by Haiti's corrupt bourgeoisie, is embroiled in a massive political and social crisis. Most of the population sees the government as completely illegitimate. Henry, who did not attain office through election, is broadly hated among the Haitian masses. He heads a right-wing regime containing reactionary operatives from Moïse's P.H.T.K., or Bald Head party.

On Friday, the constitutional crisis facing the country intensified when Henry declared via tweet that he would not end his term on February 7, as some local political parties demanded, and that his administration will organize "free and democratic elections" on an unspecified date. "The next tenant of the National Palace will be a president freely elected by all the Haitian people," he wrote. The announcement triggered massive popular anger, while provoking calls by the imperialist powers for stepped-up intervention.

The country has also seen a sharp spike in kidnappings by armed gangs, who represent warring factions of Haiti's venal ruling class who are seeking to consolidate power. Earlier this month, gunmen tried to kill Henry during a ceremony to mark the anniversary of the country's independence, an attempt that officials say the prime minister narrowly survived. Poverty is also deepening as the cost of living rises amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and the security and economic crisis is leading desperate Haitians to flee the country by sea.

Henry's political history has always been that of a loyal servant of US imperialism. He served as vice president on the so-called Council of Wise Men, a body formed by the US and its allies to legitimize the US-backed 2004 coup that deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and sent him to Africa aboard a US military aircraft. Over 1,000 US Marines invaded the country the next day. The council presided over the creation of an unelected government headed by Prime Minister Gérard Latortue, a right-wing talk show host who launched a violent campaign of repression against Aristide's supporters.

Henry subsequently served as minister of interior in the government of President Michel Martelly, presiding over the repression of a series of mass protests against price hikes, corruption and crooked elections. Martelly, a former singer nicknamed "Sweet Micky," is closely tied to the Haitian police, ex-military and former members of the hated Tonton Macoutes, the murderous secret police of the "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier dictatorships.

The cover-up of the assassination and the elevation of an unelected Henry is the latest in a long string of colonial-style interventions in Haiti, dating back to the 1915 invasion launched by President Woodrow Wilson, which was followed by a 30-year occupation and savage repression of popular opposition, the

creation of a Haitian army to continue this repression and then the 30-year dictatorship of the Duvaliers.

The evidence pointing to Henry's own involvement in the plot to depose and assassinate Moïse profoundly discredits the investigations of both the Haitian government and US authorities which bear all the characteristics of a cover-up.

Forensic examinations of the slain president and other initial inquiries immediately following his death were obstructed when a judge and local court clerks involved in evidence gathering received death threats from unknown callers and visitors, who intimidated them into modifying witnesses' sworn statements.

The clerks, Marcelin Valentin and Waky Philostène, along with court Justice Carl Henry Destin, told the media in August that their requests for protection were ignored by top authorities. The local officials claimed the probe into Moïse's death has been hampered due to deliberate efforts on the part of high-ranking officials to suppress politically incriminating information. "There are great interests at play that are not interested in solving this case," Valentin said. "There's no progress, no will to find the truth."

Soon after then-acting Prime Minister Claude Joseph asked Interpol and security agencies from the United States and Colombia to send investigators to Haiti, many complained of struggling to gain access to evidence and to the suspects, according to officials familiar with the investigation. Moreover, none of the suspects detained or sought by the Haitian police appeared to have the resources or the connections to finance the plot, which involved flying in two dozen highly trained former commandos from Colombia.

So far 44 people have been detained by Haitian investigators, including the retired Colombian commandos accused of taking part in the assault. However, reports and comments made by Colombian President Ivan Duque in July indicated that many of the Colombian mercenaries were not even aware of the goals of their mission or that an assassination would take place. According to relatives, they were offered monthly salaries of up to \$2,700 and told they would be providing security for important dignitaries and investors in Haiti.

Henry and other leading government figures have pinned central responsibility for the plot on 63-year-old Christian Emmanuel Sanon, a doctor who traveled frequently between Florida and Haiti who is implausibly accused of masterminding the conspiracy with the aim of seizing power once Moïse was killed.

However, Haitian authorities offered little to no explanation as to how Sanon, a US citizen who had lived for two decades in Florida, could have planned to take over once the president was killed. They have also failed to explain how Sanon, who filed for bankruptcy protection in a Florida court in 2013, financed a team of Colombian mercenaries, some of whom received American military training, to carry out such a coordinated assault.



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