

Canada preparing to lead new military intervention in imperialist-ravaged Haiti

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At Washington's behest, Canada's Liberal government is leading preparations for yet another imperialist military intervention in Haiti, the Western hemisphere's most impoverished country.

Under conditions where the country's 11 million inhabitants face a desperate health and social crisis—including mounting deaths from cholera and famine—and where there is mass opposition towards the imperialist-installed government of President Ariel Henry, Washington and its imperialist allies are determined to stabilize capitalist rule in the island nation through military force.

Henry public requested foreign military intervention in October. His regime has been increasingly crippled and discredited by a combination of mass popular protests demanding his resignation and new elections, and the occupation of large swathes of the county by criminal gangs with ties to rival factions of the Haitian oligarchy.

The Biden administration quickly made clear its support for a military deployment by drafting a UN Security Council resolution authorizing such action. However, given the popular anger in Haiti over Washington's long and bloody record on the island—including its colonial occupation from 1915 to 1934 and support for the bloody dictatorship of the Duvaliers—the US prefers that Canada assume responsibility for organizing and leading the new mission.

The Trudeau government is eager to oblige its closest ally and principal military-security partner. But it also fears being sucked into a bloody quagmire. The gangs are heavily armed, and even more importantly, any foreign military intervention led by Canada risks facing mass opposition, especially from the working people of Port-au Prince, Cap-Haïtien, and other large cities. In recent years, Canada has been increasingly targeted by protests over its role as Washington's partner in imperialist brigandage in Haiti, including through the so-called Core Group of nations.

The push of Henry and Washington for a military intervention intensified as protests swept Haiti following September's abolition of oil price subsidies at the behest of the International Monetary Fund. Henry's appeal for military aid triggered further demonstrations, which were brutally suppressed by the Haitian National Police (HNP). To further this repression, Canada airlifted armoured vehicles to Haiti in mid-October.

Widespread food shortages, combined with a cholera epidemic that has claimed over 290 lives and infected an estimated 14,000 since October, are fuelling fears in Ottawa and Washington that the social devastation in Haiti could destabilize the entire region and trigger social unrest in neighbouring countries. Of especial concern to the imperialist vultures in Ottawa and Washington, who have imposed one savage IMF restructuring program on the country after another, is that an implosion of Haiti will produce a "refugee crisis"—i.e., a flood of people seeking to escape repression, violence and unspeakable social misery.

The cholera epidemic is taking an especially horrific toll on children, with those aged between 1 and 5 making up more than 40 percent of infections. An emergency vaccine campaign launched December 18 with the aim of vaccinating more than one-tenth of the population, and a higher

percentage of young children aged 1 to 5, is expected to fail in many areas that are under gang control due to the inability to guarantee the health care workers' safety.

Estimates suggest that at least 70 percent of the capital, Port-au-Prince, is currently under the control of the gangs, who have long received support from the government and its backers in Haiti's oligarchy.

The gangs have unleashed sustained violence in Port-au-Prince and other cities. Official figures put the death toll from gang violence this year at 1,448, while 1,005 have been kidnapped for ransom. Jimmy "Barbecue" Cherizier, one of the most notorious gang leaders, is a former officer in the Haitian police, and was, at least for a time, working in close association with Henry's assassinated predecessor, Jovenel Moïse.

On top of the epidemic and violence, there is a rapidly worsening food crisis. Last week, Jean-Martin Bauer, head of the World Food Program in Haiti, warned that the country is on the verge of famine. Large portions of the population have nothing to eat due to the drying up of imports and the criminal gang's control of key transport routes, including the north-south highway. The food that remains available is beyond the financial reach of the vast majority of the population, which relies on the informal sector to make ends meet.

Trudeau's "new approach" to securing imperialist interests in Haiti

Earlier this month, Canada's UN ambassador, Bob Rae, travelled to Haiti for a three-day "fact-finding mission," during which he held talks with leading government officials and opposition politicians. The trip was in response to mounting pressure from Biden for Canada to take the lead in putting boots on the ground, likely in cooperation with several Caribbean and South American states. Following a meeting late last week of Trudeau and his national-security crisis Incident Response Group that Rae and Canada's ambassadors to the US and Haiti attended, Ottawa announced that it would be sending additional armoured vehicles to Haiti, as well as a small number of experts to assist the Haitian National Police. The HNP has consistently been a key source of support for the pro-government gangs, with widespread evidence of collusion in brutally suppressing popular protests.

Rae also indicated that Canada supports the far-right, Duvalierist-led attempt to revive the Haitian army, telling CBC, "Name me a country around the world that doesn't have an army. The main thing to recognize right now is that Haiti has a profound security problem."

Discussing Haiti in an interview last week with *La Presse*, Trudeau asserted, "We recognize that we will play a leading role in this."

Indicating that Ottawa is well-advanced in its plans to deploy Canadian Armed Forces personnel to Haiti, Trudeau then said, "We have not taken anything off the table, but with 30 years of experience in Haiti, we know

very well that there are enormous challenges when it comes to interventions. It is clear that our approach has to change this time.”

No one should be fooled by such rhetoric. Like the previous “interventions,” the one now being plotted by Ottawa and Washington has nothing to do with bringing “democracy” or “security” to the people of Haiti. Rather its aim will be to uphold and advance the North American imperialist powers’ predatory geopolitical and economic interests. In so far as there is change in “approach” from the US-led imperialist “regime change” operations launched in 1994 and 2004, it will only be how the intervention is packaged.

The first of these two interventions saw the deployment of a 20,000-strong military force to Haiti in September 1994 to reinstall Jean-Bertrand Aristide as president just three years after his ouster in a US-backed coup. The Clinton administration mounted the operation on the calculation that allowing Aristide to serve out the little more than a year remaining in his presidential term would better correspond with Washington’s global “human rights” imperialist agenda than continuing to prop up Raoul Cedras, an unpopular dictator whose rule was characterized by a reign of terror in Haiti’s impoverished urban neighbourhoods.

Nearly a decade later, Canadian and US troops united to topple Aristide, who, in spite of prostrating himself before the imperialist powers, was seen as an obstacle to their unfettered domination over Haiti and despised by the traditional oligarchy that was a key backer of the decades-long Duvalier dictatorship. The intervention of Canadian and American forces was coordinated with an uprising of fascist gangs—composed of former army personnel and Tonton Macoutes who had served as killers under Cedras—to remove Aristide for a second time. There followed a decade of military occupation by foreign troops under a UN mandate that propped up a series of right-wing, kleptocratic regimes with ties to the old Duvalier dictatorship, including President Michel Martelly.

Following the catastrophic 2010 earthquake, which claimed the lives of over 200,000 Haitians, UN troops from Brazil, Nepal, and other less-developed countries inadvertently introduced cholera into the impoverished nation. The outbreak claimed the lives of over 10,000 people over the subsequent decade.

The Montana Accord and the political forces behind it

In the hopes of reducing Haitian opposition to a Canadian-led imperialist occupation of Haiti and so as not to so blatantly appear as intervening to uphold an unelected, repressive and corrupt regime, the Trudeau government is trying to cobble together a power-sharing deal between Henry and sections of the pro-imperialist opposition.

While in Haiti, Rae met with various opposition politicians associated with the Montana Accord. Named after the hotel where it was negotiated, the accord calls for a “transitional government,” including leading oppositionists, to hold office prior to any election, so as to prevent the neo-Duvalierist faction from using its control of the state apparatus and gangs to manipulate the vote.

In a marked shift, Ottawa recently announced sanctions against leading figures within the Haitian Bald Head Party (PHTK), which has held power with staunch US and Canadian support almost uninterruptedly for over a decade, and with which Henry, although ostensibly “independent,” has worked closely. The half-dozen leading politicians targeted by the sanctions included Martelly and former prime ministers, along with several businessmen.

While at the Francophonie summit in Tunisia last month, Trudeau said of Haiti, “Our approach now is not about doing what one political party or

the government wants. We cannot simply support one side or the other on the political spectrum in Haiti, but this time we’ve implemented serious sanctions on the elite, on these oligarchs, specific individuals who for too long have been directly profiting from violence and instability in Haiti that is harming the Haitian people.”

In early December, Canada announced that it would freeze the assets of Gilbert Bigio, Reynold Deeb, and Sherif Abdallah, three of the richest members of the country’s tiny oligarchy. Known as the “15 families,” they provided the critical backing to the Duvaliers and have dominated economic and political life ever since. Bigio, the country’s only billionaire, owns a private port through which weaponry and drugs have reportedly been smuggled. It is from this layer of oligarchs that support has been provided for the gangs, who were implicated in a series of massacres of government opponents over recent years.

Under Moïse, who was bloodily assassinated in July 2021, massacres of anti-government protesters involving gang members were reported in the Port-au-Prince districts of Bel-Air, La Saline and Cite Soleil. According to Harvard Law School’s International Human Rights Clinic, these incidents showed collusion between the government, gangs and HNP, the very same institution Canada and the US are now supplying with weapons.

The supporters of the Montana Accord, with whom Canada is now working to lend an air of popular legitimacy to a new imperialist military occupation of Haiti are in fact a motley group of venal right-wing politicians who felt excluded from power positions under the Martelly-Moïse governments. They are jockeying for positions in and control of the government for their individual enrichment. These include figures such as Fritz Alphonse Jean, a former governor of the central bank who was briefly prime minister in 2016 under the interim presidency of Jocelerme Privert.

In comments to the CBC in late October, Monique Clesca, a former UN official and now a leading member of the opposition Montana Accord, made clear that the opposition is just as ready to support an imperialist intervention as Henry, provided it has the necessary “legitimacy.” Denouncing Henry’s request for military assistance as “treasonous,” Clesca asked, “Why is (US Secretary of State) Antony Blinken talking to Canada and not talking to us? Why are (Canadian Foreign Minister) Madame Joly and Mr. Trudeau talking to Antony Blinken rather than talking to us? ... We have said we would need technical assistance, we need financial assistance, we would need equipment.”

Nobody should be under any illusions about Ottawa’s intentions. While Trudeau recently invoked a “special relationship” between Canada and Haiti, the reality is that Canadian imperialism has treated the impoverished nation and the entire Caribbean as a source of profit and plunder for well over a century. Its actions and those of its principal allies in the Core Group, the US and France, are what are principally responsible for the social misery and oppression to which capitalism has condemned the Haitian people.



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