

Canada deploys surveillance plane over Haiti to lay groundwork for US-demanded military intervention

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Canada's Liberal government moved closer to launching a full-scale military intervention in Haiti this past weekend, deploying a long-range Canadian Armed Forces surveillance plane to support operations by the country's national police to combat a sustained wave of gang violence. The Western Hemisphere's most impoverished country, Haiti has been gripped for years by an ever widening social calamity, characterized by mass hunger and destitution, the COVID-19 pandemic, a cholera epidemic, and a proliferation of heavily-armed gangs that are allied with competing factions of Haiti's corrupt, pro-imperialist ruling elite.

The Biden administration has been pushing Ottawa behind the scenes and in public statements to assume a leadership role in a military intervention in Haiti since late October. In a joint statement issued Sunday, Canadian Defence Minister Anita Anand and Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly confirmed that a C-140 Aurora spy plane had begun surveilling Haiti, but refused to specify how long the mission would continue. "This Canadian patrol aircraft will provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability to bolster efforts to establish and maintain peace and security for the people of Haiti," the ministers declared in their statement. "The CP-140 aircraft has already deployed to the region and is currently operating over Haiti. It will remain in the region for a number of days."

To describe the blather about Canada working to establish "peace" and "security" for "the people of Haiti" as hypocritical would be an understatement. The social disaster that faces the vast majority of the country's 12 million inhabitants is the outcome of a long series of catastrophic foreign occupations and interventions stretching back over a century, primarily led by US imperialism, but also in recent decades directly involving its Canadian ally.

The last of these interventions began in 2004, when US and Canadian troops collaborated with far-right paramilitary forces associated with the old Duvalier dictatorship—which Washington had backed to the hilt for three decades ending in 1986—to violently overthrow Haiti's elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The intervening two decades have witnessed the imperialist powers in the so-called "Core Group," which includes the US, France and Canada, back a series of increasingly right-wing governments that have presided over deepening social and economic breakdown, especially since the devastating 2010 earthquake.

Under pressure from the Biden administration, the Trudeau Liberal government has made preparations over recent months to mount a new imperialist military occupation of the island nation. The Trudeau government sent a batch of armoured vehicles to the Haitian national police in October and made a second delivery last month. Ottawa also dispatched a fact-finding mission to Port-au-Prince late last year after Ariel Henry, the imperialist-installed acting president, appealed in October 2022 for a foreign military intervention to suppress the criminal gangs that control much of Port-au-Prince and other cities and exact tolls on traffic and the transport of fuel and other essentials.

Henry has held power since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse—in what appears to have been a settling of scores within the traditionally pro-Duvalierist, ultra-right-wing faction of the ruling elite from which Moïse himself hailed. The well-armed gangs, some of which were used by Moïse to suppress popular unrest, are backed by powerful figures within the Haitian oligarchy.

If there is a certain reluctance on the part of the Trudeau government to rush to deploy ground troops to Port-au-Prince, this is certainly not to be explained by any aversion to aggressive military operations in other countries. Over the past two decades, Canadian imperialism has participated side-by-side with its US ally in the savage destruction of Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, and is now in the front ranks of the imperialist war on Russia.

The delay in finalizing the intervention in Haiti has much more to do with the depth of the crisis confronting Haitian capitalism and its pro-imperialist puppet regime, and fears that the attempt to bloodily prop it up could prove costly.

Henry, who is widely suspected of having a hand in Moïse's assassination, is hated by the vast majority of the populace. His rule is also seen as illegitimate by the bourgeois opposition, which has long argued that Moïse's election and that of his predecessor and mentor, Michel Martelly, were the result of manipulation and outright fraud.

Among Haiti's workers and toilers there is mass opposition to American imperialism due to its more than century-long role in bloodily suppressing the democratic and social aspirations of the Haitian people. But there is also widespread and mounting hostility to Canadian imperialism, with repeated protests in recent years targeting Ottawa's role in upholding the country's vicious,

corrupt capitalist ruling elite.

The Liberal government clearly fears that a Canadian-led military intervention would face mass popular opposition from the outset, and that this could dangerously undermine the “democratic” and “human rights” façade behind which Ottawa conducts its predatory foreign policy, including its increasingly significant roles in the US military-strategic offensives against Russia and China.

It also needs to be noted that the gangs are heavily armed and could prove difficult to disarm. As for the National Police, some of whose former personnel are now gang leaders, they are likely to prove a less than reliable ally of a Canadian-led military intervention. Late last month, a group of officers staged a violent day-long protest in Port-au-Prince to press for more state support and weaponry, forcing acting Prime Minister Henry to shelter in the airport as they fired guns into the air. At least 78 police officers have been killed on duty since Moïse’s assassination, including 14 who were kidnapped.

The spy plane mission indicates that a decision on a Canadian-led military intervention may be imminent. During a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the North American leaders’ summit in Mexico City last month, Biden again pressed Ottawa on the issue. If Trudeau has not green-lighted such a deployment by the time the US president visits Canada in March, it could well serve as the backdrop for unveiling a Canadian-led military operation. This is the preferred outcome for the Biden administration, which is eager to avoid yet another US-led operation as it wages war against Russia and intensifies its all-sided campaign of diplomatic, economic and military pressure against China.

Bob Rae, the Trudeau government’s ambassador to the United Nations, told a meeting of the UN Security Council in January that Canada intends to “do things differently than in the past” and “learn from the history of large, outside military interventions in Haiti because they have actually failed to bring about long-term stability for Haitians.” The “solutions” Ottawa is striving for must be “led by Haitians and Haitian institutions,” Rae claimed.

Behind the florid rhetoric, Rae was essentially saying that pressure is being applied behind the scenes to establish a more stable regime that can better front an imperialist intervention. Henry duly sought to oblige his imperialist masters with his announcement February 6 of the creation of a “High Transition Council,” which he stated unanimously supports a foreign military intervention to “restore order.” Its three members represent the political, business and civil sectors. They include Mirlande Manigat, a former right-wing presidential candidate associated with Henry’s supporters; Laurent Saint-Cyr, president of Haiti’s Chamber of Commerce; and Pastor Calixte Fleuridor, from the country’s Protestant Federation.

The imperialists would like to see the political integration of the bourgeois opposition “Montana Accord” parties into a transitional regime capable of imposing the dictates of the major powers and international investors, who are demanding “stability” to facilitate the ruthless exploitation of Haiti’s impoverished workers. Washington and Ottawa are also anxious that the social crisis in Haiti not destabilize the broader Caribbean region, including through a mass exodus of desperate refugees to the neighbouring

Dominican Republic and beyond.

Amid the unfolding nightmare in Haiti, both the US and Canada continue to deport Haitians en masse.

A report released this week by the UN Children’s Agency UNICEF underscored the extent of the social catastrophe produced by decades of imperialist intervention and the corrupt rule of their local stooges. Fully 2.5 million children, half of the country’s entire child population, will require emergency assistance this year due to a lack of food and other basic necessities. As Bruno Maes, UNICEF’s Haiti representative told the *Guardian*, “Haitian children don’t just face challenges accessing food and potable water while the health system collapses around them. There is also a lack of protection. Children are being abused, young girls are being raped and services are not there at the scale they should be for their survival and development.”

A deadly cholera epidemic continues to rage across the country. According to a UN report dated January 15, 483 deaths, 1,742 confirmed cases and 24,232 suspected cases can be attributed to the outbreak that began last year. The impact of the disease is compounded by widespread malnutrition, with the World Food Program reporting that 4.7 million Haitians, more than a third of the population, face acute hunger.

Chief responsibility for this abysmal state of affairs lies with the imperialist powers. After decades of military occupations and interventions, and the backing of brutal dictatorships, they responded to the 2010 earthquake that claimed at least 250,000 lives by offering up Haiti’s impoverished masses as a source of cheap labour for international finance capital. Money provided to support the victims was funnelled through pro-imperialist organizations like the Inter-American Development Bank, and large investment deals brokered by the war criminals Bill and Hillary Clinton were struck.

Under this regime of “aid,” approximately 60,000 jobs were created in the low-paying apparel sector, as large international concerns took advantage of extremely low wage rates and Washington’s removal of export restrictions to cash in. At least 11,000 of these jobs have disappeared since December 2021.

The latest announcement came from South Korean producer Sae-A Trading Co., which is cutting 3,500 jobs from its workforce of 7,000 and closing one of its six factories in northeastern Haiti. The company, which operates as S&H Global in Haiti, arrogantly complained about the prevalence of strikes by customs officials, gang violence and the unreliable local power supply in a statement full of corporate managerial-speak. “These disruptions,” declared Sae-A Trading, had led “to orders canceled and trust lost from our retailer customers in the USA as they suffered significant losses from delayed and non-delivery of merchandise.” For 2023, it continued, the large US-based retailers are rerouting orders “elsewhere around the Caribbean and Central America leaving us, S&H Global with a dearth of orders.”



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