

US kidnaps prime minister it imposed on Haitian people, as Western hemisphere's poorest country descends into chaos

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On Tuesday, the US government effectively kidnapped Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry, a right-wing figure whom it had hitherto staunchly supported, a *Miami Herald* report has revealed.

Against the will of the vast majority of Haiti's impoverished people, Washington—backed by Canada and France, the other imperialist powers long involved in Haiti—placed Henry in power following the July 2021 assassination of the country's president, Jovenel Moïse. The US-led “Core Group” of nations has continued to support Henry ever since, although he has no popular or legal-constitutional legitimacy and has refused to hold parliamentary or presidential elections despite the mandates of all elected officials having long expired.

Now, however, under conditions where the country is overrun by criminal gangs, most of which have close ties to rival factions of Haiti's ruling elite, the Biden administration has apparently concluded Henry is a liability who should be flushed from office. To accomplish this, as the *Herald* article documents, US imperialism is resorting to its traditional thugery and criminality.

This is all playing out as Washington and Ottawa scramble to put together a foreign paramilitary force to be deployed to Haiti with US and Canadian logistical support to bloodily restore bourgeois “law and order” on the Caribbean island-nation.

Both the US and Canada have a long history of neo-colonial occupation and military intervention in Haiti, including as recently as 2004 when they deployed troops to oust its elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. But under conditions where they are waging war against Russia in Ukraine, supporting Israel's genocide in Gaza and actively preparing for war with China, and where there is visceral opposition among the Haitian masses to an intervention led by either of North America's twin imperialist powers, they are anxious to contract out the job.

Last week Henry traveled to Kenya, whose avidly pro-imperialist government has volunteered to lead a Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission to Haiti and staff it with more than a thousand Kenyan national police.

In Henry's absence, the gangs launched a coordinated offensive, whose purpose it soon became clear was to derail the planned MSS deployment and oust the prime minister. Over the weekend, the gangs stormed two Port-au-Prince prisons, freeing several thousand prisoners, and attacked Haitian National Guard facilities. On Monday, they encircled the capital's two airports forcing them to suspend operations.

On Tuesday, Henry attempted to return to Haiti via the Dominican Republic, only to find his plans thwarted by his Washington patrons. Even if the *Miami Herald* exclusive published on Wednesday does not put it in so many words, its account makes clear that the Haitian prime minister was effectively kidnapped so that US officials and those of allied governments could browbeat him into accepting new marching orders.

Herald, Henry's ~~outing~~ had spent to the previous two the United States and had informed Washington and the UN of when and how he intended to return to Haiti, was suddenly informed by Dominican officials as his plane approached Santo Domingo that he would not be allowed to land.

This soon proved to be only an opening gambit. Once his small 13-seat jet changed course for the US territory of Puerto Rico, Henry received a second midair message, this one from the US State Department, asking “him to agree to a new transitional government—and resign.” When Henry's plane landed in San Juan, Puerto Rico's capital, it was “immediately met by US Secret Service agents” and for hours the Haitian prime minister was refused permission to deplane.

During this time, Washington, working with various CARICOM (Caribbean Community) leaders, was sounding out Haitian opposition and business leaders on putting together some type of new interim government to provide a fig-leaf of “popular support” for another imperialist-backed military/security intervention in Haiti.

According to the *Herald*, “The US proposal would have Henry usher in a new government structure in which a new prime minister and presidential board will lead a transition to elections and prepare for the Kenya-led mission. He would agree to step down once the new structure has been established, and a new prime minister is appointed or the security mission has deployed—whichever comes first.”

On Tuesday evening, US officials, acting in classic imperial potentate fashion, were making clear that Henry's days were over. The *Herald* cited an unnamed US National Security Council official as saying the administration was “not providing any assistance to help the prime minister return to Haiti.”

“Our support,” the official continued, “is focused on helping the [Haiti National Police] restore security, expediting the deployment of the MSS mission, and accelerating a peaceful transition of power via free and fair elections. Our dialogue with Prime Minister Henry has been focused on these efforts and the need for security and a peaceful political transition.”

On Wednesday afternoon, US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller clumsily tried to cover up the abundant evidence that Washington is once again carrying out regime change in Haiti, shuffling in figurehead presidents and prime ministers as needed. Miller told a press conference, the Biden administration is “not calling on him [Henry] or pushing for him to resign.”

Criminal gangs and social devastation

What will happen next is unclear, to say the least.

As of Wednesday afternoon, Henry's whereabouts were unknown or at least not being reported.

One of the most prominent gang leaders, Jimmy Chezier, or "Barbecue," has declared, "If Ariel Henry doesn't resign, if the international community continues to support him, we'll be heading straight for a civil war that will lead to genocide.

"Either Haiti becomes a paradise or a hell for all of us. It's out of the question for a small group of rich people living in big hotels to decide the fate of people living in working-class neighborhoods."

Chezier's claims to be a spokesman for Haiti's workers and toilers is a monumental fraud. He is an ex-senior Haitian national police officer who came to prominence by using gang violence to assist the late President Moïse in suppressing popular opposition in the slums of Port-au-Prince.

As for Haiti becoming a "hell," it is already a nightmare for the vast majority. Subject to the ravages of imperialist occupation and oppression for over a century, Haiti was further devastated in 2010 by an earthquake from which it never recovered, largely because the imperialist-led "humanitarian" efforts to help it rebuild turned into systematic plunder and opportunist banditry. Haiti's social crisis was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and repeated rounds of austerity measures, including the slashing of fuel subsidies, implemented by Moïse and then Henry on the orders of the IMF.

The social conditions faced by the Haitian people are among the most brutal on earth. About half of the country's population, some 5.5 million people, are in need of humanitarian assistance.

Pervasive gang violence is hindering the basic functioning of normal social life. According to UN humanitarian coordinator Ulrika Richardson, gang violence has forced more than 300,000 Haitians from their homes, reducing them to living on the streets. "Haiti had more than 8,000 cases of killings, lynchings or rape, including group rapes of women and young girls" last year said Richardson. In January, "the country saw its most violent month in two years" with 1,100 people "killed, injured or kidnapped" and a thousand schools failing to open due to the violence.

Recent months have also seen the re-emergence on Haiti's political scene of Guy Philippe. He is a fascist figure who was instrumental in Aristide's ouster, having emerged from the Tonton Macoutes—the terror gang employed by the Duvaliers during their three-decade-long, US-backed dictatorship to suppress left-wing and working class opposition. In 2004, the US and Canada stood by, allowing a far-right rebellion of ex-army and Tonton Macoutes personnel led by Philippe to reach the gates of Port-au-Prince, then intervened ostensibly to "save" democratic and constitutional government in Haiti. In fact, the very first thing that the US and Canadian troops did on deploying to Haiti's capital was to hustle Aristide, whom Washington and the Haitian elite viewed as insufficiently pliant, although he had long ago abandoned any radical pretensions, onto a plane destined for the Central African Republic—an episode that finds an echo in Henry's "kidnapping" Tuesday.

Philippe, who was elected a Haitian senator in 2016, only soon after to be extradited and imprisoned in the US on drug-trafficking charges, is reportedly being promoted by the most right-wing sections of Haiti's capitalist elite—those once aligned with the Duvaliers, Michel Martelly (Haiti's president from 2001-16) and his chosen successor Moïse—as the head of an interim presidential council.

A "humanitarian" intervention to secure imperialist interests

The UN Security Council was due to meet behind closed doors on Wednesday afternoon to discuss the crisis in Haiti. At the time of writing,

there were no reports on its deliberations, but it is evident Washington hopes to use the UN to provide "humanitarian cover" for what will be another bloody imperialist intervention. An intervention that is aimed not at assisting the Haitian people, but rather defending imperialist interests and domination.

The proposal to have the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission led by Kenya is a further demonstration of imperialist criminality. The Kenyan National Police are popularly considered by Kenyans to be themselves a "criminal gang." It routinely coerces money from working class people and youth and has a long record of human rights abuses, including killing more than 60 people in mass protests last year against the brutal austerity measures imposed by the government of President William Ruto. Even Canada's state broadcaster the CBC had to report: "There [are] concerns about the human rights record of Kenya's security forces. They used live fire to suppress protests this summer and are frequently accused of brutal excesses at home."

The imperialist powers are utterly indifferent to the plight of the Haitian people—for which they are principally responsible—and hostile to their democratic and social aspirations. Earlier this week the UN reported that an appeal for \$674 million in funding for Haiti this year is currently only about 2.5 percent funded.

By contrast, for the Haitian National Police and the prospective MSS deployment, Canada's trade union-backed Trudeau Liberal government announced a \$125 million contribution last month. This is in addition to previous contributions of armored vehicles and other paramilitary gear.

Under pressure from the Biden administration, the Trudeau government did carry out reconnaissance and other preparatory work for a possible Canadian-led military intervention in Haiti in late 2022 and 2023. But ultimately it balked, for fear of being drawn into a military quagmire that would result in significant casualties, and no less importantly, shatter the myths long promoted by the ruling class, the unions and the pseudo-left of Canada as a benevolent, non-imperialist power. In recent years Haitians have taken to the streets to protest Ottawa's role, working alongside Washington, in suppressing them and propping up the venal Haitian capitalist elite. This includes an October 2022 demonstration outside the Canadian embassy in Port-au-Prince in which thousands participated.

While the US and Canada have economic interests in Haiti, they have picked over the carcass of the Haitian people and bled them white. Today they effectively treat the half of the island of Hispaniola where the Haitian people live as an open-air prison camp.

Their principal concerns are that the crisis in Haiti not precipitate a mass outflow of refugees to the US and Canada or serve to destabilize the Caribbean region. Washington also views the manifest unraveling of a state in its historic "backyard" and stomping ground, a supposed US ally, as a threat to its global prestige.



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