

US military strengthens presence at Haitian embassy as gang violence in Port-au-Prince escalates

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The Caribbean Community (Caricom) regional trade bloc convened an emergency meeting in Jamaica on Monday to address the rapidly worsening social and political crisis in Haiti.

However, the key players at the meeting were the representatives of the United States, France, and Canada—the imperialist powers that have historically dominated Haiti through occupation, repression, and regime-change operations. Underscoring, the gravity of the crisis, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who has been playing a key role in Washington's increasingly frantic efforts to escalate NATO's war on Russia and its enabling of Israel's genocidal assault on the Palestinians, was reported to be traveling to Jamaica. Canada's UN Ambassador Bob Rae and representatives of Brazil and the United Nations were also expected to attend.

The discussion proceeded after a weekend in which US military forces flew into Port-au-Prince by helicopter to strengthen security at Washington's embassy, and the US, Germany, and European Union rushed to extricate their non-essential diplomatic staffs amid a continuing surge in gang violence.

Washington with Canada and France's support are trying to cobble together a new "transitional government" supported by all the warring factions of Haiti's corrupt oligarchy and political elite to provide a fig-leaf of "national unity" and "legality" for another foreign military intervention aimed at enforcing bourgeois "order" in the western hemisphere's most impoverished country.

The meeting took place just days after the US effectively kidnapped Haiti's un-elected Prime Minister, Ariel Henry. Hitherto, it had staunchly backed Henry, as he refused to call presidential or parliamentary elections and imposed brutal IMF austerity measures.

Henry is currently stranded in Puerto Rico, where US officials are browbeating him to assist their efforts to establish a more "broadly based" government, then step aside. Henry was prevented from reentering the country on his return from a diplomatic trip to Kenya, where a US- and Canada-sponsored deal was signed to send a paramilitary force of 1,000 Kenyan

military police officers to Haiti in order to help stabilize the crumbling state and restore "law and order."

As usual, these interventions are said to be motivated by "humanitarian" concerns. In reality, the well-being of the Haitian people is the least of the imperialist powers' worries.

It is the US and its allies who are principally responsible for the situation in Haiti, which is the result of over a century of bloody occupation and interventions since 1915. In 2004, the US and Canada deployed troops to oust Haiti's elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Following a devastating earthquake in 2010 that claimed well over a quarter of a million lives, the imperialists' claims of "post-disaster rebuilding" and "humanitarian aid" proved to be a cruel hoax as virtually none of the donated funds reached their targets, while a small handful of Haitian oligarchs and international companies made a killing.

Haiti is currently engulfed in a massive social crisis fueled by want and pervasive gang violence which is paralyzing the country. Gangs have closed the country's main international airport and released over 4,000 inmates from its main prisons. Schools are closed, hospitals are being looted, buildings are being set on fire (including attempts to set alight Haiti's Interior Ministry and the Canadian Embassy), and the streets are strewn with victims of shootings whose bodies are being burned as a way to dispose of them.

A BBC reporter described a scene at the State University of Haiti Hospital in Port-au-Prince: "There is no sign of any medical staff at all. A dead body, covered by a sheet and swarming with flies, lies in a bed next to patients waiting in vain for treatment. Despite the overpowering stench, no-one has come to remove the body. It is rapidly decomposing in the Caribbean heat."

With 80 percent of the country's capital under the control of gangs, the US military deployed Marines to bolster the security at its embassy and to evacuate non-essential staff Saturday night. This operation, conducted by helicopter under the cover of darkness, was carried out at the behest of the State Department. Two hastily organized helicopter flights across the border to a dirt landing strip at a military airfield in the

Dominican Republic went ahead Sunday to evacuate a dozen officials, including the German and European Union ambassadors.

The escalation of gang violence has exacerbated the Haitian population's already all-pervasive plight. As they dodge stray bullets, Haitians have to deal with severe shortages caused by the gangs' control of roads leading out of the ports and their exaction of "tolls" on the transport of essential goods. Almost half of all Haitians are in need of humanitarian assistance, and over a million of them already face undernourishment. Hundreds of thousands are without refuge and stay in makeshift shelters or roam the streets.

Thousands have desperately sought to cross the heavily guarded 375-kilometre border with the Dominican Republic to the east, where armed gangs aligned with the military have whipped up anti-Haitian chauvinism. A *Le Monde* correspondent witnessed armed gangs made up of hooded men kidnapping, beating, and threatening dozens of Haitians in a Dominican border town. According to an immigration official, approximately 1,000 Haitians are deported every day from the Dominican Republic, which uses trucks fitted with animal cages for the purpose.

Henry was placed in power by Washington, with the support of Canada and France, and in defiance of the overwhelming opposition from Haiti's impoverished majority after the July 2021 assassination of the country's right-wing president, Jovenel Moïse. Since then, the US-led "Core Group" of countries had maintained its support for Henry, despite his lack of popular or legal-constitutional legitimacy and his failure to conduct elections, even though the terms of all elected officials have long expired.

Henry is suspected of having ties to the gangs, which are backed by rival factions of the Haitian elite. In November 2022, it was revealed that Senate President Joseph Lambert, and former president of the chamber Youri Latortue, both collaborated with gang networks in drug trafficking. While the imperialist powers have now retracted their support for Henry, all sections of Haiti's political establishment are tainted by its association with one form of criminality or another.

Gang leaders, the most vocal among them being Jimmy Chérizier, are seizing upon the popular opposition to the current government and another military intervention by the imperialist powers to demagogically provide their activities with a veneer of political legitimacy. That gang leaders of this sort have become the face of Haiti's opposition to the government testifies to the state's profound crisis and the bankruptcy of Haiti's bourgeois opposition. The latter has always been characterized by its fear of the country's impoverished masses and cravenness before the imperialist vampires that have ravaged Haiti, once the world's most lucrative colony.

The resurgence of the fascist leader and criminal Guy Philippe among political contenders to replace Henry provides yet further confirmation of the reactionary character of the US

imperialist-led efforts to concoct a new interim regime. Along with ex-presidential candidate and Senator Moïse Jean Charles, Philippe has formed a new political alliance, creating a three-person council which aims to lead the country. Philippe, who was pivotal in the 2004 US-backed coup against former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and served time in the US for money laundering and drug trafficking, has been advocating for the resignation of the current government since his return to Haiti in November. Interviewed by *Le Monde*, he declared, "Henry is illegitimate, he was not elected by the Haitian people and should resign. That's the solution. He can't stay in power."

Whatever the composition of the new regime that the US and its imperialist allies concoct and seek to impose on the Haitian people, it will inevitably help perpetuate Haiti's crisis. At present, the US and Canada calculate that a direct military intervention under their flags would be too risky and too costly, in terms of both imperialist treasure and lives, in the face of the challenges posed by gang warfare and massive opposition among Haitians to foreign intervention, and to Washington and Ottawa in particular.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre stated late last week that there are no current plans to send US forces to Haiti, highlighting instead Kenya's agreement to dispatch its notoriously corrupt and violent military police for a "security mission" in the country.

The imperialist powers' main concerns include preventing the situation in Haiti from triggering a large-scale exodus of refugees to the US and Canada and avoiding destabilization of the Caribbean region, which they consider to be their "backyard." Additionally, Washington perceives the apparent collapse of a nation within its traditional sphere of influence, an assumed ally of the US, as damaging to its worldwide reputation.

In remarks from a 1994 TV appearance, Joe Biden summarized American imperialism's traditional attitude of mercenary calculation and indifference and hostility to the Haitian people which prevails to this day: "If Haiti—a god-awful thing to say—just quietly sunk into the Caribbean, or rose up 300 feet, it wouldn't matter a whole lot in terms of our interests," said Biden, then a leading member of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "If the United States of America allows a chaotic circumstance to exist that close to our shore, notwithstanding the fact that it is not going to fundamentally alter our position in the world no matter what happens in Haiti, it does have effects on our ability to generate consensus on much more important issues throughout Latin America."



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