

Florida launches crackdown on Haitians fleeing violence

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Florida Governor Ron DeSantis announced last week that he would deploy hundreds of police and soldiers to south Florida in anticipation of an influx of Haitian refugees fleeing the recent violence in that country. They will be equipped with speedboats, drones and helicopters, and will serve as an auxiliary force to the US Coast Guard, which patrols the waters off south Florida.

Haitian migrants captured by the Coast Guard are repatriated to the island nation. Though a mass migration has not yet occurred, it is predicted that as the violence and disorder there escalate, more Haitians, driven by desperation, will attempt the dangerous sea passage to the United States.

Already, the Coast Guard has repatriated 65 Haitian migrants found in the waters off the Bahamas on March 11, according to the *Miami Herald*. The Coast Guard has also captured 41 Haitians in the waters near Puerto Rico through the end of February. The US colony is another common destination for Haitian migrants. Since October 1, the beginning of the fiscal year, Customs and Border Patrol officers in Puerto Rico have detained 112 Haitian nationals.

The deployment in south Florida will include 133 members of the Florida State Guard, according to press releases from the governor's office. The State Guard was first established at the outset of World War II to fulfill duties normally performed by National Guard troops who were participating in the war. It was dissolved in 1947 and not reactivated until December 2021 by Governor DeSantis, who has command over the state-level force.

The reactivation of the State Guard was a response to both the mass protests in 2020 in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder by the Minneapolis police as well as the "stolen election" lie propagated by then-

President Trump in an attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. DeSantis resurrected the military unit to suppress future protests and to elevate his national profile within the far right in advance of his failed attempt to become the Republican nominee for president this year.

In February DeSantis deployed members of both the State and National Guard to Texas to assist in Republican Governor Greg Abbott's illegal campaign to detain and deport migrants crossing the southern border. He also deployed hundreds of State Guard members to the Florida Keys in January 2023, during an earlier surge of migration from Cuba and Haiti.

DeSantis aims to use the current migrant crisis to bolster his political standing, and has framed his response to the potential surge in migrants in military terms, stating in a press release, "Illegal immigrants feel empowered to enter the sovereign territory of the United States because of the federal government's refusal to diligently enforce our immigration laws and protect the integrity of the border. When a state faces the possibility of invasion, it has the right and duty to defend its territory and people."

DeSantis' claim that he is deploying the State Guard because of an invasion, the same pretext used by Abbott in Texas, is transparently false. So is his claim that the federal response has been insufficiently severe. The Biden administration has carried out an expansive attack on immigrants and refugees. In 2023 this administration deported 142,000 immigrants, nearly twice the figure from 2022. Another 690,000 have been deported since Biden took office under Title 42, a public health law invoked by Trump at the outset of the pandemic to expedite deportations. The Biden administration has summarily refused entry to the US to an additional 2.8 million migrants encountered at the

southern border in the same time period.

More recently, in an attempt to secure support from congressional Republicans for continue funding the ongoing US/NATO war in Ukraine, Biden has proposed new anti-immigrant legislation that the *Wall Street Journal* characterized as “the most restrictive migrant legislation in decades.” The new legislation would increase the capacity of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities by nearly 50 percent, allow the president to close the southern border if migration numbers surpass 5,000 per day, and vastly increase the overall number of Border Patrol officers.

The largest part of the proposed \$120 billion legislation, \$60 billion, would go to funding the US/NATO war effort in Ukraine. Another \$14 billion is earmarked to bolster the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The Biden administration may also use the US Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to detain and process Haitians captured at sea. The Navy maintains an immigrant processing facility on the base, separate from the prison where the US has illegally detained thousands of so-called “enemy combatants” since 2001, and where 30 inmates remain imprisoned.

As the political crisis in Haiti escalates, it can be expected that more desperate citizens of that impoverished country, the poorest in the Western Hemisphere, will attempt to escape the violence by embarking on the 700-mile passage to the US.

This was the case in 2010, when 200,000 Haitians were killed in an earthquake that destroyed much of the island’s infrastructure. There were also sharp increases in migration from Haiti after both the 1994 and 2004 interventions by the imperialist powers. In every case, those fleeing the poverty and violence engineered by the US and its partners were greeted with further oppression.

The most recent cycle of violence began in January of 2021, when then-president Jovenel Moïse was assassinated by gunmen who breached the presidential residence. Although the details surrounding Moïse’s killing remain unclear, there are indications that current President Ariel Henry, acting on behalf of both the US and elements of the Haitian bourgeoisie hostile to Moïse, helped engineer the killing.

Henry’s elevation to the presidency, and subsequent refusal to hold elections, sparked a further upsurge in

gang violence, with criminal organizations linked to various political figures within Haiti controlling large sections of the country, including the capital Port-au-Prince. As the violence and lawlessness escalated, Henry sought assistance from his imperialist backers and was offered the services of the Kenyan national police.

This triggered a further surge in violence, with many rival gangs reportedly uniting to combat the state-backed forces. The situation deteriorated to the extent that Henry, returning to Haiti after signing the agreement with Kenya, was contacted in mid-flight by his de facto boss, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, and informed that he would not be returning to Haiti, and would in fact be resigning from the presidency. After the US detained Henry in Puerto Rico for several days, and with additional threats issued by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Henry carried out these orders and issued a statement saying he would resign in favor of a new seven-person “transitional council.”

Whatever the composition of the new council may be, its central purpose will be to create political cover for further imperialist intervention. The living conditions for the Haitian masses will continue to deteriorate, and terrible violence will be used to restore order.



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