

The Coup-Installed Regime and its Reign of Terror

By Richard Sanders

2004: Regime Change

In early February 2004, a small, rebel force of “thugs,” that was “directed,...operated,...equipped,...financed and organized”¹ by U.S. intelligence services, entered Haiti from the Dominican Republic. Most were former members of Haiti’s military (disbanded by Aristide in 1995) and the FRAPH death squads that tortured and assassinated thousands of Aristide supporters during the CIA-sponsored, military coup regime of 1991-1994.

Led by former military and police chief, Guy Philippe, and two leaders of FRAPH, Emmanuel Constant and Jodel Chamblain, their strategy was to “attack cities, drive out the police, burn police stations and... swiftly withdraw.”²

But, as Aristide later explained: “They couldn’t take the [capital] city, and that’s why their masters decided ...to create the illusion that much of the country was under their control.... There was no great insurrection:

there was a small group of soldiers, heavily armed,...able to overwhelm some police stations [and] kill some policemen.... The police had run out of ammunition, and were no match for the rebels’ M16s.”³

They also freed about 3000 prisoners, including convicted rapists, murderers and fellow FRAPH members and military men imprisoned by Aristide’s



Jodel Chamblain, co-founder of the CIA's FRAPH death squads posing at a pro-U.S. rally, 1994 (left) and while helping lead rebel attacks, 2004 (right).

One day after the 2004 coup, Chamblain thanked the U.S., Canada and France “for allowing us to get rid of Aristide.”
(*Globe & Mail*, March 2, 2004.)

government for serious human rights abuses.⁴ Given weapons, some of these convicts swelled the rebel’s ranks.⁵

The following timeline outlines how rebel attacks were used as a pretext by the U.S., Canada and France to overthrow Haiti’s elected government.

Feb. 5: Rebels begin attacks on northern cities and move towards capital.

Feb. 7: 100,000 rallied to demand that Aristide’s government be allowed to finish its five-year mandate.

Feb. 11: Canadian government memos reveal plans to use “Responsibility to Protect” to justify regime change. Memos also “indicate speculation about working with members of Haiti’s former military.”⁶

Feb. 20: U.S. Ambassador James Foley, told Aristide that he must accept a U.S./Canada/France plan to install a new prime minister and cabinet.⁷

Feb. 21: Aristide accepted the demand, but his opponents did not. They did not want him to remain as president until his mandate ended in 2006.⁸

Feb. 23: U.S. Marines arrive in Haiti, supposedly to protect the embassy.⁹

Feb. 26: Canadian Commandos arrived in Haiti. Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham and U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell publicly support rebel demands that Aristide resign.¹⁰

Feb. 29: U.S. Marines and embassy officials came to Aristide’s home at 3 a.m. Aristide says they told him that rebels and U.S. troops were ready to “open fire on Port-au-Prince. Right then, the Americans precisely stated that they will kill thousands of people and it will be a bloodbath.... This was no bluff.... we were under an illegal foreign occupation which was ready to drop bodies on the ground.”

U.S. diplomat Luis Moreno told Aristide that the U.S. would do nothing to stop the rebels who were poised to kill him. Aristide was taken at gunpoint to the airport¹² (which Canadian Forces had “secured”) and was flown to the Central African Republic.¹³

Political Gains

- Haiti’s independent electoral commission oversaw the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections and three parliamentary and local elections.
- In 2000, 29,500 candidates ran for 7,500 posts. Four million registered for the election and 60% voted.
- For the first time, women served as Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Finance and Chief of Police.
- Aristide created a cabinet-level Ministry of Women’s Affairs.
- There was unprecedented freedom to organize, speak out and assemble.
- The Haitian constitution was printed in Creole and widely distributed, so Haitians learned their rights which, for the first time, they really had.

Economic Gains

- The minimum wage was raised in 1995 and doubled in 2003.
- A land reform program distributed land to 1500 peasant families.
- The government provided tools, credit, technical assistance, fertilizers and heavy equipment to farmers.
- Irrigation systems were repaired bringing water to 7000 farmers.

- The government distributed tens of thousands of Creole pigs. This reversed a 1980, U.S. extermination policy that prevented competition with U.S. farmers, and cost Haitians hundreds of millions of dollars.
- Unpaid tax/utility bills were collected from the wealthy, creating revenues for health care and education.
- 30,000 fishermen got aid and training to build boats. Lakes were stocked and 50 new lakes were created.
- Hundreds of community stores were created to sell food at a discount. This forced wealthy elites to drop prices.
- By 2003, malnutrition dropped from 63% to 51%. (Many community kitchens were opened to provide low-cost meals to communities in need.)
- More than 1000 low-cost housing units built (2002-2003). Low-interest loans enabled workers to buy them.
- Carpentry programs, sewing workshops and agricultural cooperatives were set up (1994) to aid the return of 100,000 who fled the 1991 coup.

Source: Stephen Lendman, “Achievements Under Aristide, Now Lost,” *ZNet*, Dec. 16, 2005.

BACKGROUND

Aristide also explained that: “On Feb. 29, a shipment of police munitions—that we had bought from South Africa, perfectly legally—was due to arrive in Port-au-Prince. This decided the matter... If the police were restored to something like their full operational capacity, then the rebels stood no chance at all.

Interviewer: So at that point the Americans had no option but to go in and get you themselves?

Aristide: That’s right. They knew that in a few hours, they would lose their opportunity.... They grabbed their chance...and bundled us onto a plane in the middle of the night.”¹⁴

A few hours later, in a brief ceremony attended by U.S. Ambassador Foley, Haiti’s Chief Justice, Boniface Alexandre, was made president. This was illegal because it was not approved by Haiti’s elected parliament as is required by their 1987 constitution.¹⁵

To protect this unconstitutional regime, Alexandre asked the UN Security Council to send armed forces. It quickly authorized a “Multinational Interim Force,”¹⁶ and the U.S., Canada France and Chile sent troops.¹⁷

Mar. 4: A “Tripartite Council” was chosen by Haiti’s new regime, the anti-Aristide group “Democratic Platform” and “the international community.”¹⁸

Mar. 5: The “Tripartite Council” handpicked a seven-member “Council of Wise Men,” to represent Haiti’s elite and their foreign backers.

Mar. 9: The “Council of Wise Men” selected Haiti’s Prime Minister, Gerard Latortue, an international business consultant based in Miami, Florida, who had lived outside Haiti for decades.

Mid-March: Latortue picked the “Interim Government’s” thirteen cabinet ministers. Anyone who had worked for Aristide’s duly-elected government was “automatically disqualified.”¹⁹

2004–2006:

A Human Rights Disaster

In its first month, the puppet regime “summarily cut off” all “funding and other support” to “literacy programs, food and shelter programs, and orphanages.”²⁰ In April, Latortue dropped the government’s law suit against France for \$21-billion in reparations for the “debt” Haiti had paid for French losses

during Haiti’s 1791-1803 revolution.²¹

Several U.S.-based groups issued reports detailing attacks against Aristide supporters by Haiti’s police and their allies in revitalized paramilitary death squads. For instance, the U.S. National Lawyers Guild said there was

“overwhelming evidence that victims...have been supporters of the elected government of...Aristide and the Fanmi Lavalas party, elected and appointed officials in that government or party, or employees of the government.... Many are in hiding.... others have been beaten and/or killed. Many of their homes have been selectively destroyed.”²²

With Aristide supporters being “hunted down, arrested and sometimes beaten and killed,” some sought asylum at the U.S., Canadian and French embassies but were turned away.²³

Miami University’s Law School report was another damning indictment of the coup-installed regime. It stated: “Haiti’s security and justice institutions fuel the cycle of violence. Summary executions are a police tactic.... UN police and soldiers....resort to heavy-handed incursions into the poorest neighborhoods.”²⁴

When asked about this report, then-Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew said: “I absolutely think that it is propaganda which is absolutely not interesting.”²⁵ (See page 22.) Despite such off-hand dismissals by cheerleaders for Haiti’s brutal regime, human rights reports kept exposing the truth.

In July, the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti said “murder, torture, mutilation [and] rape” was largely done by “the government’s armed forces” or “armed gangs” acting:

“with impunity and what appears to be...the tacit consent of the authorities. Many...cases of arbitrary arrests, illegal detention and torture,... are linked to...victims... expressing their support for... democracy.”²⁶

Amnesty International reported:

- Several unlawful killings, allegedly by police officers.



In November 2004, Paul Martin became the first Canadian Prime Minister to visit Haiti. He met with “president” Boniface Alexandre and “prime minister” Gérard Latortue, of the illegal, coup-installed puppet regime.

- Numerous reported incidents of ill-treatment, sometimes amounting to torture in police custody.
- Numerous reports of arbitrary and illegal arrests
- Defenders of workers’ rights faced intimidation, harassment and death threats from police.²⁷

A report in *The Lancet*, a prestigious British medical journal, stated that “kidnappings and extrajudicial detentions, physical assaults, death threats, physical threats and threats of sexual violence were...common.” Researchers estimated there had been 8000 murders in the capital region, during the coup regime’s 22-months. Of these, 21.7% were committed by “police and other government security forces,” 13% by the “demobilized army” and 13% by “armed anti-Lavalas groups.” “Lavalas members or partisans” were not accused of any murders.

The study also found that 35,000 women had been victimised by “sexual assault.” While “officers from the Haitian National Police accounted for 13.8% and armed anti-Lavalas groups accounted for 10.6% of identified perpetrators of sexual assault,” “Lavalas members and partisans” were, once again, not responsible.

This study also estimated that there had been 13,000 “government detentions or arrests” in the capital region during the coup-installed regime.²⁸

The report’s authors soon received death threats, “a package wrapped to look like a bomb,” and “a dead rat in the mail.”²⁹ And, their work came under immediate fire by AP, the *Guardian*, *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star*.³⁰ Although these media ignored the congruence of data in other reports, they gave credence to government assurances that their “peacekeeping” mission in Haiti as a wonderful success.

The following timeline is but a

sampling of human rights abuses committed against poor supporters of President Aristide's government by police, right-wing death squads and UN troops (MINUSTAH) during the coup regime:

2004

Mar. 7: The State Morgue in Port-au-Prince, "dumped" 800 corpses into a mass grave. Many "had their hands tied behind their backs, had black bags over their heads, and had been shot."

Mar. 28: The State Morgue buried another 200 bodies.³¹

May 18: When 30,000 to 60,000 Fanmi Lavalas supporters marched peacefully in the capital, police fired into the crowd killing at least nine. U.S. Marines ("peacekeepers") stood by with heavy artillery and threatened to arrest a photographer.³²

Sept. 30: Police shot at unarmed, pro-democracy protesters in the capital.³³

Oct. 15: The General Hospital disposed of 600+ corpses stockpiled during two-weeks of police/death squad raids into pro-Lavalas slums.³⁴

Dec. 1: Police and prison guards kill 107 inmates³⁵ (many illegally detained).

2005

Feb. 28: "Police opened fire on peaceful protesters, killing two...and scattering an estimated 2,000 people.... Peacekeepers, whose orders are to support the police, stood by."³⁶ After leaving the rally, 27 protesters were killed by police and associated "men-in-black."³⁷

Mar. 24: "Police opened fire during a street march in Haiti's capital to demand the return of...President Aristide....At least one person was killed."³⁸

April 27: Nine were killed by police who used "indiscriminate violence...to disperse and repress demonstrators."³⁹

May 18: After a Flag Day rally, unarmed prodemocracy protesters were killed by death squads.

June 3-4: While police torched 15 homes in a pro-Lavalas slum and then execute 54 people, UN troops in tanks stood by and gave cover to the police.⁴⁰

June 29: UN troops killed unarmed bystanders during a large military operation in a pro-Lavalas slum.⁴¹

July 6: "About 400 UN troops with 41 armored vehicles and helicopters, and several dozen Haitian police, conducted a raid in Cite Soleil." Doctors Without Borders said: "We received 27

people wounded by gunshots. Three quarters were children and women."⁴² More than 60 were killed.⁴³

Aug. 7-8: Death squads, accompanied by police, used machetes to kill at least 19 women. Many of them were Lavalas community leaders. In addition, the State Hospital's morgue received 40 other people, killed by bullets.⁴⁴

Aug. 10: "Police vehicles led dozens of hooligans armed with guns, machetes, axes and clubs" into a pro-Lavalas slum. "More than 12 people were hacked to death...or riddled with police bullets," including a pregnant girl.⁴⁵

Aug. 20: More than 12 police vehicles surrounded a soccer stadium with 6000 people attending a U.S. funded game to promote peace. Police in black masks with assault rifles, and machete-wielding thugs, burst in, ordered people to the ground and fired into the crowd. Some victims were handcuffed and shot in the head, others were hacked to death or murdered as they tried to escape. UN soldiers stood by watching the massacre, in which 30 were killed.⁴⁶

Nov. 8: When UN troops with tanks and helicopters raided a pro-Lavalas slum, they wounded 15 and killed two.⁴⁷

2006-2007

Despite the victory of René Preval in the 2006 presidential elections (see pages 35-40), the human rights disaster in Haiti is far from over. In December 2006 and January 2007, UN troops massacred numerous innocent civilians in a pro-Lavalas slum. (See page 34.)

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