

# Exposing the Big Lie of “Operation Baghdad”

By Nik Barry-Shaw, researcher and activist with Haiti Action Montréal

One “big lie” that is consistently told about recent Haiti history, is that Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his Lavalas movement used—and continue to use—street gangs, or “*chimère*,” to violently achieve political ends. [See “Epithets without Borders, pp.14-15.] From the attempted coup of July 2001 that President Aristide supposedly staged against himself, to his alleged instigation of “mob violence” in 1991, to the attacks he is said to have faked against his own church in 1988, there is litany of charges made by Aristide’s foes that stretch back to the very beginning of his involvement

in politics.<sup>1</sup> As Peter Hallward notes, it often seems that Aristide’s critics find it immaterial to distinguish between fact and mere accusation.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the success of a propaganda effort, as Joseph Goebbels understood, has less to do with the veracity of claims than with their magnitude and ceaseless repetition. A “big lie” is often difficult to grapple with—due to its sheer size and to all its various retellings and embellishments. Therefore, when analyzing a propaganda campaign, it is useful to isolate one element of the “big lie” that is common to most accounts. A centrepiece in the post-coup vilification of Aristide and his supporters, is undoubtedly what his opponents dubbed “Operation Baghdad.”

## Setting the Context

Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s second term as President of Haiti was cut short by a coup d’état. After U.S. Marines forced Aristide out of the country on February 29, 2004, Haiti quickly came apart at the seams. Many prisons had been emptied by paramilitary rebels, the country’s police force crumbled and, in the absence of any effective public order, crime, looting and gang warfare spiralled out of control.

At the same time, forces of repression hostile to the poor masses were quickly gathering strength. Three days after his appointment, the coup-installed Prime Minister, Gerard Latorue, openly and publicly embraced the rebels, hailing them as “freedom fight-



Translation: “Operation Baghdad is a plot by Group 184 to put an end to Lavalas. They will Fail!”

## A Fabrication by the Group of 184

On December 16, 2004, the 14th anniversary of President Aristide’s first electoral landslide in 1990, more than 10,000 Haitians took to the streets of Cap Haitien, the country’s second largest city, to demand his return and to call for an end to repression against his Lavalas political party.

Depicted above is the Kreyol banner that led the demonstration. It reads: “Operation Baghdad is a plot by Group 184 to put an end to Lavalas. They will Fail!” An organizer of the

demonstration explained:

“It was the Group 184 and [its leader André] Apaid who twisted the violence following September 30 [2004] into further justifying our extermination. Everyone knows September 30 began as a peaceful protest that degenerated into violence after the UN stood by as police opened fire on the crowd. We, in Lavalas, categorically reject the assertions of Apaid’s puppet Jean-Claude Bajeux, a so-called human rights activist, and the inter-

national press, that there was ever any such [Operation Baghdad] campaign by our movement. It was a fabrication that fed the violence to justify our slaughter and we denounce those who use it to portray our movement as gangsters and bandits.”

**Source:** “Massive Protest demanding Aristide’s return in Haiti’s second largest city,” *Haiti Information Project*, December 16, 2004. [www.haitiaction.net/News/HIP/12\\_16\\_4.html](http://www.haitiaction.net/News/HIP/12_16_4.html)

## “Operation Baghdad”



On September 30, 2004, ten thousand peaceful protesters rallied in Port-au-Prince to demand an end to foreign military occupation, the departure of the coup-installed regime, the release of all political prisoners and the return of President Aristide and his constitutional government. The police opened fire on the procession, killing at least two.

ers.”<sup>3</sup> One former member of the military, the new Interior Minister, announced that the rebels—composed mostly of members of Haiti’s disbanded army and of death squads that operated during the first coup—would be integrated into Haiti’s police.<sup>4</sup> Other rebel factions declared Haiti’s army to be re-established and, with the support of residents, set up a base in Pétienville, an upper-class neighborhood.<sup>5</sup>

Visiting the country one month after the coup, an Amnesty International delegation reported a widespread “pattern of persecution” against supporters of the deposed government.<sup>6</sup> This persecution was an attempt to pacify the residents of Port-au-Prince’s teeming slum neighborhoods—overwhelmingly supporters of Aristide—who continued to voice their opposition to the coup and to the Latortue regime that had been imposed on them. As the Haiti Accompaniment Project reported in July 2004:

“despite stepped up repression, many groups in Port-au-Prince and in other parts of the country were preparing for ongoing long-term mobilizations to call for the return of democracy to Haiti.”<sup>7</sup>

### September-30th Rally

One such mobilization was a mass demonstration on September 30, 2004, that marked the 13th anniversary of the first coup that ousted President Aristide in 1991. Starting at 10 a.m., a crowd of more than 10,000 protesters wound their way through the capitol to demand an end to foreign military occupation, the departure of the Latortue government, the release of all political prisoners and the return of the constitutional government, including President Aristide. Soon after the crowd passed the National Palace, police opened fire on the procession, killing two demonstrators.<sup>8</sup> Some press reports claimed that protesters then retaliated, attacking police officers and looting businesses.

In a radio interview the next day, Gerard Latortue was unrepentant about police actions saying: “We fired on them. Some died, others were wounded, and others fled.” The government banned all further demonstrations and Latortue indicated that they would take action against unauthorized protests.<sup>9</sup>

The day after the demonstration, government officials announced the discovery of the headless bodies of three police officers, and quickly

blamed the supporters of Aristide’s Lavalas Party for the crime.<sup>10</sup> These beheadings were soon described as the beginning of “Operation Baghdad,” a supposed campaign of terror and mayhem led by pro-Lavalas gangs intent on destabilizing the country and forcing the return of President Aristide. “The decapitations are imitative of those in Iraq, and they are meant to show the failure of U.S. policy in Haiti,” explained anti-Aristide politician Jean-Claude Bajeux, head of the Centre Ecuménique des Droits de l’Homme (CEDH).<sup>11</sup> In the following weeks, Port-au-Prince would crackle with gunfire. The hospital morgue began to overflow with bodies, and press reports indicated that the death toll reached at least 46 in the first two weeks of October alone.<sup>12</sup>

The very origins of the name “Operation Baghdad” are deeply contested. The coup-imposed government alleged that “fanatical hordes” of Aristide partisans

“constantly claim responsibility for the terror they have instilled, operating under names echoing doom and gloom such as ‘Operation Baghdad.’”<sup>13</sup>

However, according to Joseph Guyler

Delva, head of the Haitian Journalists Association and widely regarded as one of the most even-handed observers in Haiti, the term “Operation Baghdad” was coined by Latortue himself. Lavalas supporters, on the other hand, had never spoken of any such operation.<sup>14</sup>

The coup government’s version of the September 30th events was equally suspect. Government officials presented no evidence that the decapitations were the work of Aristide supporters, and did not release any photos or even the names of the alleged victims.<sup>15</sup> The Comité des Avocats pour le Respect des Libertés Individuelles (CARLI), a human rights group, reported that two officers had been decapitated, but that those responsible were former soldiers, *not* Lavalas supporters. CARLI’s investigation also concluded that the beheadings had taken place on September 29, the day before the demonstration. It was not until after the demonstration that the government began to blame the crimes on Lavalas supporters, said CARLI.<sup>16</sup>

The coup government also failed to substantiate its more general claim that a violent campaign against them was underway. As the *Observer* (UK) noted one month after “Operation Baghdad” had allegedly begun:

“Evidence of such ‘destabilization’ is scant. Shootings and robberies have become common in central Port-au-Prince, but it is not always clear whether they are politically motivated or the result of crime sparked by desperate economic conditions and an ineffectual police force. [Minister of Justice] Gousse said he knew of only two lootings, and that police officers had only been killed while carrying out raids in slums.”<sup>17</sup>

CARLI’s investigation of “Operation Baghdad” yielded the same result, leading the organization to conclude “that there was no such operation launched by Lavalas supporters.”<sup>18</sup>

Whatever its origins, the story of “Operation Baghdad” is highly instructive. The sectors that had participated in the opposition to Aristide’s government—such as Bajeux’s CEDH and other foreign-funded “civil society” groups, political parties and intellectuals (including those generously

supported by the Canadian International Development Agency)—enthusiastically took up the epithet, “Operation Baghdad.” They joined in blaming Aristide and his supporters for the violence wracking Port-au-Prince, and called on the interim government for more vigorous action against Aristide’s “*chimère*.”<sup>19</sup>

U.S. and U.N. officials were also quick to jump on the “destabilization” bandwagon. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher was unequivocal about the source of the post-September 30 violence:

“Over the past two weeks, pro-Aristide thugs have murdered policemen, looted businesses and public installations, and terrorized civilians.”<sup>20</sup>

U.S. Embassy officials also repeated the claim that police officers were beheaded in “a slum gang operation called ‘Operation Baghdad’” when speaking with human rights investigators.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, Lavalas activists and political leaders, immediately denounced the violence, and condemned the police for firing on unarmed demonstrators. One Lavalas spokesperson identified “Operation Baghdad” as “a calculated attempt to manipulate the media and U.S. public opinion.”<sup>22</sup> Trade unionist Paul “Loulou” Chery charged that the label had been concocted to “demonize the movement, the people and Lavalas supporters in particular.”<sup>23</sup> Likewise, tens of thousands of demonstrators in Cap-Haitien marched behind a banner on December 16, 2004 decrying “Operation Baghdad” as a plot by the bourgeoisie “to put an end to Lavalas.”<sup>24</sup> These statements, however, rarely if ever found their way into domestic or foreign press reports about the violence in Haiti after September 30.

Faced with a regime intolerant of dissent and outraged at the attacks on the demonstrators of September 30, the poor neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince erupted. *Häiti Progrès* reported on October 6 that

“Skirmishes, barricades and spontaneous demonstrations have sprung up daily in poor neighborhoods around the capital since the police and paramilitary gunmen tried to stop a massive demonstration on

September 30.”<sup>25</sup>

When the barricades failed to prevent the heavily-armed police and UN troops from entering these neighborhood, the invaders would sometimes be met with a hail of stones, bottles or other debris thrown by residents.<sup>26</sup>

### Escalation of anti-Lavalas Violence

Destabilization or no destabilization, the Latortue government unleashed a new wave of repression against the Lavalas movement. Scores of prominent Lavalas figures and activists from popular organization were arrested on charges of being “intellectual authors of the violence,” of hiding “organizers of violence,” or simply being “close to the Lavalas authorities.” These arrests were conducted with neither warrants nor evidence—hardly surprising given the vagueness of the charges.<sup>27</sup> Haiti’s prisons then began to overflow with Lavalas members or poor people from pro-Aristide neighbourhoods.<sup>28</sup>

In the following weeks, the frequency and violence of paramilitary police operations also increased dramatically, with some community members describing their neighborhoods as being “under siege.” The November 2004 delegation of the Centre for the Study of Human Rights described these chilling conditions:

“On an almost daily basis, the Haitian National Police in various units and dressed in a wide variety of uniforms, often masked, select and attack a neighborhood in operations reported as efforts to arrest armed gang members, with UN soldiers backing them up... [T]here are dead bodies in the street almost daily, including innocent bystanders, women and children. The violent repression... has generated desperate fear in a community that is quickly losing its young men to violent death or arbitrary arrest.”<sup>29</sup>

These incursions were characterized by “execution-style killings” and, in some cases, massacres, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG). On October 26, twelve young men were killed in the Fort National area, while on October 27, the bodies of four young men were found in Bel-

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Air. “All had been shot in the head and at least one had bound wrists,” according to the ICG, and witnesses identified black-clad police officers wearing balaclavas as the perpetrators.<sup>30</sup>

Calls for an independent enquiry into the killings were stonewalled by the Latortue government. Coup-regime authorities categorically denied any responsibility for human rights abuses by its security forces, while blocking access to either the penitentiary or the morgue by journalists and human rights observers.<sup>31</sup>

No words of rebuke were forthcoming from Latortue’s international patrons, as the administration went about its grim work. Despite a long-standing arms embargo on Haiti, the U.S. government authorized the shipment of thousands of new firearms to the Latortue government in November 2004, including military rifles and machine guns.<sup>32</sup> Then-Prime Minister Paul Martin, visiting Haiti on November 14, promised Canada would stand “shoulder to shoulder” with the so-called “interim government” in their efforts to re-

establish “security.” “You’re not going to have a democracy when people are afraid for their lives,” said Martin.<sup>33</sup>

“A lie,” Mark Twain famously remarked, “can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.” The case of “Operation Baghdad” proved to be no exception. The interim government’s account of a violent slum-gang conspiracy would receive wide dissemination in the Haitian media, convincing much of middle class that the “fanatical hordes” of poor, urban Lavalas supporters were to

## Two Human Rights Investigations

### CARLI

The Comité des Avocats pour le Respect des Libertés Individuelles (CARLI) investigation into the reported “Operation Baghdad,” concluded that there was no such operation launched by Lavalas supporters. CARLI leaders noted that the operation supposedly involved the decapitation of two police officers on September 30, 2004, but that Haiti’s interim government never released photos or names of the alleged victims. CARLI concluded that the two officers were decapitated, but that perpetrators were former soldiers and that it occurred on September 29.

CARLI noted that it was only after the proLavalas/proAristide rally on September 30 [when police killed several unarmed protesters] that the government and media blamed the beheadings on Lavalas supporters.<sup>1</sup>

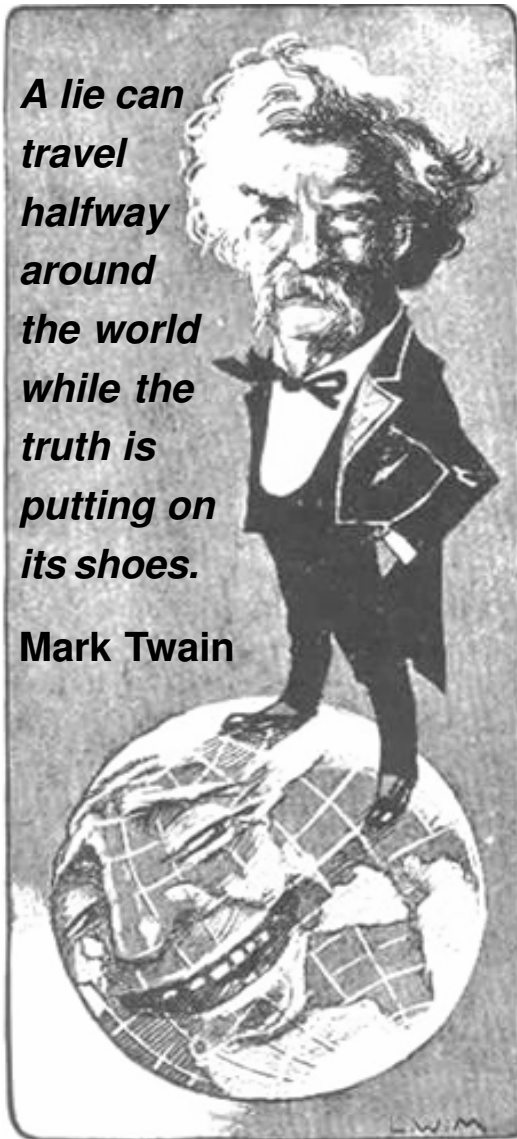
The media further stirred anti-Lavalas sentiment when reporting on a funeral for five policemen. Although only two had died in actual violence, the government/media portrayed it as a funeral of 5 heroic officers who died in pro-Aristide violence.

### CSHR

Officials of the U.S. Embassy granted interviews [with the University of Miami Law School’s Centre for the Study of Human Rights] on condition their names not be used. The officials were asked if they were aware of all the victims of Haitian police “operations” including public massacre victims, in Port-au-Prince’s poorest neighborhoods. They responded that although the perpetrators may have dressed as police during the massacres, and used the same

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**Mark Twain**



vehicles that police use, they could not be certain that they were police. They emphasized that police officers had been beheaded in a slum-gang operation called “Operation Baghdad.”

In response to inquiries about “Operation Baghdad,” the officials stated that they: (i) did not know any names of the beheaded police officers, (ii) were unsure whether it was “gangs” or Prime Minister Latortue who coined the term “Operation Baghdad,” (iii) did not know that Haiti’s most widely read daily paper, the pro-government *Le Nouvelliste* [a member of the anti-Aristide Group of 184’s elitist Association of National Haitian Media] had a regular section called “Operation Baghdad” dedicated to stories about slum violence, and (iv) were unaware of reports from sources, including CARLI, that the beheadings are believed to have involved only two Haitian National Police victims, and that the perpetrators were reported to be former soldiers, not Lavalas supporters.

### Endnote

1. The Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti noted that before the Sept.-30 rally, Haitian radio stations reported that a police officer was beheaded early that morning in a confrontation with a criminal gang. “Illegal Arrest of Political Leaders,” October 8, 2004. [www.ijdh.org](http://www.ijdh.org)

**Source:** Thomas Griffin, *Haiti Human Rights Investigation: November 11-21, 2004*. Center for the Study of Human Rights, University of Miami Law School, p.23. [www.ijdh.org/CSHRhaitireport.pdf](http://www.ijdh.org/CSHRhaitireport.pdf)

blame for the rising tide of violence and criminality.<sup>34</sup> The international wire services repeated the same storyline, seldom, if ever, questioning the government’s account.

Port-au-Prince’s poorer residents, for their part, understood quite clearly the utility of the “Operation Baghdad” fiction.

“By saying we are ‘gang members’ or ‘*chimères*,’ the press are trying to discredit our demands for justice,” a Bel-Air resident explained to the *San Francisco Bay View* newspaper.

Who cares about giving justice to those criminal gang members who just sell drugs and misbehave?”<sup>35</sup>

“The police officers will say that this was an operation against gangs. But we are all innocent,” said Eliphete Joseph, a young man from the Fort National district speaking to journalists following a police massacre:

“The worst thing is that Aristide is now in exile far from here in South Africa, but we are in Haiti, and they are persecuting us only because we live in a poor neighborhood.”<sup>36</sup>

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30. “A New Chance for Haiti?” International Crisis Group, November 18, 2004, p.15.
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36. Lindsay.

## Not the Usual Suspects: Making and Breaking Illusions in Haiti

By Nik Barry-Shaw, researcher and activist with Haiti Action Montréal

By late September 2004, Haiti's interim government headed by Florida businessman Gerard Latortue was in dire straits.

The five-month-old administration was faced with a growing resistance movement in the *quartiers populaires* and accusations of corruption and ineptitude were coming from all quarters. Diplomatic problems began cropping up as well. In a radio interview on September 16, 2004, “Latortue complained that human rights criticism was making his relations with donor countries difficult.”<sup>1</sup>

The announcement of “Operation Baghdad” by the interim government—an alleged campaign of crime and beheadings launched on September 30, 2004, by deposed president Jean-Bertrand Aristide's partisans—should therefore have invited a substantial amount of skepticism. Latortue was desperate to recover some domestic legitimacy and his international backers needed a pretext to continue supporting the government's pacification of the slums.

The allegations, moreover, seemed perfectly calibrated to the prevailing media environment. The decapitation of Nick Berg by his captors in May 2004 had caused a media shock wave, and on September 20-21, 2004, two more American contractors were beheaded in Iraq, with the fate of a British colleague still hanging in the balance as of September 30.<sup>2</sup> What better way for the regime to discredit its opponents than to accuse them of the same tactics as Al Qaida in Iraq?

In the case of “Operation Baghdad,” the Canadian media observed I.F.Stone's advice in the breach, as is typical of journalistic coverage of Canada's interventions abroad.

Skepticism was in short supply. The Canadian media observed I.F.Stone's advice in the breach, as is typical of journalistic coverage of Canada's interventions abroad. Those providing the purchased credulity for Cana-

da's Haitian puppets, however, were not the usual chorus of militarists extolling the virtues of the Karzai regime and the military's mission in Afghanistan to the mainstream press.<sup>3</sup>

On October 22, 2004, as government attacks on the slums were reaching a fever pitch, the Concertation pour Haiti (CPH) issued a news release

“denouncing the climate of terror ravaging Haiti, particularly since September 30, when the *chimères*, the armed partisans of former President Aristide, launched Operation Baghdad.”<sup>4</sup>

Just a few days earlier, the Quebec-based non-governmental organization (NGO) Alternatives had produced a nearly identical analysis of the situation in Haiti. As Tania Vachon wrote in the *Journal d'Alternatives*, a monthly insert in the newspaper *Le Devoir*,

“A vast operation of terror has been set in motion in Port-au-Prince principally in the popular neighbourhoods of Bel-Air and Cite Soleil. It is militants of [Aristide's] Fanmi Lavalas who are behind this campaign dubbed ‘Operation Baghdad’ because of the extreme acts of violence that are perpetrated: public beheadings, sexual assaults, attacks on street vendors, etc.”<sup>5</sup>

In both cases, Stone's maxim that “Government's lie,” was forgotten. Neither article considered the possibility that the coup regime and its foreign backers were trying to manipulate public opinion. The accusation that Lavalas had launched “Operation Baghdad” was uncritically repeated, while no mention was made of Lavalas statements to the contrary.

Alternatives and the CPH both lamented the lack of action by UN forces and Haiti's police in the face of this wave of supposed Lavalas violence. The CPH even went so far as to complain that police operations in the poor neighbourhoods “regularly fail to produce results.” Neither group mentioned such well-documented “results” as the brutal killings and arbitrary arrests produced by ongoing UN/police incursions into pro-Lavalas slums.



CPH's communiqué ended with a call for reinforcement and increased funding of the police and UN troops.

These views were not idiosyncratic. The CPH issued its statement on behalf of a coalition of development NGOs, unions and civil society groups, and Alternatives generally occupies the left wing of the NGO world.<sup>6</sup> Despite having opposed the 1991 coup d'état against Aristide, the CPH, Alternatives and the vast majority of Canadian NGOs working in Haiti now regarded much of the violence after the 2004 coup as the result of a shadowy conspiracy by Aristide supporters—with the puppet master pulling the strings from exile in South Africa. The “Operation Baghdad” smear is common currency amongst NGOs and continues to be used against Lavalas activists. In a later report, Alternatives referred to it simply as “one of the most serious massacres since 2004.”<sup>7</sup>

The tumultuous class dynamics of Haiti over the past two decades were deeply linked to the ideological volte-face of the NGOs. Born of a cross-class alliance against the Duvalier dictatorship, the Lavalas movement began to fracture along class lines with the advent of democracy—a process accelerated by foreign funding. In the struggle that emerged between Haiti's elite and the popular classes, the shift in aid

financing by Canadian, U.S. and the EU countries—from Haiti’s elected government to so-called “civil society” helped tip the scales in the elite’s favour.<sup>8</sup>

Parts of Haiti’s middle class were “slowly co-opted by the steady trickle of project dollars flowing through the almost interminable list of NGOs infesting every corner of Haiti.”<sup>9</sup>

Development funding offered a rare chance for upward mobility, and led to greater control of Haitian NGOs by their internationally-connected leaders. Increasingly, positions were

“not derived from a vote of a dwindling membership, but rather reflect[ed] the sentiments of a small handful of paid leaders.”<sup>10</sup>

These educated, French-speaking leaders now regarded their former ally Aristide as “worse than Cedras or Duvalier” and “aligned with the elite political movement” pushing for his overthrow.<sup>11</sup> They dismissed government supporters as nothing but small groups of “thugs” and “*chimères*.” [See “Epithets without Borders, pp.14-15.] Aristide was pronounced a traitor and the popular movement dead.

Interestingly, the international architects of policy towards Haiti weren’t beholden to such illusions about Aristide’s unpopularity. Speaking with journalist Anthony Fenton, Fabiola Cordova, National Endowment for Democracy program officer responsible for Haiti, remarked that

“one of the main problems in Haiti has been a very weak opposition... Aristide really had 70% of the popular support and then the 120 other parties had the 30% split in one hundred and twenty different ways.”<sup>12</sup>

Following the coup d’état of 2004, Haitian NGOs hailed the new “democratic opening” as many of their leaders obtained posts in the interim government. Rallying behind the interim authorities’ repression of Lavalas supporters, these groups took up the “Operation Baghdad” label as another

ideological stick with which to beat their opponents.<sup>13</sup> Canadian NGOs absorbed the prejudices of their middle-class “partners” in Haiti, including unquestioning acceptance of the coup regime’s “Operation Baghdad” fiction.

In reviewing Canada’s “difficult partnership” with Haiti, CIDA concluded that “supporting civil society initiatives and Canadian NGO partners produced relatively good qualitative results.” “Substantial support to non-governmental actors strengthened their ability to mobilize constituents” while “eroding legitimacy, capacity and will of the state to deliver key services” by creating of “parallel systems of service delivery.”<sup>14</sup> Canadian NGOs, in other words, played an integral part in bolstering elite-led opposition while undermining Haiti’s elected government.

CIDA’s candid description of Canadian NGOs’ role in the imperial destabilization of Haiti, clashes dramati-

and counterinsurgency warfare concepts in Canadian foreign policy thinking, such faith in a benevolent, empowering CIDA becomes increasingly untenable.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the subordination of aid to larger foreign policy goals—goals absolutely hostile to popular empowerment—is an area where “Canada has made significant headway” in Haiti, as CIDA’s report noted.<sup>16</sup>

The observation that, whatever delusions to the contrary, the empowerment of the poor may not be the ultimate aim of foreign aid is not particularly original. As James Ferguson observed in his 1994 book *The Anti-Politics Machine*:

“In spite of the very common involvement of ‘development’ with counter-insurgency throughout the post-war period, a surprising number of Western progressives have been drawn to ‘development’ work by way of political commitments to and solidarity with Third World causes.”

While Ferguson allowed that “under certain circumstances” development work may fulfil such commitments, “it is all too easy to enter into complicity with a state bureaucracy” working on behalf of “the very social forces...that must be challenged if the impoverished and oppressed majority are to improve their lot.”<sup>17</sup>

The case of “Operation Baghdad” illustrates just how real this danger is.

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2. Steve Fainaru and Karl Vick, “British Hostage Beheaded in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, A23, October 9, 2004. [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A17349-2004Oct8.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A17349-2004Oct8.html)
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Solidarity poster, Cuba.

cally with their self-image. These organizations firmly believe that their CIDA-funded project partners in Haiti actually “represent” civil society and are the “true” bearers of the popular movement, etc. The implicit assumption is that CIDA is in the business of funding progressive, empowering social change. Yet with the ascendancy of “all-of-government engagement”

## “Operation Baghdad”

6. CPH members include Development and Peace, Entraide Missionnaire, Centre international de Solidarite ouvriere, Centre Canadien de Coopération Internationale, the FTQ and CSQ union federations and Amnesty International - Quebec. Co-signers of later CPH statements included Solidarité Union Coopération, Rights & Democracy (a government agency) and AQOCI (the association of Quebec aid agencies).
7. Pierre Bonin and Amelie Gauthier, “Haiti: Voices of the actors,” *Alternatives* and FRIDE, p.13, fn63. [www.fride.org/download/WP52\\_Haiti\\_Voices\\_ENG\\_feb08.pdf](http://www.fride.org/download/WP52_Haiti_Voices_ENG_feb08.pdf)
8. CIDA, “Canadian Cooperation With Haiti: Reflecting on a Decade of ‘Difficult Partnership,’” December 2004, p.8. [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/45/34095943.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/45/34095943.pdf)
9. Stan Goff, “A Brief Account of Haiti,” *Black Radical Congress News*, October 22, 1999. [www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43a/399.html](http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43a/399.html)
10. Anne Sosin in Tom Reeves, “Haiti’s Disappeared,” *ZNet*, May 5, 2004.
11. Reeves, “Haiti’s Disappeared.”
12. Anthony Fenton, “Declassified Documents: National Endowment for Democracy FY2005,” *Narcosphere*, February 15, 2006. [narcosphere.narconews.com/story/2006/2/15/205828/741](http://narcosphere.narconews.com/story/2006/2/15/205828/741)  
Little has changed since the election of Rene Preval in 2006, according to David Malone, then-Assistant Deputy Minister (Global Issues) at Foreign Affairs Canada: “To the distress of the Group of Friends [i.e. Canada, the U.S. and France], Aristide remains the most potent political force within Haiti.” Sebastian von Einsiedel and David M. Malone, “Peace & Democracy for Haiti: A UN Mission Impossible?” *International Relations*, Vol 20(2): pp.153-174.
13. E.g. “Depuis le 30 sept. 2004, le peuple haïtien en général, les populations de Port-au-Prince en particulier, vit sous la coupe réglée des bandes armées exécutant les ordres de J.B.Aristide. Ces bandits ont enlencché une opération baptisée ‘Opération Bagdad’ dont la finalité ouvertement déclarée est le retour physique de Aristide au pouvoir.” “Pétition citoyenne pour réclamer la mise en accusation de Aristide et de ses partisans en Haïti,” *Alterpresse*, July 22, 2005. Signed by PAPDA, GARR, EnfoFanm & SOFA (CIDA-funded Haitian NGOs with numerous ties to Canadian NGOs).
14. CIDA, Op. cit. p.12.
15. Ibid, p.18.
16. Ibid.
17. James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, 1994, pp.283-284.

## Alternatives... to the Truth

By Nik Barry-Shaw

The director of communications for Alternatives, a “progressive” Québec-based “non-governmental international solidarity organization” funded by the government’s Canadian International Development Agency, had a front page article in its magazine, *Journal Alternatives*, that was inserted in *Le Devoir* in July 2005. François L’Écuyer’s article was a shameful parody of journalism filled with unsubstantiated assertions, anonymous sources and anecdotes masquerading as hard evidence.

Chief among L’Écuyer transgressions was his claim that “chimères, gangs loyal to and armed by President Aristide” [see pp.14-15] launched a campaign to destabilize the country called “Operation Baghdad” in order to derail elections planned for late 2005. Deposed Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide, L’Écuyer says, is profiting politically from the violence afflicting Haiti, while other sectors benefit from the chaos financially.

L’Écuyer’s analysis of the situation in Haiti bears a disturbing resemblance to the propaganda disseminated by high-level U.S. and Canadian gov-

ernment officials. One week before L’Écuyer’s article appeared, Roger Noriega, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, gave a similar account, saying:

“Aristide and his camp are singularly responsible for most of the violence and for the concerted nature of the violence” (*Miami Herald*, June 24, 2005).

Like L’Écuyer, Noriega argued that while some “opportunistic criminal organizations” engaged in kidnappings and other crimes, “Aristide and his gangs are playing a central role in generating violence, and trying to sow insecurity,” in a desperate “last stand to terrorize the Haitian people and deny them good government.”

L’Écuyer uncritically repeats the “Operation Baghdad” fiction that was spun by the Haitian elite to justify increased repression of the poor. The label “Operation Baghdad” was concocted by Jean-Claude Bajeux, a member of an anti-Aristide political party, and repeated incessantly by the interim government and the international press.

**Source:** Excerpt, “Alternatives... to what?” *ZNet*, August 17, 2005. [www.zmag.org/znet/viewArticle/5608](http://www.zmag.org/znet/viewArticle/5608)

## Alternatives... to Democracy

By Richard Sanders

The *Journal Alternatives* played up the propaganda stories about “Operation Baghdad” at least five times during the two years of Haiti’s coup-imposed regime.<sup>1</sup> Three of these references were in articles by the organization’s communications director, François L’Écuyer. In one, he uses incredible hyperbole to refer to “Operation Baghdad” as a “criminal operation [that] has cost the lives of over 600 people.” Then, L’Écuyer notes that “many sectors of Haitian society as well as the international community despair at witnessing the derailing of the current democratic transition.”<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis added.)

This article appeared midway through the reign of a totally undemocratic regime that had taken control following the kidnapping and forced exile of Presi-

dent Aristide and the unconstitutional dismissal of all levels of Haiti elected government, including some 7,000 elected officials. L’Écuyer’s telling characterization of this coup-empowered dictatorship as “the current democratic transition,” speaks volumes about his organizations’ complete betrayal not only of democracy, but of truth as well.

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François L’Écuyer, “Deepening crisis in Haïti,” June 9, 2005. [www.alternatives.ca/article1835.html](http://www.alternatives.ca/article1835.html)  
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- 2.. L’Écuyer, June 9, 2005. Op. cit. [www.alternatives.ca/article1835.html](http://www.alternatives.ca/article1835.html)