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This Week in Haiti

“War” Grips Haiti As U.N. Mission Renewal Stumbles

In a chaotic, divided Haiti, there is one thing that everyone agrees on: the United Nations Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH) is not helping.

Kidnappings, car-jackings, murders and robberies are at an all time high in Port-au-Prince, the capital where most of the 7,500 U.N. occupation troops are deployed. Washington has been pushing the MINUSTAH's Brazilian military commander, Lieutenant-General Augusto Heleno Ribeiro Pereira, to use more repression against Haiti's rebellious anti-coup and anti-occupation popular quarters from which the de facto government disingenuously claims that the crime wave emanates.

On May 31, black-clad SWAT units of the Haitian National Police (PNH) and blue-helmeted MINUSTAH troops launched an attack on Cité Soleil, the capital's largest shanty town, which is already militarily beseiged. At about the same time, heavily armed men attacked and burned the TPt Bpf market and a police post in La Saline, about two blocks south of St. Jean Bosco, the burned-out church where President Jean-Bertrand Aristide used to preach when he was a Salesian priest in the 1980s.

MINUSTAH and PNH forces rushed to the scene. Heavy gunfire from automatic weapons cleared the area's usually teeming streets, and early reports say that at least three people were killed. One man at the entrance to the market was fatally shot in the head. It is believed that some of the market's street merchants may have died in the flames.

The fire spread to neighboring homes, stores and a school. A fire-truck, arriving late, tried to contain the flames.

Almost farcically, a half-mile away at the National Palace, a ceremony inaugurating a “national dialogue” was being held. Three Lavalas Family leaders - Yvon Feuillé, Gérard Gilles, and Rudi Hériveaux - attended the affair, much to the consternation of the party's other leaders and base.

“The Lavalas Family did not give those guys any mandate to go participate in something like that,” said Mario Dupuy of the party's Communications Commission. “Thus it is a maneuver which only concerns its authors. It has nothing to do with the population's understanding, nor with the population's demands, nor with the Lavalas Family's position.”

The party's position is that national dialogue and elections cannot be held without the return of President Aristide, currently exiled in South Africa, and of constitutional order.

Aristide's lawless kidnapping by U.S. Special Forces soldiers on Feb. 29, 2004 seems to have set an example for post-coup Haiti. According to the PNH's own conservative figures, Haiti now averages six kidnappings a day, up from about five per day in 2004. Three businessmen were kidnapped on May 29 alone.

The crime epidemic has even begun to seep into neighborhoods of the usually well-insulated bourgeoisie. In the capital's rich mountain suburb of Fermathe, six armed men assaulted a fancy home, killing the Rottweiler guard dog and breaking through the front door's iron bars, *Alterpresse* reports. The mother of the household, who had undergone a Cæsarian section nine months earlier, was raped by four of the men while two stood guard with M-1s outside the house. A 10-year-old girl was also raped by the four men, who then kidnapped the nine-month-old baby. The family is now negotiating for the infant's return.

Another "untouchable" - a U.S. Embassy vehicle - was hit by five rounds on May 25 when driving near Cité Militaire, close to the airport. The apparent attack caused the State Department to order families of U.S. Embassy staff and some nonessential embassy workers to leave Haiti.

On May 31, Frenchman Paul Henry Mourral was fatally wounded when his car was fired on as he passed near Cité Soleil on his way back to the northern city of Cap HaVtien, where he was France's honorary consul.

The bourgeoisie is anxious to take matters into their own hands. "Dr. Reginald Boulos, the President of the Haitian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, recently demanded the U.S.-installed government allow the business community to form their own private security firms and arm them with automatic weapons," said a May 31 Haiti Information Project report. This, in fact, is already the bourgeoisie's current, albeit unofficial, practice.

HIP also reports that Boulos suggested the Latortue regime allow businesses to withhold taxes for one month and use the money to buy more powerful weapons on the international market for the police force. "If they don't allow us to do this then we'll take on own initiative and do it anyway," Boulos stated.

Meanwhile, de facto police chief Léon Charles declared on May 30 that "the truth is that there is a war in Haiti" pitting the PNH and MINUSTAH against "an urban guerrilla movement." He claimed that the police needed more and heavier weapons and more training from the U.N..

Different sectors condemn the MINUSTAH for different reasons. Neo-Duvalierist hardliners would like to see the U.N. force train and hand over armed authority completely to former Haitian soldiers reconfigured as policemen. "Haitians must get together to demand a strengthened national police force," said Osner Févry, a former Duvalierist lawyer and politician. "Then we can negotiate the removal of the [U.N.] destabilization mission and regain national sovereignty."

Paul Denis of the Struggling People's Organization (OPL), a bourgeois-aligned party, reproached the MINUSTAH for not being more repressive. "Has it come just to be a portrait?"

he asked, calling on the force to "revise its terms of engagement," in other words be quicker to open fire on the masses.

But the anti-imperialist National Popular Party (PPN) calls for the immediate end to Haiti's foreign military occupation as a violation of the constitution and national sovereignty. In a May 16 statement, the PPN's Georges Honorat denounced the occupation and its Haitian collaborators who "have taken our nation and our flag hostage," leading to the current situation of "kidnapping, high cost of living, police repression and MINUSTAH wanting to carry out elections."

The PPN urged the population not to register and accept the digitized national voting - and identity - cards being distributed for what it termed the "occupation selections." The Haitian people seem to agree, and voter registration has been pathetic. According to the National Council of Election Observation, only 1.2%, about 54,000, of Haiti's potential 4.5 million voters have registered since the sign-up started April 25. The Provisional Electoral Council's Patrick FéquiPre said that at the present registration rate Haiti will not be ready for balloting until 2007, HIP reports.

But Washington and France are hell-bent on holding "elections" this October and November with U.N. supervision. The mandate for the mission's first year, which cost half a billion dollars, was to run out on Jun. 1. On May 31, the U.N. Security Council voted a four-week extension to the mandate since it was unable to arrive at a longer-term agreement.

The stumbling block? Veto-wielding China is outraged that de facto Prime Minister Gérard Latortue is scheduled to visit Taiwan in July. Haiti is one of the handful of poor countries in the world that recognize Taiwan's renegade government in exchange for bribes and cash. While the U.S. and France want a one-year extension of MINUSTAH's mandate, China will only agree to a six-month extension unless the visit is scrubbed. China is particularly piqued because it has already deployed 125 police as part of the MINUSTAH, its first participation in a U.N. "peace-keeping" mission. It is scheduled to send 125 more in June.

Another question is whether Brazil can continue to militarily lead the MINUSTAH. Persistent reports say that General Ribeiro is desperate to quit. Also last week, Folha de Sao Paulo, Brazil's most important daily newspaper, assailed the Brazilian government's participation in the MINUSTAH in an editorial entitled "Shame."

The editorial says that the Brazilian Foreign Ministry has sought "to deceive Brazilian public opinion."

"UN forces, under Brazilian command, play the role of substitute army, offering military support for repressive police operations and judicial persecution," the editorial said, citing the case of Haiti's political prisoners like Yvon Neptune, Jocelerme Privert and Annette "Sb An" Auguste. Brazilian Foreign ministry officials are "active accomplices in these human rights violations," the paper said.

"The Brazilian government has played the role of hired gunman of the United States," the editorial concluded. "But the mission is slowly sinking, together with the Haitian dictatorship, which appears incapable of preparing even a tolerable electoral farce."

Crackdown in the Dominican Republic

Over the past 17 days, Dominican authorities have expelled some 4,000 Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent following the murder of a Dominican merchant woman and the serious wounding of her husband near the town of Monte Christi on May 9. Many of the deportations occurred over the weekend of May 13-15. A dire humanitarian crisis has resulted along the border as thousands of homeless people struggle to survive and reunite with their families.

Human rights groups estimate that about 400 of the deportees are Dominicans of Haitian descent, with no family in or knowledge of Haiti or who do not speak Creole.

“Frontier Solidarity [a Jesuit group] witnessed the expulsion last weekend of over 2000 people, 1414 of whom we received, who arrived in Ouanaminthe in the most inhuman conditions: in rags, starving, crammed into the vehicles carrying them, wounded physically, emotionally, and in their dignity,” said the Jesuit Refugee and Migrant Service in a May 18 letter to de facto Prime Minister Gérard Latortue. “The majority of those expelled are women and children... This massive deportation shocks our conscience as Haitians, Christians and human beings, and we must address ourselves to the Haitian government so that it does not treat lightly these violations of the rights of Haitians in the Dominican Republic and the abuses to which they have been exposed in this xenophobic and anti-Haitian climate which reigns in the Dominican Republic.”

Dominican governments have traditionally resorted to round-ups of Haitians during difficult economic times, like now, to scapegoat the migrant workers who do most of the DR's menial labor. El Nacional newspaper estimates that 85% of the farm laborers in the main banana plantations in the area of Monte Cristi, where the deportations are concentrated, are Haitian.

The excuse for the crackdown came after merchant Maritza LuZa, mother of three, in the town of Hatillo Palma, was macheted to death, while her husband Domingo Antoine was seriously wounded. Although the police are still investigating the crime, LuZa's three Haitian neighbors were arrested, provoking reprisals against all Haitians in the area. At least three Haitians have been lynched.

The Haitian government has done nothing to address the crisis. On May 13-15, Alex Baptiste, the de facto Minister for Haitians Living Abroad held a conference at the Catholic University of San Pedro de Macoris to discuss how to “intensify diplomatic relations” between Haiti and the DR. The penniless Haitian treasury doled out 2.5 million gourdes - about \$68,000 - for the conference, money that would have been better spent providing relief to the thousands of deportees along the border.