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Haiti factions try to rebuild army

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In a statement Aug. 20, the Haiti Support Group (HSG) said it continues to be seriously concerned by the power wielded by armed irregular forces in Haiti and by their increasingly bold demands for reestablishment of the Haitian Army.

The London-based Haiti Support Group is a solidarity organization working alongside Haiti's popular democratic movement since 1992.

"These concerns are heightened in the context of the farcical 'trial' and acquittals of former paramilitary group FRAPH leader Louis-Jodel Chamblain and former anti-gang head, Jackson Joanis, and the recent mobilization of former soldiers in Port-au-Prince, Les Cayes, and in the Central Plateau and other parts of the country," the Haiti Support Group said.

The statement said the interim government headed by Gerard Latortue appears to be increasingly interacting with the illegal armed groups that participated in the U.S.-led coup that deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February, and in some cases has actively engaged former leaders of the Armed Forces of Haiti, disbanded by Aristide.

The Haitian Times newspaper reported Aug. 18 that the interim government appointed Winter Etienne to direct the National Port Authority in Gonaives. Etienne, along with fugitive from justice and former FRAPH member, Jean Tatoune, led the armed uprising that started late last year in Gonaives, HSG said.

Etienne is now coordinator of the new National Reconstruction Front party, headed by former army officer, police commissioner and coup plotter, Guy Philippe. The solidarity group pointed out that at the Ministry of Interior, former Army chief Herard Abraham continues to integrate former high level officers from the Haitian Army into his staff.

A new appointee is former Colonel Williams Regala, once the right-hand man of dictator Henri Namphy and allegedly the main instigator of the Nov. 29, 1987 massacre of voters.

Regala joins a host of other former high command officers at the Ministry of the Interior, HSG said. One of the most notorious is former Colonel Henri-Robert Marc-Charles, who in September 1991 joined General Raoul Cedras in forming a military junta to overthrow Aristide's elected government. He is now a top advisor to Abraham, although a judicial order requires his imprisonment pending trial for involvement in the March 1990 Piatre peasant massacre

Under Herard Abraham, the Ministry of Interior is busying itself with the tasks of recruiting former soldiers into the National Police Force and preparing to pay 10 years' back pay and pensions to all members of the Army that was disbanded in 1995, the statement said. Meanwhile, HSG said, in the Central Plateau region, former Army Colonel Remissainthe Ravix claims to lead some 1,800 re-armed soldiers, and has ridiculed the interim's government's proposal that they disarm.