

The U.S. Government Is Still Picking Winners and Losers in Haiti

The U.S. government (USG) says it is supporting a [Haitian-led](#) solution to the country's [political crisis](#) and is "no longer in the business of [picking winners and losers](#) in Haiti." But this espoused neutrality is contradicted by USG persistence in [propping up](#) the unconstitutional, [corrupt](#), and repressive regime of de facto Prime Minister Dr. Ariel Henry and the *Pati Aysiyen Tèt Kale* (PHTK) party. [Haitian civil society](#), [Haiti experts in the U.S.](#) and [members](#) of [Congress](#) engaged with Haiti have all [identified](#) the U.S. government's backing of Haiti's regime as a [principal impediment](#) to resolving Haiti's crisis. Examples include:

1. The U.S. government continues to provide de facto PM Henry with a veto over negotiations to solve Haiti's political crisis, eliminating his incentive to compromise and allowing his regime to [continue dismantling](#) Haiti's democratic [institutions](#) and [repressing](#) the opposition. The assertion that the U.S. government is not "picking winners and losers" [ignores the reality](#) that the U.S. government already picked the winner when it [installed](#) Henry as de facto Prime Minister [in July 2021](#). Since then, the U.S. government has been [preserving](#) the corrupt and repressive status quo by publicly treating Henry as an indispensable party in negotiations and promoting his political accord over other processes with much broader support. For example, when the U.S. State Department urges Haitians to come together, it repeatedly [names](#) Dr. Henry's de facto government as one of the parties to any agreement, despite widespread [rejection](#) of the PHTK regime by Haitian civil society. The U.S. government does not treat any other civil society actor as indispensable. The USG April 2022 [Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#) in Haiti touts a political accord Henry issued in September 2021, but makes no mention of the much [broader and earlier civil society initiative](#) with [nearly a thousand signatures](#) known as the [Montana Accord](#) (see further [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). Even as it thus privileges Henry's initiatives, the U.S. government specifically [exhorts](#) representatives from the Montana Accord to "engage in earnest discussions" with his de facto regime.

Both Dr. Henry and Haitian civil society [know](#) that USG support for Henry's de facto regime [allows him](#) to make unreasonable demands that others must accept. Henry has, in fact, [refused](#) to negotiate in good faith or make meaningful compromises, while Haiti has [plunged deeper](#) into violence and misrule, and is [no closer](#) to fair elections than it was a year ago.

2. USG officials have acknowledged that they are aware of serious allegations of Henry's involvement in the assassination of President Moïse, including multiple phone calls between Henry and the alleged ringleader of the killing shortly after the assassination, yet they have [declined](#) to express corresponding concern, responding to questions from the press by citing to Henry's own bald denial and by pointing out that other political actors also have connections to nefarious actors. A judge leading the investigation was [secretly recorded declaring](#) that de facto PM Henry was part of the planning of the assassination. The U.S. government likewise refuses to publicly criticize de facto PM Henry's [obstruction](#) of the investigation, which includes acts like firing a prosecutor and a Minister of Justice who raised concerns about Henry's telephone calls with the assassination's alleged mastermind; and failing to provide resources, including security, to judges and prosecutors working on the case. The U.S. Congress has sought to clarify the State Department's understanding of interference with the investigation into the assassination,

[requiring](#) the Department to submit a report to Congress by mid-June and to the public by June 30. As of July 15, 2022, the Department has failed to comply.

3. The Biden administration refuses to condemn the well-established links between de facto PM Henry's regime and gang violence in Haiti that is making life unlivable for many Haitians and resulting in [increasingly horrific](#) human rights violations. The gangs' ascendance is directly linked to PHTK [support](#) for politically-motivated gang violence, like the 2018 [La Saline massacre](#). In 2020, the Trump administration [imposed](#) sanctions on two PHTK government officials and a police officer turned government-allied gang leader for supporting gangs that "repress political dissent in Port-au-Prince neighborhoods known to participate in anti-government demonstrations" in connection with that massacre. There has been no follow-up and no further acts by the U.S. government. The State Department's April 2022 [Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#) in Haiti notes connections between gangs and unnamed government officials, but the Biden administration has not named or sanctioned any of these individuals. Nor has the administration criticized the PHTK regime for its gang ties, despite evidence and credible allegations that the regime [finances](#) gang members, [supplies](#) them with guns and ammunition, and interferes with their prosecution (for example, a human rights group reported that PM Henry's top advisors [successfully intervened](#) with police to release members of the *400 Mawozo* gang from prison). On June 27, law school clinics at NYU, Harvard, and Yale, which work on human rights in Haiti, [denounced](#) the "United States' continued support for de facto Prime Minister Ariel Henry despite strong evidence of his government's involvement in this violence."
4. The U.S. government [invited](#) de facto PM Henry to participate among heads of state in the [Summit of the Americas](#), which the United States hosted in June, despite adopting a [policy](#) of excluding "undemocratic" governments. By contrast, the State Department wielded the policy to [exclude](#) the leaders of Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba, ignoring the pervasively [undemocratic](#) nature of Haiti's rulers.
5. The U.S. government offered Henry unqualified recognition as a head of state when it pledged USD 50 million at a [February 2022 donor conference](#). The de facto Henry regime was invited to co-lead the conference alongside the UN with no reservations as to its democratic and human rights record or to its authority to do so. In a [recent OpEd](#), U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols further noted that the U.S. government has quadrupled its security assistance to Haiti. The State Department's [statement](#) from a June 12 International Partners Ministerial Meeting on Haiti describes extensive U.S. investments in Haiti, but does not mention concerns with the Henry regime's legitimacy, repression or corruption.