

Globalization and terror - Murder Inc. and Haiti

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“Evidence is mounting that United Nations peacekeepers shot and killed unarmed civilians, including children, during a recent raid in Haiti...Independent witnesses say up to 23 people were killed during the raid and that many were shot in the head.” (1)

“Two women and two children were killed in an air strike called in by British forces in Afghanistan, the Ministry of Defence said.” (2)

“Operations by U.S. and multinational forces and Iraqi police are killing twice as many Iraqis – most of them civilians – as attacks by insurgents, according to statistics compiled by the Iraqi Health Ministry.” (3)

“Yesterday in Quito’s Military Hospital, Mexican student Lucía Morett gave her first formal statement to Ecuador’s public prosecutor William Pesantez, testifying that Colombian soldiers... murdered people who were wounded or who had surrendered.” (4)

Corporate globalization depends on governmental readiness to murder. Peoples and organizations in countries that defend their right to self determination can expect no mercy. The Bush regime and its allies may squabble occasionally over ways and means, but their behaviour towards peoples like those of Haiti and Palestine leaves no room for doubt – the US and allied governments operate a system of murderous global gangsterism to get what they want. The UN Security Council now functions pretty much as a diplomatic version of Murder Inc.

Haiti’s prolonged destruction by foreign powers is just one more example of rich country elites’ determination to seize what they want by denying fundamental rights to peoples around the world. Four years on, the coup against President Aristide organized by the United States, Canada and France fits imperialism’s familiar historical pattern. All the fake, elegant-suited blather about bringing democracy and prosperity to Haiti has boiled down to murderous military occupation by the United Nations defending a corrupt North American and European backed elite, while starving people survive by eating cakes made of dirt.

Immediately after the coup, George W. Bush said, “This government believes it essential that Haiti have a hopeful future. This is the beginning of a new chapter in the country’s history.” Then US ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte said, “Haiti has turned a new page in its history.” (5) What, now, does this brave new world for Haiti, as prepared by George Bush, John Negroponte and their corporate gangster cronies look like?

The statistics of misery

Associated Press writer Jonathan Katz reported on January 29th this year “...in places like

Cite Soleil, the oceanside slum where Charlene shares a two-room house with her baby, five siblings and two unemployed parents, cookies made of dirt, salt and vegetable shortening have become a regular meal... "When my mother does not cook anything, I have to eat them three times a day," Charlene said. Her baby, named Woodson, lay still across her lap, looking even thinner than the slim 6 pounds 3 ounces he weighed at birth."

The World Bank reckons Haiti's population is just under 9 million. Gross national income per capita in 2006 was about US\$480. After two and a half years of foreign intervention, in September 2006, the IMF reckoned (6) that over 70% of people still lived on less than US\$2 a day with 55% of people living on a per capita income of just US\$0.44 per day. Four years after the coup, Katz's report shows nothing has improved. So if we say Haiti's population is now around 8.8 million- that means that just an hour's flying time from Miami, nearly 5 million people are effectively starving.

That 2006 IMF report - an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - noted real per capita gross domestic product then equalled just 70% of Haiti's GDP in 1980. Also, "Access to basic public services (health, education, running water, sanitation) is very unreliable and social indicators are alarming. Infant mortality is estimated at 76/1,000 or two times the regional average, and life expectancy is about 18 years short of the regional average. Moreover, less than half of the population has access to drinking water in both rural and urban areas, compared to regional averages of 71 percent and 93 percent, respectively. Access to improved sanitary facilities is available to a very small portion of Haiti's population: 16 percent in rural areas and 50 percent in urban areas, whereas in Central America and the Caribbean, these percentages average 49 percent and 86 percent, respectively."

Another report, this one by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, also appeared in September 2006. "Haiti's Dirty Little Secret: the Problem of Child Slavery", reported on the "restavec" system of forced child labour, "According to the Haitian government, there are about 90,000 to 120,000 children in bondage, but UNICEF estimates significantly larger numbers, ranging from 250,000 to 300,000." This, remember, from a population of just under 9 million.

Right now, the sustainability of Haiti's economy is doubtful. Haiti has suffered the same imperialist policy pressures as all the other countries in Central America and the Caribbean that have led to a decline of their rural economies along with concomitant environmental destruction. Those neoliberal policies were deliberately designed by rich country "development" planners to create a large pool of vulnerable easily exploited migrant labour all too ready to seek work either as illegal immigrants to the US or in local super-exploitative maquila industries serving luxury brands in North America and Europe.

The resulting agricultural collapse has been disastrous for Haiti's rural economy and for the poor majority's ability to get enough to eat. "Student activists in Haiti are calling for an overhaul of the nation's agriculture policies, which they say have resulted in Haiti importing more than half of its food while local farmers are mired in poverty." (7) The misery and suffering endured by Haiti's people four years after the coup against President Aristide prevails despite what passes for support from the "international community".

Return to colonialism

Looking at Iraq or Palestine or Afghanistan, one can see quite clearly that anywhere the US government and its allies have intervened people are at least as badly off and usually worse off than they were before that intervention. Haiti's case follows the pattern. The US

government and its Murder Inc. allies on the UN Security Council decide it is time for “regime-change”. They impose economic sanctions. They deliberately attempt to provoke internal crisis and conflict. Their propaganda media mount a relentless campaign to prepare public opinion among the Murder Inc. countries’ domestic audience. Finally they resort to military force to install the regime they want. Invariably, it is a puppet government facing fierce, resentful opposition from the people on whom it has been imposed, able to survive only via enforcement by foreign troops.

This is readily apparent if one reviews quotes from the time of the coup. Colin Powell , then US Secretary of State, said in the coup aftermath “...we felt by the end of last week that the only real answer was if President Aristide would take a hard look at the situation and decide to step down, which is what he did. And we said that under those circumstances we would come in, and we came in immediately.” Or, “...it became very clear to all of us and to the Canadians and the French that he [Aristide] had pretty much used up whatever political authority and credibility he had.” (see note 5)

“We felt”. “It became pretty clear to all of us.” But who are these “we”, these “all of us” except the most reactionary elements among the elites of the former colonial powers? Effectively nothing has changed since the days of the US military occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934. The only superficial difference is that the occupying forces are now UN mercenaries, most shamefully from Latin American countries like Brazil, Bolivia and Chile. The supreme, revolting irony is that United Nations member countries are themselves effectively trashing the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Charter. One wonders if Evo Morales does not see that something similar to President Aristide’s fate could just as plausibly befall him once John Negroponte and hit-men like US ambassador Philip Goldberg have created the right conditions in Bolivia.

Human rights in post-coup Haiti

Corporate media coverage of hunger and poverty in Haiti fits snugly into the long standing racist stereotype Haiti shares with impoverished African countries. They are viewed as “basket cases” whom their former colonial owners, unfortunately and regrettably, can do hardly anything to help. To indifferent rich country public opinion, such cliches are sufficient to explain away the “international community’s” abject failure to help promote sustainable economic progress in Haiti.

But it is much harder for the UN occupation forces and the “international community” to justify the persistence of gross human rights abuses which is what the 2004 coup was supposedly intended to stop. To cover up the shocking reality, Murder Inc. governments enlist media obfuscation and oblivion to tread softly around gross abuses. These include the thousands of people killed during and after the coup, the political prisoners held without due process for years, the hundreds of people unjustly convicted, mass victimization of members of Fanmi Lavalas, impunity for US-trained murderers, UN massacres and blatant attempts to rig electoral processes.

Constant advocacy for human rights in Haiti by respected, authoritative organizations like the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (<http://www.ijdh.org>) have been backed up by various studies since the 2004 coup describing and documenting abuse and violation of human rights in the country. The Center for the Study of Human Rights of Miami University’s Law School published a report of an investigation by Thomas Griffin in November 2004.

Griffin and his team documented the truly sickening security breakdown in Port-au-Prince with the police dominated by former Haitian army soldiers and gang warfare fomented by sinister US-supported figures like coup-instigator Andy Apaid.

Griffin gives important context in his report by explaining the role of US government not-so-non-governmental organizations like the International Foundation for Electoral Systems – funded directly by USAID on a no-competing-bid basis – in the coup against Aristide. The report’s account of an interview with Pierre Vixamar, a stooge of the US and Canadian governments, is a classic portrait of the mentality of a colonialist catspaw. After documenting the nightmarish conditions in the Haitian capital’s hospitals and morgue, Griffin concluded “Life for the impoverished majority is becoming more violent and more inhuman as the months pass since the elected government’s removal on February 29, 2004.”

A July 19th 2004 report by IJDH, also covering the post coup period, documented hundreds of violent deaths. Anthony Fenton (8) makes two important observations about that report. Firstly, he notes that like all the other reports on the post-coup human rights situation it was only able to cover the Port au Prince/Central Plateau area – implying rightly that the full extent of abuses and violent death throughout Haiti following the coup is certainly many times higher. Secondly, he focuses on the report’s assertion that “With the exception of four victims and for those whom it has not been possible to obtain their identity, interviewees have reported that the victims were supporters of Aristide or Haiti’s former constitutional government.”

Corporate media silence on the post coup massacres in Haiti is in stark contrast to mainstream media coverage of government repression of the 2007 uprising in Burma or of the post-election inter-communal violence in Kenya. One is entitled to assume that since most of the victims of Haiti’s violence seem to have been impoverished supporters of President Aristide, their suffering was and is unimportant as far as the Western Bloc propaganda media are concerned. At the time of the coup only a handful of journalists like Kevin Pina and Jean Ristil were faithfully reporting matters at grass roots – their reports were ignored by the major corporate media.

One can draw a similar conclusion with regard to the The Lancet article “Human rights abuse and other criminal violations in Port-au-Prince, Haiti: a random survey of households”. (9) One of the report’s authors, Athena Kolbe, wrote more graphically in at least one other article (as Lyn Duff) about the horrific use of rape and sexual abuse to destroy pro-Aristide families. (10) The Lancet article reported, “Our findings suggested that 8000 individuals were murdered in the greater Port-au-Prince area during the 22-month period assessed. Almost half of the identified perpetrators were government forces or outside political actors. Sexual assault of women and girls was common, with findings suggesting that 35,000 women were victimised in the area; more than half of all female victims were younger than 18 years.”

The article’s authors interpreted these findings as follows, “crime and systematic abuse of human rights were common in Port-au-Prince. Although criminals were the most identified perpetrators of violations, political actors and UN soldiers were also frequently identified. These findings suggest the need for a systematic response from the newly elected Haitian government, the UN, and social service organisations to address the legal, medical, psychological, and economic consequences of widespread human rights abuses and crime.”

Given the Haitian government's meagre resources and the intimidating political context in which they are working, the promotion and defence of human rights in Haiti are likely to remain in the balance. The case of human rights activist Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine, still missing after seven months is emblematic of the the government's failure to impose whatever limited authority it may have. Amnesty International has issued repeated alerts lately documenting death threats to human rights activists, among them Wilson Mesilien, Franztco Joseph and Yveson Piton. (11)

Historical continuities : regional projections

Most of these these reports of systematic human rights abuses have been either ignored or when they are impossible to ignore, like the Lancet article, they have been rubbished, the integrity of their authors challenged, their methodology questioned. That pattern follows the same pattern of perception management deployed by the US government and its allies against any steadfast opposition in Latin America, from Sandino's pequeño ejercito loco in 1930s Nicaragua to the FARC in Colombia for over forty years, from Guatemala's Arbenz to Allende's Chile, from the Cuban revolution to the Sandinista revolution to the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela and the indigenous resurgence under Evo Morales in Bolivia.

During the Nicaraguan war the historic 1986 judgement by the International Court of Human Rights against the United States government for instigating the Contra terrorist campaign against Nicaragua's elected government was buried by the media. Numerous reports detailing systematic and widespread contra atrocities were discounted while Nicaraguan government measures to combat US government directed terrorism were demonized. Against current adversaries, the US government - run by many of the same people who connived in trafficking arms and drugs to fund the Nicaraguan Contra - continues implementing with its allies what in the 1980s, against Nicaragua, Mozambique and Angola, they called "total war at grass roots level".

Just as in those former conflicts, they openly fund non-governmental organizations opposed to target governments under the guise of "strengthening democracy and human rights". At the same time they covertly organize paramilitary organizations and murder campaigns. Having deliberately provoked conflict and instability, they then accuse the target government of being incapable of meeting its people's needs. Then it is time for "regime change" via whatever puppet quisling opportunists they can muster, imposed by some cynically engineered "coalition of the willing" with or without a UN Murder Inc. permit.

The United States and allies like Canada or member countries of the European Union maintain the same colonialist mentality they have always had. Their priority is the maintenance of their own power and influence via local proxies and enfeebled governments. To achieve that outcome they will relentlessly and deliberately arrange wholesale murder so as to repress democratic popular movements. They represent an ancien regime whose overwhelming advantage - derived from slavery and genocide in countries they colonised - is slipping away. The horrific deliberate destruction of Haiti and the wholesale murder and imprisonment of supporters of former President Aristide has a double aspect.

On the one hand it is a reprise of imperialist policy as applied throughout the 20th century against peoples that insist on their right to self-determination. On the other it is the latest precursor in Latin America of renewed US and allied readiness to destroy progressive movements in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. The recent Colombian government massacre of FARC members and visiting Mexican research students in Ecuador was a trial run for what

is likely to be a series of such provocations through 2008. After their success in Haiti, the US government and its Murder Inc. allies are moving on to bigger, oil-and-gas-rich prey.

Notes

1. "Women and children killed in Afghanistan by British air strike", John Bingham, Independent, March 13th 2008
2. "Peacekeepers accused after killings in Haiti ", Andrew Buncombe, Independent, July 29th 2005
3. "More Iraqi Civilians Killed by US Forces Than By Insurgents, Data Shows", Nancy A. Youssef, Knight-Ridder, September 25th 2004
4. "La estudiante superviviente mexicana revela que los soldados colombianos remataron a gente herida o que se había rendido." Blanche Petrich, La Jornada, Rebellion, March 17th 2008
5. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2004/03/mil-040301-usia01.htm>
6. "A Window of Opportunity for Haiti" - www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2006/cr06411.pdf
7. "HAITI: Once-Vibrant Farming Sector in Dire Straits", Nazaire St. Fort, IPS March 4th 2008
8. "Human Rights Horrors in Haiti" Anthony Fenton, www.dissidentvoice.org , July 27, 2004
9. <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140673606692118/fulltext>
10. "Haiti rapes" Lyn Duff, Haiti Action, March 10th 2005.
11. "Human rights activists under fire in Haiti" Haiti Information Project, Haiti Action, January 13th 2008

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