

# Haiti's Nightmare: The Cocaine Coup and The CIA Connection

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It was a day before the scheduled return of Haiti's exiled president Jean Bertrand Aristide, and it was clear that the October 30, 1993 deadline for a return to democratic rule in the western hemisphere's poorest nation could not occur. Aristide, a Roman Catholic priest who had been elected nearly three years before with 70 percent of the vote in Haiti's first free election, was speaking to a packed session of the United Nations General Assembly.

In a dramatic move, Aristide told the diplomats that the military government of Haiti had to yield the power that was to end Haiti's role in the drug trade, a trade financed by Colombia's Cali cartel, that had exploded in the months following the coup. Aristide told the UN that each year Haiti is the transit point for nearly 50 tons of cocaine worth more than a billion dollars, providing Haiti's military rulers with \$200 million in profits.

Aristide's electrifying accusations opened the floodgate of even more sinister revelations. Massachusetts senator John Kerry heads a subcommittee concerned with international terrorism and drug trafficking that turned up collusion between the CIA and drug traffickers during the late 1980s' Iran Contra hearings.

Kerry had developed detailed information on drug trafficking by Haiti's military rulers that led to the indictment in Miami in 1988, of Lt. Col. Jean Paul. The indictment was a major embarrassment to the Haitian military, especially since Paul defiantly refused to surrender to U.S. authorities. It was just a month before thousands of U.S. troops invaded Panama and arrested Manuel Noriega who, like Col. Paul, was also under indictment for drug trafficking in Florida.

In November 1989, Col. Paul was found dead after he consumed a traditional Haitian good will gift—a bowl of pumpkin soup. Haitian officials accused Paul's wife of the murder, apparently because she had been cheated out of her share of a cocaine deal by associates of her husband, who were involved in smuggling through Miami.

The U.S. senate also heard testimony in 1988 that then interior minister, Gen. Williams Regala, and his DEA liaison officer, protected and supervised cocaine shipments. The testimony also charged the then Haitian military commander Gen. Henry Namphy with accepting bribes from Colombian traffickers in return for landing rights in the mid 1980's.

It was in 1989 that yet another military coup brought Lt. Gen. Prosper Avril to power. Under U.S. pressure Avril, the former finance chief under the 30-year Duvalier family dictatorship, fired 140 officers suspected of drug trafficking. Avril, who is currently living in Miami, is

being sued by six Haitians, including Port-au-Prince mayor Evans Paul, who claim they were abducted and tortured by the Haitian military under Avril's orders in November 1989. According to a witness before Senator John Kerry's subcommittee, Avril is in fact a major player in Haiti's role as a transit point in the cocaine trade.

Four years later, on the eve of Aristide's negotiated return as Haiti's elected president, a summary of a confidential report prepared for Congress and leaked to the media says that *corruption levels within the (Haitian military-run) narcotics service are substantial enough to hamper any significant investigation attempting to dismantle a Colombian organization in Haiti*. The report says that more than 1,000 Colombians live in Haiti using forged passports of the neighboring Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic leader Joaquin Balaguer opposes the UN blockade of Haiti, and maintains close ties with the Haitian military. The road connecting Port-au-Prince with the border town of Jimini in the Dominican Republic is the only well paved route in Haiti, and serves as the lifeline for the regime. Despite the embargo and U.S. naval blockade of Haiti, the road to the Dominican Republic has become not only the route for oil tanker trucks breaking the embargo, but the major route for cocaine shipments as well.

Fernando Burgos Martinez, a Colombian national with major business interests in Haiti, has been named in congressional records as a major cocaine trafficker, brazen enough to do business with other Colombian drug dealers on his home telephone. One DEA source says both the U.S. embassy and Haitian government have been pressed unsuccessfully to authorize wiretaps, despite DEA allegations that Martinez has been involved in every major drug shipment to Haiti since 1987.

The Kerry report claims Martinez is the *bag man* for Colombia's cocaine cartels, and supervises bribes paid to the Haitian military. According to Miami attorney John Mattes, who is defending a Cuban-American drug trafficker cooperating with U.S. prosecutors, Martinez was paid \$30,000 to bribe Haitian authorities into releasing two drug pilots jailed in Haiti after the engine in their plane conked out, forcing them to land in Port-au-Prince.

Martinez claims innocence from his lavish home in Petionville, an ornate suburb where Haiti's ruling class live, overlooking the slums of the capital. He runs the casino at the plush El Rancho Hotel, that prior to the embargo realized nearly \$50 million in business each week, a cash flow adequate to conceal a major money laundering operation.

But the most disturbing allegations have been of the role played by the CIA in keeping many of the coup leaders on the agency's payroll, as part of an anti-drug intelligence unit set up by the U.S. in Haiti in 1986. Many of these same military men have had their U.S. assets frozen, and are prevented from entering this country because of their role in overthrowing Aristide, and subsequent human rights violations, including torture and murders of political opponents, raising the question—was the U.S. involved in a cocaine coup that overthrew Aristide?

## War on Drugs and Human Rights Violations

When thousands of U.S. soldiers went crashing into Panama to arrest Manuel Noriega on December 20 1989, the administration of President George Bush justified the action as a major victory in the war on drugs. The cost of that victory was played down in the rush of propaganda hailing a rare victory, in a war where the light at the end of the tunnel isn't often seen. The White House claimed casualties were low, 200 Panamanians killed along

with about 20 U.S. soldiers. Bush declared the price worth the achievement of ending Panama's role as banker and transit point for cocaine smuggled from the cartels of Colombia.

But the human cost turned out to be a great deal larger than the official pronouncements. A lawsuit brought by New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights on behalf of 300 victims of the Panama invasion, charges that the casualties were actually more than 2,000 killed, that the assault left 20,000 homeless and damages exceeding \$2 billion. Mass graves were unearthed after the invasion, and hundreds of victims buried in U.S.-made body bags were discovered, and eyewitnesses testified that they saw U.S. troops throwing the bodies of civilians into trenches. These revelations moved the OAS to open an investigation into possible human rights violations by the United States during its invasion of Panama, the first such investigation of a U.S. intervention ever mounted by an international body.

The gunfire had barely subsided in Panama, and General Noriega was hardly settled into his new digs in a federal prison, when another battle in the war on drugs seemed won. In Haiti, decades of brutal dictatorship seemed to be passing, with the election of President Jean Bertrand Aristide to lead the Caribbean nation of six million. It was a time when dreams of a better future by Haiti's impoverished people seemed within reach.

But it wasn't long before the dream was transformed into a nightmare. Less than a year after the election, on September 30 1991, Haiti's army launched a ruthless coup d'état that forced Aristide into exile. The coup ushered in yet another period of military repression in Haiti's tortured history—a history marked by twenty years of U.S. military occupation, beginning with the 1915 crushing of a popular revolt by U.S. Marines.

Human rights groups report that Haitians killed in the repression following the coup may be more than 3,000. More than 2,000 others were seriously injured, including victims of gunshots and torture. The OAS imposed an embargo that failed to topple the coup leaders, but forced negotiations, brokered by the UN at Governors Island in New York last July. There coup leader General Raoul Cedras agreed to allow Aristide to return in exchange for an end to the embargo.

Yet as the date for Aristide's return grew near, the military began a campaign of terror against their opponents. The killings peaked in the days before the scheduled return of Aristide, with the brazen murder of Antoine Izmerly, a businessman and key Aristide backer, who was abducted from a cathedral and gunned down on a busy city street. Later, Guy Malary, Aristide's justice minister, was also killed, and his body left by a roadside.

President Bill Clinton publicly expressed his support for Aristide's return to Haiti, and sent the transport USS Harlan County, with hundreds of troops, to insure the transition to democracy. But at the port where the ship was to dock, pro-military government thugs staged a demonstration, prompting the Harlan County to turn back. It was shortly after the images of dead U.S. troops dragged through the streets of Somalia had shocked Americans, and provided an excuse for the Clinton administration to back off from what promised to be another open-ended intervention.

### The Boys From the Company

Meanwhile, the CIA was openly running a full-scale disinformation campaign against Aristide. Ultra-conservative North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, a leading opponent of

Aristide, brought CIA analyst Brian Latell to Capitol Hill in October, to brief selected senators and representatives on allegations that Aristide had been treated for mental illness. It turned out that the time during which the CIA report alleges Aristide was treated at a Canadian hospital falls within the same period that Aristide was studying and teaching in Israel. Latell also said he *saw no evidence of oppressive rule* in Haiti.

While Helms was a long-time backer of the brutal dictatorship of Jean Claude Duvalier, the Democrats have their own ties to the human rights violators and drug dealers who rule Haiti.

Former Democratic party head and current secretary of commerce Ron Brown headed a law firm that represented the Duvalier family for decades. Part of that representation was a public relations campaign that stressed Duvalier's opposition to communism in the cold war. United States support for Duvalier was worth more than \$400 million in aid to the country, before the man who called himself Haiti's *President-for-Life* was forced from the country.

Even Duvalier's exit from Haiti, in February 1986, is shrouded in covert intrigue and remains an unexplored facet of the career of Lt. Col. Oliver North. Shortly after Duvalier's ouster, North was quoted as saying he had brought an end to *Haiti's nightmare*, a cryptic statement that was never publicly perused by the Iran-Contra hearings.

#### The CIA and the Cocaine Connection

As Jesse Helms was using the CIA to slag Aristide in the media, an intelligence service in Haiti set up by the agency to battle the cocaine trade, had evolved into a gang of political terrorists and drug traffickers. Three former chiefs of the Haitian National Intelligence Service (NIS) are now on the list of 41 Haitian officials whose assets in the United States were frozen for supporting the military coup.

The CIA poured millions into the NIS from its founding in 1986 to the 1991 coup. A 1992 DEA document describes the NIS as *a covert counter-narcotics intelligence unit which often works in unison with the CIA*. Although most of the CIA's activities in Haiti remain secret, U.S. officials accuse some NIS members of becoming *enmeshed* in the drug trade. A U.S. embassy official in Haiti told the New York Times that the NIS *was a military organization that distributed drugs in Haiti*.

Aristide's exiled interior minister Patrick Elie says the relationship between the CIA and NIS involves more than drugs. Elie told investigative reporter Dennis Bernstein that *the NIS was created by the CIA*. Created, Elie says, to *infiltrate the drug network*. But Elie adds, the NIS, which is staffed entirely by the Haitian military, spends most of its resources in *political repression and spying on Haitians*.

After the 1991 coup, Elie maintains that the drug trade took a *quantum leap*, taking control over the national Port Authority through the offices of Port-au-Prince Police Chief Lt. Col. Michel Francois. It was Francois's thugs, called attaches, who were primarily responsible for the waves of political killings since the coup.

United States government sources say the NIS never provided much narcotics intelligence, and its commanding officers were responsible for the torture and murder of Aristide supporters, and were involved in death threats that forced the local DEA chief to flee the country. Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd, who sits on the Foreign Relations

Committee and received extensive CIA briefings, said that the drug intelligence the U.S. was getting came *from the very same people who in front of the world are brutally murdering people.*

## Legacy of Corruption

In the early 1980's, when Haiti was still under Duvalier's rule, the drug trade in Haiti was the province of individually corrupt military men associated with Duvalier's powerful father-in-law. By 1985 the cocaine cartels began to seek transit points for the booming cocaine industry. A natural candidate was Haiti lying just south of the Bahamas—another favorite transit route.

Haiti is particularly attractive to the drug smugglers because the most direct route from the Colombian coast to Florida lies through the Windward passage between northern Haiti and eastern Cuba. Port-au-Prince is approximately 500 nautical miles north of Colombia and 700 miles southeast of Miami. A former agent in charge of the Miami DEA, Thomas Cash, told Senator Kerry's committee that Haiti's attraction to smugglers is aided by dozens of small airstrips, the lack of patrols over Haitian airspace and the total lack of any radar monitoring approaches to the country. Combined with the legendary corruption of public officials, these conditions make Haiti a *very fertile ground* for drug traffickers.

In fact, infamous drug trafficker George Morales told Kerry that during the mid 1980's *I used the isle of Haiti mainly as a parking lot, as a place that I would place my aircraft so they could be repaired.* When asked if he shipped drugs through Haiti, Morales replied, *Yes, I did, adding, it's something which is done fairly commonly.*

Since then the role of Haiti in the drug trade has grown, and the profits to the Haitian officials involved have skyrocketed. This may explain the difficulty Aristide experienced during his short rule, in trying to interdict drug shipments. A confidential DEA report provided to Michigan Representative John Conyers told of the case of Tony Greco, a former DEA agent in Haiti, who fled for his life in September 1992, following the arrest of a Haitian military officer charged with drug running.

Patrick Elie says he got no assistance from the Haitian military in attempts to interdict drug shipments. And when Greco received information in May 1991 that 400 kilos of cocaine were arriving in Haiti, the DEA man watched helplessly as the drugs were delivered to waiting boats. Greco told Elie that the military was *conspicuously absent* at a moment they knew drugs were coming in.

Greco said he finally gave up and fled the country after he received a telephone death threat against his family from a man who identified himself as *the boss of the arrested officer.* Greco says only army commander Raoul Cedras and Port-au-Prince police chief Michel Francois, leaders of the 1991 coup, had his private number.

Despite Tony Greco's experiences, the DEA defends their continuing presence in Haiti. There are currently two DEA agents still stationed in the country, and the DEA has continued its contacts with the military following Aristide's ouster, despite the DEA's admission that over 26,400 pounds of cocaine entered the United States in 1993, transhipped through Haiti with the cooperation of the military.

The DEA remains defensive of its contacts with the Haitian military. Agency spokesperson



William Ruzzamenti says, *Quite frankly and honestly, we have gotten reliable and good support in the things we're trying to do there.* He acknowledged that the DEA has received reports of Haitian army officers' involvement in the drug trade, but said that the reports *have not been verified.*

The International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, released in April by the U.S. Department of State—Bureau of International Narcotics matters, says the *current level of detected air and maritime drug-related activity in Haiti is low.* On the subject of official corruption, the report says the United States *does not have evidence directly linking senior government of Haiti officials to drug trafficking, though rumors and (unsubstantiated) allegations abound.* Responding to the State Department report, Representative Major Owens, who heads the Haiti committee of the Congressional Black Caucus, told the SHADOW that the State Department's failure to act on evidence of corruption by Haiti's military commanders was a *good question* the government has failed to answer. Owens says Secretary of State Warren Christopher is guilty of a *double standard* motivated by *racism* against Black Haitian refugees.

### The Shadowy World of Col. Francois

Most Haitians believe that Port-au-Prince police chief Col. Michel Francois and his elder brother Evans currently run the drug trade. Col. Francois has gained that control and become one of Haiti's most powerful men , by recruiting hundreds of police auxiliaries or *attaches*, to control and eliminate his rivals. Francois commands his own independent intelligence service that spies on opponents and allies alike, while running a protection racket for local drug traffickers. Michael Ratner, an attorney with the CCR, says Francois and former dictator Prosper Avril are the rule behind the facade of General Cedras.

Francois and his men have a history of involvement in the torture of opponents and death-squad-style murders of Aristide supporters. In one recent incident, attaches mobbed Port-au-Prince City Hall to prevent the capital's mayor, Evans Paul, an Aristide supporter, from entering his offices.

One person was killed and 11 wounded during the September 8th incident, when the mob opened fire on Aristide supporters. Witnesses say the attack began when attaches dragged two of Paul's aides from a car, viciously beating an Aristide official. Francois is also considered responsible for the murder of Justice Minister Guy Malary.

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Journalist Dennis Bernstein writes that Francois was trained at the U.S. Army's School of the Americas , known in Latin America as La Escuela de Golpes, the school of coups. Originally based in Panama, the SOA was moved to Ft. Benning, Georgia in 1984. In its 40-year history, the SOA has trained 55,000 military personnel from Latin America, including the late Salvadoran death squad leader Roberto d'Aubuisson.

On April 21st 1994, a convicted Colombian drug trafficker, Gabriel Taboada, who is in the fifth year of a 12-year sentence in a Miami federal prison, fingered Francois at a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee hearing chaired by Senator John Kerry. Taboada testified that Lt. Col. Francois collaborated in shipping tons of cocaine to the United States during then 1980's.

Taboada said he met Francois while he was in the Medellin, Colombia office of drug king Pablo Escobar, in 1984. During a thirty minute conversation, Taboada told Francois he was a car importer. Francois, he said, asked *why wasn't I in the drug business since the drug business made good money.*

Speaking through an interpreter, Taboada said: *I asked him what his business was and he said that at the time he was in Medellin arranging a cocaine deal.* Taboada said he later learned that Francois was Chief of Police in Haiti.

Taboada told the committee that the cartel *took planes out of Colombia and landed in Haiti, protected by the Haitian military. Michel Francois protected the drugs in Haiti, and then allowed the drugs to continue to the United States.* Taboada also told the subcommittee that Haitian military figures often met Medellin cartel members in Colombia, including strongman Prosper Avril, who along with Francois, has long been linked to the drug trade in Haiti.

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