

## Mea Culpa on Haiti

By [Murray Dobbin](#)

In-depth Report: [HAITI](#)

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Sometimes you get things wrong. A couple of people have forcefully pointed that out to me: my post on Haiti contrasting the killing of the war in Afghanistan with the response to the earthquake in Haiti. In my zeal to criticize the government's role in Afghanistan I glossed over the repressive role of the Canadian government in Haiti. While I referred to Canada's role in the overthrow of the democratically elected government of Jean Bertrand Aristide, I suggested that the role of the police (and now the army) was more honourable – bringing some semblance of peace to the country – than the occupation of Afghanistan.

That, pointed out Derrick O'Keefe, is just wrong. He wrote:

"Like in Afghanistan, Canada's police training and "peacekeeping" in Haiti has been part and parcel of propping up an illegitimate regime. If Haiti is more peaceful in recent years, it is the "peace of the graveyard," following years of savage repression, including the taking of political prisoners and the outright murder of hundreds and thousands of members/supporters of the party of the ousted elected president, Aristide. The Haitian National Police force, which the RCMP is there to train and assist, has committed many of these atrocities. Years of this "politicide" and repression under UN occupation has evidently left Haiti with basically zero public sector with which to prepare for and respond to a small disaster, let alone a catastrophe on this scale."

I did refer to the militarization of aid in Haiti and the [Canadian Peace Alliance](#) has spoken more on this issue.

The [Georgia Straight](#) has had a [couple](#) of articles on the issue, pointing out, amongst other things, the role that Canada has played in virtually outlawing Aristide's popular political party from participating in the country's political affairs:

"Canada has supported the exclusion of Aristide's political party, Fanmi Lavalas, from every election since 2004, .... 'Haitians are very knowledgeable about what Canada is doing in their country, and they are generally not happy about it at all.'"

Peter Hallward, the author of Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide and the Politics of Containment wrote of Aristide's [removal from office in 2004](#):

"In late February 2004, France, the U.S. and a few other old 'friends of Haiti' [including Canada] called on the country's elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide to resign."

During his last few days in office, these countries threatened Aristide with a 'bloodbath' if he chose to serve out the remainder of his term in office. By early 2004, Haiti's oldest friends had done everything to make such a threat look imminent. Even before he returned to office in 2001, they went to considerable lengths to promote both a political and a paramilitary opposition that adopted the elimination of Aristide as their very *raison d'être*. Relentless pressure from these opponents, combined with punitive economic measures implemented by their foreign patrons, eventually backed Aristide into a corner from which he couldn't escape.

By February 28, 2004, the area of the country that remained under the government's control had shrunk to little more than Port-au-Prince. A small but well-armed and well-funded military force led by ex-soldiers Guy Philippe and Jodel Chamblain was apparently poised to attack the capital. The government's rather less well-armed security forces were no longer reliable, and the international community made it clear that it would only intervene if Aristide stepped down.

With his back to the wall, did Aristide choose to save his skin and accept a U.S. offer for safe passage to a friendly third country? Or, was he forced to resign by hostile foreign troops before being led, *manu militari*, onto an American plane?

Did Aristide leap to safety, or was he pushed into captivity?

In my opinion it's blindingly obvious that Aristide was pushed out by the immediate prospect of overwhelming violence against unarmed civilians, coupled with the longer-term prospect of a debilitating civil war.

Aristide's government wasn't perfect, but its violent removal was an outrageous political crime."

One of the best sources for information and background on Haiti is the [Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade](#). I urge you to visit the site. We all, me included, need to know the terrible details of our destruction of democracy in Haiti and our continued complicity in the repression of the population. More to the point we need to be holding the Harper government to account for the current militarization of the disaster response.

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