

MINUSTAH's Occupation of Haiti - A Structure of Global Complicity

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The United Nations Security Council is preparing to renew its military occupation of Haiti by October 15, 2014. Most people across the Americas are probably unaware of the fact that the people of Haiti live today under an occupation. They are more likely to be aware of the recent passing of the infamous dictator and president-for-life than to know about the military force imposed on Haitian soil.

Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, erstwhile dictator of Haiti, died of a heart attack on October 4, 2014. He had been ousted by a popular movement in 1986, but retained wealth and cronies until his death. News emerged from the capital Port-au-Prince on October 10 that the Duvalierist regime in Haiti would not provide a state funeral to its favoured son – in deference to popular sentiment that still runs deep.

One week after Baby Doc's last breath, the [Campaign to End the Occupation of Haiti](#) (based in Toronto) held an informational picket to highlight the abusive role MINUSTAH – the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti charged with ensuring a compliant and neoliberal Haiti – plays on the island.

MINUSTAH was charged with keeping order in Haiti, following the coup that removed democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004. The [coup had its origin](#) in a meeting just outside of Ottawa with officials from the United States, Canada and France plotting a post-Aristide Haiti.

The abuses this international force has directed against Haitians are legion: sexual assault of minors (which resulted in, among others, [111 Sri Lankan soldiers and three officers being returned to their country of origin](#)), political repression directed against entire neighbourhoods, and extrajudicial murders. Children were shot at and others killed during violent MINUSTAH suppression of protests in 2005, where 41 armored carriers transported personnel into a pro-Aristide neighbourhood. During this operation, these UN troops used over 22,000 rounds of ammunition.

To add base insult to the injuries, a cholera outbreak – originating in October 2010 at a MINUSTAH base – has thus far killed 9,200 people and infected over 750,000. In other words, MINUSTAH personnel evidently saw fit to dump untreated, contaminated sewage into the Artibonite River, an important source of water for domestic and agricultural purposes for Haitians.

These infuriating truths are symptoms of an underlying power imbalance between Haiti and the rest of the world. MINUSTAH personnel are governed by extraterritoriality agreements,

which make it difficult to prosecute foreign troops on Haitian soil. The sense of impunity these troops must feel – carrying a gun, absent any fear of legal consequence, psychologically molded in the global crucible of anti-Black racism – creates a culture of unrestrained disrespect among UN personnel.

Yet even this haphazard structure of terror serves a political and economic purpose. Wikileaks reports that a classified cable from US ambassador to Haiti, Janet Sanderson, stated on October 1, 2008 that “a premature departure of MINUSTAH would leave the [Haitian] government...vulnerable to...resurgent populist and anti-market economy political forces – reversing gains of the last two years.” In spite of a part of [MINUSTAH's mandate](#) being “to support the constitutional and political processes; to assist in organizing, monitoring, and carrying out free and fair municipal, parliamentary and presidential elections,” Fanmi Lavalas, the most popular political and electoral organization in Haiti, has been [barred from all elections](#) since the 2004 coup. Aristide once led the party.

Haiti under Aristide was no longer content to be the world's sweatshop, providing cheap labour to whomever would bring it capital. Haitians wanted to chart a course away from the neoliberal capitalist economic and social policy framework that would have generated mass suffering. Aristide was responsive to the needs of Fanmi Lavalas and the people because they put him in power, and he was acquainted with their condition from his pastoral work as a priest.

One aim of the Aristide government, which Sanderson's cable refers to by innuendo, was to seek repayment of the 90 million gold francs (now worth over \$22 billion) paid out to France between 1825 and 1947, as compensation for the slaveholders' loss of property in enslaved Afrikans and land resulting from the Haitian Revolution. [Aristide's claim](#) for compensation infuriated France. His demand that France repay the extracted independence ransom is widely seen as a factor that country's role in engineering the 2004 coup.

And so Aristide was removed, and so MINUSTAH moved in. The UN's façade of political neutrality here is unmasked. Duvalier is dead, but his [role has been recast](#) in the current regime of President Martelly, with his Duvalierist ministers and administrative approach.

The era of the personalist dictator, in the mould of Duvalier, has morphed into an “elected” Martelly regime and the era of international “stabilization forces.”

These may be deployed, withdrawn, and replaced: foreigners and local elite far removed from Haiti's social realities, without internal dissension about the role they are playing on the island. Cholera, sexual abuse, and gunfire from the occupation forces and its surrogate Haitian National Police – each plays its role as a weapon against Haiti's economic resurgence and its population's political self-assertion.

The heirs of those whom CLR James called the “[Black Jacobins](#)” have another battle to fight. The responsibility for ending the occupation of Haiti is not only theirs, but that of politically engaged people from [each country of the world](#) – Canada among them – represented in MINUSTAH.

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