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Bill Van Auken

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Washington forces reshuffling of Haitian regime

Haiti's acting Prime Minister Claude Joseph, who claimed power after the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, announced Monday he will surrender power to Washington's choice, Ariel Henry. Henry had been nominated by Moïse to succeed Joseph, but his installation was interrupted by the early morning raid on Moïse's private residence in the wealthy Petionville suburb of Port-au-Prince that ended in the death of the president, who was shot 12 times and had his eye gouged out.

In the immediate aftermath of the killing, both the United Nations special envoy to Haiti, Helen La Lime, and the US State Department recognized Joseph as Haiti's head of state, but on Saturday, the so-called Core Group, comprised of the US, France, Canada, Germany, Brazil, Spain, the European Union and representatives from the United Nations and the Organization of American States, pulled the rug out from under him.



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Police patrol the street around the Primature in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Tuesday, July 20, 2021. (AP Photo/Matias Delacroix)

The Core Group issued a statement Saturday that failed to mention Joseph's name, while urging the formation of "a consensual and inclusive government," adding, "To this end, it strongly encourages the designated Prime Minister Ariel Henry to continue the mission entrusted to him to form such a government."

Joseph, Henry and others in Haiti's ruling kleptocracy of US puppets swiftly responded to their master's voice. Joseph told the *Washington Post* that he had agreed on Sunday to step down "for the good of the nation," adding, "Everyone who knows me knows that I am not interested in this battle, or in any kind of power grab."

In the immediate aftermath of the assassination, Joseph announced that he was in control, declared a nationwide state of siege and called for the United States to send in troops.

For his part, Henry issued a pre-recorded message to the Haitian people on Sunday, claiming power and congratulating the population for its "political maturity in the face of what we can call a 'coup d'état.'"

Finally, Joseph Lambert, the president of the Haitian Senate, which has ceased to function because all but 10 of its members' terms expired as Moïse blocked elections, dropped his own claim to be the rightful successor to the president. He openly admitted that he had received phone calls from both the US Embassy in Port-au-Prince and the State Department telling him to "stand down."

In other words, Henry is the hand-picked puppet of Washington. As for the claims that he is forming a "consensual and inclusive government," he is being installed without the consent of the Haitian people. His claim to office is based upon his appointment by Moïse, who had maintained himself in power in defiance of his constitutional term limit, ruling by decree, having gutted the legislature, local government and the judiciary.

Henry has assembled a cabinet that is controlled by operatives of Moïse's right-wing ruling P.H.T.K., or Bald Head party. Joseph, whom he accused of carrying out a "coup," retains his post as Haiti's foreign minister. Incumbents are also remaining in the ministries of finance, justice and health.

A French and US-trained neurosurgeon, Henry is a trusted servant of imperialist interests in Haiti. He earned Washington's confidence serving as vice president of the so-called Council of Wise Men, a body formed by the US and its allies to legitimize the US-backed 2004 coup in which President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was deposed and flown to Africa aboard a US military aircraft, with 1,000 US Marines invading the country the next day. The council presided over the creation of an unelected government headed by Prime Minister Gérard Latortue, a right-wing talk show host from south Florida, who oversaw a reign of terror against Aristide supporters and ruled with the backing of a United Nations "peace-keeping" force known as MINUSTAH. This force occupied Haiti for 13 years, quelling unrest in the slums of Port-au-Prince and spreading a cholera epidemic—the first in modern Haitian history—which claimed some 10,000 lives.

Henry subsequently served as minister of interior in the government of President Michel Martelly, overseeing repression of a series of mass protests against price hikes, corruption and crooked elections. A former singer known as "Sweet Micky," with close ties to Haitian police, ex-military and former members of the hated Tonton Macoutes, the murderous secret police of the Duvalier dictatorship, Martelly was brought to power in 2011 through fraudulent elections engineered by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Moïse, Martelly's hand-picked successor, also installed with US backing through fraudulent elections, earned Washington's loyalty by backing the US campaign for regime change in Venezuela.

The bringing to power of the un-elected Ariel Henry is only the latest in the long line of US imperialism's colonial-style interventions in Haiti, dating back to the 1915 invasion launched by Woodrow Wilson, on the pretext of maintaining order following the country's last presidential assassination. That invasion was followed by a 30-year occupation and savage repression of popular resistance, the creation of a Haitian army to continue this repression and then the 30-year dictatorship of the Duvaliers, which was supported by Washington until 1986, when the US Air Force flew "Baby Doc" out of the country to escape a mass popular revolt.

The details surrounding the assassination of Moïse, the pretext for the latest political machinations orchestrated by Washington, remain far from clear.

While Moïse's political successors have tried to attribute the killing to Colombian mercenaries, 18 of whom are in custody, with five allegedly still being sought, Haitian authorities have been compelled to arrest five Haitian police officers, including Dimitri Hérard, the chief of Moïse's security, who had traveled to Colombia at least five times this year. Questions have been raised as to how Moïse's assassins were able to evade security checkpoints on the road leading up to his villa, and why not a single member of his security detail suffered a scratch in the attack.

The nexus between US imperialist operations and the assassination is also evident. The Pentagon has acknowledged that an undisclosed number of the Colombian mercenaries were US-trained, while one of the Haitian suspects arrested was a principal FBI and DEA "asset" in Haiti. The firms that recruited the Colombian mercenaries and financed the operation are both based in south Florida, while the individual in charge of recruiting the alleged assassins, Antonio Intriago, has been tied to the February 2019 provocation on the Colombia-Venezuela border involving an attempt to force through a fraudulent aid convoy. He has been linked to prominent right-wing US politicians like Florida Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen as well as to Colombian President Iván Duque, Washington's closest ally in the region.

Colombian television news channel Noticias Caracol has reported gaining access to statements made by the Colombian mercenaries arrested in Haiti in which they recounted being brought into the country under diplomatic status and escorted by police special forces units. They also testified that Claude Joseph, who assumed power after the assassination, had given the order for the assassination. They said that they had been assured his protection, and therefore had not had a plan for escaping the country after the killing.

While the Biden administration dispatched FBI and Homeland Security personnel to Haiti with the ostensible purpose of aiding in the investigation of the assassination, there is no doubt that Washington will facilitate whatever cover-up is required to consolidate a regime subordinate to US imperialist interests.

The US attempts to cobble together a new puppet government have no support whatsoever in the Haitian population. They will only inflame the mounting social anger of masses of

workers and poor against the existing social conditions and political setup in the poorest country of the Americas and against the imperialist powers that stand behind them.

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