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Congress Pushes Back on US-Haiti Policy

In a December 8 letter, Congresswomen Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), Yvette Clarke (D-NY), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), James McGovern (D-MA) and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), wrote to Secretary Blinken to express their concerns over the administration's backing of the Kenya-led multinational security support mission. They warned that “another armed foreign intervention in Haiti will not result in the necessary Haitian-led transition to a democratic government, rather it risks further destabilizing the country, endangering more innocent people, and entrenching the current, illegitimate regime.”

The letter also criticizes the choice of Kenyan security forces for the mission, citing their “documented record of violating human rights,” and urges the administration to stop propping up de facto prime minister Ariel Henry and back a transitional government instead, which they note is “the only viable path forward for Haiti to return to stability and democracy.” The letter ends by highlighting the issue of arms trafficking to Haiti, noting that the flow of weapons from the US is helping gangs maintain power.

In a separate letter dated December 19, Senators Ed Markey (D-MA), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), John Hickenlooper (D-CO), and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), expressed similar concerns. In their letter, the senators highlight Ariel Henry's lack of legitimacy among the Haitian people and that he was not elected to his position. The senators added that the December 21 Accord, a narrow political agreement signed by Henry's supporters, had called for elections in 2023 and the handing of power to an elected government come February 7, 2024 — when Henry's mandate ends — but that none of those steps have yet been completed.

“Without a functioning, democratically elected government, an international security mission will not sufficiently address the complexity of the current crisis and could effectively reinforce Henry’s illegitimate and ineffective rule,” the senators wrote.

They ended their letter by requesting that the administration leverage Global Magnitsky Act sanctions against Haitian elites and politicians, act to stop the flow of arms to Haiti through the Dominican Republic, and reengage with Haitian civil society on the establishment of a transitional government.

Former Coup Leader Guy Philippe Announces He Will Lead “Revolution” in Haiti

Guy Philippe, the former Haitian senator and coup leader who spent six-plus years in US prison on drug charges and was deported to Haiti in November, has been touring various cities in Haiti and drawing large crowds. On January 2, during a visit to the Massacre River canal, Philippe denounced the US backing of de facto prime minister Ariel Henry and declared that there would be a “revolution” in 2024.

Philippe made a public statement calling on Haitians to shut the country down on January 15 in protest against the government. Le Nouvelliste reports that many provincial towns were indeed affected by protests following Philippe’s call. Philippe’s activity has raised alarms over his control of the Protected Areas Security Brigade (BSAP) an environmental security force led by the head of Philipp’s political party, Jeantel Joseph. In recent years, BSAP has fallen outside the control of Haiti’s central government. Though there are no reliable data, the BSAP is believed to consist of hundreds of armed individuals who have formed a quasi-paramilitary force. In videos on social media, BSAP officers have made repeated calls in support of Philippe and against the Henry government.

“All the departmental leaders of the BSAP are former soldiers who, for the most part, fought with Guy Philippe in 2004,” one told Ayibopost, in a reference to the 2004 ouster of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Ayibopost has done the most detailed reporting on the force and their relationship with Philippe, interviewing numerous BSAP leaders and documenting their current role with many local leaders.

Nevertheless, some have questioned the sincerity of Philippe’s anti-government sentiment. One reason is that, since becoming de facto prime minister following the presidential assassination in 2021, Henry has relied on a small group of individuals for his security — including at least one individual who has been a long-time associate of Guy Philippe. The comments from Philippe also reinforce the rationale for the Henry government’s request for foreign intervention.

US, Kenya Reach Agreements on Haiti Deployment

The proposed Kenyan-led security mission is currently being blocked by the country's courts. However, ahead of an expected ruling in late January, the US and Kenya have reached agreement on key issues for the deployment, according to Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the UN.

“Just last week, planning teams from the United States and Haiti traveled to Kenya, where we reached agreement on several key requirements in advance of the MSS mission, including progress on a concept of operations and use of force,” Thomas-Greenfield told the UN on December 18. She added that Kenya was “already training its first contingent of troops with a verified and robust UN curriculum.”

CARICOM Eminent Persons Group's Fourth Attempt at Political Negotiations Ends in Failure

The Eminent Persons Group's fourth visit to Port-au-Prince, in mid-December, again ended with no political agreement brokered by the various parties. The crux of the disagreement within the opposition, and with the de facto the government and its allies remains the same: the resignation of Ariel Henry and the formation of a transitional council. The signatories of the December 21 agreement rejected the latter proposal due to fears it might oust Ariel Henry if given unlimited presidential powers, and the opposition parties could not unite behind calling for the de facto prime minister to resign. The EPG's press release on their visit notes that although “the stakeholders achieved consensus on several aspects of the draft framework” for the transitional governance arrangement, they would only be willing to return to Haiti once the parties provide “clear indication” of their willingness to finish negotiations.

Le Nouvelliste reported this week that, ahead of February 7, all parties are working quietly to try and reach a new political accord. Those close to Henry, however, have indicated they intend to move forward with organizing elections regardless of if there is a new accord.

“The international community is pushing for an agreement, believing that Ariel Henry is not making enough concessions,” a source told the paper. “However, the Americans do not intend to let him go because there is no clear alternative to replace him. They don't want to take a leap into the unknown,” this source explained.

More Than 30 Arrest Warrants Issued Against Former Haitian Officials on Charges of Corruption

Haitian investigating judge Al Duniel Dimanche has issued arrest warrants for several prominent former Haitian officials on charges of corruption, collusion in corruption, and

influence peddling related to the theft and diversion of public assets and usurpation of public functions. The list includes former Haitian presidents Michel Martelly and Jocelerme Privert, former prime ministers Joseph Jouthe, Jean Max Bellerive, Laurent Lamothe, Garry Conille, Evans Paul, Florence Duperval Guillaume, Enex Jean Charles, Jean Henry Céant, Jean-Michel Lapin, and Michelle Duvivier Pierre Louis. Some former lawmakers, including Willot Joseph, are also included.

Former provisional president Jocelerme Privert issued a statement, denying the allegations and accusing the judge of “acting maliciously and thoughtlessly,” according to AP. He also said that the court “has no jurisdiction over the actions taken by presidents, prime ministers and ministers in the exercise of their functions.”

Ariel Henry Questioned by Judge Walter Voltaire in Moïse Assassination Case

For several months, de facto prime minister Ariel Henry has ignored an invitation from the judge presiding over investigations into Jovenel Moïse’s assassination, but Henry finally talked with the judge at Henry’s residence on December 26. The judge also questioned two other high-level officials: Minister of Finance Michel Patrick Boisvert, and Secretary General of the Prime Minister Josué Pierre-Louis. The optics of the judge traveling to Henry’s residence caused outrage and debate on social media as people feared he was being given special treatment and began to lose faith in the case. In a press release, the prime minister’s office stated that by responding to the judge’s questioning, Henry showed proof that “no one is above the law and that it is our duty to do what is in our power so that justice is served for President Moïse, his family and the entire nation.”

Colombian Ex-Soldier Mario Palacios Pleads Guilty in US Investigation of Moïse Assassination

On December 22, a former Colombian soldier who was part of the planning meeting and ground operation in the assassination of Jovenel Moïse pleaded guilty in the Department of Justice investigation of the plot. This makes him the fifth defendant to do so among the eleven named in the case, according to reports in the Miami Herald.

New Wave of Sanctions Against Haitian Individuals by the US, UK, and UN

Various sanctions were announced last December by the US Treasury and other entities as part of the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For Haiti, the US Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Johnson “Izo” André of 5 Segond, Renel Destina of Grand Ravine, Vitel’homme Innocent of Kraze Baryè, and Wilson Joseph of 400 Mawozo, four major gang leaders in Haiti.

The same individuals sanctioned by OFAC were also added to the United Nations Security Council 2653 Sanctions Committee's list after recommendation by the United States. The council, however, did not add any members of Haiti's political or economic elite to its sanctions list, despite a report from the committee's expert group documenting the involvement of myriad specific individuals, including former president Michel Martelly, in human rights violations and other criminal activity.

In the United Kingdom, Fednel Monchéry and Joseph Pierre Richard Duplan were sanctioned for their involvement in the 2018 La Saline attacks that left 70 people dead. The US Department of State also announced sanctions against former high-level officials on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day, designating former prime minister Jean-Max Bellerive and his immediate family members, former senator Nene Cassy and his immediate family members, and former senator Hervé Fourcand. All three were sanctioned for "abusing" their "public position by participating in corrupt activity that undermined the integrity of Haiti's government."

Haiti Earthquake Anniversary

January 12 marked 14 years since the devastating 7.0 magnitude earthquake in Haiti. Unlike in previous years, public remembrance of the occasion seems to have faded, with few events taking place in the country. An official ceremony that was attended by de facto prime minister Ariel Henry and members of his government lasted only 6 minutes and 39 seconds. During the commemoration, sporadic gunshots could be heard echoing at the National Palace, a reminder of Haiti's ongoing crisis of insecurity. At another memorial site in Morne St. Christophe, no event could take place, as the road leading to it is controlled by armed groups.

Fourteen years after the world pledged more than ten billion dollars towards Haiti's recovery and reconstruction, the situation on the ground is worse than ever and serves as a stark reminder of the failures of those efforts.

In his forthcoming book *Aid State*, CEPR Research Associate Jake Johnston details the long-term political effects of the internationally led post-quake response. The book examines the many things the international community got wrong in responding to one of Haiti's worst-ever disasters, and the lessons to be learned. As much as anything, the book serves as an explanation of how Haiti arrived at its current state.

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