NACLA Report on the Americas

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rnac20

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To cite this article: Jemima Pierre (2023) Haiti as Empire's Laboratory, NACLA Report on the Americas, 55:3, 244-250, DOI: 10.1080/10714839.2023.2247749

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2023.2247749

REPORT

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As the United States and its allies push renewed foreign intervention, the uses and abuses of the first Black republic as a testing ground of imperialism offer stark warnings. Haiti still struggles to be free.

In December 2019, President Donald Trump signed into law H.R.2116, also known as the Global Fragility Act (GFA). Although this act was developed by the conservative United States Institute of Peace, it was introduced to Congress by Democratic Representative Eliot L. Engel, then chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and cosponsored by a bipartisan group of representatives, including, significantly, Democrat Karen Bass. The GFA presents new strategies for deploying U.S. hard and soft power in a changing world. It focuses U.S. foreign policy on the idea that there are so-called "fragile states," countries prone to instability, extremism, conflict, and extreme poverty, which are presumably threats to U.S. security.

Though not explicitly stated, analysts argue that the GFA is intended to prevent unnecessary and increasingly ineffective U.S. military interventions abroad. The stated goal is for the United States to invest in "its ability to prevent and mitigate violent conflict" by funding projects that mandate "an interagency approach among the key players, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Departments of State, Defense, and the Treasury" amid collaboration with "international allies and partners."

In April 2022, the Biden-Harris administration affirmed its commitment to the GFA by outlining a strategy for its implementation. As detailed in the strategy's prologue, the U.S. government's new foreign policy approach depends on "willing partners to address common challenges, [and] share costs." "Ultimately," the document continues, "no U.S. or international intervention will be successful without the buy-in and mutual ownership of trusted regional, national and local partners." The Biden administration has also stressed that the GFA will use the United Nations and "other multilateral organizations" to carry out its missions. The prologue outlines a 10-year plan for the GFA that, according to the U.S. Institute of Peace, will "allow for the integration and sequencing of U.S. diplomatic, development, and military-related efforts." Among five trial countries for GFA implementation, Haiti is the first target.

Hailed by development experts as "landmark" legislation and, as *Foreign Policy* reported, a "potential

 — 244-250, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2023.2247749
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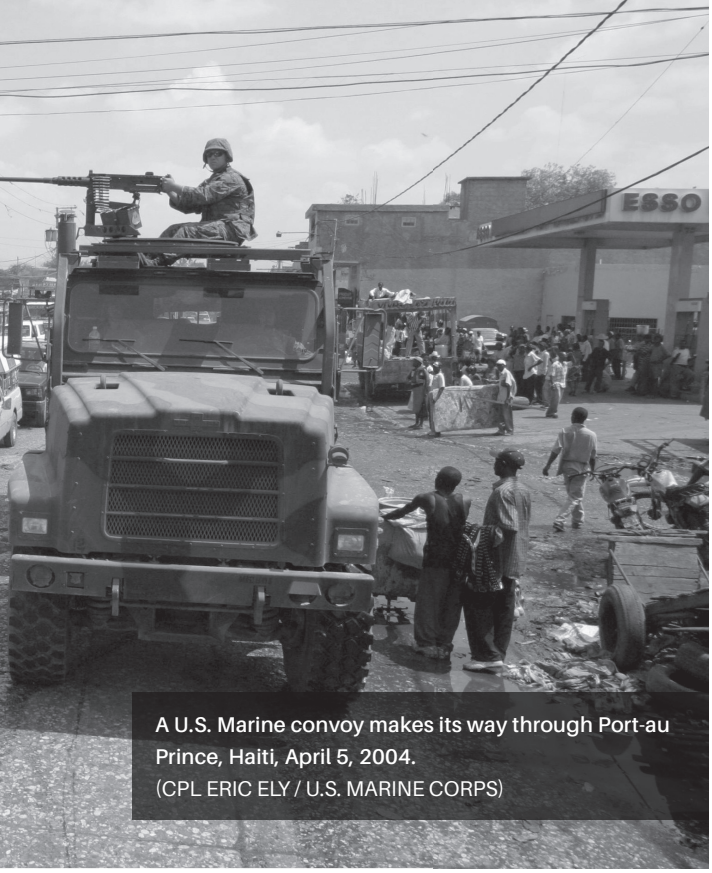

A U.S. Marine convoy makes its way through Port-au Prince, Haiti, April 5, 2004.
(CPL ERIC ELY / U.S. MARINE CORPS)

game-changer in the world of U.S. foreign aid," the act seems to offer a reset of U.S. foreign policy in ways that shift tactics while maintaining the objectives and strategies of U.S. global domination. The act and its prologue clearly articulate that the main goals are to advance "U.S. national security and interests" and to "manage rival powers," presumably Russia and China. In this sense, especially for governments and societies in the Western Hemisphere, the GFA can be seen as a revamping of the Monroe Doctrine, the 1823 U.S. foreign policy position that established the entire region as its recognized sphere of influence, shaping U.S. imperialism. The GFA deploys cunning language—tackling the "drivers" of violence, promoting stability in "conflict-prone regions," supporting "locally-driven political solutions"—that hides the legislation's real intent: to rebrand U.S. imperialism.

In their deliberations on the Global Fragilities Act, U.S. officials labeled Haiti as one of the world's most "fragile" states. Yet this supposed fragility has been caused by more than a century of U.S. interference and a consistent push to deny Haitian sovereignty. Throughout a long history and complex—though blatant—imperialism, Haiti has been and continues to be the main laboratory for U.S. imperial machinations in the region and throughout the world. It is no surprise, therefore, that Haiti is the first object in the United States' latest rearticulation of a policy for maintaining global hegemony.

In fact, a review of the actions of the United States and the so-called "international community" in Haiti from 2004 to the present demonstrates how Haiti has served as the testing ground—the laboratory—for much of what is encapsulated in the Global Fragilities Act. The GFA, in other words, is not so much a new policy as it is a formal expression of de facto U.S. policy toward Haiti and Haitian people over the past two decades. Without recognizing these uses and abuses of Haiti, the site of the longest and most brutal neocolonial experiment in the modern world, we cannot fully understand the workings of U.S. (and Western) hegemony. And if we cannot understand U.S. hegemony, then we cannot defeat it. And Haiti will never be free.

Sovereignty Again Denied

Since 2004, Haiti has been under renewed foreign occupation and lacks sovereignty. This is not hyperbole. Take, for example, a series of events and actions following the July 7, 2021 assassination of Haiti's arguably illegitimate but still sitting president, Jovenel Moïse. The day after the assassination, Helen La Lime, head of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), declared that interim prime minister Claude Joseph would lead the Haitian government until elections were scheduled. Because of Joseph's interim status, however, the line of succession was unclear. Days before his killing, Moïse had named neurosurgeon and political ally Ariel Henry as prime minister to replace Joseph, but he had not yet been sworn in.

A few days after Moïse's assassination, the Biden administration sent a delegation to Haiti to meet with both Joseph and Henry, as well as with Joseph Lambert, who had been chosen by Haiti's 10 remaining

senators—the only elected officials in the country at the time—to stand in as president pending new elections. Despite these competing claims to power, Washington chose a side. The U.S. delegation sidelined Lambert, convinced Joseph and Henry to come to an agreement over Haiti's governance, and urged Joseph to stand down.

A week later, on July 17, BINUH and the Core Group—an organization of mostly Western foreign powers dictating politics in Haiti—issued a statement. They called for the formation of a "consensual and inclusive government," directing Henry, as the designated prime minister named by Moïse, "to continue the mission entrusted to him." Two days later, on July 19, Joseph announced he would step aside, allowing Henry to assume the mantle of prime minister on July 20. The "new"—and completely unelected—government and cabinet was composed mostly of members of the Haitian Tèt Kale Party (PHTK), the neo-Duvalierist political party of Moïse and his predecessor Michel Martelly. In the wake of the devastating 2010 earthquake, the PHTK, with Martelly at the helm, was put in place by the United States and other Western powers without the support of the Haitian masses.

After the U.S. Embassy, the Core Group, and the Organization of American States (OAS) released similar statements applauding the formation of a new "consensus" government, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken affirmed support for the unelected leaders. "The United States welcomes efforts by Haiti's political leadership to come together in choosing an interim prime minister and a unity cabinet," he said in a statement. In effect, Haiti's true power brokers—or what I have called the "white rulers of Haiti"—determined the Haitian government's replacement through a press release.

Meanwhile, the international community's decision-making process completely left out Haiti's civil society organizations, which had been meeting since early 2021 to find a way to resolve the country's political crisis as Moïse, already ruling by decree, was poised to overstay his constitutional mandate. These groups adamantly rejected the foreign-imposed interim government and have criticized the international community's actions as blatantly colonial.

Who and what are the entities making decisions for Haiti and the Haitian people, and how did they claim such prominent roles in controlling Haitian politics? Haitians are not members of the BINUH, OAS, or Core Group. But also central is the question of the country's sovereignty—or lack thereof. Haiti has been under foreign military and political control for almost 20 years. But this is not the first time, of course, that Haiti has been under occupation.

Legacies of Foreign Control and Occupation

In the summer of 1915, U.S. Marines landed in Port-au-Prince and initiated a 19-year period of military rule that sought to snuff the sovereignty of the modern world's first Black republic. During this first occupation, as I have written elsewhere with Peter James Hudson, "the US rewrote the Haitian constitution and installed a puppet president [who signed treaties that turned over control of the Haitian state's finances to the U.S. government], imposed press censorship and martial law, and brought Jim Crow policies and forced labor to the island." In line with its racist view that Black people do not have the capacity for civilization or self-government, Washington rationalized that it was necessary to teach Haitians the arts of self-government—a view that continues today.

But the most pronounced labor of the U.S. Marines was counterinsurgency. They waged a "pacification" campaign throughout the countryside to suppress a peasant uprising against the occupation, using aerial bombardment techniques for the first time. Dropping bombs from planes onto Haitian villages, the pacification campaigns left more than 15,000 dead and countless others maimed. Those who survived and continued to resist were tortured and forced into labor camps.

The United States finally left the country in 1934 after massive grassroots protests by the Haitian people. But one of the most consequential results was

the establishment and training during the occupation of a local police force, the Gendarmerie d'Haïti. For years, this police force and its successors were used to terrorize the Haitian people, a legacy that continues today.

In the years after the 1915-1934 occupation, the United States continued to intervene politically and economically in Haitian affairs. The most notorious of these engagements was the U.S. support for the brutal dictatorship of Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier and Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. In the first democratic elections after the fall of the Duvalier regime, the United States unsuccessfully tried to prevent the ascension of the popular candidate, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. However, nine months after his January 1991 election, Aristide was deposed in a CIA-bankrolled coup d'état. The coup was not consolidated, though, because of continuous resistance from the Haitian people. By 1994, U.S. president Bill Clinton's administration was forced to bring Aristide back to Haiti after three years in exile—with more than 20,000 U.S. troops in tow. Aristide was now a hostage to U.S. neoliberal policy. The troops remained until 2000.

Haiti officially lost its nominal sovereignty again in late February 2004. The Western governments, as well as the powerful Haitian elite, never supported the Aristide government, presumably because of its "populist and anti-market economy" positions, as former U.S. ambassador Janet Sanderson later alluded in a leaked 2008 diplomatic cable calling for continued foreign intervention. Thus, when Aristide won a second term in the 2000 elections, just months after his Fanmi Lavalas party gained control of a majority of seats in the parliament, the U.S. and its Western partners worked to discredit the administration. The French ambassador to Haiti at the time, Thierry Burkhard, later admitted that France was concerned about Aristide demanding financial restitution for the immoral indemnity—or what *The New York Times* has called "The Ransome"—that Haiti was forced to pay for its independence.

The plans for the 2004 intervention and occupation were hatched the previous year at a meeting in Canada dubbed the "Ottawa Initiative on Haiti." Aristide had been back in power for two years. Canadian prime minister Jean Chrétien and his Liberal Party government organized a two-day conference from January 31 to February 1, 2003 at Meech Lake, a government resort near Ottawa, that brought together top officials from the United States, European Union, and OAS to decide the future of Haiti's governance. There were no representatives from Haiti in attendance. Canadian journalist Michel Vastel, who got wind of this secret meeting, reported that the discussion in Ottawa included the possible removal of Aristide with a potential Western-led trusteeship over Haiti.

On February 29, 2004, President Aristide was deposed, bundled onto a flight by U.S. Marines, and flown to the Central African Republic. Almost immediately, U.S. President George W. Bush sent 200 U.S. troops to Port-au-Prince to "help stabilize the country." By the evening of Aristide's expulsion, 2,000 U.S., French, and Canadian soldiers were on the ground.

In the meantime, at the behest of permanent members the United States and France, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously passed a resolution that authorized "the immediate deployment of a Multinational Interim Force for a period of three months to help to secure and stabilize the capital, Port-au-Prince, and elsewhere in the country." In other words, the UN voted to send a "peacekeeping" mission to Haiti. Significantly, Resolution 1529 was passed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which, unlike a Chapter VI resolution, authorizes UN forces to take military action through land, air, and sea without requiring the consent of the parties in conflict. That is, the resolution empowered the multinational force to "take all necessary measures to fulfill its mandate."

The UN mission to Haiti raises four important points. First, Haiti was the only country not engulfed in civil war to receive a Chapter VII UN military deployment. There were certainly local protests

during the passage of the resolution, but these were of Haitians demonstrating against the removal of their democratically elected president. The situation in Haiti, in other words, could not be considered a civil war, in the normal sense of the word, that merited a Chapter VII deployment (if such deployment can ever be merited). Rather, through the deployment, the same characters who initiated and consolidated the coup suppressed a people's protest.

Second, key players in backing and aiding Aristide's removal were also permanent members of the UNSC, the only body with the power to deploy a multinational "peacekeeping" mission. From the Ottawa Initiative, it was clear that the United States, France, and Canada had conspired to remove Aristide and destroy the Haitian state. Third, and relatedly, to justify the foreign intervention and subsequent occupation, the United States and France concocted a narrative that Aristide had abdicated the presidency. Indeed, UN security documents and resolutions about Haiti during this time, as well as Western media reports, pointed to Aristide's presumed "resignation" as the reason for the deployment of UN military forces.

On March 1, 2004, the morning after Aristide's ouster, *Democracy Now!* broadcasted a remarkable live program during which U.S. congresswoman and chairperson of the Congressional Black Caucus, Maxine Waters, called in to say that she had spoken to President Aristide. "He said that he was kidnapped," Waters reported. "He said that he was forced to leave Haiti…that the American Embassy sent the diplomats...and they ordered him to leave." In the weeks following, Aristide spoke to *Democracy Now!* about the kidnapping. "When you have militaries coming from abroad surrounding your house, taking control of the airport, surrounding the national palace, being in the streets, and [they] take you from your house to put you in the plane," he said, "…it was using force to take an elected president out of his country."

Fourth, and perhaps most egregiously, the UNSC claimed that the so-called interim government set up in the wake of Aristide's ouster had asked for the stabilization force. But that government was illegitimate. In his 2012 book *Paramilitarism and the Assault on Democracy in Haiti*, Jeb Sprague recounts that in the early morning after the Aristides were escorted to the airport, the U.S. ambassador to Haiti, James Foley, picked up Haitian Supreme Court Justice Boniface Alexandre and took him to the "prime minister's office for consultations in preparation for his ascension to power." Haiti's prime minister, Yvon Neptune, later reported that he did not have a say—nor did he participate, as dictated by Haitian law—in the swearing-in of Haiti's U.S.-installed interim president. Alexandre's first act as interim president was, on the order of the U.S. ambassador, to submit an official request to the UNSC for multinational military forces to restore law and order. The UNSC immediately authorized the deployment.

Taken together, these realities demonstrate how the entire UN deployment and occupation—based on a coup d'état sponsored by two permanent members of the UNSC, claims that the president had resigned, and the illegal swearing-in of an illegitimate head of state—were fraudulent. At the same time, protests from the Haitian people were dismissed by Western governments and media as "gang violence" and the action of "bandits." Such characterizations not only tapped into age-old racist stereotypes of Haitians as always already violent, but also gave more pretext for the Chapter VII deployment. To add insult to injury, most of the UN resolutions referred to securing Haiti's "sovereignty," as if this sovereignty could coexist with foreign political control and military occupation.

The illegal 2004 coup d'état was both perpetrated and cleaned up with UN sanction. On June 1, 2004, the UN officially took over from U.S. forces and set up the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) under the guise of establishing peace and security. A multibillion-dollar operation, MINUSTAH had, at any given time, between 6,000 and 13,000 troops and police stationed in Haiti alongside thousands of bureaucrats, technical staff, and civilian personnel. In a horrific parallel to the first U.S. occupation of Haiti, MINUSTAH soldiers committed numerous acts of violence against the Haitian

A protest commenorates the 100th anniversary of the U.S. occupation of Haiti and the launch of the people's tribunal, Port-au-Prince, July 2015. (MARK SCHULLER)

people, including shootings and rapes. MINUSTAH soldiers were also responsible for bringing cholera into the country, a disease that officially killed as many as 30,000 and infected almost a million people.

But what most solidified this occupation was the creation and operationalization of the Core Group. An international coalition of self-proclaimed and non-Black "friends" of Haiti, the Core Group was established as part of the 2004 UN resolution that brought foreign soldiers and technocrats to the country. While the group's membership has fluctuated since its initial formation, it currently has nine members: Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, the United States, European Union, OAS, and United Nations Organization. Significantly, the group has never had a Haitian representative. The Core Group's stated goal is to oversee Haiti's governance through the coordination of the various branches and elements of the United Nations mission in Haiti. But in practice, the Core Group represents an insidious example of (neo) colonialism driven by white supremacy.

Imperial Punishment

While there was a formal drawdown of the MINUSTAH mission in 2017, the UN has remained in Haiti through a set of new offices, culminating in the establishment of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) in 2019. Despite protests in Haiti against ongoing UN presence, the UNSC continues to renew BINUH's mandate each year. The latest renewal was on July 14, 2023. BINUH has had an outsized, public role in Haitian internal political affairs and is often the mouthpiece of the Core Group.

The overwhelming power of the Core Group is blatantly public. At a special session on Haiti at the UNSC on April 26, 2023, the newly appointed head of BINUH, María Isabel Salvador of Ecuador, took the lead in presenting Haiti in typical racist terms—as a basket case of unthinking and violent gangs. Unelected and unaccountable to the Haitian people, the Core Group is the arbiter of colonial direct rule of Haiti.

Western imperialism in Haiti is a hierarchical structure established through the power of the United States, which then outsources colonial control of Haiti to others. In a confidential 2008 diplomatic cable released by Wikileaks, then U.S. ambassador Sanderson called MINUSTAH "a remarkable product and symbol of hemispheric cooperation in a country with little going for it." She continued: "There is no feasible substitute for this UN presence. It is a financial and regional security bargain for the [U.S. government]… We must work to preserve MINUSTAH by continuing to partner with it at all levels…That partnering will also help counter perceptions in Latin contributing countries that Haitians see their presence in Haiti as unwanted."

Brazil, for example, home to the largest Black population outside of Africa, oversaw the military wing of the occupation since its inception. The nominally leftist administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva spent more than $750 million to fund this operation. As I have written elsewhere, Haiti was Brazil's "imperial ground zero." But there was also buy-in from other marginalized governments from the Caribbean and Latin America. At one point, MINUSTAH's leadership included a representative from Trinidad and Tobago and an African American attorney and diplomat. And this leadership was accompanied by a multinational military force made up of troops from several South American, Caribbean, and African countries, including Argentina, Colombia, Grenada, Bolivia, Benin, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Cameroon, Niger, and Mali.

In addition to Brazil, other neighboring countries' neocolonial governments have been similarly recruited by the United States to aid in its undermining of Haitian sovereignty. The Dominican Republic, for instance, funded and housed the ragtag paramilitary troops that terrorized Haiti from 2000 to 2004. More recently, in the fall of 2022, Mexico joined the United States last year in advocating before the UNSC for renewed foreign military intervention in Haiti. Washington has urged Canada to take the lead, and in June 2023, Ottawa announced plans to coordinate international security assistance to Haiti, including police training, from the Dominican Republic.

Since Moïse's 2021 assassination, Haitians have protested foreign support for the illegitimate and corrupt de facto government, rising inflation and fuel prices, illegal weapons dumping, and a dizzying rise in violence. In response, the United States and its allies have continued to push for foreign military intervention in the country. In January 2023, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) supported the call for a foreign force. In July, U.S. Secretary of State Blinken, Vice President Kamala Harris, and U.S. Representative Hakeem Jeffries convinced the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to reverse its initial course affirming Haitian sovereignty to now call for intervention. At the time of writing, the United States was poised to introduce a UNSC resolution after Kenya expressed willingness to lead a multinational armed mission. It must be noted that it is Haiti's Core Group-installed Prime Minister Henry who, along with the UN office in Haiti, is insisting on this violent solution to the crisis in the country—a crisis they themselves helped to create.

The Haitian community's continued protests against foreign troops and Western meddling are a testament to their unwavering courage.

The denial of Haitian sovereignty seems to be, as Sprague has described, "a synchronized effort by cooperating states and institutions bolstered by a global elite's consensus against popular democracy." The Global Fragilities Act, then, not only lays out a plan that has already been implemented in Haiti over the last 20 years, but also directly emerges out of U.S. experiences in the Haitian (neo)colonial laboratory. We need to recognize Haiti's critical place as a testing ground for U.S. and Western imperialism.

But Haiti is also the site of one of the longest struggles in the world for both Black liberation and anticolonial independence. This explains the U.S. empire's constant reactionary onslaught against the people of Haiti, punishing their repeated attempts at sovereignty with decades of instability designed to secure and expand U.S. hegemony. For two centuries, imperial counterinsurgency against Haiti has aimed to terminate the most ambitious revolutionary experiment in the modern world. The tactics deployed to attack Haitian sovereignty have been consistent and persistent. We ignore how these tactics may be used on the rest of the region at our peril.

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