

Foreigners Select Haiti's Prime Minister

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It is déjà vu all over again.

Recently the Core Group (US, Canada, France, Spain, Germany, Brazil, UN and OAS) published a note saying Ariel Henry was the prime minister of Haiti. Within 48 hours the other individual claiming the position fell into line behind Henry, who was a [member](#) of the US/France/Canada created 'Council of the Wise' that appointed the prime minister after President Jean Bertrand Aristide was ousted in 2004.

The Core Group's bid to unify the PHTK (right wing 'Bald-Headed' Party) regime was designed to undercut an effort by a [broad group](#) of Haitian political actors to form a consensus government. The Commission pour la recherche d'une solution à la crise is seeking to form a government that would remain in place for a year or two in a bid to stabilize the country and revitalize moribund state institutions. Then it would oversee elections.

But the Core Group wants the PHTK regime to oversee quick elections, which will be easy to manipulate. Something that has happened numerous times in the recent past.

As a result, many Haitian civil society and political actors have [criticized](#) the Core Group's 'selection of Haiti's leader by statement'. To understand their concerns, imagine the Jamaican, Congolese, Guatemalan and Filipino ambassadors releasing a collective statement on who should be prime minister of Canada.

The assassination of President Jovenel Moïse reflects the disintegration of Haitian politics after a decade of foreign intervention that empowered the neo-Duvalierist PHTK since an earthquake devastated Port-au-Prince and surrounding regions in January 2010. Instead of dispatching Heavy Urban Search and Rescue Teams to help with relief and medical support after the quake, Ottawa sent 2,000 troops to join over 10,000 US troops deployed to Haiti. As [internal Canadian](#) government documents show, they were deployed out of concern over a "popular uprising" amidst the political vacuum and the return of Haiti's most popular politician, Aristide, from forced exile.

While their massive capacities offered certain logistical benefits, the foreign troops trampled

on Haitian sovereignty by seizing control of the airport and port. Simultaneously, the government was sidelined from international reconstruction. In the months after the quake the US and Canada demanded the Haitian parliament pass an 18-month state of emergency [law](#) that effectively gave up government control over the reconstruction.

Not viewing then-President Renée Préal as sufficiently compliant, the US and Canada pushed for elections to take place only months after the horrific earthquake. With rubble throughout Port au Prince and hundreds of thousands living in camps, Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon [demanded](#) Préal hold elections by the end of the year. In May 2010 Cannon said, “[the international](#) community wants to see a commitment, a solid, serious commitment to have an election by the end of this year.” (With far fewer logistical hurdles, it took two years to hold elections after the 2004 US/France/Canada coup.)

As a result of various obstacles tied to the earthquake and a [devastating cholera](#) outbreak introduced to the country by negligent UN troops in October 2010, hundreds of thousands were unable to vote during the first round of the November 28, 2010, election. Another factor dampening turnout was the exclusion of Aristide’s Fanmi Lavalas from participating.

Following the first round of voting the US and Canada forced the candidate whom Haiti’s electoral council had in second place, Jude Celestin, out of the runoff. Rather than the candidate of Préal’s social democratic INITE party, US and Canadian officials claimed the extreme right-wing Michel Martelly deserved to be in the second round. A US and Canada dominated OAS electoral mission concluded Martelly was in second place despite, explains the Centre for Economic Policy Research, no “[legal](#), statistical, or other logical basis for its conclusions.” Nevertheless, Ottawa and Washington pushed the Haitian government to accept the OAS’s recommendations. Cannon said he “[strongly urges](#) the Provisional Electoral Council to accept and implement the [OAS] report’s recommendations and to proceed with the next steps of the electoral process accordingly.” In an interview Canada’s foreign minister warned that “time is running out”, adding that “[our ambassador](#) has raised this with the president [Préal] himself.” As part of their full-court press, Haitian officials had their US visas revoked, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton traveled to Port-au-Prince and there were threats that aid would be cut off if Martelly’s vote total was not increased as per the OAS recommendation.

The pressure worked. But only about 20% of voters participated in the second round of elections, which Martelly ‘won’.

Washington and Ottawa backed Martelly as he failed to hold constitutionally mandated elections and became ever more violent. As president, Martelly [surrounded](#) himself with former Duvalierists and death squad leaders who’d been arrested for rape, murder, kidnapping and drug trafficking. When brutal dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier returned to Haiti after 25 years, Martelly told the *New York Times* no one wanted him prosecuted except for “[certain](#) institutions and governments” abroad.

During repeated visits Canadian foreign minister John Baird praised Martelly for “going in the right direction” and operating “[a really](#) functioning government.” In 2013 Baird and minister for the Americas Diane Ablonczy met Martelly and his Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe in Port-au-Prince saying, “[we share](#) with Haitian leaders the goal of seeing a self-sustaining economy with opportunity for all Haitians and a greater role for private-sector actors, including Canadian companies.” Ottawa backed Martelly until protests forced him to

leave office at the end of his five-year mandate.

They also helped Martelly make the little-known Jovenel Moïse his successor. The US and Canada pushed to move forward with the second round of voting after [mass protests](#) broke out over election irregularities. When the second round was finally canceled Global Affairs put out a statement headlined “[Ministers](#) Dion and Bibeau concerned by postponement of Haiti’s presidential elections.” A subsequent audit of the election results found that 92% of polling place tally sheets had significant irregularities and a stunning 900,000 of the 1.5 million votes cast were from ‘accredited poll observers’ who could vote at any voting station.

In a new election a year later barely one in five eligible voters participated. According to official figures, Moïse received less than [600,000 votes](#) — just [9.6 percent](#) of registered voters. Voter [suppression](#) was widespread.

Beyond direct efforts to dampen turnout, elections had largely lost their legitimacy. Many Haitians believed then and believe today that no matter who receives the most votes the tallies will be ‘arranged’ to suit the ruling candidate. And if a pro-poor candidate wins, their agenda will be stifled or they will be overthrown.

This belief is based upon experience. In the most credible election in Haitian history, Aristide’s Fanmi Lavalas won more than 70% of the votes for 7,000 positions. In the May 2000 legislative and municipal elections they [took](#) an unprecedented 89 of 115 mayoral positions, 72 of 83 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 18 of 19 Senate seats.

Knowing they had no chance of gaining power via the ballot box in the foreseeable future, the foreign backed opposition parties cried foul. After initially describing the elections as “[a great](#) success for the Haitian population”, the OAS subsequently criticized the counting method in a handful of Senate seats (as has been done in previous selections, the electoral council determined the 50 percent plus one vote required for a first-round victory by calculating the percentages of the top four candidates.) The opposition boycotted the subsequent presidential election, which they had no chance of winning. A USAID poll of 1,002 Haitians conducted on the eve of the November 2000 presidential election showed that Aristide was [far and away](#) the most popular politician and Fanmi Lavalas was the preferred party by an incredible 13 to one.

In one of the most impressive feats of 21st-century imperial propaganda, supposed ‘irregularities’ in the May legislative and municipal election became the justification for destabilizing and ultimately overthrowing Aristide. In other words, the 2004 coup against President Aristide began with an effort to discredit elections he neither participated in nor oversaw.

The US- and Canada-sponsored destabilization campaign included an aid embargo, funding for opposition groups, diplomatic isolation and paramilitary attacks. It culminated with US, French and Canadian troops invading the country to physically remove the president.

Incredibly this was all planned, in broad outline, in advance, in Canada.

In 2003 Jean Chrétien’s Liberal government organized the “[Ottawa Initiative](#) on Haiti” where high-level US, French and OAS officials discussed ousting Haiti’s elected president, re-creating the dreaded army and putting the country under UN trusteeship. Thirteen months

after the meeting Aristide was forced out and Haiti was under UN occupation. The military was subsequently re-created.

The current Core Group traces its roots to the 2003 Ottawa Initiative on Haiti meeting. Some have labeled it a "[fourth branch](#)" of the Haitian government. But the Core Group's success at rallying the PHTK behind Ariel Henry demonstrates its influence may be greater than that.

The vast majority of Haitians are right to be angry at foreign interference in their country. Look at where it has led.

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