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Haiti

Mobilizations against Brazilian troops in wake of quake

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One of the most vexing issues in Latin America's relations with Haiti, is the grievous lack of understanding on the part of anti-imperialist forces about the nature of the repeated imperialist occupations of the former French colony, and of the crushing of the Lavalas movement, including the ouster of the country's democratically-elected President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

I understand that at least some currents on the Brazilian left – for example the PSOL – understand that the UN occupation of Haiti was really a US-NATO occupation. This became clear when the US put an end to the pretense and used the quake devastation and catastrophe as a pretext to directly occupy Haiti with US troops.

However, to my knowledge, the Lula government has been silent on this issue. Its military have the lead role in the UN Minustah occupation mission, misnamed to be sure. Bolivia also has troops in the same UN police force – the Blue Helmets.

Today's human catastrophe in Haiti brought about by the quake and the total absence of any sovereign government is an announced second or third demolition of this country – the first being premeditated and brutal interventions and occupations by Washington-dominated foreign armed forces.

The silence of both the Brazilian PT (Workers Party) and the governing MAS movement in Bolivia significantly undermines our Latin American and Caribbean unity. It weakens anti-imperialist forces on all continents.

There is no Haitian democracy, no Haitian state, and much less any independent government. The cabal fronting for imperialism in Haiti counts in its stable only hired clowns and imitators, political prostitutes and craven bootlickers masquerading as concerned NGO spokespersons.

In any case, I think the publication of this brief report is a very positive sign. Perhaps this indicates that broader layers of the Brazilian political classes are having some doubts about the disgusting and undignified role of Brazil in carrying out with troops the criminal designs of Washington, Paris, and Ottawa in the land of Toussaint Louverture.

Felipe Stuart C., Managua, Nicaragua

Minority groups, radical allies of deposed president Jean-Bertrand Aristide oppose foreign troops in Haiti

Some of the people in poor barrios show disdain for the UN peace forces. This criticism has increased amidst the chaos following the earthquake.

FÃ BIO ZANINI

Feature report from Port-au-Prince

Mobilizations against Brazilian troops in wake of quake

Cornered and radicalized, a layer of Haitian society is taking advantage of the chaos in the wake of the earthquake to turn up the volume of their now six-year old demand –“Brazilians, go home!”

Most of them are sympathizers of ex-president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, deposed in 2004 by a U.S. action (which the UN ignored) and now exiled in South Africa.

They live in miserable neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince, such as Cité Soleil and Bel Air, where Aristide appears in wall graffiti alongside Bob Marley and Martin Luther King.

“Aristide built everything hereabouts and the Brazilians destroyed them,” said a man who described himself simply as Jean, drinking a beer and smoking grass at ten in the morning amidst the rubble of in a Bel Air street.

Another person who identified himself as “Matador” says that the Brazilians have nothing to do in the country. “They never built even one bathroom here.”

Many people in the region resented the “pacification” operations conducted by Brazilian troops between 2004 and 2007 to disarm pro Aristide gangs in tough clashes.

“They [the Brazilian soldiers] are not our friends. They kill our people,” said Vanel Louis Paul, a leader of Massa Popular, a pro Aristide grouping whose headquarters is in the gigantic slum of Cité Soleil, the biggest in Port-au-Prince.

Emile Wales, a member of that group and a member of the Board of the Fundação Aristide [Aristide Foundation] an aid non-profit NGO sustained by allies of the former president, say that Brazil is one of the countries now attempting to impede the return of their leader from exile.

“We viewed [Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva] as a democrat. But now, looking at what has happened here, we no longer see him that way,” he stated.

Over ten days in Port-au-Prince, a Folha [newspaper] encountered many more demonstrations of appreciation for the Brazilians than the contrary. Brazil has the military leadership of Minustah, the UN peace-keepers who are generally well received by Haitians.

Nevertheless, the radicalized layer exists and is active not only in the slums but also within the student movement. The worst scenario for Brazil would be an alliance between the impoverished masses in the slums and this politicized elite.

“We are watching attentively and with concern the activity of Aristide’s partisans, even if they are still weak,” said Coronel Alan Santos, public relations officer of the Brazilian Minustah battalion.

Annual March

Every year on the 28 of February (the anniversary of Aristide’s ouster) at least five thousand people March in the streets of Port-au-Prince to remember what they characterize as a coup d’état. Graffiti calling for the withdrawal of

Minustah is scant, but visible on some walls in the center of the capital.

There has never been violence in these demonstrations - the gangs linked to the former president were disarmed, and their leaders jailed. About 5500 former members of those paramilitary groups escaped from prison at the time of the earthquake, and they are on the loose.

Aristide wants to return to Haiti and promises never to run again for the Presidency. There have not been any opinion polls in Haiti about his party's popularity, the FamÃ-lia Lavalas. But it certainly continues to be strong in the main pockets of poverty in the country.

"We are present throughout the country. We are the majority party," Maryse Narcisse, party chair and Aristide's main representative in Haiti, said to Folha.

A former minister in the deposed president's government, Narcisse is more diplomatic when speaking about the Brazilians. However, she clearly calls for a timeline for the withdrawal of foreign troops, something the UN has already said will only take place "several years" ahead.

"We can't fathom how Minustah is going to hang around here forever. It's high time that we knew when their work will end," she said. "We need international solidarity but it has to go along with dignity for us."

Division

Minustah's response to the earthquake, with Brazil up front, led to a wider gulf between those who defend and those who attack the foreign presence in Haiti.

Thumbs up and applause are the usual signs of approval when Brazilians carry out food distribution. But the opponents are not convinced.

"Minustah has not been capable of giving an adequate response to the earthquake. My impression is that the troops really do not know what to do," said Narcisse.

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