

Clinton and the Taming of Haiti

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A white smile is not always a sign of friendship

“Jan ou vini se jan an yo resevwa ou”
(Your approach will determine your welcome. Aysien Proverb)

On the 19th of May, Ban Ki Moon, secretary general of the UN, appointed ex US president Bill Clinton as United Nations special envoy to Haiti[1]. His Mission: *“to help mobilise resources for the reconstruction of the country, devastated by natural disasters and the food crisis, among other problems”*[2].

At the beginning of September, Clinton and the Tunisian head of MINUSTAH, Hédi Annaba, having “reminded” us in quite a paternalistic way that the Haitians are perfectly capable, intelligent and creative people (they were only short of adding “almost like the rest of us”), they told us that the misery, oppression and violence that reign in the Caribbean nation are due to:

“it having suffered bad governments, abuse and neglect, not only from inside the country, but also from its neighbours and from the international community. We currently have a great team of leaders in Haiti, we can turn the situation around. And since we can, we must do it”[3].

This confession is surprising in that, for the first time, as far as I know at least, a leader of the “international community” has recognised, even though it was just in passing, that the international community has something to do with the poverty and hardship suffered in Ayiti[4] (Haiti). And we can gather from his declarations that there has been some sort of relationship between



the abusive and negligent Haitian leadership, and this international community. Coming from somebody like Clinton, this declaration should not be taken lightly and it should refresh our memories regarding the role that Clinton himself has played in relation to the abuses suffered for so long by the Ayisien[5] people and which he himself doesn't seem to remember.

Clinton and the return of the makoutes[6] to power in Ayiti (1993-1994)

“Ipokrit se kouto de bò”
(Hypocrites are a double-edged sword. Aysien Proverb)

With his appointment in May as the all new special envoy of the general secretary of the UN in Haiti, it wasn't the first time that Clinton posed as a “friend” of the Haitian people. The first time he did it was 15 years ago when one of the most ferocious dictatorships ever to have plagued Haiti, that of Raoul Cedras, had violently come to power.

Let's refresh our memories a bit. In September 1991, after seven months in power, father Jean Bertrand Aristide, priest, follower of Liberation Theology and leader of one of the biggest popular

movements in recent Haitian history, forged in the struggle against the Duvalier dictatorship, was overthrown by a CIA financed coup d'état with unofficial approval from the White House (unofficial, because, with the end of the Cold War and the inauguration of the New World Order, the image of the supposed “guardian of democracy” could not be sullied) [7].

During his 1993 presidential campaign, Clinton criticised Bush's policies towards Haiti, his soft touch approach to the makoutes and his not unequivocally recognising the legitimacy of the ousted Aristide. Clinton was particularly fierce in his criticism of Bush's policy of repatriating Haitian rafters at a time when the makoutes killed a total of 5000 people, mutilating, torturing and raping many thousands more. Among his promises were to halt the repatriation of Ayisiens who had defied the odds in flimsy rafts to seek asylum in Florida and to fulfil the international obligations of the US in terms of guaranteeing political asylum to refugees, to take drastic measures in order to return Aristide to power and to toughen the embargo on Haiti[8] (an embargo that Chomsky defined as the most porous embargo of all times, a mere “public relations” stunt by the US without any intention of putting real pressure on the makoutes[9]).

More than a few Ayisiens swallowed the bait (including Aristide himself) believing that imperialism could be changed from within the very centre of imperialism, or that the foreign policy of the US is not State policy, but depends on the personal whims of each president. With Clinton in power, they thought that everything would be different. More than a few of them supported his campaign[10]. But what happened once Clinton got in to office couldn't have been more disappointing: not only did he take months to close the concentration camps opened by Bush in Guantanamo to house thousands of Ayisien refugees (April 1993) in inhuman conditions, in 1994 he re-opened them just after the dictatorship had stepped up the terror and carried out more atrocities and massacres, resulting in a new wave of Ayisien rafters setting out for Florida. The overcrowded conditions of these concentration camps were horrendous: built to house 5000 people, by August 1994 they were housing over 50000 people like animals[11]. Otherwise, his repatriation policy was no different to that of Bush

In order to maintain his image, Clinton merely signalled that his government would root out the cause of the flow of refugees, which was the Cedras dictatorship, and that he would return Aristide to power. Clinton did indeed return Aristide to power in September 1994, but only after tortuous negotiations in which he obliged him to renounce the reformist dimension of his political program, forced him in to agreeing to "national reconciliation" (which meant sharing power with those who had tortured and mutilated his social support base and who, conveniently, would receive amnesty) and to implementing a series of neoliberal measures recommended by the international financial institutions which went against the interests of the people who had elected him to improve the subsistence conditions and the misery in which the Haitian people languished. In other words, Aristide's return to power was conditional on a compromise with the makoutes, offering impunity to a genocidal military and their political supporters and deepening the economic

interests of the US in Haiti[12].

Nothing that has happened in Ayiti since then can be understood outside of these events. What we see today is the second act in the process of taming the Ayisien popular movement which began with the September 1991 coup.

Clinton and the return of pirates to the Caribbean

"Fizi tire, nanpwen aranjman"
(Once the gun sounds, there can be no agreement. Ayisien proverb)

The context in which Clinton is once again offering his "good offices" for the stabilisation of Ayiti is different to the context in 1993-1994 only in that the current military occupation which is propping up the de facto regime of Preval is an extreme version of the clientelist regimes which have characterised the last 100 years of Haitian history - "effectively" combining foreign intervention and native autocracy. A regime which prevails in the context of the complete disintegration of the Republic of Haiti.

This new context began with the 2004 Coup, which overthrew Aristide for the second time. This time Aristide was not leading a powerful grassroots movement emerging from the struggle against dictatorship, like when he came to power in 1991, his government was isolated and in ruins, was scraping by and was faced with a population forced to make do with whatever measures allowed them to improve their existence and ease their extreme poverty, however humble they were. In this context Aristide resists the impositions of the international financial institutions, points out the responsibility of foreign powers for the misery in Ayiti and seeks certain reforms which bring him up against an unmovable oligarchy, incapable of making the least concession or of accepting the slightest change to the status quo, and who thought they had gotten rid of the spectre of reformism in 1991. In the midst of a political crisis triggered by paramilitary troops trained by the CIA, troops from France, Canada, US and Chile kidnap Aristide at the end of February 2004 signalling the beginning of

another cycle of repression and de facto governments, under the military control of MINUSTAH, a UN international policing-military force which carries out the role of coup army in a country that hasn't had its own army since 1995[13].

And whereas it had fallen to Bush Snr and Bush Jnr to orchestrate both coups against Aristide, our Clinton got the role of "normalising" the situation post-coup. Back then, Clinton was proposing the return of Aristide. This is currently off the agenda: the international community now accepts the normality of Ayiti's status as a protectorate. Now Clinton is back on a mission to paint a rosy image of the "fantastic" work carried out by MINUSTAH. Clinton is also coming back this time (let us not forget that, like all dictatorships, this is also a dictatorship of the dominant class) with the same old story that might have been popular in the 90's, but which is now completely discredited, according to which it's necessary to attract foreign investment and that this will, magically, solve all of the "underdevelopment" problems. It's common knowledge and the case of Haiti empirically proves that the period of highest foreign investment flows, coincides with the worst ever period of impoverishment of the people. I'm referring to the period comprising the 1970's and 1980's, when it was thought that Haiti could be transformed in to the "Taiwan of the Caribbean"[14]. "The Haitian people work hard" says Clinton. "The Haitian people work well. I want to tell the whole world that this is a good place to invest" [15]. As if the world didn't know. With misery wages, a complete lack of labour regulation in the free trade zones and with two commercial accords agreed to suit foreign capital (the HOPE Act with the US and an EPA with the EU[16]) it's unlikely that they don't know about it. What remains unclear is the relationship between the levels of exploitation of the Haitian people and the creation of new enclaves for foreign capital on the one hand, and the improvement of living standards for the Ayisiens on the other. In fact, they're all rushing to see how they can make money with Haiti: even Brazil, has just recently revealed its intension to take advantage of the

HOPE ACT[17] for its manufacturing companies located in the free trade zones. At the end of the day, what Clinton has come to do is finish the job he started in 90's, ie. to consolidate the project of turning Ayiti in to a disorganised source of cheap labour, without any rights, under international military supervision and always open to international investors. A place without direction, without a destiny and without its own future, in which the needs of the population would be satisfied by means of pitiful charity.

Getting back to Clinton's surprising quote which aroused our initial interest, we notice that this can be gleaned from his own words, when read closely and carefully:

"It having suffered bad governments, abuse and neglect, not only from inside the country, but also from its neighbours and from the international community. We currently have a great team of leaders in Haiti, we can turn the situation around And since we can, we must do it"[18].

Who are this great team of leaders in Ayiti? The leaders of the military occupation, MINUSTAH, the military force which, in the absence of a Haitian national army, has maintained the makoutes in power since the 2004 coup d'état? Businessmen from the multinationals and their local allies – like Andy Apaid, an out and out makoute businessman- who keep the working people of Ayiti surviving on hunger wages? Preval's puppet government, which has no more than a facade of a democratic government without any democratic content whatsoever, not even in the most bourgeois sense of the term, and which administers the now discredited coup regime?[19]

What we can gather from Clinton's announcements is that, for him, and for the rest of the "international community", the solution to Ayiti's problems is not, and cannot be, in the hands of the Ayisien people themselves. It's only now that Ayiti can be raped and pillaged under a military occupation which has turned it in to a UN protectorate, that the country has a "great team of leaders" meek, obedient and tamed enough not



to go against the dictates of the US, France and now Brazil, which is emerging as a new regional power. Nothing is said of the scant participation in the last elections (April and June), in which Fanmi Lavalas, the party of the ousted Aristide, was once again prevented from participating, and in which various source reported participation rates of between 5% and 11%, revealing the lack of legitimacy of the regime[20]. Although, what the Ayisien people might have to say is, of course, rarely taken in to consideration by their bosses and defenders from the North.

Ayiti and the reestablishment of US hegemony in the hemisphere

"Ti kou ti kou bay lanmò"
(One soft blow after the other, murders. Ayisien proverb)

The coup in Ayiti and the subsequent military occupation cannot be considered in isolation. They reflect the political changes that have taken place in the hemisphere since the break up of the New World Order at the end of the 90's and the beginning of the US War on Terror[21]. On the one hand, the occupation being carried out by Latin American troops, under Brazilian leadership represents the emergence of regional powers capable of challenging total US hegemony in various regions while defending their own interests-

whether they be Brazil's ambition to hold a permanent seat on the UN Security Council or its interests in the Haitian free trade zones[22]. On the other hand, the coup reflects the reaction of the elites in Latin America to the wave of popular protests which has been shaking up Latin America since 2000. Both factors indicate a definite decline in the power of the land of the dollar in Latin America, its traditional back yard. And today it's willing to reassert this hegemony through whatever means necessary: whether by reactivating its Southern Command, through the installation of new military bases in Colombia, by pushing for bilateral free trade agreements with countries such as Peru, Chile or Central America or through the encouragement of reactionary, ultra-conservative and even fascist movements in Santa Cruz (Bolivia), Venezuela and Colombia or through the support, direct or indirect of coups in Ayiti or Honduras[23]. Both countries, among the poorest in the region, know only too well that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

While US support for the Haitian coup leaders in 2004 is beyond doubt, the role of the US in Honduras is not at all clear; there has at least been a certain amount of complicit tolerance of the Micheletti regime, which could not have been brought to power by a military coup carried out by one of the armies most servile to the Pentagon without its knowledge and consent

[24]. While on the one hand, the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, distances herself from the coup leaders in Honduras, half-heartedly recognises the legitimacy of the Zelaya government and lays down some sanctions more in a bid, it would seem, to silence those voices which have pointed to Washington's involvement after the coup than to exert any real pressure on the coup leaders, on the other hand, she supports the unacceptable negotiations in Costa Rica between Zelaya and the coup leaders- which attempt to limit the scope of Zelaya's social reforms and push for more participation by the coup leaders in a "government of national reconciliation"- and allow for the continuation of the fluid relationship between the US army military base in Soto Cono and the ultra-conservative putschist military there, as if nothing had ever happened. All of this without any mention of the fact that two close associates of the Clinton family- Lanny Davis and Bennett Ratcliff- are advising and publicly defending the Honduran dictatorship[25].

The difference is that while the coup d'état in Honduras was condemned in unison by the international community, and vociferously so by the countries of Latin America, the coup d'état in Haiti went unrecognized as such: in the international press it was presented as a "rebellion", a "mutiny", as the latest of many "political crises", and its true nature was thereby hidden. It is a coup d'état which has still not been recognised in those terms. And it certainly hasn't been recognised that the military occupation at the hands of MINUSTAH is nothing more than a system of power which maintains the status quo which commenced in February of 2004 with the second overthrow of Aristide. The military component of this sui generis dictatorship covers itself in sheep's clothing: peace mission, humanitarian mission, for national reconstruction, etc. Leaving to one side the undeniable coercion and repression that have characterised it, the irrefutable proof for which includes multiple massacres (which have cost the lives of 10000 Haitians according to a report by The Lancet), crimes and human rights viola-

tions carried out by the blue helmets which have been carefully recorded and denounced in the face of the silent complicity of the same "international community" now so indignant in the face of the Honduran coup[26].

What's most serious in all of this is that the same Latin American community which is pulling all the diplomatic strings to achieve a peaceful outcome to the Honduran crisis, which means, a solution that will stop both the heavy handedness and a possible popular leftist outburst, is playing an active role in MINUSTAH, which is made up mostly of Latin American troops (mainly Brazilians, Chileans and Argentineans) indoctrinated themselves by the National Security Doctrine[27]. MINUSTAH troops have not stopped carrying out acts of violence against the Ayisien people; on the 18 June at the funeral of father Jean Juste, ex-compañero of Aristide, in a skirmish with the mourners, they killed a young boy, Kenel Pascal[28]. Similarly, they reacted with unexpected violence against workers protesting against the occupation and the miserable conditions of the working class on the first of May[29] and against students who were demonstrating between June and August for an increase in the minimum hunger wages in Ayiti[30]. Even though the main wave of repression took place in the 2004-2006 period, the mere prospect of social protests arising and MINUSTAH shows no hesitation in raising its iron fist.

But even though differences exist between both coup experiences, the final result has been the same, and that is that both aim to re-establish that lost hegemony and install reliable agents in power (in the case of Honduras it is hoped that they will take their place in a so-called government of national reconciliation when Zelaya is back in power, based on the model already tried and tested in Haiti in the 1994 negotiations). Within the framework of this occupation, and of the efforts to "normalise", on the surface at least, the situation in Haiti, and in the context of the attempt by the US to re-establish their lost hegemony, we can better

understand Clinton's real mission as special envoy of the UN secretary general in Haiti. It is the carrot coming after the stick. Even though the stick is still wielded when necessary. When one understands in context the role that Clinton has played in Ayiti over the past two decades, one can't help remembering that the name of one of the hurricanes that slammed in to the Haitian coastline in August, leaving behind it a trail of great death and destruction, was Bill. In truth, Bill Clinton's Ayiti policy has not been much more benign than those hurricanes.

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References

- [1] Haiti en Marche, Vol. XXIII No.17, 20 May 2009, p.3.
- [2] <http://www.un.org/spanish/News/fullstorynews.asp?newsID...2=Ban>
- [3] <http://www.un.org/spanish/News/fullstorynews.asp?NewsID...16451>
- [4] Haití in Creole, the most widely spoken language in Haiti.
- [5] Haitian in Creole.
- [6] The name given to the Duvalier dictatorship's personal armed forces (officially called the VSN, National Security Volunteers, but known by the poor as the Tonton Makoutes, a figure from Haitian folklore of a man carrying a large bag who makes bold children disappear). By extension, makoute was used to describe all representatives of the traditional Duvalier elite which still dominates Haiti.
- [7] For further details, see "The Elite's Revenge", J.P. Slavin, in "Haiti, Dangerous Crossroads", NACLA, 1995, pp.57-61.
- [8] See "Haiti in the New World Order", Alex Dupuy, Westview Press 1997, pp.140-141.
- [9] Raven Quarterly No.28. "Chomsky on Haiti" Freedom Press, 1994.

[10] "Progressive Activism in the United States", Cynthia Peters, en NACLA 1995, p.210.

[11] For more details on this shameful chapter in the dark history of US-Haitian relations, consult a previous article by the same author "Guantánamo y Haití: la conexión ignorada" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/3521>

[12] See Dupuy, 1997, pp. 146-151, 163-166.

[13] For more details, see "Ayití, una cicatriz en el rostro de América" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/1063>

[14] This has been analysed in a previous article, "Ayití, entre la liberación y la ocupación" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/4651>

[15] "La nomination de Clinton: inquiétude ou espoir?" [1] Haiti en Marche, Vol. XXIII No.18, 27 May 2009, p.1.

[16] The HOPE Act is a free trade agreement for textile companies located in Ayiti, whose products can enter the US market tariff and duty free. It goes without saying that this measure benefits the owners of national and transnational companies in Haiti, but the same cannot be said for the factory workers or the masses of the unemployed who haven't seen a single new job created thanks to this piece of legislation first approved at the end of 2006. The EPA's (Economic Partnership Agreements) are free trade agreements, disguised with clauses regarding political dialogue and cooperation, which have been used by the European Commission since 2005 as a way to compete more aggressively in International markets, mainly in its areas of "influence", ie. Its ex colonies: the Caribbean, Africa and Asia.

[17] <http://business.globaltimes.cn/world/2009-09/469356.html>

[18] <http://www.un.org/spanish/News/fullstorynews>.

asp?NewsID...16451 Our underlining.

[19] For a more detailed analysis of the context in which Preval won power, consult: "Las elecciones en Ayití: el fraude democrático para validar a los golpistas y macoutes en el poder" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/2078>, "Ayití en la encrucijada tras las elecciones" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/2698> y "Ayití, entre la liberación y la ocupación" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/4651>

[20] http://www.haitiaction.net/News/HA/6_27_9/6_27_9.html

[21] This gradual break up of US unipolarity since the end of the 90's and the emergence of several dynamic capitalist powers capable of challenging the super power's hegemony at regional level as well as the surge in global competition with new Chinese and EU economic policies are looked at in more detail in an article that I wrote together with Seán Flood for the Irish publication Red and Black Revolution No.15, Spring 2009. The article is called "The Global Game".

[22] See "Ayití y los anarquistas" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/4714> and "Ayití, una cicatriz en el rostro de América" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/1063>

[23] On the (attempted) process of reestablishing US hegemony under the leadership of Obama, See a previous article written in Puebla No.35 December 2008 "La Obamanía y la fábrica de las ilusiones". The full article can be consulted at <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/11453>. On Obama's Latin America policy and his new search for geopolitical control there, see another previous article, entitled "Obama y América Latina, ¿el imperialismo amigable?" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/9067>

[24] For more details on the Honduran coup, see our previous articles "Golpe de Estado en Honduras ¿el regreso de los gorilas o la táctica del desgaste?" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/13596>,

"Honduras, negociando la crisis a espaldas del pueblo" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/13683> e "¿Insurrección en Honduras?" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/13854>

[25] "Who's in Charge of US foreign policy?" Mark Weisbrot, The Guardian, 16 July 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2009...inton>

[26] See some of my other previous articles: "La violación en (de) Ayití, los logros de cuatro años de ocupación militar 'humanitaria'" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/7616>, "Ayití, entre la liberación y la ocupación" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/4651> y "Ayití, una cicatriz en el rostro de América" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/1063>

[27] The complete list of Latin American troops in Haiti is: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia (police only), Ecuador, El Salvador (police only), Granada (police only), Guatemala, Jamaica (police only), Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay.

[28] http://www.haitiaction.net/News/HA/6_20_9/6_20_9.html

[29] <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/13002>

[30] Consult "Update on Haitian Minimum Wage Struggle" for the Miami Autonomy and Solidarity group <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/14020>, "Factory Occupation in Haiti" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/14018>, the KOPA declaration "Batay sou salè minimòm la ann Ayiti se batay otònòm ouvriye yo ak tout lòt travayè!" <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/13426> and "Salario Mínio y Luchas en Haiti" for the worker's organisation Batay Ouvriye <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/14209>