

“Coup d’etat” Haitian News Blog

Despite enjoying support by the majority of Haitians, the Washington Post informed their readers that regime change was looming on 21 November 2003: “Aristide has pushed with mixed success a populist agenda of higher minimum wages, school construction, literacy programs, higher taxes on the rich and other policies that have angered an opposition movement run largely by a mulatto elite that has traditionally controlled Haiti’s economy.”^[16] In the three years leading up to the coup, the nation’s already moribund economy further deteriorated and the government ground to a halt as the opposition refused to participate in elections.^[17]

The [International Republican Institute](#), a nonprofit political group backed by powerful Republicans close to the Bush administration funded opposition to Aristide. For six years leading up to the coup, the I.R.I. conducted a \$3 million party-building program in Haiti, training Aristide’s political opponents, uniting them into a single bloc and, according to a former U.S. ambassador there, encouraging them to reject internationally sanctioned power-sharing agreements in order to heighten Haiti’s political crisis.^[18] “[Aristide] was espousing change in Haiti, fundamental [populist](#) change,” said Robert Maguire, a Haiti scholar. “Right away, he was viewed as a threat by very powerful forces in Haiti.” President Aristide promised not only to give voice to the poor in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, but also to raise the [minimum wage](#) and force businesses to pay taxes. He rallied supporters with heated attacks on the United States, a tacit supporter of past dictatorships and a major influence in Haitian affairs. The anti-Aristide message had currency around Washington. Mr. Einaudi, the veteran diplomat, recalled attending the I.R.I.’s 2001 fund-raising dinner and being surrounded by a half-dozen Haitian businessmen sounding a common cry: “We were foolish to think that we could do anything with Aristide. That it was impossible to negotiate with him. That it was necessary to get rid of him.”^[19]

In September 2003, [Amiot Metayer](#) was found dead, his eyes shot out and his heart cut out, most likely the result of machete-inflicted wounds. He was, prior to his death, the leader of the Gonaives gang known as “[The Cannibal Army](#).” After his death, his brother [Buteur Metayer](#) swore vengeance against those he felt responsible for Amiot’s death—namely, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Buteur took charge of the Cannibal Army and promptly renamed it the [National Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Haiti](#).^[citation needed] On 5 February 2004, this rebel group seized control of Haiti’s fourth-largest city, [Gonaïves](#), marking the beginning of a minor revolt against Aristide. During their sack of the city, they burned the police station and looted it for weapons and vehicles, which they used to continue their campaign down the coast. By 22 February, the rebels had captured Haiti’s second-largest city, [Cap-Haïtien](#). As the end of February approached, rebels threatened to take the capital, [Port-au-Prince](#), fueling increasing political unrest and the building of barricades throughout the capital.^[20] Haitians fled their country on boats, seeking to get to the United States.^[21] After a three-week rebellion, Aristide involuntarily^{[22][23]} left Haiti on a US plane accompanied by US security personnel^{[22][23]} as the rebels took over the capital^[24] and was flown without^[22] knowledge of his route and destination, via [Antigua](#) to [Bangui](#), Central African Republic.^[25]

Many international politicians, including members of the U.S. congress and the Jamaican Prime Minister, expressed concern that the United States had interfered with Haiti’s democratic process by removing

Aristide with excessive force. According to Rep. [Maxine Waters](#) D-California, Mildred Aristide called her at her home at 6:30 am to inform her “the coup d’etat has been completed”, and Jean-Bertrand Aristide said the U.S. Embassy in Haiti’s chief of staff came to his house to say he would be killed “and a lot of Haitians would be killed” if he refused to resign immediately and said he “has to go now.” [1] Rep. [Charles Rangel](#), D-New York expressed similar words, saying Aristide had told him he was “disappointed that the international community had let him down” and “that he resigned under pressure” – “As a matter of fact, he was very apprehensive for his life. They made it clear that he had to go now or he would be killed.” [1] When asked for his response to these statements [Colin Powell](#) said that “it might have been better for members of Congress who have heard these stories to ask us about the stories before going public with them so we don’t make a difficult situation that much more difficult” and he alleged that Aristide “did not democratically govern or govern well”. [1] Jamaican Prime Minister [P. J. Patterson](#) released a statement saying “we are bound to question whether his resignation was truly voluntary, as it comes after the capture of sections of Haiti by armed insurgents and the failure of the international community to provide the requisite support. The removal of President Aristide in these circumstances sets a dangerous precedent for democratically elected governments anywhere and everywhere, as it promotes the removal of duly elected persons from office by the power of rebel forces.”