

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

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SL: [Interventions in Haiti belong in the dustbin of history](#)

### The Takeaway:

- As Haiti continues to experience political turmoil, Haitians are pushing back against calls for foreign intervention by countries like Canada, Mexico, and the United States.
- Foreign interventions in Haiti have never produced the stable security conditions that the invading countries said they would, and they fail to take into account what creating security actually looks like to the majority of Haitian people.
- Haiti's neighbors have a responsibility to let Haitians set the terms for how they'd like to restructure their political environment, and to welcome Haitian asylum seekers that seek refuge in their countries, as required by international law.

### Calls for Intervention

In July 2021, to the shock of Haitians and people across the world, Haitian president Jovenel Moïse was assassinated by a group of foreign mercenaries, some with ties to U.S. law enforcement agencies and U.S. military training. Overnight, Ariel Henry, Moïse's pick for prime minister, was propped up by the [Core Group](#), a collection of Western ambassadors, to become the new interim prime minister *and* president. There was no election. To this day, Haitian people haven't been given the chance to vote on Henry's presidency. But that hasn't stopped him from fully leaning into the power of the presidential office, most recently going before the United Nations and [requesting](#) an armed, foreign intervention into Haiti.

When making this ask, Henry cited armed militias' current hold on the country's major ports and fuel imports, saying that they are blocking the delivery of humanitarian relief that could help slow a new cholera outbreak. Currently, the United Nations is [debating](#) whether and how this intervention could take place, and the U.S., in particular, is looking for [partner nations](#) that could take the lead on a "limited, carefully scoped, non-U.N. mission." In response to this request, the Haitian public and civil society have voiced strong opposition, organizing [protests](#) and [letters](#) to U.S. [officials](#), with many people referencing the long legacy of failed interventions in the country.

While it's true that the behavior of these militias have contributed to a deepening economic and humanitarian crisis, adding foreign soldiers to the mix would only exacerbate the violence and instability that Haitian people are suffering through. The international community must let Haitian people create the political space to build a new government that represents their stated interests, which is to resolve the ongoing violence and political instability there with local solutions rather than foreign intervention.

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## Past is Prologue

Haitian people's skepticism of foreign invasions is well-earned. As citizens of the world's first self-liberated slave republic, Haitians have experienced repeated foreign interference in their country's governance to suppress the potential for Haiti to serve as [inspiration](#) to other Black people seeking freedom, and to rob the country of its resources. In 1914, U.S. Marines [stole](#) Haiti's gold reserves, around \$500,000 dollars at the time (around 13 million today). The following year, the U.S. military began a 19-year [occupation](#) of Haiti, controlling the political system, exploiting the economic system, and massacring Haitian [civilians](#).

Fast forward to more of the same: the U.S. has invaded or politically meddled in Haiti multiple times in the last three decades. In 1994, the U.S. [invaded](#) Haiti again, overthrowing a military junta. A decade later, in 2004, it [backed](#) another [coup](#) against democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, including by forcibly [removing](#) and [flying](#) Aristide into exile in the Central African Republic. Later that year, and for the next 11 years, U.S.-backed UN soldiers would occupy Haiti, engage in rampant [sexual violence](#), and introduce [cholera](#) to the island, leading to the deaths 10,000 Haitian people and infecting more than 800,000 others. It's safe to say that the U.S. and other countries have produced exactly zero successful interventions that have made Haitian people safer and the country more politically stable. It begs the question: what makes any of these countries think the next intervention will be any more successful?

## Not Every Conflict Has a Military Solution

To answer that question: these countries' presumption that they can help clear the path for Haiti's reconstruction isn't necessarily based in reality as much as it has been rooted in the belief that Black people can't, or shouldn't, govern themselves. Even since Haiti's colonial era, the (largely white) political leaders of Western powers like the U.S. and France have used this excuse to justify suppressing Haitian freedom and governance, and stealing from the island, all while declaring the righteousness of their policies. That sentiment doesn't just disappear. Instead, it reappears in the faulty logic used to justify further intervention today.

One argument in favor of intervention is that no political dialogue in Haiti is possible while militias retain any amount of control over the security situation in the country. But stating that the Henry government needs a military victory as a prerequisite to political progress is getting it backwards. The militias are political actors with political goals, and they're blocking the ports to achieve a political end. An effort to force them out through armed conflict, even if it were successful, would do nothing to end Haiti's political challenges.

Given this history, it doesn't take much to understand why many Haitians today are repulsed by suggestions of foreign intervention, or why people in the U.S. committed to building a more humane, diplomatic, and anti-imperial foreign policy should stand in solidarity with Haitian people's demands.

## Legitimacy Matters

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Another reason why launching an armed intervention into Haiti right now is such a preposterous idea? Because it would make it even harder for people in Haiti to hold their leaders accountable for the current situation. Henry is not only unelected, but he [indefinitely postponed](#) presidential and legislative elections, leaving the Haitian public with uncertainty on when they will be able to form a post-Moïse government. There's even evidence to suggest that he could have been [involved](#) in Moïse's assassination, and he's been uncooperative with the murder investigation. He has also [opposed](#) a civil society-led initiative called the Montana Accord to build a transitional government as part of a return to democratic governance.

If Henry is able to call on foreign forces to fight his enemies against the will of the Haitian public, his incentives to seek popular support through elections will decrease even further. Foreign countries shouldn't be in the business of undermining the Haitian public's prospects for demanding accountability from their government. Based on these factors, other countries should be honoring the desires of the Haitian public, which has consistently voiced opposition to an armed intervention, rather than listening to an unelected leader who's yet to prove that he has that public's confidence.

## **The People's Demands**

The U.S. and other intervention-ready parties at the UN need to envision a way to engage with Haiti other than through violence. Because we've seen the violence and authoritarianism to which that leads, and Haitians have had more than enough.

A coalition of civil society groups, which include those on the ground in Haiti, in the diaspora in the U.S., and allied U.S.-based groups have made [several demands](#) of the U.S. and the U.N. that can help lead to building significant and sustainable change in Haiti. They include:

- The U.S. government [dropping](#) support for Henry and his de facto government, and allowing for "a Haitian-led solution to emerge."
- The U.S. extending Temporary Protected Status for Haitians, which is set to expire in February 2023 (this already has congressional [support](#)).

Interventions in Haiti began as a means to steal and secure capital for the few, at the expense of the safety and interests of the Haitian people. Several centuries and invasions later, the U.S. and other Western countries could repeat this cycle and launch another destined-to-fail intervention. Or they can allow Haitians, who are already taking charge, to rebuild their country's government and economy on their terms. There's certainly one option that looks better to us.

## **THE INTERVIEW**

### **Reader Note!**

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This week, we are experimenting with something new: interviews with influential progressive voices you should know about. Ms. Harpootlian starts us off for our first ever interview:

*Allegra Harpootlian is a communications strategist for the American Civil Liberties Union, focusing on the pressing national security, technology, and privacy issues of our time. She is also a Political Partner with the Truman National Security Project. In her spare time you can find her bingeing sub-par sitcoms or looking for the best Italian restaurant in DC. Follow her on Twitter [here](#).*

**1) What was the first moment you realized you were interested in national security and accountability - a topic you've worked on for years now? Do you have any lessons learned for students or those just starting in a similar career path?**

I really wish there was an aha moment to point to in my life, but honestly there was always a part of me — even as a kid — that just found myself drawn to international affairs, the outsized role I saw America take on around the world, and what consequences that had on us and the people in all of these countries. And maybe that's because of the era I grew up in — I was 8 when 9/11 happened, 10 when we invaded Iraq, 16 when the Arab Spring erupted across the Middle East and North Africa, and still 16 when I watched leaders care more about their power and greed than the people they were supposed to be governing for. As I grew up, I started devouring more and more news related to these topics until I eventually started working on them. Being the communications person for Defense One throughout the 2016 election and then at ReThink Media, working to end America's post-9/11 wars, I realized that “national security” and “accountability” are two words that don't often make it into our government's vocabulary — and I wanted that to change.

I'll be the first to admit that I'm still learning every day, but there are a few tips and tricks I'd like to pass on. First, read everything and talk to everyone. Stay up on the news, sign up for all the niche newsletters, engage with the reporters writing these stories and the incredible people quoted in them. See an expert at an organization you admire tweeting about something you care about? DM them. Hear about someone in the space that everyone speaks highly of? Email them for a coffee. Going to a conference with interesting panelists? Find them after or shoot them a note. You'll learn so much and you'll quickly pick up on trends, interesting perspectives, and things out of the ordinary. Second, don't be afraid to be yourself. What we need right now is authenticity and disruption. Far too often I see young people in this space that shrink down, stay quiet, and follow the rules — they often think their time will come when they ultimately deserve it. But, that's not necessarily how it works (and it also shouldn't be how it works.) Don't sit down and wait for someone to tap you in. Start forming your opinions, pointing out gaps, and pushing back. And third, meet people where they are. We hear all the time that people just don't care about foreign policy and while that can be true — it's also in how you talk about it. Don't forget that everyone is doing the best they can and you might just be the person to help them connect the dots.

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## 2) What does a diplomacy-first foreign policy mean to you and what do you wish more Americans understood about it?

A diplomacy-first foreign policy means focusing on the people at the center of these policies and making sure that we have more tools in our toolbox than simply waging war or arming those who are. As Americans, we hear since we're little about how good America is, how it fights for the little guy, and protects everyone's rights, which is, unfortunately, fundamentally untrue. We've seen our country fail at these goals times and time again. We've seen our country refuse to live up to the values it purports to support, simply because it happened overseas or to a non-US citizen. What I wish more Americans understood is that our values don't stop at the water's edge and we shouldn't apply one set of values within our borders and another for our engagement abroad. I hope they understand that we haven't always been great, or even good, but that there's always a chance to do better and be better going forward.

## 3) What topic in US foreign policy concerns you the most and why?

Oof - there are so many to choose from, it's hard to pick just one! I'll be a bit meta with my response, if you don't mind. We spent the last 20+ years waging war across the world. In Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and elsewhere, we've [killed](#) hundreds of thousands of people, [hiding evidence](#), and [refusing](#) to take responsibility even when it's found. We bombed [schools](#) and [hospitals](#) and [critical infrastructure](#) and then left without so much as an apology, much less real accountability. We [rounded people up](#) here in America and [detained them](#) based solely on the color of their skin and what religion they practice. [Tortured people](#) and then covered it up. We [spied on](#) entire communities, while [demonizing them](#) in the news. Our foreign policy for the past two decades destroyed so many lives and yet we haven't ever reckoned with it, that's what concerns me most. I know it's a cliché, but it's a cliché for a reason: If we don't learn from history, we're doomed to repeat it.

### BURIED LEDES

**Elon Musk now owns Twitter, a move that has alarmed Democrats to take action against possible infringement on free speech.** Senator Chris Murphy [called](#) for a Committee on Foreign Investment investigation into Saudi Arabian investors stating that Saudis "have a clear interest in repressing political speech and impacting U.S. politics." In addition to pouring all their money into US think tanks and universities, social media platforms are the newest victims on the Saudis menu.

**75-year-old Saifullah Paracha who was held in the most notorious offshore U.S. military prison, Guantánamo Bay, can now go home after 18 years.** His charges — none. He was the [oldest](#) detainee at Guantánamo. He was cleared to leave for over a year but bureaucratic

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challenges prevented his departure. . This comes as a group of current and former detainees have [signed](#) an open letter calling on President Biden to allow g artwork made by detainees be made public. During their indefinite detention, many detainees took up visual art. “Our artworks are parts of ourselves,” explains a detainee. “We are still not free while parts of us are still imprisoned at Guantánamo.”

This was a heavier foreign policy debrief, so here’s a [cute fun fact](#) for making it all the way to the end.