

Haiti: U.S. disinformation campaign provides pretext as UN military intervention looms

written by Dan Cohen
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Jimmy "Barbecue" Cherizier speaks with an ailing man in Cité Soleil's Boston

neighborhood in Port-au-Prince. Photo: John Wesley Amady

As a popular uprising engulfs Haiti and threatens to topple the U.S.-backed regime of de facto Prime Minister Ariel Henry, Washington is seeking to deploy a military force to target the figure at the storm's center, Jimmy Cherizier, nicknamed "Barbecue."

Cherizier is the leader of a federation of armed groups called the *Revolutionary Forces of the G9 Family and Allies*, or FRG9. [Since](#) September 19, Cherizier and the FRG9 have blockaded with trenches and empty truck containers the Varreux gas terminal, where Haiti receives some 70 percent of its fuel supplies. Haitian National Police (HNP) forces have attacked the FRG9 in attempts to dislodge its fighters but have [failed](#). This barricade, which is only one of hundreds around the capital and Haiti generally, is today providing the excuse for Henry to [request](#) foreign military intervention.

While the masses of protesters demand Henry's resignation and denounce his request, it is the G9's blockade of the terminal that presents the most severe threat to Henry's continued grip on the country.

On Oct. 21, the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2653, drafted by the United States and Mexico, leveling international sanctions against "gang" leaders and their financial and political sponsors. However, only one leader was named: Cherizier. This follows U.S. Magnitsky [sanctions](#) leveled against Cherizier in December 2020.



FRG9 leader Jimmy Cherizier addresses a crowd of supporters in Port-au-Prince's La Saline neighborhood in July 2021. Photo: John Wesley Amady

"This resolution is an initial answer to calls for help from the Haitian people," U.S. ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield [remarked](#). "Today's adoption of this resolution is only the first step. We have much more work to do."

Haiti is plagued by criminal armed groups like the 400 Mawozo and the Five Seconds Gang, all arrayed against the FRG9 in the G-Pèp confederation, which is [connected](#) to powerful oligarchs with close ties to the U.S.. Haitians have taken note that, Cherizier, an anti-crime crusader, is the only figure targeted by the resolution, which claims that he "has engaged in acts that threaten the peace, security and stability of Haiti" and that the fuel blockade has "directly contributed to the economic paralysis and humanitarian crisis in Haiti."

"Ironically, the UN Security Council sanctions on Cherizier alone have boosted his

image among the Haitian masses,” remarked a Cité Soleil community leader, who requested anonymity.

The resolution also activated the UN Charter’s armed intervention clause, outlined in Chapter 7, which was used to legitimize UN “peacekeeper” missions in Haiti from 1994 to 2000 and 2004 to 2019.

Indeed, Washington is pushing for UNSC approval to deputize a UN-member country to carry out a military intervention, which dovetails with the U.S. Global Fragility Act, a 2019 law that [authorizes](#) covert military operations in targeted countries, with [Haiti](#) being the test case.

Secretary-General António Guterres put forth an October 8 [proposal](#) for foreign military intervention in Haiti, calling for a “rapid action force” that would be “composed of special armed forces personnel provided by one or several Member States, with one Member State providing leadership to the effort, including in terms of the planning, start-up, command and direction of operations.”

This would be followed by a “multinational police task force” to either train and advise a HNP hit squad, or to establish a “special force” to operate alongside the HNP in “tackling gangs, including through joint strike, isolation and containment operations.”

Greenfield-Thompson, draft co-penholder, told the council in an October 17 debate that “This resolution will pose a limited, carefully-scoped, non-UN mission, led by a partner country, with a deep, necessary experience required for such an effort to be effective.”

Guterres’ proposal was reflected in an earlier draft of the resolution containing a section calling for “immediate deployment of a multinational rapid action force,” however it was struck from the resolution in negotiations.

Preparing for war

Cherizier is well aware of the possibility of the U.S. military attempting to assassinate him. “We know that U.S. troops are preparing to trample on sovereign Haitian soil,” he [told](#) *Haiti Liberté*, “We are devising our strategies and tactics to deal with them.”

The U.S. and its allies’ crosshairs on Cherizier follow a multi-faceted disinformation campaign, alleging that Cherizier has committed multiple massacres in Port-au-Prince’s slums on behalf of the ruling Haitian Bald Headed Party (PHTK). These accusations have been listed in State Department annual human rights [reports](#) and were cited as justification for U.S. sanctions against Cherizier, who remains the only Haitian “gang leader” under such designation.

Indeed, the UNSC draft resolution contains similar language, claiming that Cherizier “planned and participated in the November 2018 deadly attack against civilians in a Port-au-Prince neighborhood known as La Saline.”



Port-au-Prince's Croix des Bossales market. Photo: Dan Cohen

However, as this investigation, based on visits to La Saline, interviews with residents and local officials, a U.S. official, and careful examination of media and human rights reports, will show, there is no evidence of Cherizier's involvement in a massacre in La Saline, or that a massacre even took place. The events of Nov. 1-13, 2018 have been mischaracterized as part of a disinformation campaign emanating from the State Department and National Endowment for Democracy (NED) that has paved the way for the current push for military intervention in Haiti. The allegations of massacres provide a patina of human rights concern for aggression against the burgeoning revolutionaries of the G9, and maintenance of Haiti as a neo-colony of the U.S. empire.

U.S. disinformation machine in action

According to multiple interviews we conducted in Haiti, on Nov. 1, 2018, two armed

groups began fighting in the Croix des Bossales market (Slaves Market) in the Port-au-Prince shantytown of La Saline, the site where French slavers sold captive Africans until Haiti's revolution (1791-1804) initiated the demise of the western slave economy. The conflict culminated in a fierce gun battle on Nov. 13, 2018.

By the time the fighting subsided, piles of dead bodies were strewn upon piles of garbage, gnawed on by wild pigs and left to rot under the Caribbean sun.

This outbreak of violence, and the Nov. 13 battle, would become the central plank in the disinformation campaign targeting Cherizier. Yet there are few established facts regarding what exactly happened in La Saline, and several narratives, often contradictory, exist among various political sectors and currents of those who allege a massacre took place.

There are a total of seven reports on the events of La Saline.

The most widely-cited report was published by the Haitian National Network for Human Rights (RNDDH), which is funded by the NED, Open Society Foundation, and American Jewish World Service (whose top [donor](#) is former Google CEO's Eric Schmidt's Schmidt Family Foundation). The RNDDH is headed by Pierre Espérance, a close collaborator of the U.S. State Department.

Espérance's office in Port-au-Prince is adorned with an award from the U.S. Embassy dated 2002, the period when his prior employer, the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR), led a disinformation campaign in the lead-up to the 2004 U.S.-backed coup d'état against President Jean Bertrand Aristide, [accusing](#) it of committing a "crime against humanity" and "genocide."

Espérance and the NCHR maintained close ties to the coup government of Gérard Latortue as state and paramilitary forces rounded up and imprisoned without charges former Aristide government officials and [imprisoned and killed](#) 8,000

Lavalas activists. The NCHR report used to justify the persecution of former Aristide officials and Lavalas activists were later discredited. United Nations Special Rapporteur Thierry Faggart [called](#) the NCHR's actions "a real failure" that demonstrated a "lack of responsibility."

Espérance, now head of the RNDDH, has continued to develop ties to the U.S. and is backed by some of the world's most powerful oligarchs.

According to one account in the RNDDH's report on the November 2018 events of La Saline, Cherizier convened a meeting with government officials in his Delmas 6 neighborhood several days in advance to plan it and distribute weapons. The report claims that Cherizier and Serge "Ti Junior" Alectis, whose armed group would later become an original component of the FRG9, went on a rampage, murdering people, destroying homes, and feeding human remains to pigs.

Despite the report's total lack of evidence, subsequent reports on the La Saline events would cite and draw on its version of events.

Another report written by Pierre Espérance's former right-hand woman, Marie Yolène Gilles, who now heads the Open Eyes Foundation (FJKL), was released just two days after the La Saline incident. It primarily describes a conflict between formerly allied armed groups for control of the Croix de Bossales market, however, it tacks on the word "massacre" at the end, though provides no evidence for its claim.

A third report published by the California-based National Lawyers Guild and Haitian Action Committee insists, in sharp contrast to the RNDDH and FJKL reports, that the narrative of a clash between armed groups was a cover for a state-sponsored massacre that sought to "punish and destroy" La Saline because of its historic support for the Lavalas movement. Despite its opposite conclusion as the FJKL report, it too claims that Jimmy Cherizier partook in the violence, however it does not allege he oversaw or partook in a massacre as the RNDDH and FJKL do. Instead,

it alleges that he blocked victims of the massacre from fleeing into his lower Delmas neighborhood. This allegation is based on an interview to a link that no longer works. However, Cherizier has stated publicly that he, along with residents and other police officers from his neighborhood, blocked alleyways to prevent criminals from the notorious “117 Gang,” which they had previously expelled, from returning. Cherizier’s clashes with this armed group have been reported by the RNDDH itself, whose May 3, 2019 [report](#) states that “Having learned that some members of base 117 have joined Pablo’s gang in Nan Tokyo, Jimmy CHERIZIER alias Barbecue has decided to make war on them.”

The report claims that Cherizier’s statement on blocking the alleyways “corroborates the testimony given by survivors in Lasalin accusing him and other police officers of participating in the massacre.” However, the testimonies contained in the report never mention Cherizier.

This sloppy and false claim is characteristic of the NLG/HAC report. It also states that Cherizier is a PHTK member, though provides no evidence for this claim. Presumably, it is based off of two [photos](#) circulating on social media of Cherizier wearing a PHTK bracelet. Cherizier has [stated](#) that he helped the campaign of Espwa candidate Jude Célestin and the photos were from an event several years ago in which bracelets were handed out where he and other police officers provided security. This was prior to his 2018 firing from the Haitian National Police and ideological transformation to revolutionary leader. Whether one believes Cherizier or not, photos that are several years old are insufficient evidence to prove that he is a member of the PHTK, and fly in the face of all circumstantial evidence.

Harvard Law School’s International Human Rights Clinic published a [report](#) deeming the incident a “state-sanctioned massacre.” Its authors relied heavily on the RNDDH and conducted no fieldwork.

The Port-au-Prince-based Center For Analysis and Research of Human Rights

published a [report](#) portraying the La Saline incident as a massacre amid gang violence, but in contrast to other reports, it never mentions Jimmy Cherizier and accuses the state only of “complicit silence.”

A United Nations [report](#) is the most circumspect of all, repeatedly qualifying its claims against Cherizier. “The alleged presence of the departmental delegate and national police agents suggests a possible involvement of these state officials,” the report reads.

The Organization of American States (OAS) – notorious for its [subversion](#) of democracy in Haiti, issued a [report](#) on Dec. 31, 2019. The five-page document uses careful and qualified language. The words “alleged”, “suggests,” and “supposed” appear 25 times. The report makes no definitive claim, nor does it mention Cherizier. A body known as the Victims Committee on La Saline [appealed](#) to the OAS, but even this did not overcome the body’s circumspection.

Belying all the narratives is the wide disparity of death tolls, ranging from [15](#) to [71](#). The NLG/HAC report concedes that “it has been difficult to get an accurate number of those killed.”

Ultimately, none of the contradictory reports provide concrete evidence of Jimmy Cherizier’s involvement, or that a massacre even took place.

Cherry picking testimony and ignoring victims

According to Jean Renel Félix, director of the Croix des Bossales market, the La Saline incident was not a massacre, but a battle between two armed groups in which innocent civilians may have been killed in the crossfire.

“To have a massacre, you’d have to have peaceful, inoffensive citizens that another group attacks, there I could talk about a massacre. But when it’s two armed groups which lock horns on the same block, both sides had casualties. That meant that the

civilian population was also victim.”

Félix’s description of a fight for control of the area is supported by the [RNDDH](#), [Open Eyes Foundation](#), [CARDH](#) and [UN](#) reports on the incident.

Cherizier maintains that he never left his Lower Delmas neighborhood during the events in La Saline and recalls that Ti Junior called him on November 1 ahead of the battle to inform him that the criminals he had previously expelled from his Lower Delmas neighborhood would attempt to return, thus prompting him and other neighborhood residents to block three alleyways.

“We, the area’s police officers, along with the local population, took measures so that these guys couldn’t return into lower Delmas,” Cherizier recalled. “In other words, it was the first time that I spoke to Ti Junior, on the telephone no less. But I had never met Ti Junior face-to-face, much less would I go fight for him, much less carry out a massacre.”

Haitian-born U.S. citizen and Delmas 6 resident Mario Brunache recalls hearing on the radio that Cherizier was carrying out a massacre in La Saline.



Jean Renel Félix, director of the Croix des Bossales market. Photo: John Wesley Amady

“It was about 6 or 7 o’clock at night, I heard over the radio that Barbecue was in La Saline shooting people,” Brunache said. “I was in my house and I said ‘Goddamn, what the hell is going on? What is he doing in La Saline?’

Brunache says he ran from his house to ask neighbors why Cherizier was in La Saline, and found him asleep on the floor.

“I woke him up, I said ‘They say you in La Saline shooting people.’ He said, ‘Huh?’”

Brunache said he gave testimony to the police and to a former law school colleague who is an investigator for the FJKL, which authored the first report on the La Saline incident. His version of events, however, does not appear in the report.

Haiti Liberté journalist Kim Ives contacted FJKL co-director Samuel Madistin to ask

about his organization's documentation of the La Saline events.

Madistin is the lawyer of Reginald Boulos, an oligarch who is a key supporter of Ariel Henry's regime. U.S. diplomatic cables by *Wikileaks* and *Haiti Liberté* [revealed](#) that Boulos had been paying the Haitian National Police as a private security force. He also sat on former U.S. president Bill Clinton's Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC), which decided to which projects to channel the \$13 billion donated to rebuild Haiti after the 2010 earthquake.

Not only did the FJKL exclude Brunache's version of events, but its authors made no attempt to obtain Cherizier's testimony about his whereabouts during the La Saline incident. Madistin insisted that he both did not know which neighborhood Cherizier resided in, and that his neighborhood was too dangerous to visit.

"So they didn't know where he was or they were afraid?" asked Ives.

"Both," replied Madistin. "We didn't know where to find him. Nor was it an area that was accessible for an investigator to make contact with him... There is no investigator who could enter the area saying they're investigating and then find Barbecue. It's a lawless neighborhood."

Cherizier says these human rights groups have political agendas.

"The human rights organizations in Haiti, particularly the two most influential ones, have transformed themselves into political parties," he said, referring to the RNDDH and FJKL. "They do not do their job with fairness. They have a lot of bias. They destroy one side and protect the other. They destroy me and they protect those that I'm up against."

"Whether it's RNDDH or FJKL, they have no tangible proof," Félix commented. "I defy them, defy them, to prove what they say in their reports.."

Félix claims that these human rights groups described both people who had died long before and gang members killed in the fighting as innocent victims of a massacre in their reports.

“They put photos of people who died a long time ago and they never have the family of those victims to say that a given person was a victim. Many people whose pictures they put had guns and were fighting.”

The ‘political hand’ behind the massacre

“The reason they say there was a massacre is because there was a political hand behind the scene,” Félix continued. “There’s a political hand which is for, and [another] which is against. The political hand which is for, I will take an example.

The opposition, which they say there was, ...because that opposition worked in concert with those people in the human rights organizations to destroy young people in the poor neighborhoods.”

Indeed, a former U.S. official told me that it is plausible that the opposition would fabricate allegations of massacres for political reasons.

“I can certainly see Jovenel’s opposition coming up with that narrative. Absolutely,” the official said.

In 2019, the IMF imposed fuel-price hikes, sparking a round of protest known as “*Peyi Lòk*”, or National Lockdown. For about two months, protesters and barricades shut down city streets. Protests turned to riots as businesses were burned and looted.

Cherizier, however, once again mobilized lower Delmas residents to stop the looting from entering their neighborhood. This earned him the attention of multiple opposition figures, who courted him, believing he would act as a hired gun.

“At that time, those guys offered me a lot of money,” Cherizier recalls. “Another militant named Fernando Duclerc offered to give me 80,000 Haitian gourdes (\$1,114 USD) along with two Galil military firearms for me to fire on the motorcade of President Jovenel Moïse when he came to Point Rouge.”

With Cherizier reluctant, a prominent opposition leader and former schoolmate named Rony Timothée, visited him on November 18th, 2018, the day of a major demonstration against Jovenel Moïse.

Cherizier alleges that Timothée again attempted to convince him to join the opposition. This time, he communicated an offer from Pierre Espérance to have Cherizier’s name removed from the RNDDH’s upcoming report on La Saline in exchange for supporting their bid to overthrow Jovenel Moïse.

His success in protecting his neighborhood brought him the attention of oligarch Réginald Boulos.

Following protests against fuel price hikes in July 2018, Cherizier says that Boulos, whose Nissan car dealership was burned down in the uprising, began contributing money to his neighborhood association, and approached him to set fire to the rival Toyota dealership across the road from his Delmas 6 neighborhood.

“That’s something I would never agree to,” Cherizier says, explaining that he was initially perceived as a gun-for-hire.

“In the beginning, when people were talking about ‘Barbecue, Barbecue, Barbecue’, a lot of people thought that I was the head of a gang or of bandits who were going around killing people and burning businesses. That’s why Boulos proposed that to me.”

Having rejected Réginald Boulos and Pierre Espérance’s requests, Cherizier was at odds with both the Jovenel Moïse government and the bourgeois opposition. Thus he

was named as the culprit of a massacre in La Saline.

The mainstream media's promotion of the 'massacre' narrative

This narrative has been accepted by virtually all establishment political sectors and is found in news reports on the incident. A Jan. 14, 2019 *Associated Press* [article](#) became the first to recycle the RNDDH's claim of Cherizier's involvement in a supposed massacre in La Saline. The same day, Voice of America [published](#) an article based on the AP's report. The allegations went to appear in virtually every mainstream article, including the [New York Times](#), [Washington Post](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [Miami Herald](#), [Vice](#), [PBS](#), [USAID-funded Insight Crime](#), and the [NED-funded Ayibo Post](#), though many qualify them as "alleged."

Western governments and UN bodies have used these reports to bolster their calls to punish Cherizier.

- On Nov. 13, 2019, the House Foreign Affairs Committee [called](#) for legislation to hold the "perpetrators of the La Saline massacre accountable."
- On Nov. 14, 2019, the U.S. embassy [urged](#) the Haitian government and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to investigate what it called the "La Saline violence." Notably, it did not deem the incident as a massacre.
- In August 2020, United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), headed by longtime State Department official Helen La Lime, [demanded](#) Cherizier's arrest, despite qualifying his involvement in massacres as "alleged."
- In November 2020, the U.S. embassy [called](#) to "accelerate and intensify efforts" to punish the revolutionary leader.
- In February 2021, Nathalie Broadhurst, France's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, [called](#) for Cherizier's to be put behind bars. □I ask this question straightforwardly: how is it possible today that Jimmy Cherizier is still walking free? Those responsible for the La Saline and Bel Air massacres must be brought to justice,□ she said.

- In January 2022, the U.S. Senate, [passed](#) the Haiti Development, Accountability, and Institutional Transparency Initiative Act ([1104](#)), authored by Senators Ben Cardin (D-Maryland) and Marco Rubio (R-Florida), also calling for “holding perpetrators of the La Saline massacre accountable.”

In short, the demonization campaign against Jimmy Cherizier and the FRG9 began long ago in preparation for this precise historical moment. It aims to provide a clearly delineated and vilified straw-man to overcome anti-intervention sentiments and confuse influential sectors of the liberal and progressive “left,” both in Haiti and abroad. With the UNSC having passed international sanctions on Cherizier, another resolution calling for military action will soon circulate. Once again, Haiti finds itself in the crosshairs of the U.S. empire.

Source: [Haïti Liberté](#)

