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DISPARATE FORCES BEHIND THE VIOLENT OPPOSITION IN **HAITI** GROUPS UNITING WITH SINGLE GOAL: OUSTING ARISTIDE

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GONAIVES, **Haiti** - This is the face of the Haitian revolution: He has soft black skin and a rugged mustache. His eyes hide behind dark sunglasses with gold-plated rims. He wears shorts and a blue shirt with a small Nike symbol. He sits in a battered metal chair and has a machete and a bottle of Barbancourt rum within reach. Several handlers slouch on crusty couches, with M-4 carbines and Uzi submachine guns lying across their laps.

They call themselves the Liberation Front of Gonaives. But they are almost too drunk to say why they are here, at the center of a revolt that began as an act of vengeance and has turned into a nationwide uprising that threatens to topple the Haitian government.

The Liberation Front controls at least one major city. Yesterday, the rebels began to widen their hold on the northern part of this small nation, reportedly blocking a road that leads into the Dominican Republic.

"We're ready for anything," says the Nike-clad leader, Butteur Metayer, 33, as he scans his men. "Now I'm the president of the province."

The Liberation Front is only one part of the disparate, amorphous opposition in **Haiti** that is as divided as the government is discredited.

In **Haiti's** capital, Port-au-Prince, several prominent businessmen, political parties, and community organizations have turned against President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. They say the former Catholic priest, who rode a wave of popular support to the presidency on two occasions in the past 15 years, is corrupt and inept and has armed his supporters to keep his enemies in check.

Two movements are at the forefront of an effort to remove Aristide. The Democratic Convergence is a group of 200 political organizations, led by former Port-au-Prince mayor Evans Paul. A prominent industrialist, Andre Apaid, leads the Group of 184, whose name refers to the number of organizations it represents.

For months the two groups have been calling for Aristide's resignation, followed by special elections. They have organized several rallies in the capital. Many demonstrations have ended in violence; more than 50 people have died in clashes since last December.

Now the focus has turned to Gonaives, a port city 70 miles north of Port-au-Prince with a strident history. The slaves of Gonaives were the first to rebel against French colonialists in the late 1700s. The uprising provoked a nationwide revolt, which led to Haitian independence in 1804.

The city's residents also were some of the first to rise against the longtime dictatorship of the Duvalier family in the mid-1980s. Jean-Claude Duvalier fled in 1986, which paved the way for Aristide's election in 1990.

After seven months, a military coup ousted Aristide. In 1994, the United States sent 23,000 troops to restore him to the presidency, and he served out his term and was reelected in 2000. That year, his party, Lavalas, swept what many said were flawed legislative elections.

For Metayer, this fight is personal. He says Lavalas killed his brother Amiot, who was head of the so-called Cannibal Army, a ragtag group of thugs. Butteur Metayer joined the Cannibal Army in 2000, after returning from Lansing, Mich., where he had worked for seven years at an auto plant.

He says Lavalas armed the group to ensure there was little opposition in the city: "When someone took to the streets to say *abad* [down with] Aristide, we beat them."

But over time, Amiot's reputation in the international community as a drug-trafficking thug forced Aristide to take action. In 2002, the government jailed the militia leader. Shortly afterward, the Cannibal Army bulldozed a prison wall and set him free. Another escapee, Jean Tatoune, had been in jail for leading a 1994 massacre of pro-Aristide residents in Gonaives.

The two fugitives allegedly joined forces to fight Aristide from the waterfront slum that became their headquarters, thwarting frequent police barrages with automatic weapons and makeshift barricades. But last year, Butteur Metayer says, Aristide's men murdered Amiot, shooting out his eyes and leaving his body along the road. "I'm looking for justice for my brother," he says. Aristide "gives me the guns," he adds. "Now the guns backfired on him."

Ten days ago, Metayer's band, which numbers almost 70 armed men, burned the police station and forced officers to flee. When Aristide sent a special police unit to retake the town the next day, several officers were killed.

Since then, Metayer and his comrades, often drunk, parade through the war-torn streets of Gonaives twice a day, frequently cajoling civilians to join them in the chants for Aristide's downfall. They skip around the rocks, burned-out vehicles, and old appliances that block the roads. Armed males, many of them teenagers wearing bits and pieces of police gear, speed past in pickups the group took from officers.

Aristide's government says Metayer and his gang are working with the political groups in Port-au-Prince. Metayer denies this, but acknowledges he is not working alone.

Inside a one-story villa, away from the hoopla on the street, several men who say they are former military personnel talk strategy. Like Metayer's, their fight is personal. Aristide disbanded the military, which numbered almost 7,000 soldiers, when he returned to power with US help in 1994.

The leader of the group of former soldiers is Guy Philippe, a short, dark-skinned 35-year-old former police chief from the northern city of Cap-Haitien. He was forced to flee to the Dominican Republic after he was implicated in an attempted coup. In the intervening years, he has been tied to other attacks and plots against the government and even was detained for a short time by Dominican authorities. The Dominican government released him, despite **Haiti's** pleas that Philippe be extradited to face trial.

"I have 210 men ready to fight, ready to die for what they believe," Philippe says in the nearly flawless English accent he picked up during the two years he lived in the United States.

His wife is from Wisconsin. He was a soldier in training when the United States disbanded the Haitian military, and he says he was trained by the US Secret Service in 1995 to protect the president before rising through the police ranks. Now he says he will sacrifice the good life he had in Santo Domingo to overthrow Aristide.

"The president is nothing," he says. "We gave him this job. Now we want this job back."

Philippe says he is forming an alliance with Metayer's gang. He adds that he has cells working for him in a half-dozen cities around **Haiti**. He said his cells are responsible for much of the unrest that has rocked this nation of 8 million people in the past week.

Since the Gonaives revolt about 10 days ago, rioting and clashes in 12 Haitian cities have forced the police to flee those areas. **Haiti** has only 5,000 police and one main road that slices up the coast, making it hard to control these towns. Many units who have returned to their posts put up barricades at night so antigovernment forces cannot enter.

"We don't really need a lot more people," Philippe says. "We are ready to fight. . . . In the days to come, you will see."

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GRAPHIC: PHOTO MAP, 1. A father drives his children past barricades at the entrance to the city of Gonaives, **Haiti**, yesterday. Revolts led by the Liberation Front of Gonaives have sparked unrest that threatens to topple President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. A4. / AP PHOTO. (PHOTO RAN ON PAGE A1.2. Butteur Metayer, leader of the Liberation Front of Gonaives, marched with followers through the Haitian city on Friday. The group is at the center of a revolt that led to turmoil in the streets. / GLOBE PHOTO / CARLOS VILLALON

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