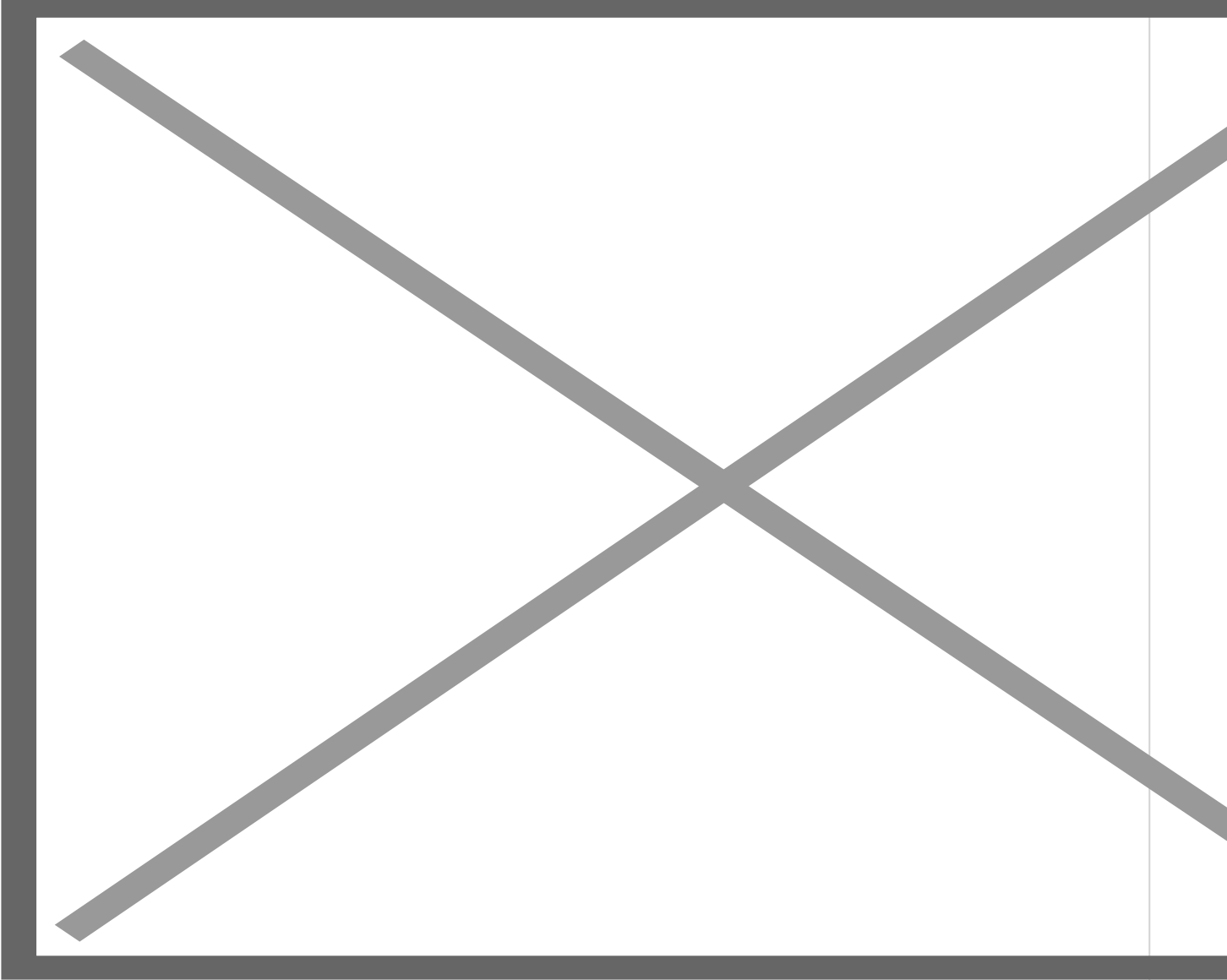


Some accused in Haitian assassination had U.S. military training

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Suspects in the assassination of President Jovenel Moise, who was shot dead early Wednesday at his home, are shown to the media in Port-au-Prince, Haiti on July 8, 2021 [File: Estailove St-Val/Reuters]

Port-au-Prince, July 15 (RHC)-- A number of the former Colombian soldiers accused of involvement in the assassination of Haiti's President Jovenel Moise this month had received U.S. military training in the past, the Pentagon admitted on Thursday.

Haitian authorities have said Moise was shot dead at his home on July 7 by a unit of assassins including 26 Colombians and two Haitian Americans. Eighteen Colombians have been detained and three others were killed by police. Families and colleagues in Colombia have told reporters the men were hired to act as bodyguards.

"A review of our training databases indicates that a small number of the Colombian individuals detained as part of this investigation had participated in past US military training and education programs, while serving as active members of the Colombian Military Forces," Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Ken Hoffman said in a statement sent to Al Jazeera.

Hoffman did not say how many of the detained Colombians had received training.

The U.S. military routinely trains service members from the region, he said, adding that the training "emphasizes and promotes respect for human rights, compliance with the rule of law, and militaries subordinate to democratically elected civilian leadership."

Meanwhile, the small Miami, Florida security company that hired the former Colombian soldiers faces questions about its role in the assassination of Moise. Antonio "Tony" Intriago, the owner of CTU Security, was presented with what looked like a good opportunity: Find people with military experience for a job in Haiti. Now Intriago is under scrutiny from Haitian and Colombian police officials.

On Wednesday, Leon Charles, head of Haiti's National Police, accused Intriago of travelling to Haiti numerous times as part of the assassination plot and of signing a contract while there, but provided no other details and offered no evidence. "The investigation is very advanced," Charles said.

Charles previously announced the arrest of the alleged mastermind behind the assassination plot, 63-year-old Christian Emmanuel Sanon, a Haitian who was living in Florida and hired CTU Security.

"He arrived by private plane in June with political objectives and contacted a private security firm to recruit the people who committed this act," Charles said Sunday. Colombia's national police chief, General Jorge Luis Vargas, has said that CTU Security used its company credit card to buy 19 plane tickets from Bogota to Santo Domingo for the Colombian suspects allegedly involved in the killing. One of the Colombians who was killed, Duberney Capador, photographed himself wearing a black CTU Security polo shirt.

Nelson Romero Velasquez, an ex-soldier and attorney who is advising 16 families of the Colombians held in Haiti, said Wednesday that the men had all served in the Colombian military's elite special forces and could operate without being detected, if they had desired. He said their behaviour made it clear they did not go to Haiti to assassinate the president. "They have the ability to be like shadows," Romero Velasquez said.

The predawn attack took place at the president's private home. He was shot to death and his wife wounded. It's not clear who pulled the trigger. The latest suspects identified in the sweeping investigation included a former Haitian senator, a fired government official and an informant for the U.S. government.

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