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Council On Hemispheric Affairs

MONITORING POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND DIPLOMATIC ISSUES AFFECTING THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

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Today, President Bush addresses the Organization of American States General Assembly and he will use his speech to explain why Congress should ratify the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). For a critical assessment of CAFTA, please see COHA's Press Release "CAFTA and its Discontents," available at

http://www.coha.org/NEW_PRESS_RELEASES/New_Press_Releases_2005/05.57_CAFTA_and_its_Discontents.htm

Note to the press: COHA Research Fellow Sarah Schaffer is in attendance at Fort Lauderdale and can be contacted at (402) 617-2347. Alternatively, COHA in Washington, D.C. can be reached at (202) 223-4975.

Barbados Creates Rift Within CARICOM --

Who are the Heroes and Who are the Knaves?

- The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) calls for an international investigation into former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's removal from office.
- An opportunistic Prime Minister, Owen Arthur, has led Barbados to break ranks with CARICOM by acknowledging Haiti's Interim Government (IGH), led by U.S.-

imposed Prime Minister Gérard Latortue.

- **Arthur is ignoring CARICOM's Charter respecting democracy, at the cost of weakening the Community.**
- **Powerful actors, namely Washington and Paris, influence the Community's dilemma.**
- **Barbados follows Washington's strategy for democratization in the region.**

CARICOM's Principled Stance

Following the February 2004 ouster of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) suspended Haiti from its membership and called for a UN investigation into the circumstances under which the new regime, backed by the United States, assumed power. Ultimately, Washington and Paris were able to use their institutional clout to avert a UN investigation, but CARICOM's refusal to allow Prime Minister Gérard Latortue's interim government (IGH) to participate in its councils, has demonstrated an intent to adhere to its charter principles of respecting democracy and the rule of law. Although CARICOM has refused to send military personnel to participate in the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the organization has maintained an energized commitment to promoting dialogue between the warring Haitian factions, as well as within the international community.

CARICOM's Unity Begins to Dissolve

Despite CARICOM's initial high-minded stance in defense of democracy, it took less than six months for cracks to develop in the group's united front. In July of 2004, Barbadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dame Billie Miller, along with her counterparts from four other CARICOM states (the Bahamas, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Antigua and Barbuda), met with Latortue in Port-au-Prince. The governments' decisions to send representatives to Haiti prompted outrage from other CARICOM members which were, as Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves of St. Vincent and the Grenadines said, "shocked at the extent to which some in CARICOM are going so as to prepare the ground to capitulate on our earlier principled stand on Haiti." It could be said with more than a little accuracy that just as Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Barbados, have set a low mark for regional solidarity, none has turned in a more high-minded definition of the concept than St. Vincent's Ralph Gonsalves.

Barbadian Prime Minister Owen Arthur has not been perturbed in the least by the diplomatic strife stirred up by his Minister of Foreign Affairs' trip to Port-au-Prince, since her words and deeds are entirely congruent with his own. Since then, Arthur has defended Barbados' right to engage Haiti even if CARICOM does not collectively take this step. Barbados has continued to press for Haiti's return to CARICOM while openly commenting on the deficiencies of the interim government. In a September 2004 address to the United Nations General Assembly, his Foreign Affairs Minister Miller remarked that the "events surrounding the abrupt departure of President Aristide remain a matter of deep concern, particularly as they pertain to the constitutionality of the removal of democratically elected

the situation has sharply worsened since Washington, with the connivance of Canada, France and Kofi Annan, installed Latortue at the head of the IGH.

Barbados and some Caribbean allies do not wish to undermine the region's economic relations with France and the EU solely to adhere to CARICOM's Charter principles. The New Regional Economic Participation Agreement that is being negotiated with the EU seems to be, according to the Barbados government, worth putting the Community's members in a compromised situation and taking the risk of portraying CARICOM around the world as divided and weak-willed, and ready to be violated at a price. Integrating the IGH, without any respect for the right of Haiti's citizenry to determine their own destiny through a voting process, is an expedient way to strengthen CARICOM's relationship with France and the EU, but it has little to do with the expansion of democracy. The Owen Arthur government, as well as all Barbadians, must face up to the fact that in order to court favor with powerful regional actors, Barbados, among others, has abandoned its commitment to the core principles of CARICOM and disgraced themselves in the process.

The Importance of Cooperative Foreign Policies

Barbados' Haiti strategy undoubtedly has created a rift within the already fragile Community. In an interview with COHA, senior lecturer at the Institute of International Relations, Anselm Lewis, confided that he would have preferred to see a united CARICOM position rather than individual countries acting on their own terms. He observed that "the fundamental issue here is the coordination of foreign policies." Barbados, one of the strongest members of CARICOM, should have respected the collective effort being attempted by St. Vincent and the Grenadines and other plucky CARICOM members. Instead, it irreverently disregarded the importance of a cooperative venture on the Haitian issue.

CARICOM is responsible for synchronizing the various foreign policies undertaken by the 15 independent members which make up the Community; Haiti is clearly a case where coordination was desirable. Prime Minister Arthur, all along partial to a swift recognition of the IGH, has dismissively ignored CARICOM's prudent, common position based on legitimacy and constitutionality. Lewis agrees that although a hands-off approach is not always advisable, Arthur's almost contemptuous attitude, so soon after Aristide's expulsion, cannot contribute to a constructive ending. The haste with which Arthur tried to reach a consensus for full engagement with the IGH, is all but unprecedented, given the circumstances.

Divergent Policies

St. Lucian Prime Minister Kenneth Anthony and St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Gonsalves have stalwartly, in fact heroically, resisted pressure from outside forces and continued to call for free and fair elections that would usher in a constitutional government in Haiti after an OAS investigation of Aristide's departure, which would then qualify Haiti to have its suspension lifted. On the other hand, Arthur's stance on Haiti, without question an attempt to curry favor with Washington, is a shortsighted and ill advised strategy, which can only add to Barbados' already questionable credentials as having a government perpetually on the take. Arthur's present stand is not surprising, given that he

has always been considered one of the weaker links regarding upholding a democratic script when it came to CARICOM's relations with Haiti's U.S.-imposed rump government. In addition to lending support to an illegitimate and grossly incompetent Haitian government that has shown little consideration for the constitutionally-mandated right of due process for its own citizens, Arthur's decision to move closer to Latortue undermines the Caribbean Community's efforts to promote democracy in the region. This carries on a recent Barbadian tradition, save for the period when the island was led by the distinguished prime minister, Erskine Lloyd Sandiford (1987-1994), in which the country's leaders have served as bucket carriers for U.S. policy makers. Perhaps of all CARICOM's leaders at the time, Sandiford struck an honorable stance on Haiti, in marked contrast to the role taken by Arthur, his successor.

Barbados' attitude of assuming a bent knee posture in regard to Washington at least dates back to 1983 when the Tom Adams government cooperated with the contrived plot by the Reagan administration to justify the controversial U.S. invasion of Grenada by closing down Barbados' airport so that U.S. students, attending Grenada's St. George's Medical School, would be unable to escape the island by flying to Bridgetown. The allegedly stranded students helped justify the invasion by U.S. forces, using the putative danger of the medical students as little better than hostages to U.S. imperialist policies.

While the majority of CARICOM's member states support isolating Haiti from that body until free and fair elections are held, Barbados has indicated its willingness to waive its commitment to democratic procedures and overlook the plight of the Haitian citizenry so long as sufficient incentives – be they on immigration, drugs, trade, tax exemptions and grants- are forthcoming from the U.S. As for Arthur's respect for Haitian democracy, to quote Franklin Delano Roosevelt on Mussolini's attack on France in 1940, "the hand that holds the dagger has struck it into the back of its neighbor." At the very least, Arthur owes an apology to his Caribbean neighbors and the suffering people of Haiti.

Moreover, Arthur's move emphasizes the weakness of the region's collaborative decision-making processes. To be taken seriously as a unified body, CARICOM needs to be perceived by the outside world as an example of inclusiveness and partnership. Barbados' so-called "engagement" policy could have a disastrous impact on efforts being made to strengthen CARICOM's reputation regionally and internationally. If Caribbean states break rank at the first hint of an opportunity to score points with Washington or Brussels, then the regional body faces an uphill struggle to establish itself as an effective, relevant, self-respecting regional organization with a keen sense of its own sovereignty and collective pride. Prime Minister Owen Arthur has done nothing to strengthen these high-minded ideals, a fact that is bound to become increasingly well known.

This analysis was prepared by COHA Research Associates Oceane Jasor and Phil Morrow.

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