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Restored European Aid Could Make Free and Fair Elections at Least a Distant Possibility, as Haiti Continues to Fumble Along

- Haitian Justice Minister Bernard Gousse's resignation could lead to a purge of the rest of the hapless Latortue government, including the interim prime minister himself.
- Escalating violence on the island still makes casting a free ballot a long shot.
- Washington's unproductive meddling in Haitian affairs has failed to strengthen democratic institutions on the island.
- Haiti's infrastructure and civil service desperately need to be overhauled.
- The interim government needs to ensure that its suspension from CARICOM is lifted and that it gains the respect of the English-speaking Caribbean.

According to contrasting reports from Port-au-Prince, another police raid on Bel Air and other pro-Aristide neighborhoods of the capital city has left anywhere from two to 23 dead, with over 35 reported missing. The police raid came in retaliation against an attack on a police station and market by unknown vigilantes, which claimed ten victims. Much to the consternation of international observers (although all but unacknowledged by U.S. authorities), police brutality has become commonplace since the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, in an U.S.-authored script in February 2004, which was carried out by

armed rebel groups and ex-soldiers allied with the country's discredited "peaceful opposition."

On June 15, Minister of Justice and Public Security Bernard Gousse delighted the nation and the world by resigning without an explanation, but coincident with a spate of kidnappings that claimed many foreign nationals and amidst growing criticism over his failure to prosecute perpetrators of the record crime wave now scourging the country. Gousse's critics also point to his ministry's illegal detention of former prime minister, Yvon Neptune, who was accused by Gousse, with no evidence being cited, of ordering the execution of the former president's enemies. Gousse was also responsible for apprehending other high Aristide aides in a reign of terror, as well as having close ties with brutal former members of the military. Some of his critics saw him as a reincarnation of Torquemada. In any event, he was the antithesis of a responsible public servant.

Gousse's resignation does not come as a great shock to Washington, as many in the Bush administration have taken to referring to Haiti, under U.S. jurisdiction, as the hemisphere's failed state *par excellence*. Hopefully, this may lead to a purge of the ineffective Gerard Latortue government, including interim Prime Minister Latortue himself. Further setbacks in the country's road to elections include an announcement made by General Augusto Heleno Ribeiro, Brazilian head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission to Haiti (MINUSTAH), that he will not seek a second tour of duty in this strife-torn nation. There remain few bright spots in Haiti today, with its chronic pandemonium, leaving any hope for the free and fair local and national elections scheduled for later this year, a veritable piece of mythology.

The EU has Some of the Answers

Today, the European Union (EU) is the primary source of loans and grants to Haiti, with \$368 million pledged over a three-year period. This includes \$91 million for post-crisis rehabilitation and economic stimulation, \$35 million for basic services and \$13 million to support elections. The Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Union (ECHO) also allocated \$20 million in 2004 for other human development programs. However, the EU declared in September 2003 that it would cancel aid to the impoverished nation if the ongoing state of lawlessness did not dissipate. Haiti found itself in a paradox in which aid was being held hostage by elections that could not take place successfully without outside assistance as well as cooperation from the country's political opposition. Needless to say, a resolution was not achieved after the EU, blindly following the U.S. lead, suspended its aid over a somewhat flawed, but certainly not indefensible senate election held under Aristide. One would think it would be fortunate for Haiti's future that on May 12 the EU's Haiti delegation chief Marcel Van Opstal signed the first installment of a total of \$22 million in aid aimed at helping Haiti mount general elections as well as \$3 million to disarm previously demobilized troops, who were holding out for little better than a payoff.

The U.S. role in Haiti has been less obvious than that of the EU even though both decided against contributing troops to MINUSTAH when it was being created. Washington's relationship with the Caribbean republic has constantly shifted. Clinton initially took a wary stance toward Aristide, but due to public pressure resulting from the growing number of

refugees now in the U.S., and rising anger among the Congressional Black Caucus, the Clinton White House decided to restore Aristide to Port-au-Prince in 1994, by force if need be. The following year, now under a Republican-controlled Congress, U.S. aid to Haiti was terminated and federal funds were channeled to Haitian non-governmental groups as well as factions opposed to the democratically-elected Aristide. Again in 2000, the incoming Bush administration pressured the Inter-American Development Bank to take the lead in canceling over \$650 million in development assistance funding in order to undermine Aristide's presidency. Since the latter's expulsion, Washington, after superimposing an extra-constitutional interim government on Haiti, has lifted its weapons ban on the island and now has given the corrupt and ill-trained local police force the firepower to terrorize peaceful demonstrators. As of now, the U.S. has basically left Haiti to its own devices, offering little aid and no technical assistance in registering voters. Fortunately, Haiti has not been abandoned by all of its friends, with Brazil in the leadership role of MINUSTAH, providing a mixed blessing in seeking to help alleviate the country's woes. After a very slow start, which included muddled UN involvement and President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva seemingly being more interested in winning over Washington's esteem than in affording security to the average Haitian civilian—particularly members of the pro-Aristide Lavalas party—MINUSTAH has settled down to play a more constructive role.

However, Haiti's problems go well beyond planning for the upcoming elections. The country's troubles include rectifying its legacy of government instability, fobbing off U.S. intrusiveness and a parade of military dictatorships over the decades. Nevertheless, it is universally agreed that in order to create a viable and flourishing country, more aid will be needed to construct a stable, democratic Haiti.

Steps Toward a Stable Government

The present hapless Haitian government desperately needs to be reorganized and reformed as Latortue's inept provisional authority has an appalling lack of witnessed no improvement since Aristide's ouster. Even the State Department and international human rights groups have been far too slow to point out some of the abuses taking place in Haiti. The latter group attributed much of the blame to the interim government's "failure to bring perpetrators to justice to establish accountability [which] contributes to this climate of impunity, insecurity and lawlessness that prevails now in the country." But many outsiders maintain hope, but remain dubious that the elections scheduled to take place before the end of the year will reestablish effective government control and stringent new standards of accountability. Louis Michel, the European Commissioner responsible for development and humanitarian aid, pledged the support of the EU for "the political transition process and the holding of presidential elections with broad participation in a climate of security before the end of the year."

Moreover, in order to restore security, Haiti now must rebuild its shattered infrastructure. Roads, hospitals and schools have been left in shambles since anti-Aristide rebels marched on Port-au-Prince last year. The situation has become so anarchic that patients were kidnapped from dilapidated hospitals and 481 prison inmates escaped from a woefully guarded prison after a mere six gunmen had sought to storm its gates. The UN and the Inter-

American Development Bank have pledged \$5 million to Haiti to help repair, and in some cases rebuild, roads in the north and northwest areas of the country, some of them devastated by tropical storm Jeanne, but it is doubtful that this effort will be enough to renovate the grave infrastructural crisis that still plagues the island. However, EU aid will help to improve Haiti's transportation system as well as abate increasing crime levels by providing jobs for disadvantaged Haitians, who have resorted to looting in the absence of any other way to earn a living.

The final pillar in Haiti's transformation into a stable democracy, where the rule of law is respected and upheld, will only be achieved with the rejuvenation of the country's basic institutions—beginning with the courts and the civil services. For example, the courts experienced extensive problems even before Aristide was overthrown. In May 2002, some of Haiti's 500-member Bar Association went on a one-day strike to protest the interference of the legislative and executive branches in the trial of former dictator Prosper Avril.

Haiti's shabby police force has been in particularly poor shape ever since the ouster of Aristide. The professional police overseer in the justice ministry, the inspector-general, the head of the judiciary police, and other top personnel accompanied the president into exile. The Haitian Democracy Project, an anti-Aristide U.S. group, has maintained that Latortue inherited what was little better than a tattered regime and has had little luck and even less success in repairing it.

Haiti's Uphill Struggle

An important step in Haiti's attempt to secure an end to strife and seek respectability would be its reinstatement to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Haiti was dropped from active CARICOM membership following Aristide's departure from the island, when the Caribbean body labeled the Latortue administration as unconstitutional and said that Haiti's full membership would not be restored until national elections were held. Nevertheless, on May 19, *Caribbean Net News* reported that "Haiti is set to become an active member of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) [...] Though Haiti has been barred from attending the ministerial and leaders' councils of the 15-nation CARICOM, [Compton Bourne (CDB's president)] said strife-torn nations should not suffer financial isolation." *Caribbean Net News* further stated that even though Bourne did not mention how quickly Haiti would be able to borrow from the bank, he assured other nations in the region that Haitian membership would not weaken the bank's ability to serve its other members. Bourne explained that "large non-borrowing members of the bank outside the region would help to contribute funds to a 'special window' for that impoverished country." There is little doubt that these "other non-borrowing members" that he referred to were the EU countries.

In a January 15, 2004 statement released by the then president of the EU, part of that aid to Haiti was suspended due to the escalating violence occurring throughout Haiti, and in accordance with Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement. Signed in June 2000, while Aristide was in power, the trade accord represented an arrangement between the EU and the lesser developed countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Its main goal was to provide a framework in which these countries, with marginal economies, could integrate into the

world economy as well as to reduce and eventually eradicate existing poverty. Under Article 96, recipient countries that violate fundamental principles laid out in the document could risk facing appropriate actions taken against them by the EU. When Haiti was found to be in violation of the agreement, the EU later reduced its level of aid. However, the EU decided to resume sending assistance to Haiti in order to help register voters and to disarm gangs that might seek to disrupt national elections.

A Future Without Aid?

Haiti's fate today lies in its ability to secure a predictable flow of financial support until it is able to stabilize its government, rebuild its infrastructure and transform its institutions. Haiti is unlikely to achieve any of this under the present ineffectual government. The current reality is that assistance is far from guaranteed due to the island's record of poor governance and the high probability of corruption at almost every level of public transaction.

This analysis was prepared by COHA Research Associate Shelliann Powell.

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