

HAITIAN POLITICS, GOVERNANCE & EXTERNAL ACTORS A Current Trends Assessment

Remarks delivered by

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Over the past week, three highly contrasting developments related to current trends in Haiti occurred. First, at a meeting of international multilateral and bilateral donors hosted in Washington by the World Bank, pledges for the amount of \$1.075 billion were made in support of the interim Haitian government toward the reconstruction and development of Haiti over the next two years. Among the leading pledges were those of the United States (\$230 million), the European Union (\$225 million), the Inter-American Development Bank (\$260 million), the World Bank (\$150 million), Canada (\$112 million), and France (\$92.8 million). Added to \$440,000 of multilateral funds already in the interim government’s pipeline, a total of \$1.5 billion has been promised to assist Haiti meet various pressing needs between now and September 2006.¹

The second, and somewhat contrasting, development over the past week was the release of yet another human rights report detailing the continuation of violence and abuse, largely directed toward supporters and members of the disposed government and

¹ “Donors pledge \$1bn in Haiti aid,” BBC News, July 21, 2004; “\$1 Billion is Pledged to Help Haiti Rebuild, Topping Request,” Christopher Marquis, New York Times, July 21, 2004

international aid has been pledged following a period when the country's serious social, economic, and political problems were exacerbated by a politically-driven embargo of international assistance to Haiti's government over the previous four years. The suspension of US bilateral assistance, in particular, actually began in the late 1990's, when various conditionalities placed on the aid effectively limited everything save that disbursed in support of the Haitian Coast Guard.⁴

Funding pledged by international donors will support the following four broad themes of a transition strategy hastily devised by the interim government:

- Strengthen political governance and promote national dialogue;
- Strengthen economic governance and contribute to institutional development;
- Promote economic recovery;
- Improve access to basic service.

International expectations of what its funding will do have been outlined in the following summary included in a press release issued by the United Nations even prior to the donor's conference, indicating significant donor involvement in the planning process:

“By September 2006, at the end of the Interim Framework for Cooperation's (IFC) life span, Haiti will hopefully have, among other things, 500,000 new jobs (30 percent of them for women), 6,000 trained police, round-the-clock electricity in Port-au-Prince, water and sanitation service for 100,000 people in disadvantaged neighborhoods, 1,500 newly rehabilitated schools, garbage

⁴ For an assessment of evolving US-Haiti policy over the past ten years, see, “US Policy Toward Haiti: Engagement or Estrangement?,” Robert Maguire, Haiti Papers Number 8, Trinity College Haiti Program, November 2003, 12 pp. (The paper is available on-line at: http://www.trinitydc.edu/academics/depts/Interdisc/International/Haiti_Program.htm)

collection in one-quarter of the slums; 10,000 upgraded housing units in the slums, and 2,000 new housing units there.”⁵

Donor decisions to pledge large sums to the interim government were largely attributed to a positive response to – and faith in – that government, citing its apolitical, technocratic profile, well-developed plans, and anti-corruption pledges. Heavy US and French arm-twisting also helped to stimulate donor enthusiasm.

While donor response was positive, however, others, including some of the international press, responded a bit more cautiously. The New York Times, for example, in a July 23rd editorial pointed out that “Washington, which encouraged the violent overthrow of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February, has a special responsibility to see through a far-reaching rebuilding effort,” concluding:

“No amount of aid can solve Haiti’s problems unless the appointed interim government of technocrats... does its part competently and fairly, seeing to it that the impoverished slum dwellers who followed Mr. Aristide are not again ignored. Until the latest rebuilding effort demonstrates a will to take on these challenges, Haiti’s poor are entitled to remain skeptical.”⁶

The Miami Herald, in an editorial written just prior to the meeting entitled “New Government Should Seek Even-Handed Justice,” threw its support behind aid to the interim government but cautioned that the poor record thus far of that government in the administration of justice gives rise to concern. “Instead of reconciliation,” wrote the

⁵ “Donors Asked to Pledge \$924 Million to Haiti Next Week,” Traci Hukill, U.N., Wire, July 13, 2004. Details of the government’s proposed plan and the Interim Cooperation Framework are available on-line at <http://www.worldbank.org/haitidonors2004>

⁶ “The Long Haul in Haiti,” New York Times, July 23, 2004.

Herald, citing the widespread arrest and intimidation of the former, Aristide-led government's supporters, "the new government seems intent on revenge."⁷

To the surprise of many, even the US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Roger Noriega, well-known for his staunchly anti-Aristide posture and supportive stance toward the interim government, voiced concern last week in this same vein. In an interview with the Miami Herald, Noriega specified that the recent arrests by the interim government of such officials as former Haitian Prime Minister Yvon Neptune "trouble the Bush administration."⁸

In view of these concerns, one might conclude that while the international donors have indeed 'shown the money' to the interim government, that largess comes attached with closer scrutiny and some strings, including the demand for even-handed administration of justice and respect for human rights. Whether or not these international concerns will be fully and effectively addressed by the interim government or will be consistently raised and monitored by international actors, however, remain open questions that should be followed carefully.

THE BAD

This leads to some consideration of the previously mentioned 'bad' development of the past week, the issuance of yet another human rights report highly critical of the

⁷ "New Government Should Seek Even-Handed Justice," Miami Herald, July 18, 2004

⁸ "Latortue gets U.S. warning on holding Aristide allies: A top U/S/ diplomat expresses concern over arrests in Haiti, but says there had been improvement otherwise since President Aristide left," Michael Ottey, Miami Herald, July 17, 2004

situation in Haiti. In its detailed July 19 report, the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti deepens the concerns expressed a month earlier by Amnesty International that Haiti is not-so-successfully struggling under a heavy burden of human rights abuse, violence and impunity. That burden includes not only the so-called 'witch-hunt' enacted by the interim government against supporters and members of the ousted government, but also the fact that neither the leaders nor members of the myriad of armed groups – including high profile insurrectionist groups that remain armed and in charge in localities throughout the countryside – have been disarmed or detained. To date, little, if anything, has been done by Haiti's interim government – or by UN troops, for that matter – about this dangerous situation of Haiti's new warlords.

Perhaps the interim government, however, whose leader previously embraced the armed insurrectionists as 'freedom fighters,' has begun to read the writing on the international wall in regards to this issue. Even though interim Prime Minister Latortue has not retracted his embrace of the thugs, his government did issue a document on July 8th that sets a September 15th deadline for armed factions to turn in illegal weapons and disarm themselves before facing arrest. That official edict, however, lacks details of how this will be achieved.

One so-called rebel leader issued an immediate response to the interim government's disarmament manifesto from his 'headquarters' in the Central Plateau. Former FAd'H Col. Remissainthe Ravix, who claims leadership over some 1,800 re-armed soldiers, stated: "If they think they can confiscate our weapons, they can try it, but they better

watch out. If our weapons are illegal," he continued, "the government is also illegal because it is thanks to our weapons they are now where they are."⁹

Ravix's response is only one indication that Haiti's 'genie of armed political violence' will be very difficult to put back in the bottle. Some analysts have dismissed Haiti's resurgent soldiers as aging, fat, and unhappy activists who, given a deferred retirement pension, will melt back into the crowd. The fact remains, however, that even those who fit this description – and not all do – are armed, dangerous, and abusive.

Further, while disarmament may be a stated objective of the UN mission to Haiti, the military leaders of that mission contend that their position will be to support a strengthened and reformed Haitian National Police (HNP), which will do the disarming. This approach by UN peacekeepers is worrisome in view of the alarmingly weak and ineffective status of the HNP, plus the fact that the interim government, through its Minister of the Interior, former General Herard Abraham, is pushing hard to integrate former soldiers into the reformulated force.

While these developments are disturbing, it is what is going on beneath this radar screen of the apparent reinstallation of the *ancien regime militaire* that is even more troublesome. Reports of the re-creation of the dreaded SIN (National Intelligence Service) in the Ministry of the Interior, headed by a former officer of Duvalier's repressive "Leopard" unit of the Armed Forces of Haiti (FAd'H) have been joined by reports of the creation of other so-called 'national security commissions' within that

⁹ "Haiti ex-rebels threaten to take up arms again," Joseph Guyler Delva, Reuters, July 14, 2004.

ministry staffed with notorious former FAd'H officers. Among the disreputable former military officers emerging with ministerial sinecures is former Gen. Williams Regala, a key figure in several provisional military governments in the late 1980's.

Not only do these developments portend badly for improved human rights and public safety in Haiti, but they also throw into doubt the ability of the country to move toward free, fair, participative and open elections next year. Following the ouster of President Aristide and the nationwide flight of elected officials affiliated with his political party, the resultant political vacuum was filled in many communities in a de facto sense by individuals aligned with the former Haitian army or paramilitary groups. Ample evidence is also emerging that the interim government, through its Interior Ministry, is in the process of appointing to various local and municipal level posts some individuals with rather questionable democratic credentials.

As elections approach, these individuals could form the backdrop of support for 'law and order' political candidates affiliated with military and paramilitary groups. These de facto local officials could adopt a strategy of using their weight to stack the electoral deck in favor of such wannabe political figures as well-known insurrectionist leader and alleged drug dealer/coup plotter-turned-politician Guy Philippe or other candidates with a military background, to ensure less-than-democratic election results. The re-emergence of militarism throughout the country will make it difficult for any political party or organization – not just the embattled FL – to campaign unless it receives a laissez passé from the local 'authorities.'

The Ugly

Now, let's turn our attention to the third and 'ugly' aforementioned development, the on-line publication on regime change in Haiti. To begin assessing the importance of this development, it is useful to delve briefly into the status of what former US Ambassador to Haiti Brian Dean Curran described a year ago as the "*chimeres* of Washington," or individuals and organizations who worked in cahoots with partisan political groups and others in Haiti toward instability and to undermine prospects for political settlements there.¹⁰

Much was made during hearings in the US House of Representatives and Senate in early March 2004, immediately following the ouster of Aristide, of the importance for Washington to move forward on Haiti by forging a bi-partisan approach. This followed an acknowledged period when the political polarity plaguing Port-au-Prince had become replicated in Washington.

To some refreshing extent, bi-partisanship toward Haiti has occurred in Washington, with support of renewed aid by representatives of both political parties, witnessed by strong endorsement of the Haiti Economic Recovery Opportunities (HERO) act by key members from both sides of the political aisle in the US Senate. If it becomes law, HERO will provide goods assembled in Haiti with preferential access to US markets, hence creating needed employment. The bi-partisanship also has been manifested through a general willingness on both sides of the aisle to give the installed interim

¹⁰ See, "US Policy Toward Haiti," op cit., p.6

government a chance to prove itself, in spite of the lingering bad taste among many Democrats over how that interim government came to power in the first place.

Regarding the executive branch, the Bush Administration, having achieved a political goal with the removal of Aristide, now has altered a long-held policy that at best distanced itself from the government of Haiti and at worst actively supported initiatives and strategies that undermined that government. Its new approach is to jump on board, and actively promote, the 'engage Haiti' train. Ironically, in doing so, it has confirmed its own prior policy of estrangement from the GOH by having Mr. Noriega pronounce in the immediate aftermath of Aristide's departure that "we will engage the Government of Haiti..."¹¹

A key question, however, is how that engagement will ultimately define itself. It is here that the third development over the past week – the aforementioned investigative report into the political activities of the International Republican Institute (IRI) - begs attention. This article presents a highly disturbing story of long-term strategies and activities enacted under the auspices of the IRI that contributed fundamentally to political conflict, violence, and regime change in Haiti, highlighting the antics of its Haitian-born program representative who is characterized in the piece as "the Haitian version of Ahmed Chalabi." Among the revelations confirmed in it is that there has been a history of direct contact between that program representative and Guy Philippe, the notorious armed insurrectionist and alleged drug trafficker and coup instigator mentioned above.

¹¹ "Haiti at the Crossroads of Democracy," remarks of Roger F. Noriega, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs to the American Enterprise Institute, Washington, DC, April 14, 2004.

But, one might conclude, that was then and this is now, particularly in view of today's desired bi-partisan approach toward Haiti that will relegate the so-called "*chimeres* of Washington" to the dustbin of the past. From now on, this thinking goes, the winks and nods that emanated from Washington over the past four years will be eclipsed by a single, overt policy.

But is that so? Although it is too soon to reach any definitive conclusion, information from Haiti suggest that at least some of Washington's *chimeres* remain quite active as independent actors who will undermine the stated desire for bi-partisanship toward Haiti. For example, just as the interim government is coming under increased pressure regarding its apparent lop-sided approach toward rule of law, administration of justice, and political participation in Haiti, information from Port-au-Prince indicates growing concern among international organization representatives over the inability of the IRI to play team ball in the promotion of an inclusive and transparent political future for Haiti. As program officers, experts and consultants from the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and other international organizations, including the Washington-based National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), have begun to work together – and with Haitian officials – to set the stage for Haiti's political future through democratic elections, some have expressed concern that the IRI has not been actively involved among them. Is this controversial international political actor

developing an independent parallel strategy seeking to promote only the interests of its own political favorites? If so, then why?

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

One takes a risk in here in Boston this week, and throughout this highly polarized American electoral season, to call for a bi-partisan approach toward anything. But clearly, bi-partisanship out of Washington, toward Haiti, can only be positive in helping our neighbor and its people to move forward and begin to resolve their not inconsiderable political, economic, environmental and social problems. And, such an approach can avoid any further tendency by Washington toward Secretary of State Powell's now well-known "Pottery Barn" principle: you break it and you own it. Progress toward the resolution of Haiti's deep and complex problems merits US support, not US ownership. Through a sustained, consistent, fair, and openly engaged approach, the US has an opportunity to break away from covert, contradictory, one-sided or misleading policies that do more harm than good, and to help Haiti move forward.

Unfortunately, past US commitment toward Haiti and its people, like that of the international community, has trended less toward a sustained and consistent approach than toward one that looks for the next band-aid to apply to a continuing series of crises. As stated in the New York Times, US involvement has to become more than acting "only when crises threaten to unleash waves of unwanted refugees," when we are "typically content... with writing checks and changing a few faces at the top."¹²

¹² "The Long Haul in Haiti," op cit.

Today in Washington, Haiti has fallen off the high-profile policy radar screen. In spite of such warning flags as those outlined above that indicate a simple regime change has not made all well in Haiti, the general perception in Washington is that things have settled down quite a bit. All that's needed, therefore, is a commitment to write checks now that a few faces at the top have been changed.

This brief examination of good, bad and ugly developments of the past week suggests that this is not a time to pay less attention to Haiti and, in so doing, to allow the resurgence of actors and the continuation of strategies that aim to undermine democratic development in Haiti and to promote political vengeance and polarization. Rather, this is a crucial time to keep Haiti front and center and to underscore the necessity of policies and programs that do more than write a check and facilitate some – in or beyond Haiti – to try to be the bull in the china shop.

Haiti, indeed, has yet another chance to move forward. The country, and that chance, deserves our support. That support, however, must include informed and critical assessments of continuing developments in Haiti, as well as close, regular and sustained Congressional oversight of policies and programs supported by the U.S. government and receiving U.S. government funding. As implied in the donor meeting-linked editorials cited above, while aid to our impoverished neighbor merits our support, we must ensure that the playing field on which that aid will be spent is a level one that includes respect for human rights and the inclusion of all the society's social, economic and political actors in the resolution of problems.

Many analysts of Haiti, including this one, have voiced concern about the country's winner-takes-all political tendencies. In a democratic political culture, there is room for both the winners and the losers, as there is also a compelling necessity for all actors to contribute toward the well-being of their country. 'Good, bad and ugly' may be suitable for a Hollywood movie plot, but such a combustible mix is not healthy toward the resolution of a country's deeply rooted social, economic and political problems.

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