

THINK AGAIN ON HAITI

(Updating *Executive Memorandum* No. 325, "Aristide Is No Answer to Haiti's Problems," March 13, 1992)

Bill Clinton is on the verge of repeating in Haiti the mistakes that he made in Somalia: placing United States military personnel in harm's way before clearly evaluating American national interests and defining U.S. military objectives. Worse yet, the President's proposal to involve American troops does not even meet the criteria for peacekeeping he recently established in a speech at the United Nations.

The Clinton Administration has staked its Haiti policy on returning President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power in the name of democracy. But equating democracy with Aristide is a grave mistake, and deploying U.S. troops to prop up his questionable regime is even more senseless. Faced with growing opposition in Congress and throughout the country, the Clinton Administration has been forced to reevaluate its decision to send troops to Haiti. Various legislative proposals, including one sponsored by Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole on October 18, would restrict American military involvement absent the President's determination that urgent national security interests were involved.

In placing such faith in Aristide, the White House is overlooking the fact that even its own State Department has demonstrated that Aristide has little respect for democratic principles and human rights. The State Department's recent human rights report acknowledges that while Aristide was in power from February 1991 to September 1991, his government often incited or condoned political violence and human rights abuses against its opposition. By firmly backing the anti-American, radical Aristide, the Clinton Administration is blindly overlooking its own interests in Haiti and the fact that a growing segment of the Haitian society no longer supports Aristide's return.

To prevent the needless loss of American life in pursuit of Haitian democracy and to minimize the impact of Haitian turmoil on the U.S. and other countries in the region, the Clinton Administration must:

- ❖ **Refrain from sending U.S. military personnel to Haiti.** U.S. forces in Haiti, which would be lightly armed engineers and civic affairs personnel, according to the Administration's plans, would be unable to defend themselves from attack. They would have to depend on the Haitian military and police forces for protection. This would be a tragic mistake. The use of U.S. military personnel should be considered only if Americans in Haiti are threatened.
- ❖ **Evaluate the Haitian policy in accordance with the criteria the Administration itself has established for participation in U.N.-sponsored peacekeeping missions.** The prudent application of Clinton's own criteria will avoid the needless loss of American life which occurred in Somalia and permit the U.S. to maintain its moral authority while helping broker a negotiated settlement to the Haiti crisis.
- ❖ **Lift the economic embargo on Haiti.** The Clinton Administration forced through a U.N. Security Council resolution re-imposing an embargo on Haiti. The last embargo on Haiti, which was lifted in July following the completion of U.N. sponsored agreements, only devastated the poorest elements

of Haiti's population, while proving little more than an irritant to the wealthy and the security forces. The Haitian armed forces, police, and others who were targets of the embargo routinely engaged in smuggling to circumvent the trade sanctions and to enrich themselves. The poor, on the other hand, had no resort but to go hungry. This led directly to the exodus of some 40,000 economic refugees, most of whom were turned back at sea by the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard. In addition, it is estimated that some 10,000 Haitians died from disease and hunger associated with the embargo. Moreover, trade sanctions against Haiti are destroying the country's middle class and private sector—the only force in Haiti that is pro-U.S. and willing to engage in political dialogue.

- ❖ **De-link U.S.-Haiti policy from Aristide.** While Aristide was indeed democratically elected with 67 percent of the vote on December 16, 1990, he was anything but a democrat while in power. He and his followers routinely incited mob violence and class warfare. Aristide has publicly condoned the practice of “necklacing” opponents—igniting a gasoline-soaked tire around the head of an enemy and burning the victim alive. He also is believed to have personally ordered the execution of one of his top political enemies prior to being overthrown in September 1991. Aristide, moreover, routinely acted without the consent of the Haitian parliament and ignored the country's constitution. Restoring Aristide to office, therefore, must not be construed as a restoration of democracy in Haiti.

CLINTON'S CRITERIA FOR PEACEKEEPING

To avoid a repetition of the Somalia tragedy, President Clinton and his foreign policy advisors have established new criteria for American participation in U.N.-sponsored peacekeeping operations. In a series of speeches, culminating with the President's own before the U.N. General Assembly on September 27, the Administration set out five conditions that must be met before the U.S. will become involved in a U.N. peacekeeping effort. President Clinton said at the U.N.: “The United Nations [and the U.S.] simply cannot become engaged in every one of the world's conflicts, [nor can they undertake] some crusade to force [the U.S.] way of life on others or replicate [its] institutions.”

Does Haiti Meet These Criteria? When analyzing Clinton's five criteria for deploying U.S. military personnel as part of a U.S. peacekeeping force, it quickly becomes apparent that the Haitian crisis, as terrible as it may be, does not qualify.

Criterion # 1: Is there a threat to international peace and security? The answer clearly is no. If the crisis in Haiti were a “real threat to international peace or security,” then the Dominican Republic—which shares the West Indies island of Hispaniola with Haiti—would be the first country calling for immediate intervention. It is not. To be sure, Haiti is geographically close to the U.S., and America has an interest in preventing thousands of “boat people” from fleeing to the shores of Florida. But the Haitian crisis does not threaten the peace or stability of the international community. With its bankrupt economy, population of seven million, and rag-tag military, the only threat Haiti represents is to its own people. Moreover, the re-imposition of economic sanctions will only worsen Haiti's economic crisis, causing an exodus of boat people which the embargo is supposed to prevent.

Criterion #2: Does the mission have a clear objective? Again, the answer is no. Other than restoring Aristide to power, the proposed mission to Haiti does not have any “clear objective.” The Clinton Administration has not answered the question of what it will do if violence breaks out against the Aristide government once he is returned to power. Nor has it said what role, if any, U.S. troops would play in safeguarding his regime. As recently pointed out by former Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Elliott Abrams, “The Administration should start out by defining American interests in Haiti, and then see how and whether Mr. Aristide fits with them.” Instead, the White House has been shaping its policy to fit Aristide's interests and those of liberal Democrats on Capitol Hill, rather than those of the U.S.

Criterion #3: Do all parties agree to a U.N. presence? They do not. To be sure, the September 23 vote by the U.N. Security Council to send a peacekeeping unit to Haiti was unanimous. However, when the U.S. sent its first deployment of some 200 non-combatants to Haiti on October 11 to begin fulfilling its obligation to the resolution, the ship carrying the U.S. personnel was turned back by an angry mob on the pier with the apparent support of police auxiliary forces under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Michel François. To the extent that François and military ruler Lieutenant General Raoul Cedras control power in Port-au-Prince, their exclusion from any agreements will make execution of the U.N. resolution a difficult endeavor. Moreover, Aristide's own appointed Prime Minister, Robert Malval, has stated that he does not support foreign troops coming ashore in Haiti in present conditions.

Criterion #4: Are sufficient resources available for the mission? The answer to this question is unknown. There has been no assessment of what it will take to put Aristide back in office, keep him there, and establish democracy in Haiti. The scale of peacekeeping operations in Haiti will likely be smaller than in Somalia; that U.N. operation has thus far cost the American taxpayers more than \$1 billion. Before the U.S. starts down the path of involvement, the burden of assessing costs lies with the Administration and supporters of the intervention option.

Criterion #5: Can an end-point to the operation be identified? The answer, again, is no. This criterion cannot be met unless the U.S. decides to disengage from Haiti once Aristide has been returned to power. This is unlikely given the probability that widespread violence and chaos would break out once U.S. or U.N. troops left Haiti. Not only would Aristide's opponents attempt to destroy his regime, but, given his practices while in office, Aristide would likely attempt to seek revenge on these political opponents. The United States could find itself in an open-ended mission of playing "palace guard" to a government that is increasingly unpopular with its own population, as well as with Clinton Administration officials and members of Congress. Moreover, Haiti has been suffering from political violence, civil war, human rights violations, and poverty for most of its 190 years of independence. This is not a matter that can be resolved by a quick and temporary deployment of U.S. forces, especially when that force consists only of 600 U.S. lightly armed soldiers unable to defend themselves against ruthless attacks by the various paramilitary factions and gangs in Haiti.

Criteria Not Met. If Clinton and his advisors are serious about using these conditions to gauge whether or not to deploy U.S. troops as part of a U.N. peacekeeping force, they must conclude that Haiti does not meet the conditions, and thus avoid direct U.S. military involvement.

FORGING A NEW U.S. POLICY TOWARD HAITI

The Clinton Administration's Haiti policy has been a failure. Sending U.S. forces to participate in a U.N. peacekeeping force in Haiti is ill-advised. Reimposing the embargo and economic sanctions will only lead to more economic refugees and calls for the U.S. to "do something," which will surely fail. Moreover, equating Aristide's return to power with the restoration of democracy in Haiti is a recipe for disaster. The Clinton Administration, therefore, needs to re-evaluate its Haiti policy. To promote U.S. interests and encourage a political compromise in Haiti, Washington should promote negotiations to seek a political settlement in Haiti. The U.S. should work more closely with regional democracies through the Organization of American States (OAS) to promote a dialogue between all of the parties involved in the Haiti crisis. The U.N. is increasingly seen as part of the problem, not part of the solution, and therefore is becoming an obstacle to progress in Haiti. The U.S. should also enlist the support of the Vatican in the Haiti negotiations. The Roman Catholic Church would be welcomed as a mediator by almost all of the engaged parties. It has had success in the past in brokering political compromises in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Washington also should continue a program of humanitarian assistance and press for economic reforms in Haiti. The U.S., Canada, France, and the Caribbean community should continue sending foodstuffs, agriculture assistance, and medical aid to Haiti. Because of the U.N. embargo against Haiti and the ongoing political crisis, U.S. aid programs support as many as one million Haitians each day. American aid, however, should be targeted to private groups, churches, and local communities for distribution, not to the government, the military, or

pro-Aristide groups. The U.S. and the Organization of American States should also begin to work with Haiti's private sector and moderate politicians to develop a strategy for free market reforms, which could be put in place once the political crisis is resolved.

For the time being at least, Clinton has stepped back from sending U.S. forces to Haiti. He now must make it clear to the American people, to the U.S. Congress, and to Aristide that no U.S. troops will be forthcoming. At the same time, the Clinton Administration must overhaul its policy toward Aristide and Haiti. If it does not, the country will continue to be racked by coups, countercoups, violence, and economic misery. And the U.S. could find itself once again drawn into a fruitless and failing military operation in which U.S. vital interests are not involved.

Michael G. Wilson
Senior Policy Analyst