

IS HAITI TURNING INTO ANOTHER CUBA?

(Updating *Backgrounder* 746, "Haiti's Continuing Challenge to U.S. Policy Makers," January 18, 1990.)

Haiti last week joined the ranks of the Western Hemisphere's democratic nations, leaving Cuba to stand as the sole dictatorship in the Americas. Internationally supervised presidential elections were held in Haiti on December 16, setting the stage for the February 7 inauguration of Haiti's first-ever democratically-elected president, 37-year-old Jean-Bertrand Aristide of the leftist National Front for Democratic Convergence (FNCD). Yet, Haiti's nascent democratic experiment could be short lived. The new government in Port-au-Prince may be steering Haiti toward a communist dictatorship, hostile to the United States. To counter this, the Bush Administration should freeze all U.S. assistance for Haiti until Aristide demonstrates a commitment to upholding constitutional democracy and a willingness to cooperate with Washington on security and economic matters.

A leftist dictatorship by Aristide on the Cuban model would harm greatly U.S. interests in the Caribbean Basin. Increased political and economic chaos in Haiti could become infectious, destabilizing the region at a time when democracy and free market economies are taking hold in such neighboring countries as the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. Moreover, Haiti is strategically located only 750 miles southeast of Miami. In 1989, some 3,368 Haitians fleeing violence were picked up at sea by U.S. authorities, forcing the U.S. Coast Guard to redirect and expend resources normally used in anti-drug patrols. These numbers could increase significantly if Aristide imposed a Cuban-style dictatorship on Haiti.

Target of Subversion. Located just 100 miles east of Cuba, Haiti has been a target of subversion by Cuban dictator Fidel Castro for three decades. As early as August 1959, just months after Castro seized power, a small force of Cuban revolutionaries tried to invade Haiti. Based in Cuba, moreover, are several military camps which train leftists from all over the globe in subversion, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Haitians are believed to be training at camps in Pinar del Rio Province and Guanabo, according to U.S. intelligence sources.

As troubling, Haiti is attractive to the Colombian narcotics cartels as a trans-shipment point for cocaine flowing to the U.S. Cocaine seizures in Haiti increased from 667 kilos (1,467 pounds) in 1987 to 1.80 metric tons last year. Finally, Haiti lies astride the Caribbean sea-lanes, used to transport some 1.1 billion tons of cargo each year, half of which originates in the U.S. An anti-American regime ruling Haiti, allied with Cuba, could interfere with commercial shipping.

Anti-American Record. Aristide may be the man to establish this leftist dictatorship in Haiti. He is a lifelong leftist, a fervent nationalist, and a strong advocate of liberation theology, which promotes the ideals of communism thinly veiled with religion. In fact, Aristide, who is a Roman Catholic priest, was

ousted from the Salesian Order of the Roman Catholic Church in 1988 because it considered him a revolutionary.

Leftist Platform. Aristide was elected by a three-to-one margin over the moderately conservative Marc Bazin of the National Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ANDP). Aristide's platform calls for the destruction of all remnants of the nearly three-decade-long family dictatorship of François "Papa Doc" and Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, and emphasizes the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor. Much of Aristide's campaign rhetoric blames the U.S. for Haiti's economic and political troubles. He has often been quoted as saying, for example, that the U.S. is "responsible for the worst abuses of the Duvalierists."

Despite Aristide's record, the U.S. was quick to offer support to the president-elect. Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Bernard Aronson said on December 18 that relations with Aristide "got off to a good start." Aronson was the first major foreign representative to congratulate Aristide after the election. In meeting Aristide in Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital, Aronson offered the U.S. stamp of approval on Aristide's election, stressing that the U.S. "looked forward to working with him." U.S. officials are now discussing the possibility of increasing Haiti's economic assistance to strengthen its devastated economy, to bolster its fragile democracy, and to reform its security forces. Last year, \$42 million was appropriated by the U.S. Congress for Haiti.

Economic support for Aristide under the present circumstances, however, would be unwise. While the U.S. should welcome and applaud Haiti's democratic elections, it should take a wait-and-see approach before considering any assistance to the new government. So far, the signals coming from Port-au-Prince are discouraging. Aristide's campaign platform gives improving relations with Washington a low priority. In fact, Aristide has stated that his government might be unwilling to accept assistance from the U.S., claiming that such aid has only produced misery in Haiti. While Aristide is making a valid point in claiming that U.S. aid often does more harm than good, he is doing so solely for his own political purposes. Food and emergency humanitarian aid could help Haiti temporarily survive tremendous food shortages. Even former President Jimmy Carter and former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, who met with Aristide following his election, said in a joint statement on December 18 that "he was violently anti-U.S. and hostile."

Warming Up To Havana. There are troubling signs that the Aristide government could degenerate into a left-wing dictatorship. Aristide invited the Castro government to send a delegation to attend his February 7 inauguration. It consisted of 26 members and was led by Esteban Lazo of the Cuban Communist Party Politburo. Despite the fact that Port-au-Prince and communist Cuba have never had diplomatic relations, it appears that such relations will be forged in the coming months. Aristide's party, the FNCD, is sending "young volunteers" to Cuba for training as "political party operatives." Finally, FNCD leaders are creating neighborhood militia called "vigilance committees" to mobilize against Haiti's political opposition, remnants of the Duvalier regime, the press, and foreign diplomatic and business interests. The vigilance committees, similar to the neighborhood watch committees in Cuba, are organizing street protests, encouraging violent attacks against opponents, and spying on them on behalf of Aristide's party.

Government-sponsored street violence is growing in Haiti. Aristide supporters have lynched and burned dozens of people since the elections. Their targets have been mainly suspected Duvalierists and other opponents of the new government. An FNCD-backed demonstration was held in Port-au-Prince on January 26 threatening the life of U.S. Ambassador Alvin Adams and calling for the burning of the U.S. Embassy.

Reassessing the U.S. Role. While the U.S. alone cannot save Haiti, the Bush Administration should withhold its financial support until Aristide has proven that he will not erect an anti-American leftist dictatorship. Washington must make sure that it does not repeat the mistakes it made in 1959 with Castro and in 1979 with the communist Sandinistas in Nicaragua by providing assistance to an anti-democratic and anti-U.S. regime. Such assistance could provide Aristide with the breathing room needed to eliminate all his political enemies. Instead, U.S. aid should be withheld as an inducement for establishing a constitutional democracy, protecting human rights, and allowing economic freedom.

If the Aristide government in fact does follow Castro's path by creating a communist dictatorship, the Bush Administration should:

- ◆ **Temporarily freeze all economic and security aid for Port-au-Prince.** Some \$54 million was appropriated for Haiti last year and was used mainly for food aid, humanitarian assistance, rural development, and anti-drug efforts. This year, Port-au-Prince will receive approximately \$83 million from Washington. This aid was announced today by the Agency for International Development (AID) and will be used for health programs, private business development, education, agriculture, and anti-drug efforts.
- ◆ **Impose a trade embargo on Haiti.** The U.S. currently imports some \$400 million worth of goods — clothing, leather goods, fruits, coffee, and seafood — from Haiti; while its exports to Haiti — electronic equipment, motor vehicles, textiles, telecommunications, and wheat — are valued at approximately \$480 million.
- ◆ **Encourage Venezuela and other Caribbean Basin and European countries like France to isolate Aristide and promote a return to democracy in Haiti by temporarily suspending trade with and financial assistance to Port-au-Prince.** There is precedence for such cooperation, since both Venezuela and France have been actively involved in promoting democracy in Haiti.
- ◆ **Work with Caribbean Basin democracies and European countries to assist financially such moderate Haitian pro-democratic parties as the National Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ANDP).** Through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a U.S. agency created by the Reagan Administration and Congress to nurture democratic movements around the globe, Washington could provide technical training, educational, and financial assistance to Haiti's democratic institutions and parties, which are extremely weak and underfunded. Such assistance is badly needed.

The Bush Administration should tell Aristide that a return to dictatorship, reprisals against political opponents, and closer ties to Castro will jeopardize U.S.-Haitian relations. Aristide is not yet a lost cause for the U.S. If he understands clearly that the U.S. has no intention of supporting his attempts to erect a leftist dictatorship, he may desist from his anti-American policies and put Haiti on the path toward real democracy and economic prosperity.

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