

## ARISTIDE IS NO ANSWER TO HAITI'S PROBLEMS

In the months since the September 30 military coup in Haiti, the Bush Administration stubbornly has backed ousted President Jean Bertrand Aristide and demanded his return to power as a precondition for normalizing relations with Port-au-Prince. Equating democracy with Aristide, however, is a mistake. Prior to the putsch that toppled Aristide, his actions began to resemble those of communist neighbor Fidel Castro of Cuba. Aristide fostered class violence, incited lynchings, encouraged attacks against political opponents, and organized militias for his personal use. As a result, the Haitian people have good reason if they decide not to take him back. Rather than forcing Aristide on Haiti, Washington should ask the Haitian people what they want. To do this, the Organization of American States (OAS) could help Haitian civilian authorities arrange for a referendum on Aristide's fate.

After last year's coup, the Bush Administration suspended the United States' \$85.5 million in economic and military aid to Haiti for fiscal 1992. The 34-member OAS, with strong U.S. backing, voted on October 8 to impose a trade embargo on Haiti and freeze all of the country's international financial assets. This February 4, Bush wisely eased the embargo's impact on Haiti's struggling and innocent work force by allowing some American companies to resume assembling goods in Haiti for export to the U.S. This helped save at least 40,000 Haitian jobs. The Administration correctly explained that the reason for this action was to direct the embargo against Haiti's junta leaders, not against the Haitian people.

**Reconciliation Plan.** The Bush Administration and the OAS have worked vigorously to seek a negotiated solution to the political impasse in the troubled Caribbean nation. Marathon meetings were held in Washington and Venezuela between Aristide, his representatives, members of the Haitian Parliament, and political leaders from across Haiti's political spectrum. As a result, an agreement was reached in Washington on February 23 between Aristide and members of the Haitian Parliament to restore civilian control over the Haitian government. The Haitian Parliament is expected to vote on the plan on March 23.

The reconciliation plan, which is supported by Washington, the OAS, most of Haiti's political parties, business community, and military leadership, named Rene Theodore as Haiti's new Prime Minister-designate. Theodore is the President of the National Reconstruction Movement (MRN), a coalition of leftist and centrist political groups, viewed as a moderating force by many Haitian and U.S. officials. If the plan is approved, then Theodore and the Haitian Parliament, in consultation with the U.S. and OAS, will decide whether to pave the way for Aristide's return to the Haitian presidency or to lead the charge for a new Haitian president. Regardless of the path that Theodore and the Haitian lawmakers take, it is clear that Aristide's return remains a clear issue of dispute.

**Political Extremist.** The reasons for this are many. Despite being a clear victor in Haiti's December 1990 elections, Aristide surely is not the democrat he claims to be. His actions since his February 7, 1991, inauguration paint him as a political extremist in the tradition of previous Haitian rulers. He has repeatedly used explicit and implicit threats of mob and class violence to intimidate his opponents in the wealthy business class, the Haitian National Assembly, centrist and conservative political parties, and the army. The headquarters of every single opposition party in Haiti, for example, has been attacked since Aristide's election. Often during

speeches, moreover, Aristide hinted of his willingness to use his popularity among Haiti's poorest sectors to ride roughshod over the business, military, and political opposition sectors of Haitian society.

**Unpriestly Preaching.** Aristide is a former priest, expelled from the Salesian order of the Roman Catholic Church for preaching class hatred. While he claims to be a champion of human rights, the U.S. State Department's Annual Human Rights Report on Haiti indicates otherwise. According to the January 31 report, at least 75 political opponents were brutally attacked in incidents of so-called "popular justice" last year. For example, well-known critic of Aristide and two-time presidential candidate Silvio Claude was attacked and killed by a pro-Aristide mob on the day before the September coup. Aristide's followers used a Haitian murder method called "necklacing" to kill Claude. This involves chopping off the victim's arms, hanging a gasoline-soaked tire around the victim's neck, and burning the victim alive. Aristide said the day prior to the murder: "What a beautiful tool, what a beautiful instrument, what a beautiful device. It smells good, and everywhere you go you want to breathe it." As a last strike against his enemies before fleeing Haiti during the September coup, Aristide may also have ordered the killing of Roger Lafontant, who was serving a life sentence in the National Prison in Port-au-Prince for a previous coup attempt against the government.

Aristide, moreover, is no friend of the U.S. During his 1990 campaign for president, he often said that the U.S. was "responsible for the worst abuses" of the former Duvalier family dictatorship in Haiti and routinely blamed Haiti's economic and political troubles on Washington. Just last month, in fact, Antoine Adrien, a senior Aristide advisor, charged that Washington was behind the September coup and that the crisis in Haiti would only be solved if the U.S. "explained its role in the coup." Adrien also said that U.S. Ambassador to Haiti Alvin P. Adams "played a role in the coup" and that in the days following the military takeover, Adams "provided coup supporters with high technology communication equipment and manipulated the situation."

With this record, Aristide should be viewed as a threat to Haiti's chances of democratic and economic progress. To help restore democracy and stability in Haiti, as well as help launch an economic recovery program on the island nation, the Bush Administration should:

- ◆ **Not force Aristide upon the Haitian people.** Washington, along with the OAS countries, should propose a referendum in Haiti to decide Aristide's status. If the Haitians reject him, then the OAS, with U.S. backing, should help Prime Minister Theodore, the Haitian Parliament, and Haiti's political parties organize new elections.
- ◆ **Call for the OAS-sponsored embargo against Haiti to end once the February 23 accord is made law by the Haitian Parliament.** Now that a democratic accord tentatively has been agreed to by the political, military, and business groups in Haiti, and a civilian Prime Minister-designate has been named, there is no need for an economic embargo.
- ◆ **Help organize an OAS monitoring team to gauge whether the terms of the February 23 reconciliation accord are carried out.** These terms include a full amnesty for military officers, civilian control over the political system, and protection of human rights.
- ◆ **Threaten to organize an OAS peacekeeping force if the democratic accord collapses and extremists of either the left or the right again seize power.**
- ◆ **Dispense emergency humanitarian relief to Haiti's poor.** Mindful of the embargo's potential devastating impact on the Haitian people, the Bush Administration correctly exempted some food staples, including rice, wheat, and cooking oil, from the economic sanctions. A special humanitarian assistance program, operating through private voluntary agencies and the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), also gave food and medical assistance to the Haitian poor. Because of economic mismanagement in Haiti and the OAS economic embargo, however, the Haitian economy has collapsed and the country is on the verge of chaos. Additional humanitarian assistance will be needed urgently in the coming weeks to prevent loss of human life.

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