

7/29/94 | Number 231

AFTER INVADING HAITI, THEN WHAT, MR. PRESIDENT?

(Updating *Backgrounder Update* No. 205, "Think Again on Haiti," October 20, 1993, and *Executive Memorandum* No. 325, "Aristide Is No Answer to Haiti's Problems," March 13, 1992)

"Democracy...is not created by aspirations or by new faith; it is built up by slow habit....It comes, like manhood, as the fruit of youth: immature peoples cannot have it, and the maturity to which it is vouchsafed is the maturity of freedom and self-control, and no other."

Woodrow Wilson, 1885¹

Thirty years after offering this stern assessment of democracy, President Wilson in 1915 invaded Haiti. His reason, he explained to one White House visitor, was to "teach the South American republics to elect good men!"² Five presidencies later, Franklin Roosevelt in 1934 withdrew the U.S. Marines after a nearly two-decade occupation that left Haiti no closer to democracy than when Wilson sent them in.

Oblivious to the central truth of Wilson's earlier statement—that democracy "is built up by slow habit"—President Clinton is poised to repeat Wilson's mistake and invade Haiti to "restore democracy." On July 25, Clinton Administration officials at the United Nations circulated a draft resolution that would permit member states to use "all necessary means" to reinstall deposed president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.³ This is well-understood diplomatic parlance for "military force." To emphasize the point, Clinton has dispatched a naval task force of some dozen ships, including a 2,000-man Marine Expeditionary Unit, to Haitian waters. Meanwhile, units of the Army's XVIIIth Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, have over the past several weeks conducted high-visibility training exercises.

The question regarding a possible invasion is not whether U.S. forces can defeat the 7,000-member Haitian military. That force has very little artillery, no combat aircraft, and probably no more than two hundred small arms rounds per man.⁴ Few doubt the ability of the United States to occupy Haiti in short order.

- 1 As quoted in Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson: Revolution, War, and Peace* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1979), p. 5.
- 2 As cited in Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1991), p. 183. Millett's history of the 1915-1934 occupation is one of the best available, and is the source for events described in this paper, unless otherwise indicated.
- 3 Warren Strobel and Stewart Stogel, "U.S. sets the stage for Haiti invasion," *The Washington Times*, July 26, 1994, p. A1. *The Military Balance, 1993-1994* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1993), p. 187.

The real question for the Clinton Administration is: Then what? After having occupied Haiti, what will be the mission of that military force? What can U.S. forces expect as they attend to that mission? And what conditions must be met for its return to the United States? The Administration's ability to answer these questions inspires little confidence. As House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Lee Hamilton (D-IN) has noted, "We are not thinking enough about what happens after the invasion. There are concerns all around about the exit strategy."⁵

NOT PANAMA, NOT GRENADA

In public statements on a possible invasion, Administration officials have suggested that they intend to get U.S. forces in quickly, kick out the junta, then remove U.S. combat troops and turn the mission over to a multinational peacekeeping force. This quick "exit strategy" would be patterned after either the invasion of Grenada in 1983 or of Panama in 1989.

But there are more differences than similarities between these two countries and Haiti. Unlike Haiti, both Grenada and Panama had functioning institutions and economies before the invasion; U.S. forces could exit without creating a vacuum in their wake. Grenada was part of the British Commonwealth whose titular head of state was a Governor-General appointed by the Queen of England. Panama is the permanent home of over 10,000 U.S. troops. It is also a hemispheric banking capital and a de facto member of the U.S. commonwealth, where the dollar is the legal tender. By comparison, Haiti is one of the poorest nations in the world, with a per capita income of under \$300 (before the U.S.-led embargo destroyed 95 percent of light manufacturing jobs) and an illiteracy rate over 80 percent.

Another difference is the threat to American lives, the proximate cause for each of the earlier invasions. The Clinton Administration has begun to refer to such a threat as a justification for the military build-up around Haiti. But Americans in Haiti are safe; the Administration has not reported a single instance of government-induced violence toward any of the more than 3,000 Americans living in Haiti. Indeed, a U.S. Embassy spokesman noted in a recent interview that "as of right now, we know of no direct threats to Americans"⁶

By contrast, in both Panama and Grenada, threats to Americans were widespread, well-known, and directly attributable to government actions. There were nearly one thousand U.S. medical students in Grenada, where a shoot-on-sight curfew—imposed after a Marxist coup d'état—had been announced several days before the invasion. In Panama, harassment of U.S. citizens by government troops had begun as early as May 1989. This culminated in December 1989, when four off-duty Marines were stopped at a Panamanian check-point. After an altercation, the Panamanians opened fire on the American car, killing one of the Marines. This was followed by the torture of an off-duty naval officer and sexual assault of his wife by Panamanian Defense Force soldiers. President Bush ordered the invasion the next day. In a news conference less than a week later, he cited his reasons: "[T]he death of the Marine; the brutalizing, really obscene torture of the Navy lieutenant and the threat of sexual abuse and the terror inflicted on that [officer's] wife;...the fact that our people [weren't sure that] we could guarantee the safety of Americans there."⁷

HAITI: D-DAY PLUS ONE

Despite his rhetoric about safeguarding American lives, Clinton has made no similar case for action in Haiti. A more likely model than Grenada or Panama for a potential invasion of Haiti is the first U.S. invasion of Haiti, executed also in the name of "democracy." Whether American troops will remain this time for twenty years is an open question. But the challenges facing an occupation force today would be similar to those of eight decades ago. Before sending American troops into Haiti to "restore democracy," President Clinton should explain to the American people that those troops will be responsible for:

5 Tim Zimmerman, *et al.*, "Caribbean cruise," *U.S. News & World Report*, July 18, 1994, p. 37.

6 CNN interview with Stanley Schrager, U.S. Embassy, Port-au-Prince, broadcast July 26, 1994.

7 David Adams, *et al.*, "U.S. Invades Panama," *Newsweek*, January 1, 1990, p. 20.

- ❖ **Disarming the Haitian people.** Administration officials recently acknowledged that this would be a high priority for occupation forces.⁸ But they give little indication how this might be accomplished. In the 1915 invasion, the U.S. commander offered a reward for each weapon turned in.⁹ This did little to stop the gradual escalation in violence that led ultimately to nearly 200 American and probably five times as many Haitian casualties during the two-decade occupation.

More recently, disarming the various warring factions was a priority for U.S. peacekeepers in Somalia after the June 1993 attack on the U.N. operation. Despite a concentrated effort, over two-dozen American servicemen lost their lives in armed exchanges several months after the initiative was launched.

- ❖ **Protecting American citizens.** The Administration has used this as a rationale for invading in the first place. In a July 3 television interview, Clinton special envoy William H. Gray III declared that “[t]he president has responsibility to protect American lives....[T]here is great concern that we must be prepared to protect American citizens.”¹⁰ But some 3,000 Americans remain in Haiti despite the junta’s crackdown, and the Administration has not recounted one instance of threats to Americans. Indeed, the common refrain from American businesspersons and relief workers has been that they feel safe—“unless there is an invasion.”¹¹

Should there be one, the threat to Americans from Haitians opposed to Aristide’s return would be real. So while subduing whatever armed resistance they may meet and maintaining calm in the crowded slums of Port-au-Prince, U.S. troops would also have to contend with organizing, protecting, and perhaps evacuating several thousand Americans.

- ❖ **Defeating guerrilla forces.** Initial opposition to the July 1915 invasion was light; two U.S. sailors in the landing party were killed, probably by “friendly fire.”¹² But this passivity was soon replaced by the rise of well-organized guerrilla bands and their supporters numbering in excess of 10,000. Bloody exchanges with the U.S. forces culminated in a 1929 uprising by an armed mob in which U.S. Marines killed or wounded dozens of Haitians. The resulting American government investigation led eventually to the 1934 withdrawal of U.S. forces.

This history, together with recent experience with armed tribal factions in Somalia, demands that the U.S. be ready for a similar response to another invasion of Haiti. It appears that U.N. Secretary General Bouros Boutros-Ghali has learned this lesson, even if the Clinton Administration has not. Reluctant to see a U.N. peacekeeping force left vulnerable after a U.S. evacuation, Boutros-Ghali recently advised Administration officials that he would be unable to raise and finance the 12,000- to 15,000-member multinational force the White House has said will be necessary to pacify Haiti after an invasion.¹³

- ❖ **Serving as Aristide’s “palace guard.”** Inasmuch as a U.S. invasion would be directed against the very military and police forces responsible for civil order, their defeat would require the occupation force to assume that responsibility. In addition to crowd control, maintaining public order, and pa-

8 Daniel Williams, "If U.S. Invades, Plans Call for Disarming Haitians," *The Washington Post*, July 21, 1994, p. A24.

9 Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), p. 93.

10 As cited in Ann Devroy and Bradley Graham, "As Pressure Builds, U.S. Intensifies Efforts to Recruit Peacekeepers for Haiti," *The Washington Post*, July 4, 1994, p. A20.

11 One American relief worker, a Catholic nun who has been in Haiti for more than ten years, provided representative testimony during a National Public Radio interview broadcast on July 18, 1994.

12 Millet, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

13 Ann Devroy and Bradley Graham, "U.S. Units Ready to Invade but Clinton Is Said to Be Weeks From Decision," *The Washington Post*, July 17, 1994, p. A21.

trolling Haiti's largest cities, this force would also have to provide protection to Aristide. That could be a challenge; his divisive and uncompromising approach to governance during his brief tenure as Haiti's elected president led to two coup attempts (one successful) and at least one assassination attempt against him.

To ensure Aristide's survival, the Clinton Administration will have to make Haiti essentially an American protectorate. This was the objective of the 1915-1934 occupation; the September 1915 treaty between the two countries called for, among other things, "the creation of an American-officered national constabulary, and the use of American engineers and public health officials to reform the public works and sanitation systems."¹⁴

Those objectives differ little from those outlined by Senator Bob Graham (D-FL), a leading proponent of a U.S. invasion, during recent Senate debate: "[I]t is going to be necessary to have a very effective political reform, starting with the separation of the police from the military, and economic reform, starting with creating the stimulus for the private sector to commence activities again...."¹⁵ Who will do this "separating" and "creating" after the combined effect of the U.S. embargo and invasion have turned Haiti into a de facto U.S. colony?

BACK FROM THE PRECIPICE

It is not too late for the President to step back from the threat of using force to reinstall Aristide. Clinton has already demonstrated a remarkable ability to reverse course on major policies; indeed, his Haiti saber-rattling belies his October 1993 declaration: "I have no intention of asking our young people in uniform... to go in there to do anything other than implement a peace agreement...." Changing his policy now will save American lives from being squandered in pursuit of democracy in this hemisphere's least democratic country.¹⁶

To defuse this crisis of his own making, Clinton should take two actions immediately:

- ❖ **Lift the economic embargo on Haiti.** Since economic sanctions were intensified on June 16, nearly 25,000 refugees have left Haiti in pursuit of a better life anywhere else. Nearly 16,000 refugees remain in what is little more than a concentration camp at the U.S. Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Meanwhile, the military leaders against whom the sanctions supposedly are targeted appear unaffected. Representative Bill Richardson (D-NM) recently was the guest of junta leader Raoul Cedras at a five-hour dinner/discussion; presumably the table was full.

Economic sanctions are a blunt and usually ineffective instrument of foreign policy. August 2 marks the four-year anniversary of sanctions against Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait; Iraqi president Saddam Hussein has outlasted the American leader who imposed them. The Serbian leadership in Bosnia has just rejected the West's latest cease-fire proposal, despite the tough sanctions imposed on their principal supporters in neighboring Serbia. In Haiti, sanctions imposed after the 1991 coup against Aristide have only destroyed the subsistence economy there and created the very refugee crisis the Administration now cites as a principal justification for ending the stalemate by force.

Lifting the embargo will ease the immediate crisis and allow refugees to return to a better life in Haiti. It is a necessary first step to a negotiated solution to this tragedy.

- ❖ **Appoint a presidential commission to examine other options.** The Senate defeated by a party-line vote an amendment offered by Republican Leader Bob Dole (R-KS) to appoint a bi-partisan con-

¹⁴ Millet, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

¹⁵ *Congressional Record* - Senate, July 14, 1994, p. S8967.

¹⁶ For a full discussion, see Lawrence T. Di Rita, "Read My Flips: Clinton's Foreign Policy Reversals In His Own Words," Heritage Foundation *FYI* No. 19, June 20, 1994.

gressional commission to assess "the humanitarian, political, and diplomatic conditions in Haiti and [report] to the Congress on the appropriate policy options available to the United States...."¹⁷ This option would have resulted in a 45-day "cooling off period" that Clinton could have used to generate bi-partisan support for a new policy toward Haiti.

In appointing a commission, Clinton would be responding to democratic forces in Haiti. The Haitian Chamber of Deputies, whose members can claim democratic legitimacy equal to Aristide's since they achieved office in the same election that brought Aristide to power, has consistently proposed negotiation over confrontation. Recalling Nelson Mandela, who "achieved a consensus that has allowed formation of his new government," Haitian Deputy Duly Brutus counseled this approach in a recent *Washington Post* editorial.¹⁸

Clinton is right to oppose a congressionally mandated commission; the President is the constitutionally designated executor of U.S. foreign policy. He should take the initiative away from the Congress and appoint his own commission. In other crises, he has shown no aversion to last-minute negotiations: he sent former President Jimmy Carter to North Korea to make one last appeal for negotiations to end the nuclear weapons program in that country. If Clinton is willing to conduct negotiations with a communist dictator bent on acquiring nuclear weapons, certainly there can be little danger in doing the same with a petty military junta in poor Haiti.

CONCLUSION

The history of Haiti is a sad one, made no better by a two-decade U.S. military occupation in the name of democracy. In the seven years prior to the 1915 U.S. invasion, seven successive presidents were overthrown by force. This has been the norm in the nearly two centuries since Haiti's independence. Aristide is only the latest to receive such treatment. In response, the U.S.-led economic embargo and threats of another invasion only have increased the misery of a population that has been promised "democracy" in return.

Before adding American casualties and more Haitian deaths to his strange policy brew, Clinton must explain to the American people exactly what a U.S. invasion would entail. If he fails to do so, he should not be surprised when angry Americans demand an explanation why even a single U.S. life should be lost to "restore democracy" to a country that has never known it.

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¹⁷ *Congressional Record - Senate*, July 14, 1994, p. S8940.

¹⁸ Duly Brutus, "Alternative To Invasion," *The Washington Post*, July 7, 1994, p. A19. Deputy Brutus was elected in December 1990 (when Aristide was elected) and served as president of the Chamber of Deputies in 1991.

