

The Executive Memorandum

The Heritage Foundation

214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E. Washington, D.C. 20002-4999 (202) 546-4400

RUSH!

9/20/94

Number 391

NOW COMES THE HARD PART: THE U.S. OCCUPATION OF HAITI

Everyone can draw a sigh of relief now that U.S. forces will not be invading Haiti. The loss of American lives that would have resulted from an invasion has been avoided. Nonetheless, for the first time in 80 years, large numbers of American troops are landing in Haiti. Within several weeks, as many as 15,000 U.S. forces are expected to be dispatched to that poor, chaotic nation. Thus, while an invasion of Haiti has been avoided, an occupation has not.

And this is precisely Bill Clinton's—and America's—new problem. The actual invasion of Haiti to reinstall Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power was never the main reason for opposition to Clinton's Haiti policy. Secretary of Defense William Perry recently acknowledged that even an invasion that encountered resistance would have taken no more than "a few hours." Rather, people were against the invasion because of what would come afterward—a U.S. occupation of Haiti that they felt was unwise and unnecessary. Therefore, the original cause of opposition to Clinton's policy remains. With U.S. troops heading for Haiti, the easy part is over. Now the difficult task of pacifying and "restoring" democracy begins.

Public Wary About Clinton Policy. Having assumed responsibility for Haiti's future, the Clinton Administration still has not convinced the American people that intervention in Haiti was necessary. Even after a speech to the nation on September 15, in which the President outlined his reasons for military action, more than 60 percent of Americans polled were against the use of U.S. force. In fact, as the hour of invasion drew closer, the more opposition to an invasion mounted. New reports reveal that Clinton was desperate for Jimmy Carter's peace mission to succeed. In the hours before the invasion was to begin, the President apparently began to realize that military action would be a big political mistake.

But the President may face an even bigger political headache in the future: managing the occupation of an extremely poor and divided Third World country. Clinton has yet to outline a convincing "exit strategy" for the U.S.—to define clearly the conditions that must be met in order to get the troops back home. Despite the President's assurances that U.S. troops will return soon, the Clinton Administration is underestimating the troubles U.S. forces will face in Haiti. Bringing Aristide back to Port-au-Prince will be easy. Keeping him there in power will not be.

Many Unanswered Questions. The precise terms of the agreement between the United States and the Haitian military junta are unclear. According to the deal brokered by Jimmy Carter, by October 15, unless the Haitian parliament has acted sooner to offer them political reprieve, the junta must relinquish power to the elected government of Aristide. This poses a number of intriguing questions, including:

To whom will the military and police forces owe their allegiance once their leaders have abdicated? Many of them were opponents of Aristide and his supporters. American peacekeepers may be left to contend with general lawlessness among thousands of armed forces whose leaders no longer control them. The U.S. troops will have to disarm these troops if they are to avoid becoming targets

themselves. But the policy of disarming belligerents in Somalia failed, at the cost of more than three dozen American lives.

- 2) **What if General Raoul Cedras or other members of the junta refuse to leave Haiti once they step down from power?** In the press conference after the deal was announced, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said that "there will be no incentive for [the generals] to stay in Haiti" after October 15. But nothing in the agreement prevents them from staying in Haiti. Moreover, Cedras and his allies represent the most well-organized and determined opposition to Aristide. If Cedras stays and decides to run for parliament this year or for president next year, U.S. forces may find themselves caught between two diametrically opposed political factions. It is not inconceivable that Aristide, emboldened by the U.S. presence, might incite his followers to the same type of mob tactics he used as president to intimidate political opponents. In August 1991, he encouraged his supporters to surround the parliament building to prevent members from voting a motion of no-confidence against his government.
- 3) **How long before Aristide turns on his American mentors?** The Clinton Administration has been able to extract promises of good behavior from Aristide as long as he has been living comfortably in Washington, D.C. Once he is back in Port-au-Prince, however, he could revert to the anti-Americanism that had been the hallmark of his political career. For example, in an April 1990 radio interview regarding U.S. support for the upcoming Haitian elections, Aristide claimed that "they [the Americans] want to hold our guts always in their hands. Thus, we will be economically, politically, and culturally dependent. For our part, we reject this...." If Aristide becomes unhappy with the United States—if aid is not enough or if he thinks the U.S. is equivocating in its support for him personally—this anti-Americanism is bound to resurface.
- 4) **What happens if Aristide decides not to step down at the end of his presidential term?** In his September 15 address to the nation, President Clinton declared that "Aristide has pledged to step down when his term ends...[in 1996]." But that is a rather dramatic concession that may come as a surprise to Aristide's supporters in Haiti. Until now, Aristide has held firm to the belief that the period of his exile does not count as part of his five-year term in office. Will the U.S. blockade Haiti and impose economic sanctions if Aristide remains in office past 1996, in violation of the 1987 Haitian constitution?
- 5) **What happens when "democracy" fails to take root with Aristide's return?** With the occupation of Haiti, the U.S. assumes responsibility for building "democracy" in a country where three-quarters of its presidents in nearly two centuries of independence have not completed their terms. The U.S. will soon be sending judicial, law enforcement, military, economic, and political advisors to help establish civil order there. Despite Clinton's claims to the contrary in his September 15 speech, this is nation-building pure and simple; it is a policy that failed miserably in Somalia last year with the unnecessary loss of some 40 American lives.

America's new venture into liberal colonialism has begun. The U.S. is about to occupy a country to install in power a left-wing priest who made a career out of denouncing America and everything it stands for. Meanwhile, a few hundred miles closer to U.S. shores, another Caribbean dictator abuses human rights and rules undemocratically. Yet Fidel Castro is spared the fate of the Haitian generals. The reasons for this double standard are as mysterious as the reasons for occupying Haiti in the first place.

Lawrence T. DiRita
Deputy Director of Foreign Policy and Defense Studies