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FICTION AND FACT: THE CLINTON SPEECH ON HAITI

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President Clinton's address to the nation on September 15 tried to make the case that invading Haiti is a national security interest of the United States. In making his argument, Clinton referred to President Bush's comments at the time of the September 1991 coup that the situation posed "an unusual...threat to national security." Clinton chose to ignore Bush's more recent warnings, including those made in an interview in early September, that invading Haiti would be a grave mistake for the United States. There are other areas requiring clarification.

FICTION: President Clinton likened Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his followers to the American revolutionaries "who...appealed to all those who believed in democracy to help their cause."

FACT: Until he was deposed, Aristide had nothing but contempt for America. In a 1990 Haiti radio interview regarding U.S. calls for elections, he said: "[The Americans] want to hold our guts... in their hands. Thus, we will be economically [and] politically dependent. For our part, we reject this."

FICTION: President Clinton charges that, "Beyond the human rights violations, the immigration problems, the importance of democracy, the United States also has strong interest in not letting dictators, especially in our own region, break their word to the United States and to the United Nations."

FACT: Cuba's Fidel Castro has repeatedly broken his word to the United States, abused the rights of his people, and governed with dictatorial rule. Yet, Clinton is not about to invade Cuba. Why the double standard?

FICTION: "We have tried everything—persuasion and negotiation, mediation and condemnation."

FACT: The Administration has ignored democrats in Haiti who want General Raoul Cedras to go but want to resolve the matter peacefully. Some 48 democratically elected members of the Haitian Chamber of Deputies on July 1 asked for bipartisan negotiations with the United States and were ignored by the Clinton Administration and the U.S. Embassy. Former president of the Chamber Duly Brutus has formed an alliance between these members and the nine-member

“National Mediation Commission” made up of business, professional, Catholic and Protestant church leaders. The alliance represents a broad centrist consensus and its first demand is that Cedras depart. The Administration has refused to meet with them.

FICTION: “300,000...Haitians...could be the next wave of refugees at our door...if we don’t act.”

FACT: The refugee crisis was created when the Administration in June began to process refugees for admission to the U.S. Until Clinton rescinded that promise two weeks later, over 20,000 refugees left Haiti. Since the policy was tightened, Haitian refugees have slowed to virtually zero.

FICTION: “Our mission in Haiti, as it was in Panama and Grenada, will be limited and specific.”

FACT: The primary mission in both Panama and Grenada was to save American lives. Both Presidents Reagan and Bush have said as much. In Grenada, 800 American students were in danger because of a shoot-on-sight curfew; in Panama, one American military officer had been killed by government forces and another officer and his wife were abducted and beaten. In Haiti, even the U.S. Embassy spokesman told CNN that “we know of no threats to Americans.”

FICTION: “President Aristide has pledged to step down when his term ends...[in 1996].”

FACT: Aristide’s long-held position has been that his years in exile should not count against his five-year term. If what Clinton said is true, it represents a significant change in Aristide’s policy. It is unlikely his supporters in Haiti are aware of this change.

FICTION: “More than 20 countries from around the globe...have...agreed to join us....”

FACT: These 20 countries have pledged 1,500 troops. This is an average of 75 troops per country. Argentina is sending one warship, while Great Britain is dispatching 10 “observers.” The U.S. will be sending 20,000 troops.

FICTION: “[The junta has]...destroyed their economy.”

FACT: Since the imposition of the U.S.-led United Nations embargo in 1991, 95 percent of the 150,000 light manufacturing jobs in Haiti have evaporated as businesses have shut down. The 20,000 economic refugees who left Haiti in the weeks following the Administration’s tightening of the embargo in June was more than in the ten years prior to the imposition of sanctions in 1991.