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CARTER CENTER REPORT DISAVOWS HAITI'S "RESTORATION" OF DEMOCRACY

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Opposition to the Clinton Administration's boldest foreign policy initiative, the intervention in Haiti, has come full circle with the defection of former President Jimmy Carter as an uncritical supporter of Clinton's effort to "restore" democracy to Haiti. It was Carter himself who led the diplomatic team last September that prepared the way for the return of ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the removal of the military junta which had replaced him in 1991. Without Carter's participation, it is doubtful that the operation would have succeeded without bloodshed or that the intervention would have been supported by the American people.

Now Carter and his staff at the Atlanta-based Carter Center have issued a devastating critique of the political process Aristide has produced in Haiti, particularly the June 25 elections which resulted in a pro-Aristide sweep of local and parliamentary seats. The report, written by Carter confidant and former National Security Council advisor Robert Pastor, amounts to a complete denial of the electoral process's legitimacy. By exposing the true nature of Aristide's one-party ("Lavalas") rule in Haiti, including its widespread corruption, mismanagement, and manipulation of the balloting, the Carter Center (albeit belatedly) has joined other critics of the Clinton Administration's endorsement of Aristide's left-wing dictatorship.

CARTER'S TURNAROUND

Carter's critique of Haiti's democratic progress under Aristide is even more startling when one considers the long political association between the two. When Aristide won Haiti's 1990 presidential election, the Carter Center was at the forefront of groups supporting the results. But relations began to sour within months after Carter paved the way for Aristide's triumphant return in October 1994. By year's end it was becoming apparent to all but the most ideologically driven that Haiti was turning into another one-man dictatorship.

Previous Heritage Foundation studies have outlined the authoritarian character of Aristide's political personality, his Marxist beliefs, and the follies of U.S. intervention on his behalf.¹ A critical part of Aristide's plan for total power was his illegal and authoritarian command of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP), the body responsible for conducting the June elections.² Sensing trouble, former President Carter revisited Haiti in March 1995 but was formally rebuffed by Aristide and

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unofficially greeted by hostile crowds and vicious graffiti, all engineered by Lavalas street gangs intent on embarrassing him.

Thus, the stage was set for the June elections. While the Lavalas victory was expected, not even the most influential of Aristide's private backers, including Jimmy Carter, were prepared for the disgraceful conduct of the government and the Lavalas party. "Of the 13 elections that I have observed," notes Pastor, "the June 25 Haitian elections were the most disastrous technically, with the most insecure count."³ Pastor implicitly indicts Aristide, concluding that "instead of building confidence in an electoral process, the government and the CEP—by their words, actions and inactions—eroded confidence. Instead of building bonds with the political parties by listening to their concerns and complaints and responding in an expeditious and helpful manner, the CEP stiff-armed the parties and never responded to their complaints."⁴

CLINTON'S DEBACLE

After the intervention of 21,000 U.S. troops, at a cost of \$3 billion and in conjunction with 6,000 United Nations forces, the Clinton Administration finds itself forced to defend the Haiti operation as its biggest foreign policy "success." But the sham elections in Haiti were riddled with graft, fraud, and chaos. They represent a complete denial of democratic rule. The balloting was marked by widespread irregularities: ballots burned, hundreds of voting stations never opened, and tens of thousands of people never able to vote. "I personally witnessed," writes Pastor, "the compromise of one-third of the ballot boxes in Port-au-Prince."⁵ Conceding the legitimacy of opposition complaints, he argues that "the international community will not help Haiti's democratic process by being silent or dishonest. It has a responsibility to insist that the parties' concerns be effectively addressed."⁶

DEMOCRACY AND HAITI'S FUTURE

The Carter Center report includes a number of constructive recommendations, both near-term and long-term. Among these are:

- ✓ **Improved criteria** for determining complete reruns of the June 1995 elections;
- ✓ **Changes in the composition of the Provisional Electoral Council**, to include replacing members chosen by Aristide with candidates chosen by Parliament;

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- 1 Michael G. Wilson, "Presidential Commission Needed to Avert Disaster in Haiti," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 381, May 18, 1994; Lawrence T. Di Rita, "After Invading Haiti, Then What, Mr. President?" Heritage Foundation *Background Update* No. 231, July 29, 1994; Kim R. Holmes, "Will Congressional Approval of Haiti Invasion Weaken Presidential Prerogatives?" Heritage Foundation *F.Y.I.* No. 36, September 15, 1994; Lawrence T. Di Rita, "Aristide in His Own Words," Heritage Foundation *F.Y.I.* No. 37, September 16, 1994; Lawrence T. Di Rita, "Now Comes the Hard Part: The U.S. Occupation of Haiti," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 391, September 20, 1994.
 - 2 John J. Tierney, Jr., "Democracy a Casualty of Aristide's Bid for Power," Heritage Foundation *Background Update* No. 241, February 28, 1995.
 - 3 Robert A. Pastor, *Mission to Haiti #3, Elections for Parliament and Municipalities, June 23-26, 1995*, The Carter Center, July 17, 1995.
 - 4 *Ibid.*
 - 5 *Ibid.* My own experience as an observer of the June 25 elections for the International Republican Institute confirms this. I also witnessed the burning of ballots, cancellation of voting, irregularities in counting, and intimidation of precincts by Lavalas groups.
 - 6 *Ibid.*

- ✓ **A multi-party National Dialogue and companion Task Force** to begin the process of political reconciliation;
- ✓ **Improved electoral training** (including practice runs for future elections) and counting procedures, and strict voting hours;
- ✓ **Long-term legal and constitutional reform** of Haiti's electoral process.

Such measures, if adopted, would improve the performance of Haiti's electoral system, but recent experience and the long history of Haitian politics both indicate that the problems encountered by Clinton's intervention are embedded deeply in Haiti's political culture. If anything, the Aristide elections have magnified these problems for the rest of the world to see. Thus, the Carter Center's dissent from these elections, while fair and constructive, may have missed the central point. As expressed over a century ago by then Princeton professor Woodrow Wilson: "Democracy...is not created by aspirations or by new faith; it is built up by slow habit...."⁷ The time has not yet arrived to call Haiti a democracy.

⁷ Quoted in Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson: Revolution, War and Peace* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1979), p. 5.

