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THE ADMINISTRATION'S FAILED GAMBLE IN HAITI

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The Clinton Administration may have had good intentions when it intervened in Haiti in 1994, but despite U.S. expenditures of \$3 billion in aid and the commitment of 20,000 U.S. troops, conditions for Haiti's 7.5 million people have not improved. According to recent polls, nearly half of all Haitians believe life is worse today than before Operation Restore Democracy returned democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power. Aristide's hand-picked successor now rules by decree, and the underlying problems of extreme poverty, low literacy, unemployment, and few functioning public institutions continue to plague the nation.

Clearly, the Administration's self-proclaimed "success" in Haiti is a fiction, and elections now scheduled for May 21 offer little hope that the situation will improve. Opposition party politicians fear the voting will be delayed, stolen, or marred by the partisan violence that claimed the lives of radio journalist Jean Domenique in April and Space for Concord party activist Elam Senat in May, and that has provoked the destruction of opposition party meeting places. Rather than continue policies that merely prop up a corrupt and crippled regime, the United States should choose a new course of action that promotes more responsible leadership in Haiti, bolsters public institutions in ways that do not waste money, and helps to educate Haitians to create a secure basis for future development.

Shortsighted Goals. Several factors lie at the root of the Clinton Administration's policy failure in Haiti: a poor understanding of the problems, a desire to make a foreign policy slam dunk, and overconfidence in an untested leader. When it intervened in 1994, the White House ignored the

fact that Haiti had not experienced extended participatory government during its 200-year history. Moreover, the Administration limited its goals to restoring Aristide to the presidency, stanching the outflow of Haitian rafters, and turning over peacekeeping to the United Nations by February 1996. This approach was naive; before the United States could declare victory and exit, Haiti's democratic "restoration" fell apart.

While President Bill Clinton praised Aristide for his "commitment to reconciliation and the rule of law," the radical ex-priest was harassing his opponents in the same ruthless fashion as had past dictators. In 1995, members of Aristide's security forces were implicated in the murders of two dozen opposition figures. The White House even had to persuade Aristide to step down at the end of his term so that his elected successor and protégé, René Préval, could take office.

At that point, the Administration's goal shifted to preventing a meltdown, with big-dollar aid programs and admonitions from a parade of White House intermediaries. In the end, Préval proved no more democratic or open to advice than had his predecessor. Following flawed parliamentary elec-

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tions in 1997, Préval repeatedly blocked a new vote until most legislative seats expired in January 1999, leaving the government with just a president and a handful of unconfirmed cabinet ministers.

Reforms quickly stalled. The Haitian National Police force—trained at great expense by the United Nations, the United States, and other parties—is demoralized and politicized, and its numbers have fallen from 6,000 to 4,000 officers. It largely protects Lavalas party members and allows mobs to attack political opponents and government critics. Absent qualified judges, the justice system is little more than a holding pen for the accused; 80 percent of prisoners are still awaiting trial. Money to bolster public institutions is misspent or diverted to personal gain. Foreign aid for organizing elections (\$6 million to \$8 million each time) has not resulted in any lasting electoral infrastructure.

Equally troubling, Haiti's cooperation on counternarcotics is moribund. Aristide's opponents argue that his party's continuing influence over police administration hinders interdiction. According to the U.S. Department of State, cocaine flowing through Haiti accounts for 14 percent of the narcotic reaching the United States; meanwhile, seizures in Haiti are down by two-thirds since 1998. There are even allegations that drug traffickers supply arms to partisan thugs.

A New Long-Range Policy. Measures to reduce poverty, curtail refugee flows, and control international crime cannot be effective if the Haitian government fails to institute and abide by the rule of law. The Administration, having pinned its hopes on persons rather than institution-building, failed to recognize this principle. To achieve its goals in Haiti, Washington should adopt a long-range policy that helps Haiti develop democracy and ensure its own stability. Such a policy should:

- **Hold Haitian leaders accountable for their actions.** If necessary, the United States should revoke visas and freeze bank accounts of leaders involved in corrupt activities. U.S. federal law enforcement agencies should investigate all

credible allegations against Haitian officials accused of laundering money or facilitating drug and arms trafficking.

- **Support lean, targeted programs that build democratic institutions and the rule of law.** Such programs should seek to cultivate and train cadres of civic leaders and public officials at the grassroots and national levels as a solid foundation for government, not to fund overly ambitious reforms unlikely to survive frequent government upheavals. Further, international donors should train Haitian planners to coordinate the efforts of the more than 270 non-governmental organizations—some with clashing agendas—that now provide aid.
- **Concentrate development assistance where it will do the most good.** U.S. assistance should be used to improve the quality of basic education to help Haiti overcome its paltry 35 percent adult literacy and estimated 60 percent unemployment rates. Educated Haitians will be better prepared to govern themselves and more likely to earn above subsistence-level wages.

Conclusion. Until there is a legitimate and responsible government in Haiti, most outside efforts to fix things will fail. The people of Haiti will not prosper as long as interested parties, including the United States, back self-serving politicians. Haiti's leaders must be held to a common standard of responsibility while the people become better educated and institutions are made more robust. This will require continued scrutiny and time for democratic practices to become institutionalized. If the United States does not commit to a long-term, sensible approach to helping Haiti, the only growth Haiti experiences will be in misery, instability, and problems that threaten the United States and its neighbors in the Caribbean.

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