



## Haiti at the Crossroads of Democracy

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Remarks to American Enterprise Institute

Washington, DC

April 14, 2004

### Introduction

Thank you, Mark (Falcoff), for that kind introduction. Mark is one of the leading scholars of Haitian history and politics working in Washington, and he has contributed many thoughtful insights to the public discourse on Haiti, its relationship with the United States and the international community. I commend him for his work. I also want to thank the American Enterprise Institute for organizing and hosting this event. And thank you all for coming.

When I thought about what I wanted to say here this morning, I knew that I wanted to stress that Haiti is at an important crossroads...that now, perhaps more than at anytime in decades, there was an opportunity for the Haitian people to make a break from their troubled past and begin again to make progress on the path of democracy and development. After waiting for 200 years, Haitians deserve democracy--and a government that looks out for their interests.

Some people look at Haitian history, shrug their shoulders, and say, "Well, it's Haiti, what do you expect?" That cynical perspective overlooks that fact that many times in the past the Haitian people have made great efforts to establish true democracy, only to be undermined from within by the selfish ambitions of a petty tyrant and from without by the low expectations of their friends and neighbors. The Bush Administration believes that if we all do our part and do it right, Haiti will have the democracy it deserves.

I do want to talk to you about those prospects and what the United States will do to help the Haitian people fulfill them, but I realize that to articulate how the United States sees the way ahead, I have to explain how we found ourselves in the present predicament...how the hopes and aspirations of the Haitian people for a truly representative government have been frustrated in the past. It is a familiar story. It is the story of how a popular leader who promises radical change only to become what he once beheld. Sadly this story is not unique to Haiti. It is, if anything, a cautionary tale for leaders and citizens of democracies everywhere.

### A Brief History of Haiti and the Aristide Regime, or How to Lose your Democracy

Haitians are justifiably proud of many historic accomplishments. Haiti is the first nation born of a slave revolution, a revolt that saw the defeat of Napoleon's army. Haiti was the second republic established in the Western Hemisphere, after the United States, and the first black republic in history. During its first century, Haiti endured international isolation and internal strife.

In its second century, a succession of strongmen and failed attempts at implementing democratic rule were followed by the election in 1957 of Dr. Francois Duvalier, a popular leader known as "Papa Doc" who promised democratic reform but quickly resorted to demagoguery and political violence to maintain his self-proclaimed title, "President for Life." He was succeeded by his son, "Baby Doc" Duvalier, who reigned in Haiti until 1986 when a combination of international pressure and internal antagonism brought on by decades of brutal and corrupt misrule forced him from power.

As you know, the dominant figure in Haitian politics of the last thirteen years or so was Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Initially, many had high hopes for this charismatic priest who worked with the least fortunate in Haitian society and found most of his support there. His movement, Lavalas, meaning "cleansing flood" in Creole, was a self-styled reform movement that promised to undo the vestiges of the Duvalier regime.

In hindsight, the Aristide regime bore too much of a resemblance to the Duvalier regime. Despite his early promise and lipservice to democracy, the Aristide years were yet another disappointing chapter in Haitian history. The lesson is that democracy is not an election, a street demonstration, or a dusty legal document, it is a way of living and working together and, as such, it is contingent on what people do and how they treat one another. Leaders can undermine a republic and their own legitimacy by their actions and that is how a people can lose their democracy.

There are many examples of how Jean-Bertrand Aristide contributed to the collapse of his own government. However, four factors stand out:

First, there is the culture of political violence and impunity that characterized his movement and his regime;

Second, the corruption of the institutions of the state that flourished under him;

Third, his polarizing rhetoric and willful refusal to give any quarter to or compromise with political adversaries;

And finally, his flouting of the concerns of his neighbors and friends in the international community.

### Political Violence and Impunity

Early on, Aristide was associated with the most egregious transgression of democratic principles, the use of violence to further political ambition and intimidate opponents. It is the trademark of tyrants that from the beginning of their political careers they are associated with and inspire violent acts. Aristide was a compelling and inflammatory orator, and his followers were known to have "necklaced" opponents with gasoline-filled tires and set them on fire.

Some apologists at the time essentially made a moral relativism and ends-justify-the-means argument. They said, "Well in Haiti, politics is a contact sport, and moving against the remnants of the Duvalier regime required extreme measures." That argument overlooks the fact that murder is simply inconsistent with democracy.

These early incidents were portents of things to come. Critics and adversaries of President Aristide often wound up dead, while their killers went unpunished. The murders of journalists Jean Dominique in April 2000 and Brignol Lindor in December 2001 and the former Aristide-thug-turned-renegade-gang-leader Amiot "Cubain" Metayer in September 2003 are examples.

As years passed, Aristide increasingly relied on chimeres, violent gangs, to maintain his authority, intimidate opponents, and control the streets. A notorious example: On December 5 of last year, a day that came to be known as "Black Friday," chimeres assaulted State University students who were gathering for a demonstration in Port-au-Prince. An estimated 30 students were injured, at least 10 by gunfire. The University Rector suffered 2 broken kneecaps from a brutal beating by chimeres.

### Corruption

In addition to inspiring violence, Aristide also allowed corruption to flourish in the legitimate institutions of the Haitian state. Teleco, Haiti's national telephone monopoly, was one of the few reliable sources of revenue for the Haitian government. Aristide packed its staff with cronies. Often, after a long day of beating up students and democracy activists, chimeres were observed marching down to the Teleco headquarters in Port-au-Prince, where Aristide's apparatchiks would hand out money to the

mob. What should have been the national patrimony was used as a piggybank to fund Aristide's ambitions.

The Haitian National Police was also thoroughly corrupted. Stood up with international aid after the intervention in 1994, the HNP was intended to be a national force that, unlike its many predecessors, would be a credible guardian of Haitian state and effective enforcer of the rule of law. The United States and international community spent hundreds of millions of dollars to ensure the HNP could fulfill this role.

Aristide clearly had other ideas in mind for the HNP. He systematically removed professional policemen and replaced them with thugs and criminals loyal to him. He withheld necessary funding to support, train, and equip the HNP. More and more, Aristide employed it as an instrument of repression. As a consequence, by the end of his reign, the HNP was a hollow and demoralized force.

On paper, it was supposed to be 5,000 men strong. In reality, perhaps a quarter of that number showed up to work on any given day. Many good policemen left the HNP out of frustration. Many dangerous men, men who had no business being in the police force to begin with, were left to fight over the graft that was the perquisite of being an Aristide loyalist on the force. In the end, the HNP was less of a crime fighting organization, than it was an ongoing criminal enterprise.

#### **Demagoguery and Winner Takes All Politics**

The malfeasance at Teleco and the HNP was a part of pattern. The Aristide regime operated on patronage politics. Fanmi Lavalas was aptly named. It operated like a family with Aristide playing the part of the autocratic patriarch. Aristide inculcated an "us against them" belief in his following. His adversaries were not simply political opponents, they were enemies to be driven from the field. Winning an election was not enough, victory had to be absolute.

Aristide's handling of the parliamentary elections of May 2000 was an example of his winner takes all mentality. Not content with a majority won at the polls with the full resources of his political machine, Aristide declared several cronies the winners in close elections that should have gone to a second ballot. His contempt for the democratic process was evident.

For Aristide, it seemed that winning wasn't everything...it was the only thing. It was this approach to politics that made him such a polarizing figure and drove so many people away from him. Even before the split in the Lavalas party, many allies and adversaries came to regard Aristide as ultimately self-interested and untrustworthy.

#### **Flouting the Concerns of His Neighbors and the International Community**

Eventually, many of Aristide's neighbors and members of the international community began see him in this light as well. The Organization of American States passed Resolution 806 and 822 out of concern for the increasing number of politically motivated acts of violence and the collapse of the political process in Haiti.

Resolution 822 called on the Haitian Government to ensure a climate of security and confidence with a view to establishing the conditions necessary for free and fair elections in 2003. It also established November 4 of that year as the date by which an autonomous, credible, and neutral Provisional Electoral Council should be formed.

The United States and other interested nations worked diligently to broker an agreement between opposition parties and the Aristide government throughout the fall of 2003 that would satisfy the opposition's reasonable concerns about security, given the violence they had endured at the hands of the HNP and the chimeres. Aristide refused to guarantee their safety, and no agreement was reached. Despite his public protestations, Aristide was not negotiating in good faith.

Months passed, the deadline for elections approached and tensions grew. As violence began to break out in the capital and outlying cities, many Haitians took to the seas. Naturally, this was of concern to all Haiti's neighbors, including the United States, for humanitarian and security reasons. In his final days, Aristide issued numerous statements on immigration that most observers agree were intentionally ambiguous and intended to put his neighbors on notice that they faced the prospect of a major migration crisis, if they did not come to his aid. It was attempted blackmail, and the real victims were the Haitian people.

#### **Lessons Learned**

I am convinced that Aristide himself is to blame for his own political demise. Had he not encouraged and condoned political violence, he would have had much greater moral authority and political sympathy. Had he not corrupted the state and the HNP, his government could have withstood the challenge brought by a handful of rebels. Had he not alienated so many former allies and adversaries by grabbing for power with both hands, he would likely have had continued success at the polls. Had he not turned his back on his neighbors and friends in the international community--especially when they were trying to help him resolve his political crisis by constitutional, electoral, and peaceful means, he probably would be in office today. Aristide is, as I said before, a disappointing chapter in Haitian history and a cautionary tale.

#### **Haiti's Future**

Fortunately for the people of Haiti, that chapter is over, and they now have the opportunity to write a new one. As Secretary Powell observed during his recent visit to Haiti, the Government of President Alexander and Prime Minister Latortue is off to a good start. The cabinet that the Prime Minister has named is comprised of many experts in their fields, and it is as professional and non-partisan a group of public servants as Haiti has ever had. Earlier this month, the Government brokered an agreement with political parties that calls for elections in 2005. That timeframe will allow for the restoration of government services and the necessary preparations for national elections.

The Multinational Interim Force (MIF) has established security in the capital and many outlying cities. I want to thank the governments of France, Canada, and Chile for their contributions to the MIF. Their soldiers and the US forces in Haiti have performed brilliantly under difficult circumstances. We are also engaged in discussions with the United Nations and other member states as to the nature and composition of the follow-on Peacekeeping Force (PKO,) and those talks are progressing well.

At the beginning of my speech, I said that if we in the International Community do our part right, Haiti would have the true democracy that it deserves. To achieve that goal, the Bush Administration believes that our engagement with Haiti needs to be guided by certain principles.

#### **Principles of US Engagement in Haiti**

First of all, the norms established by the Inter-American Democratic Charter and other international conventions regarding human rights must be adhered to in Haiti. Political power must not be turned over to persons who have participated in political violence, including irregular armed groups. Moreover, the political process should encourage participation by all nonviolent, peaceful political movements, including Lavalas.

Second, if Haiti is to make a break with its dark past, no form of political violence or corruption can be tolerated. It is vital to restore security and impose the rule of law through duly authorized forces, including the MIF, PKO, and a renovated, apolitical, independent, and professional HNP. All Haitians, without regard to political affiliation, must be held accountable for past crimes through a system of justice, not revenge.

Third, to begin to fulfill Haiti's economic potential and provide opportunity for the Haitian people, we will engage the Government of Haiti, the Haitian private sector and the Haitian Diaspora. We will help jumpstart private sector job creation, trade and investment. We will help the Government of Haiti ensure accountability in public finances including the effective and timely use of development resources. We will provide technical and legal aid to update Haiti's Commercial Code, which dates from the 19th century, in order to help create the right environment for growth and wealth creation. We will also encourage the Government of Haiti to move forward, at the appropriate time, with restructuring and privatization of some public sector enterprises through a transparent process.

#### **US Engagement**

We have already begun to put these principles into action. As Secretary Powell announced during his visit last week, we are deploying a team of seven security experts to the appropriate Haitian government ministries and agencies to aid Haitian officials as they rebuild their security and justice systems. The U.S. Treasury Department will send a team to Haiti to determine the technical assistance needed by the Ministry of Finance, and we are prepared to assist Haitian authorities in the recovery of assets that may have been illegally diverted.

In addition to an ongoing \$52 million economic development and humanitarian assistance program, the U.S. will begin an urgent three-year jobs program, which will provide tens of thousands of jobs to improve municipal infrastructure and create jobs in Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haïtien, Gonaïves and other locations as needed. The project will rehabilitate schools and public buildings destroyed by rioting and burning; build or rehabilitate roads; and, improve community water supplies.

Prospectively, the US government will seek to expand our humanitarian development programs to ensure that the medical and nutritional needs of Haiti's most disadvantaged people are met. Since the latest crisis began to unfold in February, the US has responded with additional funds totaling \$3 million to provide badly needed medical and food supplies.

On the political side, we will allocate \$9 million for elections and democracy building to support the activities of the OAS Special Mission for Strengthening Democracy in Haiti. This money is in addition to the special voluntary contribution of \$4.9 million recently given to the Special Mission.

Other efforts may include training and assistance to the Haitian National Police and support for Haiti's new Truth, Justice and National Reconciliation Commission.

**Conclusion**

The Haitian people face a real challenge, but I am confident that they are up to it. Haiti has an opportunity to make a break from the past. At previous critical junctures, the hard work and aspirations of the Haitian people were subverted from within by bad leaders and from without by indifference and cynicism in the international community, but we do not have to repeat those mistakes. If we move forward and abide by principles of democracy as opposed to expediency, I am sure that we will succeed.

Thank you.



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