

**Committee on International Relations
United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere**

Hon. Cass Ballenger, North Carolina, Chairman Hearing:

**The Situation in Haiti
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to speak before you and other members of the subcommittee and the U.S. House of Representatives today. I am happy to have this opportunity to share my insights and analysis on what is going on in Haiti. I have followed Haiti and Haiti-US policy issues for 25 years. Over that time I have come to know the country both from the 'bottom-up' through work at the Inter-American Foundation, a U.S. government agency, where I held responsibility for its grassroots development programs in Haiti, and from the 'top down' through both work at the U.S. Department of State in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and scholarly activities at Johns Hopkins, Georgetown, and Brown Universities. I continue my involvement with Haiti as the Director of the Trinity College Haiti Program in Washington, DC. This program has been supported by the Ford and the Rockefeller Foundations.

DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN

Since this is a time of year when many of us begin to turn our attention to baseball, allow me to open my remarks by citing a phrase made famous by one of the sport's most colorful characters, Yogi Berra, who coined the expression "deja vu all over again." What we are seeing today in Haiti is something akin to that expression. And, as the expression implies, to understand the present we need to look backward. Today, in the streets of Port-au-Prince and in other cities and towns of Haiti, we have been seeing the kind of murder and mayhem that characterized the country between 1991 and 1994, following a violent coup d'etat carried out by Haiti's army, leading to three years of brutal de facto military rule. Gunmen in fatigues roam the streets, menacing citizens and waving their automatic weapons arrogantly. Bodies mysteriously turn up at intersections in city streets, some of them face down with hands bound and bullet holes in their backs. Rampaging mobs of civilians and erstwhile soldiers and members of paramilitary death squads attack public and private property, looting, burning and destroying in a practice that Haitians call dechoukaj, or uprooting.

Elected and appointed government officials, in fear of their lives, are either going into hiding within Haiti or fleeing the country. In press reports released earlier today, it is stated that U.S. Marines have become ambulant bodyguards for Haitian officials rushing to the airport to save themselves. Also, we have begun to receive reports of meetings between the armed thugs dressed up in military fatigues and members of the unarmed opposition, and of tense confrontations between US military officials and the thugs. And, finally, we have begun to receive reports that cracks are already forming in the facade of unity among the armed and unarmed opponents of the recently uprooted, elected President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, as Haiti's next struggle for power begins in earnest. Yes, Mr. Chairman, this is certainly a case of "deja vu all over again."

MULTIPLE DISAPPOINTMENTS

Last week, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell stated that he had been "disappointed" with Haiti's now-deposed president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Secretary Powell is correct in this statement, as there is no doubt that Mr. Aristide provided much to be disappointed about. But I wonder if Mr. Powell is also disappointed in Haiti's self-proclaimed democratic opposition, a group of political and economic leaders who have also given us much to criticize and regret.

The single-minded intransigence of this largely ad hoc group toward achieving its one, unifying objective - the removal of Mr. Aristide from office - has motivated it to behave rather undemocratically. Its leaders have failed to engage in true democratic process as measured by elections and by negotiated solutions to political problems. Instead, they have acted with a veto from an empty chair from the negotiating table, repeatedly undermining or thwarting internationally-led attempts to find a solution to Haiti's political crisis. Also, and particularly over the past two months, they have practiced that deeply rooted Haitian political practice of giving a 'wink and a nod' to violence in the street if you believe it furthers your political objectives.

I wonder, as well, if Mr. Powell was disappointed, or perhaps even outraged, by the failure of the unarmed opposition to respond to the latest international urgings, two weekends ago, when both he, via telephone, and his Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere, Mr. Roger Noriega, in person, pushed for this group to finally agree to take its seat at the negotiating table - when the odds appeared highly favorable for it to achieve an objective of political inclusion.

The CARICOM plan, a solid recipe for achieving a negotiated, non-violent solution to Haiti's long lasting and disastrous political crisis, supported not only by the United States, but by all the hemisphere's democratic governments, was simply rejected out-of-hand by this so-called democratic group. This failure of US influence - perhaps we can say of US diplomacy - is doubly shocking since the personalities who comprise this opposition have been widely perceived as allies - even sycophants - of Washington. Among these personalities are individuals who have participated in an array of political strategy meetings organized by the International Republican Institute using US government funds, and who have repeatedly visited Washington over the past three years.

And, at least one of the highest profile leaders of this faction, Mr. Andre Apaid, is a US citizen. As this veteran Haiti-watcher scans this political landscape, I get a strong sense of Haitian *deja vu* all over again, as self-styled and unelected political leaders seek the ways and means to broker their way into power. In their mind's eye, again taking a page from deeply rooted Haitian political practice, their means justify their ends.

And what are those ends? Allow me to state, Mr. Chairman, that what we have been seeing in Haiti is not a political struggle of competing issues, ideas, and principals. What we have been seeing in Haiti is nothing more than a struggle among the political class and its allies, and the incumbent government to seize, and/or to hold on to, power. Let us hope that the dust of confrontation and violence settles in Haiti and that moderate, reasonable voices, with viable ideas, will emerge from among those struggling for power and some true democratic credentials will begin to be earned. Let us hope, also, that new, more democratic voices, less tainted by participation in the tragic political confrontations of the past three years, will come forth to relieve the country of its largely failed leadership on both sides of the current political equation.

THE CONDUCT OF U.S. POLICY TOWARD HAITI

In terms of disappointment, Mr. Chairman and members of the sub-committee, I also wonder whether this sense of Mr. Powell has extended to those who have been largely responsible for the conduct of U.S. policy toward Haiti since January 2001. As I have outlined in Trinity College Haiti Program Briefing Paper Number 8, *US Policy Toward Haiti: Engagement or Estrangement*, published last November, over the past ten years, US policy toward Haiti has evolved from one where our government was constructively engaged with the government of Haiti in an attempt to nurture democratic institutions and democratic practice in this country trying to find its way out of 200 years of bad and mostly authoritarian governance, to a policy that worked to isolate the Haitian government, withhold resources from it, punish it, and push it into a corner.

Concurrently, as we constantly chastised that government, our efforts focused more and more exclusively on working with Haiti's opposition groups. In following this path, we sacrificed carefully constructed leverage and influence with Haitian elected political actors, many of whom are already pre-disposed to be distrustful of the United States as a dominant force in Haitian political reality that has not always made choices that have worked toward the benefit of Haiti's people.

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit Briefing Paper Number 8 as a part of my written testimony since it elaborates this analysis in much greater detail than I have an opportunity to do in this testimony today. Not all in Washington abandoned that leverage and influence we worked to achieve over many years. You may recall, Mr. Chairman, that in March 2001, I escorted to your office several high Haitian government officials who had traveled to Washington only a month after the inauguration of Mr. Aristide to his second term in office to participate in a symposium on Haiti at Trinity College. Among them were Mr. Yvon Neptune, who at that time was the President of Haiti's Senate, and Mr. Leslie Voltaire, the then- and current - Minister for Haitians Living Overseas. Also a part of the Haitian government delegation that visited you were two ministers who, even though members of the opposition, had accepted Mr. Aristide's invitation to join his government's cabinet. One of these ministers was Mr. Marc Louis Bazin, Mr. Aristide's principal opponent in the 1990 election who, subsequently, briefly served as the Prime Minister of the 1991-1994 de facto military regime. What better example could we have had of the potential for political reconciliation in Haiti than Mr. Aristide and Mr. Bazin working together.

Sadly, because Mr. Bazin had rejected participation in the bitterly recidivistic opposition to Mr. Aristide (at that time called the "Democratic Convergence"), his credentials as a member of the opposition working within the Lavalas government were not accepted by Aristide's opponents in Haiti and in Washington.

Much to your credit, Mr. Chairman, you were open to meeting these Haitian government officials and engaging them in constructive conversation. And they were anxious to engage you. You even made an extra effort by taking time from your busy schedule to travel up North Capital Street to Trinity's campus the next day to listen to them speak at the symposium.

Sadly, Executive Branch officials reacted quite differently to this opportunity for engagement and dialogue. Not only did ranking officials in Washington choose not to engage these Haitian government officials, but, in the run-up to the symposium, they urged me not to invite them to Washington, adding that this would embarrass the new American administration. This, Mr. Chairman, is my own personal story of a golden opportunity the Bush Administration lost to engage, to maintain/strengthen influence and leverage in Haiti, and to assist Haiti emerge from its dark political past. Surely, this is not the only time that administration officials refused an opportunity like this.

Rather than taking advantage of this and similar opportunities, it seems to me that our government was not only busy isolating Haiti's elected government, but, through various intermediaries and political operatives in Washington, it was allowing signals to travel to Port-au-Prince that emboldened the opposition and its "zero option" policy of intransigence by suggesting that the opposition had Washington's support.

THE CHIMERES OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

This is not my assessment alone. This concern that presumptive policy signals were being sent to Port-au-Prince from Washington, and that those signals were highly damaging to efforts to resolve what was, back then, a relatively reparable political crisis, was shared by none other than the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti. In his farewell address in Port-au-Prince last summer to HAMCHAM, the Haitian-American Chamber of Commerce, the career diplomat who headed our embassy in Haiti, the Honorable Brian Dean Curran, reflected on Haiti's long-standing political crisis remarking:

"There is an incoherence (in Haiti) that has troubled me: the incoherence of the way Washington's views are interpreted here. Those of you who know me will realize that since I arrived here as President Clinton's Ambassador and then President Bush's, I have always talked straight about US policy and what might and might not be new policy directions. But there were many in Haiti who preferred not to listen to me, the president's representative, but to their own friends in Washington, sirens of extremism or revanchism on the one hand or apologists on the other. They don't hold official positions. I call them the chimeres of Washington."

And who, pray tell, might these irregular actors be? I would suggest, Mr. Chairman, that the committee takes steps to get to the bottom of this. It might begin by heeding the supposition of the Washington Post that the International Republican Institute has played an important role in the 'wink and nod' messages from

Washington sent to the opposition. In its February 19th edition, the Post editorialized: "In particular, it (the administration) has declined to exercise its considerable leverage on the civilian opposition parties, some of which have been supported by such U.S. groups as the International Republican Institute and which have rejected any political solution short of Mr. Aristide's immediate resignation."

In sum, Mr. Chairman, it seems to me that our policy - and practices - toward Haiti in recent years have been driven, unfortunately, by a deeply rooted animosity to one man - Jean-Bertrand Aristide - that has been held among a relatively small but powerful group of actors in Washington. Policies rigorously enacted under the auspices of this zealous group in order either to emasculate Mr. Aristide politically or to force him out of office, as we are seeing right now, have put the citizens and country of Haiti at grave risk, and have created potential spill over effects both in the Caribbean and on to our shores.

To achieve the narrow political goal of getting Mr. Aristide, the chimeres of Washington have, in essence, enacted policies that have devastated Haiti. What better example can one identify of the irresponsibility of being willing to throw out the bathwater in order to get at the baby.

ACTS OF DESPERATION

As I reflect on the result of these policies of isolation, non-engagement, constant criticism and punitive action I get the sense of the gradual strangulation of an elected government. As the noose around its neck tightened, it was pushed increasingly toward ill-advised and desperate acts. The suspension of international assistance was a particularly key element of strangulation.

The government of Mr. Aristide, like all governments in this tragically poor and resourcestarved country, was deeply dependent on external assistance in order to enact government programs. During his inaugural address of February 7, 2001, Mr. Aristide took a quite unusual - perhaps even unprecedented - step for a Haitian President when he outlined a series of social welfare, infrastructure development and investment goals of his government, suggesting that his term in office be judged according to his ability to meet these goals. These plans were derived from the Lavalas Family party's "White Paper" for Haiti, an unusual attempt - for Haitian political parties - to set forth a platform that directed itself toward the country's multitude of social, economic and environmental problems.

Sadly, following the virtual complete suspension of bilateral and multilateral aid to his government as a result of the May 2000 election's eight flawed senatorial vote counts and the Haitian government's bewildering failure to address this issue, few resources were available to the government to work toward these goals. As Mr. Aristide and his government were pushed more and more into a corner, predictable results emerged. With fewer and fewer resources to manage, the government was left to manage scarcity and, became increasingly desperate and corrupt. And, in Haiti's political reality, managing scarcity means managing power, with equally predictable results. Mr. Aristide, presiding over a resource starved government under constant assault from political opponents both in and beyond Haiti, took to the streets, aligning his government with impoverished urban youth - the now infamous chimeres of Haiti - who, by way of organized gangs, served as a means of managing the maintenance of power.

Interviews with urban gang leaders over the past several months on various National Public Radio (NPR) broadcasts have been quite revealing in this regard and have underscored the enormous tragedy of both the government's strangulation and its descent into the streets. Those interviewed have repeatedly suggested that they would have preferred to have a legitimate government job as opposed to becoming a member or leader of a street gang. Sadly, with no jobs available, the life of a chimere presented itself as a viable option.

Mr. Chairman, when I was a boy growing up in the New Jersey suburbs in an area that had just recently been farmland, I occasionally encountered a rabbit that had found its way into my back yard that was enclosed with a chain link fence. Sometimes, I attempted to catch the rabbit, gradually backing it into a corner of the fence as what I perceived as the best strategy to capture it. I never did manage to catch one of those elusive critters, but I recall vividly how the rabbits that I managed to back into the corner of the fence

became increasingly desperate as their maneuvering space shrank. In fact, I recall vividly on one occasion how a panicked rabbit that I had edged into the corner acted with such desperation that bashed itself against the fence, injuring itself in its attempts to elude my grasp. Aghast at the blood streaming from the animal, I quickly backed away. This was the last time I tried cornering a rabbit in order to capture it. It was not my goal to force self-inflicted damage.

I relate this story, Mr. Chairman, because I think of it when I reflect on what has happened in Haiti over the past several years. As the government of Haiti was increasingly backed into that corner, it acted more and more like that panicked rabbit of my youth, injuring itself in desperation. Ultimately, as its maneuvering space shrank, the government, in its increasing desperation to escape the trap, inflicted many wounds on itself. What a tragedy of huge proportions.

A PYRRHIC VICTORY

The departure of Mr. Aristide, at least for now, has been achieved. Those who have sought it for quite some time are certainly rejoicing their political victory. But their victory is proving to be a Pyrrhic one as Haiti descends deeper on the slippery slope of lawlessness. Revenge killing and settling scores - in Port-au-Prince and elsewhere in the country - have become the new *ordre du jour*. Prisons throughout the country have been emptied. Secondary cities, towns and villages across the land have become the domain of gang leaders establishing fiefdoms in what is now a balkanized country. And, with the descent into lawlessness comes the probable scenario of Haiti's emergence as a kind of narco-trafficking free state, as the countryside's runways and ports fall within the domain of the local warlords, many of whom already have a history of involvement in drug trafficking.

The victory is Pyrrhic also, Mr. Chairman, because it was achieved through the slow strangulation of Haiti's capacity to respond to the humanitarian, social and environmental challenges and crises before it. And, in recent weeks, we have seen in particular a rash of significant damage to the country's already weak humanitarian and development infrastructure, as roads and ports have been severely damaged and destroyed, and public and private buildings looted and burned.

Perhaps the most Pyrrhic element of this victory, however, has been its achievement at the expense of the Haitian population's faith in democracy. This is illustrated most vividly by the enthusiastic welcome being given by some to the return of the gunmen. While there should be no doubt that this welcome has been fueled by a realistic sense of self-preservation by those who do not have the guns, by the gratitude of those released from Haiti's jails and their families, and by former military and paramilitary figures who have been waiting patiently for such an opening to occur, this welcome is also fueled by another factor. Haiti's citizens are deeply disappointed, indeed, disgusted, with the comportment of all of the country's political leaders who, over the past decade, have been so intent on their own, personal struggles to maintain or attain power that they have sacrificed their country. To coin a phrase, they have been fiddling while Rome has been burning.

This disenchantment with democracy is an enormously tragic and dangerous development. Haitians have harbored 'dreams of democracy' since the 1986 ouster of the Duvalier dictatorship. Their dreams have repeatedly been turned into nightmares. It is in everyone's interest in this room that we work together to deflect that disenchantment and restore faith in the resolution of disputes through participation, engagement, the peaceful mediation of differences, rule of law, and the rejection of all forms of political intimidation, violence and recidivism.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF DEJA VU

I will leave to others the debate and the necessary investigation over the circumstances of Mr. Aristide's abrupt departure from Haiti last Sunday. Surely, the removal - regardless of how it occurred - of a democratically-elected leader prior to the completion of his term - is a set-back to Haiti's democratic process and a threat to other nations in the hemisphere; indeed around the world. Regardless of whether or not Mr. Aristide is restored to the presidency to complete his term of office ending on February 7, 2006, however, there are several steps we can take, actions we can support, and principles that can guide us that

will contribute toward a sustained resolution of Haiti's seemingly unending internal and external political warfare.

First, from a Washington and US perspective, we must forge a bi-partisan approach toward Haiti. Of course, this being Washington and ours being a democracy, we will agree to disagree over certain specifics. But, even amid our disagreements, we must be prepared to examine our role in Haiti's affairs in a more even-handed manner that does not choose sides, stem from deeply rooted personal animosities, or seek to profit from Haiti's misfortunes.

In this regard, it is of great necessity that the chimeres of Washington be removed from any real or perceived role in the future of U.S. policy toward Haiti. We must put an end to 'wink and nod' messages coming out of Washington. These messages - and actions that reinforced them - have caused considerable damage not only to Haiti, but also to the credibility of Washington's leadership on Haiti and around the world. I would urge you, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, to examine the roles of these chimeres, who, as the US Ambassador suggested, were aiding and abetting Haiti's tragedies. Specifically, I would urge you to clarify the validity of various allegations that have been leveled at the International Republican Institute for its role in exacerbating and reinforcing an atmosphere of political intransigence and violence in Haiti. I would urge you, also, to explore alleged links among Haiti's resurgent gunmen once based in the Dominican Republic and drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, and money laundering.

Second, I would urge us support policies and practices that will reinforce the notion of political inclusion in Haiti. Let us work - successfully this time - not to play favorites, but rather work to get all the legitimate political actors under the political tent. It is of vital importance that Haiti's once and future political actors all participate in the governance of their country and accept the responsibilities that come along with it. To this end, the framework offered by the CARICOM plan is an excellent place to start. Acts of dechoukaj aimed at members of the Aristide government and the Lavalas party, and the urgent flight from the country of these political actors is not.

Third, and directly related to the need to have all legitimate political actors gain inclusion in governance, we must support steps to put an end to Haiti's tried and true political practices of 'winner takes all' and 'loser undermines the winner.' In this regard, Haiti's electoral laws that prescribe a winner takes all approach toward each and every elective office should be reexamined.

In my view, Mr. Chairman, this approach, particularly in a country that has had one dominant party competing with many smaller ones, has only exacerbated polarization and confrontation. Some form of proportional representation, perhaps in Haiti's Chamber of Deputies, would help to ensure broader political participation. A party that captures, say, 10 percent of the votes nationwide, could be awarded 10 percent of the seats in that parliamentary body. This would both bring that element into the process and force upon it the responsibilities of governance.

Fourth, there is an immediate need to move against the armed thugs and convicts who have been freed from prison, and to re-establish some semblance of rule of law. In this regard, Haiti's civilian-led police need immediate strengthening and support, and its judicial system requires intense and long term support. The thugs must not find their way into the police force. Putting this genie back into the bottle will be a difficult, but necessary element not only to allow the country to move forward, but to provide a needed push toward ending impunity. The return of the army and of the FRAPH gunmen and criminals is in the best interests of only those particular individuals, not of the Haiti, its citizens, and the international community.

Fifth, we need to be prepared to stick with Haiti over the long haul. Staying the course will mean that our attention to Haiti can not be merely intense and short term, as it was in 1994/95, and then leaving the country to its own devices, while enacting partisan-driven policies in Washington that harmed gains that had been made. If nation-building is an expression that gives some of you heartburn, think of perhaps another approach - call it "nation-nurturing" - where we provide active and sustained support to the non-governmental - and government - bodies in Haiti that will develop the country and its required institutions. In other words, we do not have to build Haiti, but we should have a long term commitment to all Haitians to help them rebuild their own country.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Mr. Chairman, the tragic developments in Haiti, that are still unfolding, are to some considerable extent the result of failed US policies and practices that have sacrificed the well-being of Haiti to achieve a narrow political goal - the removal of one man from elected office. These policies and practices have not served Secretary Powell; they have not served President Bush; they have not served the United States Congress, they have not served the American people, and they have surely not served the long-suffering people of Haiti.

Again, I thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts and analysis with you, and I stand ready to work with all of you to help improving the way the government of the United States relates to and works with its Caribbean neighbor.

Thank you.