

## **Haiti: Democracy Denied; Justice Desired**

**Clifford Griffin**

**North Carolina State University**

### **Introduction**

Although impoverished and corrupt, Haiti nonetheless had a democratically elected president. But within a mere two months of celebrating its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary as the first independent Black republic in the Americas, Haiti's President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was being whisked away at gunpoint and under threat of his life in the early hours of the morning of February 29, 2004. The fact that a mini-revolution against Aristide led by a few hundred rebels, including an alleged drug-dealing police chief could sway major countries, including the US, Canada, and France to demand the resignation of an elected president should sound alarm bells throughout the hemisphere.

At one extreme, the two richest and oldest democracies in the Americas—the US and Canada—were among the most vocal in calling for Aristide's resignation. In the middle were Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and most members of the Organization of American States (OAS), who were deafeningly silent on this issue. And at the other end were the Caribbean Community and Common Market countries (CARICOM)—the smallest and among the most democratic in the region—who were most strident and consistent in their efforts to preserve the democratic experiment in Haiti.

Aristide's undemocratic ouster has taken place at a time when violent antigovernment groups seem to be spreading in several Latin American countries with politically weak elected leaders, and where some elected governments seem more tolerant of dictatorships than their predecessors. This was the case in Peru under President

Alberto Fujimori; and it also appears to be the case in Venezuela under President Hugo Chávez. The armed rebellion against Aristide comes a mere five months after radical, Indian-led leftist groups forced the resignation of a president in Bolivia and after similar riots brought down a democratic president in Argentina in 2001 and in Ecuador in 2000 (Miami Herald 29 February 2004). Moreover, these developments have taken place some twelve years after OAS members signed a number of protocols committing themselves to democracy, generally, and to creating mechanisms to preserve democratic institutions and processes, specifically, should they become threatened.

Why the apparent backslide from this commitment to democracy? The answer to this question is embedded in the larger issue of whether the US, the indisputably most highly influential actor in this hemisphere, really believes in democracy or prefers to have leaders in power willing to conform with and readily acquiesce to Washington's wishes. It is an open secret that the Bush Administration is uncomfortable with the leadership style and the relationships that have been cultivated by Venezuela's democratically elected President Hugo Chávez, including his open support for and aid to the government of Fidel Castro. When a short-lived coup removed the Venezuelan leader from power, the Bush Administration's premature support of the new government did not surprise many observers. But when the coup collapsed a few days later, it was a US administration, whose rhetoric was patently inconsistent with its actions—an administration that sent clear and unmistakable signals that it would recognize a new Venezuelan government installed by force rather than by elections—that was forced to backpedal. Incidentally, the core of Chávez's support in Venezuela is similar to the base of Aristide's support in Haiti—the overwhelmingly poor masses who have long been excluded from the political

process. Correspondingly, US support is directed largely to the business and political elite in both countries, who see very little opportunity to regain political power through the ballot box given the popularity of these two leaders.

In light of the foregoing, and in attempt to answer the question posed above, two interrelated arguments are made in this paper. If the US believes in democracy, then 1) democracy's cause will not be well served if the international community, generally, and the US, in particular, allows the precedent to be set whereby an elected President or Prime Minister can be toppled by armed gangs; and 2), if the US believes in democracy, then whenever democracy initiatives are undertaken, emphasis should be placed upon institutions and processes rather than on individuals. Individuals by themselves cannot bring about democracy; they can only help guide the process. The enduring mistake made by the US in particular is that it has focused its initiatives on individuals rather than institutions and process. These cautionary statements are being made in light of emerging trends in Latin America and the Caribbean 15 years after the decade of the 1980s had been dubbed the decade of democracy for the countries in the region—a period during which many countries in this hemisphere underwent a transition from a variety of authoritarian regimes to more democratic ones.

### **Deflated Euphoria and Enlightened Self-Interest**

The decade of the 1980s, which was dubbed “the decade of democracy” for many previously non-democratic countries around the world, including Latin America and the Caribbean, was characterized by two worldwide reform movements: one toward free markets systems and the other toward liberal democratic forms of governance. The

euphoria that accompanied those reform movements has all but subsided because economic globalization has eroded rather than enhanced the economic opportunities for many countries. World Bank figures indicate that Latin America in 2002 suffered its most disastrous economic performance in nearly two decades, with a negative growth rate of 1.3 per cent ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)). Indeed, according to Pereira, Maravall and Przeworsky (1993), “whenever democratic governments followed neoliberal tenets, the outcome has been stagnation, increased poverty, political discontent, and the debilitation of democracy.” The euphoria has also subsided because democracy has yet to plant deep roots in the soil of many of these countries as well. Indeed, the evidence suggests that far more effort has been placed on opening markets than on developing and supporting democratic institutions.

As if to underscore its commitment to democracy and human dignity, the Bush Doctrine asserts that America’s national security strategy, which is based on a distinctly American internationalism, aims to help make the world not just safer but better via “political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity.” Toward that end, the US “must stand firmly for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the absolute power of the state; free speech; freedom of worship; equal justice; respect for women; religious and ethnic tolerance; and respect for private property” ([www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss2.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss2.html)).

Expounding on his concern and commitment to democracy during a speech commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) on November 6, 2003, President Bush made the following statements: “Time after time, observers have questioned whether this country, or that people, or this group, are “ready”

for democracy—as if freedom were a prize you win for meeting our own Western standards of progress. In fact, the daily work of democracy itself is the path of progress. It teaches cooperation, the free exchange of ideas, and the peaceful resolution of differences. As men and women are showing, from Bangladesh to Botswana, to Mongolia, it is the practice of democracy that makes a nation ready for democracy, and every nation can start on this path.” And in order to secure these democracy objectives, the US will “use our foreign use our foreign aid to promote freedom and support those who struggle non-violently for it, ensuring that nations moving toward democracy are rewarded for the steps they take;” and will “make freedom and the development of democratic institutions key themes in our bilateral relations, seeking solidarity and cooperation from other democracies while we press governments that deny human rights to move toward a better future ([www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss2.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss2.html)).

Notwithstanding these lofty pronouncements and promulgations, the Bush Administration displayed a demonstrably lack of commitment to its declared democratic principles by virtue of its own complicity in the non-democratic removal of Haiti’s democratically elected president. Also complicit in this event is the government of France, whose prominent role strongly suggests a connection between the events in Haiti and the rift that emerged between the US and France over the Iraqi crisis.

President Bush’s conviction that he was right to wage war against Iraq remains as fixed as President Chirac’s conviction that he was right to oppose it. During the Iraq crisis, US Secretary of State Colin Powell and France’s Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin each felt betrayed by the other. Secretary Powell apparently felt that he was taken by surprise Mr. de Villepin turned a January 2003 UN Security Council meeting

into a captive opportunity to severely criticize Washington and to forcefully and unreservedly declare that military action against Iraq was unjustified. Mr. de Villepin, in turn, claims that he felt a sense of betrayal following Secretary Powell assurances that the goal of US policy was not to overthrow Saddam Hussein but to disarm Iraq.

These ill feelings, notwithstanding, both countries—the US more so—concluded that they shared a common interest in forestalling an exodus of refugees from Haiti. The Bush Administration felt that the absence of law and order in Haiti might result in large numbers of Haitians taking to the sea in overloaded, un-seaworthy crafts and wash up on the shores of Florida, especially during an election year. When Haiti fell to an armed insurrection in 1991, some 40,000 refugees arrived on the shores of south Florida. As the latest armed insurrection unfolded, some 1,076 Haitian were intercepted by the US Coast Guard while 137 arrived in Portland, Jamaica, approximately 100 miles. France, on the other hand, was somewhat concerned about an influx of refugees into its Caribbean territories. And even with the presence of French and American troops and the violence apparently subsiding, the number of refugees continues to increase. As of April 11, some 361 Haitian refugees have arrived in Jamaica with 51 arriving on Easter Sunday. In short, stopping refugees became a high priority for the US as President Bush declared that “we will turn back any refugee that attempts to reach our shores” (New York Times, March 7, 2004), as he ordered the deployment of Marines and the US Coast Guard.

Continued consultations resulted in France apparently receiving a nod from the Bush Administration to lead the clarion call for Aristide’s resignation despite CARICOM’S efforts to broker an agreement that would stabilize the situation and allow the president to complete his term that was scheduled to end his term in 2006. This call,

together with the French plan for an international peacekeeping mission in Haiti, may have been as much geared to end the bloodshed as to take a dramatic step to mend fences with the US in the aftermath of the Iraq war. The evidence suggests that it took the Haitian crisis to get French-American relations back on track. Underscoring this development is France's Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin's description of President Aristide's departure as the result of "perfect coordination" between France and the US. Complementing this development is President Bush's telephone call to President Chirac expressing delight over "the excellent French-American cooperation in Haiti" and to "thank France for its action" (New York Times, March 3, 2004).

The decision by the French government to fall on its collective sword for the Bush Administration, therefore, serves to affirm Lord Palmerson's statement before the British House of Parliament that Her Majesty's government has no permanent allies, only "permanent interests" (Brown 2002, 82-83). This comment has served as the basis for one truism in world politics, which holds that countries do not have friends; instead, they have interests. And in the pursuit of national interests, principles are often jettisoned. This perspective is consistent with Elaine Sciolino's claim that while motivated by their own histories, national interest, and domestic politics, the joint diplomacy over Haiti dramatically demonstrates the ability of longtime allies to overlook their differences, find common ground, play to their strengths, and even operate in an atmosphere of trust (New York Times, March 3, 2004). In the process, national interests trumped a people's desire for democracy and human dignity. Where, then, does democracy factor in the lives of ordinary Haitians?

**Hemispheric Democratic Commitment?**

The past dozen or so years have witnessed a number of developments in Latin America and the Caribbean geared toward the promotion of democracy. Beginning in June 1991, members of the OAS adopted Resolution 1080, the “Santiago Commitment to Democracy and the Renewal of the Inter-American System.” According to this agreement, all states in the Americas agree to promote and maintain democratic systems of governance in their respective territories and to assist member nations in their efforts to secure and preserve their right to democratic rule. Should that right be interrupted, abrogated, or rescinded, a procedure would be initiated, which includes calling for an immediate meeting with the OAS Permanent Council within three days to be followed by a meeting of the foreign ministers or the OAS General Assembly. Thus, deviating from a long-standing antipathy toward outside intervention into a member’s internal affairs, Resolution 1080 created a framework for action regarding threats to democracy. And among the possible responses would be diplomatic pressure, trade embargoes, aid cut-offs, and military intervention. Coups in Haiti, Peru, Guatemala, Paraguay and Venezuela soon tested the resolve of the OAS.

Resolution 1080 was invoked to justify the response to the 1991 coup that ousted Aristide. Within three days the OAS met and agreed to suspend diplomatic ties, aid, trade, and freeze the assets of the coup leaders. Subsequent negotiations produced the Governor’s Island Agreement. Although that military broke that agreement, Aristide was eventually returned to office in Haiti.

In 1992 when Peru’s President Fujimori dissolved Congress, closed the courts and suspended the constitution, Resolution 1080 resulted in an immediate denunciation and a



withdrawal of aid resulted and within eight days, the OAS foreign minister strongly deplored the coup and pushed Fujimori to reinstate the Congress. And when Guatemala's President Serrano decided to dissolve Congress and abolish the constitution in May 1993, the OAS Permanent Council condemned the coup, sent the secretary general to Guatemala and began to pressure the government to back down from this interruption in democratic rule. About 10 days later, Serrano resigned, and the Congress and Constitution were reinstated. A similar set of circumstances occurred in Paraguay in 1996.

In 1992, the Declaration of Nassau (AG/DEC. 1 (XXII-O/92)) committed member states to develop mechanisms whereby assistance may be provided to member states, upon request, to promote, preserve and strengthen representative democracy, in order to complement and give effect to the provisions of Resolution 1080. The 1993 Declaration of Managua for the Promotion of Democracy and Development (AG/RES.4 XXIII-0/93) witnessed member states expressing their conviction that democracy, freedom and development are inseparable and indivisible parts of a renewed and integral vision of American solidarity. In that regard, instilling such values would depend on the capacity of the OAS to contribute to the preservation and strengthening of the democratic structures in the hemisphere. In addition, the OAS also calls for ongoing and creative work to prevent and anticipate the very causes of the problems that affect a democratic system of government.

Later in 1992, under the Washington Protocol, the OAS Charter was amended to include a provision for the suspension of member's participation in the organization if a democratic government is interrupted or overthrown by force. Mexico refused to sign,

while six other members have failed to ratify this protocol. Among them are Antigua and Barbuda, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Suriname.

Approximately a decade later during the March 26, 2001 ceremony commemorating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Santiago Commitment, former United States Undersecretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Bernard Aronson, described the Santiago Commitment as “the finest hour of the OAS...in many decades.” He observed that Resolution 1080 played a pivotal role in Haiti, Guatemala and Peru and represents “a first step,” as the Organization seeks to reaffirm its role under the original framework drawn up ten years ago. Other ambassadors sounded similarly complimentary remarks. For example, Mexican Ambassador Miguel Ruíz-Cabañas commented that since the Santiago Commitment, “the legitimacy of democratic regimes has been significantly consolidated, although there are still pockets of instability and, in some cases, governance is lacking” ([www.oas.org/OASpage/press2002](http://www.oas.org/OASpage/press2002)).

On September 11, 2001 in Lima, Peru, the Inter-American Democratic Charter was adopted and signed by all OAS members except Cuba. In brief, the Charter states that “the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it.” This landmark document spells out in 28 Articles what democracy entails and specifies how it should be defended when it is under threat. Governments in the hemisphere, therefore, have given themselves a new compass to guide their collective action when democracy faces challenges.

What is significant about all of these initiatives and protocols is the fact that the US has spearheaded, if not, signed on to all of them. The probing question, therefore,

becomes, “Where was that commitment when President Aristide’s government was under threat from armed insurrectionists aimed at circumventing the democratic process?” A brief examination of the circumstances surrounding the coup is informative.

### **Haiti’s 33<sup>rd</sup> Coup in 200 Years**

Haiti’s non-democratic opposition—there really is no truly democratic opposition in the country—capitalized on the Bush Administration’s reluctance to support President Aristide, as well as the pressure by the French and Canadian that the Haitian president must resign. A man with his own mind and a deep concern for the plight of the average Haitian, Aristide refused to submit to the policies of the international community that would only perpetuate the desperate poverty of the Haitian people. Unable to control him, Aristide was undermined every step of the way. The positions taken by the US, Canadian and French administration emboldened the so-called democratic opposition in their determination to thwart the course of democracy. Collectively, therefore, these forces helped to bring about the second coup in fourteen years and the 33<sup>rd</sup> in the 200-year history of the first independent black republic in the Americas.

Nowhere in Latin America and the Caribbean comes close to matching Haiti’s dismal record of violence, poverty, corruption and oppression—entrenched behaviors that Aristide was supposed to change—to arrest the tradition of the state preying upon the nation (Dupuy 1997, 1989). The undermining of Aristide has prevented this outcome and has completely dashed the hopes that millions of Haitian had invested in Aristide to bring some human dignity to their miserable existence.

The path is now clear for the restoration to power of those rightist, predatory groups—that cadre of super rich businessmen created during the Duvalier years—as well as an assorted drug dealers and corrupt police, military and paramilitary, who will only use the power of the state to subjugate and exploit the nation (Griffin 1997; 1993; 1992).

Press reports situate the beginnings of the current crisis to the 2000 elections. Parliamentary elections were largely funded, managed, and overseen by foreigners, after which monitors declared a victory for Haiti's nascent democracy. However, after a number of foreign diplomats alleged that those elections were fraudulent, the US and other foreign governments refused to monitor the presidential election that followed, which the opposition boycotted. President Aristide won handily while the opposition claimed that the election was illegitimate. Led by the US, Aristide's government has had to endure a near total embargo on foreign aid, including loans from the Inter-American Development Bank for improvements in education, roads, health care, and water supplies. The US had also withdrawn support for Haiti's police force of about 4,000 for a country of 8 million.

Overlooked in the course of events was Haiti's opposition, which declared that it would not be satisfied with any outcome short of Aristide's departure. Aristide, meanwhile, planned to remain in power until his term ended in 2006. However, he agreed to find ways to include the opposition in his decision making, and promised to create a broad-based governing council that would advise him and that he would accelerate the creation of a new temporary electoral council that would organize parliamentary elections sometime during the summer of 2004. Rather than accepting Aristide's concessions, the opposition returned to the streets, having accused the president of repressing protestors.

Aristide countered that democracy is still new to Haiti and that its political process was still maturing (CNN International News, February 4, 2004). In an intolerant society, rife with political and class conflicts, violence had long become an accepted means of political change, a reality that was unfolding before everyone's eyes (Marcella and Schulz 1994).

It is true that Aristide did not display the expansive inclusiveness that was managed by Nelson Mandela in the immediate post-Apartheid South Africa. But he had good reasons to be wary of the many in the shadows of the Haitian opposition movement, some of whom reflect and represent the kinds of people who facilitated, if not encouraged, his overthrow in the early 1990s, and the socioeconomic group that backed and benefited from previous rightist dictatorships.

Among the so-called democratic forces in Haiti now are rebel leaders Guy Philippe, formerly Aristide's chief of police for northern Haiti, and former death-squad leader Louis-Jodel Chamblan, who have returned from sanctuary in the Dominican Republic to capitalize on the growing anarchy in the country. Chamblan, an army officer accused of heading death squads during the last years of Jean-Claude Duvalier's rule, suspected of taking part in a 1987 election massacre, joined with Emmanuel "Toto" Constant to form the Front for the Advancement of Progress of the Haitian People of FRAPH, which brutally attacked Aristide supporters and set fire to entire neighborhoods, and is blamed for the 3,000-5,000 deaths during the three years after a military junta deposed Aristide. Convicted in absentia in 1995 for the murder of prominent businessman and Aristide supporter Antoine Izmerly, who was dragged from a church, forced to kneel and shot in the head, Chamblan claims that he is ready to face any

tribunal because “my hands are clean, my conscience is clean and my pockets are empty.”

Philippe, who is alleged to have received military training in the US and Ecuador, and who was assigned to the police after Aristide disbanded the army, was suspected of plotting a coup in 2000. He was also implicated in a mysterious attack on the National Palace in December 2001, and arrested and released by the Dominican Republic authorities in 2003 after an investigation into a plot to launch a new coup in Haiti. Both Philippe and Chamblan are seeking to re-establish the army that was disbanded by Aristide. Philippe claimed that he received donations from Haitians in the US and Canada as well as by businessmen in Haiti. Reconstituting the military, an institution long associated with predatory and plundering behavior against Haitians, and thereby reestablishing the status quo ante Aristide, would certainly enable Chamblan to fill his pockets.

So, in its bicentennial year after having defeated the French and the British to gain its independence, Haiti’s history in part reflects a country whose independence received no support from the US. It is a country whose people fought alongside President Lincoln; and a country that sent men and material to aid Simon Bolivar in his quest for the liberation of Latin America. Yet, there is very little for Haitians to celebrate because it is a country whose history also reflects a political culture in which the state continues to prey upon the nation. The coup has returned the country to the status quo ante of “Duvalierism”—a highly repressive state apparatus, which included the military and secret police, and an even tinier oligarchy with strong ties to the military. These are

among the forces that sought and supported Aristide's ouster. The overwhelming majority of poor at the bottom are again without a voice to speak for them.

There is no disputing the fact that Aristide squandered democratic good will, violated democratic rules by harassing, silencing or sanctioning the killing vocal opponents, and allowed street gangs loyal to him to have a monopoly on local crime in return for defending his rule. But the larger reality is that Haiti is in fact paying for its great crime—being the location of the one great and successful revolt by African slaves, who were inspired by France's egalitarian principles of the democratic revolution that had just toppled the monarchy in France. The Haitian Revolution has also been used by the leaders of the Dominican Republic and Cuba to justify their arrogation of power to the whites and the denial of their respective black populations equal access to political rights and civil liberties. It is also France that has led the international community's charge to arrest democracy in Haiti. So, as the international troops prepare to descend on Haiti once more, the old adage Haitian adage seems to apply: "*plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose*"—the more things change, the more they remain the same.

## **CARICOM**

In recent months, CARICOM-US relations have been stretched, with the Caribbean leaders opposing the Washington-led war in Iraq and calling for an independent probe into the circumstances that led to Aristide, the nation's first democratically elected leader, being forced from office a second time. A number of these countries have also refused sign bilateral treaties exempting the US from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Aristide accused Washington of orchestrating his removal and forcing him into exile, a claim denied by the Bush administration, but Caribbean leaders have remained unconvinced of the denial, given that the United States and other members of the UN Security Council refused to answer Aristide's call for a multinational force to restore order in the country just days before his departure. And in a move to iron out differences, CARICOM invited Haiti's new Prime Minister Gerard Latortue to attend the CARICOM summit held in St Kitts in March 2004 despite withdrawing his ambassador from Jamaica and threatening to terminate relations with the Caribbean community following the Jamaican government's decision to allow Aristide to stay in that country for up to ten weeks. Latortue's invitation was rescinded following his refusal to repudiate scathing remarks he made earlier about CARICOM and Jamaica, which is providing temporary asylum to Aristide. In a statement, host country St Kitts said Caribbean leaders did not extend the invitation to Latortue, who had signaled his intention to attend the summit, after he failed to issue an acceptable statement clarifying his remarks on the freezing of diplomatic relations with Jamaica and possibly CARICOM.

Bahamas Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell stated in a press conference during the St. Kitts meeting that "there was a demarche by the United States on all of the CARICOM countries, demanding that the Caribbean countries recognize the interim government of Haiti as the de jure and not just a de facto government" (Nassau Guardian March 24, 2004).

The leaders, who stressed their adherence to democratic principles concerning Haiti as a political stalemate was joined by a rebel uprising that swept across the country in February, hardened their position on Latortue after he shared a platform with rebel



leaders—some of whom are convicted death squad leaders and coup plotters—in the Haitian town of Gonaives, and whom he praised as heroes and liberators. Caribbean political observers believe that Haiti's seat in the 15-member CARICOM will remain vacant until free and fair elections are held in the nation of eight million people. Latortue has suggested polls will be held within two years.

But apparently not satisfied with having removed Aristide from office, Washington now appears ready to politically assassinate the deposed Haitian leader. According to a story first reported in the *Wall Street Journal* and picked up by the *Miami Herald* of April 3, 2004, US prosecutors in Miami are investigating whether the deposed Haitian President pocketed millions of dollars from drug traffickers who Haiti as a transshipment point for tons of cocaine. According to reports, relatives of Aristide and his wife, Mildred, hold nearly \$250 million in European banks although there is not confirmation that such accounts and funds actually exist. Nevertheless, Haitian Justice Minister Bernard Gousse has announced that he will establish a commission to investigate allegations against Aristide—from misuse of government funds to human-rights abuses.

These developments are being fueled by Aristide's allegation that US officials forced him to resign and go into exile, a claim Washington denies. According to the report, US officials in Washington, who had refused to support a criminal case against Aristide when he was still president, are now prepared to move ahead on this issue. U.S. officials have long complained that Aristide was at least turning a blind eye to drug traffickers who used Haiti to transship Colombian cocaine to U.S. streets. Ironically, his increased cooperation with DEA and U.S. Embassy personnel in the waning months of

his tenure greatly accelerated the case now being built against him. *The Herald* has learned that the Aristide government expelled to the United States four prominent drug trafficking suspects between June and October -- three of whom have pleaded guilty and are now cooperating with the DEA in the investigation against the former president.

Why did the OAS failed to put these mechanisms into play in the Haitian case? Standing alone on the principles of democracy were the 15-member CARICOM group of countries, who consistently called for respect for democratically elected leaders and have not acknowledged the present unconstitutional government in Haiti. "Where are the Brazilians? Where are the Argentineans? Where are the Mexicans? Where are all these other countries? Could that thunderous silence be the result of economic blackmail via the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or even European Union pressure, or fear of US sanctions? It would appear that part of the difficulty in protecting democratic advances in this hemisphere lies with the US, which, in these and other cases of coups or threats of coups, has failed to demonstrate an abiding commitment to democratization.

## **WASHINGTON'S RESPONSE**

The US military is back in Haiti for the third time in 90 years on a mission slated to last 90 days. The plan is to hand Haiti over to a UN peacekeeping force on June 1, 2004. While the first US intervention into Haiti lasted two decades from 1915-1934, a three-month deployment period will be the shortest episode in the history of US intervention in Haiti. Battles between populist, pro-Aristide forces and armed thugs representing elite interests have been a recurring theme ever since Mr. Aristide won

Haiti's first democratic election in 1990. This dynamic will not necessarily change simply because President Aristide is no longer in charge of Haiti.

The attempt to restore order and stability to Haiti may well require more soldiers, more time and more money than the last American military deployment in 1994 to build lasting institutions such as the police, the courts and schools. Indeed, the promotion of elections alone as the key to the transition to democracy is woefully myopic and insufficient. Creating a democracy requires a sustained commitment of time and money to develop all of the necessary elements: transparent executive branch, a competent legislature, a neutral judiciary and a free press. Elections are necessary but not sufficient. Thus, to assume that a popular vote will usher in a democratic transition is to condemn Haiti to repeat the cycle of a short-lived period of freedom, a descent into chaos, and then an American intervention to try to restore order.

If the past is any guide, Washington is rarely willing to commit itself to creating the structures and processes that are necessary for democracy. What is needed is an independent and highly educated bench of judges, fair prosecutors, public defenders, a well-equipped police force, and a humane corrections system. In addition to bringing in outside experts, constructing new courts, jails and police stations, it is important to build schools, hospitals, universities and training academies. The US short circuited the democratic process in Haiti when it cut off aid and blocked international loans to that country following allegations of electoral irregularity. While Aristide deserves some blame, America's decision precipitated the uprising by ensuring that Aristide's government would fail to address the people's needs and that he would gradually, if not rapidly, lose their support.

White House spokesman, Scott McClellan stated that the Bush Administration intended to deal only with the business people, civic leaders and politicians who make up the nonviolent opposition to Mr. Aristide and his Lavalas Party. Observers considered this distinction a false one as the Administration attempted to differentiate between the political leaders, whose fortunes have been enhanced by the rebel assault and subsequent ouster of President Aristide, and the rebels themselves (*New York Times*, March 3, 2004). Various NGOs contend that the region must provide Haiti with the financial and technical resources to improve its physical infrastructure, including roads, utilities, schools and hospitals; provide food security; and furnish capital for economic development in agriculture, manufacturing and other industries and services. The governments and people of the region must assist Haiti to get money rightfully due to the country and special funds to deal with the humanitarian crisis. In addition, a number of law makers and human rights advocates expressed concern that a number of the rebels, including Chamblain and Philippe, and the possibility that they would be allowed to re-enter the society and live with impunity.

But above all, the emphasis of the US and the international community must be place on the development of institutions and practices rather than on individual leaders.

## **CONCLUSION**

Americans generally fail to see the depth of the crisis in Haiti. The country sadly suffers from two centuries of misgovernment and human abuse of the land. When viewed from the air, Haiti becomes a brown island in a tropical sea, devoid of vegetation and topsoil, which is both a metaphor and a manifestation of the extent of the country's

poverty. This reality underscores the fact that the road to human dignity in Haiti is a long one and requires a long-term commitment by the international community rather than the episodic, short-term involvement

In keeping with the horticultural metaphor, Haiti's revolutionary, combative, and predatory political culture has not permitted democracy to plant deep roots in that society. The soil is too infertile for democracy to grow because state continues to prey on the nation. Democracy cannot plant roots in a field where employment, food, health care, education and other physiological necessities continue to be unavailable or in short supply. So, while the US Marines, the Canadian and French forces may succeed in temporarily mitigating the violence, nothing but a long term involvement will change the course of events in Haiti.

According to the *Toronto Star* (April 9, 2004), Canadian troops in Haiti could have their 90-day stay extended while they train Haiti's police force. The original plan calls for the Canadian, US, French and Chilean troops was to stay 90 days while the United Nations put together a longer term peacekeeping force, to be led by Brazil.

But while there seems to be as sense that a long-term engagement with Haiti is critical to that country's future, the larger question of US commitment to democracy remains as one sees differing responses to events in Haiti and Venezuela. A critical analysis of the performance of both President Aristide and President Chavez indicates the near impossibility of cloaking either in the mantle of "great leader." Both have resorted to demagoguery when they deemed it necessary for political survival; and neither has provided political or economic stability to their respective countries. But does the international community, generally, and the US, particularly, have the right to oust a duly

elected leader—to assert that he has overstayed his welcome in his own country? Is it the right of the US to tell Haitians and/or Venezuelans that they do not have the right to choose their own leader or that they are too stupid to make the right choice of leader?

Will the US and OAS members invoke the 2001 OAS Democracy Charter, which commits countries to ostracize elected presidents who break the rule of law? It does not appear likely at this point. Venezuela's President Chávez is ruling through controlled institutions, and there is a strong chance that Washington and Latin America will continue looking the other way. The reason, of course, is Venezuela's oil. The Bush administration doesn't want any political turmoil that could threaten the steady supply of oil, while much of the Caribbean and Central America depend on Chávez-supplied subsidized oil, and Brazil and Argentina are exploring petroleum joint ventures with Venezuela. It does not appear that the will to deal with these non-democratic issues is as great as it was a decade ago. The U.S. commitment for democracy can be strong, unless it collides with other interests, such as oil.

## WORKS CITED

- Brown, David, 2002. *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy, 1846-1855*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Dupuy, Alex, 1997. *Haiti in the New World Order: The Limits of the Democratic Revolution*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1989. *Haiti in the World Economy: Class, Race and Underdevelopment Since 1700*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Griffin, Clifford E. 1997. *Democracy and Neoliberalism in the Developing World: Lessons From the Anglophone Caribbean*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1993. "Democracy in the Commonwealth Caribbean." *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 4, No. 2.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1992. "Haiti's Democratic Challenge." *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4.
- Marcella, Gabriel and Schulz, Donald E. 1994. "Pitfalls and Prospects for Haiti," *North-South, the Magazine of the Americas*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (July/August).
- Nicholls, David, 1996. *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Color and National Independence in Haiti*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo, 1994. "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 1.
- \_\_\_\_\_, and Schmitter, Philippe C. 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Democracies*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Pereira, Luiz Carlos Bresser, Maravall, José María, and Przeworski, Adam, 1993. *Economic Reforms in New Democracies: A Social-Democratic Approach*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Weinstein, Brian and Segal, Aaron, 1984. *Haiti: Political Failures, Cultural Successes*, the Hoover Institution, Stanford University Press.