

Regime Change in Haiti

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Dye mon, gen mon.

(Over the mountains, more mountains)

Byen mal ne pas la mo.

Very bad isn't dead ("Things can get worse.")

--Haitian Proverbs

A man who stands for nothing will fall for anything.

-- Malcolm X

On January 1, 2004, Haitian President **Jean-Bertrand Aristide** welcomed South Africa's **Thabo Mbeki** to Port-au-Prince, the only significant world leader who joined him to celebrate Haiti's two hundred years of "independence" from France (as one of its formerly [most lucrative colonies](#)), and



Figure 1 Aristide

Haiti's status as **the world's oldest surviving black republic** – complete with 32 coup d'états, 5 US military interventions, 10-15 percent of US-inbound cocaine traffic, and the lowest per capita income level, the most poverty, and the highest rate of HIV/AIDS infection in the Western Hemisphere. Thabo soon experienced the side-effects of

such social conditions first-hand; during a visit to the northern city of Gonaives, one of his helicopters was [reportedly fired upon](#), and, even though he wasn't in it at the time, his security guards evacuated the area and cancelled further trips to that region.

Just three months later, it was Aristide and his family that had to be evacuated. Escorted by US Marines and an indeterminate number of French troops, they were unceremoniously spirited out of Port-au-Prince in the wee hours of a Sunday morning, **effectively deposed for the second time in thirteen years**. Aristide now has the dubious distinction of having been removed from power under, and perhaps by, two different Bush Administrations – the first time in September 1991, by way of a Haitian military coup that is widely believed to have been CIA-supported, and this time, on February 29, 2004, by way of a “resign or die” safe conduct offer that was abetted by two prodigal US allies, France and Canada.



Figure 2 Haitian "Contras"

Of course Aristide has many shortcomings, including his divisive leadership style, [his dubious former associates](#), his appetite for bizarre proposals like the “[French colonial reparations](#)” scheme, his tolerance of [armed thugs](#) in the **Lavalas Family party**, and the “[fundamentally flawed](#)” May 2000 elections (according to the OAS and Human Rights Watch) that may have given Lavalas temporary control of Haiti’s parliament, but also contributed significantly to the current crisis. Perhaps most important, over time, it has become less and less clear even to his followers what he actually stands for, beyond populist rhetoric.

Regardless of what we may think of Aristide and his followers, however, the recent behavior of the US, France, Canada, and indeed, the UN, with respect to Haiti has been **inexcusable**, from the standpoint of strengthening Haitian democracy. As discussed below, rather than intervene quickly in early February with a limited show of force that would have easily deterred further violence, the US and its allies temporized. Ultimately this gave the Haitian “opposition,” whose own track record of support for democracy is mixed at best, the power to dictate Aristide’s resignation letter. That is a power that the opposition, even now, would almost certainly would not have been able to win at the ballot box.

All told, as **Jamaica Prime Minister P.J. Patterson, chairman of CARICOM (the Caribbean Community)**, said this week, all this has created a very “[dangerous precedent](#)” for all the other fledgling democracies in the region and around the world.

In Haiti's case, the next time around, we should expect Aristide's still-numerous followers to bring a few more heavy weapons of their own to the party. As if we needed one, this episode also provides yet another unattractive example of **American (and French) neo-imperialism**, as well as "**first-the-US, then-the-UN**" diplomacy."

ARISTIDE'S LEGITIMACY

Aristide is not the only elected country leader who is divisive, has an imperfect electoral past, or has a few corrupt friends and associates in his closet. There may even be a few such leaders in [George W. Bush's America](#), [Jacque \("the Crook"\) Chirac's France](#), and [Paul Martin's Canada](#). And let's be clear – for all his flaws, Aristide is **undeniably the most "democratically elected" President in modern Haitian history**. For that reason alone, his non-democratic denouement should concern us.

- ❑ The first time that Aristide was elected President, in December 1990, he won the country's first free Presidential elections in history with **67.5 percent** of the vote. The runner-up, who was supported by the US, was former World Bank Vice President and Duvalier finance minister Marc Bazin. He got **14.2 percent**. Aristide only served 7 months of his first five-year term before the 1991 coup. When he was finally restored to power by the Clinton Administration in September 1994, not only were all the thugs in the Haitian military given amnesty, but he was only permitted to **serve another 16 months** before being involuntarily sidelined for five more years.
- ❑ The second time, in November 2000, Aristide was elected President [with an even greater majority](#). True, turnout in that Presidential election was just 15-20 percent. Facing certain defeat, without a compelling candidate of its own, Haiti's opposition cynically boycotted the contest entirely, citing irregularities in the May 2000 parliamentary election.
- ❑ There were indeed many irregularities in that parliamentary election, and, in retrospect, Aristide should have made amends for them sooner. But no one believes that this would have changed the outcome of the Presidential election. There are also grave doubts that the US, the World Bank, and the IDB should have **held up [more than \\$500 million](#) of badly-needed aid to Haiti's people**, just because of these Lavalas Party irregularities. But Aristide's long-

standing foes in Washington and the EU leaped at these electoral infractions as an excuse for cutting most foreign aid. (For the interested reader, the election irregularities issue is discussed [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).) Curiously, the OAS standards for that election were evidently [altered after the May 2000](#) race was run. Suffice it to say that by OAS standards, Florida's balloting in 2000 -- which *did* determine a Presidential election -- was even more "fundamentally flawed."

BARGAINING IN GOOD FAITH – OR JUST BUYING TIME?

The other key fact to understand about the recent "proto-coup" is that **Aristide had agreed by late January 2004 to accept the "[Kingston Accord](#) proposed by the [15 CARICOM countries](#)**, which called for power-sharing and new elections. This would have allowed him to serve just two more years in office, and could have produced new parliamentary and Presidential elections, perhaps even quicker than they will occur now.



Figure 3 The Other Noriega

Unfortunately, Haiti's "peaceful" opposition was, in the words of one foreign policy analyst, "[out for the kill.](#)" The Bush Administration, which is top-heavy with long-



Figure 4 Guy Philippe

time [Aristide detractors](#) like **Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega** (a former Senate staffer to Senator Jesse Helms, and one of the people who popularized the bogus CIA "psychotic" analysis of Aristide in 1994), permitted the Haitian opposition to stone-wall these CARICOM proposals to death. The opposition knew full well that the armed

rebels were on their way, and it received strong signals from its friends in Washington that it had nothing to fear from refusal.

The US, France, and Canada, as well as the UN, also had plenty of advance warning about the few hundred well-armed anti-Aristide "**Haitian contras**" who started moving in from the Dominican Republic as early as March 2003. They were presided over by such notorious ex-Haitian Army convicted criminals and [drug traffickers](#) as

[Louis Jodel Chamblain](#), [Jean Tatoune](#), and [Guy Philippe](#). Even though they were few in number, they were surprisingly well-organized, financed, and equipped, dressed in brand new combat suits and brandishing new M-16s and M-60s. Meanwhile, the poorly-trained, ill-led, and under-equipped Haitian Police had for the most part skeepdattled, leaving Aristide with only the “*chimere*,” his street militias, and a small group of bodyguards hired from [the Steele Foundation](#), a San Francisco security firm.

Unless the US or the UN were willing to defend Aristide against these “Haitian contras,” therefore, they must have realized that they were effectively giving the opposition the power to mandate Aristide's immediate ouster. As we’ve seen since then, it has been [relatively easy for the 1000 or so US troops that have landed to disarm the contras](#). The question is why this could not have been done before? The US claims that it didn’t want its troops to be seen supporting Aristide. But this begs the question – couldn't their role have been positioned as supporting power-sharing and a constitutional transition?

Yet **the US, France, and Canada failed to support** [the February 23rd Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\) proposal](#) for

an immediate UN peacekeeping force that would have disarmed all sides.

The US also [blocked Aristide’s last-minute attempts to import new bodyguards](#) from the Steel

Foundation. On the other hand, **once Aristide had left, the UN moved with astonishing speed** to establish a peace-keeping force,

compared with other situations that happened to be less important to the US, like [Rwanda, DR Congo, or Liberia.](#)

Prime Minister P.J. Patterson



Figure 5 PJ Patterson

In 2002, while maintaining the boycott on economic aid to Haiti, the US had also sanctioned the sale of [20,000 new M-16s](#) to the Dominican Republic’s Army. Why the Dominican Republic’s Army, which has [a horrific human rights and drug-trafficking record of its own](#), needs so many M-16s is not obvious. Perhaps, in addition to defending the DR elite against their own people, turning back starving Haitian immigrants, and arming the Haitian *contras*, it expected it might have to worry about a newly-reconstituted Haitian Army!

In any case, the US and the Multilateral Interim Force that brought Aristide back to power in 1994 had also [failed to disarm](#) the Haitian military and FRAPH paramilitary. That, in turn, only encouraged Aristide's followers to form militias of their own. Not surprisingly, some of them also turned to drug traffic, given the plummeting regular economy and the continuing US aid cutoff, on the one hand, and the strong US demand for cocaine and their own ideal location on the "trade route," on the other.

The US and the MIF also **failed to provide adequate resources and training for the National Police**. For example, New York City, with a population roughly comparable to Haiti's 8 million people, has nearly 40,000 police; Haiti's entire police force, only founded in July 1995, numbered 4,000 at its peak. (true, more than a million of Haiti's 8 million people may be working in the US, at any one time, but the overall point still remains.)



Figure 6 "Baby Doc" Duvalier

The US and the MIF also failed to **bring any significant human rights violators to justice**. As noted, several of them have recently turned up among the "Haitian contras." Apparently the US preferred to reserve its prosecutorial resources for Haitian immigrants. Indeed, the US and France, as well as the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Honduras, all provided



refuge to **top human rights violators** like "Baby "Doc" Duvalier and [Emmanuel "Toto" Constant](#), a CIA "grantee" and close associate of Chamblain's who led the coup against Aristide in 1991, and helped to found the FRAPH, the right-wing death squad that was

responsible for several thousand deaths in 1992-94. (The US refused to extradite him to be tried in Haiti, and he's reportedly been living in Queens.) **At least 15 other former top FRAPH leaders have also reportedly found refuge in the US**. Philippe, one of the leaders of the "contras," was reportedly convicted in Haiti of several previous coup attempts, and has been living in the Dominican Republic. But the DR [refused to extradite him](#), or even sign an extradition treaty with Haiti, its next-door neighbor. Perhaps the DR just valued his leadership skills.

STANDING ASIDE

The failure of the US and the increasingly feckless UN to move quickly against the Haitian *contras* meant [that at least 130 Haitians lost their lives](#) in the violence leading up to Aristide's ouster, and [thousands more suffered increased hunger and disease](#) as a result of the uprising. It also meant that **a band of a few hundred armed hooligans** effectively **undermined** the position that Secretary of State Colin Powell took before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 12, when he said, "[The policy of the Administration is not regime change](#). **President Aristide is the elected President of Haiti.**"

Whether or not the US held a gun to Aristide's head and forced him to sign his "resignation" letter, therefore, is irrelevant. It might as well have. **If this was not "regime change," then the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was a "peacekeeping mission."**

In fact, all the talk about a "negotiated settlement" by the US, the French, and the Canadians appears to have been just a **smokescreen** -- a way of buying time for the *contras* until they gained enough ground to leave Aristide no alternative but surrender.

Moreover, as P.J. Patterson noted above, for the other young democracies in the region -- especially those whose armies have a history of misbehaving, like Panama, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala -- Aristide's removal without a constitutional transition is very unhelpful.

Indeed, the main lesson that "future Aristides" may draw is that they cannot rely on the international community for even-handed protection against even a tiny band of well-armed "contra" free-lancers who have influential First World supporters. Instead, they will have to deploy their own heavily-armed defenders. This is something that Aristide, to his credit, never did. But Venezuela's Hugo Chavez is already digging in. For him, unlike Aristide, one coup attempt by his US-backed opponents was quite enough.

FRENCH HOSPITALITY

So President Aristide is now reportedly seeking asylum from President Mbeki, who probably [wishes the whole issue would just go away](#), but will no doubt grant it. Several other countries in the Caribbean, like [Panama and Costa Rica](#), were also willing to offer asylum. That seems only fair. After all, [in the mid-1990s, Panama provided refuge to former Haitian general Raoul Cedras, the instigator of the first coup against Aristide](#), with his ocean-front apartment paid for by the US Government.

But apparently *someone* decided that it would be *more convenient* to park Aristide in West Africa, 6200 miles away, rather than in Panama, a country that has regularly scheduled airline flights and is just 800 miles from Port-au-Prince. Pending South African asylum, then, Aristide was compelled to accept temporary quasi-house arrest in the [Central African Republic](#) ("CAR"), a pathetic little



Figure 7 Omar Bongo

submerging market that is even poorer than Haiti. This first-class hospitality was arranged for him by Dominique de Villepin, France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its favorite West African dictator, [Gabon's Omar Bongo](#).

Bongo, 67, is Africa's second longest serving "President for Life." He has ruled his impoverished-though-oil-rich country with an iron hand since 1967, with the help of Moroccan body guards and French security experts. As described in [SubmergingMarkets™' recent article on the Elf scandal](#), in the process, he developed an **incestuous, mutually-lucrative relationship with top officials at Elf-Aquitaine**, (formerly France's leading oil company and now part of Total SA), as well **as with leading French politicians like Jacque "The Crook."** He also developed private banking relationships with leading French and US banks -- including **Citibank-NY**, [where he has reportedly secreted more than \\$180 million](#). No sentimental democrat or populist, Bongo has also arranged his country's political system so that he can remain in power [until at least 2012](#) -- assuming that he lives that long, and that the fickle French don't turn on *him*.

In Aristides' case, according to one report, Bongo was able to prevail on his good friend **Francois Bozize, CAR's former Army Chief and current dictator**, to open the door at least temporarily. According to [another report](#), however, Dominique de

Villepin simply called Bozize directly, with just 20 minutes notice, when the plane was already close to landing in CAR, to tell him that Aristide was about to arrive! France and Bongo had helped Bozize seize power from CAR's previous (elected) leader, Ange-Félix Patassé, [in a March 2003 coup](#). That was **CAR's ninth coup** since



Figure 9 Emperor Bokassa

it became "independent" of France in 1960. Bozize remains utterly dependent on French aid, and is undoubtedly very concerned about his own stability, so the CAR is probably one of the few countries in the world where the arrangements for such a "hot guest" could be made so quickly. He and Aristide may have much to talk about. Minding their masters' voice, however, Aristide's new hosts in CAR have already cautioned Aristide to [curb his criticisms of the US and France](#).

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Figure 8 Patasse' and Bozize

Between his own stints in power, the CAR's **General Bozize** was permitted to take up refuge in France-proper. So was **Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko**. So, too, from 1983 to 1986, in Haudricourt, northwest of Paris, was **Jean-Bedel Bokassa, CAR's "Emperor" from 1965 to 1979, who also seized power in a French-backed coup**. Bokassa, a French Army veteran and the recipient of the Legion d'Honneur and the Croix de Guerre, was famous not only for his 17 wives, for crowning himself Emperor, and for presenting former French **President Giscard d'Estaing** frequent gifts of diamonds and hunting trips, but also for [slaughtering at least 100 school children](#) who had refused to wear the school uniforms that one of his companies had made for them. He then reportedly dined on their flesh. (He was later tried for cannibalism.) While in the CAR's capital, Bangui, Aristide might ask to visit the prison where the slaughter of these children took place in May 1979, as well as Bokassa's huge refrigerator.

France also welcomed **former Haitian dictator Jean-Claude "Baby" Duvalier** with open arms after his 1986 ouster. He and his father had ruled disastrously from

1957 on, helping themselves to a great deal of the country's wealth. So they clearly met France's rigorous admissions standards.

The warm welcome was also facilitated by the expensive villa Baby Doc purchased at Grasse, in the south of France, and the several hundred millions dollars that he reportedly diverted to leading French and Swiss banks. Just this week, after Aristide's sudden exit, Duvalier, now 53, lost no time in [voicing interest in returning to Haiti](#). This led some to suspect that he may have helped to finance the "Haitian contras." But "Baby Doc" has also reportedly gone through an expensive divorce, and may be in poor health, so we will just have to see.

So France has clearly established quite a reputation over the years, and has certainly made a *distinctive* contribution to Third World development. It has helped the world safe for dictators like the Bozizes, Bongos, Bokassas, Mobutus, and Duvaliers, by giving them refuge in continental France until they are ready to return home and either face trials or establish new Life Presidencies.

Aristide and his family may never qualify for this kind of French hospitality. If one is only a minor thief, let alone a more or less *democratically-elected, populist leader* of a former French black colony, with more powerful global enemies than friends, one may not be so welcome in France. *After all, what kind of profit could there possibly be in that?.....*

In Haiti's case there is also another great French tradition. This was first established by **Napoleon**, with his memorable betrayal, seizure, imprisonment, and ultimate murder-by-neglect of Haiti's national liberator **Toussaint L'Ouverture** in 1803, in violation of Napoleon's own personal promise of safe conduct. When questioned about this despicable act years later, while Napoleon himself was imprisoned on St. Helena, he reportedly remarked, "[What could the death of one wretched Negro mean to me?](#)"

Even though centuries have passed since then, there appears to be a faint odor of a similar French disdain toward Aristide, at least as expressed in Foreign Minister de Villepin's [haughty criticism of Aristide last week](#). One senses that to this day, there is a special French animus reserved for those Haitian blacks who are rebellious -- who dare to contort the French language almost beyond recognition, and once or twice even soundly trounced Napoleon's army! As he contemplates the gardens and lakes of Bangui, at least Aristide can be grateful that he is not freezing to death in a prison cell in the Jura Mountains.

We should not forget that Colin Powell, Condoleeza Rice, and "Grand Master of the Order of the Sun" Roger Noriega, a Cuban-American, were also involved in these decisions. So there could not possibly be any question of racial prejudice....except perhaps for the mutual contempt that "house Negroes" and "field Negroes" often have for each other.

CONCLUSION

Aristide now claims that the US, which leased [the 757 jet](#) that took him to Africa, [never informed him](#) that he was going to be dropped off in the CAR. It also appears that on his arrival in the CAR, he was accompanied by a detachment of 60 US Marines, which seems a little excessive for a "voluntary departure." Did they fear that Guy Philippe would follow them all the way to CAR? Aristide also claims – like Hugo Chavez did after the attempted April 2002 coup in Venezuela -- that he never actually resigned voluntarily, but was [pressured to flee – or even effectively "kidnapped"](#) -- by US officials.



Figure 10 ProConsul Powell

The US Government and Colin Powell in particular have dismissed these accusations as "[complete nonsense](#)," and [blamed Aristide for the entire crisis](#).

But Colin and the USG are having more than a few credibility problems these days. What do we expect them to say -- that they

dangled Titid from a third-story window? Even an outside observer with no particular brief for Aristide may be forgiven having a few doubts about the official US version of the story. CARICOM has called for an [independent international inquiry](#) to establish just what happened -- but don't hold your breath. However, it may not really matter -- even on the face of it, as we've seen, the US' unwillingness to defend Aristide was pressure enough.

From a slight distance, then, this whole bad ending to US nation-building in Haiti was intended to put the annoying black populist Aristide behind us once and for all. At the same time, the Administration probably hoped that a quick US intervention,

followed briskly by UN surrogates, would avoid another messy immigration crisis, smack dab in the middle of a US election. Many Bush Administration veterans no doubt recall those troubling days back in 1991-92 in their sleep, when Pappy Bush just wanted to win Florida and get re-elected, and 40,000 determined Haitian boat people started showing up on Miami beaches, fleeing the nasty Cedras dictatorship that we'd just encouraged.

This situation also presents an opportunity for self-important-but-increasingly-insecure countries like France, Canada, and Chile, which just volunteered 120 troops for Haiti, to come skulking back to the "coalition of the willing." It may also soon permit the recipients of USAID, IDB and World Bank funding – a high fraction of which actually gets spent in the First World, or on locals with above-average incomes – to tap these sources for the usual litany of Haitian projects -- docks and dams, "ecommerce for Haitian artisans," rural hygiene and roads -- once again. They never seem to quite deliver much "development," but that's another matter. And no doubt there will also be many other benefits to business elites, security forces. and politically-correct local politicians.



Indeed, the only potential beneficiaries who may be left out of this picture are ordinary Haitians – the seventy percent of the population that still survives on less than \$1 per day, and have always constituted the core of Aristide's supporters. Many of them have suffered directly from all these upheavals, and Aristide as well as his high-minded opponents alike share a grave responsibility for their inability to settle their differences peaceably, and get back to solving real problems.

But it is also clear is that these millions of ordinary Haitians have just been disenfranchised, by forces "beyond their control." However imperfect Aristide was, however discomfiting to First World interests and ideology, he was their voice. And now they've lost that voice. And that is a form of **political decapitalization** that no amount of "economic assistance" can compensate for.

Haitians of all political persuasions eagerly await the next installment of neoimperialism's grand design for their tiny, impoverished, magical, and really quite heart-breaking, "independent" republic.



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