

The Haiti Dilemma

DANIEL ERIKSON
Director of Caribbean Programs
Inter-American Dialogue

HAITI REPRESENTS ONE OF THE most complex and deeply rooted challenges facing U.S. foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere: a failing state on the doorstep of the world's most powerful nation. By nearly any measure, Haiti ranks among the most difficult places to live, with social indicators rivaling the war-torn countries of sub-Saharan Africa. More than nine years since the United States restored the democratically-elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti remains plagued by an ongoing political conflict, growing insecurity, and deteriorating institutions. On the threshold of Haiti's 2004 bicentennial anniversary of independence, the second oldest republic in the Americas is gripped by a crisis that threatens to become a permanent feature of the regional landscape.

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Over the last decade, the U.S. approach to Haiti has vacillated between aggressive engagement that eventually falls prey to disappointing results, and partial withdrawal that allows the country's woes to multiply until heightened involvement again becomes necessary. While this cycle has been exacerbated by political divisions within the United States around Haiti policy, it is also driven by the fact that U.S. policy tools have only limited power to address even the country's most fundamental needs. Many experts argue that Haiti requires sustained international attention towards a nation-building strategy that can develop functional government ministries, a workable legal and judicial system, and some form of democratic politics. This is undoubtedly true. Unfortunately, such a project seems to lie beyond the political and technical capacity of the United States, and Haiti's fragile institutional fabric has not sustained the gains made in earlier periods of deeper U.S. engagement. As a result, the Haiti dilemma has become a constant source of frustration for U.S. policymakers.

How did Haiti's emerging democracy go so awry? Analysts and observers are deeply divided on this question. Many place the blame for Haiti's failure on the country's

DANIEL ERIKSON is Director of Caribbean Programs at the Inter-American Dialogue.

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rulers, especially on the leadership of Aristide and his political party following his restoration in 1994. Others point to “the international community,” most notably the United States, for withdrawing from Haiti once the democratic process ran off course. While the constraints posed by Haiti’s prior lack of stable institutions and democratic norms are almost universally recognized, there is remarkably little discussion of moder-

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ating expectations in pursuit of modest, gradual success over time. What is certain is that the overarching challenge that Haiti poses to the United States lacks easy answers. There is no set of actions, no matter how decisively implemented,

which is sure to resolve the political and economic woes facing the country. Every course involves costs and risks that some will claim are greater than the promised gains. All choices will involve compromises on principles, yet adherence to the present course also carries a significant price.

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This longstanding tension was highlighted in the most recent variant of the Haitian crisis, when the flawed legislative elections of May 2000 precipitated a sudden cutback in foreign aid to Haiti’s government. In 2003, despite no progress on resolving the electoral dispute, worsening poverty prompted the United States to partially reverse course and support renewed lending by the Washington-based international financial institutions. Since Haiti’s political problems are almost certain to stay unresolved without aggressive U.S. diplomacy, the pendulum is likely to swing again soon, although in which direction, it is too early to tell. The United States could allow Haiti’s current trajectory to spin out for some time, with the democratic process stalled, the economy in tatters, and the humanitarian crisis mounting. Another option is for the United States to pressure Haiti’s political leaders to get new elections off the ground and step up aid efforts. Of course, Washington’s hand may be forced—by a significant migration crisis, a political convulsion to overthrow the Haitian leadership, or a breakdown into more widespread violence—leaving the U.S. no choice but to become more actively involved, as occurred in the 1990s.

No matter what happens, the United States will ultimately be unsatisfied and Haiti’s underlying problems will endure. The fickle *pas de deux* between the two countries (and more broadly between Haiti and the range of international actors that follow Washington’s lead) will remain overshadowed by the yawning gap between Haiti’s needs and what the United States is willing or able to provide. This is not to say that U.S.

policy is irrelevant to Haiti's future. On the contrary, a strong, unified, and constructively engaged U.S. approach can make substantial inroads towards achieving and enforcing compromise among Haiti's warring factions and combating disease and poverty over the long term. Yet even in this best-case scenario, Haiti's social tensions, needs of its growing population, and weak institutions will all limit efforts to break the country's cycle of poverty and bad governance. U.S. policy towards Haiti should be as forward-looking as possible but cognizant of the constraints on its abilities to transform this struggling nation into something resembling a prosperous democracy.

ARISTIDE AND HIS DISCONTENTS

Any analysis of Haitian democracy must start with President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the former priest who has dominated the political scene since he was elected in 1990 in Haiti's first free presidential election. A year later, he was overthrown by a military junta led by General Raoul Cédras. After spending three years in exile, Aristide was returned to power in 1994 by a multinational force of 20,000 led by the United States. The arrangements, however, only allowed Aristide to serve out the remainder of his original five-year term, and in early 1996 he was succeeded by his hand-picked supporter, René Preval. Soon thereafter, the withdrawal of U.S. forces was nearly complete, although the Haitian government continued to receive substantial foreign aid.

Constitutional government lost traction during the Preval years, and in January 1999 Preval suspended the Haitian Parliament and ruled by decree. In May 2000, Haiti held legislative and municipal elections intended to resolve the country's political crisis by restoring a democratically-elected parliament. Instead, they compounded the problem and set the stage for a prolonged stalemate between the ruling Fanmi Lavalas party of Aristide and the coalition of opposition parties known as the Democratic Convergence. This cycle was set in motion not by voting—which was generally considered to be free and fair—but by manipulation of the vote counting process that awarded legislative seats to Lavalas candidates, instead of deciding them by run-off. Lavalas would have won most of the seats under the proper method, but the victory became a tainted triumph. In November 2000, Aristide went on to win the presidency in an election boycotted by the opposition. The level of voter turnout was also deeply contested, with the government and some of its supporters claiming 60 percent participation, while other observers put the figure much lower, at 10 percent or even less.¹ Thus, Aristide re-emerged as the dominant political force in Haiti under circumstances calling his legitimacy into question.

The war of attrition over the disputed May 2000 elections has proven remarkably intractable and has had important consequences. The international community, led by

the United States and Europe, responded to the elections by suspending hundreds of millions of dollars in aid. Over the last three years, the Organization of American States (OAS) has taken the lead in brokering new elections between the Aristide government and the Democratic Convergence. However, the OAS lacked a mechanism for enforcing resolutions on Haiti, and the standoff between Aristide and the opposition has created a kind of Gordian knot. One key element did arise from the OAS negotiations: the formula for a nine-member provisional electoral council tasked with overseeing new legislative elections. Two seats were reserved for government appointees, while the remaining seven seats were to be occupied by opposition parties and independent civil society groups. But the electoral council remained unformed when several sectors refused to appoint representatives, citing security concerns.

The Haitian government failed to satisfy either its political opponents or the United States in its treatment of issues such as political gang disarmament and the ending of impunity. When measures were taken they often either backfired or failed to instill confidence. A newly-appointed chief of the Haitian National Police lasted two weeks and then fled into exile. Amiot Metayer, a notorious criminal and prison escapee, was left free for a year in the city of Gonaives and then mysteriously executed. Deadlines passed and pressure mounted but Haiti's political leaders dragged their feet on joining the council and setting a timeline for new elections. The process instead dissolved into finger-pointing, with the opposition accusing the Haitian government of failing to provide security, while Aristide viewed his opponents as seeking to strategically obstruct an election crucial to his legitimacy.

Meanwhile, Haiti's insecurity crisis became increasingly severe. In December 2001, several unidentified gunmen attacked the National Palace in Port-au-Prince; pro-Lavalas groups responded by assaulting the homes and offices of opposition members. Violence also undercut freedom of the press. In April 2000, the celebrated broadcaster Jean Dominique was gunned down on the steps of his radio station. The following year, a pro-government mob in the city of Petit-Goave hacked to death Brignol Lindor, a second radio journalist. Several other journalists received death threats and dozens have fled the country. In 2002, the Paris-based watchdog group Reporters Without Borders named Aristide a "press predator."² In an unwanted echo of the Duvalier era, government-affiliated gangs known as *chimères* have emerged as a key source of violence and a power in their own right. Narcotics traffickers also strengthened their foothold in Haiti, which is believed to be the transshipment point for an estimated 15 percent of the Colombian cocaine en route to the United States.³ In 2003, U.S. and Haitian authorities nabbed Jacques Ketant, one of the country's leading drug traffickers. Last September, however, the White House found that Haiti has "failed demonstrably" to comply with international agreements on drugs.⁴ Many Haitians cite dete-

riorating rule of law as their top concern.

Against the backdrop of political deadlock and mounting insecurity, new political forces have attempted to mobilize against Aristide by organizing mass protests calling for his resignation. These include the Group of 184, a grassroots civil society movement promoting a 'new social contract' for Haiti. Mobilized by examples in Venezuela (and more recently, Bolivia), groups have organized strikes and demonstrations in the hopes of increasing pressure on Aristide. In several instances, peaceful rallies have been subject to violence by pro-government groups. While it is impossible to know what level of support the government maintains

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after three years of economic decline, the Aristide administration has repeatedly proven its ability to withstand pressures to force its collapse. The Haitian public, though increasingly skeptical of the political class, has largely either remained on the sidelines or continued to give Aristide the benefit of the doubt. He is still the country's most popular politician, although there are signs that may change. But among his political opponents and certain influential sectors of civil society, he is deeply detested. Many of the government's enemies still contemplate scenarios of U.S. intervention to remove Aristide, however unrealistic.

Today, it is difficult to see how Haiti's political conflict can be resolved unless the United States aggressively pressures Haiti's fractious politicians into a lasting agreement. Otherwise, Haiti's political paralysis threatens to continue indefinitely and fuel greater polarization and civil unrest, with the attendant repercussions on assistance programs and economic development. Washington's reluctance to enter the fray, however, is rooted in the history of the last decade.

WASHINGTON: A HOUSE DIVIDED

When it comes to Haitian politics, the United States is the elephant in the room. This is doubly unfortunate as it prompts many Haitian actors to try to solve their problems through Washington, and U.S. policy itself has been undermined by the political partisanship of the Clinton years. When it comes to Haiti, Washington speaks in many voices. The seeds of the partisan divide on Haiti were sown during the 1992 presidential election, when Democratic candidate Bill Clinton promised a more humane foreign policy toward the country to distinguish himself from then-President George H.

W. Bush. A military junta had seized power in 1991, and a growing number of Haitians were attempting to escape the island. Clinton pledged to reverse an executive order implemented by Bush allowing the Coast Guard to return boat people to Haiti without the opportunity of an asylum hearing. Haitians were listening. In late 1992, as President-elect, Clinton was informed that Pentagon reconnaissance flights had observed hundreds of makeshift boats being built in anticipation of his inauguration; the estimated refugee wave was thought to exceed 100,000 people. Clinton decided to maintain the migration policy and seek other avenues for resolving the situation in Haiti; he later promoted a boycott against the military government.

The next turning point came in October 1993, when a group of American soldiers were due to land in Haiti following the signing of the Governor's Island Accords that were intended to pave the way for Aristide's return. When the U.S.S. Harlan County arrived in Port-au-Prince, the ship was met by a group of armed Haitians shouting jeers from the dock, presumably on the orders of Haiti's military leaders. Unprepared for the chilly reception and uncertain about suddenly escalating a military commitment in Haiti, the United States left the ship circling off the coast, and then withdrew. Occurring less than a week after 18 Americans had died in street-fighting in Mogadishu, Somalia, the Harlan County debacle set the stage for a year-long showdown between the U.S. government and the Haitian junta—and between the Clinton administration and its doubters in the U.S. Congress.

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By the fall of 1994, polls indicated that 78 percent of the American public thought the President should receive authorization from Congress for military action in Haiti.⁵ Many legislators argued that the type of intervention the Clinton administration was now proposing represented a major conceptual departure from the mission sent following the Governor's Island Accords in 1993. Having gained the approval of the United Nations, President Clinton decided against taking a proposal for U.S. intervention to Congress, although he had an important bulwark of political support in the Congressional Black Caucus. The endgame arrived in September 1994, when a negotiating team composed of former President Jimmy Carter, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, and Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA) brokered the Haitian junta's terms of departure hours before the scheduled invasion. President Aristide returned to Haiti on 15 October 1994. For the Clinton Administration, Operation Restore Democracy was claimed as a notable foreign policy success: the military departed without bloodshed, and Haiti's rightful government was restored.

Yet the events surrounding the intervention crystallized the deep partisan divisions that continue to plague U.S.-Haiti policy today. Conservative Republicans rejected the view of the Haiti intervention as a foreign policy achievement, and considered the mission a massive waste of resources devoted to restoring a left-wing dema-

gogue, inimical to U.S. interests. Some also thought that an opportunity to promote a broad-based Haitian government had been lost. Personal antipathy towards both Aristide and Clinton gave these policy views a sharper edge. On the Democratic side of the aisle, many liberal supporters of Aristide considered the Haiti policy a big win. For its part, the Clinton administration claimed the restoration of Aristide as a major strike for democracy, even as Haiti went into an economic and political tailspin. Most of Congress and the American public soon moved on to other issues, but the fault lines in U.S.-Haiti policy persisted.

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In 2003, the decision by President George W. Bush to launch Operation Iraqi Freedom prompted some comparison with Clinton's intervention in Haiti. Indeed, despite their differences, both cases illustrate the perils of a first-term president claiming a controversial foreign policy success, but facing sharp partisan divides that threaten to undermine efforts at long-term nation-building. Haiti and Iraq both became political flashpoints, where failure abroad could be used to obtain partisan advantage at home. Clinton made sure to scale back the U.S. presence in Haiti in time for the 1996 elections, and Bush will be under pressure to do the same in Iraq. Both interventions demonstrate that it is difficult for the United States to engage in nation-building efforts with long time horizons without a domestic political consensus. Of course, the crucial difference is that the Iraq invasion is central to U.S. foreign policy, while Haiti never was.

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The latent tensions over the 1994 invasion, which simmered under the surface for most of Clinton's term, help explain why the contested elections of May and November 2000 proved so damaging to Haiti's relations with the international community. Conservative members of Congress predisposed to mistrust Aristide saw their worst suspicions vindicated. Shortly after the presidential election, a press release was issued by three leading Republican members of Congress, Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-NY), Rep. Porter Goss (R-FL), and Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC). The congressmen denounced the results as a "sham election with the sole purpose of delivering absolute control over Haiti's government to Mr. Jean-Bertrand Aristide."⁶

While the Clinton administration tacitly accepted Aristide's ascension as legitimate, the U.S. legislature added a provision to the Foreign Operations Act of 2001 mandating that any future assistance to the Haitian government was contingent on "free and fair" elections for a new parliament. President Clinton signed the law on 6 November 2000, effectively pulling the plug on further police and judicial aid to Haiti,

an effort that had received nearly US\$100 million since the 1994 intervention.⁷ The professionalism of the 5,000 member Haitian National Police, hardly a model force to begin with, deteriorated rapidly without direct development support and under the increased politicization of the Aristide administration. Aid to education and health ministries was also cut, causing similar detrimental effects.

The Aristide government, familiar with the workings of Washington politics, has engaged a range of lobbying firms to make the Haitian government's case for renewed and expanded aid. In 2002, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that several firms were hired to represent Haiti at the cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars.⁸ For its part, the Congressional Black Caucus continued to advocate assistance to Haiti, as have many prominent Democrats. Even as frustration with Aristide privately mounted, the cessation of aid had clearly proved damaging to the welfare of Haiti. But the message often came with a partisan twist, with comparisons drawn between Haiti's electoral woes and the initial controversy surrounding the 2000 victory of President George W. Bush. Partisan politics have helped fuel the cycle of engagement and withdrawal that has made it so difficult to remain in Haiti. Nowhere has this ambivalence been more counterproductive than in the area of foreign assistance.

THE ROLE OF FOREIGN AID

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Haiti's humanitarian crisis is a hardy perennial. The country emerged from its revolutionary war in 1804 with a badly damaged plantation system, a powerful political class composed of former soldiers and a mixed race bourgeoisie, and a largely illiterate peasant society of five hundred thousand former slaves. Nearly two centuries later, Haiti's population has swelled to almost eight million, but its infrastructure and productive capacity has shown little advancement. Roughly two-thirds of all Haitians live below the poverty line, including eighty percent of those in the countryside. Haiti's school enrollment and literacy rates are among the lowest in the world, and more than half of all Haitian adults are illiterate. Life expectancy hovers at 50 years, the infant mortality rate—at 95 deaths per 1,000 live births—is twice the regional average, and the HIV infection rates rival those of some African countries. In 2003, the UN ranked Haiti 150th out of 175 countries in its Human Development Index of life expectancy, educational attainment and adjusted real income—lower than Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, or Zimbabwe.⁹

Haiti is greatly dependent on foreign aid, yet years of engagement by international donors have failed to make a significant dent in this social panorama. During the Duvalier era, Cold War politics meant that aid effectiveness was measured in terms of stabilizing regional allies, rather than on its success in alleviating poverty. More re-

cently, assistance programs have faltered due to poor governance and lack of government accountability. Haiti received over US\$2.5 billion in assistance between 1994 and 2001, led by the United States, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the European Union. All three donors cut off aid following the May 2000 elections, and the few areas of modest progress—such as increased school enrollment and judicial reform—slid dramatically backwards.

In 2002, a World Bank report concluded that continuous political turmoil was the biggest constraint facing its operations in Haiti over the last fifteen years: “In project after project, the reason for delayed implementation or cancellation, is a coup, civil unrest, or the inevitable results of these events, such as lack of ownership by a frequently changing government and rapid staff turnover.”¹⁰ However, after a miserable year in 2002, exacerbated by the devaluation of the Haitian gourde and the implosion of a series of savings cooperatives, Haiti began to make incremental gains on the economic front in 2003. The finance ministry cut a deal with the IMF, cleared its US\$32 million in arrears with the Inter-American Development Bank and entered into discussions with the World Bank. Discretionary ministerial accounts were brought under tighter control, and several IDB loans are now in the pipeline, totaling US\$146 million.¹¹ While the United States government continued its block on direct assistance to the Haitian government, about US\$50 million per year is being channeled to Haiti through non-governmental organizations.

Although the aid picture has temporarily brightened, the Haitian private sector continues to suffer from an unstable political climate scaring off many investors; foreign direct investment in Haiti shrank from US\$30 million in 1999 to US\$5 million in 2002.¹² In the U.S. Congress, a bipartisan coalition of legislators is pushing to extend new trade preferences to Haiti under the Haitian Economy Recovery and Opportunity Act. This bill could improve Haiti’s job environment and curtail rampant unemployment. Perhaps not surprisingly, Haiti’s greatest source of foreign aid came from the Haitians themselves. An estimated 500,000 Haitians live in New York, another 380,000 in Miami, and significant populations are in Boston and Montreal.¹³ Haiti receives about US\$700 million annually in remittances from relatives living overseas, accounting for as much as 20 percent of Haiti’s total GDP.¹⁴ Yet even the lifeline of remittances is not enough to compensate for Haiti’s backsliding economy.

Foreign aid will play a vital role in determining Haiti’s well-being for the foreseeable future. Post-Duvalier Haiti is no doubt a difficult place for foreign assistance to be effective, especially in the short-term. Great care must be taken not to return to the

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days when international donors provided succor to Haitian dictators. But it is hard to argue that wildly fluctuating aid flows are the most responsible response to the political turbulence generated by Haiti's ongoing democratic transition. Surely, a better balance can be struck to help ensure that aid is not wasted, meets the needs of the Haitian people, and prevents erosion from modest gains in areas like education, health, and security. Haiti's future may well depend on whether the United States and other key donors can find a way to stay involved when the going gets rough.

THE GATHERING STORM

The deep polarization of Haitian politics, the country's inconsistent record with foreign aid, and partisan divisions in Washington all indicate that a solution to the Haitian impasse will not come easily. There is, however, an array of forces that will conspire to push Haiti ever closer to the brink in the coming years. As a result, addressing Haiti's woes will become more costly for both Haitian leaders and international policymakers.

The combination of poverty, inadequate regulation, and unsustainable agricultural practices in Haiti has led to an unparalleled level of deforestation. Haiti's forested land has shrunk from about 75 percent during the colonial era to less than one percent in 2003.¹⁵ The potential environmental damage runs far beyond loss of trees and accompanying wildlife, as the deforestation has led to the erosion of the rich topsoil needed for agriculture. The UN estimates that Haiti loses 36 million tons of topsoil each year as rains and floods wash the nutrient-rich dirt into the Caribbean Sea.¹⁶ Entire mountain ecosystems are threatened with extinction, but the deforestation also continues to exact a human toll as the growing population becomes dependent on land that is now unsuitable for farming, and run-off damages Haitian fisheries. As a result, national food production is on the decline.

Haiti's population has risen to eight million people at present—an increase of two million since the collapse of the Duvalier regime in 1986. Even accounting for infant mortality and a short life expectancy, Haiti is projected to add another three million over the next quarter-century as the population grows at two percent per year. By 2030, Haiti's population will approach 12 million, potentially eclipsing both Cuba and the Dominican Republic to become the most populous country in the Caribbean.

The juxtaposition of an expanding population and dwindling resources has already resulted in a food crisis of significant proportions. In the summer of 2003, the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) released a report calling Haiti a "silent crisis" where 3.8 million people are unable to secure minimum food requirements, with the rural areas being particularly hard hit.¹⁷ Acute malnutrition is at 4.5 percent and poised to rise.¹⁸ Simply put, Haiti's expanding population is on a collision

course with declining food production and rapid deforestation. At some point, these three lines have to cross.

Haiti is also in the eye of the storm of the Caribbean AIDS epidemic. While 2.4 percent of the region's population is affected, estimates put the HIV prevalence rate in Haiti's urban centers at twelve percent while rural areas have a rate of five percent. About 30,000 Haitians die of AIDS every year, twice the number of victims in the United States, a country with a population thirty times Haiti's.¹⁹ With 200,000 AIDS orphans, Haiti has the highest AIDS rate outside of Africa.²⁰ As the movement to battle AIDS has gained currency worldwide, the United States and other countries have moved to help Haiti fight the disease. Haiti today has some of the most innovative AIDS programs in the world, but greater resources will be needed to combat the disease in the coming years.

In addition to the internal challenges facing the country, Haiti faces potential future competition in its claim for development aid and international attention. In neighboring Cuba, President Fidel Castro recently celebrated his 77th birthday and commemorated the 50th anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Barracks that launched the Cuban Revolution. Change in Cuba after Castro is inevitable, although it is too early to predict what form this might take, and the conceivable outcomes range from democratic transition, to a China-style opening, or perhaps civil unrest. However, all scenarios for a post-Castro Cuba have the potential to transform U.S. policy priorities in the Caribbean and subsume substantial political, and possibly financial, resources. Haiti can ill afford to lose the world's attention at its time of greatest need, and yet Cuba poses precisely that challenge.

A ROADMAP FOR HAITI?

Haiti has problems that will not solve themselves, and the coming period will both be decisive for Haiti and further challenge U.S. policy. Without the establishment of some democratic normalcy, a marked improvement in the security environment, and the beginnings of a sustainable economy in Haiti, the United States cannot discount that the country may again emerge as a front-burner issue. Given the current demographic and economic trends, Haiti's status quo is not sufficiently stable to maintain even today's poor standard of living in the face of further population growth and environmental exhaustion. Prospects for political violence are perhaps greater now than at any other time since the restoration of the Aristide government in 1994, due to the deep political divisions and the number of arms available in the country. Even if food aid and remittances continue to keep Haiti's economy on life support, mounting political tensions threaten to render the country ungovernable. In 2004, a sudden refugee crisis will


remain a distinct possibility.

Haiti desperately needs a strong and engaged United States to stem its slide into a failed state. Despite lingering partisan divisions in Washington, Haiti's political and economic unraveling of the past three years has begun to provoke a convergence of views on how to deal with the country. Aristide's former supporters have become increasingly frustrated with the levels of political violence and the president's unwillingness or inability to rein in gangs affiliated with his political party. Yet economic deterioration has softened opposition to aid among Aristide's fiercest critics, as evidenced by the Bush administration's renewed support for lending by the Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank.

The United States can play a vital role in moving the democratic process forward. The OAS has produced a roadmap for elections in Haiti and appointed Ambassador Terrence Todman, a respected U.S. diplomat, to work for the formation of the electoral council. But an agreement needs to be reached soon. Otherwise, Haiti faces a situation where two-thirds of the parliament expires in 2004, leaving Aristide to rule by decree and pushing the country's political stalemate into a new and more uncertain phase. More importantly, successful legislative elections will pave the way for an honest presidential election in 2005, by far the most significant event on the political horizon. With Aristide constitutionally barred from running again, Haiti's democracy will have a precious window of opportunity to move past the bitter political deadlock facing the country. The United States could work closely with Haitian actors to secure the compromise needed to form the electoral council, and then collaborate with regional partners to provide and equip a security force to safeguard the election process. An estimated 1,000 persons would be needed, a relatively small commitment that would potentially win support from Latin America and Europe.

In the short term, enhanced security, increased aid, and clean elections in 2005 would certainly help to get the country back on track. With luck, it could facilitate the emergence of leadership supported by the Haitian people, calm the country's social tensions, and pave the way for increased financial and political resources from the international community. This outcome is by no means assured, however, and Haiti faces environmental and population pressures that will be difficult for even the most honest and effective government to handle.

The United States cannot solve all of Haiti's problems, but there is clearly ample room to benefit the country through smart, steady, and sustained involvement in both the political and economic realms. It will be difficult for U.S. policy towards Haiti to break the cycle of engagement, disappointment, withdrawal, and re-engagement. In the coming period, events in Haiti are certain to demand attention and create frustration for U.S. policymakers. But perhaps by moderating expectations, limiting the role

of partisanship, and adopting a “first, do no harm” approach to the country’s institutions, the United States can forge a pragmatic and realistic relationship that gradually builds towards the goal of a democratic, stable, and economically viable Haiti. The people of Haiti have enough problems; erratic U.S. policy should not be yet another. 

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