



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

Georges A. Fauriol

Director, Americas Program
Center for Strategic and International Studies
Washington, D. C.

**Before the House Government Reform Committee Subcommittee on Criminal Justice,
Drug Policy and Human Resources
April 12, 2000**

The New Haitian end-game

U.S. policy on Haiti is collapsing and there is a need for Congress to re-impose some discipline. The United States intervened in September 1994 with 20,000+ troops along with a complex UN-mandated coalition to return to Haiti deposed president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The strategic marker for this remarkable action was the return to democratic governance.

Fast forward to April 2000: local and parliamentary elections scheduled for March 19 have been postponed, even though until recently most Haitian and U.S. officials were insisting that everything was on track. Haitian President, Rene Preval and the Haitian provisional election commission (CEP) are arguing over authority to reset the electoral calendar.

Haiti is now a country where elections are not held on time, results are not credible, foreign aid is wasted or simply not spent, the economy is wide open to the drug trade, the president of the country rules by decree, political intimidation is widespread, the new national police kills, and the government has invited Cuban technical advisers.

This sequence of events leads me to two general observations. First, for all practical purposes, senior Haitian executive leadership appears to be barely functioning. Second, there is little credibility left in U.S. policy efforts. What is happening here?

Washington's rhetoric alludes to five priority areas, with little if any progress in most of them: democracy, human rights, institution building; alleviation of poverty; countering of drug flows; management of illegal immigration; and linking up Haiti with the region's democratization and economic growth trends. Yet, the *unstated* strategic assumption is that Washington's interest in Haiti is measured by stability, not democracy, hence a policy posture that is satisfied with the low outflow of refugees rather than high Haitian voter turnout.

Washington is desperately attempting to keep on track a wobbly Haitian electoral strategy on the record of successively worse efforts since 1995. Specifically, the Administration's tactical imperative is to sanction this spring's Haitian electoral exercise as a stepping-stone to make credible a presidential election at the end of this year.

The subtext to all of the above involves Aristide, his influence over current events, his motivation regarding any upcoming elections, and the presumption that all political scenarios ultimately come back to him. Although his role is probably exaggerated, for U.S. policymakers Aristide appears to have become the past, the present, and the future. They are boxed in.

Item: The 1994 intervention consumed about \$1.5 billion-plus of U.S. taxpayer moneys in FY94-95. The intervention also triggered a \$1.2 billion multinational reconstruction effort, which ground to a halt in 1996 with the Haitian government's dismal record of necessary reforms (including privatization) and budgetary oversight. For an *average* of about \$6 million/year in direct U.S. support since 1995, each successive election [two in 1995, one in 1997] has generated a lower

voter turnout (less than 5 percent in 1997--the same as with the 1988 elections run by the military). More remarkably considering the scope of the effort, there are no verifiable final vote counts, no permanent voter registration record, nor electoral machinery institution building ensuing from any of these elections.

Item: Haiti has opened up to Colombia's narcotics traffickers, and widespread contraband, that is damaging legitimate business—let alone U.S. investment. The country is reported to account for the transit of about 13 percent (or more) of all the cocaine reaching the United States, which may be 2-4 times the rate of the international embargo years (1991-94). Haiti was recently “decertified” by Washington for failing the annual narcotics policy cooperation test, yet protected from its implications by a White House “national interest” waiver.

Item: What is keeping Haiti's political system from going off the rails is the surprising resiliency of a battered opposition and civil society that will not quit. This includes former Aristide tactical partners (most notably the OPL, the country's second largest political block) as well as new actors (Mochrena, linked to a growing grass-roots protestant constituency, claims major party status) and struggling moderate party coalitions (the Espace de Concertation the most durable so far). U.S. policy leadership has generally been openly skeptical of their credibility, lending credence to the perception of many Haitians that Washington has had no other game than Aristide's. The media remains surprisingly vibrant if under constant barrage of conflicting pressures, as the assassination last week of Radio Haiti Inter owner and political activist suggests.

Item: The real story behind the delayed March 17th elections--*delayed since November 1998*--is a Haiti governed by presidential decrees and operating with a government led by a *de facto* prime minister never constitutionally approved. Democracy? President Rene Preval, a weak if cunning Aristide protégé, shut down the national parliament last year in the wake of 18 months of skirmishes over the nomination of a Prime Minister. Petty rivalries? No. The previous Prime Minister, Rosny Smart, had resigned after refusing to legitimize the bogus April 1997 elections.

Item: An amazing aspect of post-94 politics relates to senior figures that have gravitated toward Aristide, an intriguing cast of individuals with apparently U.S. law enforcement, DEA, and Interpol files--untouchables as suggested by a February *Miami Herald* story. Some are graduates of the disbanded Haitian military and also candidates for parliamentary seats. The notables include Danny Toussaint, linked in media reporting to the Mireille Durocher Bertin assassination case in 1995, Fourrel Celestin, Aristide's failed police chief nominee in 1995, Serge Calvin, *political commissar* of Fanmi Lavalas and brother-in-law of President Rene Preval, Milien Romages, reportedly implicated in the assassination of pastor Leroy of the MDN party. This image conflicts with the socio-political dynamic heavily promoted—in Haiti and the United States-- in the wake of Aristide's return in 1994 of a Haiti governed by civilian leadership free of the military past.

Item: The judiciary and the related law enforcement structure are by all accounts barely functioning despite heroic efforts by the United States and other donors. A non-functioning judicial apparatus is therefore not much of a counterpart to a highly politicized *Haitian National Police*--a police whose ranks appear to be evaporating, down to about a 4,000-strong force from 6,000 two years ago. The original vetting process for new recruits laboriously set up in 1995, let alone a reasonably effective command structure, has been penetrated politically. This led last spring to several weeks of public pressure on Haiti's law enforcement leadership, triggering the resignation and exile of the key public security official (Robert --Bob--Manuel). The HNP's chief, Pierre Denize, even if originally well intentioned, is at best a weak actor and at worst a political instrument of the shenanigans of current and past occupants of the presidential palace.

The U.S.-Haitian policy environment has generated a form of “you know that he knows, that he knows you know” kind of round-robin policy consideration. There is an uneven and at times awkward structure to U.S. diplomacy directed mostly at Aristide rather than the Preval government (at least until recently) or the opposition. This structure has at least three layers: the Department of State and the U.S. Embassy (with only a “super-Charge d’Affaires” in place

presently); the Special Haiti Coordinator (Ambassador Donald Steinberg); and an occasional private envoy (former NSC chief, Anthony Lake). Some would add a fourth layer, composed of miscellaneous intermediaries, including congressional visits. I believe this in part explains late last year's resignation of our career ambassador (Timothy Carney), who left essentially out of frustration with a Washington political machinery captured by its own multiple scripts.

Admittedly, this sounds like "inside the Beltway" considerations but may have some effect on the effectiveness of Washington's response. This is what I mean in the opening sentence of this statement when suggesting a need to re-impose policy discipline. There are too many cooks in the kitchen. This is fundamental to a Congressional-Executive branch foreign policy engagement with a modicum of bipartisan support to address the difficulties in U.S.-Haitian relations.

- It has become difficult to support a policy so wasteful in resources and missed political opportunities. Haiti's problems are not insurmountable but they require support of democratic and modernizing forces. Continuing flawed elections strategies in an environment led by discredited national leadership and institutions is not in the U.S. interest. Washington should be more demanding, not only for its sake but also that of Haitians.
- As a result I support the continuation of the various congressional "holds" on assistance to Haiti. However, I would also attempt in this interim to reconcile or streamline the various congressional resolutions, amendments, restrictions, and waivers that confuse — at least from the public's perspective— what the United States is actually trying to do, and how U.S. resources are being spent.
- Haiti is close to being ungovernable so I would be cautious regarding implied sanctions. I agree that serious problems require serious solutions but I do not get the impressions that the Administration is working from well integrated strategy—let alone one where the United States is not the only country holding the bag. While the most senior Haitian leadership is acting with what appears to be extraordinary bad faith, I am not certain either that this same leadership controls the ship of state all that strongly. In any event, the paths down the road of U.S. or multilateral sanctions (OAS 1080 for example) are paved with good intentions and catastrophic results for Haiti's recent experience. Congress should be extremely vigilant.
- The electoral underpinnings of the current crisis suggest a need to assess U.S. spending in this area since 1995. Future actions to break the political logjam in Haiti are anchored to pursuing effective electoral assistance strategies. Even a casual observation of Haiti's recent electoral experience suggests that the international community should bear some of the responsibility and be accountable for the dismal failure of the effort. This review should include not only a public accounting of resources but also of agencies and programs involved to pursue what appears to be a cumulative waste of funds.