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Haiti: Will Things Fall Apart?

DONALD E. SCHULZ

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"From time immemorial in Guinea, every man betrays his neighbor." -- Crèole proverb

"The Americans, in short, had modernized everything but Haiti and the Haitians." -- Robert and Nancy Heintz, on the US occupation of Haiti, 1915-34

Some time ago I published a bleak, though by no means hopeless analysis of Haiti's political and socioeconomic prospects, arguing that in spite of the substantive progress that had been made since the US-led multinational intervention in September 1994, there was still a long way to go.[1] The political situation remained extremely fragile, and the prospects for economic development were at best problematic. The latter was all the more doubtful because of the suspension of over \$130 million in foreign aid due to the Aristide administration's failure to rationalize the economy in accordance with the prescriptions of international lenders. Unless this deadlock were to be broken, the tactical success that had been achieved to that point would likely, sooner or later, turn into a strategic failure.

Subsequent developments have served only to confirm and lend urgency to that prognosis. The past year has witnessed an intensification of both political and nonpolitical violence. National unity has dissipated, as the ruling "Lavalas" coalition has splintered into hostile factions, the largest of which opposes the Préval administration's structural adjustment program. In April 1997, flawed elections led to a major political crisis. Meanwhile, the government's inability to implement reforms in a timely fashion has once again jeopardized substantial amounts of foreign aid. The upshot is that economic recovery has been stymied, and public unrest is reaching dangerous proportions.

All this has once again raised questions about the viability of the Haitian experiment. Moreover, it comes at a time when the UN peacekeeping effort is winding down. Though 650 soldiers, 250 civilian police, and a 50-member military headquarters staff are to stay on until December 1997, by the time this article appears Haiti essentially will be on its own. At that point, the Préval government and the Haitian National Police will face a moment of truth. Will they be able to maintain political stability and the rule of law, or will things fall apart?

Cycles of Violence or a Descending Spiral?

Political violence in Haiti tends to come in waves, two of which occurred in the past 18 months. In the summer of 1996, there was a flurry of political arrests, conspiracies, and assassinations, the most troubling of which occurred in August, when Haitian police arrested some 20 members of the ultra-right-wing Mobilization for National Development (MND), most of whom were former members of the disbanded Haitian military (Forces Armées d'Haiti, or FAdH) said to have been planning political assassinations. These arrests were followed by an attack on the national police headquarters and the parliament building by gunmen wearing military-style uniforms, and by the killing of two MND politicians, Jacques Fleurival and Antoine Leroy, by elements linked to President René Préval's security guard.

While Préval himself was not involved in the killings, the problem could not be ignored lest the Clinton Administration's Haiti policy become an issue in the US presidential election campaign. Under US pressure, the Haitian president agreed to clean house. The head of the presidential security unit and his chief deputy were transferred, and it was announced that other members of the force would be suspended. At the same time, the Americans and Canadians quickly placed a protective cocoon around Préval. Several dozen armed Canadians surrounded the Presidential Palace, and a score of State Department agents were rushed to Port-au-Prince to join a smaller contingent of security personnel that had been in place ever since Aristide's return two years earlier. The

retaking of the Presidential Palace--as one scribe referred to it--dramatically underscored the fragility of Haitian political stability. The United States found itself in the position of having to protect Préval from his own US-trained bodyguards while these units were investigated, given additional training, and turned into a security force that he could trust.

In the weeks that followed, violence diminished and a semblance of order was restored. In mid-February 1997, however, a new cycle began. Over the next six weeks, several dozen people would be killed. The carnage began with a war between rival drug gangs in the sprawling Port-au-Prince slum of Cité Soleil and quickly spread to more upscale areas. In part, this was a reaction to pressures from the Haitian National Police (HNP), which had stepped up its operations in the slum. The gangs retaliated by targeting officers and extending their activities to areas where the HNP was less active. Some of the violence, too, came from the police, who occasionally engaged in extrajudicial executions or killed innocent bystanders. Some also appears to have been political. As conflicts within Lavalas intensified, competing factions began accusing each other of directing the violence. Some ex-military, "macoutes,"[2] and other elements sympathetic to the Duvalier dictatorship reappeared to take advantage of the chaos, and anti-government demonstrations assumed increasingly menacing overtones.

Like the wave of the previous summer, the violence of February and March 1997 eventually ran its course. But the recurrent appearance of these outbursts--and these were only the most recent--suggested a pattern that was likely to continue. The violence was coming from multiple sources, some of which were interacting in a pattern of threat and retaliation, and there was a widespread fear that the situation might grow worse. And once the UN peacekeepers departed, an important psychological and physical barrier would be removed. One could not but be apprehensive that the cycles of violence might evolve into a descending spiral.

The Politics of Self-Destruction

The Haitian crisis involves much more than a simple propensity for violence. No sooner had the turmoil of August 1996 begun to die down than former President Aristide attacked the Préval administration, claiming that the machinery of government had become loaded down with corruption and disorder, and that certain politicians had become blinded by power and had given up on the people. An economic coup was underway, he asserted; privatization was a trap that had sown division, confusion, and conflict within Lavalas. If order were to be restored, there must be good relations between the Lavalas in power and the Lavalas out of power.[3]

Relations between Préval and Aristide had long been the subject of speculation. Though the two men have been close for years--Préval served as Aristide's prime minister in 1991, and they have often been referred to as twins--their temperaments and styles are quite different. Whereas Aristide is intense, Préval is low-key. One is a rabble-rouser, with an enormous public following based largely on his messianic presence; the other is an administrator, whose popular support flows from his constitutional authority and the backing he has received from Aristide. Lacking a strong independent political base of his own, Préval's continuing public support depends on his ability to improve living conditions, provide public security, and, above all, maintain good relations with his political benefactor. This last requirement partially accounts for his reluctance to purge his security detail, since it was composed largely of Aristide loyalists, some of whom had been with the former president when he was in exile.

It is no secret that Aristide has ambitions to regain the presidency. The constitution will allow him to run for office again in 2000, and his statement was an attempt to stay in the public spotlight while distancing himself from a government whose policies were not likely to improve living conditions. Equally important, the government's modernization program was on the verge of receiving final approval in the Haitian Senate. The plan, which combined the partial privatization of nine state enterprises with a series of belt-tightening measures and was intended to reopen the sluiceways of international aid, had been rejected by Aristide when he was president. Nothing that had happened since had changed his mind.

This was the beginning of a major political offensive. In November 1996, Aristide announced the creation of a new umbrella movement, the Lavalas Family (Fanmi Lavalas, or FL), which, he claimed, was not intended to challenge the president or create more division, but merely reinvigorate and unify the Lavalas coalition. At the same time, however, he criticized international financial institutions for having imposed regressive economic reforms on Latin America and

the Caribbean, and spoke of "traitors, invisible enemies, and disinformation . . . aimed at destabilizing the population." Even as he was denying that there were divisions within Lavalas, activists from opposing factions distributed leaflets to the audience accusing him of sowing division, misusing funds, and treason.[4] Since then, things have gone downhill.

Notwithstanding Aristide's initial denials that the Lavalas Family was a political party, in January 1997 his associates registered it as such and began recruiting candidates for elections scheduled that April. About the same time, pro-Aristide groups opposed to the government's economic program called a general strike, triggering riots in Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haïtien, and Gonaïves. A second strike in March proved less successful, but both actions--accompanied by threats against those who refused to respect the calls--added to the incivility that was increasingly suffusing Haitian political life. The concerted campaign to force the resignation of Prime Minister Rosny Smarth, who had become a lightning rod for the administration's critics, became a significant feature of opposition rhetoric.

In the local and national elections held in April, the balloting was boycotted by some parties, and only about five to ten percent of the voters bothered to turn out. There was an almost total breakdown in the collection and consolidation of ballots and other electoral materials, which were often strewn about or left unsecured and unlogged. There were numerous instances of ballot stuffing--some precincts reported over 100-percent turnout rates--as well as some cases of voter intimidation--and blank ballots were not counted, which allowed two Lavalas Family senatorial candidates to obtain majorities in the first round. The Lavalas Political Organization (OPL) and other parties concluded that the election was stacked in favor of the Lavalas Family and declined to participate in the scheduled run-offs. Under heavy foreign and domestic pressure, the government was forced to postpone the second round indefinitely.

Haiti now plunged into a full-scale political crisis. The growing split within the Lavalas movement had immobilized both the executive and the legislature, where for weeks neither the Senate nor the Chamber of Deputies could reach a quorum. Legislation needed to comply with international agreements and rebuild decrepit institutions was not being passed, the budget was seven months overdue, ministries were strapped for cash, and employees went unpaid. Crucial economic and development programs needed to create jobs and reduce mounting social tension remained stalled.

President Préval, too, seemed paralyzed, torn between his loyalty to and dependence on Aristide and his commitments to the OPL (which supported the economic reforms) and to his international sponsors who provided some 70 percent of the government's budget. Increasingly passive, he appeared unable to perform the critical tasks of political communication that were necessary to obtain public and congressional support for his programs, seemingly isolated within his own administration. By June, all of his cabinet except Prime Minister Smarth had gone over to Aristide's party--and on 9 June, Préval lost Smarth as well. After months of vitriolic attacks from Aristide and his followers, the prime minister resigned, declaring that he was stepping down because he did not want to be party to electoral fraud. "In our country," he noted, "power is a disease."

Aristide, meanwhile, pressed his advantage, first encouraging his followers to join a nationwide teachers' strike which ended in riots, then attacking the government's economic program in fiery speeches, branding it economic "schizophrenia," and accusing the international community of trying to undermine the country's democratic forces: "If they believe they can discharge the battery of our morale by programming hunger and the high cost of living, they have miscalculated." Haiti, he warned, must never become "indebted to imperialism." [5] Nationalism flourished as some congressmen and leaders of popular organizations called for an end to the foreign "occupation." In July 1997, demonstrators burned tires and threw rocks at UN peacekeepers during a general strike held to demand the departure of international troops.

Haiti was slowly drifting towards chaos. As of September 1997, Préval had still not found a new prime minister; in August the Congress had rejected his nominee, Eric Pierre, and he had not yet selected another. While Haitian politicians hesitated, the economy stagnated. Unemployment was widely estimated at around 70 percent, and even the traditional oligarchy--the much-reviled Morally Repugnant Elites, or MRE's--were doing poorly. The resulting frustration was leading to growing disillusionment with the Préval government and--more seriously--with democracy itself; [6] several disturbing acts of violence occurred, including an assassination attempt against the foreign minister and the execution-style killing of a presidential bodyguard. While these attacks had not produced another full-scale cycle of violence, by early autumn 1997 the conditions for such a development seemed to be building.

The Security Problem in Perspective

The situation is not totally bleak, however; there have been some very real gains made over the past three years, and these need to be recognized lest one conclude that nothing has been accomplished or that Haiti is a hopeless case.

Perhaps the most important achievement has been a marked improvement in the security situation. This has been due largely to the dissolution of the Haitian armed forces and allied paramilitary organizations, but not without creating a certain irony. US officials originally had wanted to keep the FAdH--to purge it, professionalize it, and maintain it at a reduced level of manpower--which was a terrible idea considering the predatory nature of the institution and its near total lack of legitimacy. But Aristide outmaneuvered them, effectively dissolving it. Had the army remained intact, the danger of a coup would always have been in the background. Haitian presidents would have been forever looking over their shoulders, since the very existence of the military would have undercut public confidence in the government. To have been associated with it in any way would have had a delegitimizing effect.

Now, instead, there is a Haitian National Police (HNP) which, for all its weaknesses and faults, is still infinitely preferable to what existed before. While human rights abuses continue, they are not massive, systematic, or centrally directed, as was the case under the de facto regime (1991-94) when at least 3000 people died. According to one report, 114 people had been killed by the police since the force began operations in July 1995, with 20 of the deaths occurring in the first six months of 1997. Most close observers, however, believe that the HNP is gradually improving, and that most officers are doing a credible job in spite of inexperience and a debilitating lack of equipment.[7] And while the Director and the Inspector General of the HNP appear committed to ending the practice of impunity under which police have traditionally operated, the concept of police accountability is foreign to Haiti, and resources to investigate, try, and punish abuses are very limited. Though 33 officers were in jail awaiting trial in September 1997, not a single murder conviction had yet been obtained.[8] Even so--and in spite of all the problems the HNP faced--most urban Haitians, at least, seemed to believe that a fair amount of progress had been made in creating an effective police force.[9]

At the same time, the security situation is not quite as bad as it might seem from reading the US press. Since the events of August 1996, the Presidential Security Unit and the National Palace and Residential Guard have been reevaluated, retrained, and brought under the control of the HNP. The investigation into the 1996 killing of the two MND politicians, Fleurival and Leroy, has progressed, albeit slowly. A prime suspect reportedly has been identified, and a solid case is being built. These killings have been linked to a number of murders that occurred in 1995. Apparently, some of the gunmen in those killings were working at the National Palace at the time.[10]

Fortunately those anti-government forces that have been resorting to violence are still weak and disorganized. Politically, the Duvalierists appear to be a spent force. They have no leadership, organization, or army. While some ex-members of FAdH have held disruptive protests and threatened to take up arms if they did not receive certain benefits, government concessions seem to have defused their movement. Still, there continues to be a large reservoir of unemployed, violence-prone former military and paramilitary, many of whom are engaging in criminal activities or selling their services to any available bidder. There are also small political groups on both the extreme right and left who are trying to manipulate these elements and draw them into conspiratorial activities. These groups view democracy and the rule of law as threats to their own privileges and ambitions and prefer a police force they might be able to subvert or control to one that is professional and apolitical.

Three other security issues must be mentioned. One involves the criminal gangs that have proliferated in recent years. The increased circulation of weapons and more sophisticated forms of organized crime have created a serious problem. The police have long been afraid to go into some of the slums for fear they will be attacked. (Even US Embassy personnel have been forbidden to go into Cité Soleil without special permission.) As the HNP becomes more effective in combating these groups, the potential for violent confrontations will increase. Still, there is a distinction between criminal violence and political violence. There are five or six identifiable gangs in Cité Soleil, but they don't cooperate with one another and often shoot at each other. Even the most notorious--the so-called Red Army--is not a well-organized, cohesive entity. While some of its members may share a fantasy of being part of a popular army, they have no idea how to organize or discipline themselves. On the other hand, with guns plentiful and opportunities for enrichment scarce it should not be surprising that some might hire themselves out as thugs or assassins.

Another concern is the proliferation of private security forces. Currently, there are about a dozen government-licensed security companies, as well as scores of unlicensed security forces organized by local authorities and wealthy families. In Port-au-Prince, there are more private security agents than police officers, and they are often more experienced and better armed. Many are former FAdH, who are putting to use the skills they learned in the military. While the HNP was initially limited to sidearms, the resulting imbalance in weaponry between the police and their potential rivals in the criminal gangs and private security forces recently led Congress to authorize some specialized units (e.g., SWAT and crowd-control teams) to carry semiautomatic weapons.

Finally, there is a concern over the growing violence between Lavalas factions and other political groups. While the good news is that most Haitian politicians continue to reject violence in favor of the democratic process, the potential for an escalation of conflict and bloodshed cannot be ignored.

The bottom line is that no group presently has the capability of overthrowing the government. The most they can do--for the time being, at least--is to continue engaging in sporadic violence. Under these circumstances, the threat is not so much a coup, which is unlikely to be successful and in any case could not be consolidated in the face of the foreign military presence (as long as that lasts). Rather, the primary dangers are the assassination of Préval, Aristide, or both, leading to massive violence between their followers and those perceived to be responsible for the killings; the triggering of a dialectic of revolution in which ongoing violence from each side accelerates the violence of the other; and the creation of such chaos and anxiety as to undermine and destroy the government's ability to maintain order and public confidence, thus preparing the way for its eventual collapse or overthrow.

This is the real meaning of the cycles of violence. Pre-revolutionary conditions are being created which, if not contained, could lead to something much worse. The problem is complicated by the fact that the government's security forces show signs of overreacting to threats and provocations. The Leroy and Fleurival killings were only the most notorious cases. While reports on the HNP by the OAS/UN International Civilian Mission generally have been favorable, they have documented continuing high levels of police violence.[11] Though not all of these incidents constitute abuse, human rights violations have been all too common. Efforts to investigate and punish the guilty still leave much to be desired. Since April 1996, moreover, scores of people have been arrested on vague charges of subversion, sometimes without warrants, leading to accusations that the government has been targeting its political opponents.

The Window of Opportunity: Opening or Closing?

One of the most notable achievements during the past three and a half years has been Haiti's political transition. For the first time in its history, there was a peaceful turnover of office from one democratically elected president to another. At the same time, several rounds of elections have been conducted without violence. Clearly, these are important steps in the right direction.

This progress was not always apparent, however. The June 1995 elections that ushered in the new legislature were seriously flawed, and were roundly denounced by critics. By the same token, the landslide victory by Lavalas gave rise to fears that Haiti was developing a one-party state dominated by radical elements in the Aristide camp. In retrospect, however, those concerns seem exaggerated. The problem with the elections was primarily one of chaos and incompetence, rather than systematic fraud or violence, and was largely confined to the initial round of balloting. No serious observer doubts that Lavalas would have won an overwhelming victory even under the most pristine conditions. The Congress that emerged is a broadly representative body--the first really representative legislature Haiti has ever had--and the deputies have been taking their jobs seriously. (In contrast, the previous parliament was overflowing with opportunists.)

As for Lavalas, it was never a monolithic organization. The Lavalas movement is a coalition of groups, several of which have representatives in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies. There is no party discipline; Gérard Pierre-Charles, the leader of the Lavalas Political Organization, which is still the largest of these blocs, claims he doesn't know how many deputies he has. And certainly they don't always do what the executive wants. The legislators have rejected a number of presidential appointments and programs, and even an Inter-American Development Bank loan that was considered inappropriate. Whatever else this parliament might be, it is no rubber stamp.

The name of the game is responsible co-government. Not the least of this Congress's virtues is that it is serving as a check on the president, in contrast to the traditional Haitian propensity to place all power in the hands of the executive. And in spite of all its recent problems and an incredible lack of resources, the legislature is not without accomplishments. Keep in mind that there is no party machinery to advance the process of legislation, and almost no trained staff. There is no legislative research service, and few people to help draft bills. There are not enough secretaries, copy machines, telephones, or desks. Nor is there air conditioning. (The temperature in the Chamber of Deputies is often around 95° F.) The Senate does not even have a chamber of its own in which to meet; it has had to adapt a conference room for that purpose.

Yet, even under these conditions, some progress has been made. Notwithstanding Aristide's opposition, a major modernization law providing for the partial privatization of nine state enterprises has been passed. So has a civil service law designed to help streamline the bureaucracy. These reforms, part of the price for restarting the flow of aid from international lending institutions, are also necessary if Haiti is to attract investment and construct an economy that is capable of operating with some semblance of efficiency. The government monopolies, in particular, have been notorious sources of graft, overstaffing, and incompetence: ghost workers abound, most enterprises lose money or do not operate at all, and the only way the telephone company can turn a profit is by charging inflated prices for overseas calls. Without reforms, Haiti's prospects for developing self-sustaining economic growth are nil.

President Préval, too, deserves credit. During his first year in office, he displayed leadership and courage in pressing for these changes. Some of his appointees--like Pierre Denizé, chief of the HNP; Robert Manuel, the Minister for Public Safety; and Leslie Delatour, the Central Bank Governor[12]--are competent technocrats who are committed to economic reforms, human rights, and all the other things that must be done if Haiti's future is not to be a repeat of her past.

It is precisely because Préval's first year was so promising that his second year has been so frustrating. As matters now stand, all that has been accomplished is in jeopardy. Unless the warring Lavalas camps can reach some compromise, there will be no more reforms, and those that have been passed may never be implemented or may be implemented badly. The downsizing of the civil service has not yet been approved, and while the process of privatizing state enterprises is continuing, it has been very slow. There is still a danger that political conflict may discourage potential bidders or torpedo the program altogether. At stake is the confidence of domestic and foreign investors, whose capital is essential to the country's economic and social development.

In short, one has the impression that a window of opportunity is closing. Haiti has only so much time before the international community loses interest and turns its attention elsewhere. Currently, some \$100 million in vital foreign aid remains undistributed because of the paralysis in parliament. Unless the logjam is broken and the money starts flowing, economic recovery could be delayed indefinitely. If that happens, there will likely be even more social and political unrest, which, in turn, will make it even more difficult to generate growth.

The Immensity of the Challenge

Political evolution

In the three years since Aristide was restored, there has been a fair amount of progress in building the institutional bases of democracy, but much less in changing the political culture. The old values, attitudes, and behavior live on; they are an enormous weight dragging the country down even as it continues the struggle to get to its feet. Thus, just when it appeared that Haiti was entering a new stage of political development, under a technocratic leadership with the skills needed to pull the country out of underdevelopment, there has been a reversion to the politics of egocentrism and charisma. The creation of the Lavalas Family has little to do with modernization. Rather than helping institutionalize the political party system, Aristide has chosen--in traditional Haitian fashion--to create a vehicle for his own ambitions.

Haiti is a society built on mistrust. The old fears and suspicions continue to exist just below the surface, and all it takes to bring them into the open are events such as those of early 1997. At the same time, there is a propensity for violence which, while not manifested in the daily lives of ordinary people, can easily break out at moments of stress, as

occurred in the aftermath of the Duvalier regime's fall when hundreds of Tonton Macoutes and Vodou clergy were hunted down and killed. Even today, there are well over a hundred cases of vigilante justice every year.[13] This says much about the low public confidence in Haiti's law enforcement capabilities, especially the judicial system. It also reflects a lack of understanding of the role that the police and courts play in a democracy. The idea that one can look to those sources for justice--as opposed to taking matters into one's own hands--is a new idea for Haitians and will require time to take root.[14]

Beyond this, there is a deeply ingrained, 200-year tradition of predation to overcome. This has been a political culture in which, traditionally, everyone has been out for himself. Every politician wanted to be president, or at least get his share of the spoils. Given that mentality, it should not be surprising that the state would become a mechanism to extract wealth for the benefit of those who controlled it. When combined with grinding poverty, endemic corruption, and deep-seated distrust and insecurity, the result was chronic violence. For those with the means, force or the threat of force was often the option of first resort, and those without means became not merely the objects but sometimes the instruments of terror.[15] While the Duvalierists have been ousted, the political culture that spawned them has been only partially uprooted. As long as there are weapons available and elements in the government and opposition willing to resort to violence, democracy will remain vulnerable.

Political culture is important in other ways as well. One can see it in the oligarchy and many (though by no means all) businessmen, whose pursuit of wealth at any cost to national development has helped make Haiti the poorest country in the hemisphere. Again, this has been a predatory elite, with no sense of identity with or responsibility to the Haitian people. And that raises the question of the role these elements will play in the "new Haiti." Clearly, their talent and capital must be tapped if the country is to have any hope of escaping underdevelopment. Incentives will be needed to get these elites to invest in their own country, especially when it is safer to send one's money abroad. Even if their capital can be attracted, there is no assurance that it will be invested in ways that promote the national interest, as well as their own private interests.

Economic reform

Part of the problem with the economic strategy international lenders have imposed on Haiti is that, given the norms and habits of that political culture, it may perpetuate or even intensify certain abuses. There can be no assurance that privatized state monopolies will not become private monopolies continuing many of the same exploitative practices (e.g., high prices, low wages) that have marked past behavior. And it is difficult to imagine how one might prevent the kinds of corruption that have accompanied privatization in so many other countries. In an environment like Haiti's, where graft is endemic and socioeconomic inequalities immense, the danger is that neoliberal reforms may lead to even greater inequalities and hardships, an outcome that is generally conceded for the short run. Haitian officials estimate that as many as 3000 workers will be laid off at the overstuffed port, telephone, and electric companies and another 7500 from the civil service. The hope is that in the longer term more jobs will be created than eliminated, but there are no guarantees.

Another area of concern is the extent of foreign ownership of business and industry. Because most Haitian businessmen do not have the capital to buy the larger privatized entities, the major industries are likely to be transferred to US, Canadian, or French control. While it can be argued that this is not necessarily a bad thing--the capital has to come from somewhere and foreign owners may be less susceptible to corruption and more sensitive to their social responsibilities than Haitians--it is already a source of discontent among some nationalists and businessmen and could lead to a backlash.

This not an argument against reform. The old predatory and parasitic structures and relationships must be changed if Haiti is to move forward. But such transitions are always difficult and painful. Social safety nets will be needed to catch those who are endangered, with mechanisms of oversight and accountability to prevent abuses. Otherwise the damage done may offset any improvements made. For its part, the Haitian government has attempted to ameliorate some of these problems by retaining a state role in the companies that are to be privatized. But how this will work out in practice--if, indeed, it works at all--remains to be seen.

Complicating all these challenges is a staggering lack of human and material resources. While the quality of personnel

at the top of the executive branch is mixed, there is an appalling lack of competence below the ministerial level. In effect, what you have are ministers without ministries. The comparative handful of talented and dedicated people are constantly being bombarded--indeed, overwhelmed--by demands. Lacking proper administrative support, they have to deal with problems that should be dealt with at lower levels of the bureaucracy. As a result, things move very slowly. Nor is there any assurance that the decisions and policies made will be carried out by those responsible for implementing them.

Challenges in the justice system

The Haitian National Police often lacks the means to conduct basic operations. It needs more officers and vehicles, heavier weapons, more money, better leadership--in short, more of everything. Due to the financial crisis, the police have sometimes gone months without pay. They suffer from a shortfall of leadership and management at all levels; as of July 1997 the HNP, with an authorized strength of about 5300, lacked 49 senior officers, 162 inspectors, and 292 upper-level agents.[16] Morale and public support continue to be fragile, as officers increasingly become targets of political or gang violence and resort to unnecessary violence in return.

But the police at least function, which is more than can be said for the judicial system. There the problems are simply mind-boggling. In the words of one observer:

Haitian justice lacks everything: financial resources, materials, competent personnel, independence, stature and trust. Court facilities are a disgrace, courthouses often indistinguishable from small shops or run-down residences in Haitian cities and towns. Judges and prosecutors, ill-trained and often chosen because of their connections or willingness to comply with their benefactors' demands, dispense justice to the highest bidder or to the most powerful. No judge or prosecutor in Haiti, until mid-1995, had received any specialized professional training. Law schools are woefully inadequate and lack the most rudimentary necessities like decent classrooms and a law library; cronyism reigns, professors are ill-trained, students ill-prepared, passing grades bought and sold.[17]

One of the advantages police reform has had over judicial reform is that Haiti could construct a new police force more-or-less from scratch after the old police (which had been part of the FAdH) had been dissolved. In contrast, the new Haiti has inherited the old Haiti's judicial system lock, stock, and barrel, including personnel. While some progress has been made in getting rid of corrupt or incompetent judges and prosecutors, training new ones, and distributing law books, judicial reform has taken a back seat to the more immediate demands of security. As a result, the process of improving law enforcement and judicial procedures has been disrupted. It matters little that the police can apprehend criminals if the courts cannot try them. The resulting breakdown in the justice system has added to the morale problems of the police, fostering apathy, cynicism, corruption, and extrajudicial punishment in the field.

Rejuvenation of the countryside

Uli Locher once commented that "rural Haiti as we know it is doomed." [18] It is easy to see what he meant. Deforestation and soil erosion are turning parts of the country into a desert; a mere three percent of the original forest cover remains, and tropical storms have carried some 20 percent of the topsoil to the sea. In the last half of the 20th century, arable land per capita will have decreased from 0.38 hectares to about 0.16 hectares, a casualty of an exploding rural population, overworked lands, deforestation, and erosion.[19] With only about 11 percent of its land still arable, Haiti can no longer feed itself.

Reversing this decline will require not only a major long-term reforestation program, but fundamental changes in Haitian behavior. Population growth and the demand for charcoal (which accounts for much tree-cutting) must be sharply reduced, and economic incentives and means provided to enable farmers to cultivate crops in more efficient and less destructive ways. Unfortunately, there is reason to doubt whether either the Haitian government or its international sponsors will be up to the challenge. The former has been ambivalent about family planning, with the result that little has been accomplished. Over the last decade, moreover, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has cut funding for such purposes by almost half. And as for reforestation, the USAID track record provides ample reason for skepticism: During the 1980s, reforestation was a top priority, and by 1990 about ten million trees a year were being grown. Even that, however, was far from sufficient, for simultaneously an estimated 15 to 20 million

trees were being cut down. USAID terminated the program in 1991, shortly before the coup that deposed President Aristide, and annual tree planting immediately dropped to less than one million. While that decision has since been reversed, current efforts appear likely to provide for only two to four million hardwood seedlings a year, a small fraction of what is needed.[20]

Urban migration

In 1994, Haiti had a population of roughly seven million people. By 2025, it will have an estimated 13.1 million. This is bad enough, but whereas in 1994 the populace was only 30.9 percent urban, by 2025 the percentage is expected to be around 53.9 percent. While the rural population may grow only modestly, from 4.86 million to 6.1 million, the urban population could explode from 2.2 million to an estimated 7.1 million.[21] Port-au-Prince, now roughly 1.5 million people, could contain an estimated four million people. Even today, in the most crowded areas people frequently sleep in shifts or upright: One person leans against the wall with his head in his arms, another leans against him, and so on, sometimes as many as three or four in a row.[22]

Keeping in mind the current astronomical unemployment rate, one must ask whether enough jobs can be created to absorb the newcomers. If not, what are the implications for political stability and crime? This is not to mention pollution, housing, education, and health services. Only half the capital's population today has potable water. Raw sewage pollutes the roadsides. In the face of growing demand, the water table below the city will continue to recede. Some observers estimate that the water will turn brackish in the next few years.

Socioeconomic problems

Even before the current crisis, Haiti had the lowest per capita income (\$360) and life expectancy (48 years), and the highest infant mortality (124 per 1000) and illiteracy (63-90 percent) rates in the Western Hemisphere. At least 70 percent of the children suffered from malnutrition, and about 33 percent were seriously malnourished. With only 810 doctors and even fewer nurses to serve a population of six to seven million people, Haitians could not even begin to cope with their severe health problems. To the traditional afflictions of tuberculosis (affecting ten percent of the population), malaria, salmonellosis, venereal disease, and the endemic illnesses associated with malnutrition has recently been added the AIDS virus. Between seven and ten percent of pregnant women in urban areas tested HIV positive.[23]

These conditions worsened considerably during military rule (1991-94), in part because of the international embargo of the regime, when per capita income fell to around \$250. Subsequently, that deterioration was checked by the influx of hundreds of millions of dollars in aid. Unfortunately, much of this assistance was in the form of short-term, quick-impact projects imposed from above, without consulting the local populace about its needs and desires. As a consequence, "few durable new investments materialized and fewer still benefited the poor majority." [24] Moreover, the aid freezes resulting from repeated deadlocks between the Haitian government and its foreign sponsors postponed costly infrastructure projects and prevented any sustained economic recovery. Relatively few permanent jobs have been created, and the problem of chronic poverty has been largely ignored. Popular expectations that democracy would bring improved living conditions have been frustrated, resulting in growing disillusionment and a heightened potential for violence.

Haiti's absorptive capacity

Because of widespread corruption and incompetence, Haiti has only a limited ability to use the aid that is being doled out. In 1996 only about 200 of the 500 vehicles given to the Haitian National Police were still functioning, primarily because many of the HNP's recruits did not know how to drive (almost none had licenses at the time they entered the force), and many others were unfamiliar with even the basics of maintenance, such as the need to occasionally put oil in their vehicles. In the carnage that followed the fielding of the HNP's automobile fleet, scores of cars and trucks were wrecked or broke down because of negligence. Partially as a result, the police today are frequently unable to respond to calls for help.

There must be some balance between the justifiable concern of donors that their assistance not be wasted and the need for such aid to better serve locally established priorities and be managed by Haitian institutions. One should remember

that aid can also be squandered on highly paid foreign consultants. As one observer has noted, the cost of a single day of a World Bank consultant's time, including travel, translation, and local expenses, could pay the operating costs of a privately run health clinic in a Port-au-Prince slum for two or three days. This is one reason, among many, why there has been such a disparity between the massive international resources expended on Haiti and the lack of sustainable results.

No Easy Answers

So, is Haiti a "success" or a "failure?" There is no easy answer. In making judgments, however, the proper frame of reference is a country's past, rather than some idealistic--and invariably culture-bound--standard of what its future ought to be. On this basis, US policy must still be judged a qualified (though very shaky) success: Aristide was restored and political power transferred from one duly elected government to another; a new police force has been created which, for all its limitations, is functioning reasonably well under extremely difficult conditions; though political violence and human rights violations persist, they are not the massive problem they have been in the past. Even today--in spite of all their problems--Haitians do not expect or want a return to dictatorship.

The trouble is that when one looks to the future, judgments become much more tenuous. Clearly, democratization is not irreversible, and in 1997 Haiti has been sliding in the wrong direction. While it is still possible to reverse that trend, one must be realistic. Time is running out, and the odds against long-term success are formidable. It is now clear that the United States and the international community greatly underestimated the Haitian challenge. After the success of the 1994 military intervention, it was assumed that the tasks of political and economic development would be relatively easy. *This was an illusion.* In fact, there is an inverse relationship between these operations. The very Haitian weaknesses which made the military engagement so easy make the political and socioeconomic challenges so difficult. The debility of Haitian institutions provided no basis for resisting an invasion; neither did they--or the self-destructive political culture that had emaciated them--provide a foundation for democracy and economic development.

In short, Haiti's problems are so huge, its resources so limited, and the weight of political tradition so great that it is difficult to be optimistic. Even if Haitians can forge a stable democracy--and this will be no easy task--the socioeconomic challenges will be even more difficult. Privatization will not solve all the country's socioeconomic ills, and it may even create some new ones. Haiti is in the process of transformation from a rural-agrarian society into an urban-light industrial society. Traditional society is crumbling because its economic base is disintegrating, and there is no guarantee that Haitians will be much better off in the new society that is emerging than in the old one they are leaving.

The bottom line is that if Haiti is to have any chance at a brighter future, it will need a lot of help over a long period. One of the dangers is that the international community--especially the United States--will not stay the course. This would be shortsighted, for Haitians are not likely to let us forget them. If political and socioeconomic conditions continue to deteriorate, the flow of boat people will at some point resume. There are already roughly a million Haitians in the United States. How many more come will in part be determined by the long-term success or failure of the current experiment.

What, specifically, should the international community and the United States do? A few brief observations may be illustrative.[25]

. The United States and the international community need to reevaluate their minimalist approach toward Haiti. Much of what has been done has been piecemeal and inadequate. Thus, there were only limited efforts to carry out disarmament, though an effective program was crucial to Haiti's prospects for stability. The newly created HNP was rushed onto the job with insufficient training (only four months, whereas police trainers tell us cadets need a year).[26] Judicial reforms were neglected, though without them police reform could not ultimately succeed. Foreign aid was distributed in a stop-start pattern which undercut economic recovery. The UN peacekeeping force was limited to repeated short-term extensions, which gave hope to subversives that all they had to do was bide their time until the foreigners left. Halfway actions lead to halfway, ineffective results.

. A major international effort will be needed to resolve the current political and economic impasse. This initiative must involve all major Haitian actors, especially Aristide. Whatever one thinks of the former president, he continues to have a huge base of popular support, and efforts to isolate him will likely be counterproductive. If he is not part of the solution, he will be part of the problem, and his potential for mischief is enormous.

. Aristide's criticisms of the modernization program have to be taken seriously. The concept of modernization should be broadened to include social modernization. Most important, ways must be found to alleviate the crushing 70-percent jobless rate. It is not reasonable to expect Haitians to accept more unemployment as the price for economic reform. If this requires a temporary, large-scale public works program, then so be it. The bottom line is that unless living conditions improve, political and social turmoil will increase, undermining economic recovery in a vicious spiral that could well end in an explosion.

. A moment of truth will occur when foreign peacekeepers leave Haiti. At this writing, the HNP is still not capable of maintaining law and order by itself. UN troops continue to patrol Port-au-Prince and provide essential helicopter transportation for Haitian crowd-control units. UN military personnel protect the National Palace and the residence of former President Aristide. Civilian police sponsored by the UN are deployed in the capital and provinces, providing vital training as they accompany HNP officers on patrols. These activities should continue. Either the UN presence has to be extended, or other multilateral or bilateral arrangements have to be made.

. An accelerated effort should be made to create a functioning judicial system. In comparison to the energy and resources that have gone into the Haitian National Police, this sector of law enforcement has been sorely neglected. Yet, without just and effective courts, attempts to institute the rule of law will be doomed. Put another way, the sooner Haiti has an effective judicial system to complement the professional police force that is being developed, the sooner foreign peacekeepers can go home.

. Much more attention needs to be given to the task of creating an ecologically viable Haiti. Deforestation, erosion, soil exhaustion, water depletion, desertification, and rapid population growth cannot be allowed to continue, or the country will become utterly uninhabitable. Of all the problems Haiti faces, this complex of maladies, with their built-in momentum, poses the greatest danger to the country's survival.

. There is a need to continue pressing the Haitian government with regard to human rights violations. If allowed to continue, political violence could destroy everything that has been accomplished. One should caution, however, that it makes little sense to cut off aid for the HNP, as has sometimes been proposed. Rather, the police need more officers, equipment, and training, including continuing human rights instruction. One does not create a better police force by denying it the means to become a truly professional and competent organization. Quite the opposite.

. Finally, the United States should convert its military support mission into a semipermanent operation (preferably military, but civilian if a military operation is not an option) with ongoing infrastructural and humanitarian responsibilities. One of the mistakes the United States made when it went into Haiti was imposing severe limitations on nationbuilding operations. This was a golden opportunity lost. Haitians would have loved for the United States to have done more of this kind of thing, and they still would.[27] Certainly, the need is there.

NOTES

1. See Donald E. Schulz, *Whither Haiti?* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, 1996).

2. Lavalas generally refers to Aristide and Préval's political movement. Macoutes are the Tonton Macoutes, the paramilitary arm of the Duvalier dictatorship (1957-1986).

3. Christopher Marquis and Sandra Marquez García, "Aristide Says Corruption, Chaos Tainting Préval's Government,"

Miami Herald, 20 September 1996; Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), *Daily Report: Latin America*, 24 September 1996.

4. FBIS, *Daily Report: Latin America*, 6 November 1996.

5. Michael Norton, "Aristide Reasserts His Past--Attributing Haiti's Troubles to Imperialism," *The Washington Post*, 15 June 1997.

6. According to a July 1997 USIA opinion poll of 1351 adults in Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haïtien, Les Cayes, Gonaïves, and Jacmel, 54 percent of the urban public now has little or no confidence in the Préval administration. Over half doubt that senators, deputies, or local mayors care anything at all about the problems of their constituents. More people now believe that Haiti is not a democracy than that it is. Office of Research and Media Reaction, *USIA Briefing Paper*, 15 August 1997.

7. The casualty figures are from Serge F. Kovaleski, "Haitians Find New Police Force Too Similar to Old," *The Washington Post*, 14 July 1997. The most balanced evaluation of the HNP may be found in Rachel Neild et al., "The Human Rights Record of the Haitian National Police," Washington: Human Rights Watch/Americas, National Coalition for Haitian Rights, and Washington Office on Latin America, January 1997.

8. US House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, "CODEL Conyers Haiti Trip Report," 29 June - 2 July 1997, p. 6.

9. Eighty percent, according to the July 1997 USIA survey (see note 6).

10. A weapon found at the site of the Leroy killing has been traced to an arms cache at the National Palace, as has a gun found in the possession of suspects in the March 1995 assassination of Mireille Durocher Bertin. There may also be a connection to several former members of the FAdH, who subsequently became Aristide security aides and, more recently, Lavalas Family political candidates. See Roger Noriega and Denis McDonough, "Bipartisan Report on Current Conditions in Haiti," US House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, p. 6.

11. OAS/UN International Civilian Mission, *La Police Nationale d'Haiti et les Droits de l'Homme*, July 1996, p. 55; and Report of the UN Secretary-General, *The Situation of Democracy and Human Rights in Haiti*, A/51/703, 2 December 1996; Kovaleski, "Haitians Find New Police Force Too Similar to Old."

12. Actually, Delatour was originally appointed by Aristide, but Préval kept him on.

13. See the UN Secretary-General's reports on the United Nations Support Mission in Haiti, *The Situation of Democracy and Human Rights in Haiti*, and *Haiti--UNSMIH*, S/1997/564, 19 July 1997.

14. Rachel Neild tells the story of how the residents of Gonaïves lost respect for the police because the latter were "too nice." After the populace began challenging and throwing stones at them, officers began beating up detainees and committing other abuses, which in turn led to greater popular respect for the HNP. "Police Reform in Haiti: The Challenge of Demilitarizing Public Order and Establishing the Rule of Law," a presentation at a conference organized by the Canadian Foundation for the Americas, 7-8 November 1996, p. 6.

15. Michel-Rolf Trouillot, for instance, has remarked on the number of extreme abuses committed by the Duvalier regime's henchmen. He notes that the perpetrators were mostly "miserable wretches whose average incomes hardly exceeded what some elite families spend for four servants." See *Haiti: State Against Nation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), p. 155.

16. Report of the Secretary-General, *Haiti--UNSMIH*.

17. William G. O'Neill, "No Longer a Pipe-Dream? Justice in Haiti," in *Haiti Renewed*, ed., Robert I. Rotberg (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), p. 200.

18. Uli Locher, "Land Distribution, Land Tenure and Land Erosion in Haiti," paper presented at the 12th Annual Conference of the Society for Caribbean Studies, 12-14 July 1988, p. 16.
19. Mats Lundahl, "The Haitian Dilemma Reexamined: Lessons From the Past in the Light of Some New Economic Theory," in Rotberg, ed., *Haiti Renewed*, p. 85; Donald E. Schulz and Gabriel Marcella, *Reconciling the Irreconcilable: The Troubled Outlook for U.S. Policy Toward Haiti* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, 1994), p. 5.
20. Ernest H. Preeg, *The Haitian Dilemma: A Case Study in Demographics, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1996), pp. 33-34, 37-39.
21. Population Division, Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, United Nations, 1994 Revision. Electronic document: gopher://gopher.undp.org:70/00/ungophers/popln/wdtrends/urban, 13 December 1995.
22. Amy Wilentz, *The Rainy Season: Haiti Since Duvalier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), p. 18.
23. Schulz and Marcella, *Reconciling the Irreconcilable*, pp. 3-4.
24. Robert Maguire et al., *Haiti Held Hostage: International Responses to the Quest for Nationhood, 1986 to 1996*, Occasional Paper No. 23 (Providence, R.I.: Brown University, 1996), p. 95.
25. Elsewhere, the author has presented a detailed list of policy recommendations, and these need not be repeated here. See Schulz, *Whither Haiti?*, pp. 35-42; and Max Manwaring, et al., *The Challenge of Haiti's Future* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, 1997).
26. Neild et al., *The Human Rights Record of the Haitian National Police*, p. 31.
27. Sixty-three percent, according to the July 1997 USIA survey (see note 6).

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