

**U.S. POLICY TOWARD
HAITI: HEARING, 103
CONGRESS, SECOND
SESSION, MARCH 8, 1994**

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HEARING
 BEFORE THE
 SUBCOMMITTEE ON
 WESTERN HEMISPHERE AND PEACE CORPS
 AFFAIRS
 OF THE
 COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
 UNITED STATES SENATE
 ONE HUNDRED THIRD CONGRESS
 SECOND SESSION

MARCH 8, 1994

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U.S. POLICY TOWARD HAITI

TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 1994

UNITED STATES SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE AND
PEACE CORPS AFFAIRS
OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met at 9:02 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Christopher J. Dodd (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Senator Dodd.

Senator DODD. The committee will come to order.

At the outset let me invite our colleagues from the House and the Senate who have joined us this morning at the witness table: our colleague from Iowa, Senator Tom Harkin; the distinguished Congressman from New York, Charles Rangel; my neighbor colleague from New England, Joseph P. Kennedy; and the Honorable Carrie Meek from the State of Florida. Let me welcome everyone here this morning.

Today the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs meets for the purpose of considering U.S. policy toward Haiti. In the 2½ years since the Aristide Government was overthrown by a military coup, U.S. policy has been driven by one overriding objective: to restore democracy to Haiti by returning President Aristide to power. How far we have come toward meeting that objective and the nature of the work that remains to be done is the focus of this hearing today.

On December 16, 1990, the Haitians went to the polls and chose as their President a Roman Catholic priest by the name of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The election of President Aristide in the most free and fair elections in that nation's history gave hope to a watching world that Haiti had finally overcome a bitter legacy of repression and military rule. Sadly, Haiti's brief encounter with democracy would end almost as soon as it began. In September 1991, just 10 months later, military and security forces overthrew the Aristide Government and resumed their iron grip on the people of Haiti.

For those who have followed the sad fortunes of Haiti over the recent years, the events of 1991 had a familiar and unsettling ring. Time and again, since the fall of Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986, the military has taken the reins of power in Haiti. Time and time again the military has promised the international community that reform and democratic rule were just around the corner, and time and time again the military has gone back on its word.

First there was Gen. Henri Namphy, who assumed power in 1986 and was rewarded with U.S. military aid after promising to hold free and fair elections. Those elections, of course, turned into a bloodbath and were quickly canceled.

Then there was a civilian, Leslie Manigat, who was handpicked by the military to lead the country in 1988. The Reagan administration decided against imposing sanctions on Haiti in the hopes that the military would allow the new President a measure of autonomy. Those hopes were soon dashed by a military coup led by none other than General Namphy himself.

Then there was Prosper Avril, who overthrew Namphy in yet another coup 3 months later. General Avril also promised to hold elections and even managed to convince the Bush administration to publicly defend his record on human rights. He too went back on his word.

Then there was Herard Abraham, who took over from General Avril. Abraham sat on his hands while opponents of democracy tried unsuccessfully to disrupt the 1990 elections. After permitting the supporters of Duvalier to plot the assassination of then President-elect Aristide, he too was forced to step aside as commander of the Haitian Armed Forces and allow then Colonel Cedras to take his place. But like his predecessors, Cedras' commitment to democracy was short-term and solely self-serving.

So, it came as no surprise when last summer, as Cedras and others were to have stepped aside, the military reneged on yet another agreement to restore democratic rule in Haiti. The Governors Island accord called on the military to take a number of steps toward democratic reform, culminating with the return of President Aristide by October 30. But no sooner was the ink dry on that accord and no sooner had sanctions on Haiti been lifted, than the military signaled its disdain for the agreement and the commitments it had made. Most notably, the military prevented the arrival of U.N. sanctioned military personnel and engaged in a number of serious human rights abuses, including the high profile murders of several of President Aristide's close associates.

In response to these events, the Clinton administration has lent its strong support to the restoration of democracy in Haiti and to the return of President Aristide. The administration has played an important role in peace talks sponsored by the U.N. and it has won broad-based support for its policies throughout the international community. At the same time I think it is fair to say that a number of very serious questions have been raised in recent months about the present direction of the administration's policy. This hearing will give us an opportunity to explore those questions with administration witnesses and outside experts.

The most serious of these questions in my view surround the willingness of the administration to push for tougher measures against the present leadership in Haiti. On December 21, the nations known collectively as the Four Friends of the Secretary General on Haiti, the United States, Canada, France, and Venezuela, announced that they would call for additional sanctions if no progress had been made by January 15 on negotiations to restore President Aristide to office. That deadline has come and gone, and no additional sanctions have been imposed.

In fact, it is now uncertain what the next steps will be. In testimony before this committee on February 23, Secretary of State Warren Christopher sought to downplay the sanctions issue, and this week the U.N. Security Council, at the administration's urging, will consider a rather vaguely worded resolution which, if passed, in my view, will further delay any decision on the imposition of additional sanctions.

All of this leads many people to wonder, myself included, if the administration has chosen to put its pressure on the wrong side. Let us not forget that President Aristide won nearly 70 percent of the vote in Haiti, a popular mandate that would be the envy of any politician in this country. Let us not forget that it was the military and not President Aristide that backed out of the Governors Island accord. Let us not forget that it was the military and not President Aristide that stands accused of murdering thousands of innocent civilians in their homes, in their churches, and in their streets.

There are now also many who ask if the administration has fully thought through the kind of signal being sent to the Haitian military. The military has already broken a major agreement with the international community and it has paid little or no price for doing so. Now we are being told that if we can just find the magic formula, if we can just squeeze the right concessions out of President Aristide, the military leaders in Haiti might be convinced to step aside, but the truth of the matter is that they have called our bluff. They believe that they can simply wait us out again, just as they have done over and over and over again.

Finally, as we continue the debate over Haiti's political future, we also must address the plight of Haiti's people, many of whom have set out for our shores in search of political asylum. It is said that granting asylum would only encourage more people to leave and that may indeed be true. It is said that granting asylum would be unpopular here at home. That is almost certainly true. But it is also true that we as a Nation are committed to certain legal and international standards and we are bound to uphold those standards even when it is inconvenient to do so.

At the same time, I want to emphasize that the best solution to the refugee crisis and ultimately the only solution is a political solution in Haiti that is responsive to the Haitian people. That is what President Aristide represents and that is why it is so important in my view that he be returned to his country.

At this juncture let me add a few words about the crisis in Haiti as it reflects upon the nature of leadership here in this Nation. This administration took office with a commitment to the promotion of democracy and human rights and it has acted to fulfill that commitment in many parts of the world.

The administration has taken a strong leadership role in regard to the reform process in Russia and the rest of the former Soviet republics. It has outlined a firm policy of support of human rights in China. It has developed a strong and effective policy to combat terrorism and the spread of nuclear weapons, and it has not hesitated to take whatever steps necessary to support these goals, as illustrated by its willingness to support military action in places like Iraq and Somalia.

In Haiti, however, this administration has called for the restoration of democracy and the return of President Aristide. President Clinton has personally insisted that these conditions be met and he is to be commended in my view for doing so. But I also think it is fair to ask whether the policy, as presently outlined by the State Department and other administrative agencies, will achieve the objective that our President has set forth.

I think it is also fair to ask why this administration sends combat troops to Mogadishu or launches cruise missiles at Baghdad, but does not even rattle a saber at the leaders in Port-au-Prince. I think it is fair to ask why this administration sends its top human rights official to China to demand better treatment of people there, but silences that very official when he asks fundamental questions about our policy toward Haiti and its impact on the Haitian people.

Today in Haiti, democracy is under siege, an elected leader is in exile, and a population lives in fear. Haitians need the help of the international community and they need the leadership of the United States. In the final analysis, the policy we choose is not only about the 6 million citizens of Haiti, it is about the example that is set as the rules and regulations of the New World order are written. And so, it is also about us.

Let the military get away with its hijacking of civilian rule in Haiti and outlaws everywhere will know that they can play us for time with half-met promises and empty gestures. Let the repression in Haiti continue and victims everywhere will know that our commitment to them is false, that human rights and the rule of law are matters of convenience and not necessity. Above all, abandon democratic rule in Haiti and we will live forever with the knowledge that our speeches and our promises about democracy and human freedom are only words and nothing more.

Those are the issues at stake in my view in the policies being considered by the subcommittee today, for those are the issues at stake in Haiti. The people of Haiti are crying out for our help. For their sake and for ours, I hope we are listening.

I would now like to welcome our colleagues from the House and the Senate. Let me begin with my colleague from Iowa. We thank you all for being here. All of you have played a significant role over these last 2½ years in the issue on policies affecting Haiti.

Senator HARKIN. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate that. Congresswoman Meek has a pressing appointment on the House side. I would like to yield to her.

Senator DODD. Fine. If you have worked out some other arrangement let me know.

Representative RANCEL. She is on the powerful Appropriations Committee, so they always have something more important to do.

Senator DODD. Well, the Senator from Iowa is as well.

Senator HARKIN. I want to be real nice to her. [Laughter.]

Senator DODD. I am going to be nice to both of you. [Laughter.]

Congresswoman Meek, we welcome you.