

HAITI'S NEW GOVERNMENT WRESTLES WITH THE PAST



Clemente Baeillo

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PRESIDENT RENÉ PRÉVAL MUST USE DONORS' GOOD WILL FOR PROGRAMS THAT IMPROVE CONDITIONS NOW WHILE LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR SUSTAINED PROGRESS.

BY ROBERT M. PERITO

resident René Préval and a new legislature were swept into office in Port-au-Prince this past spring on a wave of international good will and pledges of new support. The U.N. Security Council extended the mandate of the U.N. peacekeeping mission there, while Argentina, Brazil and Chile, the leaders of that force, offered to provide a joint development strategy. The Caribbean Community readmitted Haiti. At a July 25 conference, international donors pledged \$750 million in aid, including \$210 million from the U.S. The Organization of American States promised

to remain to help Haiti build stronger government institutions, after helping to organize the presidential and parliamentary elections.

This positive international attitude spurred a new sense of optimism in Haiti, but it did not alter conditions on the ground. Frequently cited as an example of a failed and possibly ungovernable state, Haiti remains the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and among the poorest in the world. Two-thirds of its eight million citizens live in abject poverty, while half of the adult population is illiterate. Haitian society is deeply divided between a small, well-educated, affluent and French-speaking elite and a large, uneducated, Creole-speaking, peasant population. The country ranks 153rd of 177 in the latest edition of the *U.N. Human Development Report*, which combines measures of income, life expectancy, school enrollment and literacy.

The challenge facing President Préval is to translate good wishes and pledges of support into constructive government programs that improve the livelihood of the Haitian people while laying the groundwork for sustained political and economic progress. His task will be made more difficult by a historical legacy that has overwhelmed earlier efforts to reform the country's social, political and economic institutions.

A Troubled Past

After an auspicious beginning as a French colony, Haiti suffered two centuries of insurrection, dictatorship and economic decline. In 1790, exports of sugar and coffee made it the richest French colony in the New World. Haitian society was composed of 30,000 Europeans, an equal number of free "gens de couleur," and a half-million African slaves. In 1804, a successful slave revolt spawned a new republic that was seen as a threat to the existing world order. European nations and the United States reacted by isolating Haiti, for fear its example would incite slave revolts elsewhere. International exclusion and economic disruption at home forced Haiti's founding fathers

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to reinstate the old plantation system and a return to forced labor, instead of protecting emancipation by allowing small, inefficient land holdings.

Despite ending slavery, the Haitian Revolution created a tradition of imperious leadership and a hierarchical social structure based on stark class and racial divides. The polarization of Haitian society excluded the vast majority of citizens from meaningful participation in the country's political and economic life. Haiti's serial constitutions enshrined the tradition of a single, all-powerful leader who monopolized power, and a predatory state that exploited rather than served the people. Social tensions have reinforced a history of violent change in national leadership; only two of Haiti's 44 presidents completed their terms and left office voluntarily. Fortunately, one of these was President Préval, who previously served from 1996 to 2001.

Préval's predecessor, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was re-elected president in 2000 in elections marred by allegations of irregularities and low voter turnout. Less than 10 percent of the electorate voted, as opposition parties led a boycott to protest disputed parliamentary elections held earlier. In an atmosphere of worsening political crisis, Aristide's second term was marked by increased criminal activity, allegations of public corruption and government failure to deliver services and invigorate the economy.

In February 2004, armed rebels led by former soldiers seized Gonaïves, Haiti's fourth-largest city. As the rebels marched south toward Port-au-Prince, Aristide reportedly requested U.S. assistance in leaving the country. Yet upon arriving safely in the Central African Republic, Aristide claimed that he was "kidnapped," a charge the U.S. strongly denies.

To deal with the chaos that followed Aristide's departure, the U.N. authorized a peacekeeping force composed initially of U.S. Marines and French and Canadian forces to restore order. In accordance with the Haitian Constitution, the Supreme Court chief justice was sworn in as president on Feb. 29, 2004. A government of technocrats with no party affiliations led by Prime Minister Gerard la Tortue was installed, but failed to gain traction. On June 1, 2004, the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti assumed responsibility for security, although it took over a year for the full complement of 8,000 troops and police to arrive. Under the interim government, Haiti continued to be plagued by gang violence, drug trafficking, social unrest and economic calamity.

A Bitter Legacy

The deterioration of Haiti's economy is rooted in the rapacious policies of past governments and the misguided efforts of foreign donors and the international financial institutions to ameliorate their effects. Under the dictatorial regimes of "Baby Doc" Jean Claude Duvalier and his successors in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Haitian economy was starved of resources for sustained growth and development. To attract outside capital, successive Haitian regimes offered foreign investors generous incentives, including tax exemptions on income, profits and raw materials. Investors flocked to take advantage of the abundance of cheap, unskilled labor and the absence of foreign exchange controls and government interference. With an infusion of foreign investment, Haiti experienced rapid growth in its assembly, construction and public utilities sectors.

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This "golden age" was short-lived, however, and failed to foster sustained economic growth and commercial development. By 1984, it was evident that the Haitian assembly industry — established according to the international community's development strategy — provided no long-term benefits to the country. Materials were imported for assembly, while finished products were exported and consumed abroad. Reliance on cheap, unskilled labor did little to enhance the skills of Haiti's labor force, encourage training or stimulate technology transfer. The dominance of the American market meant Haiti was at the mercy of U.S. import quotas and consumer preferences. Moreover, the Haitian government failed to benefit because commercial profits were tax-exempt and public services were subsidized. Thus, the system not only had a largely neutral effect on income distribution in Haiti

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but prevented other industrial sectors from leveraging its success.

Despite the negative consequences for Haiti, the donor community and the international financial institutions continued to advocate export assembly for Haiti until the country could expand its infrastructure, educate its labor force and diversify its industry. Yet these same governments and institutions were aware that Haiti's ruling elite and dictatorial governments were unlikely to implement policies that would achieve broader economic and social development.

Even after the U.S.-led intervention in 1994, Haiti's economy actually shrank, while its transportation and communication infrastructure and natural environment deteriorated. In part, this was the result of ruinous agricultural trade policies that destroyed Haiti's successful small farmers who produced exports of rice, pork and chicken. Haiti became a net importer of agricultural products, creating food insecurity and malnutrition for the majority of its people. At the same time, ownership of wealth became concentrated in a smaller percentage of the population. In 2002, the top 4 percent of the population controlled 66 percent of the country's assets.

Institutions Need Strengthening

To end the tradition of presidential succession by serial coups, Pres. Préval will have to strengthen the parliament, government ministries and civil society so these institutions can both complement and balance the power of the presidency. Parliament will require technical assistance and training from donor countries, both because many of its new members are entering public service for the first time and because the institution needs physical refurbishing after years of neglect and damage.

Préval also needs to reinforce the role of political parties and cultivate a culture of compromise by fostering an open debate on the future of the country. This will require a formal political dialogue conducted through the media and in institutional channels, without resorting to strong-arm tactics. Préval has appointed representatives from a broad spectrum of political groups and appears ready to reach beyond his own party for support. So far, however, he has been characteristically cautious in his approach to governance. He has postponed decisions and not acted in a manner that would create winners and losers. His government's five-year proposal for international support resulted in larger than requested commit-

ments from international donors. However, Préval has not dealt effectively with the challenge from heavily-armed gangs that remain a major threat to security in Port-au-Prince and other important cities. In the near term, he will need to address the major issues facing Haiti, including poverty, drug trafficking, corruption, the role of former soldiers and the gang problem.

Haiti's new leader will also have to establish local governments that are capable of providing services to the majority of the population that lives in rural areas. Decentralizing the responsibilities of the government to localities will shift the burden from the executive branch by locating authority and resources closer to the people. The new government should harness Haitian civil society and encourage it to fill the gaps in government capacity. Over the course of the last two decades, almost all civic associations — community, peasant, youth and business organizations — have been adversely affected. Winning back the confidence and restoring the vitality of civil society will be critical to the nation's political future. To encourage public trust, Préval must ensure that his actions are as transparent as possible.

Reforming Haiti's political traditions and institutions will not be easy, for the political situation remains tenuous. Préval's Lespwa Party holds only 11 of 30 Senate seats and 21 out of 97 deputy seats, far from a majority in either chamber of parliament. Progress on a range of sensitive issues will require a spirit of compromise, which has not been the tradition in Haitian politics. Former President Aristide could become a destabilizing factor if he attempts to return to Haiti from exile in South Africa before conditions warrant. Fortunately, there has been little public manifestation of support for Aristide's return beyond small street demonstrations that were held this spring to mark the anniversary of his 2004 departure from Haiti. Politics could become more fractious in the near term, particularly as popular expectations are frustrated by the government's inevitable inability to quickly satisfy a broad range of demands.

The Challenge of Stabilization

Assuring stability will also be a challenge. The 8,700 soldiers and police of the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti are the only coherent security forces in the country. MINUSTAH has demonstrated the ability to maintain order in Port-au-Prince and the willingness to use armed force against disruptive elements. Already 12

U.N. soldiers and three U.N. police officers have been killed in the line of duty. However, those forces are insufficient to provide security in the many parts of the country outside government control. Nor have the peacekeepers implemented an effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program to remove the threat posed by former soldiers, or dealt effectively with the armed gangs that control urban slums and the isolated ports that are used for the transshipment of narcotics from South America.

The U.N. has also failed to reform and reconstitute the Haitian National Police, the country's only security force, or improve the judicial and penal systems, which are essential for the rule of law. U.N. police have determined that only 4,600 of the 8,000 Haitian officers on the police rolls are currently serving, and many of those are guilty of criminal offenses and abuse of human rights. Political manipulation, corruption and involvement in narcotics trafficking have tarnished the image of the HNP and limited its effectiveness. The U.N. is working on a comprehensive plan for police development, but effective implementation will require buy-in from the Préval government and generous support from the donor community. Making matters worse, the Haitian justice system remains corrupt and dysfunctional; the penal system is notorious for abuse and the indefinite incarceration of prisoners without trial.

Increased U.S. assistance will be focused on strengthening Haiti's security sector through vetting, retraining and reforming the police. More is needed, however. In 1994, the U.S. teamed up with Canada and France to train and equip a 5,000-member Haitian police force in just one year. This needs to be done again. New U.S. assistance will also focus on improving the effectiveness of Haitian courts and reducing pre-trial detention. However, the U.S. needs to develop a comprehensive program for police and judicial training and reform — including international mentoring — over an extended term. Without such a comprehensive and sustained effort, the Préval government will not be able to establish the rule of law.

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A Dialogue on Assistance Levels

In pursuing its political and security objectives, the Préval government will be helped by the fact that the international financial institutions and the major donor countries appear to have learned from previous experience, and intend to engage the Haitians in a discussion of priorities for development assistance. The international community also appears determined to stay for the long term and not to repeat the mistake of withdrawing before reforms take root and the Haitians can sustain innovations on their own. Emphasis in most programs will be on capacity-building, to overcome the critical lack of physical infrastructure and human capital. Below a thin veneer of world-class professionals, most Haitian institutions lack the appropriately educated and technically skilled manpower to operate modern systems for management and administration of government programs.

The Préval administration has requested international assistance for quick-impact public works projects to provide employment and suppress violence in Haiti's poorest slums and depressed rural areas. It has also indicated an interest in pursuing development in tourism, light industry and agriculture. As a result, USAID is concentrating on dual priorities: stability and growth. It will support Préval's request for funding to create 200,000 short-term, public works jobs in slums and other underserved areas, and to rebuild towns and villages that were devastated by Tropical Storm Jeanne in September 2004. USAID will also work to improve the government's ability at both the national and local level to plan, manage and deliver basic services over the long term.

In administering aid, it will be challenging for USAID and other donors to alter the habit of working through nongovernmental organizations, a practice developed to avoid inept or corrupt Haitian government agencies. Working through the Haitian government will be more difficult, costly and time-consuming than going it alone, but doing so will be essential to insure sustainability.

Haiti's new government may also profit from the energy and talents of the Haitian diaspora, if it engages this diverse community in a common effort to move the country forward. Last year, remittances from Haitians

living abroad totaled more than one billion dollars, or a quarter of Haiti's GDP. Haitian-Americans form a distinctive and increasingly active political force in many U.S. communities, particularly in Florida and New York. This community represents a ready reserve of needed skills and financial resources that has never been fully tapped.

Successful Haitians such as businessman Dumas Simeus, CEO of Simeus Foods International, are involved in their homeland through charity organizations, medical missions and village improvement projects. Such efforts do little, however, to raise national living standards, create permanent jobs or improve the economy. Currently, legal red tape and bureaucratic inefficiency discourage investments by expatriates. Haiti's newly-convened Parliament should make it a priority to update and streamline laws governing foreign involvement and the creation of new businesses. For his part, Pres. Préval should encourage overseas Haitians to return home by simplifying administrative procedures for travel and investment.

Moment of Opportunity

The success of Haiti's new government is of vital importance to the United States. Given its location, Haiti remains a potential source of mass, unregulated migration. A repeat of the "boat people" crisis of the 1970s is possible if conditions deteriorate. In addition, Haiti remains an important conduit for the flow of narcotics into the United States. The Drug Enforcement Administration estimates that 10 to 15 percent of cocaine entering the U.S. transits Haiti. Finally, Haiti is a potential source of public health problems, as demonstrated by the previous experience with HIV/AIDS.

Haiti is also important to the United Nations. The country has become a poster child for the failure of international interventions in crisis states. This is due largely to the revolving-door nature of U.N. missions and the fecklessness of multilateral involvement in the past decade. In March 1996, the U.S.-led Multinational Force handed off to the first U.N. Mission in Haiti; it was an extremely well-prepared and seamless transition that should have been the model for subsequent U.N. involvement. Instead, UNMIH (1994-1996) handed off to a "revolving door" of follow-on peacekeeping missions: the U.N. Support Mission in Haiti (1996-1997); the U.N. Transition Mission in Haiti (1997); the U.N. Civilian Police Mission in Haiti (1997-2000); and, final-

ly, the current International Civilian Support Mission in Haiti. With each new mission, the U.N. peace-keeping force actually became smaller and its influence waned.

The last U.N. mission in this series, the International Civilian Support Mission in Haiti, was authorized by the General Assembly (not the Security Council) in March 2000 to avoid Russian and Chinese vetoes. MICAH's mandate was to "consolidate progress" already made in developing the Haitian National Police and in promoting respect for human rights. It was authorized to field 36 U.N. police officers; but five months into the mission, only three had arrived. At the time, Haiti was at the beginning of the power struggle over the results of the May 2000 parliamentary and local elections that would eventually doom Pres. Aristide's second term. As the country headed toward political crisis, the U.N. mission was reduced to irrelevancy.

With the installation of Haiti's new government, a turning point has been reached which the U.S. and the international community cannot afford to ignore. The lessons learned during previous episodes of international intervention should be recalled and applied.

- Above all, international assistance should be coherent, consistent and implemented through the Haitian government. Circumventing it by channeling international assistance through nongovernmental organizations will be counterproductive. Haitian ministries must be engaged and held accountable. There is no other way to create sustainable administrative capacity.

- International assistance must be provided for the long term. Another attempt to execute an "exit strategy" of quick fixes to chronic problems will be self-defeating. Toward this end, Canada has proposed an assistance package extending over five years. Other donors have similarly indicated an intention to remain engaged for the foreseeable future.

- Finally, as the largest donor, the U.S. must take the lead in improving the capacity of the Haitian government to provide effective governance and ensure the rule of law. Such programs must result in the creation of a civil service that can plan, budget and implement effective programs. The U.S. must also help create a police force, courts and prisons that perform in a manner consistent with internationally recognized human rights and judicial standards. Nothing is more important than finally providing justice to Haiti. ■