

A SHORT HISTORY OF HAITI

AS ISLAND AWAITS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS NEXT MONTH,
CARTER TEAM INSIDER RECALLS 'DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT'

BY ROBERT A. PASTOR

In 1791, stirred by the spirit of the French Revolution, Haitian slaves began a punishing, 13-year war for independence against Europe's most powerful army. The proclamation of the world's first independent black republic on Jan. 1, 1804, posed a dual challenge for Haiti and the world. The challenge for Haitians was to fulfill the ideals that moved them to insurrection — liberty, equality and fraternity. The challenge to the world was to accept a black republic as a sovereign and equal state. Neither passed the test then. Today, presidents Jean-Bertrand Aristide and Bill Clinton are doing better in meeting the dual challenge than at any point in Haiti's 200-year history.

Haitians rid themselves of colonialism in 1804 but not of oppression. Its new leaders exploited the people while transforming the richest colony in the Caribbean into the poorest country. A peaceful, democratic process never took hold. Instead, a succession of civil wars and brutal dictators devastated the country. Only the pride of Haiti's birth helped Haitians to withstand 200 years of abject poverty, international isolation and brutal dictatorship.

In the 19th century, Europe feared that slave

revolts could spread through their colonies, and so they tried to contain and isolate the new republic. The U.S. response was similar, but more tragic because Haitians also had been inspired by the U.S. revolution, and the United States owed them a debt for preventing Napoleon from using the island as a base to capture North America. The United States only contemplated relations with the republic after emancipating its own slaves.

Haitians were saddened by the imposed isolation, but they adjusted, becoming a kind of political Galapagos island with unique political and spiritual forms. Its politics became virtually impervious to outside influence until U.S. marines landed in 1915. But when the marines departed 19 years later, a new generation of dictators returned, culminating with the 30-year Duvalier dynasty.

On Feb. 7, 1986, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier fled to France, and the most recent and promising phase in Haiti's liberation struggle began. The issue, once again, was whether a new government would meet the people's democratic and material needs or whether the corrupt alliance between Haiti's armed forces and its wealthiest elite would maintain its grip on the country. The challenge for the international community was whether it would take the steps necessary to bring Haiti into the fold of democratic nations, or whether it would simply wash its hands of Haiti.

After trying unsuccessfully to manipulate the electoral process, the military grudgingly allowed a free

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election in 1990. This did not happen by accident. Since the lessons of 1990 were lost by the June 1995 elections, it might be useful to review them.

In 1990, the provisional president Ertha Pascal-Trouillot invited the international community to Haiti to observe and, indirectly, help construct an electoral process. The U.N. and the OAS advised the Provisional Elections Council (CEP) and did a quick count — a random sample of results — that permitted a reliable prediction of the final results of the presidential election. In addition, she invited former president Jimmy Carter, chairman of the Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government, an informal group of 25 current and former presidents of the Americas. The council, working with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, mediated for five months among the political parties, the CEP and the government.

One “mediates” an electoral process by listening to the opposition parties, distilling their complaints, and helping the government and the CEP fashion fair responses. This process increased confidence in the electoral process so that all the candidates and parties felt a sense of ownership in the elections and would therefore accept the results even if they lost. In addition, the council, through two incumbent members — Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez and Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley — persuaded the United Nations to send security observers to monitor the elections and prevent violence that had aborted the election in November 1987.

The Bush administration supported these efforts, but, correctly, kept some distance from the mediation. The proud, nationalistic Haitians preferred to negotiate the rules of the election with international and non-governmental organizations rather than with the U.S. government.

On Dec. 16, 1990, Haitians voted for 11 presidential candidates, but Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a young priest, won two-thirds of the vote. Because of the effective mediation during the campaign, all the political parties accepted the results. Jean Casimir, who was the executive secretary of the CEP in 1990 and is currently Haiti’s ambassador to the United States, acknowledged: “Without electoral observation, it

would have been totally impossible for Haiti to rid itself of its dictators and their armed forces.”

Aristide was hardly a typical politician, any more than Haiti’s politics were classically democratic. Aristide was connected to the people by a spiritual bond, and this was evident during his inauguration on Feb. 7, 1991 as the people chanted passionately: “Thank you God, for sending Titi [Aristide].”

The election turned the Haitian power pyramid upside down. The vast majority of Haitians are poor, and for the first time, they had their champion in the presidential palace. The elite found themselves on the outside, fearful that the masses might treat them as they had treated the people.

It was a delicate transition, and it did not last. Barely seven months after his inauguration, the military overthrew Aristide with the consent of the oligarchy and perhaps at its invitation. When he later reflected on what had gone wrong, Aristide acknowledged that perhaps he had won the election by too much. He had little incentive to compromise, and he showed too little respect for the independence of the Parliament. One of his mistakes was replacing the commander-in-chief of the Army, Gen. Herard Abraham, with Gen. Raul Cedras. Abraham, a skillful political actor, had secured the election and stopped a military coup led by Duvalierist Roger LaFontant in January 1991.

In exile, Aristide tried to marshal international support for his return. The international community was eager to help. During the previous 15 years, a democratic wave had swept through the hemisphere. When the OAS General Assembly met in Santiago in June 1991, every active member had had free and competitive elections. (Cuba was not an active member. Mexico and the Dominican Republic had competitive elections, but their integrity was questioned.) The foreign ministers understood the fragility of democracy in the Americas, and they passed the

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Santiago Commitment on Democracy and Resolution 1080, pledging that if a coup occurred in the Americas, they would meet in emergency session to decide on action to discuss ways to restore democracy.

Three months later, in September 1991, Haiti provided the first test case. Within days of the coup, the OAS Foreign Ministers met in Washington, quickly condemned the coup, and sent a delegation to Haiti to demand the return of Aristide. The military humiliated the group, and the OAS responded by imposing an economic embargo on the regime. President Bush supported President Aristide's return, but some in his administration did not, and that might have influenced his decision to limit the means he would use to accomplish that goal. He ordered the U.S. Coast Guard to return refugees to Haiti, and this reduced the pressure on him to restore Aristide to power.

During the campaign, Bill Clinton criticized Bush for his refugee policy, but after his election, Clinton adopted the same policy and gained Aristide's support by promising to restore him to power. Making good on that promise proved far more difficult than the new president thought. The Haitian military and the elite did not want Aristide to return, and no diplomatic effort would succeed unless backed by a credible threat of force. The credibility of U.S. and U.N. diplomatic efforts was undermined significantly when the *Harlan County*, a Navy ship carrying 200 U.S. soldiers on a humanitarian mission, was prevented from docking in Port-au-Prince by thugs organized by the armed forces.

While the president remained committed to restoring Aristide, the difficulty of accomplishing that goal tempted the administration to put the issue aside. However, intense pressure by Randall Robinson, the director of TransAfrica, and the Congressional Black Caucus compelled the adminis-

tration to take a giant step forward. In July 1994, the United States persuaded the U.N. Security Council to pass a resolution calling on member states to use force to compel the Haitian military to accept Aristide's return. This was a watershed event in international relations — the first time that the U.N. Security Council had authorized the use of force for the purpose of restoring democracy to a member state. The following August, President Clinton decided that the U.S. would take the lead in an invasion.

The next month, on Sept. 15, President Clinton publicly warned the Haitian military leaders to leave power immediately. He said all diplomatic options were exhausted, but in fact, the U.S. government had stopped talking to the Haitian military six months before. Nonetheless, Gen. Raoul Cedras, the commander of the Haitian military, had opened a dialogue during the previous week with former president Jimmy Carter, whom he had met during the 1990 elections. The president, who had been told by Carter of the talks, decided on Friday, Sept. 16, to send Carter, Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and General Colin Powell to try one last time to negotiate the departure of Haiti's military leaders.

The Carter team had a deadline of less than 24 hours. They arrived Saturday afternoon and began their meeting with the Haitian military high command about 2:50 p.m. After one hour, the three statesmen had convinced the generals, for the first time, that force would be used against them if the talks failed. But the Carter team understood what some in the Clinton administration did not — that the Haitian military leaders were not interested in negotiating their exit, wealth or safety. Representing the traditional elites, the military were desperately fearful that Aristide would unleash the masses against them. Moreover, like President Aristide, the generals were

proud Haitians, who did not want to surrender or be lectured.

By about 1 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 18, the Carter team had succeeded in gaining agreement to allow the peaceful entry of U.S. forces into Haiti and the restoration of President Aristide. But there were some details that needed to be negotiated, and time was running out. Suddenly, Gen. Philippe Biamby burst into the room with the news that the men of the 82nd Airborne were being readied for attack, a fact not known to the Carter team, and he accused the three Americans of deception. He informed the three he was taking Cedras to a secure area. The negotiations were over.

It is hard to find a better example of the difference between a credible threat, which was essential to reach an agreement, and the actual use of force, which in this case, was counterproductive. Although ready to sign the agreement, Cedras would not do so after learning the attack had begun. Carter

reached deep into his soul to try to persuade the generals to complete the agreement, but he could not overcome their anger and fear. He then tried a different tactic - to change the venue of negotiations, and he asked Cedras to accompany him. At the new site, the presidential palace, de facto President Jonnaissant announced that he would sign the agreement. This created problems for President Clinton and for President Aristide, who was in Washington, and was reluctant to accept any agreement with the military or the de facto government. With the U.S. Air Force halfway to Haiti, President Clinton finally turned the planes around and authorized Carter to sign the agreement on his behalf.

The president asked Carter, Nunn and Powell to return to the White House immediately, and they asked me to remain to brief the U.S. Ambassador and Pentagon officials, who had not participated in the negotiations, and to arrange meetings between Haitian and U.S. military officers. This proved to be extremely difficult because the Haitian generals went into hiding, and U.S. government officials in Port-au-Prince did not trust the Haitian generals to implement the agreement; they feared a double-cross like *Harlan County*. With less than two hours before touch-down by the U.S. military, I was able to arrange the crucial meetings by sending a mixed harsh-and-intimate message to Cedras through his wife.

U.S. forces arrived without having to fire one shot and 20,000 U.S. troops disembarked without a single casualty or injured civilian.

There was no question that U.S. forces would prevail, but because of the *Harlan County*, the Somalia experience, and the need to minimize U.S. casualties, the U.S. military plan called for a ferocious assault that would have involved hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Haitian casualties, and inevitably, some Americans. Moreover, as Gen.

Hugh Shelton, the commanding officer, told me, such an invasion would have engendered long-term bitterness in some of the Haitian population, making it more difficult for the United Nations to secure order and for the country to build democracy.

Gen. Cedras stepped down from power on Oct. 12 and only then, at the moment that he had the fewest bargaining chips, sought to rent his houses and find a place for asylum.

On Oct. 15, Aristide returned to the presidency and Haiti. He had a second chance, and he showed that he had learned some lessons. He called for national reconciliation and assembled a multi-party government. He proposed an economic program that elicited both praise from the international community and pledges of \$1.2 billion. He established a Truth Commission to investigate human rights violations during the military regime but not in a vindictive way. A Police Academy was established to train a new, professional police force. A project on the administration of justice aimed to train justices of the peace and dispatch them throughout the country. The armed forces had been so thoroughly discredited that Aristide moved quickly to reduce their size and influence and, by spring of this year, to virtually dismantle the institution. In the year since Aristide's return, there have been some political assassinations, but to most Haitians, it has been a period of less fear than ever before.

In December 1994, Aristide created a CEP to prepare for municipal and parliamentary elections. Virtually all of the political parties, including KONAKOM, PANPRA and FNCD, which had been partners of Aristide in the 1990 election, criticized the CEP for being partial to one faction of the president's supporters, Lavalas, and for being completely unresponsive to their complaints. Unfortunately, there was

no mediation between the parties and the CEP and no quick count. Three political parties boycotted the June 25 election, and many of the 27 parties that participated were skeptical that the CEP would conduct a fair election.

An estimated 50 percent cast their ballots, according to OAS estimates. But the most serious problem occurred after the voting stopped, and the counting began. Officials were poorly trained, and I witnessed the most insecure and tainted vote count that I have seen in the course of monitoring 13 "transitional" elections during the last decade. Even before the results were announced, almost all of the political parties, except Lavalas, called for an annulment and the recall of the CEP members. On July 12, the CEP finally released some of the results that showed Lavalas doing the best, with the FNCD and KONAKOM trailing far behind. Perhaps as many as one-fifth of the elections needed to be held again, and the majority of the Senate and Deputy seats required a run-off. Of the 84 main mayoral elections, Lavalas won 64, including Port-au-Prince, by a margin of 45-18 percent over incumbent Mayor Evans Paul.

The CEP went ahead with the re-run of some elections on Aug. 13 and the runoff of other elections on Sept. 17 despite the boycott of virtually all the political parties. Again, there was practically no campaign, and despite great efforts by President Aristide to get people to vote, the turnout was very low.

Therefore, the parliamentary and municipal elections cannot be viewed as a step forward. Moreover, the government hurt the fragile party system by seducing opposition candidates to participate in the runoff contrary to their parties' decision. Partly because of the opposition boycott, and partly because of Aristide's continued popularity, Lavalas swept the runoff elections, giving it 80 percent of the Deputy and two-thirds of the Senate seats.

The opposition parties condemned the Parliament as illegitimate, and many feared that Haiti was moving to a one-party state. Lavalas could prove as fractious as the original Aristide coalition, but regardless, an opportunity for a more inclusive democracy and an impartial electoral process was lost.

If an effective mediation does not enlist the participation of the opposition parties in time for the presidential elections next month, the new president's authority will be impugned, especially if the Constitution were changed illegally to permit Aristide to run again. If the U.N. forces depart on the inauguration of the new president, the old elite of the country will no doubt try to use the questionable authority of the new president to weaken him even as they try to seduce the new police force. The only way that democracy can be preserved in Haiti is if the new police force remains professional and accountable to the rule of law. If the force is co-opted by the rich, as has occurred in the past, then a popular democracy cannot survive.

The international community and Haiti formed a remarkable partnership in the summer of 1990 to reinforce the democratic process and to respond positively to Haiti's double challenge — to respect Haitians and to make the country a part of a democratic hemisphere.

Returning to Haiti with Carter and Powell last February, Sen. Nunn said, "We have a one-year plan for a 10-year challenge." Haiti's democratic experiment will be endangered if it does not ask the United States and the United Nations to remain after February 1996, and if those two entities do not agree to stay. To keep the process on track, the Haitian government needs to respond fully to the legitimate concerns with the electoral process raised by the opposition parties. Only then can meaningful presidential elections occur. The second step is for the international community to ensure that a multi-party democracy takes root in Haiti. ■