

Haiti rebel leader rejects military dictatorship

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that his movement wants to re-establish the army but is not interested in installing another dictatorship.

A military dictatorship is "not good for the country," said Philippe, formerly Aristide's assistant police chief for northern Haiti. "The military should stay in the barracks."

Even if the opposition coalition accepts the U.S. peace plan, the rebels insist they will lay down their arms only when Aristide is out of power. Asked if he was in contact with opposition politicians, Philippe smiled and said "not officially." He refused to elaborate.

Opposition leaders disputed that.

"We refuse to have contacts with the rebels, as well as with Aristide," said Mischa Gaillard, a spokesman for the opposition coalition. "We don't want to be tainted with any suspicion of condoning violence."

The opposition has said they are a nonviolent movement that supports the rebel goal of getting Aristide to step down. Aristide maintains that opposition factions are supporting the rebellion and the rebels are an armed wing of the political opposition.

Premier Yvon Neptune appealed to the political opposition coalition to agree to the peace plan, which Aristide has accepted. The plan would allow him to remain president with diminished powers, sharing with political rivals a government that would organize elections.

Philippe said he was on his way to a Western Union office to pick up donations being sent by Haitians in the United States and Canada. He said his rebellion also was being funded by businessmen in Haiti.

French President Jacques Chirac said Tuesday his country is ready to consider contributing to any eventual peacekeeping force approved by the United Nations.

"France does not exclude

contributing to a civilian force for peace," he said, adding however that such a deployment "depends on a decision of the Security Council."

In Port-au-Prince on Monday, about 50 Marines in full battle gear rushed off a U.S. Air Force transport plane and secured a perimeter around the international airport. The Marines then drove to the U.S. Embassy in a convoy of trucks and cars. Western diplomats and a Defense Department official

said their mission was to protect the U.S. Embassy and staff.

Ten years ago, the U.S. sent 20,000 troops to end a military dictatorship that ousted Aristide in 1991, a year after he became Haiti's first freely elected leader. But Washington has made clear it won't commit a large number of troops this time.

Aristide, hugely popular when he was elected leader of the Western hemisphere's poorest country, has since lost much of his support.

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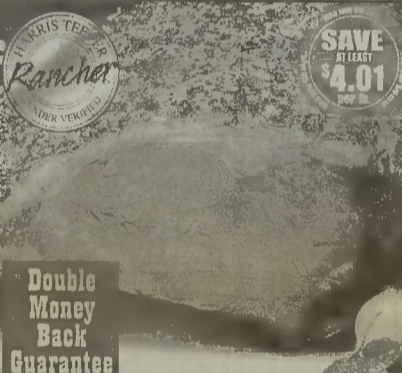
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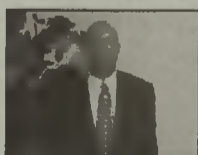
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