

If Elections Can Happen In Iraq, Why Not Haiti?

By: Bill Fletcher Jr.
—Guest Columnist—

Having helped to bring about the horrendous mess that has been unfolding in Haiti following the overthrow of elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the Bush administration faces a tremendous dilemma. There is no stability at all. The puppet government has proven totally incompetent in addressing anything, ranging from natural disasters to the reign of terror by the thugs of the former Haitian military. The obvious hope of the Bush administration was for a smooth transition, but there is nothing smooth about the situation in Haiti.

In this setting of chaos, a peculiar proposal has begun to emerge. Sort of like the emergence of a rash, with first one bump and then more, various individuals have started to suggest that the situation in Haiti is hopeless. Specifically, they suggest that it is impossible for Haiti to return to stability in the near future and, therefore, the elections that are scheduled to take place in the fall of 2005 will have to be put off. Actually, this line does not end there: The elections would need to be put off indefinitely, while Haiti is placed under a United Nations protectorate to help the country recover from its current trauma.

On one level, this may sound quite reasonable. Killings continue to take place, particularly targeting supporters of ousted Pres. Aristide. Leaders from his administration, along with ranking members of the Fanmi Lavalas political party, are underground or in exile. Unemployment is going through the roof. So, one may ask, why not just put the whole thing off?

The first answer is contained in one word: Iraq. As you may have noted, the Bush administration has been willing to push forward with an election in Iraq, despite the fact that there is a full-scale guerrilla war underway, along with the activities of terrorists. There is no stability yet the Bush administration and many of their allies believe that an election needs to happen in order to send the right signal—whatever it may happen to be.

So, what about Haiti? The violence is certainly not on the scale that is taking place in Iraq. But more importantly, the violence can be continued largely because it is being carried out by supporters of the government, otherwise known as allies of the U.S.A. Thus, it does not take an Einstein to understand that, should the Bush administration truly wish to end the killings in Haiti and provide the groundwork for elections, it could do this with a bit of pressure on both the puppet government and the thugs running around the countryside.

It is amazing that a situation that the Bush administration repeatedly described as being "out of control" under the leadership of Pres. Aristide is now either ignored entirely or considered unredeemable, short of a UN trusteeship.

Demonstrations are taking place in Haiti on a regular basis, calling for the return of elected Pres. Aristide. If there is any doubt as to who should be the legitimate leader of Haiti, then free and fair elections would be the most effective means of establishing an

answer. In order for elections to take place, the killings must stop. This demands that the Brazilian troops, currently in Haiti under a UN mandate, take a strong and unequivocal stand in favor of the rule of law and break the backs of the armed thugs. It is clear to most observers that the armed thugs allied with the puppet government could not withstand a crackdown by the Brazilian military.

A crackdown must be accompanied by legitimate, independent assistance in paving the way for new elections. Unfortunately, assistance from the U.S., with the possible exception of some financial assistance to an honest intermediary, seems much too risky for many to take seriously. The destabilization project undertaken against the Aristide administration by the U.S., including a de facto blockade, makes any suggestion of U.S. involvement a source of concern. The same can be said for France, which played nothing short of a despicable role in the overthrow of Mr. Aristide. There are, however, countries in the Organization of American States (OAS) and the African Union, along perhaps with the Nordic countries, that might be willing and able to assist in the transition back to democracy.

We have to stop permitting our leaders to speak with forked tongues. There is nothing special about Iraq that permits it to have elections in a time of war—leaving aside the entire question of the legitimacy of their proposed elections—while Haiti remains under a cloud. There are some disturbing racial overtones to the notion that Haiti is an eternal basket-case that can only be improved by being caged as a UN protectorate. The basket in which Haiti is encased is one that was woven by the U.S. and France a very long time ago. It is time for Haiti to regain its sovereignty and be permitted to follow its own path.

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