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Intervention and Occupation in Haiti:  
A Case Study in Irregular Warfare

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of  
INTERVENTION AND OCCUPATION IN HAITI

The Clinton Administration has repeatedly threatened the introduction of United States forces into Haiti to restore the legitimate government of exiled President Jean Bertrand Aristide. As the United States military is being charged to conduct increasingly non-traditional and irregular missions around the world, it is useful to view these unique operations from a historical perspective and learn from previous commanders and policy-makers alike. An earlier military intervention in Haiti reviews the successes and shortcomings of previous operations in that country. In addition this study will highlight lessons learned and make recommendations for any operational commander tasked with such a mission in the future.

" Dear me, think of it, niggers speaking French."

William Jennings Bryant  
U.S. Secretary of State (1)

### 1. Introduction

As the Clinton Administration begins its second year, foreign policy issues will continue to dominate its political agenda. Events from South Africa to North Korea to Iraq have maintained the State Department's interest and will continue to do so. In the Western Hemisphere the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the restoration of an elected government in Haiti became early mantras of the Administration. When both the President and Secretary of State alluded to the forceful introduction of US military personnel into Haiti to restore ousted President Jean Bertrand Aristide, the prospect of another non-traditional military intervention appeared eminent.

The changing dynamics of United States foreign policy now call for greater diversity in the use of military forces and Haiti, in addition to Somalia and Bosnia, were to serve as examples of this new direction. While policymakers undertook the political implications of such a move, military planners prepared for what appeared to be another controversial and irregular military operation.

Yet, US military intervention in Haiti would not be a novel occurrence. The United States routinely landed troops in Haiti throughout the latter part of the last century and early 20th century. This research paper will review the longest intervention in Haiti which lasted some 19 years. By studying how the United States undertook such an irregular mission, we should be able to apply valuable lessons to any future operation in that troubled republic.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Throughout the early part of the twentieth century US military forces were employed in Cuba, Mexico, Panama, The Dominican Republic and Haiti. By far the most complete occupation occurred in Haiti. From 1915 until 1934 the United States Marine Corps ruled Haiti. In general terms the US decision was based on the need to provide stability in a nearby nation as well as deter European, primarily German, influence in Haiti.

More specifically, the US intervention in Haiti was based on military and strategic considerations. The construction of the Panama Canal had created new strategic security requirements for the US military, particularly the Navy. Thus absolute control of the Caribbean and its vital sea lanes were considered geo-strategic necessities.

American supremacy in the Caribbean was an idea which could be traced to the philosophy of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan. In the late 19th century Mahan had espoused the view that the United States needed to increase its trade with the Far East and build a canal across Panama to facilitate such trade. In addition, he warned that the creation of such a canal would create new national security problems for the United States. European powers, Mahan believed, would attempt to control trade routes to and from the canal and might possibly establish bases in the Caribbean. To prevent that,

Mahan believed that the US needed its own bases in the region. (2)

Of all the potential European powers, Germany was perceived to be the most threatening. By the first decade of the 20th century Imperial Germany had established itself as the preeminent European power in Haiti. Given America's new security requirements and the ever-changing political scene in the Caribbean Basin, the United States set into motion a series of events which eventually led to the occupation.

American views on the Caribbean in general and Haiti in specific were based on a blend of Moral Diplomacy and a genuine fear of European encroachment. To keep the European powers out of the Caribbean, the United States needed to maintain stable and fiscally responsible governments in the region. Thus was born the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. President Woodrow Wilson, Secretary of State William Jennings Bryant, and his successor, William Lansing, all believed that stable and honest governments were the best safeguards against European interventions. Germany's extensive commercial interests in Haiti were thus viewed as menacing to US national interests.

Although no US troops had ever engaged in combat operations in Haiti before, US military involvement there was not new. From 1849 to 1915, US Navy ships had visited Haitian ports and patrolled Haitian waters to "protect American lives and property" no fewer than 28 times (3).



While the US Government was monitoring Euro-Haitian commercial and business transactions, it was also following internal political events in Port-au-Prince. That the Haitian political situation was volatile is an understatement. From 1843 to 1915 only one Haitian president served a complete seven year term and only one died a natural death while in office. Usually a local leader or self-proclaimed military commander would form a rebel army, take the important northern city of Cap Haitian then march on Port-au-Prince to be installed as the new President. The process would repeat itself with the departing regime helping itself to the contents of the Haitian treasury on the way out. This process strained Haiti's ability to service its foreign debt and on the eve of US military intervention, some 80% of Haiti's meager revenues were pledged to service that debt (4).

In January 1914, a rebel general revolted against the government of President Michel Oreste. President Oreste took refuge on a German Navy cruiser and his replacement, Oreste Zamor, appeared to be returning the country to normal. To insure against financial irresponsibility on the part of the Haitian government, President Wilson pressed the Haitian Government to accept a US receivership of all Haitian customhouses. The Haitians refused.

By mid-1915 the US State Department was convinced that Haiti was in dire need of true and meaningful reform and decided to act. President Guillaume Sam, Oreste's successor,

oversaw a reign of terror and a virtual disintegration of what remained of Haitian society. After he was wounded in an attempted coup, Sam retaliated by having 167 political opponents executed. This move led to mass demonstrations forcing Sam to take refuge in the French Legation from which a mob dragged him out to the street where a he was beaten to death. The time for the US to act appeared at hand.

### 3. Intervention

On July 28, 1915 a force of 330 marines and sailors from the cruiser USS Washington landed in Port-au-Prince to restore order and protect United States property and lives. Rear Admiral William B. Caperton and his small force of marines and sailors landed with some trepidation. The US forces had no long term plans and the city was full of armed bandits, rioters, and the remnants of the Haitian Army. After moving into the city and the magnitude of his mission became evident, Caperton immediately requested reinforcements. On 4 August 1915, the cruiser USS Connecticut reached the Haitian capitol. Aboard was a marine regimental headquarters and five more marine infantry companies. Barely two weeks later the USS Tennessee brought yet another regiment, the headquarters of the 1st Marine Brigade and the new commander of Marine Corps forces in Haiti, Colonel Littleton Waller. By mid-August there were 2029 marines ashore (5).

Admiral Caperton's mission in Haiti was as political as it was complex. He was to secure and pacify Haiti, hold an election, make sure the winning candidate won with a respectable majority and begin the process of normalizing the turbulent political climate within the country. In the meantime, Colonel Waller was tasked with the pacification of the nation.

While Caperton took on the duties of "de-facto" Military Governor, Waller proceeded to expand the scope of Marine Corps

control over Haiti. Admiral Caperton personally took control over the main customhouse in Port-au-Prince and the Marines provided armed escorts to the paymasters and port officers as they made their way throughout the country. Navy paymasters moved in as customs collectors and port captains at all of Haiti's principal ports.

Marines quickly demobilized the military garrison in Port-au-Prince and occupied military arsenals. They also confiscated the heavy weaponry, small arms and ammunition available throughout the capitol and its surroundings. By September, the demobilization of the 9000-man Haitian Army (of whom over 300 were generals!) had begun.

Prior to this, the marines had conducted unilateral operations against Haitian rebels in the countryside. Initially there was little organized opposition to the US intervention. But those Haitian nationalists determined to forcibly opposed the US presence took refuge in Haiti's rugged interior where they conducted sporadic military operations. These actions resulted in high Haitian casualties, a disruption of the occupation effort and few US casualties.

Shortly after the US landing, Philippe Dartiguenave, the President of the Haitian Senate, emerged as the new US-anointed President. Upon Dartiguenave taking office, a revolt by rebels in the northern part of the country threatened the political successes of the American mission. As a southerner, Dartiguenave did not enjoy any popularity in Haiti's

tradition-rich northern sectors and was perceived to be untrustworthy. These armed rebels became known as "cacos".

Under Admiral Caperton, US plans called for a two-phased approach to the caco problem. Rebel leaders and their forces were bribed to surrender themselves and their weapons. After using this initial approach, those rebels who did not take advantage of American generosity were to be militarily defeated.

As the occupation reached further into the interior of the country, heavily armed marine rifle companies were placed at important and strategic towns and villages. On November 1, 1915 the marines began a major offensive against the remaining caco bands. Beginning at the important town of Ouanaminthe, on the Dominican border, marine patrols moved west in small columns through the very heart of caco country. Rebel stronghold after stronghold fell to the marines until the rebels were concentrated at the old abandoned French garrison village of Fort Riviere. Led by marine Major Smedley Butler, 4 companies of marines and sailors attacked Fort Riviere during the night of 17 November 1915. The caco rebels suffered over 150 killed, the uprising was effectively defeated and Butler was eventually awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his exploits (6).

In early 1916 Admiral Caperton left his post in Haiti to assume similar duties in the neighboring Dominican Republic. While Caperton had genuinely tried to cultivate the Haitian

political and business elites and to lesson the many tensions resulting from the US military presence, his successor, Colonel Waller, took a much more different approach. A strict disciplinarian with little use for political and diplomatic finesse, civil-military relations became very strained.

Initially, US forces undertook a myriad of tasks not necessarily related to combat operations. Navy doctors began treating people with the most horrible of diseases such as leprosy, elephantiasis, and syphilis (7). In addition, Marine Corps district and sub-district Gendarme commanders began the arduous task of creating a national infrastructure. Ostensibly to promote national development, the Corps saw the building of bridges, roads, and telegraphs as essential to maintaining command and control in the rural areas.

By 1 February 1916 a newly created entity, the Gendarme d'Haiti, took control over the responsibility of policing the country. A cadre of French-speaking marines and naval officers were assigned to senior positions within the 1500-man Gendarme with US non-commissioned officers serving as junior officers. Now that the country had been pacified the Gendarme could undertake its' primary mission to police the country and maintain public order.

The creation of the Gendarme d'Haiti staffed with US Marines as its officers brought with it many organizational and societal problems. The first commander of the Gendarme, Major Smedley Butler, also held the Haitian military rank of

Major General. Other marines in the Gendarme held Haitian rank and each received both his US and Haitian salary. Few marines spoke French and the new Haitian recruits spoke no English. The sons of the important elite families refused to join the Gendarme so that early recruits were considered substandard by even the most charitable of definitions. Ill-fed, illiterate and in poor physical health these lower class Haitians saw in the Gendarme d'Haiti an opportunity for social mobility or at the very least a place to eat. Despite its problems the Gendarme emerged as the most important and best organized institution in the country.

The Gendarme also emerged as the enforcer of the US-supported Haitian Government's political will. As the Gendarme's organizational structure matured and military training progressed, it gradually took over the pacification duties from the 1st Marine Brigade. The Brigade subsequently withdrew its forces into the cities of Port-au-Prince and Cap Haitian.

Gendarme (USMC) officers exercised full control over most government matters from the national level down to local affairs. One American observer wrote that:

The marine who becomes an officer in the Gendarme finds himself clothed with practically unlimited powers in the district where he serves. He is the judge of practically all civil and criminal cases, settles everything from a family fight to a murder. He is paymaster for all funds expended by the national government, he is

ex-officio director of all the schools...He controls the mayor and city council, since they can spend no funds without his O.K. (8)

The full political authority of the Gendarme was evidenced in 1917 when the Haitian National Assembly turned down a new US-sponsored constitution and proceeded to write a more nationalist document. Major Butler entered the proceedings and declared that the Assembly had been dissolved. It would not sit again until 1929.

The task of nation-building would not prove to be an easy one for US military authorities. In an effort to provide infrastructure for the country, employment for the unemployed and secure lines of communications the Gendarme undertook an ambitious public works program.

Reaching into the Haitian Rural Code, Haitian and US administrators decided that the manpower needed for such an undertaking would require the use of the corvee system. Enjoying a legal status if not popular support, the corvee system empowered municipal authorities to order residents to report for three days work on public works projects. Unbeknown to US officials, the corvee system was routinely used and abused by Haitian municipal officials to either enrich themselves by granting exemptions or as punishment for any real or fabricated transgression.

In 1915 only three miles of roads useable by automobiles existed outside of the major towns. When Major Butler left Haiti in March 1918, the Gendarme-operated corvee had built or



rebuilt 470 miles of highway. Administered closely by US officials, the corvee system appeared not to have the excesses and abuses found in previous times. Despite its successes, the corvee system was seen by many nationalists as the tool of foreign white men coming back to physically exploit the blacks as had been the case during the French colonial period.

On 1 October 1918, Major A.S. Williams, Butler's successor as the Gendarme commander, abolished the corvee. By this time matters in the countryside had become so aggravated by local abuses that another rebellion unfolded. While the US managed to run the corvee system with laudable efficiency and relative honesty, local Haitian leaders, far away from but perceived to be under the protection of US forces brought the system to a breaking point. Led by a political opponent of the Haitian president, this new caco rebellion was to be much more serious than earlier anti-American skirmishes.

The new caco rebellion began in the central Haitian town of Hinche on 17 October 1918 and quickly spread to other parts of the country. Cast in racial terms as a battle between the conquering white men who were returning to enslave the black masses, the revolt gained momentum.

Under the leadership of one Charlemagne Peralte, the revolt spread from town to town overwhelming the inadequately trained rural Gendarme. Gendarme detachments were systematically attacked and in many instances the rebels massed odds of 20 or 30 to one against the outposts. The

commander of the 1st Marine Brigade, Colonel John H. Russell, estimated that Peralte had some 5,000 followers (9). Another military observer wrote that the caco forces represented:

".... the most efficient Haitian army in the country's history. The cacos learned concealment and infiltration...caco forces never assembled in strength in any one place...and moved in small detachments by back trails at night to assemble in a given locality at the appointed time. (10)

American military authorities realized that they had a full-scale, national rebellion on their hands they also realized that the modestly trained Gendarme was ill-equipped to contain such an uprising. The Gendarme leadership quickly requested direct military assistance from the 1st Marine Brigade.

Six marine infantry companies were deployed to the insurgent-controlled areas. As a general rule 25 per cent of the marine force was required to be on patrol taking the war to the insurgents. In addition, marine reinforcements were brought in from Guantanamo, Cuba and 13 aircraft (7 HS-2 Seaplanes and 6 World War I land-based "Jennys") were used to conduct ground support operations.

From April to September 1919 the marines and cacos fought 131 actions from small skirmishes to pitched battles. By October 1919, Peralte and his forces were within striking distance of the capitol. After the marines and Gendarmes repelled an attack on Port-au-Prince by some 300 cacos, the

Gendarme commander, Colonel Frederic Wise, realized that the only way to put down the revolt was to either capture or kill Peralte.

Gendarme detachments were dispatched to the caco controlled countryside and attempted to pass themselves off as independent caco units in an hopes of locating the leader of the rebellion. One such detachment, led by two Creole-speaking marines in charcoal blackface, were able to penetrate Peralte's camp and kill him. Much to the marines and Gendarme's distress, Peralte's second in command, Benoit Batraverse, continued the fight.

In January 1920, Colonel Russell prepared his forces for an all out offensive against Batraverse's forces. Reinforcements were brought in to strengthen the Brigade, the staff was reorganized, intelligence was improved and the country was divided into tactical areas of operations. Troops were assigned to each area and tactical patrols were maintained almost constantly.

On January 15 Batraverse attempted to attack the capitol. When the attack was repelled at a very high cost to the rebels, the rebellion was all but over. Rebel chieftains of varying importance began to surrender. They were sent back into the bush accompanied by armed escorts in hopes of getting other guerrillas to surrender. On May 19, Batraverse was shot and killed by a marine patrol. During the period between Peralte's death and the end of June 1920, 165 caco generals

and 11,656 individual cacos surrendered and were given amnesty (11).

Overall, caco attacks and ambushes against the marines were unsuccessful and costly. In a report from the Marine Corps Commandant, General George Barnett stated that from 1914 to 1920 some 3250 Haitian rebels had been killed as opposed to 14 or 16 marine. The year 1919 was the bloodiest year with 1861 Haitian casualties that year alone (12).

Once the revolt had been put down, the marine corps occupation came under increasing public scrutiny and discussion in the United States. In addition, State Department officials appointed to various posts throughout Haiti took great exception to the interference in civilian matters by military personnel. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that from 1915 to 1922 there were six different Brigade commanders and six different Gendarme commandants. The adverse publicity generated by the Corps' highly successful counterinsurgency operations coupled with increased bureaucratic infighting eventually became an election issue in 1920. Echoing the anti-Wilsonian sentiment and post World War I isolationism the Republicans denounced the occupation. As a result a Senate committee was created to investigate the situation.

Headed by Senator Medill McCormack, (R-IL), the Committee recommended that a High Commissioner with extraordinarily vast powers be appointed to supervise the Marine Brigade, Gendarme

d'Haiti and all civilian technicians assigned to Haiti. In 1922, General John Russell, the former commander of the 1st Marine Brigade, was appointed to the post of High Commissioner.

Russell served in Haiti for 10 years. Under his administration U.S. occupation matters were highly centralized. Working with the Presidents of Haiti, Russell lessened tensions and paved the way for the eventual withdrawal of all US forces. Although martial law remained in effect from the days of the caco rebellions, it was not rigidly enforced. While the remainder of the occupation was not without incident, no more serious threats to marine authority occurred.

Slowly, the United States began to disengage from Haiti. In July, 1934, as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration began to enact the Good Neighbor Policy, the US military presence in Haiti came to an end.

#### 4. Lessons Learned

While there is a danger in assessing operational deficiencies from the vantage point of 1994, there are still lessons to be learned from the Haitian occupation. These might be useful in any future intervention.

Clearly, the most important lesson is that the tangible results of a successful military occupation, by US standards, will last only as long as the United States maintains a strong and visible presence. As in other Latin American countries during that period and more recently, events in Somalia and elsewhere attest, numerically superior forces and firepower will gain only short-term stability. The US Marines were operationally successful in Haiti because they use superior tactics, organization, equipment and generous rules of engagement. Rebel elements were never really in a position to oust the US forces so long as the marines were not inhibited from accomplishing the mission.

The establishment of the Gendarme d'Haiti, the precursor of today's Haitian Army, solved short-term operational requirements. Rather than maintain thinly stretched marine detachments throughout the country the marines elected to establish and supervise a force of Haitians to defend and protect their fellow countrymen. This altruistic notion of creating an "apolitical" and "professional" force founded on the principles of its American creators would later prove to be ineffective. So adept were the marines in establishing

foreign forces in their spiritual image that the creation of a constabulary force in an occupied country, the establishment of a military government and the supervision of elections were listed as separate chapters in the Marine Corps Small Wars Manual . The manual was published in 1940 so that marines would have the benefit of the Corps' vast experience in peacekeeping and counter-insurgency operations. This attempt by the marines to leave behind a safeguard against the need for future interventions ignored very real societal characteristics and cultural complexities.

Relying primarily on force, the early years of the occupation experienced operational hardships due to the most apparent barrier- language. While French is the official language, the majority of the population speaks Creole and most Haitians were (and still are) illiterate in their own language. In occupying a country where the vast majority of the population did not speak the official language, the difficulties were compounded.

Such a lack of cultural understanding also led to the fomenting of doubts among the populace about the American's intentions and later, insurrection. The Marines, reflecting the racism of the times, treated all Haitians, either elites or peasants, with disdain and contempt. Many believed that they were in Haiti to restore order because blacks were incapable of self-rule. As a result, rather than identifying and working with local expertise to eventually turn over the

operation of the country, the Marines undertook the majority of the nation-building mission themselves. By not actively recruiting members of the technically competent business and political elites, the Corps made its mission to stabilize the country even more difficult. Relying on ill-suited, untrained and in many cases sick and illiterate Haitians, the task of nation-building became more protracted.

The marines' counter-insurgency tactics were excellently conceived. Tailor-made for the environment in which they were fighting, the Corps scored numerous tactical successes against their skillful and highly motivated adversaries. Still, its successes often caused the very reactions it was hoping to prevent. When the marines killed the rebel leader Peralte, they photographed and paraded his body on a crucifix-like wooden structure giving the corpse the aura of a Haitian Christ. Rather than intimidate the rebels into submission, the desecration of Peralte's body coupled with Haitian religious mysticism helped turn him into a martyr (13).

The corvee system was another instance where good intentions clashed with Haitian reality. Long used by local political bosses to enforce their rule and punish the unruly, the corvee system, reminded many Haitians of the excesses of the ruling class.

While US forces appeared to be well trained, equipped and organized, chain-of-command problems arose early and became irritants throughout the occupation. Legally, the United



States had been invited to station troops in Haiti under provisions of a treaty arrangement negotiated after the intervention. Yet, during the occupation there were at least four separate national-level authorities charged with administering the country - the President of Haiti, the United States Ambassador, the Commander of the 1st Marine Brigade and the Commandant of the Gendarme d'Haiti. In fact while Major Butler commanded the Gendarme, he would not follow an order from the President of Haiti without the approval of the Marine Brigade Commander. Although the creation of the post of High Commissioner centralized the occupation, it also added another bureaucratic layer to an already bureaucratized situation.

Perhaps the biggest and most enduring criticism of the marine occupation is that its early tactical successes later became its political failure. Rather than accomplish the mission of stabilizing the country and protecting US lives and property, the marines gradually became an integral part of the very flawed society they were sent to reform. Considering their stay in Haiti to be of an indefinite nature, the Marines denied the Haitians the necessary opportunities to learn to effectively govern themselves after their eventual withdrawal. By turning a military intervention into a military occupation and later, a defacto military government, the US fed nationalist sentiments and probably contributed to Haiti's long term instability; the situation which brings us to the very reason for this paper.

#### 4. Recommendations

Should the United States commit to a unilateral intervention in Haiti several operational factors should be taken into account. At a minimum, the operational commander must presuppose that he will be given complete authority to accomplish the designated mission(s), that the United States Government unreservedly backs such an operation and that there exists a legitimate framework under which the intervention can be carried out. While these suppositions appear to be self evident and were operative the Haiti case, history has shown that lack of complete operational authority and/or of domestic and international support can greatly hamper the success of the operation.

A United States intervention in Haiti will, by its very nature, be a different operation than Operations "Urgent Fury", "Just Cause" or "Desert Shield/Storm". Each of these operations had distinctive differences in scope, mission, task organization and intensity but they all share the same result-victory.

A military operation in Haiti will require the United States to defeat and occupy an armed, heavily populated, rural and impoverished country. Unlike past operations, commanders will not have the philosophical and intellectual pillars on which to base the need for such a mission. In addition it is doubtful that overwhelming political public approval will exist for such an operation. Whereas in the past the Marine

Corps leadership felt that it was undertaking a morally superior task and had clearly defined missions within the broader context of US national policy, today's commanders are unlikely to enjoy a mission that is limited in scope with popular support. Their reasons for being there will not be as clear and the autonomy to deal the myriad of political problems within his area of operation may not be as great. While Haiti represents a relatively benign target, Operational Commanders may not have the luxury of deploying from their cantonment areas (Just Cause), from a neighboring country after a six-month build-up (Desert Shield/Storm) or moving into a small, relatively obscure island backwater such as Grenada.

Defeating and occupying an armed, nationalist, xenophobic and primitive society presents unique challenges to the operational commander. Rather than fighting in a high tech environment, the operational commander will find himself fighting at the extreme low end of the spectrum with all of its political complications.

United States objectives in a Haiti intervention should, as a minimum, contain the following five components:

- 1). Protect American lives and property
- 2). Restore the legitimate government
- 3). Disarm and disband military and paramilitary units.
- 4). Maintain regional stability

5). End drug smuggling

Each of these merits a closer review.

**Protect American lives and property:** Although a permissive Non-combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) should be attempted, the likelihood of such an operation remains remote. As a result, US planners should conduct the operation giving high priority to securing those Americans unable to leave Haiti or to make it to the relative safety of the US Embassy. There are hundreds (if not thousands) of Americans and other foreigners living in Haiti. Most of whom are humanitarian relief workers, missionaries, diplomats, dual-nationals and some expatriots. The recent assault by organized mobs upon the Vatican Embassy (where the Papal Nuncio was attacked, stripped naked and paraded through the streets) signifies that the sovereignty of the US diplomatic mission may not be respected. The US Mission and other official entities should be reinforced prior to or during the early phases of the operation.

**Restore the legitimate government:** The current popularly elected and internationally recognized Head of Government, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, resides in exile in the United States. Aristide's early appearance on the scene, perhaps immediately after the first wave of troops, may prove helpful. By officially requesting US military support and asking his considerable political following to support (or at least not impede) US operations, a large segment of the

civilian population may be neutralized. In addition, by having in place the established executive authority, legal and diplomatic problems can be averted. While President Aristide's mental well-being and ability to effectively govern remain in doubt, his controlled presence can be useful and should be exploited by the operational commander.

**Disarm and Disband Haitian military forces:** A successful intervention must include the dismemberment of the current Haitian military establishment. The Haitian armed forces and their paramilitary allies are currently the only national level institution with a power structure parallel to the civilian government. Without the destruction of the Haitian military apparatus as it now exists, there exist little chance for long term stability.

Unlike more traditional armed forces, the Haitian military also has police/gendarme, fire fighting, immigration, penal and administrative functions. While this organization dilutes its capacity to conduct concentrated tactical operations, its loose command structure make its decisive defeat significantly harder.

Although the US will have complete control of the sea and sky (Haiti's Navy and Air Force have only transport and support roles with no combat power) the widely garrisoned army can present problems. With some 7000 troops, the army deploys its forces in 31 separate companies throughout the country. The army's only real tactical asset, 1 combat infantry

battalion, can offer limited opposition in urban areas. The greater challenge will come from dislodging the remainder of the Haitian forces whose organization and equipment can turn them into dangerous rural adversaries. In addition, armed civilian supporters of the military can blur the battlefield since they are indistinguishable from the general populace. Unlike the haphazardly organized Dignity Battalions in Panama, Haiti's Volunteers for State Security (VSN) (better known as the Tonton Moucoutes) have been around for decades even though they have been officially abolished. Given the large numbers of small arms in the hands of those whose very actions caused the intervention, the operational commander must move quickly and forcefully to disarm as many military personnel and their civilian supports as possible.

**Maintain Regional Stability:** The pathetic images of thousands of boat people taking to the high seas are still fresh in many people's minds. The last thing that a commander needs is to be distracted by having to conduct humanitarian seaborne rescues in the middle of a tactical military operation. In addition to distracting and diluting US combat operations, the onslaught of thousands of Haitian refugees headed for the Bahamas, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and the United States will distract from the mission. Every effort must be made to seal Haiti's land and sea borders quickly. For example, by cutting off land access to the neighboring Dominican Republic, refugees will not inundate

that country's already meager resources. At the same time a secure border insures that those Haitians easily attracted to conduct a guerrilla campaign against the US cannot be resupplied from abroad. It is the ongoing contraband trade from the Dominican Republic which has allowed the current Haitian Government to survive in the face of a United Nations-sponsored economic boycott. Liberating Haiti while creating a regional refugee problem or insurgency will negate much of the operation's effectiveness.

**End Narcotics Smuggling:** Probably the least operationally important but politically sensitive factor, the prevention of narcotics smuggling through Haiti is an important positive by-product of the US intervention. As the Haitian economy began to collapse and international support for the current regime disappeared, drug trafficking through Haiti has increased. Senior members of the Haitian military have been connected to narcotics smuggling. The Chief of the Haitian Police for example, Brigadier General Jean-Claude Paul, has been indicted by a Miami Grand Jury for drug trafficking (14). The apprehension and deportation of those officers and civilians accused of drug smuggling will not only shut down another drug pipeline into the United States but will also serve to improve US domestic public opinion regarding the intervention.

Clearly, the most important aspect of any military intervention in Haiti, either limited or unlimited, is the ability of the operational commander to have a wide military

and political latitude to complete his mission. While the National Command Authority will ultimately decide to initiate such an operation, any attempt to condition operational authority could cost lives, time, and resources. While a Haitian intervention will differ from other such operations, the one constant has been the autonomy and independence given to the commander. Once the country has been pacified to the point where it can once again join the community of nations, the US should withdrawal expeditiously and without leaving behind any political-military entanglements. Only then will we not commit the mistake of the past by turning a short, limited intervention into an unwelcome and prolonged stay in a country whose history and cultural mystique revolves around the image of the foreign white man occupying and enslaving its people.

Any US unilateral intervention into another country is a tragic affair. Given our historical relationship with Haiti, an intervention should be the option of last resort. But if intervention is warranted and so ordered by the National Command Authority, then operational commanders should take their cues from the past and understand that we have been on this ride before, the fun part wore off quickly and it was not easy getting off.



## NOTES

1. Statement made by United States Secretary of State William Jennings Bryant after being briefed on Haiti by the American manager of the Banque Nationale of Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 1912.

2. Mahan's views on US national security and America's role in the world were not unique to the military. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this political and social Darwinism was widely acceptable to and encouraged by many Americans.

3. Robert D. Heinl and Nancy G. Heinl, Written in Blood, the Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1971 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), pp.404-405.

4. Testimony of John A. McIlhenny, Financial Adviser-General Receiver of the Republic of Haiti; Senate Hearings, 1922, p.1225.

5. Heinl and Heinl, p. 410.

6. Between 1915 and 1920 eight US Marines were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for duty in Haiti.

7. Heinl and Heinl, p.434.

8. S.G. Inman, Through Santo Domingo and Haiti: A Cruise with the Marines, (New York: Committee on Cooperation in Latin America, 1919), p. 68.

9. Heinl and Heinl, p. 453.

10. Captain John H. Craige, Cannibal Cousins, (New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1934), p. 89.

11. Heinl and Heinl, p. 462.

12. Hans Schmidt, The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.102.

13. Elizabeth Abbott, Haiti: An Insider's History of the Rise and Fall of the Duvaliers, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), p.42.

14. Ibid, p.341.

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