

A Commentary: Haiti - Is There No Hope?

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There seems to be a naïve and ill-advised notion behind the Bush Administration's push for democracy around the world—that democracy is the solution to major international crises. Yet, time and again, we are seeing so-called democratic elections in nations with no political legacy of democracy fail to produce results that advance American national interests.

Elections in Palestine brought Hamas to power. That same electoral process in Iraq has only exacerbated violent sectarianism and contributed to political instability. In our own hemisphere, democratic elections have brought to the presidencies of Latin American countries firm opponents of the United States (US) in Venezuela, Bolivia and Chile. And, even closer to home, recent popular elections in Haiti have only complicated that country's social, political, and economic recovery, making no friends for the US in the process.

Most Haitians believe that the Election Commission of Haiti's US-appointed interim government tried to rig the elections to prevent former Haitian President, Rene Preval, from being re-elected to Haiti's presidency. Giving credence to this view was the vacillation of Haiti's Election Commission. First, the Commission announced that Preval was leading by 60 percent of the vote. Later, the Commission announced that Preval only had 47 percent of the required 50 percent of the vote to be declared winner. Apparently shocked by the violent protests of the poor supporters of exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the Electoral Commission finally declared Rene Preval winner and next President of Haiti. So much for the democratic process in Haiti.

Rene Preval has two claims to fame: (1) He is the ONLY Haitian President in the country's 202-year history to have served out and survived his full term in office; and, (2) He is a close ally of ousted and exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. It is his alliance with and loyalty to Aristide that causes the greatest distress to the Bush Administration as Preval is most likely going to allow Aristide to return to Haiti from his exile in South Africa.

Meanwhile, supporters of Aristide have organized themselves into violent gangs, mainly in the capital city of Port-au-Prince. These gangs use kidnappings, beatings, murders, car theft, and worse to intimidate what there is of an upper class and middle class. As a result, those Haitians who can afford it are sending their families abroad...even sending them to the neighboring Dominican Republic, which is no friend of Haiti.

Exacerbating Haiti's problems is the lack of a clear mandate for the 6,000 United Nations (UN) troops in the country. Whatever their orders may be, those mostly Brazilian troops are either unwilling or unable to prevent lawlessness, mayhem, and chaos from

being the order of the day. Evidence of the extent of this state of affairs is the shooting death of the Brazilian General in command of the UN troops. He was recently mysteriously gunned down on the balcony of his hotel room (called a “suicide” by the Haitian police).

Democratic elections alone do not bring political stability to countries like Haiti, Iraq, Afghanistan, and others that have no history of the rule of law, no respect for human rights, no protection of minority rights, no sense of service to the poor, and no respect for the environment. As I have said so many times before, the only hope for such countries is extended administration of their governments by experts from the United Nations committed to training a generation of a country’s citizens to govern in a manner compatible with the standards of the UN Charter. The precedent for such United Nations administration in recent times is to be found in East Timor (Timor Leste) and in Kosovo. Why not Haiti?