



AN ENCOUNTER WITH

HAITI

Notes of a Special Adviser

REGINALD DUMAS

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The Security Council

The next day, Sunday, February 29, we woke to the news that the President of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, had left his country for a destination yet unknown. It was immediately assumed by all and sundry that he had been forced out by US and French pressure.

About 5 that afternoon Michael Moller of Annan's office called me at my hotel to say there was likely to be a Security Council meeting on Haiti at 6. I hustled over to the UN.

The Council's informal meeting began at 6:30 and the draft resolution on Haiti was introduced by US Ambassador John Negroponte¹, who was immediately followed by the French Ambassador, Jean-Marc de la Sablière. Both made essentially the same point: Aristide's departure represented a new beginning for Haiti. Aristide had resigned² and, in conformity with the Haitian Constitution³, the President of the Supreme Court had been sworn in as Interim President⁴.

¹Negroponte was subsequently appointed Ambassador to Iraq. He then became the first Director of National Intelligence.

²His letter of "resignation" is discussed at pages 51/3.

³Article 149.

⁴In fact, the draft resolution did not describe Alexandre as "interim President" but as "new President" – an attempt by the drafters, it seems, to impose a president on Haiti in total contravention of the Constitution they would no doubt argue they were seeking to uphold.

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A letter had been received from the Interim President, Boniface Alexandre, requesting urgent help from friendly governments for the “peaceful and constitutional process which had begun to unfold” in Haiti and authorizing the entry on Haitian territory of “security forces.” Alexandre had also spoken that afternoon to Annan asking him to inform the Council of the pressing need for an international force in Haiti to assist in maintaining order and reinforcing “the legitimate authority.” It was amazing how quickly Alexandre’s request had arrived and with what dispatch a draft resolution had been prepared and was being considered on a Sunday evening by the full Security Council – after all, only 12 hours had elapsed since Aristide’s departure from Haiti at 6:15 that morning.

Since the Security Council’s meeting was informal, I do not consider myself at liberty to indicate who proposed what amendments to the draft. What I will say is that after a recess of nearly 1½ hours to consider the proposals the Council met again, rapidly concluded its work, then met again in formal session. Unanimous adoption of the amended document came after 10 minutes, at 9:55p.m. It had been a good day for the drafters.

The central element of the resolution (1529 of 2004) was the authorization of “the immediate deployment of a Multinational Interim Force (MIF) for a period of not more than three months from adoption of (the) resolution.” The Council also declared “its readiness to establish a follow-on United Nations stabilization force to support continuation of a peaceful and constitutional political process and the maintenance of a secure and stable environment. . . .”⁵

CARICOM and the OAS were commended for their “lead efforts” towards a peaceful resolution and confidence-building in Haiti, and reference was made to “their” Plan of Action for that country.⁶

Unfortunately, I no longer have the original draft resolution, but my notes say that CARICOM and the OAS were not mentioned at all in any of the draft’s operative paragraphs, suggesting that the drafters did not perceive a role – or, at any rate, a UN-approved role – for the two organizations in the proposed new dispensation for Haiti. Specific mention is however made of them in operative paragraph 10 of the final resolution, where the Council

⁵ This force, now in Haiti, is the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, or MINUSTAH. The French initials are used.

⁶ See Chapter Two for a discussion of this and other plans.

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calls on the international community, “in particular the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the Caribbean Community, to work with the people of Haiti in a long-term effort...” towards the reconstruction of the country.

My appointment as Special Adviser was welcomed, which was fine, but two other aspects of the resolution disturbed me.

First, the resolution determined that the Haiti situation constituted “a threat to international peace and security, and to stability in the Caribbean through the potential outflow of people to other states in the subregion.”⁷ The Council therefore decided that it would act under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. As distinct from Chapter VI of the Charter, which deals with the pacific settlement of disputes, Chapter VII deals with the use of force.

But, strangely, the resolution was silent on the specific and crucial issue of disarmament – which would obviously involve force – of the many armed unofficial groups in Haiti, whether disgruntled ex-soldiers, drug gangs, anti-Aristide rebels, Aristide loyalists, civil society bourgeoisie, etc. Rather, its operative paragraph 2 called with studied vagueness on the MIF “to contribute to a secure and stable environment in the Haitian capital and elsewhere in the country, as appropriate and as circumstances permit, in order to support Haitian President Alexandre’s⁸ request for international assistance to support the constitutional process underway in Haiti.”

What “(contributing) to a secure and stable environment. . . . as appropriate and as circumstances permit” could possibly mean in practice, I have no idea. I was however very aware of the imminence of the US presidential election and the understandable desire of the US Administration not to get sucked into military confrontations in Haiti which could alarm voters – Iraq and to a lesser extent Afghanistan were already more than enough. Nor had Congressional and Administration Republicans over the years manifested any special regard for Haiti. I did not wish to believe that this indifference (to put it mildly) was in any way inspired by the fact that, unlike Cubans, nearly all Haitians are, as the Nobelist Sir Vidia Naipaul is reported to have said in a different context, irretrievably black.

The second aspect of the resolution that bothered me was its broader disconnection from reality. Despite the fact that before it began its deliberations on the 29th the Council was already in receipt of a furious

⁷ But not, apparently, to the USA.

⁸ Neither “acting” nor “interim” appeared at this point.

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statement from the Prime Minister of Jamaica and then Chairman of CARICOM, P.J. Patterson,⁹ it blithely “(called) on Member States to support the constitutional succession and political process now underway in Haiti and the promotion of a peaceful and lasting solution to the current crisis.” I had the impression that CARICOM’s views, to be sharpened a few days later in Kingston, Jamaica, simply did not count for much. The non-mention of the organization in any of the original draft’s operative paragraphs only strengthened that impression.

Not content with that, the resolution in operative paragraph 7 “demand(ed) that all the parties to the conflict in Haiti cease using violent means. . . respect the constitutional succession and the political process underway to resolve the current crisis, and enable legitimate Haitian security forces and other public institutions to perform their duties and provide access to humanitarian agencies to carry out their work.”

It sounded noble, but how exactly were these “demands” to be obeyed in a framework of silence on disarmament – a silence that was clearly deliberate on the part of the drafters – and where the MIF was merely mandated “to contribute to a secure and stable environment” only “as appropriate and as circumstances (permitted)”? Who was to judge appropriateness and the nature of circumstances? On what criteria? What, in the absence of an army and the near-absence of a functioning Police Service, were the “legitimate...security forces”? What were these “other public institutions” which we knew had nearly all collapsed? What duties could they perform?

Operative paragraph 7 also “reiterat(ed) that all parties (should) respect international law, including with respect to human rights, and that there...be individual accountability and no impunity for violators...” Again, you cannot fault the principle and the good intentions behind it, but how, especially in the disordered condition of Haiti, was it to be put into effect? And that wasn’t all.

Operative paragraph 8 “(called) on all parties in Haiti and on Member States to cooperate fully with the (MIF) in the execution of its mandate...” Again, what means would be employed to induce the many mutually

⁹ See pages 6 and 25/6.

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hostile parties in Haiti to cooperate with the MIF? Who would decide on these means? On what criteria? How could they be implemented and monitored?

A few days earlier, on February 26, the Security Council had met in formal session at the request of CARICOM to discuss Haiti. Speaking on behalf of the organization, the Foreign Minister of Jamaica, K.D. Knight, reviewed the situation over the previous several months. CARICOM, he said, “maintained that adherence to (three) principles (was) critical: the full application of democracy in Haiti; non-acceptance of a *coup d’état* in any form; and any change in Haiti must be in accordance with the (Haitian) Constitution.” CARICOM sought “the direct and immediate intervention of the United Nations in Haiti within the context of the UN Charter.”

He went on: “The immediate need now is for the Security Council to authorize the urgent deployment of a multinational force to assist in the restoration of law and order, to facilitate a return to stability and to create an environment in which the continuing efforts to find a solution to the political crisis can be pursued.” He called also for urgent international action “to address the growing humanitarian crisis” and for international aid, as well as resources to help neighbouring states¹⁰ deal with the growing number of refugees from Haiti.

Knight’s statement was supported by Frederick Mitchell, the Bahamas¹¹ Foreign Minister, who said that the immediate problem was “helping to restore law and order in Haiti, not next week or next month but today.” If the international community did not act quickly, it would be “condoning a creeping attempt to overthrow the Government of Haiti” (which he described as “the legitimate authority” in Haiti) “by force.” Three days later, the Government of Haiti changed. No military force was directly utilized.

For its pains, CARICOM did not extract a resolution from the Council. Rather, a presidential statement was issued trotting out the habitual clichés: expressing deep concern, deploring loss of life, commending and supporting the OAS and CARICOM, calling on the Haitian parties to do this, that and

¹⁰ Particularly Bahamas and Jamaica.

¹¹ Bahamas is the only CARICOM state with an Embassy in Haiti.

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the other, and ending with the customary coda – the Council would “continue to monitor closely the situation in Haiti and (remain) seized of the matter.”¹² The CARICOM representatives had been well advised not to upgrade and circulate as a draft resolution the “elements” for such a resolution they had prepared beforehand.

It is against the background of intense CARICOM efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution of the Haiti crisis that Patterson’s statement of February 29 must be considered. He questioned whether Aristide’s resignation was “truly voluntary”, and stated that his “removal...in these circumstances sets a dangerous precedent for democratically elected governments anywhere and everywhere, as it promotes the removal of duly elected persons from office by the power of rebel forces.”

He went on: “At no point in time was the CARICOM Action Plan predicated on the unconstitutional removal of President Aristide from office. The Action Plan, endorsed by the International Community, was based on the precepts of shared Government, binding both President Aristide and the legitimate Opposition to specific commitments, which would eventually lead to a political solution in accordance with the Constitution of Haiti and result in a peaceful settlement of the crisis and the promotion of the democratic process.

“Any suggestions therefore that CARICOM was a party to a plan or was in consultation or had subscribed to the removal of President Aristide from office, as a prior condition, would be in complete contradiction to the long-held CARICOM position that the removal of the constitutionally elected President by unconstitutional means could not be supported by ... CARICOM...”

His statement did not trouble the Security Council.

By the last week of February Aristide had to know, even if he would not admit to others (or to himself), that his presidency was at an end. Anti-Aristide forces were controlling the country’s north and west – St. Marc, Fort Liberté, Cap Haïtien, the ironically named Port de Paix (Port of Peace) – having earlier in the month taken Gonaïves in the northwest and Hinche in

¹² The following day, February 27, Annan issued his own statement of concern at the deteriorating situation and called for an end to violence. He also reminded the leaders of their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law and – ironically, given what was taking place in Haiti – of their responsibilities towards their compatriots.

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the Central Plateau. Two of his most implacable enemies, Guy Philippe and Louis-Jodel Chamblain, were back in the country; Chamblain was vowing to deal personally with him.¹³

Violent demonstrations were taking place elsewhere, and the rebels were converging on the capital. The police, widely regarded as brutal, corrupt and owing allegiance to Aristide rather than the Haitian state, were under attack and deserting in droves. Sensing the government's increasing frailty, the Plate-Forme Démocratique (Democratic Platform)¹⁴ was rejecting calls for compromise from the international community, principally CARICOM and the OAS, and increasing the stridency of its demand that Aristide step down.

Cracks were also appearing in the policy façade of the international community. Foreign Ministers Knight and Mitchell had represented CARICOM before the Security Council on February 26. Their proposal for deployment of a multinational force in Haiti was predicated on the continued stay in office of Aristide, democratically elected in 2000 and President since 2001.

But the previous day, February 25, de la Sablière had written the President of the Security Council, Ambassador Wang Guangya of China, transmitting a declaration from his Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin. The sentiments expressed in the declaration, and the language in which they were couched, left nothing to the imagination.

The Aristide régime, de Villepin said early in the statement, had "already shaken off constitutional legality."¹⁵ A transitional national unity government should be established, headed by a Prime Minister designated in accordance with the CARICOM Plan of Action. France, however, felt that that Plan should be broadened in scope by

- the immediate establishment of a civilian peacekeeping force which would be responsible for guaranteeing the return to public order and supporting the international community's action on the ground

¹³ Several years before, Chamblain's pregnant wife was murdered, reportedly by Aristideans who slit her stomach open. The unborn child also died. Chamblain is said to be still seeking revenge.

¹⁴ The alliance of the Convergence Démocratique (the parties of the political opposition) and the Groupe des 184 (G184, the umbrella body of civil society opposition organizations). Some Haitians say it is not always easy to distinguish one from the other.

¹⁵ So much for the views of the people of independent Haiti as a whole.

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- international assistance for preparing the presidential election
- the delivery of international humanitarian aid
- the dispatch of human rights observers
- a long-term commitment to providing international aid for reconstruction.

If CARICOM, the OAS and the rest of the international community agreed to these suggestions, and if they were adopted by the Security Council, the UN Secretary-General would be in charge of implementation.

De Villepin ended:

“As for President Aristide, he bears a heavy responsibility for the current situation. It is up to him to accept the consequences while respecting the rule of law. It is his decision; it is his responsibility. Everyone sees quite well that a new page must be opened in Haiti’s history, while respecting the dignity and integrity of all protagonists.”

The writing was not only on the wall; it was also on the floor and ceiling. And the unwillingness of the Security Council the following day to go beyond a bloodless “Presidential Statement”, greatly disappointing the CARICOM spokesmen, was of a piece with de Villepin’s declaration. As CARICOM was to learn four days later, small countries like theirs are allowed morality; they are even entitled to logic. They must not, however, come to believe that these virtues can override the self-interest, however defined, of the great and the powerful.

Aristide, France and the USA

At this point, the USA (at least, Secretary of State Colin Powell) was still saying that whatever it thought of the quality of Aristide’s governance, it recognized him as the democratically elected President of Haiti. This too was to change: on February 28 CNN reported the White House as saying that the “long-simmering crisis is largely of Mr Aristide’s making. His failure to adhere to democratic principles has contributed to the deep polarization and violent unrest that we are witnessing in Haiti today...”

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The statement continued in words that could have been written in the Quai d'Orsay: "His actions have called into question his fitness to continue to govern Haiti. We urge him to examine his position carefully, to accept responsibility, and to act in the best interests of the people of Haiti."¹⁶

At the same time, the USA issued "an equally urgent appeal to the armed elements of the north to stop their advance in order to spare the capital from violence." As I discovered later, the suspicion – conviction for many – was widespread that the USA was already in constant touch with these elements.

But why would the USA and France have wanted Aristide to leave? On the face of it, he posed no threat to them, even if his rhetoric might be exasperating. A few Haitians managing to reach the shores of Florida in a rickety boat could hardly disturb the equilibrium of the USA, and of course they couldn't reach mainland France (though they could get to Guadeloupe and Martinique). If they fetched up in Bahamas or Jamaica, well, that was those countries' business.

A number of explanations have been put forward. First, possible US motives.

On March 1 Colin Powell, disingenuous to a fault, said on CNN that, yes, Aristide had been elected democratically but had not governed democratically. This was for me a new reason for régime change, and I asked myself if old US friends like Mubarak and the Saudis, and new acquaintances like Qaddafi, in none of whose countries democracy, Powell-style, was known to flourish, might now be on the hit list.

The next day, the White House spokesman, Scott McClellan, categorized Aristide's administration as a "failed government that empowered armed gangs to control the country. It was a failed government that condoned official corruption, including drug trafficking, (and) that engaged in acts of political violence against a peaceful democratic opposition." If these are indeed the US justifications for régime change, I can only wonder why that country manages only to slap lightly on the wrist – indeed, coexist easily with – governments as antediluvian as those in, say, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Surely US oil interests and airbases couldn't be more important than democratic governance?

¹⁶ Quoted in Rickey Singh, *CARICOM'S Haitian moment*, Daily Express (Trinidad and Tobago), March 3, 2004.

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The US Ambassador to Jamaica, Sue Cobb, carried out her instructions from Washington well. Aristide's departure was, "in the view of many, his only real service to the people of Haiti in a dozen years." There followed the familiar litany of the fallen leader's alleged ills and the astounding assertion, despite the clear message in the White House statement of February 28, that his exit "was never a US demand." (Well, alright, not a demand. Just the result of a very firm shove.) The USA would however continue to support democracy in Haiti and to provide economic assistance, which "contrary to some claims...(had) never (been) cut off or suspended." It would also continue "to support IFI¹⁷ loans to Haiti based on their technical merits."¹⁸

The Economist (UK) of March 4 had a different slant. Aristide's "doom was sealed" on February 27 when his *chimères*¹⁹ beat up a number of boat people who had been turned back by the US Coast Guard. If intimidation by the *chimères* (and deteriorating economic conditions) caused Haitians to take flight, and if, on their forced return, they were beaten up by the same *chimères* whose attentions had induced them to leave Haiti in the first place, that would be bad enough. But what if US human rights groups got into the act and brought pressure to bear on the Bush administration? And what if the administration then had to yield, however slightly, to such pressure? Wouldn't this offend the president's conservative base? In a presidential election year would that be the wisest thing to do?

The New York Times had taken a similar line on March 1, though its facts were somewhat different. There had indeed been an incident on February 27, but it had been an attack on a Haitian Coast Guard installation which had obliged the Haitians working there to flee the site by boat. The incident, the Times went on, "persuaded White House officials that Mr Aristide and his armed loyalists sought to shut down the process by which refugees were being intercepted by the United States Coast Guard and returned home." So a few boat people *did* make a difference, after all. A trickle could become a flood, a *lavalas*.²⁰ Aristide knew more about that

¹⁷ International Financial Institutions.

¹⁸ Sue Cobb, *Haiti-Observateur*, March 10-17, 2004.

¹⁹ Robert Fatton, *Haiti's predatory republic*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002, page 24, says that "*Chimères* and *Zinglèndos* are Creole words used to describe violent and intimidating gangs...*Chimères*...have been associated with groups of lumpen connected to Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party; their function is to menace the opposition into silence."

²⁰ Fatton, *op. cit.*, page 23, says that *lavalas*, the Creole word for flood, "symbolizes the loosely structured mass movement of the poor that sought to uproot Duvalierism."

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sort of thing than most others. He was welcome to keep it, or at least not export it to the USA.

It is also true that Republicans in the US administration and Congress have for years set their faces against Aristide, considered a leftist, hence dangerous. Former Senator Jesse Helms was known to have no use for him, and Helms' former assistant, Roger Noriega, was now Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs.²¹ Outside the administration and Congress, the unwaveringly conservative International Republican Institute (IRI)²² was seen as closely connected to, and a financier of, the political and civil society opposition to Aristide.

Different considerations moved France.

First, a common stand with the USA on any international issue would go a long way towards repairing the damage in the relationship between the two countries caused by their acidulous falling-out over the invasion of Iraq in early 2003. I've often wondered, in fact, whether the timing of their ultimata to Aristide – France on February 25, the USA on February 28 – was not as a result of the USA saying, Okay, we're prepared to go along with you on this, but we don't fully trust you, so you go first and we'll see. Speculation on my part, of course, and thus easily deniable by one or both. Which doesn't necessarily make it invalid.

Second, it was often said to me that France had never really forgiven Haiti for expelling her 200 years before – in this context, it was pointed out that no French President or Foreign Minister had ever visited the country. To add aggravation to purported historical resentment, Aristide had been preaching what to many was an outlandish doctrine of reparations by France for the punitive indemnity of 150 million francs imposed by her on Haiti in 1825.²³

²¹ In *Getting Haiti right this time: the US and the coup* (Noam Chomsky, Paul Farmer and Amy Goodman, Common Courage Press, 2004), Noriega is described by Aristide's lawyer, Ira Kurzban, as "an Aristide hater for over a decade" (page 55). Helms is said by Congresswoman Maxine Waters to be someone who "hated Haiti" (page 39). No evidence to support these charges is presented.

²² The IRI (www.iri.org/about.asp) says it is "dedicated to advancing democracy worldwide... (It) is guided by the fundamental American principles of individual liberty, the rule of law and the entrepreneurial spirit." It has been involved in Haiti for several years, and has a website called www.haitigetinvolved.com.

²³ Charles X was the French monarch, Jean-Pierre Boyer the Haitian President.

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Philippe Girard writes: “Thanks to the magic of compounding interests (Aristide) calculated that France now owed Haiti exactly \$21,685,155,571.48.²⁴ Haitian jokesters had a ready-made explanation for Aristide’s insistence that the sum not be rounded to the nearest dollar: ‘otherwise, what would be left for the people?’”²⁵ The French government may not have been amused, however, and de Villepin was set to visit post-Aristide Haiti – to make a triumphal entry, some claimed – when a Cabinet reshuffle suddenly sent him to the Interior Ministry.²⁶ His Prime Minister at the time, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, whom he was said to hold in low esteem, must have been wryly amused.²⁷

Aristide for one was in no doubt that his call for reparations had infuriated the French. “It’s as clear as day,” he told the writer Claude Ribbe shortly after his departure. “I demanded, on behalf of Haiti, the repayment of this debt, which was our right . . . They (the French) reacted with unkindness, resorting to persecution and a systematic campaign of disinformation, and by colluding in this political kidnapping.”²⁸

The French part, one must also consider the Foreign Minister’s personal philosophy. A passionate admirer of Napoleon, de Villepin has written a book covering the period between the end of that leader’s exile in Elba and his final abdication following his comprehensive defeat at Waterloo.²⁹ An article in the Daily Telegraph (UK) states that “a French politician in a position of authority has identified himself with Napoleon for the first time in more than 150 years.”³⁰ It is difficult not to see a direct connection between this self-view and the fact of the bicentennial in 2004, a no doubt unpleasant reminder of Haiti’s expulsion of Napoleon’s France

²⁴ A January 2004 committee report gives a slightly different figure of \$21,685,135,571.48. The committee, established by de Villepin, was chaired by Régis Debray and included Véronique Albanet, de Villepin’s sister. It dismissed the Haitian claim for reparations as juridically unsound (*Rapport au Ministre des affaires étrangères M. Dominique de Villepin du Comité indépendant de réflexion et de propositions sur les relations Franco-Haïtiennes*, www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/actual/pdf/rapport_haiti.pdf).

²⁵ Philippe Girard, *Clinton in Haiti: the 1994 US invasion of Haiti*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

²⁶ It has been suggested that the shift was made in part to mollify Washington, which was said to feel that de Villepin had been less than candid with them in the run-up to Security Council action.

²⁷ Now Prime Minister himself in succession to Raffarin, de Villepin has had the last laugh. Will French policy towards Haiti change even though it is the French President, rather than the Prime Minister, who normally looks after foreign affairs? And what if de Villepin becomes President one day?

²⁸ The Daily Observer, Jamaica, March 6, 2004.

²⁹ Dominique de Villepin, *Les cent-jours, ou l’esprit de sacrifice* (The 100 days, or the spirit of sacrifice), Librairie Académique Perrin, Paris, 2001. de Villepin won one of the 2001 Grands Prix du Souvenir Napoléonien for this book.

³⁰ Frank Johnson, *Who is now running France? A would-be Napoleon*, The Daily Telegraph, June 8, 2005.

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and achievement of independence. Worse, a Haiti whose president was taunting France over a massive debt it was said to owe. What more delicious comeuppance than an authoritative French return to this upstart former slave possession in a year of such significance?

In a later essay, de Villepin writes that “France...still burns with a desire for history; she has kept intact the flame of a great nation and is eager to defend her status...The French...listen, proud of their blessings, to revive their history of epic collective adventures, without renouncing a language steeped in the unknown and the new, the near and the far, alive in the Caribbean in memories of galleons and plantations, coloured with the spices and flavours of the Orient, shrunken by the sun and the dryness of Africa where, in the vast expanses, the man free of baggage walks along the horizon, eating the dust and the sky, forever watching out with his black eyes for the call of the god within himself.”³¹ Comment would be superfluous.

France and the USA, especially the latter, would in addition have been much disquieted by the news that a shipment of arms from South Africa was, or would shortly be, on its way to Aristide’s government. A report out of Cape Town said that a military aircraft, a Boeing 747, was to transport rifles, smoke grenades, bullet proof vests and several thousand rounds of ammunition. If Aristide had to go, the policymakers in Paris and Washington must have reasoned, he would have to go quickly – reinforced with weaponry, he would obviously consider his position strengthened and would dig in his heels. There would likely be a bloodbath, but Aristide would then argue, and the argument would receive widespread acceptance or sympathy, that he had been left with no choice: he was defending his democratically elected government and the integrity of the Haitian state against bandits, insurgents, terrorists, and convicted murderers whose sole objective was the re-imposition of a brutal dictatorship of the gun and the establishment of a narco-commercial régime.

The arms never got to him, and the Jamaican government subsequently issued a statement on the matter.

In a letter of February 23, Aristide had requested Prime Minister Patterson’s help in “equipping” the Haitian National Police (HNP), given the deteriorating security situation in Haiti. Patterson communicated on the

³¹ de Villepin, *Le cri de la gargouille (The cry of the gargoyle)*, Albin Michel, 2002 (quoted in *The Guardian*, UK, June 1, 2005).

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same day with President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, given Mbeki's earlier promise to assist in any way possible in improving the HNP's efficiency. Arrangements were then made for the arms shipment from South Africa to Haiti on the specific understanding that the arms were to be used only for the purpose requested.

The shipment left South Africa for Haiti on February 29. Given the time difference between the two countries, the plane would have taken off while Aristide was still in Haiti. By the time it stopped in Jamaica to refuel, Aristide was airborne. On Wednesday, March 3 the plane, its sealed cargo still on board, flew back to South Africa.

Aristide's missteps

As for Aristide, he had done a first-class job of helping dig his own political grave. That he would have been traumatized and deeply suspicious – I will not say “paranoid” – after his return to office in October 1994 and again in February 2001 is understandable. In 1991 he had been overthrown by the army after less than eight months in office, and had spent three years in exile before resuming his presidency following President Bill Clinton's invasion of Haiti the previous month. A few months later, in April 1995, he had disbanded the army.³²

But the sad-eyed ex-priest with the gentle voice, slight in stature, unassuming in manner, was acquiring for himself a reputation at home which did not match the great respect in which he was held abroad. The politico-social rhetoric which had enthused the Haitian masses (and discomfited the *haute bourgeoisie*) was being engulfed by something incontrovertibly retrograde: the syndrome of the autocrat. The platform populist, who had already convinced many in the nervous middle and upper classes he was

³² On November 30, 1994 Aristide called the army “a cancer”. Two weeks later he announced plans to reduce it in size to 1,500. On January 17, 1995 he officially dismissed the rest of the army and created a border patrol of 1,500 former soldiers. At a press conference in Port-au-Prince on April 28 the former President of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias Sánchez, said that a poll conducted in Haiti in March and early April indicated that 62% of the Haitian people wanted to abolish the army while only 12% wanted to keep it, with the rest undecided. Whereupon Aristide went to the microphone “and spontaneously announced that given the clear wish of the majority of his people, he herewith declared the army abolished!” Johan Galtung and Dietrich Fischer, *How Haiti abolished its military* (January 19, 1996, www.transcend.org/haiti.htm).

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socialist, or worse, was morphing into the palace messiah.³³ The fact that he was obviously not a competent manager (few politicians are) only made things worse.

Recollection of his behaviour, alleged and actual, in 1991 and in 1994/95 was still fresh in the minds of many Haitians when he was installed again as President in 2001, after elections the previous November in which only a small number of voters participated.³⁴ I expect that more wickedness was attributed to him than was in reality the case – Haiti, I soon understood, is a country where fact and fiction are not always distinguishable one from the other.³⁵

But in politics, whether in Haiti or elsewhere, perception is often reality, and even many erstwhile supporters came to associate him with illegal enrichment, political killings, drug trafficking, over-centralization of government functions, etc. I stress that much of this has not been proved – at any rate, no credible evidence was ever adduced to me. But I could not ignore many events I knew *had* taken place, and for which no adequate explanation was forthcoming.

One, for example, was the savage beating in late 2003 of Pierre-Marie Paquiot, Rector of Haiti's State University. A strong critic of Aristide's government, Paquiot had been removed from his post in 2002. Reinstated after student protests, he had become a symbol of independent thought vindicated, a status which was not likely to attract Aristide's admiration.

On December 5, 2003 an anti-government demonstration took place at the University. Persons arrived and, in the presence of the police, who stood quietly by, attacked students, the Rector and the Vice-Rector, Paul Laloux. Considerable damage was also done to buildings and equipment. Paquiot's legs were repeatedly struck with iron bars; tendons in both knees were severed. Surgery was required, and, following death threats, he and his family left for the US, where he received further treatment and therapy. The attackers were not caught; the police, who had witnessed the whole incident, clearly did not have either the energy or the will. Significantly, a number of government members, for example, the Ministers of Education and of the Environment, resigned over the affair.

³³ Many would say he could not have changed into something he already saw himself as being.

³⁴ See Chapter Eleven.

³⁵ The Haitian rumour mill is called *télédiol*.

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A second incident involved a number of opposition leaders, including the late Gérard Pierre-Charles, leader of the Organisation du Peuple en Lutte (OPL)³⁶ and a former close political ally of Aristide's.³⁷ On December 17, 2001 almost certain attempts were made to kill them, or at least do them grievous bodily harm. Crippled by polio, Pierre-Charles would have been the easiest of targets.

Pierre-Charles and I had first met in Barbados in the 1980s. I had great respect for him as a person, and he was one of those with whom I made early contact after I arrived in Haiti for my first assignment visit in March 2004. He picked me up at my hotel and we went to his house to talk.

When we drove into his small courtyard, I looked automatically at the house in front of me, a modest two-storey affair. I noticed that the right façade of the upper storey was different in appearance from the rest. It seemed to be plastered but unpainted. This was simply an observation on my part; I didn't think the matter important. But it *was* important, as I learned during my subsequent conversation with Pierre-Charles, who had not of course realized what I had noticed.

He said that on December 17, 2001 Aristide's *chimères* had descended on the house looking for him. He was out of the country. They manhandled his wife, the well-known historian and intellectual Suzy Castor, then ransacked the place and set it on fire. Happily, the house was not destroyed, but much damage was done. What I had seen were the incomplete repairs.³⁸

A third event was the collapse in 2002 of what were termed "savings cooperatives", which had emerged in the late 1990s (Aristide was not then officially president – René Préval was – but the acknowledged puppeteer) promising annual returns of 120 per cent and more on investments. As President, Aristide encouraged the operation. Overseen by the Ministry of Planning, the "cooperatives" were clearly a pyramid scheme, and many

³⁶ Organization of the People in Struggle.

³⁷ In the Organisation Politique Lavalas, created by Aristide who broke from it in 1995, claiming it had betrayed him, and formed the Fanmi Lavalas (Lavalas Family) in November 1996. See pages 49/50.

³⁸ Still looking for Pierre-Charles, they went to the house next door and ransacked that as well. They didn't set fire to it, however. Pierre-Charles wrote a memoir of the incident (www.haitipolicy.org/archives/archives/mar-may2002/pierre-charles.htm). It was on December 17 that the National Palace was stormed by heavily armed men in what was said to be an attempted coup against Aristide. The assaults on the homes of Pierre-Charles and other opposition heavyweights were seen as immediate retaliation by the Aristideans against the perceived instigators. It has also been argued that the attack on the Palace was no "attempted coup" at all but an event staged by Aristide himself to win sympathy and support. If so, it backfired.

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Haitians lost their deposits. Some had sold their possessions in order to invest and were now ruined. Aristide then changed his tune: he promised compensation. None has yet come.

Even some foreign supporters of Aristide's constitutional position were expressing dismay. For instance, Bill Fletcher, Jr., President of Trans-Africa Forum of Washington DC, complained about a blind eye being turned to human rights abuses on Aristide's watch, such as harassment and detention of trade unionists, and about penetration of the ruling party, Fanmi Lavalas, "by opportunist elements from the old régime who have utilised political power in order to run roughshod over the rights of the people." Fletcher continued: "We have been perplexed and disheartened by the apparent inability of President Aristide to identify and exclude such elements from his party, particularly given the damage that they cost him."

Haiti and CARICOM over the years

CARICOM too had been showing concern, though this concern had gone undetected by the anti-Aristide civilian and political opposition in Haiti, members of which many times criticised CARICOM to me for its apparently kid-glove handling of the President. The so-called CARICOM Action Plan, which envisaged Aristide's continued retention of office, though with reduced powers, was contemptuously waved aside.

They were only speaking to me, they said, because although I was from CARICOM I was not representing that obscurantist organization which had not lifted a finger to help the Haitian people throughout the long, long night of Aristide's malevolence. Now it was busy arguing that he had been democratically elected and that removing him was undemocratic! How did CARICOM define "democracy?" Free and fair elections? Well, the legislative and presidential elections of 2000 were grievously flawed, and Aristide had not received a truly democratic mandate.³⁹ Good governance, then? Well, Aristide was a tyrant, not as awful perhaps as Papa Doc Duvalier, but every bit as bad as Baby Doc – the only real difference between them was that one was a leftist, the other a rightist. CARICOM wanted to have

³⁹ See pages 169/171.

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its cake and eat it. It was trying to give the impression that it was concerned about the welfare of Haiti. But it was really just protecting Aristide, whereas the Haitian people had needed protection from Aristide.

CARICOM's deep involvement with Haiti in 2003/4 is discussed elsewhere.⁴⁰ However, the organization had not been indifferent over the years to what was happening, or not happening, in that country.

For instance, I can recall having lengthy discussions in the early 1980s with one of the younger Duvalier's Ambassadors, who would urge that solitary Haiti needed regional friends. He was right, of course, but I would point out that CARICOM was unsympathetic to dictatorships, and would therefore find it difficult to embrace his country.

On reflection, I thought my position insufficient. If we in CARICOM were really unhappy with governance in Haiti, and if we really wanted to help the Haitian people into the bright light of democracy, we had to make contact; it was no good being distant and basking in self-attributed superiority. Accordingly, I informally approached the CARICOM Secretariat. I got no joy: the Heads of Government, I was told, wouldn't hear of it.

But all wasn't lost. In 1986 CARICOM did send a delegation to set out its concerns to Duvalier (who, coincidentally, fell almost immediately thereafter), and in 1990 provided the services of a number of election officials.

In 1999 – Haiti was not yet a member of CARICOM – the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sir James Mitchell, led an electoral mission there on behalf of the organization. CARICOM's aim was to try to ensure that the elections scheduled for the following year would be free and fair.

A CARICOM electoral mission was sent to observe the legislative, municipal and local elections in May 2000. Later, these elections were widely held to be severely tarnished, but the CARICOM mission, led by a former Prime Minister of St. Lucia, Sir John Compton, was not quite so convinced, and its report, taken with the decision of the Heads of Government thereon, was to mark a turning-point in the relationship between CARICOM and the non-military opposition in Haiti. This matter is discussed in Chapter Eleven.

⁴⁰ See Chapter Two.

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In February 2001 the CARICOM Heads held their 12th Intersessional Meeting in Barbados.⁴¹ Sworn in as President only a few days before, Aristide was in attendance, though Haiti was not yet a member. He assured the Heads that he would take such action “as (lay) within his authority” to address certain concerns arising from the May 2000 elections. He was also determined to establish a new Provisional Electoral Council (Conseil Electoral Provisoire, or CEP). In turn, they reiterated their commitment to building and strengthening democratic institutions in Haiti; emphasized that Haiti had to adhere to the CARICOM Charter of Civil Society;⁴² agreed to Aristide’s suggestion for a joint CARICOM/international mission to Haiti “to help set in train and facilitate implementation of the various undertakings” given by Aristide; and decided to establish a CARICOM office in Haiti “and to foster contacts at all levels between the citizens of Haiti and the people of the Caribbean Community”.

The next regular meeting of CARICOM Heads of Government was held in Nassau in July 2001. Haiti was still not a member, but again Aristide was present by invitation. This time the Heads did not only, as usual, devote a section of their final communiqué to Haiti, they also issued a “Statement on strengthening democracy” in that country.

Among other things, the statement expressed pleasure that “all involved parties, in their effort to reach a pre-agreement relating to the 21 May 2000 electoral difficulties, have already agreed on the composition of the Provisional Electoral Council, the mechanism for the process of a National Dialogue and the establishment of a ‘Commission for Electoral Guarantees’.”

Aristide was urged “to continue his efforts to enhance...democratic space for this process”, and the leaders “welcomed the steps taken thus far by the Fanmi Lavalas and Convergence Démocratique.”

Significantly, they noted that “*the people of Haiti* (my emphasis) are the main victims of (the) political crisis,” and they “expressed their grave concern with respect to the rapidly deteriorating social and economic situation . . . and the social misery this has brought to the majority of the Haitian society.” They called on the international community to assist “without further delay.”

⁴¹ Regular meetings of the Heads are held every July and intersessional meetings usually in February or March.

⁴² Adopted February 19, 1997 in Antigua and Barbuda.

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In late January 2002 CARICOM sent a special mission to Haiti headed by Julian Hunte, the St. Lucia Minister of Foreign Affairs.⁴³ Meeting in Belize in early February, the Heads agreed *inter alia* that CARICOM should be part of an independent international commission of inquiry into the events of December 17, 2001.⁴⁴ They “called on the political parties in Haiti to respond positively to . . . initiatives by the government” inviting the OAS and the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to Haiti. Curiously, they “also noted that it was expected that elections of all parliamentarians elected in (sic) May 21, 2000 . . . would be held prior to the end of 2002.” Whence this expectation?

At their 23rd regular meeting in Guyana from July 3 to 5, 2002, the Heads admitted Haiti to CARICOM as the 15th member state. And they heard Minister Hunte report that the Haitian government had been taking “positive steps” to implement “the undertakings urged upon it by the international community and opposition parties in Haiti.” These parties were urged to cooperate. The Heads again asked the international community to assist with development funds and in the areas of security and disarmament.

The next CARICOM intersessional, in Trinidad and Tobago in February 2003, noted that the political, economic and security environment in Haiti had deteriorated. It emphasized the need for a CEP to supervise elections later in the year.

By July, at their meeting in Jamaica (Aristide was present), the Heads were clearly very unhappy. They were now expressing “a sense of disappointment that undertakings made by the Government of Haiti had not been fully complied with.” They therefore now “strongly urged” the government urgently to carry out “commitments made to create a security environment conducive to the formation of the CEP.” They also said they would appoint a Special Representative “to support the OAS Special Mission in Haiti and to facilitate dialogue between the Government of Haiti and the political opposition.” The appointment was not made, apparently because the following month, August, the OAS named its own Special Envoy to Promote Dialogue in Haiti, retired US Ambassador Terence Todman.

The passage of time seemed to enervate the CARICOM Heads. At a special meeting in mid-November in St. Lucia (the Haitian Foreign Minister, Jean-Philippe Antonio, attended), all they did on Haiti was to refer to its

⁴³ In 2003/4 Hunte was President of the UN General Assembly.

⁴⁴ See page 16.

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impending bicentennial on January 1, 2004 and agree that “the Community would be suitably represented.”⁴⁵ The next month, December, there would be a sharp reversal of that relaxed approach.

Several points emerge from the foregoing.

First, it is clear that, whatever the accusations to the contrary, CARICOM had for years been voicing unease about events in Haiti, as far back as the younger Duvalier’s authoritarian kleptocracy and more recently under Aristide. However, the organization’s focus seemed to be heavily on elections, with references to aid from the international community made almost as an afterthought (though the organization did offer to help Haiti pay off some debts). There was certainly recognition that the atmosphere in Haiti was worsening and that the Haitian people were the ones being principally sacrificed on this altar of degeneration. But the impression given is that CARICOM believed that political agreement between Aristide and his foes was the real trigger of progress. The opposition was seen as obstructionist. Eventually, Aristide himself, if the communiqué of the July 2003 meeting is anything to go by, was causing dismay. And the people of Haiti seemed to be merely objects in a society which they in fact constituted.

But elections, even if free and fair, are not all there is to democracy, and it is strange that the Heads never saw fit all this time to have dialogue with the Haitian opposition. If the opposition was refusing to go along, why was it taking this stance? Shouldn’t CARICOM have asked that question of the opposition and not only of Aristide? Why merely call on the opposition “to respond positively” to the government’s initiatives, as if all right and justice lay with the government only?

It isn’t so strange, actually. My experience over the decades has been that political leaders, especially in small developing countries, have great difficulty with the concept of consultation. This failure is not confined to relations with opposing parties; it is a phenomenon that spreads across the board. Persons placed in ministerial office soon adopt the “strongman/strongwoman” approach: they begin to “direct” or “instruct” or “mandate”; they rapidly forget (until they or their parties are seeking votes for re-election) how to “ask” or “request”. It is no different in CARICOM, and what the Heads were doing was identifying with one of their own, Aristide, against

⁴⁵ CARICOM was represented by Prime Minister Perry Christie of Bahamas.

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what were seen as hostile or recalcitrant forces. Speaking to the opposition would have been perceived both as “interference” in Haiti’s internal affairs and as a sign of weakness, and they had their own backyards to think about. It wasn’t ideological, just politico-cultural.⁴⁶

Second, CARICOM had already badly damaged its credibility by in effect deeming the May 2000 elections as free and fair. And this had been done in the presence of René Préval, generally seen in Haiti as Aristide’s lapdog,⁴⁷ who had in January 1999 dismissed the Parliament, then appointed a Prime Minister by decree. Both acts were considered unconstitutional.⁴⁸ They were also seen as undemocratic. CARICOM said nothing. It was sending entirely the wrong message to the very Haitian civil society it was to urge in July 2001 to “continue to remain engaged and contribute to the process of developing a Haitian solution to the political crisis.”

Third, CARICOM was making many promises it was not fulfilling, whatever its intentions. Yes, the joint CARICOM/international (actually, OAS) mission did finally go, in March 2003. But how was the “commitment to building and strengthening democratic institutions in Haiti” to be implemented? Yes, the CARICOM office was established (in mid-2001, located in the Bahamas Embassy),⁴⁹ but its attempt to persuade all and sundry that its mandate was “technical” rather than “political” fell flat, especially when it was discovered that Aristide was providing some of its staff. And how were “contacts at all levels” fostered between Haiti and the rest of CARICOM? Were they fostered?

There were other shortfalls. What steps were taken to acquire assistance for Haiti from the international community? What monitoring was there of the “process of . . . national dialogue and the establishment of a ‘Commission for Electoral Guarantees’”? Let alone monitoring, did these decisions even come into effect?

Fourth, CARICOM Heads may well, in private, have been hauling Aristide over the coals from time to time – the July 2003 communiqué shows obvious displeasure with his evasions. But their detached public

⁴⁶ CARICOM may be growing up, however. Representatives of governments and oppositions are to meet for the first time in July 2005.

⁴⁷ Aristide is said to have disparagingly described him in 1995 as “closer to zero than to mediocre” (quoted in Girard, *op. cit.*, page 134).

⁴⁸ Girard, *op. cit.*, page 148. See also Fatton, *op. cit.*, page 114. For his part, Préval, i.e., Aristide, took the position that the Parliament’s mandate had expired in September 1998 and that he was therefore acting in accordance with the Constitution.

⁴⁹ Most of the funding for the office was provided by Norway and by CARICOM itself.

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attitude of expressing concern (or pleasure or satisfaction, as the case might be, or solidarity with a fellow leader) and calling on so-and-so to do such-and-such, all without proper and hardheaded follow-up, allowed Aristide to play the organization like a violin. A former close adviser of his told me in Port-au-Prince – I didn't want to believe it, but its plausibility couldn't be avoided – that Aristide had the most profound contempt for CARICOM.

This wasn't only the frequent Haitian condescension I came to recognize.⁵⁰ It referred also to the ease with which he felt he could manipulate and control events. The language of many of the communiqués mentioned above suggests that the CARICOM Heads were generally swallowing whole the morsels of hope he was feeding them. They wanted to believe him, and he clearly understood that. He therefore helped them believe, whatever their occasional spasms of doubt.

Fifth, it is reasonable to conclude that, although it did not do as much as it could and should have over the years towards Aristide and Haiti, CARICOM cannot fairly be accused of doing and saying nothing. The fact that Haiti was invited to attend Heads of Government meetings even before it was a member of the organization indicates a desire on the part of CARICOM to bring in from the cold, as it were, a country of the region which by language, history and culture has no natural allies nearby. The Prime Minister who worked most assiduously towards this end, and who played a central role in the dark, confused days of late 2003 and early 2004, was Patterson of Jamaica. There are those in Haiti and elsewhere who see him still almost as the devil incarnate propping up Aristide, the Caribbean Mephistopheles. I understand how they feel. I can only say from my point of view that even when I disagreed with Patterson I respected the principles he enunciated, and the conviction with which he held them.

I had been in New York only five days, and already my assignment seemed to have been stood on its head. Back at my hotel after the Security Council meeting of February 29, I read my contract again. Could I fit the new situation in Haiti within its terms of reference? With no government in place and with state institutions in free fall or collapse, to whom would I officially speak other than to the opposition (political and civil society) and NGOs (many if not most of which would certainly present anti-Aristide

⁵⁰ See pages 172/3.

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views)? How in such circumstances could I obtain a balanced picture of what was happening so as to be able to give the Secretary-General sensible advice? What about CARICOM, which had been so active recently in Haiti's cause and which was now thoroughly enraged by the sudden turn of events? The OAS, of which Haiti, as with the UN, was a founding member? The Security Council, which had just adopted a resolution that to me was in part unrealistic and unimplementable? The IFIs? The wider international community? I decided that, unless Annan thought otherwise, I would continue. The challenge in Haiti had now taken on larger and more complex, hence more compelling, dimensions. It was impossible for me to resist.

UN and OAS

The next day, March 1, I flew to Washington to talk with Einaudi at the OAS and assure him that the UN would work with his organization, not shunt it aside. In the light of a later event, I might have spoken too assuredly and too soon.

CARICOM meeting in Jamaica

On March 2 and 3 the CARICOM Heads held an emergency meeting in Kingston to discuss Haiti. They expressed "dismay and alarm over the (situation)" and called for "the immediate return to democratic rule and respect for the Constitution of Haiti." They were "disappointed by the reluctance of the Security Council to take immediate action" on Aristide's appeals.

They stated that "the circumstances under which (Aristide) demitted office set a dangerous precedent for democratically elected governments everywhere as it (sic) promotes the unconstitutional removal of duly elected persons from office." Although this wording implies they were sure Aristide had been deposed, they then said that because of "the contradictory reports" on Aristide's departure, they were calling for "an investigation under the auspices of the United Nations to clarify the circumstances leading to his relinquishing the presidency."

They reiterated their commitment to the people of Haiti and "stressed that (CARICOM) would continue to support (their) political, economic and social development." A Task Force would therefore be established "to

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coordinate (the organization's) assistance to Haiti in those areas where it has the capacity." In the circumstances prevailing, they did not "envisage their participation in the Multinational Interim Force authorized by the UN Security Council", though they would be part of the later UN stabilization operation.

They expressed the wish for an early return of peace and stability in Haiti,⁵¹ welcomed my appointment and promised to work "closely" with me, and emphasized the requirement of a long-term commitment to Haiti by the international community. In a reference to refugees, they "deplored" the turmoil which was "leading to an outflow of Haitians, a situation which is placing strains on the resources of neighbouring states."⁵²

They voiced their concern over the security situation and "called on the international forces to bring a stop to the lawlessness and reminded them of their legal obligation to do so." Their *legal* obligation: the Heads had obviously not read the February 29 Security Council resolution with care.

Meeting with Prime Minister Patterson

It was always clear that I would have to have an early meeting with CARICOM, but urgency had been injected by the events of February 28/29 and by the organization's reaction thereto. I flew down to Jamaica and met Patterson on March 5.

Patterson spoke frankly to me: he was very displeased with the way Aristide had left Haiti and with the action (or, as the case may be, inaction) of the Security Council. He knew of course that Aristide was no saint, but the issue was constitutionality, not personality. He was the one who had pushed for Haiti's entry into CARICOM some years before, and he had been investing a great deal of time and energy in the present situation, seeking to achieve a peaceful and satisfactory settlement of the crisis.

Now Aristide's abrupt departure meant that there no longer was a CARICOM Plan. A Plan, perhaps, but not a *CARICOM* Plan, because the latter had as one of its main elements the continued retention by Aristide of the presidency. It had been approved by the international community two months before in Monterrey, Mexico. Meetings had been held with

⁵¹ Peace and stability had in fact been eluding Haiti for many years previously.

⁵² Particularly Bahamas, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic.

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Aristide there and in Kingston, and with the civilian opposition (finally) in Nassau. He agreed that the opposition had been unbending in its stand that Aristide had to go. He did not say so, but he left me with the impression that CARICOM had been banking on the international community – particularly, I imagine, the USA – to change the opposition’s mind.

The CARICOM Intersessional Meeting of Heads later that month in St. Kitts and Nevis would decide whether or not CARICOM would allow Haiti back into the fold. One thing was certain: no such return would be permitted if the government to be formed included any of the rebels or the former military whose threatening presence so influenced Aristide’s decision to leave.

CARICOM would not participate in the MIF, but would help in police training, the political process of return to democracy, electoral reform, and humanitarian activity. And CARICOM insisted on an investigation into the circumstances surrounding Aristide’s departure. He himself would dearly love to give evidence “and to cross-examine.” He had last spoken to Aristide in the afternoon of February 28, and Aristide had not sounded like someone about to demit office.

CARICOM welcomed my appointment, especially since I was a CARICOM national, and wanted me to work closely with the Task Force decided on earlier that week. CARICOM also hoped that the IFIs would play a more constructive role than hitherto.

As for Jamaica itself, there was a problem of refugees. There were at the moment more than 100 in Portland, on the island’s south coast, and his government was in discussions with the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

It was a long meeting – an hour and a half – and I now knew exactly where Patterson and CARICOM stood. But if the challenge before me looked more daunting than ever, it wasn’t only because of the CARICOM stance. The UN bureaucracy was also playing its part.

The UN bureaucracy

The Security Council resolution of February 29 authorized the immediate deployment of a MIF and declared readiness to establish a follow-on UN stabilization force. It also requested the Secretary-General “to elaborate a programme of action for the UN to assist in the constitutional political process and support humanitarian and economic assistance and

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promote the protection of human rights and the development of the rule of law.” This encyclopaedic language – impeccable in concept but, especially given the chaos in Haiti, deficient in realism – had only helped deepen my growing conviction that the Council did not share my attachment to practicality. Nonetheless, a programme of action had to be “elaborate(d)”.

When a decision is taken to establish a UN military/peacekeeping mission in any country, the bureaucratic responsibility within the Secretariat shifts to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). In keeping with this practice, the DPKO Under-Secretary-General, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, wrote Annan on March 3 informing him of his department’s intention to establish an integrated planning team and to send a multidisciplinary assessment group to Haiti to gather information on the ground for the implementation of the relevant paragraphs of the February 29 resolution.

I met with Guéhenno and his DPKO colleagues on the same day, March 3. It had already been decided – I had no part in the decision – that the assessment group would be led by Hocine Medili, a retired DPKO official from Algeria.

At the meeting it was agreed that I would go to Haiti a few days after the team and collaborate with it; I would not be a member of it. I said I didn’t want to get caught up in any bureaucratic disharmony – the essential thing was to concentrate on what could be done for Haiti. But my ears were prickling. I had been a public servant long enough to sense that something was amiss, and that it had to do with my presence.⁵³ To whom was I responsible? To whom was I to report? To the DPA? To the DPKO, which was now seeing itself as the “lead” department? To the Secretary-General, whose Special Adviser I was? To the Security Council? I wasn’t liking this one bit. And no one was saying a word.

Arrived in Jamaica on March 4 for my meeting the next day with Patterson, I reported to New York, only to be told that I was now to lead the group. I demurred: Medili’s name had already been announced, I said, and he would lose face. They said they would digest this. The following day I was told that the team was to be “under (my) auspices.” What the hell did that mean? I asked. There was no explanation forthcoming. I was

⁵³ I realized later that it had perhaps more to do with the highly uneven relationship between the DPKO and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), to which I had been assigned after my arrival in New York.

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becoming exasperated. The people of Haiti were going through trauma and here we were on the international telephone being finicky about form.

I had had enough of the foolishness. I said to New York, as I had said to Guéhenno two days earlier, that I had no wish to be a member of the group in any capacity but that I would of course collaborate, even help with its report if it so wished. But I had to be free to do my own reporting, if need be direct to the Secretary-General. I couldn't help being intrigued by one aspect, however: the phrase "under the auspices of" had appeared in the CARICOM communiqué of March 3. Now it was being applied to me. It's a good thing I'm not superstitious.

Home again

I flew back home on March 6. Only 11 days had passed since I left Tobago. So much had happened; so much was happening. And I hadn't got to Haiti yet.