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Stay Out of Haiti **by Sheldon Richman**

Let's just get it over with. Let's make Haiti the 51st state and pump billions of dollars of welfare into it. Then at least the insertion of U.S. troops there, the third time in almost a century, won't be an unconstitutional act of foreign intervention.

But seriously, what the heck are we doing there? Guy Philippe, the leader of the rebellion against now-exiled despotic elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, has declared himself the military ruler of Haiti. The Bush administration, which has begun sending in Marines, says Philippe and his rebels should not be in any new government. It supports the head of the Supreme Court, who is the constitutional successor. So what now? (Philippe has since backed down.)

This can't have a happy ending. Given the history of U.S. intervention in Haiti, which began with a 19-year stint of outrageous meddling in 1915 at the behest of economic interests, and given the violently intractable nature of the place (in part thanks to that meddling), who can be optimistic? Haiti has been a hellhole for a long time. There is no justification, morally or constitutionally, for forcing the American people to be involved. American soldiers are dying almost daily in Iraq and somewhat less often in Afghanistan. The Bush administration has troops scattered in more than a hundred locations across the world. It plans to establish bases in former Soviet "republics" in central Asia. The armed forces are strained in a global campaign that will do nothing to protect the American people. As a result, families are being disrupted as national guard units are sent abroad.

And now this. Are they crazy in Washington?

We know what the leaders of the American one-party system have to say: It's America's responsibility to bring order to this nation in our own backyard. The words from President Bush and Sen. John Kerry are barely distinguishable. "This is the beginning of a new chapter in the country's history," President Bush said. That sure sounds familiar.

Intervention is being heralded by all the establishment voices as the "responsible" thing to do. Indeed, it has been said that we have no choice but to intervene.

The *New York Times* criticized Bush for doing so too late, but added, “Sending the Marines was the right thing to do.” The *Washington Post* said essentially the same thing: “Only over the weekend did Mr. Bush finally accept what should have been obvious from the beginning: that the United States must lead any rescue of Haiti.” It went on to say that the United States exited too soon after 20,000 Marines restored Aristide to power in 1994. (That’s right. The U.S. government restored him to power then; it helped push him out of power now.) “Not enough was done to help Haitians build democratic institutions,” the *Post* editorialized.

Thus the Wilsonian conceit lives. President Woodrow Wilson operated on the fallacy that “enlightened” force could impose democracy, at bayonet point, on people whose history contained no preparation for respecting individual rights (including property rights) and the rule of law. As a result, democracy has often resulted in the election of despots, such as Aristide. (The first U.S. intervention in Haiti was, unsurprisingly, under Wilson’s direction.) President Bush, like Bill Clinton and many other presidents before him, operates on the same fallacy. Bush is taking flak because he did not support Aristide, but nonetheless says he is intent on promoting democracy in that gang-riven excuse for a country: “The Constitution of Haiti is working. There is an interim President, as per the Constitution, in place.” And thugs roam the streets and countryside.

The Constitution “worked” on the two occasions Aristide was elected president. That didn’t stop him from engaging in violence and corruption. After so many years of American governments’ aiding corrupt elements in Haiti, who seriously believes that this time it will come out all right?

If private organizations wish to offer their services in behalf of civil peace, they should be free to do so. The U.S. military should get out and stay out.

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