

Operation Uphold Democracy: Conflict and Culture in Haiti

Operation Uphold Democracy was a success. That success was due to the coincidence between the U.S. perception of the problems in Haiti, political and military planning for the operation, the actual requirements of the operation and how the military intervention forces satisfied these requirements, and the Haitian people's perception of their situation.

The Haiti panel included American, Haitian, and UN speakers, with both military and civilian perspectives:

- **Lieutenant General George A. Fisher, Jr.**, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army Forces Command, served as Commander, Multinational Force (MNF), Haiti.
- **Dr. Michel-Rolph Trouillot** is the Kreiger/Eisenhower Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University and the Director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Global Studies in Culture, Power, and History. He is a Haitian citizen.
- **Lieutenant Colonel Gilles Lavergne**, Director of Official Language Review and Policy at the National Defense Headquarters in Ottawa, served with the Canadian Land Forces, United Nations Military, Haiti (UNMIH).
- **Lieutenant Colonel Michael A. Sheehan** is the Director of

Dr. Edsel McGrady, a research analyst at the Center for Naval Analyses, coordinated the Haiti case study.

Dr. John Ivancovich, a research analyst at CNA, was the rapporteur for this panel.

International Organizations and Peacekeeping for the National Security Council. He deployed to Haiti as Special Advisor to the Special Representative to the United Nations Secretary General.

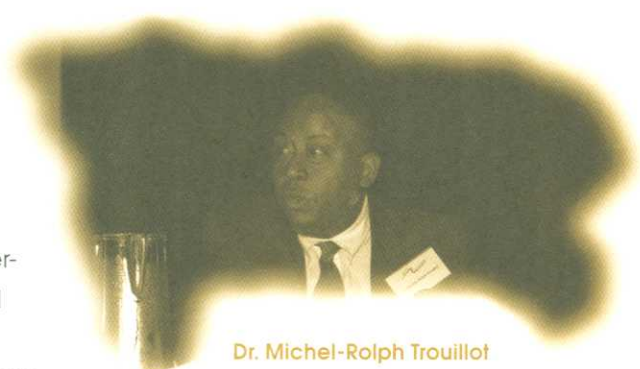
- **Ambassador Jonathan Moore**, senior fellow at CNA, senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment, and lecturer in public policy at Harvard University, moderated this panel.

While each panel member focused on a different aspect of the intervention to restore President Aristide, their comments fall under three broad themes: the historical and cultural context of the mission, the U.S. and international political context of the operation, and the balance between traditional and nontraditional missions.

The Historical and Cultural Context

All panelists felt that cultural interactions were important to the success of the operation. Dr. Trouillot described how the success of the operation was aided by the Haitian population's perceived need for intervention and its ultimate goals. First, the permissive entry into Haiti, possible due to the last-minute agreement between the U.S. and the Forces Armées d'Haiti (FAH) leadership, was important to the success of the intervention. The nonviolent entry of U.S. and coalition forces colored Haitian opinion of the intervention, particularly given Haiti's history of foreign interventions. From the Haitian viewpoint, in this operation there were no enemies among the foreign intervention forces.

Second, many Haitians welcomed foreign intervention not for the return of President Aristide, but for the departure of the military power structure. In their eyes, the intervening military forces had no role as warfighters. Instead they were there to provide stability and security during



Dr. Michel-Rolph Trouillot

the transition to democracy and to police the country. Thus, the Haitian perception of the success of the operation was based on the coalition's ability to provide policing functions.

The Haitian public's view of the role of foreign intervention forces is rooted in Haiti's history. For Haitians, the separation of police and military roles is blurred. Coalition forces' distinctions between warfighting and policing missions, from the overall command structure down to the individual soldier on the street, did not have any meaning to Haitians. If the military forces were not in the country as invaders, then they must be there to be police.

By 1994, said Trouillot, Haitian public opinion had evolved to a conviction that invasion was morally inevitable, politically feasible, and materially necessary:

- **Morally inevitable.** As a result of history, the Haitian rulers and the élite were absolutely dedicated to Haitian sovereignty and nationalism. This created a moral dilemma that split the population—support for intervention was antithetical to Haitian nationalism. But as the situation in Haiti deteriorated, the people at large began to view intervention as less threatening to their idea of Haitian nationalism. The permissive-entry agreement between the U.S. and FAd'H leadership helped reassure Haitians of their own national integrity.
- **Politically feasible.** According to Dr. Trouillot, the agreement between the U.S. and FAd'H leadership, which allowed for the permissive entry of multinational forces and the peaceful transition of power, facilitated the return of President Aristide to Haiti without political costs. Without the agreement, Aristide would have returned to power as a result of a foreign invasion of Haiti, potentially compromising the legitimacy of his leadership. The deteriorating situation in Haiti, followed by the agreement, allowed Haitians to reconcile the return of their elected leader and international intervention.
- **Materially necessary.** Gradually, a majority of the Haitian people came to believe that force was needed to purge the power structure in Haiti, and that force would not and could not be Haitian. Therefore, outside intervention—or possibly invasion—was necessary to remove the military and upper classes from power and restore the democratic institutions in Haiti. It was also the only way that promised an end to the embargo, which was serving only to enrich the military dictatorship.

The U.S. and International Political Context

Lieutenant Colonel Sheehan stated that the success of a peacekeeping mission is fundamentally a result of political decisions. Can U.S. policy-makers ask the right questions about the reasons for the mission? Can they make the right political judgments with regard to the mission?

In the case of Haiti, Sheehan believed that the U.S. asked the right questions about the reasons for the mission and made two key political judgments that contributed to its success. The first was to allow the *de facto* leadership a 30-day grace period to step down from power. The decision to allow a grace period was made just before the 82nd Airborne Division was scheduled to land, according to the planned invasion of Haiti. This decision bore fruit, as the Haitian leadership stepped aside following the grace period. The second political judgment was that President Aristide would return to Haiti as a more committed democrat than he had shown himself to be earlier.

A number of other factors contributed to the success of operations in Haiti:

- Horizontal and vertical bureaucratic integration contributed to success. During the operation, departmental assistant secretaries were responsible for specific tasks.
- The political-military plan reflected the right questions about the operation.
- The high level of cooperation among the U.S. government, the U.S. and

foreign militaries, and the United Nations was important to the success of the operation.

- The political and military aspects of the Haitian operation were also well integrated, as demonstrated by the high degree of cooperation between the military and the ambassador and his staff.



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- The personalities and talents of the on-scene commanders were well suited to the operation.

Sheehan summarized important lessons to be learned from the Haitian operation. In future operations, policy-makers must ask the right questions; facilitate the bureaucratic and organizational coordination to support policy decisions; and choose the right personalities for the operation.

Balance Between Traditional and Nontraditional Missions

In the discussion of the balance between traditional and nontraditional missions in the recent intervention, Lieutenant General Fisher focused on three problems facing the initial intervention force: the security situation, the need for nation-building assistance, and the judicial and prison systems. Lieutenant Colonel Lavergne discussed the role of the follow-on forces under UNMIH and how their civil affairs efforts supported the primary mission.

The security situation

In re-establishing a stable security situation, the military's first priority was to prevent an organized threat to the legitimate government of Haiti. The key to restoring security was getting weapons off the streets. The multinational force was prohibited from policing the country directly, and there



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was no existing, legitimate police force in Haiti. So the multinational force established an interim police force, comprising FAd'H members who had neither a criminal record nor a record of human rights abuses. Once established, this force received six days of training before it began to carry out its role.

Fisher stressed that the multinational force had to proceed carefully in assuming missions other than those explicitly assigned to it. The establishment of the interim

police force was within the charter of the multinational force as assisting the government of Haiti. But until the establishment of the interim police force, the multinational force had to assume crime-fighting missions, which were not part of the charter.

The economy and nation-building efforts

Haitians expected that economic aid and private investment would flow into the country on the heels of the intervention and the re-establishment of the legitimate government. They were disappointed. The lack of adequate infrastructure within the country has failed to attract aid organizations and investors alike. The multinational force did improve the infrastructure, improvements consistent with its military mission and necessary for achieving the military objectives. Resources for other infrastructure improvements or direct economic assistance to Haiti would have to come from other sources. Fisher noted that in operations such as Haiti, when private aid is expected but not forthcoming, public expectations of the operation are left unfulfilled. Continued public disappointment can lead to security problems for the intervention forces.

Lieutenant Colonel Lavergne focused his comments on the importance of civil affairs missions within Haiti, and how they complement the work of relief organizations. The military can facilitate civil affairs missions through its command structure. In Haiti, UNMIH established a civil-military operations center and a general support team, and placed action officers in the field. Interactions with the host government are also important. Both the government of Haiti and UNMIH signed a letter of agreement coordinating civil affairs and nation-building projects. Still, the most urgently needed civil affairs projects in Haiti are outside the scope of the letter of agreement.



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Lavergne echoed Fisher's comments that the conflict created the need for longer-term support for nation-building, and both the prescribed military mission and the UN mandate failed to consider this need. The majority of funding for such projects is from other sources with their own restrictions attached. Although civil affairs projects will ultimately make the transition to the government of Haiti as part of its own nation-building efforts, UNMIH will continue to do the projects that it is capable of and that contribute to the success of UNMIH's other missions.

The judicial and prison systems

When the multinational force first entered Haiti, it found a dysfunctional court and prison system. The multinational force responded by taking on the mission of

beginning to re-establish and reform the judicial and prison systems. This new mission included prison management and organization; re-establishing the court system, to include holding court within the prisons themselves; and associated logistics functions, such as transporting prisoners to and from their trials. Even after re-establishing a functioning judicial system, the multinational force faced the problem of courts that were unable to handle the caseload of prisoners awaiting sentencing.

Another problem that arose as a result of the renewal of the court system was public misunderstanding of the process and resulting incidents of vigilante justice. These incidents prompted

the multinational force to establish an information-management system (using television and radio broadcasts) to reassure the public of the legitimacy of the judicial renewal process. Fisher concluded that the program was successful, and the vigilante problem was ended. But Trouillot contended that official communications reached only the elite of Haitian society. The behavior of the forces and individual acts of kindness were more effective in shaping Haitian behavior and contributing to the image of a successful operation in the minds of the populace than any official television or radio communications.



Ambassador
Jonathan Moore

Trouillot concluded his comments on a historical note. He recalled that following the previous intervention in Haiti, the U.S. re-established and trained the Haitian police force using accepted police criteria of the day. The U.S. helped start an interim police force and established the Gendarmerie Nationale and national police academy. The first graduating class included future Haitian dictators, and academy graduates have been involved in every military uprising in Haiti up until the election of Aristide. This first para-police force, while created with the best intentions, resulted in the very police-military power structure that the recent intervention sought to remove. How can we reconcile this history with what is being done in Haiti right now?