

A Discussion Paper for the Katonah Great Decisions Group, April 2011 by George Roy

HAITI: A FAILED STATE

A FAILED STATE: By any measure of success Haiti is not an effective country. There is little public order, public health, sanitation, education or transportation. Life expectancy and per capita income are the lowest in the hemisphere. AIDS is rampant. This was before the earthquake which killed thousands, destroyed hospitals, schools, infrastructure and roads.

Tyler Bebe and Fred Piker of the Katonah Great Decisions Group studied Sound and Stable States in a January 2010 presentation to this group. The characteristics of these states according to their study were: a constitution, a bicameral legislature with a system of checks and balances, an independent judiciary, freedom of speech and the press, universal suffrage and free elections, an effective social support system and a free economy

Francis Fukuyama recently wrote on this issue. He approaches the problem historically. A successful state will have a strong and capable leadership which is simultaneously restricted by the parameters of the law. The state is accountable to an active citizenry which is respectful of the law.

These institutions cannot be imposed from outside the culture; they have to develop from their common history.

Fukuyama assumes that humans are social by nature and their core values reflect favoring relatives, reciprocal altruism, creating and following rules and a propensity for warfare. The first major social development was the transition from hunter-gatherer to tribal organization which was made possible by the religious worship of a common ancestor. Tribes coalesced into states because of the greater protection afforded. Loyalty to the rules of the state diminished the allegiance to the family and the tribe.

Haiti has failed to develop these characteristics. Why?

The answer lies in -1800 geography, history and economics.

GEOGRAPHY: Haiti is located in the western Caribbean; it occupies the western third of the island of Hispaniola. The eastern two-thirds of the island is the Dominican Republic. Hispaniola is surrounded by the islands of Cuba to the west, Jamaica to the south and Puerto Rico to the east.

HISTORY; 1500

Hispaniola was discovered by Columbus and was claimed by him for the Queen of Spain. The islands of the Caribbean were under the shifting control of Spain, France, Great Britain and the Netherlands during the sixteenth century. Eventually Hispaniola was divided between France which established the colony of Haiti on the western third of the island and Spain which acquired dominion over the eastern part.

Columbus is known by the Haitians as the first person to introduce slavery onto the island. He enslaved the natives (Tainos) in the search for gold. The Europeans were first interested in gold but when this proved disappointing they gradually began to raise tobacco and coffee for exportation.

France established the most prosperous colony in the world in Haiti. Haiti was the single largest source of French wealth during the eighteenth century. The crop was sugar; the labor was African. France imported over 600k slaves from Africa. Mortality was high but was offset by new arrivals. Some sources say that the French were extremely cruel masters but I did not find any evidence that they were any more cruel than the English and the Americans during the 18th century. The French derived massive profits from this brutal institution.

Socially the French were like the Spanish and different from the English. While the English immigrated to the new world with their families, the French and the Spanish sent mostly men to run the plantations. The French overseers cohabited with the African women and gave rise to the mulatto caste. Mulattos, like the house Negroes in the US, had a higher status on the plantations and began to identify with their French masters. The Mulattos began to speak French which is still the official language of Haiti even though it is not understood by a majority of the people. The majority of the people speak creole which is a mélange of African languages and French.

There were several slave revolts during the 18th century which were brutally repressed by the French. But revolution was in the air; the American Revolution and the French Revolution inspired the Haitian revolution. During the early 1790's the revolution began with the revolt of the African slaves; the French colonists and the Mulattos supported it. In 1793 slavery was abolished; the following year Haitians were given French citizenship and the Declaration of the Rights of Man was applied to all. This was extraordinary for its time since this was a colony the vast majority of whose inhabitants were Africans.

1800 -1900: Emancipation was not enough: Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines led a revolt against the French administration. Popular support enabled them to defeat the French and in 1804 Haiti became an independent state. There were massacres of white people in the aftermath which tainted their independence. The French imposed crushing reparations on Haiti which lasted until 1947 and which absorbed 80% of their GDP. As a consequence Haiti could not amass national wealth of any consequence.

The independence of Haiti did have a positive outcome for the US. Napoleon decided to sell the Louisiana Purchase based on the French defeat.

Haiti was not like any other state in the hemisphere: it was a Negro state. Thomas Jefferson denied recognition to the new state. Americans said at the time that we could never acknowledge the independence of Haiti without encouraging slaves in the U.S. to revolt. The US did not recognize Haiti until 1867 and embargoed Haitian products until 1863.

After independence the Mulattos were able to hold on to political and economic power. But the freed slaves, like their American counterparts after the Civil War, had no desire to return to the plantations and work for wages. They preferred to take over a plot of land and engage in subsistence agriculture. This diminished sugar as a cash crop. The economic situation was dire and this contributed to political instability.

The Monroe Doctrine in 1823 discouraged European investment in Haiti. The post-Civil War necessity of finding markets for American surplus production also restricted Haiti's development. Economic imperialism was the prevalent philosophy of western industrialized nations at this time and an economically dominant country had to control its markets in order to trade. The Open Door Policy only applied when a powerful country could not effectively dominate the market .

1900 - 1950: The Spanish-American War and the building of the Panama Canal were two new factors which negatively influenced Haiti. As a result of the war the US permanently occupied Puerto Rico and established a protectorate over Cuba. The Dominican Republic and Haiti were goals of US economic domination. German dominance in the economy of Haiti was a concern of the US. Germany had been growing in political and economic power in the last quarter of the 19th century and as the Panama Canal was nearing completion and WWI seemed more likely the US wanted to exert its power in Haiti.

The US invaded and occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934. The declared reason for the occupation was Haiti's political instability but the reason might have been the protection of the investments of National City Bank. After the occupation National City Bank eventually took over the Haitian National Bank. The occupation of Haiti was promoted as a short-term measure to assure US domination of the Caribbean. The US promoted itself as a liberal democratic state which was respectful of its neighbors but its priority was its own political, military and economic interest.

In 1918 the US imposed a new constitution Haiti, written by FDR, which dissolved the Haitian legislature, imposed changes to favor US economic interests and mandated territorial consolidation to favor US agribusiness. Haitians were also mandated to join 'corvees' to perform unpaid work on infrastructure projects which improved roads, sanitation and public health. The occupation was brutal: the Haitians had no guaranteed rights. Economic development was stymied by the insistence of US investors for guaranteed lucrative profits.

Wilson was promoting self-determination in Europe while we were occupying Haiti. There was no strategic reason to maintain the occupation after WWI and American newspapers called the occupation a shameful abuse of power. Yet because of economic considerations the occupation lasted another ten years.

1950 -1990: During this period anti-communism dominated American foreign policy. It was more important than the Constitution and the democratic and civil rights traditions of the US. This policy was implemented in the Caribbean and in Central and South America by the imposition of military dictatorships whose armies were trained and supplied by the US. Democratically elected governments were overthrown if they exhibited communist tendencies. Communist tendencies were identified as advocacy for human rights, civil liberties, labor unions, universal education, land distribution and minimum wage.

In Haiti this policy translated into an almost thirty year support for the dictatorship of the Duvaliers: Papa Doc (1957-1971) and Bebe Doc (1971-1986). Their rule was inhuman; they established a private armed force, the Ton Ton Macoutes, to instill fear and brutalize the opposition. This private force also insured their protection against the official army which was led by the Mulatto elite and supported by the US. It is estimated that the Duvaliers stole from sixty to eighty percent of the foreign aid during this period. Duvalier exiled foreign catholic priests who opposed him and even cajoled the Vatican into giving him the power to appoint bishops. The Catholic Church was seen as complicit in the dictatorship.

Duvalier retained American support by providing the deciding vote to keep Cuba out of the Organization of American States after Castro had taken over. Nelson Rockefeller referred to Pa Pa Doc as America's best friend. Duvalier also allowed the US to restructure the economy to provide agricultural products for American markets and low wage and tax havens for US factories. (At one time Haitians produced the baseballs for the major leagues in the US)

Bebe Doc was forced into exile in France in 1986. He left with millions of dollars in pilfered aid which had been designated for the Haitian people. He was succeeded by General Namphy who did not have popular support. In 1987 the first National Congress of Democratic Movements assembled to set up free and fair elections.

1990 -2011: Disatisfaction with dictatorship and rule by the elites grew. The approximately 100k Haitian exiles in the US began to foment desires for better conditions for the populace. The elites and the Ton Ton Macoutes reacted with accustomed brutality but the popular support for a truly representative leader continued. This desire was embodied in the person of Jean Bertrand Aristide, a Catholic priest, who was elected president in 1990 with 67% of the vote. This was the first free election which Haiti had ever experienced but the elites and the US could not tolerate a president whom they could not control.

Aristide proposed civilian control of the military, protection of human rights, universal taxation and financial reforms. He also proposed a minimum wage of two dollars per day. He angered France by proposing that they return the millions of dollars in reparations which they had exacted from a weak Haitian government in 1825. All of this was too much for the elites and the US and a coup removed Aristide after only seven

months in office. The coup was organized by General Raoul Cedras and the Army's top command who were all graduates of West Point, Annapolis or the School of the Americas (Assassins). Cedras ran a harsh dictatorship and killed four thousand Haitians. Robert Shacous in a well-reviewed book writes: "the US backed opposition to Jean-Bertrand Aristide never spent one second or one dime trying to make life better for the Haitian people." (p412)

The Catholic Church did not support Aristide. Pope John Paul having lived in Poland under Soviet style communism was wary of social change even under the banner of Christianity. He was conservative socially and opposed "liberation theology" which promoted social reform in Latin America. Aristide was a major exponent of liberation theology. The Catholic Church did institute a very effective literacy program called a "Taste of Salt" which was very effective in raising the level of political awareness..

Simultaneously a public disinformation campaign against Aristide was organized in Washington by the International Republican Institute. They described him as corrupt, autocratic and suppressor of political opposition. None of the academic or journalistic sources I consulted supported this contention. President Clinton returned Aristide to power in 1994 even though he was opposed by the CIA and the business community. The United Nations supported this restoration saying it was returning a member state to democracy. Aristide disbanded the army and instituted a program which favored US agribusiness. Since Haiti's constitution has a one term limit for the presidency Aristide even though he was not in power for most of his term did not run again until 2000.

Aristide was elected in 2000 with 80% of the vote and continued to pursue his agenda. The US had promised to return the profits from privatization but reneged. Moreover George W Bush cut off aid to Haiti. The US began to supply and train former Duvalier supporters in the Dominican Republic in preparation for another overthrow of Aristide. When the rebels invaded the US Special Forces kidnapped Aristide and sent him to Africa where he eventually settled in South Africa. Even Colin Powell and Condoleza Rice declared that he fled. It was a diplomatic manoeuvre similar to the attempted overthrow of Chavez in Venezuela. Jamaica offered Aristide sanctuary but they reneged after threats by President George W Bush.

Aristide remained in exile in South Africa for seven years. The US promised support for South Africa's admission to the UN Security Council as a reward for keeping him there. His colleague Rene Preval was elected president in 2006 but he did not have the popular support to govern effectively. The United Nations established a presence in Haiti which continues to the present time. The US had been discredited as a fair and impartial actor and Aristide, even from South Africa, remained Haiti's most popular politician.

Haiti lacks a political infrastructure given its history of occupation and dictatorship. Consequently progress has been very slow. Some of the same actors, domestic and foreign, who have dominated in the past are desirous of recreating a system which will

restore their power and prestige. The Brazilian leadership of the UN force has tried without much success to stabilize the society so that economic development can occur.

On January 12, 2010 a massive earthquake struck the vicinity of the capital city, Port-au-Prince. However poorly the society functioned up to this point it is so much worse in the aftermath. The loss of life of about 200k included a disproportionate number of government officials, medical personnel, teachers and professors. Housing, food, water and sanitation are an ongoing need for the hundreds of thousands whose homes were destroyed. The lack of sanitation resulted in an outbreak of cholera which killed almost four thousand people. The infrastructure in the capital was totally destroyed and the situation seemed hopeless. The anecdote said that it would take a thousand truck five years to remove the rubble if they had some place to put it.

The generosity of international donors was incredible but the ability to use it effectively is difficult. There are many NGO's as well as government organizations trying to make progress against the insurmountable problems. Hopefully progress will come in spite of Haiti's troubled past with internal and external forces.

2011 saw the return of Jean-Claude (Bebe Doc) Duvalier from his exile in France. The statute of limitations freed him from prosecution on many of the accusations against him. He is still a potent political force given the loyalty of the Ton Ton Macoutes. Also Jean Bertrand Aristide returned from South Africa against the will of the US who thought that he might be a disruptive force in the upcoming election. The term of Rene Preval expired and a new election was scheduled under the auspices of the UN. The initial round of voting was not free of problems: Lavalas, Aristide's party was disqualified because of a bureaucratic failure. The popular Haitian singer, Michael Martelly, was deemed not to have qualified for the final ballot until protests resulted in his being reinstated. He eventually won with a sizable majority over Mirlande Manigat, a conservative professor. Martelly is popular but he has no experience in government. We can only hope that Mr. Martelly's popularity can stabilize the country and effectively administer the aid which has been promised. If the NGO's can work with the government to provide the basic human services then Haiti might be able to develop the indigenous institutions to achieve a satisfactory level of internal cohesion and development.