

COLLEAGUES FOR THE AMERICAS SEMINAR SERIES  
“Haitian Elections Surrounded by Insecurity”

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**Featured Speaker:** **Robert Maguire**, Ph.D., Director of Programs in International Affairs,  
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Background: Robert Maguire has been involved in Haitian affairs since the mid-1970s through affiliations with the Inter-American Foundation, the Department of State, and Johns Hopkins, Brown and Georgetown Universities. He has visited Haiti on more than 100 occasions. Dr. Maguire has published extensively on issues of economic and grassroots development, governance and politics, the Haitian peasantry, public security, international assistance, and state/civil society relations. In 2001, Dr. Maguire received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to continue his research on U.S.-policy in Haiti and the contributions by Haiti and the Haitian Diaspora to the well-being of the United States. He holds a Ph.D. in Geography from McGill University and an MA in Latin American Studies from the University of Florida, and he is currently Chair of the Haiti Advanced Area Studies at the Department of State’s Foreign Service Institute.

Following Dr. Maguire’s presentation, additional commentary was provided by Luigi Einaudi, former Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Raymond Joseph, Haitian Ambassador to the United States, and Breno da Costa, First Secretary of the Embassy of Brazil.

A summary of the seminar follows.

### **Haiti’s Electoral Challenge**

The Republic of Haiti is planning to hold local and national elections later this year and plans to install a new government on February 7, 2006. As the run up to the elections moves forward, five factors are affecting the process: the “fear factor;” the unevenness of the political playing field; the uncertain engagement of a divided Lavalas Family party; the problem of defusing the fear factor; and, the dynamic electoral “dance card” of candidates. Dr. Maguire addressed each factor.

### **The “Fear Factor”**

The levels of insecurity and domestic violence currently differ between the “Republic of Port-au-Prince” and the rest of the Republic of Haiti. The countryside tends to be fairly quiet whereas Port-au-Prince, particularly the slums of Bel Air and Cité Soleil, tend to attract violent gangs and kidnapers.<sup>1</sup> These spoilers have increased anxiety and agitation among potential voters and candidates worried about armed intimidation. Among the spoilers are the so-called Chimères,<sup>2</sup> members of criminal and drug-related gangs, former members of the Haitian army and paramilitary groups, and groups of thugs known as “ninjas” who live in the hills near the capital.

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<sup>1</sup> Bel Air and Cité Soleil were Lavalas strongholds, the cities where Aristide was most popular. In 1990, Lavalas members were the victims of violence; now they tend to be the instrument of violence.

<sup>2</sup> Pro-Aristide gunmen.

The improvement of public security is among the government's foremost concerns. There also is the question of whether the army should be restored to do this.

### **An Uneven Playing Field**

The international community has pressured Haiti to hold elections in 2005. Following President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's departure in February 2004, an appointed interim regime has governed the country. These officials, although prohibited from running for office, will nevertheless influence the election process. Outside observers, aware that voting in the past has tended to be exclusionary, want to ensure that elections, not selections, take place. Thus, to be a success, these elections need the participation of all political parties, security for all candidates, and close international monitoring.

It is also critical that the elections enjoy high voter participation. The interim Prime Minister knows the international community is counting on Haiti to conduct fair and representative elections. Haiti's track record in this regard, however, is uneven and troublesome. Parliamentary and local elections in May 2000 had a high voter turn-out but were cast in doubt over vote counting. Presidential elections in 2000 drew only 10-15% of the eligible voting population. The expectations in 2005 are for a higher vote turn-out. In this regard, stronger efforts must be made to increase registration, especially in the countryside.

### **Engagement of the Lavalas Family Party**

The credibility of upcoming elections and the ability of elected leaders to govern will depend to a great extent on the Lavalas Family party's role and participation. Representing Aristide's traditional base of support, Lavalas continues to be a major national political force. Currently, the party is divided, and neither side has agreed to participate. According to its charter, Aristide is president of the party for life. Those loyal to him demand his physical return to Haiti and want to boycott the elections. The other side would rather move forward as part of the political process.

It is unclear whether the party will reunite, whether either or both factions will participate, whether the party (or the factions) could campaign in the present security environment, and what role, if any, Aristide will have in the elections.

*Since the seminar, the progressive faction of the Lavalas Family party did register by the deadline. In response, interim Lavalas party spokesman Jonas Petit denounced the group for not adhering to the boycott. Leaders of both Lavalas tendencies have stated that the continued arrest and detention of FL officials and activists remains an obstacle to their participation, however, in response to the recent arrest and detention of party activist Father Gerard Jean-Juste..*

### **Defusing the Fear Factor**

To ensure voter participation, Dr. Maguire stressed, the fear factor must be defused. Many Haitians are not willing to risk campaigning or standing in line to vote until better measures are taken to ensure their safety. Ultimately, Haitians can only accomplish this. Defusing the fear factor ultimately requires a dialogue between the Haitian parties to develop a vision for the future of their country. By reaching consensus among all parties, the spoilers will lack the incentive to undermine the elections.

International solutions are inadequate. Flooding the country with election observers decreases the potential for violence on Election Day but does not guarantee election credibility or the safety of elected leaders after observers leave. While, the United Nations Resolution 1608 increased the size of the force of the Stabilization Mission to the United Nations in Haiti (MINUSTAH),

MINUSTAH's mandate is to keep the peace, not to make it. Of great importance, the Mission is operating without a Haitian-negotiated framework for reconciliation.<sup>3</sup>

### **Electoral Dance Card**

Haitians also are wary about participating in elections when there is no Presidential candidate for whom they would be willing to risk standing in line. Politics in Haiti are characterized by opportunistic, shifting alliances; thus, the “dance card” will be very fluid. No one has emerged as the front runner.

There are approximately 95 registered parties in Haiti. Few, if any, have a strong national constituency. The “classe politique” is comprised mostly of the groups formerly associated with the so-called Democratic Convergence coalition. So far, none of these ‘parties’ appears to have a candidate who can galvanize the Haitian population. There also are “political wannabes.” The more interesting possible candidates in this category are the following:

- Evans Lescouflair and Chavannes Jean-Baptiste are independents but formerly Aristide supporters. They lead the Komba (combat) coalition party. This alliance appeals to the rural population and to disaffected urban youth.
- Danny Toussaint, who has been associated with drug and weapons trafficking, created a party called Modere (moderate). He could play a role as a political broker.
- Dumas Simeus is a Haitian-American who could emerge as a “technocrat with soul.” However, Haitians tend to be distrustful of citizens from the Diaspora—especially since the government is currently viewed as fueled by the Diaspora. In addition, Simeus’ citizenship would be a constitutional concern.
- Former President René Prével could help create an alliance, but he does not seem to be interested in running in the elections himself.
- Former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, who is currently in prison, could have wide appeal. Human rights organizations, most foreign governments, and the United Nations have come to his defense and asked for his release as a political prisoner. Mr. Neptune was also very instrumental in cooperating with the United States over the extradition of drug traffickers.
- A candidate could emerge who is closely allied with the business class.
- A new charismatic firebrand, “à la Aristide,” could emerge. Père Jean Juste, who was recently arrested, is a likely candidate.
- There could be a populist candidate who promises law and order. Guy Philippe is charismatic, has the money to run a campaign, and could offer promises of security to the Haitian voters. He has been distancing himself from the economic elite, but it is still unclear whether he will emerge as a serious contender.

It is important to understand that elections in Haiti are a very competitive process marked by a “winner takes all” mentality. The current interim government rejected the idea of proportional representation for political parties in at least one of the national legislative bodies, citing constitutional mandates. However, the reality is that the constitution is being applied only selectively. Nevertheless, providing a wider spectrum of political players with responsibility for governance and a stake in the political process is one of the keys to political stability, inclusion, and institution building.

Finally, the elections are approaching quickly, and two key issues have yet to be resolved: engagement of the Lavalas Family party and a Haitian-supported framework for cooperation beyond political competition. Consequently, it would be difficult to draw conclusions or make predictions based on the current situation.

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<sup>3</sup> The OAS has been involved in some efforts toward this end, including the negotiation of the composition of the electoral counsel.

The commentators and the general discussion provided additional insights into the electoral process and security environment.

#### *The Pace of the Elections Process*

- Some feel that there has been so much pressure to hold elections in 2005 that the process is being carried out too hastily. Considering the current state of instability, the elections process needs to be slowed down.
- Others feel that postponing elections would not be a good idea. Regardless of security, extreme divisions paralyze this government. Elections would enable a change of government and a fresh start.
- The voter registration deadline recently was pushed back, and local or national elections also may have to be delayed. By late July 2005, approximately one million Haitians had registered. With major registration campaigns scheduled, registration is expected to reach 2.5 million in a one-month period.

#### *Since the seminar:*

- *The local elections scheduled for October 9 have been postponed until late this year, and the legislative and presidential elections have been moved up from November 13 to November 6.*
- *A runoff presidential election is scheduled for December 11. The change of government is still scheduled to take place on February 7, 2006.*
- *The voter registration deadline has been extended again, to September 15.*
- *The number of registered voters has reached 1.8 million, approximately 40% of the estimated 4.5 million electorate.*

#### *The Issuance of National Identity Cards*

- Issuance of National voter registration/ID cards will continue to increase the rate of registration. The national ID cards not only legitimize the elections and but also provide assurance to voters. The ID cards establish, for the first time, a legal basis of existence as Haitian citizens. The legal right to exist is the basis for human rights.
- The ID cards can be used for a wide range of civil and legal transactions.
- To reach any kind of stability, “participation, respect, and dignity” are critical. Haiti must confront the social, human, economic, and legal marginalization of many of its citizens. Elections will not end marginalization, but the ID cards will give citizens something to hold onto when the voting has ended and provide hope for the people.

#### *Development*

- Elections are a vital prerequisite but are not a comprehensive solution to Haiti’s problems. In the short- and medium-terms, it is important to create jobs, expand opportunities, and provide education. Quick implementation projects will not resolve long-term problems.
- Long-term development strategies and international cooperation will help the economy to recover. This step is necessary to reestablish order, peace, and social justice.
- Security cannot be separated from development. Disarmament, which requires judicial strength and an end to impunity, goes hand-in-hand with economic development.
- Some of the current projects include:
  - Reforestation and water resources management (Spain)
  - A school lunch program (France)
  - A public health initiative (Canada)
  - School lunch and solid waste management projects (Brazil)
  - 10 other social projects in various sectors including public health, agriculture, sports, and the environment (Brazil)
- There also needs to be political dialogue, massive financial support, sustained development, and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

### *Security and the Role of MINUSTAH*

- Without a Haitian-negotiated political framework, MINUSTAH will have difficulty successfully carrying out its operations. Its mandate is limited. Therefore, Haitians must formulate a long-term strategy for security.
- The peacekeeping force has difficulty collecting human intelligence because there are few, if any informants, and the force is not allowed to deploy intelligence agents. There is now a MINUSTAH/CIVPOL hotline, however, which people can call if they wish to provide the peacekeeping operation with information.

### *Increased U.S. Involvement*

- The situation in Haiti has become a partisan political issue in the United States. The U.S. government must first find consensus on a policy before it can consider further involvement.
  - If the U.S. were to become more involved, it would have to consider the circumstances under which this would occur. What role would it take in peacekeeping, for example, and would U.S. forces serve under the United Nations mission or enter Haiti as a separate mission?
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The INSS Colleagues for the Americas Seminar Series is a program of monthly meetings that commenced in 1994 to further research on hemispheric security and defense issues and to contribute to the professional education of United States and foreign practitioners.

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