

Bush strikes out in Haiti

THE Boston Globe article begins like this: "Thousands of Demonstrators chanting anti-American slogans encircled the US Marine-occupied National Palace here yesterday." Reuters news service cites protestors exclaiming, "We're going to burn down the palace with the Americans inside. We have weapons and we are ready to fight." Knight Ridder news service reports that 5,000 protestors marched on the national palace "shouting anti-Bush slogans" and protesting the US occupation of their country.

Does this sound like just another day in Iraq? Or maybe perhaps it's Afghanistan, except for the fact that they really don't have anything that can realistically pass for a national palace. If you guessed either Iraq or Afghanistan, you're wrong. These reports are coming out of Haiti. "Newly liberated" from its democratically elected government, Haiti is now mired down in chaos, the result of what members of the US Congressional Black Caucus claim to have documented as a Bush administration orchestrated coup.

As they marched across Haiti, the insurgents, armed with new US weapons, and led by a cadre of US trained former death squad operatives, "liberated" prisons from the Dominican border to Port au Prince. These convicts, whose crimes range from petty theft to murder and rape, joined the so-called "rebels" in their march on the capitol. Outnumbered, and outgunned, the Haitian police moved out of their way. The Haitian people hid. And the ghosts of the ruthless US backed Duvalier dictatorship retook the capitol, just as Haitian president Jean Bertrand Aristide was being taken away, according

BUSH STRIKES OUT IN HAITI / 2

to witnesses seldom cited in the US press, by US Marines.

The ultimate result of this coup is one more "regime change" notch in George W. Bush's belt, and one more country mired in chaos. With each successive conquest, Bush seems to be upping the ante. First was Afghanistan, a country with no government to speak of, crawling with apocalyptic terrorists (formally our Rambo-era "freedom fighters"). Next was Iraq. Though it was run by a ruthless madman formally allied with Bush's dad, evidence shows that it didn't pose a threat to the US. They did, however, have lots of reasons to hate us, stemming from our "bomb them back into the stone age" tactics of Gulf War I. Haiti, as a functioning parliamentary democracy, represents a new plateau in "regime change." They have no record since their original revolution of ever threatening another country. They certainly didn't threaten the US – and given their institutionally indebted and impoverished status, couldn't pose a threat to anyone even if they wanted to. In Haiti, the Bush policy short-circuited a fledgling democracy, unseated its government, and created a vacuum so far filled only by roving bands of rapists and killers – including many of the same people who were responsible for killing thousands during the Bush Senior era coup against Haiti's democratically-elected government.

Cutting prison costs

It's a pretty simple story. The Bush administration led Haiti from a stable, albeit flawed, democracy, into chaos, all while we were distracted by Iraq, the Jacksons and the Gay Marriage debate. With every prison in Haiti now empty, the Bush administration has sunk to new levels in its relentless search for allies and collaborators.

The Haitian people were here before, however. It no doubt wasn't easy for a nation of impoverished slaves, led by a Voodoo priest, to rise up and win its freedom from Napoleon's armies. But they did. They also survived 31 violent coups -- often orchestrated and supported by foreign powers. Yet, they never lost their yearning for freedom. It's naive for the Bush administration to think that arming a group of thugs for Coup 32 would effect a smooth low-key "regime change." It's akin to thinking that Afghanistan would welcome American pipeline companies and troops, or that Iraqis would be dancing in the streets to welcome their supposed "liberators."

Press reports coming out of Haiti describe the demonstrators as being peaceful, yet armed. The warning is ominous. Life in Haiti is desperate. Haitians know these supposed "rebels" – having died en masse at their hands a decade ago after the last coup. At this juncture in Haitian history, apathy and acquiescence can lead to decades of death, as Haiti's brutal army re-forms, dominated by death squad leaders. Many Haitians won't stand for it.

Fed up & fearless: Sound familiar?

The Globe cites one, Philippe Paul, who stood outside the US occupied palace declaring that "Bush stole two elections – one with Gore, and then from Haiti." Another Haitian, Riguet Joseph, told The Globe that people are hiding from the coup forces, and that no one would be safe unless the president was restored to power. He also remarked that Haitians "won't recognize any other government" and that if one was thrust upon them, they would "burn the country," as they did during their fight for independence from France. Speaking to a reporter from Reuters news service, another Haitian was even more blunt, warning, "We are going to burn down the palace with the Americans inside." Yet another, threatened that, "If they [the Americans] don't bring the president back, there's going to be a lot of blood. George Bush kidnapped our president and we want him back."

Let's try to empathize here and put ourselves in the position of the Haitian people. Imagine, hypothetically, that we had an elected president. Then imagine a band of terrorists invading from Canada, building their army with prisoners broken out of Attica, armed by Mexico, and marching on Washington. Would we celebrate or fight?

Haitians have known suffering and bloodshed for most of their tormented history. It's the poorest country in the hemisphere. It's people have tasted democracy and aren't about to let it be lost. Their warnings should be taken seriously.

Worse than oral sex

By supporting this coup, by refusing to support the elected government, and by whisking Aristide away under cover of darkness, the Bush administration has committed a dire crime in Haiti. It's a violation of both US and international law. And, like the invasion of Iraq and the myriad layers of official lies that led up to that war, its an impeachable offense – probably even more serious than lying about oral sex.

But it's not likely we'll see Bush impeached – or the elected president of Haiti returned to power. Instead we're going to see American troops mired down in yet another quagmire of a conflict – this time re-bonding with our French buddies (see Getting a Grip 3/4/04 about why France wants Aristide out) while a bunch of Canadian troops wander the streets of Port au Prince in confusion.

Aside from the obvious ethical and legal issues, this intervention makes no sense. There's nothing to gain in Haiti, and a lot to lose. It just brings up the unsolved three-year-old question about the Bush administration: Are they psychotic ideologs, or just plain stupid? Either way, Venezuela's next. This is the domino effect that began in Florida in 2000 and knows no bounds.