

HAITI

U.S. RELATIONS WITH HAITI

309. Editorial Note

Documentation relating to U.S.-Haitian relations is presented in an accompanying microform publication. A narrative summary based upon that documentation and a purport list of the documents included in the microform supplement is provided below. The document numbers cited in the summary correspond to the document numbers in both the purport list and microform supplement.

Haiti had the misfortune to be the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. President François Duvalier was popularly elected in 1957, a break in the usual cycle of Presidential succession by military coup, but soon after his election Duvalier proved himself another Haitian dictator. Duvalier ruled through control of the National Police, the Presidential Guard, and the secret police, all chosen for their personal loyalty to him and meant as a counterweight to the Haitian Armed Forces.

Haiti's economy was virtually bankrupt. Graft and administrative ineptitude discouraged international lenders from providing Haiti with additional loans. Because Haiti's economy was dependent on coffee, a wild crop harvested by peasants, its revenues fluctuated wildly. During 1958-1960, U.S. officials responsible for relations with Haiti faced three overriding questions: how closely should the United States become associated with Duvalier, how could the United States use its influence to mitigate Duvalier's dictatorial rule, and how much money should it give Haiti?

As 1958 began, the Department of State was restoring normal relations with Haiti that were broken in late December 1957 when U.S. Ambassador Gerald Drew was recalled to protest the beating death by Haitian police of an American citizen, Shibley Jean Talamas, a political opponent of Duvalier. The Talamas family received compensation and some official action was taken against his murderers. The Department then outlined a program of improved relations: restoration of grant assistance, military assistance, and loans; recreational

visits of the U.S. fleet; possible augmentation of U.S. military training missions; and increased U.S. tourism, private investment, and technical assistance. (HA-1)

In June 1958, Ambassador Drew expressed concern about this program. Speaking specifically of a U.S. Marine training mission that Duvalier avidly wanted, Drew confided "I find myself becoming increasingly repelled by the thought of a mission here when the jails are crammed with political prisoners . . . ; when defeated candidates . . . are beaten, tortured and hounded into exile; when a restrained opposition press has been ruthlessly snuffed out of existence; and when masked night riders, . . . operate from their headquarters in the National Palace." Drew suggested that in return for the U.S. Marine trainers the United States should extract promises of better behavior from Duvalier. (HA-4)

The initiative shifted to Duvalier when his security forces foiled a coup by Haitian, Dominican, and American citizens launched from Miami on July 29, 1958. (HA-5) The United States publicly regretted and deplored the involvement of U.S. citizens. President Eisenhower privately soothed Haitian feelings. (HA-6) Two months later the U.S. Marine training mission was approved on a temporary basis notwithstanding Drew's concerns. (HA-9)

Haiti's economy suffered in early 1959 from the double blow of the failure of its coffee crop (less than half the previous year's level) and a drop in the price of coffee. Haiti was running a large deficit and needed a massive injection of U.S. assistance to forestall economic paralysis and possible social and political chaos. The United States was prepared to grant Haiti \$6 million in budgetary support from the President's special contingency fund, but the International Cooperation Agency insisted over Department of State objections that the money be given only if Haiti agreed to controls and reforms in its economy. (HA-10)

The economic crisis occasioned serious consideration in Washington and at the Embassy in Port au Prince of the advisability of continuing to shore up the Duvalier regime. In March 1959, Ambassador Drew and the Country Team reluctantly concluded that Duvalier's overthrow would create more chaos and misery than continued Duvalier rule. As Drew concluded, "we cannot afford to let Haiti 'go through the wringer.' " (HA-11 through 13) Ironically, in May 1959, Duvalier nearly died but was saved by the dispatch of a U.S. cardiologist and equipment from Guantanamo Bay. (HA-14, 17)

Disturbed conditions in the neighboring Dominican Republic and a small-scale invasion of Haiti from Fidel Castro's revolutionary Cuba gave Duvalier serious pause in late summer 1959. Haiti requested a U.S. patrol of its waters and air space and offered base facilities to the

United States. (HA-15, 18) The United States declined both requests, but did authorize extensions of visits and brief additional visits of U.S. Navy ships to Haiti. (HA-16)

When the Caribbean situation quieted, the United States concentrated upon the shambles of the Haitian economy. This time, however, U.S. aid could be justified on the grounds that Haiti needed economic and military assistance for legitimate self-defense against Cuba and communism. (HA-21) International Cooperation Agency officials complained that Haiti was not only not trying to help itself economically, but also refusing constructive help designed to bring economic development. ICA argued against budgetary support, but lost to the foreign policy considerations of the threat of Castro. (HA-22) Duvalier was not particularly grateful and complained publicly about the meagerness of U.S. aid, implying that U.S. parsimony was the real cause of Haiti's poverty. The Central Intelligence Agency concluded that Duvalier was "drifting leftward" because the ailing dictator had delegated authority to a "clique of leftists." Still, the general consensus in Washington held that Duvalier was reasonably secure and the pro-American Haitian Army would not challenge him. In effect, the United States was reluctant to give up on Duvalier even though his government's graft and mismanagement had crippled the U.S. aid program and notwithstanding his flirtation with the left. Duvalier was a force for stability in a country characterized by political instability. Despite his occasional anti-American tirades, he was a staunch anti-Communist. (HA-24, 26)

The new U.S. Ambassador to Haiti, Robert Newbegin, arrived in Port au Prince in October 1960 with limited objectives and options. He was there to commit U.S. aid money, \$5 million for budgetary support, \$4.5 million for balance-of-payments support and economic development, and \$3 million for additional development projects. He was to stress that this money was to help the Haitian people, but Haiti's past use of aid and development assistance and its inability to repay past debts did not augur well. (HA-27 through 29)