

To rescue Haiti from chaos

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After the February removal of former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the country once again lapsed into chaos. Interim officials now hold the corrupt government in a faltering grip. Insurgents clash with police forces, threatening further violence unless limited demands are met. Gang warfare consumes entire cities. A humanitarian crisis rages replete with beheadings. Drug production and distribution fester in Haiti's economy. Poor Haitians complicate natural disasters, destroying entire forests for cooking fuel. Violence and poverty force a mass exodus of "boat people" to more promising shores.

As America sits relatively immobile, China takes action. 125 riot police recently became the first Chinese troops to ever enter the Western Hemisphere when they joined the marginally effective 6,700-member United Nations peacekeeping force in Haiti.

Elsewhere in Central and South America, China has used and continues using trade deals to forge economic alliances. President Hu Jintao recently visited Cuba, Argentina, Chile and Brazil to discuss lucrative trade agreements. Columbia and Vene-zuela are even putting aside their political differences to consider an oil pipeline to shift exports away from America and help supply China's increasing energy needs.

Largely ignored, Cuba uses medical aid to solicit favor among its neighbors. More than 12,000 Haitians have received treatment from 500 Cuban medics since September. This work earns the medical personnel respect and enough support that Haitians themselves protect the Cubans from rebel attacks.

China and Cuba gain support in Latin America because they understand an important truth that seems to elude America - alliances are not won with sporadic aid but with comprehensive problem-solving. Even for America's historic allies, Chinese and Cuban partnerships are preferable to seemingly vague American rhetoric about "freedom" and "democracy."

For America, Haiti is an opportunity to develop a new "nation-making" strategy for helping failed states build stable, prosperous, pro-U.S. democracies. Full-spectrum American assistance to its southern neighbors is the only thing that will slow or stop unwanted Chinese and Cuban influence.

Nation-building in Haiti requires three fundamental elements - infrastructure development, education and governmental reform. When economic, social, and political needs of the people are met, stability and even prosperity can follow. It is no coincidence that Haitian rebels demand only housing, clear roads and canals, and money for every child to attend school. America must offer these fundamental reforms to Haitians in a more attractive manner than help from China or Cuba.

An inadequate Clinton administration strategy in Haiti, which cost taxpayers roughly \$3 billion, once again costs America - both economically and politically. Now it is time for well-planned American action, before the costs rise even higher.

The United States must pursue an aggressive and proactive effort in Haiti, far larger than the 250-member humanitarian training operation planned for next spring.

America must entice a coalition of members of the Organization of American States, in cooperation with the interim government of Haiti, to re-enter the country, root out corruption and rejuvenate the shattered economy. Any military presence must be minimal, large enough only to maintain point security and pursue construction and medical missions.

Advisers retired from the FBI and experienced law-enforcement agencies from other nations can help identify and remove corrupt individuals within the Haitian government. Civilian personnel can transform the country's battered infrastructure: Hiring Haitians to work on internal improvements, such as roads, will help provide meaningful employment and a reliable income. Because literacy and health are necessary for successful democracy, the Peace Corps, nongovernmental organizations and religious groups can lead teachers and doctors into the country to educate and rehabilitate.

The United States can subsidize much-needed efforts to train Haitians in skills ranging from technical skills to simple farming techniques. Progress on all fronts is needed for a stable and prosperous Haiti.

The great Chinese warrior-philosopher Sun Tzu once said, "In ancient times, skillful warriors first made themselves invincible, and then watched for vulnerability in their opponents." Poor policies in Latin America are a U.S. weakness. So long as China expands its sphere of influence in America's neighborhood, and so long as Cuba contends for regional support, the United States is in a precarious position. Developing a proactive and successful strategy for Haiti, can begin American reassertion of influence and weaken the threat of inference in our hemisphere.

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