

The New York Times

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New York Times

News and opinions on situation in Haiti

Democracy Undone - Mixed U.S. Signals Helped Tilt Haiti Toward Chaos By WALT BOGDANICH and JENNY NORDBERG

January 29, 2006

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti : As his plane lifted off the runway here in August 2003, Brian Dean Curran rewound his last, bleak days as the American ambassador in this tormented land.

Haiti, Mr. Curran feared, was headed toward a cataclysm, another violent uncoupling of its once jubilant embrace of democracy more than a decade before. He had come here hoping to help that tenuous democracy grow. Now he was leaving in anger and foreboding.

Seven months later, an accused death squad leader helped armed rebels topple the president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Haiti, never a model of stability, soon dissolved into a state so lawless it stunned even those who had pushed for the removal of Mr. Aristide, a former Roman Catholic priest who rose to power as the champion and hero of Haiti's poor.

Today, the capital, Port-au-Prince, is virtually paralyzed by kidnappings, spreading panic among rich and poor alike. Corrupt police officers in uniform have assassinated people on the streets in the light of day. The chaos is so extreme and the interim government so dysfunctional that voting to elect a new one has already been delayed four times. The latest date is Feb. 7.

Yet even as Haiti prepares to pick its first elected president since the rebellion two years ago, questions linger about the circumstances of Mr. Aristide's ouster, and especially why the Bush administration, which has made building democracy a centerpiece of its foreign policy in Iraq and around the world, did not do more to preserve it so close to its shores.

The Bush administration has said that while Mr. Aristide was deeply flawed, its policy was always to work with him as Haiti's democratically elected leader.

But the administration's actions in Haiti did not always match its words. Interviews and a review of government documents show that a democracy-building group close to the White House, and financed by American taxpayers, undercut the official United States policy and the ambassador assigned to carry it out.

As a result, the United States spoke with two sometimes contradictory voices in a country where its words carry enormous weight. That mixed message, the former American ambassador said, made efforts to foster political peace "immeasurably more difficult." Without a political agreement, a weak government was destabilized further, leaving it vulnerable to the rebels.

Mr. Curran accused the democracy-building group, the International Republican Institute, of trying to undermine the reconciliation process after disputed 2000 Senate elections threw Haiti into a violent political crisis. The group's leader in Haiti, Stanley Lucas, an avowed Aristide opponent from the Haitian

elite, counseled the opposition to stand firm, and not work with Mr. Aristide, as a way to cripple his government and drive him from power, said Mr. Curran, whose account is supported in crucial parts by other diplomats and opposition figures. Many of these people spoke publicly about the events for the first time.

Mr. Curran, a 30-year Foreign Service veteran and a Clinton appointee retained by President Bush, also accused Mr. Lucas of telling the opposition that he, not the ambassador, represented the Bush administration's true intentions.

Records show that Mr. Curran warned his bosses in Washington that Mr. Lucas's behavior was contrary to American policy and "risked us being accused of attempting to destabilize the government." Yet when he asked for tighter controls over the I.R.I. in the summer of 2002, he hit a roadblock after high officials in the State Department and National Security Council expressed support for the pro-democracy group, an American aid official wrote at the time.

The International Republican Institute is one of several prominent nonprofit groups that receive federal funds to help countries develop the mechanisms of democracy, like campaigning and election monitoring. Of all the groups, though, the I.R.I. is closest to the administration. President Bush picked its president, Lorne W. Craner, to run his administration's democracy-building efforts. The institute, which works in more than 60 countries, has seen its federal financing nearly triple in three years, from \$26 million in 2003 to \$75 million in 2005. Last spring, at an I.R.I. fund-raiser, Mr. Bush called democracy-building "a growth industry."

These groups walk a fine line. Under federal guidelines, they are supposed to nurture democracy in a nonpartisan way, lest they be accused of meddling in the affairs of sovereign nations. But in Haiti, according to diplomats, Mr. Lucas actively worked against President Aristide.

Colin L. Powell, the secretary of state at the time, said that the American policy in Haiti was what Mr. Curran believed it to be, and that the United States stood by Mr. Aristide until the last few days of his presidency.

But in a recent interview, Otto J. Reich, who served under Mr. Powell as the State Department's top official on Latin America, said that a subtle shift in policy away from Mr. Aristide had taken place after Mr. Bush became president, "as Mr. Curran and others had suspected.

"There was a change in policy that was perhaps not well perceived by some people in the embassy," Mr. Reich said, referring to Mr. Curran. "We wanted to change, to give the Haitians an opportunity to choose a democratic leader," said Mr. Reich, one of a group of newly ascendant policy makers who feared the rise of leftist governments in Latin America.

Told of that statement, Mr. Curran said, "That Reich would admit that a different policy was in effect totally vindicates my suspicions, as well as confirms what an amateur crowd was in charge in Washington."

Bridging the divide between Mr. Aristide and his opponents would have been difficult in even the best of circumstances. But what emerges from the events in Haiti is a portrait of how the effort to nurture democracy became entangled in the ideological wars and partisan rivalries of Washington.

"What you had was the constant undermining of the credibility of the negotiators," said Luigi R. Einaudi, a respected veteran diplomat who led the international effort to find a political settlement on behalf of the Organization of American States.

The I.R.I. did not permit The New York Times to interview Mr. Lucas, but in a response to written questions, he denied trying to undermine American policy. "I never told the opposition not to negotiate," Mr. Lucas said in an e-mail message.

Georges A. Fauriol, the I.R.I.'s senior vice president, said that his group faithfully tried to represent "the ideals of the American democratic system," and that he personally pressed the opposition to compromise. Mr. Fauriol blamed "innuendos and political interests" for the complaints of Mr. Curran and others. He also said Mr. Curran never gave him the specifics that he needed to act against Mr. Lucas, whom he called "one of our best political party trainers."

In Haiti, Mr. Lucas's partisan activities were well known. Evans Paul, a leader of the anti-Aristide movement and now a presidential candidate, said Mr. Lucas's stand against negotiating was "a bit too harsh" even for some in the opposition.

Jean-Max Bellerive, an official in three Haitian administrations, including Mr. Aristide's, added, "He said there was a big plan for Haiti that came from Washington, that Aristide would not finish his mandate." As for the ambassador, Mr. Bellerive said, "he told me that Curran was of no importance, that he did not fit in the big picture."

Micha Gaillard, a former spokesman for the main anti-Aristide coalition, the Democratic Convergence, said Mr. Lucas went so far as to act as its representative in Washington.

With Washington's approval, Mr. Lucas used taxpayer money to fly hundreds of opposition members, but no one from Mr. Aristide's Lavalas party, to a hotel in the Dominican Republic for political training that began in late 2002. Two leaders of the armed rebellion told The Times that they were in the same hotel during some of those meetings, but did not attend.

The I.R.I. said the sessions were held outside Haiti because Lavalas had physically threatened its staff, including Mr. Lucas. But another American democracy-building group, the National Democratic Institute, said it was able to work successfully with Mr. Aristide's party in Haiti.

Mr. Curran left Haiti in August 2003 for a new assignment, and by fall, Mr. Aristide's political opponents had decided there was little point in negotiating. Still, there was one last hope. Mr. Einaudi persuaded some opposition leaders to meet with Mr. Aristide at the home of the new American ambassador, James B. Foley. But while the president was prepared to give up much of his power, Mr. Einaudi said, American officials "pulled the rug out," abruptly canceling the meeting without consulting him.

Several months later, the rebels marched on Port-au-Prince and Mr. Aristide left Haiti on a plane provided by the American government. Since then, Haiti has become even more chaotic, said Marc L. Bazin, an elder statesman of Haitian politics.

"I was suspicious that it would not be good," Mr. Bazin said. "But that bad, 'no.'"

Added Mr. Einaudi, "Building democracy in Haiti now is going to take a very long time."

A Voice for the Poor

After two centuries of foreign occupiers, dictators, generals, a self-appointed president for life and the overthrow of more than 30 governments, Haitians finally had the chance in 1990 to elect the leader they wanted. The people chose Mr. Aristide, a priest who had been expelled from his Roman Catholic order for his fiery orations of liberation theology.

“He was espousing change in Haiti, fundamental populist change,” said Robert Maguire, a Haiti scholar who has criticized American policy as insufficiently concerned with Haiti’s poor. “Right away, he was viewed as a threat by very powerful forces in Haiti.”

President Aristide promised not only to give voice to the poor in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, but also to raise the minimum wage and force businesses to pay taxes. He rallied supporters with heated attacks on the United States, a tacit supporter of past dictatorships and a major influence in Haitian affairs since the Marines occupied the country from 1915 to 1934.

“He wasn’t going to be beholden to the United States, and so he was going to be trouble,” said Senator Christopher J. Dodd of Connecticut, a Democratic critic of Bush administration policy on Latin America. “We had interests and ties with some of the very strong financial interests in the country, and Aristide was threatening them.” Those interests, mostly in the textile and electronic assembly businesses, sold many of their products cheap to the United States.

When the Haitian military, with the support of the business elite, overthrew Mr. Aristide after just shy of eight months in office, the administration of George H. W. Bush criticized the loss of Haiti’s first democracy, but did not intervene militarily.

Raymond A. Joseph, the current interim government’s ambassador to the United States, recalls a speech that Mr. Aristide gave in September 1991. “That’s the speech,” Mr. Joseph said, “that triggered the coup d’état against him, where he said, ‘Whenever you feel the heat under your feet, turn your eyes to the mountains where the wealthy are, they’re responsible for you. Go give them what they deserve.’”

After the coup came repression. In the first two years, the United States Coast Guard intercepted 41,000 Haitians at sea. Pressured by the Congressional Black Caucus, President Clinton sent troops to help restore Mr. Aristide to power in 1994.

Mr. Aristide quickly disbanded the country’s most powerful institution, the military. It did not help that Mr. Aristide, and for that matter, Haiti, had little experience with the give and take of democracy.

“He was not trained to be a politician, he was trained to be a priest,” Mr. Einaudi said. “So that when he got involved heavily in politics, he didn’t know very much about the games politicians play.”

Mr. Aristide returned with only one year left in his term, and because the Haitian Constitution barred him from consecutive terms his ally René Préval was voted into office.

But the international community believed that Mr. Aristide remained a real power, and it had grown frustrated with the government’s shortcomings. That frustration built to the parliamentary elections of 2000. Mr. Aristide’s party declared victory in 18 of 19 Senate races, even though international observers said runoffs were required in 8 of them because no one had won a clear majority. Angry Lavalas opponents, in turn, boycotted presidential elections in November; Mr. Aristide, won overwhelmingly.

Tensions rose further as international lenders withheld aid from the Aristide government. “We could not deliver any goods, services to the people,” said Leslie Voltaire, a former minister under Mr. Aristide.

Even Mr. Bazin, a former World Bank official who ran against Mr. Aristide in 1990, criticized the cutoff. “The poorer you are, the less democratic you are,” he said.

Indeed, the combination of a strengthening opposition, a weaker government and an attempted coup drove Mr. Aristide deeper into the arms of his most fervent supporters in the slums. “The urban gangs received money, logistical support and weapons from the national police because the government saw them as a

bulwark against a coup,” the International Crisis Group, a conflict resolution organization that studies Haiti and other trouble spots, said in a 2005 report.

When some Aristide supporters engaged in criminal acts, including killings and drug trafficking, the president was often unwilling or unable to stop them. That eroded his popular support.

A simple dispute over a handful of Senate seats had now morphed into a showdown over the very legitimacy of Mr. Aristide’s presidency.

It was in these months that two ingredients were added to the roiling Haitian stew: a new American ambassador, Brian Dean Curran, arrived in Port-au-Prince and a Republican administration was inaugurated in Washington.

An Ambassador’s Mission

Mr. Curran began his assignment at the start of 2001. To understand the country better, he made a point of learning Creole, the language of the poor, even though diplomats and the ruling elite conversed in French.

“He was amazing to watch,” one former government official said. “He would walk in a classroom with Haitian children and take over from the teacher.”

Mr. Curran said he wanted to believe in Mr. Aristide but slowly became disillusioned. “I had many conversations with him about the police, about human rights abuses,” Mr. Curran said. “And in the end, he disappointed me.”

Even so, Mr. Curran said, his mission was clear. “The promotion of democracy was at the very heart of what I was doing in Haiti,” he said. Clear, too, was how to go about that: supporting Mr. Aristide’s right to office while working to foster a compromise. “That was the officially stated policy,” Mr. Curran said. “Those were my instructions.”

Mr. Curran was supposed to have help from the I.R.I., which had been active in Haiti since 1990. Along with the National Democratic Institute, the I.R.I. was formed in the early 1980’s after President Reagan called on Americans to fight totalitarianism.

Its board includes Republican foreign-policy heavyweights and lobbyists, and its chairman is Senator John McCain, the Arizona Republican, who did not answer requests for an interview. The group’s financing comes from the Agency for International Development, as well as the State Department, foundations and corporations like Halliburton and Chevron.

More than its sister group, the International Republican Institute tends to work in countries “it views as being strategically important to U.S. national foreign policy interests,” according to a 1999 report by the international development agency.

The I.R.I.’s Republican affiliations did not go unnoticed on the streets of Port-au-Prince. Graffiti condemning the I.R.I. had been showing up for some time, the work of Aristide supporters. “I think they distrusted I.R.I. as an organization because they were affiliated with the Republican Party, and Lavalas just felt the Republican Party was out to get them,” said David Adams, a former A.I.D. mission director in Haiti.

And there was one more reason, he said: Stanley Lucas, the I.R.I.’s leader in Haiti.

Mr. Lucas, who said he grew up in the United States and Haiti and worked as a part-time Haitian civil servant, came from a land-owning family. That background, along with his politics, “sends a very

provocative message, I think, to those supporting Aristide,” said Mr. Maguire, who runs the international affairs program at Trinity University in Washington. Mr. Lucas joined the I.R.I. in 1993 and took over its Haiti program five years later.

With his good looks, sociability and fluency in Creole, French and English, he moved easily between Port-au-Prince and Capitol Hill. “He’s the Denzel Washington of Haiti,” one A.I.D. official said. That he was a karate champion only added to his aura.

The anti-Aristide message had currency around Washington. Mr. Einaudi, the veteran diplomat, recalled attending the I.R.I.’s 2001 fund-raising dinner and being surrounded by a half-dozen Haitian businessmen sounding a common cry: “We were foolish to think that we could do anything with Aristide. That it was impossible to negotiate with him. That it was necessary to get rid of him.”

A year later, the I.R.I. created a stir when it issued a press release praising the attempted overthrow of Hugo Chávez, the elected president of Venezuela and a confrontational populist, who, like Mr. Aristide, was seen as a threat by some in Washington. The institute has since told The Times that praising the attempted coup was wrong.

Mr. Lucas had been to Venezuela seven times for the I.R.I., but he was not there at the time of the coup. Instead, he was focusing on Haiti, where his work was creating another stir for the institute.

No Negotiations, No Compromise

In early 2002, Mr. Curran said, he began receiving troubling reports about Mr. Lucas. As he urged the opposition in Haiti “to show flexibility,” the ambassador said, Mr. Lucas was sending the opposite instructions: “Hang tough. Don’t compromise. In the end, we’ll get rid of Aristide.”

As his concern mounted, Mr. Curran asked that Mr. Lucas be removed from the I.R.I.’s Haiti program. The institute resisted.

Mr. Fauriol, the institute’s senior vice president, said Mr. Curran had not been forthcoming with information about Mr. Lucas. “Specifics we’ve never been given,” he said, adding that Mr. Lucas’s critics probably did not know him very well.

“We don’t have any questions about the quality of his work,” Mr. Fauriol said. “There is something of a cottage industry that’s sort of built around what he has or hasn’t done, perceptions, rumors, whisperings. And it has sort of created a profile of an individual that is, shall we say, greatly exaggerated, simply not true.”

Mr. Curran countered that he had ample witnesses to Mr. Lucas’s behavior. And opposition leaders said in interviews that Mr. Lucas had actively opposed a political settlement.

“Mr. Lucas was of the opinion negotiations would be a bad idea; I was of the opinion we should have negotiated to show our good faith,” said Mr. Paul, a former mayor of Port-au-Prince, who nonetheless praised Mr. Lucas’s support for the opposition against Mr. Aristide.

Mr. Gaillard, the former spokesman for the Democratic Convergence, the main anti-Aristide coalition, said he also did not like that Mr. Lucas was acting as the Haitian opposition’s representative in Washington. “That really disturbed us, because we didn’t know exactly what he was saying,” he said.

Mr. Bazin added that Mr. Lucas “was prepared to act aggressively to get Aristide out of power.”

Mr. Einaudi said he found Mr. Lucas’s role disturbing.

“Stanley Lucas is a very bright man, very able man,” he said. But, he said, “I thought it was a mistake the way Dean Curran did, I think, that he should become the person in charge of I.R.I.’s policies and activities.”

At the A.I.D. office in Port-au-Prince, the agency’s director, Mr. Adams, said he found Mr. Lucas difficult to deal with.

“When Stanley tells you something, it’s kind of hard to know exactly what the kernel of truth is,” Mr. Adams said.

With the I.R.I. standing behind Mr. Lucas, Mr. Curran complained to his superiors in Washington ‘through cables, e-mail messages and’ he said, in meetings.

In a July 2002 cable, he wrote: “I continue to have grave misgivings about the participation of an individual whose questionable behavior could be to the detriment of U.S. interests. The USAID director shares my concerns.”

Mr. Curran also cautioned that Mr. Lucas’s continued participation “will, at best, lead to confusion as to U.S. policy objectives, which continue to eschew unconstitutional acts and favor negotiations and, at worst, contribute to political destabilization in Haiti.”

The Old Policy Makers Return

Mr. Curran sent his cables to the Bush administration’s Latin American policy team, records show. In addition to Mr. Reich, then assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs, that group included Elliott L. Abrams, a special assistant to the president and senior director for democracy and human rights, and Daniel W. Fisk, a deputy to Mr. Reich.

These men were veteran fighters against the spread of leftist political ideology in Latin America, beginning with Fidel Castro and Cuba. Mr. Fisk’s former boss, Jesse Helms, then a Republican senator from North Carolina, had once called Mr. Aristide a “psychopath,” based on a C.I.A. report about his mental condition that turned out to be false.

In the 1980’s, Mr. Reich and Mr. Abrams had become ensnared in investigations of Reagan administration activities opposing the socialist government of Nicaragua. The comptroller general determined in 1987 that a public diplomacy office run by the Cuban-born Mr. Reich had “engaged in prohibited, covert propaganda activities.” In 1991, Mr. Abrams pleaded guilty to withholding information from Congress in connection with the Iran-contra affair. He was pardoned by the first President Bush.

Now, with the advent of the second Bush administration, Mr. Reich, Mr. Abrams and their colleagues were back in power. The Clinton era, they felt, had been a bad one for United States interests in Latin America.

“The United States had squandered a good deal of its credibility by its support for Aristide during the Clinton years,” said Roger F. Noriega, a former senior Helms aide who replaced Mr. Reich at the State Department in 2003. “We essentially held his coat while stuffing millions of dollars in it while he terrorized the opposition.”

At the time of Mr. Curran’s complaints, the I.R.I.’s current president, Mr. Craner, was running the State Department’s democracy and human rights program. He questioned the charges leveled by Mr. Curran, who goes by his middle name, Dean.

“I’m curious about why Dean has a very different opinion of Stanley from his bosses,” Mr. Craner said. He added that neither Mr. Noriega nor Mr. Reich had come to him or the institute and complained, and he urged The Times to call them.

Mr. Noriega said Mr. Curran had not worked for him, but offered that he had seen no evidence of misconduct by the I.R.I. Mr. Reich was more specific about Mr. Curran.

“He never expressed any problems with Stanley Lucas to me, and I was his boss,” Mr. Reich said. Asked why his name showed up on cables as having received Mr. Curran’s complaints, and why Mr. Curran’s cables detailed discussions with him, Mr. Reich replied: “I have absolutely no recollection of that. I’m not questioning it, I just have no recollection of that.”

Mr. Reich said he could not understand why Mr. Curran would focus on “some low-level bureaucrat” at the I.R.I. rather than the misconduct of Mr. Aristide. That, he asserted, was why the United States had gradually backed away from Mr. Aristide. “The crime is the Clinton administration supported him as long as it did,” Mr. Reich said.

Mr. Curran said it was “a patent lie” that he had never complained to Mr. Reich.

Records show that in the summer of 2002, Mr. Curran sought tighter control over the I.R.I. before signing off on a politically delicate program that Mr. Lucas had organized in the Dominican Republic to teach the opposition the art of campaigning.

Washington officials opposed Mr. Curran’s request. Not only was there pressure from Congress, according to an e-mail message from Mr. Adams of A.I.D., but “there were senior State/N.S.C. officials who were sympathetic to I.R.I.’s position as well.”

Mr. Curran did secure several concessions suggested by Mr. Reich, including that Mr. Lucas would be barred from participating in the program for 120 days and would be dismissed from the I.R.I.’s Haiti program if he misbehaved, records show. Even so, Mr. Curran thought the grant was a bad idea if Mr. Lucas remained involved.

The Training Next Door

Haiti has had a long, tense relationship with the Dominican Republic, its more affluent neighbor on the island of Hispaniola. Haitians who work there are often mistreated, human rights groups say, and the country has been a haven for those accused of trying to overthrow Haitian governments.

In December 2002, the I.R.I. began training Haitian political parties there, at the Hotel Santo Domingo, owned by the Fanjul family, which fled Cuba under Mr. Castro and now runs a giant sugar-cane business.

The training was unusual for more than its location: only Mr. Aristide’s opponents, not members of his party, were invited.

Institute officials said this was because the opposition parties were less powerful and needed more help. The goal, Mr. Fauriol said, “was to broaden, if you will, the ability of various actors to participate in the political process.”

They also said they were not required to work with Lavalas because its members condoned violence and the institute’s workers were threatened, which was why the meetings were held outside Haiti. And they pointed out that no American officials had objected to excluding Lavalas.

There were perhaps a dozen sessions, spread over a year, the institute said. Hundreds of opposition members came.

“The training programs were really run-of-the-mill political party programs,” Mr. Fauriol said. To the Dominican ambassador who issued the travelers’ visas in Haiti, though, the meetings “clearly conveyed a confrontation, not a dialogue.”

“For the opposition, it was interesting to know that the American government, or people from the American government, supported and validated its politics,” the former ambassador, Alberto Despradel, said last fall at the Hotel Santo Domingo.

Among the trainers brought in was Brian Berry, who worked on George W. Bush’s 1994 primary campaign for Texas governor.

Mr. Berry had an interest in the Caribbean. He said he had a small bag of sand from the Bay of Pigs; he said he looked forward to returning it to “a free Cuba beach” when Mr. Castro was gone. Mr. Berry said he volunteered for I.R.I., to further the cause of democracy.

Mr. Bazin, a moderate Aristide opponent, sent representatives to the Hotel Santo Domingo. They came away believing that more was going on than routine political training.

“The report I got from my people was that there were two meetings , ‘open meetings where democracy would be discussed and closed meetings where other things would be discussed, and we are not invited to the other meetings,” said Mr. Bazin, who is now running for president as the candidate of a faction of Lavalas.

Mr. Bazin said people who had attended the closed meetings told him that “there are things you don’t know” , ‘that Mr. Aristide would ultimately be removed and that he should stop calling for compromise.

Afterward, he said, he spoke with Mr. Curran. “I asked him, “How many policies do they have in the U.S.?” “ Mr. Bazin said.

Mr. Lucas said Mr. Bazin’s comments should be viewed in light of his alliance with some former Aristide supporters. And Mr. Fauriol denied that secret meetings had occurred. Also, A.I.D.’s inspector general said in a 2004 report that the training sessions did not violate government regulations.

But by attending the first training session, Mr. Lucas violated his 120-day prohibition.

Mr. Curran sent a blistering message to Washington. “I.R.I. has set us on a collision course today,” he wrote, adding, “I am afraid this episode brings into question the good faith of I.R.I. in promising to control Stanley’s renegade activities of the past.”

He asked that the institute’s program be canceled or Mr. Lucas dismissed. Neither happened.

Mr. Fauriol apologized, attributing the violation to a simple misunderstanding of when the exclusion period began. Besides, one American official said, Mr. Lucas had only a minor role in the meetings.

To Mr. Curran, however, any involvement was a problem. “How can we control what is said in private conversations?” he wrote to Washington, “Or what is conveyed by winks and nods?”

It turns out there was another matter, one that federal officials apparently did not know about: two leaders of the armed rebels told The Times they were spending time at the Hotel Santo Domingo while the training was under way.

Guy Philippe, a former police commander who had fled Haiti after two failed coup attempts, said in an interview that he had seen Mr. Lucas at the hotel.

“I was living in the hotel, sleeping in the hotel,” Mr. Philippe said. “So I’ve seen him and his friends and those guys in the opposition, but we didn’t talk politics.” He said he had not attended any I.R.I. meetings.

Paul Arcelin, an architect of the rebellion, said he, too, had seen Mr. Lucas at the hotel during the training sessions. In an interview there last fall, Mr. Arcelin said, “I used to meet Stanley Lucas here in this hotel, alone, sitting down talking about the future of Haiti.” But he said they had not discussed overthrowing Mr. Aristide.

Mr. Lucas said Mr. Arcelin showed up at an I.R.I. meeting and was told to leave. He also disputed Mr. Philippe’s account.

Several opposition activists said they wanted nothing to do with the armed rebels. “Participation in our seminars was from a very restricted list of people,” Mr. Fauriol said.

The seminars were still under way in September 2003 when the Bush administration sent a new ambassador to Haiti. Mr. Curran wanted to stay longer, Mr. Reich said. But he said Mr. Curran was replaced because “we did not think the ambassador was carrying out the new policy in the way we wanted it carried out.”

Mr. Powell disputed that, saying he recalled that Mr. Curran was not removed because of a change in policy, but as part of a normal rotation.

Before leaving, Mr. Curran met with Haitian business leaders. “He made a remarkable speech,” Mr. Bazin said, recalling that Mr. Curran admonished them not only for doing things “that are not acceptable, including dealing with drug dealers,” but also for listening to people who only pretended to represent United States policy.

Mr. Curran called them “chimères of Washington” , invoking a word commonly used to describe gang members loyal to Mr. Aristide.

“The Haitians, in their marvelous language, which is so full of allusions and metaphor, have created this term for these people , ‘the chimv@res, the ghosts,” Mr. Curran explained. “Because they’re there and they do things and they terrify you. And then they fade away.”

Time Runs Out

The fall of 2003 was a perilous time for Haiti. In the north, the police fought gun battles with a gang called the Cannibal Army. In the capital, gangs professing loyalty to the Aristide government attacked journalists and protesting university students. Across the Dominican border, the rebels waited for the right moment to attack.

Over four years, Mr. Einaudi, a former acting secretary general of the Organization of American States, had made some 30 trips to Haiti trying to prevent such a moment. Yet he had failed. Mr. Aristide was finally willing to share power, Mr. Einaudi said, but the opposition, emboldened, felt no need to deal with him.

With time running out, Mr. Einaudi hit upon a new approach , ‘one he hoped would take advantage of the arrival of the new American ambassador, Mr. Foley. Mr. Einaudi invited Mr. Aristide and his opponents to meet at the ambassador’s home , ‘a clear signal that the United States wanted negotiations, not regime change.

When members of both sides agreed to come, there was a glimmer of hope, Mr. Einaudi said.

Terence A. Todman, a retired American diplomat who also worked in Haiti for the O.A.S, said: “We knew there would be shouting. But at least they were together.”

Then, suddenly, it was over. In a move that stunned Mr. Einaudi, the United States canceled the meeting, killing “what was in fact my last move,” he said.

His colleague was more blunt. “That blew it,” said Mr. Todman, who like Mr. Einaudi was speaking publicly about the scuttled meeting for the first time. “That was the end of any effort to get them together.”

Mr. Noriega, who had replaced Mr. Reich at the State Department, said in an interview that the administration called off the meeting after talking to Aristide opponents. It was “going to be a failure for us and wreck our credibility,” he said.

Representative Bill Delahunt, a Massachusetts Democrat who monitored Haitian elections in 2000, had a different reaction when told of the canceled meeting.

“If there was a last opportunity and it wasn’t acted upon and we did not pursue it, then that would be a stain upon the United States,” he said.

The Rebels’ Final Push

Several months later, the rebels crossed into Haiti and began their final push. There were perhaps 200 in all, many of them former soldiers in the army Mr. Aristide had disbanded years before. Leading the final assault were Mr. Philippe and Louis -Jodel Chamblain.

Rights groups have identified Mr. Chamblain as the leader of death squads when the military ran Haiti after Mr. Aristide’s first ouster in 1991. He had twice been convicted in absentia , ‘for his role in a massacre in Gonaïves in 1994 and in connection with the 1993 killing of an Aristide supporter.

As for Mr. Philippe, Mr. Curran said he was suspected of having had ties to drug traffickers before leaving Haiti after a failed coup attempt.

Mr. Philippe, who is now running for president of Haiti, denies any connection to the drug trade, pointing out that he has never been charged with such a crime.

On Feb. 19, 2004, the rebels attacked the jail in Fort-Liberté, near the border. Without the military to defend the country, the government had to rely on the poorly equipped police, its ranks weakened by corruption. Jacques Edouard, the jail supervisor, said he was forced to release 73 prisoners, including convicted murderers.

Some prisoners joined the rebels, while others took over the city, robbing residents and burning homes until the United Nations arrived a month later, said Andrea Loi Valenzuela, a United Nations worker there.

When rebels reached the city of Cap Haitien on Feb. 22, the police chief, Hugues Gabriel, told his 28 officers to flee. “They had machine guns,” he said. “We have little handguns with little ammunition.”

In Washington, the Bush administration voiced its official policy. “We cannot buy into a proposition that says the elected president must be forced out of office by thugs and those who do not respect law and are bringing terrible violence to the Haitian people,” Secretary of State Powell said.

But when Mr. Aristide asked for international troops, he did not get them.

Mr. Powell said he continued to press for a political settlement to keep Mr. Aristide in office. "We were doing everything we could to support his incumbency," he said in a recent interview. Only in the last days, when Port-au-Prince appeared "on the verge of a serious blood bath," he said, did the United States explore other options. "There comes a point when you have to make a judgment as to whether you should continue to support President Aristide or whether it is better to try another route," he said.

On Feb. 29, 'Mr. Philippe's birthday', the United States flew President Aristide to exile in South Africa.

Unanswered Questions

Almost immediately, Congressional Democrats and Caricom, the association of Caribbean nations, called for an independent inquiry into Mr. Aristide's ouster and why Haiti's neighbors had not come to its aid.

"It doesn't add up for the greatest country in the world to be fearful of 200 thugs, my goodness," said Senator Barbara Boxer, Democrat of California.

The State Department said there was nothing to investigate. "I think the U.S. role was clear," a spokesman, Richard A. Boucher, said at the time, adding, "The focus needs to be on moving forward."

Two years later, there has been no inquiry. Caricom refuses to recognize Haiti's interim government. And questions about Mr. Aristide's fall remain unanswered.

Among them is what the Bush administration knew about the rebels, who plotted in the Dominican Republic, a country friendly to the United States.

Their activities there had not gone unnoticed by Haitian authorities. Edwin M. Paraison, a former Haitian diplomat in the Dominican Republic, said his government contacted authorities there three times to express concern "about subversive actions that were being planned on the Dominican territory." But, he said, little was done.

American officials said they did not take the rebels terribly seriously. "Our sense was that they were not a large force, not a well-trained force, and not in any way a threat to the stability then in Haiti," said Mr. Foley, the American ambassador at the time. "Now that proved to be otherwise."

Mr. Despradel, the former Dominican ambassador, said American authorities had to have known what the rebels were doing.

"Given the intelligence the United States has in place throughout the Caribbean and their advanced technology that lets them hear a mosquito in outer space, 'I think Guy Philippe is bigger than that,' he said.

At a Senate hearing in 2004, Mr. Noriega was asked if he knew of any ties between Mr. Philippe and the I.R.I., 'specifically Mr. Lucas', during the training meetings in the Dominican Republic. He said he did not.

"If it were the case, we would certainly stop it," Mr. Noriega said. "We knew who Guy Philippe was and that he had a criminal background."

The inspector general of A.I.D. also said that, based on interviews with American officials and a review of federal records, it found no evidence of contacts between the men during the year or so the sessions were taking place, a view echoed by Mr. Fauriol. "If they occurred, they would have been against any sense of responsibility of the I.R.I. and any guidance from us," he said. "I don't think those meetings occurred."

And in his e-mail response, Mr. Lucas himself said, "To be clear, I do not know Guy Philippe." He added that he might have met him once in the 1990's when Mr. Philippe was a police commander in Port-au-Prince.

Mr. Philippe tells a different story. In interviews with The Times, he called Mr. Lucas "a good friend" whom he has known much of his life. "He used to be my teacher in Ping-Pong," Mr. Philippe said.

Not only did he say he saw Mr. Lucas during the training at the Hotel Santo Domingo; he said he met with him once or twice in 2000 or 2001, while in exile in Ecuador. "He was working for I.R.I.," Mr. Philippe said. "It was not a planned meeting." They did not discuss politics, he said, adding, "It's like someone I knew when I was young."

Mr. Voltaire, the former minister in the Aristide administration, recalled meeting Mr. Lucas at a diplomatic reception in Lima, Peru, in September 2001. He said Mr. Lucas told him he was headed to Ecuador to meet with a small group of former Haitian policemen who had trained there. Mr. Philippe was known to belong to that group.

Mr. Craner, the I.R.I. president, said Mr. Lucas might have been in a bar in Ecuador when Mr. Philippe was present, though Mr. Lucas could not be sure. Mr. Lucas said, "We dug down deep into scenarios where Guy Philippe was potentially present in the room, even if I could not confirm that." He did acknowledge being in Peru during the time frame cited by Mr. Voltaire.

Dashing Hopes for Calm

One day last August, Haiti's interim prime minister, Gérard Latortue, invited a Times reporter into a private cabinet meeting. With his ministers seated around a long wooden table, Mr. Latortue said he wanted to deliver a personal message: Haiti was safe to visit now.

"I really would like people to know now that there is an improvement," said the prime minister, a former Florida businessman and United Nations official. "Go where you want to go and after, report what you have seen, 'whatever it is.'" And he added, "We are living in very exceptional times."

Several days later, in a Port-au-Prince neighborhood, uniformed riot police officers swept through a crowd at a soccer match, singling out people to kill, "with guns and machetes," outside the stadium. Unable to leave, people screamed and huddled on the ground. An estimated 10 people were killed at the event, which had been financed by the United States to promote peace in the area.

Things have only deteriorated from there. Kidnapping gangs hungry for ransom money have waged an expanding war on the capital. Several months ago, the Haitian police chief, Mario André Sol, said a quarter of his force was corrupt or tied to the kidnapers. Assassinations, mob violence, torture and arbitrary arrests have created a "catastrophic" human rights problem, a top United Nations official said in October.

After Mr. Aristide left, expressions of hope for a more stable, peaceful Haiti came from Haitian business leaders and officials in other countries, including the United States. "The Bush administration believes that if we all do our part and do it right, Haiti will have the democracy it deserves," Mr. Noriega told the American Enterprise Institute in April 2004.

Those hopes have fallen short at nearly every turn, and for reasons that go beyond Haiti's desperate poverty. The interim government is widely viewed as politicized and inept. The local and international security forces are undermanned and overmatched by the proliferation of guns and drugs. The United States, which sent in troops to help stabilize the country immediately after Mr. Aristide's ouster, pulled them out several months later, even though they command unparalleled respect in Haiti.

Mr. Latortue's government, set up as an unelected caretaker, dashed any hope of reconciliation when the prime minister praised the rebels as "freedom fighters." Then, Mr. Chamblain, the rebel convicted twice in absentia for his role in political killings, was acquitted of one murder in a retrial that rights groups called a sham. His other conviction was dismissed as well.

At the same time, Mr. Aristide's former prime minister, Yvon Neptune, was jailed for a year without charges, prompting an international outcry. Only after a hunger strike left him near death did the government bring murder-related charges. Another prominent Aristide supporter, the Rev. Gv©rard Jean-Juste, has been repeatedly arrested; Amnesty International calls Father Jean-Juste, who has leukemia, "a prisoner of conscience."

Still, the Latortue government cannot be blamed for all Haiti's immediate problems.

Juan Gabriel Valdés, a Chilean who leads the United Nations mission in Haiti, said the country needed 25,000 to 30,000 police officers, more than three times the current number. International aid, \$1.08 billion has been pledged, has been slow to arrive in the slums, where violence incubates.

"If Haiti underscored anything it is that security and development must go hand in hand," said Caroline Anstey, director of the World Bank's Caribbean unit. "Better security would have meant faster development results on the ground. Faster development would have contributed to better security."

The United States has played a diminished role since its troops left in mid-2004. It pledged \$230 million to Haiti from July 2004 to September 2006, A.I.D. said.

But Mark L. Schneider, senior vice president of the International Crisis Group, said the United States pulled its forces out too soon, turning the job over to United Nations peacekeepers while the country was still in the grip of armed conflict.

On Jan. 24, a State Department spokesman, Sean McCormack, said United Nations forces "are doing a good job," adding, "I take issue with this idea that somehow the United States has not been deeply involved."

Yet the violence in Haiti, especially the kidnappings, is eating away at society.

A reporter for The Times was with United Nations troops in Bel Air, a Port-au-Prince slum, when they found and freed André Boujour, 41, who said he had been kidnapped two weeks earlier and held in a 10-by-10-foot hut, accessible only by a narrow path through a warren of tightly packed shacks.

Mr. Boujour said he was abducted after delivering several thousand dollars he had raised from friends and family to free his kidnapped sister.

'A Tragedy of Partisanship'

When Mr. Curran and Mr. Einaudi went to Haiti, they said, they believed that working with the elected government, whatever its flaws, would help a young but already sputtering democracy take hold. They said they believed that the people making policy in Washington shared that hope. Then, they said, they ran into something larger.

"Haiti is a tragedy, and it is a tragedy of partisanship and hate and hostility," Mr. Einaudi said. "These were divides among Haitians and they are also divides among Americans, because Haiti came to symbolize within the United States a point of friction between Democrats and Republicans that did not facilitate bipartisanship or stable policy or communication."

Mr. Fauriol said that the I.R.I., too, was frustrated with the interim government. "We've got to deal with reality and the reality is rather imperfect," he said. Even so, he wrote last spring that "Haiti's democratic hopes have been given another chance." The institute's activities in Haiti no longer include Mr. Lucas. He now works for the group's Afghanistan program.

Both Mr. Reich and Mr. Noriega have left the government. Before Mr. Noriega departed, he said America "will continue to be a firm supporter of democracy in Haiti."

Mr. Maguire, the Haiti expert, is skeptical. "I don't see that the U.S. is exporting democracy," he said. "I think it's more exporting a kind of fear, that if we don't do the things the way the U.S. and powerful interests in our country want us to do them, then perhaps we'll be as expendable as Mr. Aristide was."

Mr. Curran has left the Foreign Service and is working for NATO. In the final analysis, Mr. Einaudi said, the former American ambassador was simply no match for the anti-Aristide lobby in Washington.

"The difficulty," Mr. Einaudi said, "is that he took on a battle that he couldn't win."

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