

NORTH COAST



TIMES EAGLE

VOL16NO3 50CENTS

In a dark time the eye begins to see.
- Theodore Roethke

OCTOBER 1994



DRAWING BY MARSHALL ARISMAN

LIBERATING HAITI

The Cold War and its own ambitions for world power haunt the United States. Haiti, where the U.S. placed an expeditionary force to command its will during its early flush of imperialism is reinvaded to undo the mischief created by the first infusion of American troops. Iraq, ruled by a ruthless despot who was purchased and armed to neutralize reinsurgent Islam, is a renegade who has twice challenged U.S. power, the first time humiliatingly (and devastatingly) unsuccessful. He might have been eliminated then but instead the U.S. stood aside as several thousand persons died mistakenly believing that it would aid their rebellion against the tyrant. Suddenly he has forced the world to face up to him again.

The immediate result is that hundreds of thousands of American servicemen and women have been shifted all over the world while the Pentagon readies for a possibility of multiple wars.

As a nation that holds as its centerpiece a distrust of military governance (even the conservative NRA rants that only citizens' rifles stand between freedom and tyranny) the U.S. has consistently turned to military solutions to resolve its problems and realize its ambitions. Despite its own demonstrated ruthlessness in world affairs, the U.S. hasn't been quite as bad as some (Hitler & Stalin; Serbia & Rwanda), yet to those it has attempted to yoke it is bad enough. U.S. ambitions have killed or abandoned to political bondage millions of people whose only offense was to be in the way of superpower supremacy. Peasant soldiers forced to bear arms in puppet wars as well as civilians caught in the immense thrasher of abstract power gained at the expense of expendable human populations are seldom considered in the rise of empires.

Haiti is a deep and long penetrating thorn, ever since a slave made himself king and defied European colonial power 200 years ago. Despite the racist overtones of critics who dismiss Haiti as of no particular interest and who have a history of supporting military dictators, the most vested interest necessary to protect U.S. interests in Latin America and the Caribbean is democracy, which it has seldom advocated and generally thwarted. Democracy is the crucible upon which rests continued dominance by the U.S. because military despots have become too unstable and dangerous. More malleable popularly elected governments that claim the cooperation of their citizens are considerably less incendiary and less costly to exploit, though they demand an ample share of the profits for their nation's labor and support.

For that reason the U.S. attempts to impose democracy upon Haiti, though it is difficult to see how it can be forced on a society and remain democratic. The U.S. tried that before in its first invasion of Haiti in 1915. Democracy's instrument was the USMC, which imposed martial law and controlled Haitian towns, schools and political offices while suppressing opposition parties

and the press. Taking over the economy and instituting a *corvée* system of slave labor to build roads without pay, the USMC also established a military caste which subsequently ruled Haiti after the Marines left.

Democracy was not the real purpose of the USMC's occupation of Haiti but instead to tether Haiti to American political and business interests. The USMC was as prepared to teach democracy to Haitians as it was to Vietnamese more than half a century later (and Filipinos a decade earlier); winning hearts and minds is not a primary mission of such a closed, authoritarian and homicidal military corps as the USMC. In 1929, after postponing popular elections, USMC machinegunners opened fire on a large crowd of demonstrating Haitians. Eleven years earlier, in 1918, anger at forced labor broke out in rebellion against the U.S. controlled government. The USMC managed to kill the rebel leader but martyred him as a result. Most Haitians hated the occupation which finally ended when the Marines gradually withdrew in 1934 after 19 years on the island of Hispanola, which Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic (also a focus of periodic American military attention).

U.S. invasion of Haiti in the past was to replace uncooperative dictators with pro-American despots. Now a pro-American military usurper is removed in favor of a democratically elected administration the military overthrew. Father Aristide is Haiti's first ever elected President and has generally been less than enthusiastic about American hegemony though he sought refuge in the U.S. after he was deposed and has spent most of his presidency in exile. A last minute compromise before American troops invaded allowed the military junta, demonized as a pretext for invasion, the chance to leisurely vacate its offices and choose exile without retribution for its hideous crimes while the dreaded police, heirs of the savage Tonton Macoutes who terrorized Haiti during the reigns of Pappa and Baby Doc, kept their weapons and beat to death a few citizens in its usual manner as they gathered to welcome the Americans ashore last month. The specter was almost that of Vietnam in 1945 when the British reamed Japanese soldiers to suppress independence minded crowds. In Haiti the butchers were spared in exchange for a bloodless occupation.

The immediate reaction of Americans and presumably Haitians was relief. The only bloodshed experienced by the expeditionary force was that of bystanders killed by the hated Haitian security police. American military police quickly took over most policing duties following a storm of world criticism for permitting the junta's hired killers to suppress crowds cheering their liberation. Over the next several weeks, as the generals prepared to depart in a gentlemanly way and President Aristide impatiently waited in the U.S. to end his three-year exile, the Haitian army was neutralized and a few (but not all) of the junta's (and CIA's?) gangs were disarmed.

Congress hesitantly lauded President Clinton for preventing bloodshed although he bypassed the House and Senate when he declared that invasion of Haiti was imminent, creating an outcry that the President was circumventing the Constitution, which he was: But the bloodless insertion of troops by sea and air tempered criticism, and a somewhat mollified Congress said U.S. troops should be removed from Haiti as soon as possible. Though most Americans seem ambivalent and take a wait and see attitude, popular ratings for intervention in Haiti remain low despite the operation's smoothness so far. Clinton's paradox is somewhat like Lincoln's, who vigorously opposed the 1846 War with Mexico yet committed the nation to Civil War. Similarity might expand from there. Lincoln was determined to preserve the Union at any cost (though he later decided emancipation of slavery was his most important act); Clinton, who conscientiously avoided Vietnam, might very well have re-engaged the U.S. into active dominance of the western hemisphere which was first emphasized in the Monroe Doctrine.

The post Cold War division of the world between North and South opens up as many opportunities as dangers. NAFTA is an example of the vast human resources available for exploitation in what is more realistically the *2nd World* following the collapse of Soviet communism. Western industrial nations seem no longer able to afford their own technologies and export them to poor nations that operate the machinery for chickenfeed. Economic supremacy, though still dependent on military superiority, is able to perpetuate itself by its own momentum in underdeveloped nations that are greedy for industrial growth and willing to sacrifice labor and ecology. The world's only remaining superpower busily transforms its vast southern plantation into a huge factory in a marvel of post-industrial neocolonialism that combines judicious use of military force with economic boycott.

Octavio Paz wrote that Latin American democracies continue to falter because they attempt to mimic democratic forms without "the critical and modern intellectual current" out of which Western democracy grew. The counterpoint is that most Latin American democracies falter because the northern giant suppresses any genuine liberation movement that might challenge its supremacy in the hemisphere. Comic opera dictators might ruthlessly rule their people without interference as long they maintain U.S. commercial and political dominance in their nations. True democracy in Latin America has long been considered inimical to U.S. interests and most opportunities for critical and modern intellectual currents of democratic development are usually suppressed.

Yet democracy incites ever increasing numbers despite the brutal response of American puppets, and despite its own callous repression of libertarian movements covertly or overtly, the U.S. is often the model of independence sought by indigenous rebels. If the U.S. really intends to democratize the western hemisphere it must first quit exploiting and treating as less than equal the other people who live here. That would require acting as if Americans really do believe in democracy.

-MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER