

Send in the Marines—Again

Three occupations later, Haiti is not even a state (much less a democracy)—and is not likely to become one anytime soon.

By William S. Lind

THE MARINES HAVE LANDED and the situation is not well in hand, nor will it ever be. I am speaking, of course, of Haiti, that boil on the Western Hemisphere's posterior that no plaster can ever cure. In the 18th century, Haiti was so rich, thanks to the sugar trade, that it alone provided two-thirds of the value of France's overseas commerce. Today, Haiti is so poor that the average American dog probably lives better than the average Haitian.

Once again, American troops have been given "mission impossible": creating a state. While Haiti is an extreme case, what it represents, the disappearance of the state, is becoming more and more common. As in Somalia, much of West Africa, Afghanistan, and (thanks to an American invasion) Iraq, when the state vanishes, the vacuum it leaves is filled not by one new element but by many, of many different kinds: gangs, religions, militias, mahdis, business enterprises, mobs, wannabe mercenaries, you name it. State militaries, which are designed to fight other state militaries much like themselves, do not know what to do. First they find themselves targets of enemies they cannot distinguish from the civilian population. Then they get caught in the middle of the locals' battles with each other. And finally they leave, simply unable to cope. The chaos remains, unless and until some local tyrant arises who can impose a welcome if oppressive peace.

But I forget: just ten years ago, we solved all of Haiti's problems. Applying the neocons' prescription for the whole world, we sent in thousands of American troops, overthrew the "undemocratic" Haitian government, and installed Haiti's Mr. Chalabi, Monsieur Aristide. (One wonders where we find these people; is there a temp agency for them, Rent-a-Quisling?) We also spent around \$3 billion, which, in a memorable phrase from the *New York Times*, "has washed away like the soil on Haiti's denuded hills." Yet for some incomprehensible reason, democracy backed by American bayonets failed to turn Haiti into Switzerland. It's probably because we forgot to teach them how to make cuckoo clocks and put holes in cheese.

More, Monsieur Aristide, from the relative safety of Jamaican exile, now accuses the United States of having given him the bum's rush. The charge is probably false—men whose resumes include "ex-priest" are generally not of the highest moral character—but Aristide is clever enough to know it will resonate in a world grown doubtful of America's intentions. The Bush administration's attempt to play innocents abroad while simultaneously waging war on behalf of Brave New World is not universally applauded. In Haiti, Aristide's claim to retain the imperial purple will encourage his gangs to continue the fight—or at least the looting.

Haiti is in fact a fair test of the neocons' thesis, which we are now putting to further trials in the Middle East. Their core argument is that history and culture simply do not matter. Everyone in the world wants a New World Order of "democratic capitalism," and everyone is also capable of it. To think otherwise is to commit the sin of "historicism."

The argument is absurd on the face of it. History and culture don't matter? Not only do the failed cultures and disastrous histories of most of the world argue the contrary, so does our own history and culture. Democratic capitalism (the real variety) first developed in one place, England, over an historical course that goes back almost a thousand years, to the Magna Carta. America was born as an independent country to guarantee the rights of Englishmen. If England had possessed the culture of, say, Mongolia, can anyone with the slightest grasp on reality think we would be what we are today?

Haiti is the other side of the same coin. Haiti is the godawful pit that it is because of its history and culture. If the people on Haiti were replaced tomorrow by, for example, Swedes, can anyone even pretend to believe that it would remain the same?

The fantastical nature of Haitian culture was illustrated by an incident during our last occupation of Haiti in the 1990s. A Haitian woman ran up to an American soldier, writhing and screaming. "What

is she saying?” the soldier asked an interpreter. The interpreter replied, “She is yelling that someone has put a curse on her, and she is shrinking.” The soldier, a quick-thinking lad, reached into his pack and pulled out an envelope of instant coffee. He tore the envelope open and sprinkled the contents over the woman’s head, shouting out the Notre Dame fight song as he sprinkled. Through the interpreter, he then told the Haitian she was cured. She went home happy.

No one of lesser powers than the Archangel Michael’s can do anything with such a place. No system—not fascism, not communism, not “democratic capitalism” a.k.a. Brave New World, not monarchy (theocracy might be the best bet)—can make Haiti work. It is as predestined as any Calvinist, predestined to the non-state life as Hobbes described it. No political theory, least of all the vapid and simplistic theory of the neocons, can alter that reality.

So what are our Marines to do? Anyone can take Haiti: Poland could take Haiti, Luxembourg could take Haiti, the New York Police Department could take Haiti. But then what? We

seem to have decided on the best bet for step two: hand the problem to somebody else, in this case the UN with (we hope) Brazil assuming command of the occupation force. Longer term, the least bad option is probably to choose one of the less brutal local thugs from what passes as the Haitian upper class and to install him as the new “Big Man.” Bring back the Haitian Army, and let it reassume its traditional local monopoly on crime, which is preferable to intense criminal competition. Buy protection for humanitarian efforts to feed the starving, run a few schools and provide some jobs. Make sure the U.S. Coast Guard keeps up its patrols so everyone knows they cannot get to Miami.

But the neocons do not deal with reality. The theory that everybody wants the neoconservative version of “democratic capitalism” says nothing about practical application, but it says a great deal about its proponents. First, it tells us that they are ideologues. All ideologies posit that certain things must be true, regardless of any evidence to the contrary. That evidence is to be suppressed, along with the people who insist on pointing to it. Sadly, the neocons have

been able to do exactly that within the Bush administration, and the mess in Iraq is the price.

Second, it reveals the nature of the neocon ideology, which has nothing whatsoever to do with conservatism. As Russell Kirk wrote, conservatism is the negation of ideology. The neocons are in fact Jacobins, the vipers of the French Revolution who also tried to export human rights (which are very different from the concrete, specific rights of Englishmen) on bayonets. Then, the effort eventually united all of Europe against France. Today, it is uniting the rest of the world against America.

Finally it reveals the neocons as fools, lightweights who can dismiss history and culture because they know nothing of history or culture. The first generation of neocons were serious intellectuals—Trotskyites, but serious Trotskyites. The generation now in power in Washington is made up of *poseurs* who happen to have the infighting skills of the Sopranos. Perhaps it was America’s turn to have its foreign policy captured by a gang of ignorant and reckless adventurers. It has happened to others: Russia before the Russo-Japanese War, Japan in the 1930s.

Reality was best summed up by a Haitian shopkeeper, Regine Santil, who was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, “We have proved through the years that we are incapable of running this country. But didn’t the Americans who brought Aristide back 10 years ago know that this day would come?” As it will in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and anywhere else American troops are sent by the neocons’ march of folly. ■

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Abusing the Holocaust

The overused analogy misdirects American policy.

By Michael C. Desch

THE HOLOCAUST has become one of the central historical analogies for thinking about U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War world. Discussions of U.S.-Israeli relations and debates about humanitarian intervention are invariably couched in the rhetoric of the Holocaust. According to *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen, the Holocaust analogy is now so widely accepted that it has become today's equivalent of the "Munich analogy." The most recent example of this is Richard Perle and David Frum's claim in their new book that we face either "victory or holocaust" in the War on Terror.

Among most Americans, the received wisdom about the Holocaust is that the United States and the rest of the civilized world turned away Jews seeking to escape Nazi Germany before World War II and then sat idly by while the Third Reich murdered six million of them. In effect, the Jews were callously abandoned in their moment of peril although there was ample opportunity before and during the war to save them. In light of this reprehensible indifference, the United States shares some responsibility for the Holocaust, and it must "never again" watch passively as large numbers of people are slaughtered because of their race, ethnicity, or religion.

The rhetoric of recent presidents shows how accepted the Holocaust analogy is in American political life. "Out of our memory of the Holocaust,"

Jimmy Carter enjoined, "we must forge an unshakable oath with all civilized people that never again will the world stand silent, never again will the world fail to act in time to prevent this terrible crime of genocide." At the groundbreaking for the U.S. Holocaust Museum, George H.W. Bush admonished the audience, "Here we will learn that each of us bears responsibility for our actions and for our failure to act. Here we will learn that we must intervene when we see evil arise." Finally, at the inauguration of the Holocaust Museum, Bill Clinton concurred: "For those of us here today representing the nations of the West, we must live forever with this knowledge: Even as our fragmentary awareness of crimes grew into indisputable facts, far too little was done."

The deeply held belief that the United States should never again behave like it did in response to the Holocaust has two concrete policy implications. To begin with, policymakers invariably insist that the United States should unequivocally support the state of Israel. Richard Nixon, who was no philo-Semite, admitted in 1994, "No American President will let Israel go down the tubes [because] Israel is a haven for millions whose families endured incredible suffering during the Holocaust." "The Holocaust underlined, in the starkest terms, the moral basis for Israel's founding," Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) recently wrote in *Reader's*

Digest. "In standing by Israel, we are merely being true to ourselves. If we ever turned our backs on Israel, we would be abandoning the principles that built our nation."

Moreover, it is an article of faith among American elites that the United States has a moral responsibility to stop virtually any mass killing, especially genocides. For example, Congressman Steve Solarz (D-NY) and Brookings Institution analyst Michael O'Hanlon write, "We cannot bring back to life the victims of the Holocaust and the other genocides that have been among the cardinal characteristics of the century in which we live. But if we can resolve to prevent future genocides and mass killings when possible, the sacrifices and sufferings of those who lost their lives in the gas chambers of Nazi-occupied Europe and the killing fields of Cambodia and Rwanda will not have been entirely in vain." In a recent *Washington Post* interview the architect of the Bush administration's war on Iraq, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, cited the international community's failure to act in the face of Nazi extermination of the Jews as a compelling reason why the United States had to depose Saddam Hussein. This rationale has become even more important now, one suspects, as it appears that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction or meaningful links to al-Qaeda.