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## Bush undermined Haiti democracy

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So much for all that talk about democracy. President Bush dispatched Marines to Haiti to secure order -- after his administration forced the elected leader of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide -- into exile. Now the administration will determine who gets to run Haiti.

For the Bush administration it was clear: The Haitian voters had put their faith in and cast their votes for the wrong man, so he had to go. Bush then ridiculously announced that the "Haitian constitution is working" -- as if words could turn night into day.

Aristide was a huge disappointment to his followers. He made, as the leaders of the State Department say, "many mistakes." Mostly he failed to find a way to reconcile the greed of the Haitian elite with the needs of the vast majority of impoverished Haitian people. He could never curb the violence of either his followers or his enemies. And he presided over an administration that grew more intolerant and corrupt. But he was the choice of the Haitian people.

The U.S. government never liked Aristide. The neocons loathed him as a messianic dreamer who believed in redistribution of wealth. The CIA's covert operators viewed him as an ideological adversary. The Haitian elites enlisted lobbyists from both parties to undermine him. The Haitian military, which he disbanded, despised him.

So when the Haitian "opposition," led by that same elite, fed the thugs, former death squad killers, gun-runners and drug dealers who formed the armed rebellion against Aristide, the United States did nothing.

As the rebellion started taking over cities, freeing prisoners and condoning widespread looting, the Bush administration -- alarmed at the political fallout that might result from Haitian refugees flooding into Florida -- decided to act. It pressured Aristide to accept a coalition government that would be led by the opposition.

But the opposition leaders, smelling blood, refused, demanding Aristide's departure. They suffered no negative consequences. The Bush administration did nothing to suggest it would stand by the elected leader of Haiti. Instead, it ramped up the pressure on Aristide and forced him into exile. A democratically elected leader was toppled with the aid of the U.S. administration.

Now the United States is once more responsible for Haiti's fate. Once more, the elites are clamoring for a return to their former privilege. Once more the United States will have to decide how or whether to build a police force that can provide security. Once more the United States will have to decide if it has the will and the patience and the generosity to build basic infrastructure in Haiti essential to creating any kind of a functioning economy that operates beyond the level of legalized theft.

The toppling of a democratically elected president -- however flawed his administration -- should not be treated as business as usual. We need congressional hearings to probe the administration's role in this debacle. Was the CIA connected to its former agents that were leading the rebellion? Did Bush hold off any assistance to Aristide in order to force his exit?

With Republicans in control of both houses of Congress, and Republican leaders still marching in lockstep with the White House, rigorous hearings will be hard to achieve. Independent commissions and investigative journalists must take up the task.

This coup sends a chilling message to leaders across the world. Turns out all that rhetoric about supporting democracy as a centerpiece of U.S. policy is just words, not policy.

This administration values governments that protect private investment and stability for U.S. multinationals. Stable dictatorships are preferred to unstable democracies. So it runs up massive trade deficits and maintains cordial relations with the repressive, communist dictatorship of China, while it topples the elected president of Haiti.

As we learned in Florida four years ago, Bush is all for elections, but only if they come out the right way.

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