

## **U.S. Policy Appears to Deter Haitian Refugees;**

### **State Department Asks OAS to Consider Sending Mission to Help Restore Democracy, Order**

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## **Body**

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Fewer Haitians appear to be fleeing their island by boat as a result of the Bush administration's May 24 decision to force back virtually anyone found trying to leave by sea.

The number of people intercepted by the Coast Guard showed little change for the first few days after President Bush announced the policy; more than 1,000 Haitians were picked up on May 29, for example.

But none has been picked up in the last two days, administration officials said, and only four boats were intercepted in the prior three days. They expressed cautious optimism that the exodus would continue to slow, enabling them to shut down a tent city on the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where Haitian refugees had been taken until immigration officials could examine their asylum requests.

In addition, the State Department yesterday asked members of the Organization of American States to consider sending an OAS-sponsored mission to help restore democracy and maintain security in Haiti.

Administration officials said that a cable outlining U.S. ideas for the mission was sent to several members of the 34-nation OAS. The sources cautioned, however, that there is no indication the plan would be acceptable to deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was overthrown by the military in a Sept. 30 coup, or to the nation's current military government.

The latest plan is a variant of previous ideas that have been rejected. This time, the officials said, the plan spells out clearly that the civilian mission would have some kind of security component. The proposal last October also spoke of maintaining security, but under the new plan, officials said, "security" would mean some kind of military force, both to protect OAS civilians and to act as a buffer between the Haitian military and Aristide's supporters.

The precise composition, size and origin of this security force has not been resolved, the officials said. They stressed that under no circumstances would it be an invasion force imposed on Haiti but would have to be invited to the Caribbean nation. The U.S. cable said, however, that if the OAS was not amenable to sending a security force, the United Nations might be considered as an alternative. If these proposals are accepted, the officials said, the OAS would lift its economic embargo imposed last October that has wrecked Haiti's economy.

Major players in the Haitian political scheme -- the military, Aristide and other prominent political and business leaders -- would first have to make a consensus choice of a prime minister, who would assume control of the government and prepare the way for Aristide's return.

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Some officials said the new plan, first reported in today's editions of the New York Times, was prompted by the nomination Tuesday of Marc Bazin as prime minister. Bazin is a former Haitian finance minister and World Bank executive who has close ties to Haiti's business leaders. U.S. officials said there is concern among OAS members that Bazin's appointment by the military government might exacerbate the confrontation between the opposing sides.

Much of the problem stems from the fact that the coup originated among rank-and-file soldiers who feared Aristide's vows to radically reform the army. The soldiers have exercised a veto over the army's commander, Gen. Raoul Cedras, frustrating his past attempts to reach a settlement with the OAS.

While there have been reports of dissension within the Haitian armed forces, a senior U.S. official said last night, "We have no indication that the army still is not firmly in control of Haiti, just the vaguest hints of some strain."

In New York, a federal judge yesterday decided not to stop the forced repatriations of refugees, an action one official said would reinforce the administration's message that it was not worth it to try to leave Haiti.

Since the coup, "the numbers [of boat people] have gone up and down," a State Department official said, "so no one is going to make a definitive prediction" that the numbers of refugees will not go up again. "But people are not setting off as much as before," he said, and "it appears the policy is having that effect."

"One thing that's for certain," a U.S. official said in Port-au-Prince, "the word is out. People do know" about the change in policy. "It's out there in the provinces" with constant radio broadcasts. "We've blanketed the airwaves with the announcement," he said.

Several Haitians interviewed yesterday near Petit Goave, a departure center about 50 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince, said they were aware of the policy.

Mackino Virgil, 26, who said he had been sent back from Guantanamo Bay twice, said, "fewer people are taking boats now because they know they are just going to lose their money. They are not keeping Haitians in Guantanamo, they are closing the base down."

Virgil, who said he sold everything he owned and borrowed money to pay for his two trips -- \$ 40 for the first and \$ 60 for the second -- said he heard about the new policy on teledyol, a Creole expression for word of mouth. He said he might try again at some point.

He and several other Haitians said local police had begun to harass and crack down on people trying to build boats in which to flee, but no one was sure why the police had adopted that policy after months of looking the other way.

Virgil said that for now he was not going to try to leave. "Right now, people wouldn't take the chance. . . . Nobody is going to pay money for this now," he said. But he said there was no work in Haiti and no security.

Joblessness and poverty have increased as a result of the economic embargo designed to force the return of democracy to Haiti. Critics have said the embargo is only causing needless suffering and is not tight enough to have any effect on the military-backed government or its wealthy supporters.

As Virgil spoke, four cargo ships anchored at the busy contraband port unloaded cargo onto dozens of rowboats. Some of the cargo included boxes labeled toilet paper from Hialeah, Fla., and wheat flour from Omaha.

Some Haitians said they would try to flee again despite the new policy. "I'm just not staying here," said Jose Luis Oreste, 21, a mechanic who was returned from Guantanamo Bay in April. "I'm living in a country that does not offer you any opportunities."

At the same time, the administration has accelerated the numbers returned from the Navy base in Cuba. In addition to 2,878 returned directly to Haiti since May 25, more than 4,000 have been sent back from Guantanamo Bay. The

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new **policy** requires those seeking asylum to apply in Haiti and eases the criteria for approval. A **U.S.** official at the embassy said yesterday that about 2,400 Haitians had applied in recent weeks.

Since the new **policy**, the population at Guantanamo Bay dropped from just over the 12,500 level that **U.S.** officials insist is the most the base can hold, to about 8,600 yesterday. Among them are more than 2,600 who have been granted approval to come to the **United States** to pursue their asylum claims, and more than 2,700 others whose claims have been denied and are awaiting return to Haiti. The Immigration and Naturalization Service estimated that processing the remaining applicants will be completed within two weeks.

In the New York court ruling, **U.S.** District Judge Sterling Johnson Jr. said he had no choice but to uphold the administration's **policy** even though the Haitians might be headed to "the jaws of political persecution, terror, death and uncertainty" when the **United States** had a treaty saying it would not do so.

An attorney for the **refugee** groups who sued to block the **policy** said the ruling would be appealed. Other suits are pending in the New York appeals court and in an appeals court in Atlanta.

Staff writer Lee Hockstader contributed to this report from Port-au-Prince.

## Graphic

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CHART, GROUNDED

## Classification

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Language: ENGLISH

**Subject:** US PRESIDENTS (90%); HEADS OF **STATE** & GOVERNMENT (89%); PRIME MINISTERS (86%); NAVIES (78%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); **STATE DEPARTMENTS** & FOREIGN SERVICES (78%); **REFUGEES** (78%); EXECUTIVES (77%); ARMED FORCES (77%); TYPES OF GOVERNMENT (77%); ECONOMIC **POLICY** (76%); IMMIGRATION (74%); US NAVY (74%); PUBLIC FINANCE (73%); COUPS (72%); **DEMOCRACIES** (72%); MILITARY RULE (70%); UNITED NATIONS (69%); INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORGANIZATIONS (69%); POLITICAL ASYLUM (69%); UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTIONS (68%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (68%); PUBLIC FINANCE AGENCIES & TREASURIES (62%); EMBARGOES & SANCTIONS (60%)

**Company:** ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN **STATES** ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN **STATES** (93%); ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN **STATES** (83%)

**Organization:** ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN **STATES** (93%); ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN **STATES** (83%); ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN **STATES** ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN **STATES** (93%); ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN **STATES** (83%)

**Industry:** NAVIES (78%); ARMED FORCES (77%); BANKING & FINANCE (76%); US NAVY (74%); PUBLIC FINANCE AGENCIES & TREASURIES (62%)

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**Geographic:** HAITI (97%); **UNITED STATES** (94%); CUBA (90%); CARIBBEAN ISLANDS (79%)

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