



The Rhetoric of Dependence and Reconstruction in Haiti

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The beginning of 2010 was marked by a devastating earthquake in Haiti of a 7.0 magnitude, which left approximately 220,000 dead and one million people homeless. These events captured worldwide attention, as significant efforts to mobilize aid and assistance to Haiti were undertaken. United Nations organizations, aid agencies, non-governmental organizations and various national governments began pouring into Haiti in abundance. It was claimed that in addition to the widespread humanitarian crisis evidenced by the shortage of food, shelter and water, there was also a significant security concern. In the weeks following the earthquake, the United Nations sent 2,000 additional troops and 1,500 police and the United States sent 10,000 soldiers to the country to assist with the earthquake aid effort. The American soldiers also assisted with security, as there was reported looting and other acts of lawlessness in Haiti. A number of news sources commented on the difficulty that organizations were facing with the distribution of aid. Now that the immediate humanitarian emergency situation has subsided, attention has shifted to Haiti's future. Despite the fact that Haiti is currently receiving less international coverage, the gravity of the situation has far from declined. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the primary focus was the restoration of basic needs. Today, however, the focus is on the extension of relief into reconstruction and development.

The profound effects of the earthquake not only resulted in significant human loss, but also penetrated to the core of Haiti's infrastructure. The areas requiring attention are vast as they encompass education, infrastructure, economic issues and agriculture. A report of the Inter-American Development Bank estimated that the approximate damage in Haiti ranged between \$7.2 billion to \$13.2 billion. Eduardo A. Cavallo, Andrew Powell and Oscar Becerra, the authors of the report, stated that it was important to grasp the enormity of these numbers, as it would be "useful to put this event into perspective and to inform the international community of the enormity of the challenge that lies ahead in the task of reconstructing Haiti." Implicit in



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this report is the fact that the reconstruction cannot be handled by Haiti alone, as the country will require extensive international assistance.

Although the Haitian leaders seconded widespread international support, the assistance required is comprehensive in nature and enters the realm of a long-term state-building exercise. Several ideas have been presented to deal with the power vacuum in Haiti. One plan proposed by Paul Collier, a development economist, entailed the establishment of a temporary authority with extensive powers to act. This would be instituted under the aegis of the UN and an *ad hoc* group composed of a number of countries. The reconstruction of Haiti by the international community has sparked debates. Moreover, in a speech presented in February, U.S President Barack Obama, connected the idea of nation-building in Haiti to ushering in greater stability in the region. The earthquake served to exacerbate the situation in Haiti, which was already struggling as a country. For instance, in 2009, the Failed State Index, which assesses the propensity for conflict in a country, labelled it as "red alert", with a score of 101.8.

An Article in the *Miami Herald* published towards the end of January 2010 alluded to the trusteeship model as it proposed that once the immediate crisis situation subsides, "Haitians should request a formalisation of the country's dependence on the international community, i.e., a 25-year United Nations Protectorate (or some analogous political designation similar to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo) ..." It continued by stating that a framework of this nature would result in greater efficiency for all the *ad hoc* structures, which have currently been enacted to help with the reconstruction of the infrastructure as well as the maintenance of law, civil order and promotion of human rights. However, this is very controversial as it resonates clearly with an imperial mandate.

Haiti has been marked by a long history of imperial domination. In 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered the island of Hispaniola. The Spanish presence in 1496 was the first European settlement in the Western Hemisphere. Half of the island was relinquished to the French in 1697. Although Haiti proclaimed its independence in 1804, it continued to face immense political instability. Between 1843 and 1915, the country faced political instability due to frequent changes in its leadership. In 1815, the United States invaded Haiti. Although the U.S. left Haiti in 1934, they still maintained fiscal control over the country until 1947. Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier took control of the country by a military coup in 1956 and instated a dictatorship, which blatantly disregarded human rights. After his death in 1971, his son, Jean-Claude "Baby-Doc", assumed power until 1986, when he fled the country due to mounting hostility to his leadership. Since then, Haiti has been plagued by widespread political instability, as it has alternated between civilian and military regimes. In 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected President. Aristide's rule, however, was not long lasting, as there was a military coup only one year after his



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arrival to power. This resulted in the imposition of American sanctions and a subsequent U.S. invasion in 1994, with the purpose of ensuring that the civilian government was placed under Aristide again. At this point, the UN became involved and replaced the US forces. In 1996, under UN supervised elections, René Préval was declared the victor. Another election followed in 2000, in which Aristide resumed power once again. He retained power until 2004, when he was forced to leave the country. Boniface Alexandre, President of the Supreme Court, replaced Aristide. Since then, a series of elections have followed. The most recent President, René Préval was elected in the general election in 2006. This brief historical overview captures the rather lengthy experience Haiti has faced with external interference and the volatility it has undergone since independence. In the wake of the recent events, the work of aid organizations who have been working in Haiti for the past decade have been re-evaluated. Economist, Paul Collier, maintains that much of the relief work prior to the earthquake was largely un-coordinated and ineffective. Therefore, he has called for a more intensive and efficient recovery plan, one that would largely resemble a "Marshall Plan" for Haiti.

When examining the situation in Haiti today, the recent agreements that have been enacted and large presence of foreign NGO'S in Haiti, it is apparent that Haiti is relying on the international community. Attempts to conduct external state-building has a long history. Over the centuries, several headings have been invoked to justify intervention in the domestic affairs of another country or territory. They have manifested themselves in the form of protectorates, dependencies, mandates, and trusteeships. In order to grasp some of the components of this practice, it is important to understand its historical foundations. In the 16th century, Spanish jurist and theologian Francisco de Vitoria wrote extensively on the legal justification of Spanish rule over the Indians of the New World. He first articulated the concept of trusteeship, whereby property is overseen by one party for the benefit of another. In essence, the property is held in trust. This trust relationship is invoked due to the fact that one of the parties is perceived as weaker and therefore requiring assistance from the other. He maintained that the inhabitants of the territory were incapable of managing their own affairs and would consequently be overseen by an external and more capable authority, in this instance, the Spaniards. According to de Vitoria, the exercise of authority was only justified on the condition that "everything is done for the benefit and the good of the barbarians, and not merely for the profit of the Spaniards."

During the centuries that followed, this form of supervision, where the emphasis was placed on the responsibility and duty of the intervening power, was perpetuated and invoked to justify other cases. For instance, during the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Great Britain was assigned the task of assuming a "protectorate" over the Ionian Islands. This built upon some of the principles which had been introduced by De



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Vitoria. According to international law, a protectorate is an autonomous territory which receives a degree of military or diplomatic protection by a stronger state. It is important to note that it does not entail the complete removal of power from the entity undergoing state protection.. However, no specific stipulations were established regarding the nature and scope of the supervision. Similarly, in 1860, France was granted the authority to bring troops to Lebanon to protect the Christian communities. There were a number of other instances of this form of power relationship.

World War I ushered in changes and marked the beginning of a new era of international administration and state-building. This was largely facilitated by the creation of the League of Nations. Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, introduced the mandate system, and also served to legally entrench the concept of trusteeship. The mandate system, which was applied to the dismembered territories of the Ottoman and German Empire, essentially determined that the inhabitants of these territories were not fit to govern themselves. As a result, these inhabitants were placed under the supervision of more capable powers, with the ultimate objective of leading them to self-government. The administration of these territories was supervised by the League of Nations, to ensure that no abuses were committed. This relationship was supposed to serve as a "sacred trust of civilization". There were 14 mandates in total with varying degrees of supervision, which were subsumed under the following categories 'A', 'B' and 'C' mandates. The categories were determined by the degree to which they were deemed to be "civilized". The fact that this administration was under the ultimate authority of the League was relevant, as it served to internationalize and institutionalize the concept of trusteeship. It also signified that the mandatory powers would be publicly held accountable for their administration, as they had to submit annual reports to the League regarding the nature of their supervision.

Although the mandate system was dismantled after the demise of the League of Nations, its primary principles were carried out under the auspices of the United Nations Trusteeship system, which was anchored in Chapter VII of the charter of the United Nations. Even though changes and reforms were implemented, the basic principles remained the same. For instance, the UN was similarly entrusted with the task of undertaking the well-being of various territories that were deemed incapable of governing themselves. Just as the mandate system was ultimately supposed to lead to self-government, the trusteeship system was supposed to oversee the process of decolonisation. Although it received less criticism than the mandate system, its record is still far from perfect.

It is interesting to note that the mandate and trusteeship systems were revisited by a number of academics during the "failed state frenzy", which began after the end of the Cold War. A significant document, which marked the re-entrance of these ideals on



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the international community, was the 2001 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty's Report, "The Responsibility to Protect". This document emphasized that the onus falls on the international community to intervene and afford protection in the event that a state is unable or unwilling to do so. The embryonic form of trusteeships was seen in various peacekeeping operations such as Kosovo, East Timor and Afghanistan, to name a few. In essence, some of the ideas, which were introduced by de Vitoria and implemented during the mandate system, never truly disappeared. They continue to be circulated, refurbished and re-packaged.

The immediate presence of the American troops on the ground was met with controversy as some have said that the Americans were using this as a pretext for a new form of imperialism. However, the United States was not the only external presence on the terrain, as Haiti was assisted by an influx of international non-governmental organizations and countries that were keen to assist. In March, a donor conference was held in New York, convened by the US and United Nations with the cooperation of the government of Haiti and participation of Brazil, Canada, the European Union, France and Spain. Approximately 60 countries and institutions pledged \$ 9.9 billion for Haiti. Mr. Préval, the Haitian President was present in New York to discuss plans of Haiti's long-term recovery. Despite the fact that Préval admitted that Haiti is in dire need of international assistance, he still wants to ensure that the Haitian government is not entirely bypassed in the process of reconstruction. Gabriel Verret, senior economic adviser to Mr. Préval re-iterated this by saying that it is frustrating when the donors assess the needs of Haiti's future but leave the Haitian government out of the process. In order to avoid this, an interim reconstruction commission was created and will be directed by Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive and former U.S. President, Bill Clinton. The bill approving this commission was established by the International donors conference on March 31st. The Haitian parliament also consented to the creation of this commission, which grants foreign donors the right to determine and partake in the rebuilding of Haiti. Efforts have been made to integrate Haitian government officials, representatives from trade unions and businesses, in order to ensure that Haiti is not passive in the reconstruction process.

On April 12th, Michelle Obama visited Haiti and met with President René Préval and his wife who expressed gratitude for all that the United States has done. A White House statement maintained that the purpose of the visit was to "underscore to the Haitian people and the Haitian government the enduring US commitment to help Haiti recover". In the spring, an article, in *The Economist*, referred to Haiti as having been "disabled" and rendered into a state of complete invisibility after the earthquake. Haiti's state of utter dependence on the international community has been stressed continually. However, as seen in the makeup of the Interim Haitian Reconstruction Commission, efforts have been made to integrate Haitian officials. A significant sum



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of money has been pledged by a number of countries and institutions. However, many political analysts are questioning whether Haiti can effectively translate this money into good public policy. The events in Haiti after the earthquake demonstrate that the rhetoric of dependence and the need to rely on more capable powers has never really disappeared.

Further Readings

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