

Bob Dole



NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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HAITI OCCUPATION

U.S. POLICY GOES FROM "MISSION CREEP" TO "MISSION LEAP,"
IGNORES LESSONS OF SOMALIA; TIME TO SET BENCHMARKS
FOR REAL WITHDRAWAL

WASHINGTON -- Senate Republican Leader Bob Dole today issued the following statement:

Televised images of bloody Haitian-on-Haitian violence reinforce questions the American people have about the U.S. military occupation of Haiti. The Administration told Congress last week that 15,000 troops would be the upper limit of our deployment. By week's end, some 20,000 American soldiers were deployed in Haiti. Some U.S. Marines are leaving Cap Haitien, but they are being replaced by the U.S. Army.

After the President and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said U.S. troops would not become Haiti's police force, American troops are televised arresting Haitians, patrolling streets, halting looters, and even detaining police officers. That sounds like police work to me. Administration spokespersons claim the U.S. military is not an occupation force, but American soldiers took over newspapers and radio stations. That sounds like occupation to me.

American Forces Should Not Become Haiti's Police Force

The administration said American forces would not get involved in Haitian-on-Haitian violence. Yet, American forces now monitor the police, disarm Haitians, and rush to the scene of shootings and violence. Most disturbing, the administration does not seem to understand the road it is on. This weekend, Deputy Secretary of Defense Deutch claimed the policy "has been the same since the day we began planning the mission to Haiti" and that "the mission has not changed one bit."

If it's the same policy, the Administration has not been telling the Congress and the American people the same story. The size, mission and rules of engagement for American forces change constantly. This is not just "mission creep," it's mission leap.

American policy should stay with the mission explained to Congress: American military forces should not become the police force in Haiti. And, American military forces should not be in the business of disarming the Haitian populace. It would be folly to make every gun-owning Haitian an automatic enemy of the U.S. presence.

Policy Moving in Wrong Direction

America has no interests at stake which justify the occupation of Haiti. American policy is moving in the wrong direction -- more troops, more missions, and more responsibility for governing Haiti. The administration seems to think that everything will work out fine once the mission is handed off to the United Nations. This ignores the major lesson of Somalia. Exchanging American command for United Nations command is not likely to improve the situation in Haiti or get American forces out with minimal casualties. The Administration needs to set benchmarks for real withdrawal -- starting with the return of Aristide and ending with the parliamentary elections.

Every day of television images leads to a new shift in policy. The only plan for the future is for American forces to switch helmets -- from American green to United Nations blue. With mission creep, changing goals, vague objectives and little clear exit strategy, the echoes of Mogadishu can be clearly heard in Port au Prince.