

THE US PREVENTED BABYDOC FROM RETURNING IN 2006, WHY NOT NOW?

Five years ago, BabyDoc Duvalier applied for a passport for Haiti, threatening to return in a period leading up to elections. As a series of Wikileaks cables make clear, the US pressed hard—with apparent success—to prevent his return to Haiti. One cable shows the US asking France, on January 11, 2006, whether it could prevent Duvalier from leaving that country. Another shows the US raising concerns about Duvalier with Haiti Prime Minister Latortue that same day, and again on January 16. And the US raised the same concerns with the Dominican Republic, first (as far as we can tell from the cables) on January 11 and then again on February 7, 2006.

Over the course of those conversations, the US government tried the following methods to keep Duvalier from returning to Haiti and disrupting the elections:

- Asking France to help convince Haiti's interim government to refuse Duvalier the passport (which failed)
- Asking Latortue to prevent Duvalier from boarding any plane to Haiti
- Asking Latortue to use informal communication channels to ask Duvalier not to return
- Getting a commitment from Foreign Minister Herard Abraham, after he had issued

the passport, to do anything else he could to prevent Duvalier's return

- Getting Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernandez to prohibit Duvalier from entering his country in transit to Haiti

All of which raises the question why, if the US prevented Duvalier from returning in 2006, they were either unable or chose not to prevent his return this time?

Interestingly, the Guardian provides some background of these efforts in 2006. But they focus entirely on one cable recording discussions with Dominican Republic (the rest of the cables were made available by Aftenposten, the Norwegian paper that somehow got its own set of cables). This has the effect of making it appear that US objections were equally to Duvalier and Aristide (both are mentioned in the cable, though it is clear Duvalier is the worry). Yet the rest of the cables make it clear that the US was panicked about Duvalier's return.

So is and was the US as concerned this time around about Duvalier's disruptive influence? Has it simply lost its influence with the various players (who might just be ready for a stronger influence in Haiti, given that country's problems)? Or did the US give tacit approval for Duvalier's return, either explicitly or by not making the same efforts this time around as they made in 2006?