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HAITI:

Rebel Soldiers Scuttle OAS Mediation

Rebel enlisted soldiers last night stormed the National Assembly and forced the legislators at gunpoint to declare the presidency vacant, apparently to preempt a negotiated settlement between the General Staff and the OAS. Parliament appointed Supreme Court Justice Joseph Nerette, a 67-year-old political unknown, as interim president; however, he has not yet accepted the position. At the same time, [redacted] soldiers took over the international airport and Haitian Armed Forces headquarters. The OAS delegation, which returned to the US last night following renewed negotiations with General Cedras and Deputy Commander Silva [redacted] had been optimistic about reaching a settlement. Meanwhile, according to press reports "thousands" of Port-au-Prince residents are fleeing the city in anticipation of renewed violence. [redacted]

[redacted] The enlisted men consistently have taken a tougher stand against President Aristide's return under any conditions, and the imposition of Nerette is intended to put in force constitutional provisions that would require a new election within 90 days. The assault underscores the inability of officers to control enlisted men and attempts on their part to reverse the Senate's initiative and get negotiations back on track would put them at serious risk. Meanwhile, the Senate's move may prompt more intense antigovernment activity by pro-Aristide populist groups, beginning a cycle of escalating repression and violence that would place Haitian and foreign noncombatants increasingly at risk. [redacted]

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