

Warning of new Haiti intervention

US troop deployment sparks protests in Dominican Republic

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The landing of hundreds of US troops at a port city in the Dominican Republic, barely 80 miles from the Haitian border, sparked protests and warnings that Washington may be preparing another military intervention aimed at quelling the popular unrest that has erupted in Haiti over attempts to rig the presidential election.

Some 800 US troops have disembarked at the Dominican port of Barahona as part of the “New Horizons” military exercise that is to extend for several months and will reportedly involve as many as 14,000 military personnel. The city is the closest major port in the Dominican Republic to the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince.

Hundreds of demonstrators marched on the US Embassy in Santo Domingo as well as on the US military camp in Barahona, approximately 120 miles southwest of the capital.

Demonstrators representing leftist, union and student groups presented a statement to a US Embassy official demanding the immediate withdrawal of the US troops.

“For Dominicans, the presence of foreign military troops on our soil is unacceptable ... even more so when these troops are from a nation that has invaded us militarily on two occasions on the pretext of ‘saving lives,’ with the result of thousands of deaths,” the statement read.

The Dominican Republic was invaded and occupied by US Marines in 1916, a year after they landed in Haiti. The Dominican occupation lasted for eight years, while the US forces stayed in Haiti until 1934.

Washington again invaded with some 23,000 troops in 1965 after fomenting a military coup to deny an election victory to left nationalist leader Juan Bosch.

After killing, wounding and imprisoning thousands of Dominicans, the US forces turned power over to the right-wing dictatorship of Joaquín Balaguer, which carried out a reign of terror over the next decade.

The statement continued, “We cannot remain indifferent to the landing of heavily equipped troops at such a delicate moment in the Caribbean, Latin America and the world and while the western part of the island [Haiti] is under intervention by the US and its allies in an action legalized by the United Nations (MINUSTAH). Perhaps the landing of the North American military troops in the Dominican Republic has as its objective the preparation of actions against the Haitian people if their political plans suffer reverses...”

At the gate to the military camp outside Barahona, the protest was confronted by Dominican army troops who pointed their rifles at the demonstrators.

On the same day as the protests in the Dominican Republic, a Haitian television station broadcast images of thousands of election ballots that had been thrown away at a Port-au-Prince dump. The bulk of these ballots appeared to have been cast for the frontrunner in the election held February 7, Rene Preval.

News of the discarded ballots sparked fresh protests, with barricades going up in various parts of the Haitian capital. The streets of the city are reportedly controlled by groups of demonstrators, with neither the police nor UN troops in evidence. It is widely believed in Haiti that the election results have been manipulated—with the connivance of Washington—to deny Preval a victory in the first round of balloting.

Haiti and the Dominican Republic share a 180-mile border that bisects the island of Hispaniola. The

political crisis in Haiti has prompted the Dominican armed forces to build up its troops on the border. “We are maintaining a more active vigilance to guard our border from the situation of confusion that exists in Haiti as a result of the elections,” an army intelligence officer told the Spanish news agency EFE.

The “New Horizons” exercise is billed as a humanitarian aid mission that includes the building of clinics and schools. Dominican opponents of the deployment, however, pointed out that the troops have come equipped with tanks, weapons and other combat gear. “If they want to build schools, let them do it in New Orleans,” the demonstrators chanted as they marched outside the camp in Barahona.

A statement posted on the web site of US SOUTHCOM, the military command covering Latin America and the Caribbean, noted that the Pentagon “uses these humanitarian exercises as a vehicle to train US forces.... These exercises also provide valuable mobilization and deployment experience. They require units to conduct the numerous training objectives that include logistical operations to support the deployments to remote regions.”

A precondition for this “humanitarian deployment” was the Dominican government’s signing of a waiver granting US troops immunity from prosecution for war crimes or other offenses before the International Criminal Court, a servile gesture that provoked widespread anger within the Dominican population.



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