

US military tightens grip on Haiti

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Amid the humanitarian tragedy following the January 12 earthquake in Haiti, Washington has concentrated on establishing indefinite military control of the country. Fearing mass protests and riots by desperate Haitians against inadequate rescue efforts, US logistical efforts are focused on massing tens of thousands of troops for use against the population.

Speaking yesterday on ABC television's "This Week" program, US General Ken Keen, who commands the military task force in Haiti, said US troops would "be here as long as needed." He confirmed there were roughly 4,200 US troops in Haiti, largely in cutters patrolling offshore, and that by today there would be 12,000 US troops in the country.

On Saturday, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Port-au-Prince at the invitation of Haitian President René Préval. She argued for the imposition of an emergency decree in Haiti, allowing for the imposition of curfews and martial-law conditions by US forces. Clinton explained: "The decree would give the government an enormous amount of authority, which in practice they would delegate to us."

The US government is also working with a force of roughly 7,000 Brazilian-led UN peacekeepers. Clinton commented, "We're being very thoughtful about how we support them."

Brazilian officials publicly commented on the risk that mass rioting could overpower international security forces in Haiti. On Friday, Brazil's Defense Minister Nelson Jobin had warned that the peacekeepers "could struggle" if there was large-scale protests: "We are concerned about security." The *Times* of London commented, "Haiti's capital could quickly descend into rioting if three million hungry, thirsty, and traumatised earthquake survivors don't receive emergency aid soon."

US officials are citing contradictory reports of looting in Haiti to justify further US troop deployments. Keen told ABC, "having a safe and secure environment is going to be very important. ... We have had incidents of violence that impede our ability to support the government of Haiti and answer the challenges that this country faces as they're

suffering a tragedy of epic proportions."

However, one official with the World Food Program (WFP) told the *New York Times*: "For the moment, the population is rather quiet. But we are seeing the first signs of violence and looting." The first signs included scuffles between Haitians as food aid is distributed to the population, and one incident in Pétionville, where police threw an alleged looter to an angry mob, who beat him and then burned him to death.

The US military has taken control of Port-au-Prince airport as a key hub of its military buildup, blocking access by humanitarian flights. Humanitarian flights from France, Brazil, and Italy were refused permission to land, and the Red Cross reported one of its planes was diverted to Santo Domingo, the capital of the neighboring Dominican Republic.

France's ambassador to Haiti, Didier le Bret, said France's foreign minister Bernard Kouchner had lodged a protest with the US State Department after the US blocked a French flight carrying an emergency field hospital. He added that Port-au-Prince airport was "not an airport for the international community. It's an annex of Washington. ... We were told it was an extreme emergency, there was need for a field hospital. We might be able to make a difference and save lives."

French officials later backed down from these statements. Presidential counselor Claude Guéant said, "The US, who have a very sizeable Haitian community, have decided to make a considerable effort ... Now is really not the time to express rivalries between countries."

However, WFP officials confirmed that US control of Port-au-Prince airport was creating serious logistical problems for aid and rescue efforts. The WFP's Jarry Emmanuel told the *New York Times*: "There are 200 flights going in and out every day, which is an incredible amount for a country like Haiti. But most of those flights are for the United States military. ... Their priorities are to secure the country. Ours are to feed [people]. We have got to get those priorities in sync."

At Port-au-Prince's Municipal Nursing Home, barely one mile from the US-controlled airport, 85 elderly Haitians are

starving and being attacked by rats. One man, Joseph Julien, has already died. Officials have cited fights over food at a nearby soccer stadium to justify not sending them supplies, despite their proximity to the airport. Nursing home administrator Jean Emmanuel told the Associated Press: "I'm pleading for everyone to understand that there's a truce right now, the streets are free, so you can come through to help us."

As of yesterday, US search-and-rescue teams had only dug out 15 people from the rubble.

The US military intervention in Haiti is criminal in both form and content. Disguised as a humanitarian rescue operation, its main aim is to build up the necessary firepower to terrorize the masses into accepting a shocking lack of treatment without protest. Even taken on its own terms, the US occupation of Haiti has not taken the opportunities available to it to treat wounded Haitians.

This operation recalls the March 1993 US intervention in Somalia, when US forces invaded that strategically-located country, supposedly to help relieve famine. US forces were soon deeply entangled in civil war and hated by the population, leading up to a shoot-out between US forces and civilians in Mogadishu. Current US operations in Haiti are preparing similar confrontations with the population.

The rescue efforts in Haiti are held hostage by a US national security establishment that is completely impervious to popular sympathy for the victims of the earthquake, and unanswerable to the masses—of Haiti or any other country, including the US itself. Instead, as the death toll mounts, there is an unspoken but unanimous agreement in the international media that it is legitimate for the US military to dictate how operations will proceed.

Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive confirmed yesterday that the death toll was at least 70,000. However, this counted only confirmed dead in Port-au-Prince and the nearby city of Leogane, which was over 80 percent destroyed in the quake. Bellerive added that the figure of 100,000 dead throughout Haiti "would seem to be the minimum." Interviewed on NBC's "Meet the Press," USAID administrator Rajiv Shah said he had "no reason to contradict" estimates of 100,000 to 200,000 dead.

Time is also running out for many of the even larger number of Haitians wounded in the earthquake. Hospitals have been destroyed and medical staffs are overwhelmed by large numbers of patients with crushed limbs and rapidly spreading infections. Deprived of antibiotics and basic medical supplies, doctors are resorting to amputations and are refusing treatment to badly injured patients, whom they do not think they can save.

Speaking to the *Los Angeles Times* at Port-au-Prince's General Hospital, Dr. Georges Lamarre said most of his

patients the first night had bled to death, and that he still had no antibiotics or blood supplies: "Up to this moment, there are patients out there we haven't even touched."

At the General Hospital, Yolanda Gehry and her baby, Ashleigh, waited four days before doctors could tape up Ashleigh's head. However, they have not yet treated Ashleigh's shattered left hand. Gehry commented: "The Haitian doctors didn't have anything to help us, so we had to wait for the foreigners."

US officials have made clear that treating Haitian victims of the earthquake is not a US priority. Medical facilities on the US aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson*, steaming off Haiti's shores, will not treat Haitians. The senior medical officer on board, Commander Alfred Shwayhat, told the *Wall Street Journal* he had plans to "treat 1,000 Haitians if necessary," but said that he had received no orders to do so. He continued, "If the captain authorizes it, I will take anyone ... [the *Vinson's* facility] exceeds anything in the civilian sector, bar none."

Lieutenant Commander Jim Krohne, a spokesman for the *Vinson's* captain, explained that the carrier's mission was "sea-based." The *Vinson* later sent two doctors onshore to help treat Haitian patients.

US officials are also warning Haitians that, if they try to flee from Haiti to the US, they will be deported back to Haiti. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said: "There may be an impulse to leave the island to come here. You will not qualify for TPS [Temporary Protected] status." This would allow the US to deport them upon arrival.

Officials in Miami, a city with a large Haitian immigrant population, are watching for signs of a mass flight from Haiti to the US. Democratic Representative Kendrick B. Meek noted, "The entire community is emotionally attached to Haiti, and it's been rough," adding that Haitian-Americans form the bulk of the workforce for many major employers in the region. However, officials are preparing prisons for potential Haitian refugees.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced that it would move 400 detainees from the Krome detention facility to an undisclosed location, to free up space in case any Haitians manage to reach US shores.



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