

Death toll at 200,000

US military to enforce state of emergency in Haiti

Tom Eley
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The Haitian government declared a state of emergency on Monday, six days after a magnitude 7.0 earthquake laid waste to much of the nation and its capital, Port-au-Prince, killing at least 200,000, according to the latest estimate.

The state of emergency creates martial law conditions that will be enforced by the US military. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had demanded the imposition of the emergency decree during her visit to Haiti on Saturday. “The decree would give the government an enormous amount of authority, which in practice they would delegate to us,” Clinton declared.

With tens of thousands more Haitians in peril for lack of water, food and medical supplies, Haiti’s imposition of martial law until February 1 makes clear that the central preoccupation of the US-led rescue operation is not to save lives, but to establish military control over the nation.

In a preview of widespread repression to come, United Nations troops fired tear gas and rubber bullets into a crowd of desperate people who had congregated “too close” to the gate to the Port-Au-Prince airport, the entry point for food, medicine, water and other supplies coming into the country. The airport has been militarized under US control and has become the staging point for a vast influx of American military forces. Haitian riot police also fired tear gas to break up crowds in the city center.

The size of the US force in Haiti swelled to 7,500 soldiers on Monday, most of these stationed on warships off Haiti’s coast. Two companies of the 82nd US Airborne Division were scheduled to join the 1,000 soldiers already on the ground at the airport. On Sunday, President Obama signed an executive order mobilizing military reserves for potential service in Haiti.

While the US beefs up its military presence, the death toll in Haiti continues to mount. More than 70,000 corpses have been buried in mass graves, Haiti’s Secretary of State for Literacy, Carol Joseph, said Monday. The government now estimates that the final death toll will surpass 200,000. If so, this would make the earthquake among the deadliest on record—a staggering toll in a country of only 10 million people. At least 1.5 million more Haitians have been made homeless.

Numerous media accounts published Monday acknowledged that aid

was only now reaching the capital, nearly a week after the earthquake struck. “Six days after the quake ... precious little aid is getting beyond the airport perimeters,” according to the British *Times Online*. “Emergency aid is finally reaching some parts of the earthquake-devastated capital,” Radio New Zealand reported Monday.

At a camp in Challe, residents complained that the UN soldiers had arrived only on Sunday, tossing biscuit packages from the back of a truck—but supplying no food or water. “We have been waiting since Tuesday and that is all there is!” said Vanel Louis-Paul, a father of three, showing an empty biscuit package to a reporter.

“We don’t need military aid. What we need is food and shelter,” a man yelled at UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as he visited Port-au-Prince. Even in the heart of the capital, enormous tent cities next to the flattened National Palace have seen virtually no aid, according to the *Washington Post*. “I have been here every day. I heard they gave away some food but there was a riot,” said Jean Marie Magarette, who was in the encampment with her sister and four children. “If you tell me they have been giving out food I will believe you, but we have been on this spot since the day of the earthquake and we have not seen anyone give away anything but water.”

“Have we been abandoned? Where is the food?” shouted Jean Michel Jeantet, in a downtown Port-au-Prince street.

With temperatures reaching the high 80s, there is acute need for water. Port-au-Prince’s supply has been destroyed or polluted, and packaged water is selling for \$6 a bottle—more than three times Haiti’s average daily income. The World Food Program (WFP) estimated that it had reached only 160,000 residents of Haiti with nutritional rations Sunday and Monday, a small fraction of the millions with limited or no access to food or water.

Well over a quarter of a million Haitians were injured in the quake. Most of these have received no professional medical attention. Without treatment for open wounds, thousands will die of infections in the coming days.

Rescuers have largely given up for dead the tens of thousands of Haitians who remain trapped under the rubble of collapsed buildings, although a handful of survivors were extracted on Monday. The United Nations reports that only 70 people have been saved from

downed structures in five days of rescue operations.

The extent of the devastation outside of the capital of Port-au-Prince is only now coming to light. Leogane, a city of over 100,000 before the earthquake, has reportedly lost 90 percent of its structures. Twelve miles west of Port-au-Prince, Leogane was near the epicenter. Rescue teams from Great Britain and Iceland reported on Monday that they found no survivors at a collapsed local grade school. No relief supplies have reached the city, residents say.

In spite of the unfolding humanitarian disaster, the US media has increasingly shifted its focus to “the security situation” in Haiti, as the *Post* put it. In tones reminiscent of its coverage of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, the US media is now replete with references to “looters,” “gangs,” and “street violence.”

Though there are reports of looting, it is being carried out by desperate survivors in search of food, fuel, medicine and water.

Two looters were reportedly shot dead by Haitian security forces on Monday, and there have been reports of summary executions of alleged thieves. At a cemetery, Ogeris Oblasts told US National Public Radio reporter Carrie Kahn she had witnessed police forcing men to lie down face first before executing them. “A crowd gathered around one of the men as he slowly bled to death,” Kahn reported. The US is concerned about a far broader social eruption in Haiti than looting, with the *Washington Post* citing “widespread apprehension that, unless the pace of aid distribution quickens, there could be mass violence as hundreds of thousands of people suddenly lacking food, water and electricity begin to compete for scarce resources.”

The Haitian emergency decree will give the US military a legal pretext for the suppression of the entire population. “We need a safe and secure environment to be successful,” said Gen. Ken Keen of the US Southern Command, which oversees the Haiti operation. Keen warned of “increasing incidents of security ... we are going to have to deal with it as we go forward.”

US military domination of the relief effort has failed to relieve the Haitian population. It has also created a new source of global friction, particularly between the US and France, the two powers that have dominated Haiti for centuries.

French Cooperation Minister Alain Joyandet on Monday issued a complaint to the Obama administration over the US military’s arbitrary control of Port-au-Prince’s airport after a French relief plane was turned away over the weekend without explanation. In an interview with Europe 1 Radio, Joyandet referred to the US effort as an occupation. “It’s a matter of helping Haiti, not occupying Haiti,” he said.

Relief flights from Italy and Brazil and numerous aid organizations have also been diverted. The Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders both reported their flights had been forced to land in the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti. The overland route adds eight or nine hours to relief delivery, the Red Cross said. Doctors Without Borders reported its surgeons were unable to help the sick and dying for 48 hours on account of the delay.

In the face of widespread criticism, the US has apparently relented, with the World Food Program declaring late Monday that henceforth the US would give precedence to civilian over military planes for landing at Port-au-Prince’s airport. Neither the US military nor the Obama administration had confirmed the report as of Monday night.

Washington blamed congestion at the Port-au-Prince airport for the diversions and delays experienced by relief workers. But dozens of flights carrying US soldiers and weapons have landed, as have planes carrying diplomats such as Secretary Clinton and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. On Monday, former President Bill Clinton, figurehead of the US rescue operation, touched down in Haiti and was scheduled to meet with Haitian President René Préval.

Tensions over the Haiti operations have been such that the European Union was forced on Sunday to disavow “suggestions of a rift” with the US, according to the *Financial Times*.

The UN appealed for more international forces to occupy the island, and some nations have announced they will contribute to an enlarged military presence. On Monday, Italy announced it would send its aircraft carrier, the *Cavour*, to Haitian waters. Canada announced Sunday it would send 1,000 more soldiers to Haiti, doubling its force, along with two warships.

The EU increased its aid to Haiti to \$500 million, five times larger than the US donation of \$100 million. The International Monetary Fund also offered a new \$100 million loan, which, according to Richard Kim of the *Nation*, likely includes wage cuts for public sector workers as a stipulation. These loans and donations are smaller than thousands of personal fortunes in the US and Europe.

In contrast to the parsimonious reaction of the world’s governments, working people in the US have donated a record amount of money. Relief organizations describe an “outpouring” of donations, mostly of small quantities, that handily eclipsed the records established in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. As of Saturday, \$200 million had been raised among 25 charities contributing to relief operations in Haiti, according to the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. Only \$43 million came from corporate donors.

“You’ve got a bad economy and a disaster outside of the US,” said Stacy Palmer, editor of the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. “It makes sense that lots of people gave to the Katrina disaster in the US, but to give outside of the US like this is remarkable, especially at a time with 10 percent unemployment.”



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