

Haitians dying by the thousands as US escalates military intervention

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Thousands of Haitians are dying every day for lack of medical care and supplies, according to a leading humanitarian aid group. Meanwhile, the Pentagon has announced that it is expanding the US military presence in the country, maintaining Washington's priority of troops over humanitarian aid.

The US-based medical aid group Partners in Health has warned that as many as 20,000 Haitians may be dying daily due to infections such as gangrene and sepsis that have set in, as the majority of the injured receive no medical care or are treated in facilities that lack the most basic supplies.

"Tens of thousands of earthquake victims need emergency surgical care now!!!," the organization said in a statement posted on its web site. "The death toll and the incidence of gangrene and other deadly infections will continue to rise unless a massive effort is made to open and staff more operating rooms and to deliver essential equipment and supplies."

Partners in Health has worked in Haiti for more than 20 years. Its co-founder, Dr. Paul Farmer, is the deputy United Nations envoy to Haiti and a senior professor of public health at Harvard University.

While Haitian officials and other organizations have claimed the Partners in Health figure is too high, it is indisputable that Haiti confronts a disaster that could equal or even eclipse that of the quake itself because of the delays in the provision of health care to hundreds of thousands of sick and injured people.

The *New York Times* Thursday quoted Dr. Eduardo de Marchena, a University of Miami cardiologist overseeing one field hospital in Haiti, who provided a similarly grim prognosis. "There are still thousands of patients with major fractures, major wounds, that have not been treated yet," he said. "There are people, many people, who are going to die unless they're treated."

As the *Times* reported, "In the squatter camps now scattered across this capital, there are still people writhing in pain, their injuries bound up by relatives but not yet seen by

a doctor eight days after the quake struck. On top of that, the many bodies still in the wreckage increase the risk of diseases spreading, especially, experts say, if there is rain."

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the Port-au-Prince General Hospital is continuously besieged by more than 1,000 patients waiting for surgery. "Armed guards in tanks kept out mobs," the newspaper reported. It added, "At any given moment, thousands of injured, some grievously, wait outside virtually any hospital or clinic, pleading for treatment."

CNN's Karl Penhaul reported from Port-au-Prince General Hospital, where US paratroopers have taken up positions. He said that Haitians questioned why so many US troops were pouring into the country. "They say they need more food and water and fewer guys with guns," he reported.

He also indicated that American doctors at the hospital seemed mystified by the military presence. "They say there has never been a security problem here at the hospital, but there is a problem of getting supplies in." He added, "They can get nine helicopters of troops in, but some of the doctors here say if they can do that, then why can't they also bring with them IV fluids and other much needed supplies."

The Spanish daily *El País* quoted one of these American doctors, Jim Warsinguer: "We lack a lot of things, too many for so much time having passed since the earthquake: betadine, bandages, gloves. And, above all, morphine. We have to do amputations without anesthesia. You see them suffer, and it is terrible. The Haitians are very brave, but they are suffering a lot."

The desperate conditions and lack of sanitation for the estimated 2 million Haitians left homeless by the earthquake threaten to trigger a public health disaster. "The next health risk could include outbreaks of diarrhea, respiratory tract infections and other diseases among hundreds of thousands of Haitians living in overcrowded camps with poor or non-existent sanitation," said Doctors Without Borders deputy operations manager Greg Elder.

While media reports claim that ever-growing amounts of

material aid are coming into the country, reporters on the ground have said that there is still no sign that it is getting into the hands of the overwhelming majority of those who need it.

The British Broadcasting Corporation reported Thursday, “Correspondents say the aid that has thus far arrived at the port is being driven for 45 minutes across the city to the airport, where it is piling up and not being distributed to those who need it.”

The BBC continued, “The US and UN World Food Programme insist the distribution of food and water is well under way, but the BBC’s Adam Mynott in Port-au-Prince says many people have still seen no international relief at all.”

Aid organizations have charged that since establishing its unilateral control over the Port-au-Prince airport and the city’s port facilities, and assuming essential governmental powers in Haiti, the US military has given the beefing up of its presence in the country priority over the provision of aid. Doctors Without Borders, for example, has protested that military air traffic controllers have since January 14 refused permission to land to five of its planes carrying 85 tons of medical supplies.

With the Haitian catastrophe now in its 10th day, it is becoming increasingly clear that the response of the Obama administration and the Pentagon, which have made military occupation of the Caribbean nation its first objective, has deepened the immense suffering of millions of injured, homeless and hungry people.

The Pentagon has announced that it is sending 4,000 more troops to Haiti, which will boost the US military occupation force to 16,000. For the first time, a unit that had been slated for deployment by the US Central Command, which oversees the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is being diverted to the Caribbean nation.

Meanwhile, a naval encirclement of Haiti’s coastline is growing. The *Miami Herald* reported Thursday that the US military has also prepared a detention camp at the Guantánamo Bay Navy Base in Cuba—site of the infamous prison where detainees were tortured—to hold up to 1,000 Haitians should they manage to elude the US warships.

By using Guantánamo as a holding pen for refugees fleeing the horrific conditions of Haiti, the US government will insist that they have no legal rights and cannot appeal their deportation back to their homeland. This same procedure was used in 1991, when thousands of Haitians fled the country following a violent military coup.

The claim that this military “surge” into Haiti is an indispensable prerequisite for delivering aid to the Haitian people is a lie. Relief agencies operating in the country insist that they have not been threatened by the Haitian people, but

rather hindered by the attempt to impose war zone-style security over their efforts.

The US media never so much as hints that there could be anything but the sincerest humanitarian motives behind Washington’s assertion of control over Haiti. It makes no reference to the country’s history, which includes a two-decade US occupation at the beginning of the twentieth century, the deployment of US troops twice in the last 20 years, and Washington’s orchestration of a 2004 coup that ousted and exiled Haiti’s elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

In publications reflecting the views of the military-intelligence apparatus, however, there are franker assessments of Washington’s objectives and the real mission. The American Enterprise Institute’s Center for Defense Studies issued a “crisis update” on Haiti, warning: “Conducting a ‘humanitarian relief’ mission in a poor country stricken by a natural disaster can quickly embroil the United States in local politics. And desperate people can easily become violent people.”

The statement continued by affirming, “Beyond delivering relief, US soldiers and Marines will inevitably find themselves securing the peace.” Part of this mission, it added, would be “to ensure that Haiti’s gangs—particularly those loyal to ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide—are suppressed.”

Similarly, William Kristol and Thomas Donnelly, writing in the *Weekly Standard*, argued that beyond the humanitarian pretext for intervening in Haiti, “the strategic case is also compelling.”

“With a transition looming in Cuba and challenges in Central America among others, there is a political reason to be—and to be seen to be—a good and strong neighbor.”

In other words, Washington is exploiting the tragedy that has been inflicted upon the people of Haiti to assert colonial-style control over the country. Its aim is to reaffirm US imperialist hegemony in the broader region and to suppress any social revolt by the Haitian masses.

It is only a matter of time before the horrendous death toll caused by the January 12 earthquake will be augmented by victims shot to death by US occupation forces.



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