

US Military Operations Block Relief Efforts in Haiti

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The US military intervention in Haiti, after the January 12 earthquake that killed an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 people, continues to block arrival of critical supplies to the devastated country. Quake victims—including hundreds of thousands of wounded and an estimated three million Haitians made homeless—lack access to food, water, and life-saving medical equipment.

At 6 AM yesterday a strong aftershock, centered 60 km west of Port-au-Prince and measuring 6.1 on the Richter scale, again shook Haiti. There were reports of widespread building collapses, notably by buildings already weakened by the main quake, but there were no estimates on casualties from the aftershock. John Bellini of the US Geological Survey said there would be more such aftershocks in the coming weeks.

US forces who have taken over the Port-au-Prince airport are denying humanitarian flights permission to land. US helicopters also landed troops yesterday, who took over the ruins of Haiti's Presidential Palace. Roughly 10,000 US troops will be in place in Haiti in the coming days.

In response to protests by Doctors Without Borders that "hundreds of lives were lost" because one of its flights was denied landing rights at Port-au-Prince, US military spokesman Captain John Kirby said: "It's a question of physics. The airport is the only way in, it has only one runway, and there are literally hundreds of flights trying to make it in."

Publicly, US officials are taking the absurd position that they do not know the contents of humanitarian aid flights and cannot decide whether they deserve priority to land. Citing discussions with US General Ken Keen, commanding operations in Haiti, the *Washington Post* wrote, "if an air traffic controller doesn't know what's on an incoming plane, then he doesn't know what priority to give it." Apparently, priority goes to US military flights. Keen said: "If the young airman [controlling air traffic] has three planes coming in and he knows what's on one of them, he's going to land that one."

Doctors Without Borders issued a statement yesterday protesting the US military's continuing refusal to allow its planes to land at the Port-au-Prince airport. It quoted Loris De Filippi, the coordinator at Choscal hospital in the Cité Soleil neighborhood of Port-au-Prince: "they are begging us there in front of the hospital. It's a very unacceptable situation. What we are trying to do is to expand our capacity to answer these calls. But we need supplies to get to the airport—and we don't know why the planes are being redirected."

Joint UN-US efforts to deliver food and water to the millions of homeless Haitians are grossly insufficient. Nancy Exilos, of the UN's World Food Program, said: "We go to a site, where the first assessment is there are 100 people [in need of help]. We bring enough [supplies] for

100 people but when we arrive we find there are 2,000 people.” The UN was hoping to provide water and food for 200,000 people in Haiti yesterday.

Reporters in Port-au-Prince said signs are sprouting everywhere across the city, asking for food and water. US Corporal Clifford Sajous, a Haitian-American who was serving as translator in the group of 125 Marines sent by helicopter to Léogâne, said: “we’re going to hand out some water and food and not everyone is going to get some.”

The US build-up is proceeding, citing as justification fears of possible “looting” by Haitians desperate for food and water—with the *New York Times* writing that “the threat of mass looting seems to increase by the day.” However, there have been no reports of violence against aid personnel. In fact, General Keen commented, “The level of violence we see now is below pre-earthquake levels.”

Teams of Cuban doctors have traveled to Haiti and are treating earthquake victims without armed guards.

US forces nonetheless refuse to move shipments out of the airport without massive guards, further delaying rescue attempts. Gilberto Castro, emergency response director of transport company Deutsche Post DHL, told the *Wall Street Journal*: “Twenty containers go out, but you have to have about 100 heavily armed soldiers” to escort them.

The most tragic costs of US military interference with relief efforts will be borne by the Haitian masses. Debarati Guha-Sapir, professor of epidemiology at the University of Louvain in Belgium, said that normally most earthquake deaths take place in the 2 days after an earthquake. However, she added: “Haiti, I think, is going to be different. They will not die simply because there is no care. ... They will die of lack of surgical care. They will die of simple trauma that in almost any other country would not lead to death.”

Absent proper medical care and supplies, earthquake victims with crushed limbs are rapidly developing gangrene infections, which then necessitate amputation to prevent the infection from rapidly spreading—including into the bloodstream, causing septicemia. Doctors in Haiti speaking to the *Daily Telegraph* estimated that they had performed tens of thousands of amputations. Tetanus, measles, meningitis, and diarrhea are also cited as major health risks.

Laurent Ligozat, global emergency response director for Doctors Without Borders, told the *Financial Times*: “We’re doing more and more amputations every day as more and more wounds become infected. Septicaemia is going to be a real problem. There are thousands of people in a very desperate situation, and if the distribution of aid is not well organised they’re going to be in even more trouble.”

Richardson Lagredelle, who was pulled out from under the rubble four days after the earthquake, died of a gangrene infection that caused massive dehydration. Dr. Roberto Feliz, working at the UN hospital that treated Lagredelle, said: “What’s so frustrating is that we don’t have the basic equipment to save him.” Such equipment included a heart-monitoring system, an intubator, a ventilator, and oxygen. Feliz said Lagredelle was “a young, strong guy. In any normal hospital he’d survive.”

One young woman in Port-au-Prince initially refused to have her leg amputated for two days, saying: “How would I manage to survive on my own with just one leg?” As her leg became

increasingly gangrenous, her cousin, with whom she sells second-hand shoes in Bel Air, persuaded her to have the operation. Dr. Frank Diaz said, however, that septicemia had set in despite an amputation of her leg above the knee, and that her response to antibiotic treatment suggested she had little chance of surviving.

There are reports of growing anger at the US puppet regime led by President René Préal, who was installed through a coup against elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004. The Times of London wrote: "Haitians complain that their government has been silent. President Préal is himself camped out at the airport ... and aid distribution has been either totally absent or at best haphazard." It noted that water bottles sell for \$6 on the black market in Port-au-Prince.

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