

As US prepares long-term occupation, Haiti's quake victims still without aid

By Bill Van Auken
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With the US military “surge” into Haiti expected to include some 20,000 troops on land and on ships parked offshore by this weekend, a US official indicated that Washington is preparing for a protracted occupation of the impoverished and earthquake-devastated Caribbean nation.

“We are there for the long term, this is not something that will be resolved quickly and easily,” said Ambassador Alejandro Wolff, the US deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, on Haiti following a meeting on aid to the battered country.

In addition to the US, representatives from Brazil, Canada, France, Haiti and Uruguay participated in the discussions. Canada and France are major donors to Haiti, while Brazil and Uruguay each have over 1,000 troops participating in the United Nations peace-keeping mission, which constituted the main occupying force before the earthquake.

Speaking earlier in the UN, Wolff denounced the governments of Nicaragua, Bolivia and Venezuela for accusing Washington of exploiting the tragedy in Haiti to impose a military occupation of the country.

He charged the three Latin American governments with attempting “to politicize the matter with ill informed tendentious statements” and having “ridiculously alleged conspiracy and occupation.”

In Haiti itself, however, anger and protests are building over the US militarization of the response to a disaster that has claimed an estimated 200,000 lives, while leaving another quarter of a million injured and millions homeless.

Humanitarian aid and medical teams have accused the US military—which has asserted unilateral control over the country’s airport and port facilities—of making the deployment of troops and the evacuation of US

citizens from Haiti its first priorities. The delivery of desperately needed medical supplies and equipment were relegated to second place. Medical relief agencies have warned that tens of thousands more are dying from injuries sustained in the earthquake because of the lack of basic supplies and medicines.

While aid has now reportedly begun flowing into the country, fully 11 days after the earthquake, it is reportedly still not reaching those who desperately need it.

“Large quantities of medications, baby formula and other relief supplies are sitting on the tarmac and in warehouses at the Port-au-Prince airport, but no one is moving it out,” CNN cable news reported Thursday.

The network’s medical correspondent Sanjay Gupta visited the warehouse and spoke with military officers in charge of operations there.

The military “gave Gupta a trash bag full of supplies to take back to a hospital he had visited earlier but couldn’t explain why there seemed to be no organized system for distribution,” CNN reported.

Phillippe Bolopion, a correspondent for FRANCE24 television, reported from a makeshift camp of earthquake victims just outside the airport, where supplies are piling up.

“You’d think these people would be helped, but they are not,” he reported. “There are four toilets for 3,500 people; they were clogged, obviously. They had no food, very little water. The only international organization present was the Spanish Red Cross. People couldn’t understand why the generosity of the world isn’t getting to them. It’s really hard to comprehend.”

Similarly, Fran Sevilla, a correspondent for Radio Televisión Española (RTVE), reported, “There continues to be no distribution of humanitarian aid, of

food and water. I ask myself how all of these human beings survive. I ask if anyone is helping them, if they are receiving anything, and the answer is always no. They survive thanks to the solidarity between them, sharing between families and groups of friends what little they have, what little they can get.”

Clearly displeased with the reporting by the foreign media, the US military expelled them from the airport on Thursday, leaving them to scramble to find somewhere to go in the demolished Haitian capital.

Meanwhile, the United Nations reported Thursday that up to 700,000 people in Port-au-Prince are homeless, many living in some 500 camps set up in parks and empty lots, with little more than sheets to protect people from the sun.

UN representatives together with humanitarian aid workers visited 350 of these camps by late Thursday, reporting that only six of them had access to drinking water. According to the UN, 45 percent of those affected by the earthquake are children under the age of 18, and 18 percent are younger than five. Conditions are expected to worsen, with health officials warning that infectious diseases could spread through these makeshift camps like wildfire. Rain is expected early next week, which would flood these camps, creating ideal conditions for the spread of dengue, typhus and malaria.

What little remains of a Haitian government—with Washington’s puppet President René Prével having ceded all real power to the Pentagon and practically disappeared—has responded to this crisis by proposing that 400,000 homeless people be removed from Port-au-Prince, with 100,000 of them relocated to camps near the city of Croix-des-Bouquets, north of the capital.

There are, however, no camps there, and thus far, the government has made only 34 buses available to transport this mass of people.

In another indication of the criminal inadequacy of the rescue operation, the UN and US authorities announced that attempts to rescue those trapped beneath the rubble of fallen buildings in Port-au-Prince was drawing to a close, on the grounds that there were no likely survivors. All but 10 of 43 international rescue teams that had come to Haiti have left.

This effort—which was woefully under-resourced and uncoordinated from the start—is being ended even as

two more people were brought out alive from the ruins of buildings on Thursday. No doubt, many more will be left to die.

It can be predicted that with the end of these dramatic life-saving efforts, the corporate-controlled media will also begin their exodus from Haiti, reducing coverage of the continuing tragedy of the Haitian people and the many more deaths that are still to come.

It is also likely that little attention will be given to the activities of the US military and its auxiliaries in the UN peace-keeping force and the Haitian police as they undertake the repression of popular unrest.

There are indications that this has already begun. Haitian police shot to death a 20-year-old carpenter, Gentile Cherie, Wednesday, after he was seen carrying sacks of rice. Another man with him was seriously wounded. Both were shot in the back.

The police claimed the men had stolen the rice, but the wounded man said that a truck driver had given the sacks to them. Local residents and shopkeepers said that neither man was a thief. CNN reported that the Haitian police refused to say whether they have been given “shoot-on-sight” orders for dealing with alleged looters.

Meanwhile, a Cuban television team filmed scenes of UN troops firing rubber bullets and tear gas grenades at crowds of Haitians who had approached the US-occupied airport seeking food and work.

As anger over the criminal negligence that has characterized the US response to the Haitian disaster and resentment over yet another US military occupation of Haiti grow, American troops will inevitably be used to suppress protests and resistance.

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