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**January 18, 2010**

NEWS ANALYSIS

U.S. Mulls Role in Haiti After the Crisis

By [HELENE COOPER](#) and [MARK LANDLER](#)

WASHINGTON — [President Obama's aggressive response](#) to the deadly [earthquake in Haiti](#) has led to criticism from the far right that the United States is taking on too much, at a time when its foreign-policy plate is already full.

But the more relevant question, experts on the region say, is whether the United States will maintain a muscular role in the reconstruction of [Haiti](#) once the news cameras go home. The United States has a history of either political domination or neglect in its backyard, and administration officials acknowledge that for Mr. Obama, striking the right balance in Haiti will be crucial.

“The classic U.S. role in the whole hemisphere is either complete neglect, or we come in and run the show,” said Sarah Stephens, executive director for the [Center for Democracy in the Americas](#). But with Haiti, a mere 700 miles from Miami, “there is a great opportunity for the United States to do this in a new way,” she said.

Mr. Obama has pledged that the United States is in Haiti for the long haul. On Sunday, he mobilized military reserves — particularly medical staff for hospital ships — signing an executive order that said it was necessary to back up active-duty troops “for the effective conduct of operational missions, including those involving humanitarian assistance, related to relief efforts in Haiti.”

American troops have taken control of the airport at Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital, and are helping to provide security for the enormous international relief effort. A steady stream of administration officials have headed south, from Secretary of State [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) — who cut short a trip to the South Pacific, rushed home, and then flew to Haiti on Saturday — to one of Mr. Obama's closest aides, Denis R. McDonough, the [National Security Council's](#) chief of staff.

“We will be here today, tomorrow, and for the time ahead,” Mrs. Clinton said to Haitian journalists in Port-au-Prince, standing alongside President [René Préval](#).

With so many others in the Haitian government [missing or dead](#), the Obama administration is already facing questions of whether the United States is the only entity capable of bringing order to Port-au-Prince. Beyond that is the question of whether Mr. Obama can handle Haiti at a time when he is already grappling with wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“The short answer is yes,” said Rep. Jan Schakowsky, Democrat of Illinois and a frequent visitor to Haiti.

“As challenging as it is, there is no question about it straining our capacities at home. This is a tiny country. It’s close, and it’s not going to be our job alone to rebuild.”

Mr. Obama has indicated that the amount the United States has pledged so far to Haiti, \$100 million, is bound to go up significantly. Still, it is well below the \$350 million that President Bush pledged in the early weeks of the Asian tsunami, which killed 226,000 people after it struck in December 2004.

And while Mr. Obama has increased the number of American troops in Afghanistan by 30,000 to just below 100,000, and promised ambitious efforts to stabilize Yemen and Pakistan, the number of American troops being sent to Haiti is of course smaller — some 10,000 [Marines](#) and soldiers by Monday, military officials said.

The bigger issue may be sustaining the effort. In 2009, much of the administration’s energy was focused on Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, with little time on this hemisphere. The administration’s new point man for Latin America and the Caribbean — Arturo Valenzuela, the assistant secretary of state for the Western Hemisphere — was confirmed only in November.

In the past, American interest in Haiti has waxed and waned. President Clinton sent 20,000 troops there in 1994 to restore President [Jean-Bertrand Aristide](#) to power, an intervention still viewed today as producing, at best, mixed results.

If Haiti’s only problem were poverty, American officials discovered at the time, the job of building its economy would have been one thing. But endemic government corruption and a history of post-colonial abandonment left Haiti in shambles 10 years later, when Mr. Aristide was [finally driven from power in 2004](#).

In the years since 1994, Haiti has resurfaced in the American conscience only during times of crisis: the Aristide meltdown; and after four devastating storms in 2008 that wiped out most of the country’s food crops and damaged irrigation systems, causing acute hunger for millions.

Some Haiti experts say that despite the criticism from conservative commentators — [Glenn Beck](#) complained that Mr. Obama spent more time reacting to the Haiti earthquake than he did to the attempted Christmas Day terrorist attack — the heart-rending tragedy in Haiti may make it impossible for the United States to ignore it once the news media attention goes away.

Mr. McDonough, the national security aide, spoke to that in a call with reporters on Sunday, saying that the administration was determined to do everything it could to alleviate the suffering in Haiti. “The more we hear criticism, the more we are intent on trying to improve the lot of the Haitian people,” he said.

What is more, the administration and the international community appear to be uniform in their belief that Mr. Préval, unlike Mr. Aristide, is someone with whom they can deal. They credit him with taking steps in recent years to develop the economy.

Mrs. Clinton said a major reason for her four-hour visit to Port-au-Prince was to buck up Mr. Préval. At one point on Saturday, the Haitian president walked through the makeshift American command center at the airport, appearing dazed by the clamor.

But he seemed comforted by the presence of Cheryl D. Mills, Mrs. Clinton's chief of staff, who is in charge of the Haiti portfolio at the State Department and who has made multiple visits to Port-au-Prince over the last few months.

Administration officials say the White House can handle Haiti without neglecting its other concerns. They noted that Mr. Obama convened a National Security Council on meeting on Friday to discuss the implementation of his new Afghanistan policy.

"It's only a problem if the whole government isn't functioning properly," a senior administration official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he did not want to publicly discuss internal matters. "What you see here is a good example of the government functioning well."

Helene Cooper reported from Washington, and Mark Landler from Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

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Haiti needs water, not occupation

The US has never wanted Haitian self-rule, and its focus on 'security concerns' has hampered the earthquake aid response



Mark Weisbrot
guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 20 January 2010 23.00 GMT

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On Monday, six days after the earthquake in Haiti, the US Southern Command finally began to drop bottled water and food from an air force C-17. US defence secretary Robert Gates had previously rejected such a method because of "security concerns".

If people do not get clean water, there could be epidemics of water-borne diseases that could greatly increase the death toll. But the US is now sending 10,000 troops and seems to be prioritising "security" over much more urgent, life-and-death needs. This in addition to the increase of 3,500 UN troops scheduled to arrive.

On Sunday morning the world-renowned humanitarian group Doctors Without Borders complained that a plane carrying its portable hospital unit was re-routed by the US military through the Dominican Republic. This would cost a crucial 48 hours and an unknown number of lives.

On Sunday, Jarry Emmanuel, air logistics officer for the UN's World Food Programme, said: "There are 200 flights going in and out every day, which is an incredible amount for a country like Haiti ... But most flights are for the US military."

Yet Lieutenant General PK Keen, deputy commander of the US Southern Command, reports that there is less violence in Haiti now than there was before the earthquake hit. Dr Evan Lyon, of Partners in Health, a medical aid group famous for its heroic efforts in Haiti, referred to "misinformation and rumours ... and racism" concerning security issues.

We've been circulating throughout the city until 2:00 and 3:00 in the morning every night, evacuating patients, moving materials. There's no UN guards. There's no US military presence. There's no Haitian police presence. And there's also no violence. There is no insecurity.

To understand the US government's obsession with "security concerns," we must look at the recent history of Washington's involvement there.

Long before the earthquake, Haiti's plight has been comparable to that of many homeless people on city streets in the US: too poor and too black to have the same effective constitutional and legal rights as other citizens. In 2002, when a US-backed military coup temporarily toppled the elected government of Venezuela, most governments in the hemisphere responded quickly and helped force the return of democratic rule. But two years later, when Haiti's democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was kidnapped by the US and flown to exile in Africa, the response was muted.

Unlike the two centuries of looting and pillage of Haiti since its founding by a slave revolt in 1804, the brutal occupation by US marines from 1915 to 1934, the countless atrocities under dictatorships aided and abetted by Washington, the 2004 coup cannot

be dismissed as "ancient history." It was just six years ago, and it is directly relevant to what is happening there now.

The US, together with Canada and France, conspired openly for four years to topple Haiti's elected government, cutting off almost all international aid in order to destroy the economy and make the country ungovernable. They succeeded. For those who wonder why there are no Haitian government institutions to help with the earthquake relief efforts, this is a big reason. Or why there are 3 million people crowded into the area where the earthquake hit. US policy over the years also helped destroy Haitian agriculture, for example, by forcing the import of subsidised US rice and wiping out thousands of Haitian rice farmers.

Aristide, the country's first democratically elected president, was overthrown after just seven months in 1991, by military officers and death squads later discovered to be in the pay of the CIA. Now Aristide wants to return to his country, something that the majority of Haitians have demanded since his overthrow. But the US does not want him there. And the René Préval government, which is completely beholden to Washington, has decided that Aristide's party – the largest in Haiti – will not be allowed to compete in the next elections (originally scheduled for next month).

Washington's fear of democracy in Haiti may explain why the US is now sending 10,000 troops and prioritising "security" over other needs.

This military occupation by US troops will raise other concerns in the hemisphere, depending on how long they stay – just as the recent expansion of the US military presence in Colombia has been met with considerable discontent and distrust in the region. And non-governmental organisations have raised other issues about the proposed reconstruction: understandably they want Haiti's remaining debt cancelled, and grants rather than loans (the IMF has proposed a \$100m dollar loan). Reconstruction needs will be in the billions of dollars: will Washington encourage the establishment of a functioning government? Or will it prevent that, channelling aid through NGOs and taking over various functions itself, because of its long-standing opposition to Haitian self-rule?

But most urgently, there is a need for rapid delivery of water. The US air force has the capability to deliver enough water for everyone who needs it in Haiti, until ground supply chains can be established. The more water is available, the less likely there is to be fighting or rioting over this scarce resource. Food and medical supplies could also be supplied through air drops. These operations should be ramped up, immediately. There is no time to lose.

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Haiti's exiled former president vows to return

Jean-Bertrand Aristide says he is ready to help rebuild Haiti in wake of earthquake

David Smith in Johannesburg
guardian.co.uk, Friday 15 January 2010 11.47 GMT

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The exiled former president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, makes a statement of support for the people of Haiti. Photograph: South Africa government press office/EPA

A tearful Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the exiled former president of [Haiti](#), announced his intention today to return to his quake-devastated homeland.

Aristide, who has been based in [South Africa](#) since he was ousted in a 2004 rebellion, said he wanted to help rebuild his country in the wake of Tuesday's disaster, thought to have killed tens of thousands.

"We feel deeply and profoundly that we should be there, in Haiti, with them, trying our best to prevent death," Aristide told a press conference at an airport hotel in Johannesburg, standing alongside his wife, Mildred. He said friends were ready to give him a plane to return with emergency supplies.

Tears streaming down his face, Aristide continued: "We cannot wait to be with our sisters and brothers in Haiti. We share the anguish of all Haitians in the diaspora who are desperate to reach family and loved ones.

"As far as we are concerned we are ready to leave today, tomorrow, at any time to join the people of Haiti, to share in their suffering, help rebuild the country, moving from misery to poverty with dignity."

Aristide's wife stood with her eyes downcast, twisting a handkerchief. Both dabbed their eyes as they left after the brief statement.

A South African foreign affairs ministry official, Saul Kgomotso Molobi, said Aristide would not take questions because "the situation is difficult and unbearable for the family". He added that South Africa knew of no plans for Aristide to return to Haiti.

Aristide was a priest in the Haitian slum of La Saline before becoming the country's first elected president in 1990. He was ousted in a military coup the following year, then restored to power by US troops in 1994.

After stepping down, he was re-elected in 2000 but ousted again in a bloody 2004 rebellion.

He has rarely spoken in public since he was flown to South Africa on a US plane, though he released a statement earlier this week expressing solidarity with Haitians.

"It is a tragedy that defies expression, a tragedy that compels all people to the highest levels of human compassion and solidarity," he said.

Haitian protesters have periodically called for Aristide's return over the years. In speeches relayed to supporters in Haiti from South Africa, he has hinted at going back, but said he merely wants to be a teacher.

Aristide and his wife live with their two daughters in a government villa in Pretoria. The couple have embraced an academic life, with Aristide writing on the linguistics of Zulu and Haitian Creole, as well as on the theology of love.

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