

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH
LIEUTENANT GENERAL KEN KEEN, COMMANDER, JOINT TASK FORCE HAITI

VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM HAITI

SUBJECT: U.S. MILITARY DISASTER RELIEF OPERATIONS

MODERATOR: DR. JOHN OHAB

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DR. OHAB: Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of
Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Monday, January 18th, 2010.

My name is Dr. John Ohab, with the Office of the Assistant
Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I will be moderating the
call today.

Just a quick note to the bloggers on the line. As you know, if you
could please remember to clearly state your name and blog or the
organization in advance of your question, and also please respect our
guest's time, keeping your questions succinct and to the point.

Today our guest is Lieutenant General Ken Keen, commander of Joint
Task Force Haiti. Lieutenant General Keen will provide an update of
ongoing U.S. military disaster relief operations in Haiti.

SOUTHCOM is closely monitoring the situation and is working with the U.S. State Department, United States Agency for International Development, and the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, as well as other national and international agencies, to determine how to best respond to this crisis.

We're very pleased to have our guest, Lieutenant General Keen, on today. Lieutenant General, would you please start with any remarks?

GEN. KEEN: Okay. Thanks, John, I appreciate it, and to all those participating for taking time.

First, I want to start out by -- I think all of us -- by offering my condolences to all the Haitian people who have lost loved ones in this extraordinarily difficult period. The earthquake we experienced last Tuesday afternoon produced tremendous tragedy, with incomprehensible human suffering.

In response, the international community has responded. I want to express my personal appreciation to Brazil for all the countries that make up the U.N. mission here.

We are fortunate to be able to partner with them as we go about trying to provide the humanitarian assistance to the people and doing it as fast as we can and putting in as much as we have available at the point that it's most needed.

We continue to make progress every day, but no one's kidding themselves. This is an enormous task and we have a lot of challenges ahead of us.

I'd like to just take a minute before we start and give everyone a sort of a snapshot review of maybe where we're at and some of the things we have here.

The security situation is relatively calm. I know there's been lots of reporting about incidents of violence, and there certainly are incidents of violence every day. What I would say is these are pockets of violence, and we are being very vigilant to watch that closely.

The Brazilian-led U.N. mission here has the responsibility for stability and are doing it every day. And they're out and about, and they have been doing it successfully over the years.

We're here at the request of the government of Haiti, and as I mentioned, we're working in close partnership with the U.N. forces and MINUSTAH. It's incredible teamwork here, among not only the U.S. interagencies, but indeed the entire international community.

And to, you know, my personal experience, obviously, having been here Tuesday when this occurred, unlike a hurricane when you can sort of see it coming, if you will, if you listen to the weather, the earthquake just happened.

So totally unexpected, and obviously, no one was prepared for it and nothing was positioned, in place, in order to react to it in the aftermath.

So to start out and try to respond quickly is an enormous challenge, and I just say that I'm proud of what our nation has done, and the entire international community, in trying to get everything they can here as quickly as possible.

There's only one way to get supplies and equipment and people into Haiti right now to any degree, and that's through their international airport. It's an international airport with one runway, one taxiway. And as Vice President Biden said, it's like pushing a bowling ball through a soda straw.

And we are fortunate; we have the best airmen in the world, who arrived here within 24 hours of the earthquake and set up the airfield for 24-hour operation immediately thereafter.

So we were fortunate in that we were able to get that done so quickly, to start things rolling.

The USS Carl Vinson, a aircraft carrier with 19 helos, immediately turned south and headed towards Haiti when they heard about the earthquake.

And we were able to report to Southern Command that it was going to be a terrific tragedy, because I was with the U.S. ambassador when it occurred, and we were able to see from a high point over the city some of the devastation, because it occurred about 45 minutes before nightfall, and we could hear the screaming and the yelling of the people in the valleys below.

So we immediately knew that what we had just experienced was a tremendous tragedy that was going to have unforeseen circumstances the next morning.

I want to also just talk a minute about what we have on the ground here today in terms of the U.S. military.

We have about 1,400 military on the ground right now. We have another approximately 5,000 that are afloat on various ships that are supporting us. We will grow that force over the coming weeks to where we will have about 4,000 to 5,000 on Haiti and up to -- another 5,000 offshore, supporting us.

Obviously, we need to have enough people and equipment on Haiti in order to deliver all the humanitarian assistance. And we want to balance that, to make sure we have enough, but not put a footprint on Haiti -- (inaudible) -- as much as we have to, but get as much support as we can from the ships.

To give you a perspective today, we had 180 flights go through the airport with zero delays. That's the first day since we started we did

not have a delay, which -- prior to the crisis, they were having 13 flights a day through Haiti. So that just gives you a little perspective of what magnitude it is that the airport here is handling. And our airmen from the United States Air Force is doing that for us.

Just to give you an idea of how much we distributed in humanitarian supplies, in the last 24 hours we have distributed more than 233,000 bottles of water. And that's a lot, but that's nearly not enough. We have 3.5 million people that are suffering from this tragedy here, so we've got a lot of work to do.

We've distributed approximately 400,000 bottles of water; this is the U.S. military only. Of course, we have a lot of international organizations, as well as, I mentioned, all the nations that are here from the United Nations, as well as other countries doing the same. So that's just one nation's contributions.

To the humanitarian relief supplies, we delivered today 140,000 rations. Up to this point, we delivered 300,000 total, and you can say that we've been here five days. Of course, this was -- every day we get more.

Again, this is a drop in the bucket in terms of the need, but we are doing more every day and we will continue to do that.

Twelve thousand pounds of medical supplies were delivered. Sixteen water purification units have been shipped to us; five will arrive tomorrow. Right now, we're living off bottled water; that won't work.

We know that won't work, so we've got to get a sustainable water source, and that's what these water purification units are designed to do. And we will get those in operations.

We -- hospital and hospital care is extremely critical. Nations have responded -- Argentina, Israel, Russia, Portugal, Turkey. Colombia hospital is on the way -- Colombia is sending a hospital ship; it's on the way.

The United States is sending the Comfort, which is a tremendous hospital ship. It is on the way; it'll be here this week, and that ship can accommodate -- it'll be staffed to accommodate up to approximately 1,000 beds.

So we are going to increase our capacity to treat all the injuries that we see around the city. Right now, everyone is doing the best they can, but obviously we have much more to do.

I think probably that's enough of me talking, but that just gives you a little perspective of where we're at, and what -- where I think we need to go. And I'll just take some questions for now.

DR. OHAB: Thank you, General. And again, we really appreciate your being here.

Before we get started, were there any other callers who chimed in during the general's opening remarks? (No audible response.) Okay, wonderful.

The first question'll be to Bruce Henderson.

Q Hello, General -- (electronic tone on line) -- thanks for taking the time to answer all of our questions. There's a whole ton of things that we could get into.

But I guess, first off, I'd like to hit up a Marine Corps question. I know that the Bataan is -- are they there, or are they en route still? And have you found a means to allow them to land some of their heavy equipment yet?

GEN. KEEN: Well, you set me up real well. I appreciate it.

The Bataan is here. And if you're a Marine, you know that they've got to do a reconnaissance first. They did that today, and they will come ashore tomorrow morning.

We obviously prepared for them and gave them an area. And they're going to go into an area west of the city, southwest of the city, where we haven't been yet because we don't have enough forces. So we're very fortunate to have her here with --

We have a Marine landing battalion that will go ashore, and we will put her down in the Leogane, near that area, which is one of the most hardest-hit cities. It's right near the center of the epicenter.

And the reports I've heard, over 60 percent of that city was destroyed. So they're going into an area that is in great need.

DR. OHAB: The next question will go to Andrew Lubin.

Q Yes, sir. General, Andrew Lubin from Leatherneck Magazine. We'll follow up one Marine question with another one, then.

You've got the Marines coming ashore tomorrow. Will you be using them for security in the area, or will you be pushing them into the countryside, where apparently nobody's been for the past six days?

GEN. KEEN: Well, we've actually had pretty good reconnaissance, in terms of -- obviously, we've had a helicopter here; we've overflown. We were able to see where leveled buildings are and that kind of destruction.

Therefore, we've been able to get on the ground in most of the areas, at least the disaster assessment teams, which were civilian teams that are sent in.

The United States Agency for International Development sends those in, and they are able to determine where the hardest-hit areas are where

most of the people that are homeless or who are injured, and that's how we determine where we need to go.

So we know where the need is, and that's why we're putting the Marines where we are, because that's where -- the next area we are able to get to.

Now, the Canadians are also here, fortunately, with about 2,000, and so -- military -- and they're going into the Jacmel area, which is just south of where I talked about where the Marines are going. That's another area that was hard hit.

So we are working with the United Nations and the government of Haiti and other nations and looking at where each of us have capability and putting them so we're hopefully covering down.

But we do need to go and hit different areas as we expand our capability.

Getting to the question about security, I mean, we're here to provide humanitarian assistance, which right now means getting water first and then rations, obviously, and then treating and doing all of these at the same time.

But providing security is an inherent part of trying to provide humanitarian assistance. You can't do that unless it's a safe and secure environment.

And while the U.N. forces who are here do provide security and stability, as I mentioned, there are isolated incidents of violence, so you have to be prepared if you find yourself inadvertently in a situation where there's unrest or whatever, to (react to ?) it.

But I must say that all the places that U.S. forces have gone thus far have been very calm. In fact, they've been overtly welcomed. The people have been very orderly, and they've been very appreciative of all the aid that they've been given.

So we have not personally experienced any of this violence in the areas that we have been. But again, it is out there, it's been reported on quite extensively. But there was obviously looting and violence before the earthquake, so we're seeing some of that return. And the gangs are there. We're seeing indicators that they've sort of dusted themselves off and found their weapons, I guess. And now we're seeing some of that crop up.

But we will have to deal with the security situation as we try to help the Haiti people.

Q Good. Thank you.

DR. OHAB: Thank you. The next question is for Chuck Simmins.

Q Thank you, General. Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal. Two interrelated questions. The first, yes, there was a report earlier today that there had been some sort of incident where an American had been killed and three injured, but nothing more came across.

And also, I'm getting reports right now that there may have been a helicopter crash very recently. Do you know anything about either of those two incidents?

GEN. KEEN: Well, the first one, I mean, as usually the case, all first reports are wrong. Our Marines there know that all too well, and that was the case when the CNN report that they heard that there was a mass casualty and maybe 30 Americans.

As we checked it out, what transpired, what actually happened was we had doctors down at the airport actually checking the condition of all the American citizens, because it's very hot, there's upwards of 4(00) to 500 of them any one time, waiting, standing in line for two to four hours trying to get processed for evacuation.

We have right now a limited amount of tents for them. We've got plenty of water, which is not an issue. But as they were checking individuals out, an American was brought up on a vehicle who was in dire conditions. And they got him, and they started treating him. And the report I got, and it has not changed since I talked to the doctor, is that he perished.

At the same time, there were others that came forward that were having difficulty with the heat. They ended up treating three others and sending them to the hospital for heat-related injuries, and they treated two others on the scene for a lesser case of heat.

And basically, that was what was going on with that situation.

With respect to a helicopter accident, there's been no report that I'm aware of. And that's something that I would hear pretty quick, obviously, unless it was isolated and it would take a while to get the report in. But I have not heard anything about a helicopter accident.

Q Thank you.

DR. OHAB: Jim Dolbow with the U.S. Naval Institute blog. Can you tell us a little bit about the role of the Coast Guard in JTF Haiti?

GEN. KEEN: Well, like all of our services, the Coast Guard was absolutely essential. I mentioned our airmen who were instrumental in opening the airport. Well, likewise, our Coast Guard were the first aircraft seen the morning after the earthquake, and they were coming to do medical evacuations.

I mean, one of my officers was critically injured. He was standing on the fifth floor of the Montana. He found himself in the basement. He crawled out. We found him and brought him up to the ambassador's residence, did the best we could to treat him all night. Of course, we

didn't have any real pain medication. And folks cleaned him up. But basically, he had a broken arm, some broken ribs. He had a lot of deep lacerations.

So we knew we had to do MEDEVAC, but we couldn't do MEDEVACs that night because of safety issues. Quite frankly, we couldn't get him to open areas where we could get the helicopters in.

So at first light, the Coast Guard had assets that were MEDEVACing folks from the embassy down by the airport because we moved them there, and we moved those individuals back to hospitals back at Guantanamo Bay.

So they showed up very quickly with some cutters as well as, obviously, aircraft. And they were flying MEDEVACs throughout that first day as we were finding folks that were hurt and injured and collecting (them ?).

And you can imagine, like all the nations and citizens who were here and families back in the states who had folks here and they were worried about them, I mean, the first few hours in the next day was all about accountability.

And of course, the cell towers -- we were fortunate the first few hours. We were getting cell phone coverage, but it went down. So a lot of this was just trying to account for folks and determine who was missing. And that occurred, it probably took us 24 hours just to sort that out.

Q Thank you, General.

DR. OHAB: The next is Eagle One.

Q This is Eagle One, General, from eaglespeak.us and the Naval Institute blog. My question is about an Army-Navy team for the joint logistics over the shore. Is the port in such bad condition that you're going to have to do JLOG?

GEN. KEEN: Well, interesting you mention it. I've got a Navy admiral here who we've brought in, and I've got a Marine major who came in very shortly after this happened from SOUTHCOM, who is being assessed -- (inaudible) -- the south port which takes containers, and then the port just south of that that takes their fuel.

We've done assessments of the south port. We had to have divers in the water, so we had to bring divers in. They got here yesterday. They were in the water. I just got an update here before I came in here. And what we found is we do have some separation between the pilings and the pier. So we've got some challenges there.

What we're going to initially bring in is LCUs in order to get something that we can use. But we've got a little bit more work to do to determine just what we're going to be using to get that port open, whether we use JLOGs. But that is something that they're prepared to push to me if that's the way we need to go.

We are also assessing the port that takes the fuel, which is a critical port, obviously, because it's the only source of fuel for the country. And we think both of these ports, we're looking to get them open as fast as we can, but it's going to take a little while to complete the assessments and get the right things in place.

But the south port, we will have it with some operational capability, even if it's using LCUs, we think, before the end of the week.

And there's several other ports that are near Port-au-Prince that we will assess once we get these two done. But getting the ports open is absolutely critical because of what I talked about with the airport. We've got to have other means to get cargo in here and take pressure off the airport. And the faster we do that, the better.

DR. OHAB: Next is Adam Levine.

Q Hi, General. I'm wondering if you could elaborate a little more on the hospital situation. From what our reporters are seeing on the ground, it's pretty dire. There's an Israeli field hospital set up that seems to be well established. But otherwise, it seems like a lot of very primitive operating situations with very limited supplies, and they're having a hard time being replenished.

We're told Doctors Without Borders was turned away from the airport with its mobile hospital and now has to drive everything in, further delaying it.

What is being done to help alleviate the situation, because it seems like the people that are being saved are going to have a hard time surviving if this (can't be solved ?).

GEN. KEEN: Well, getting medical care is, you know, among the top priority, obviously. I talked a little bit up front about the portable hospitals and what exists. And like you said, they are pretty rudimentary, getting supplies to them is extremely important. And they're doing -- these doctors who have come from all over the world are doing, you know, a tremendous work under some very difficult conditions.

Obviously, the more field hospitals we are able to get operational, the better, and there's a number of them headed our way.

The hospital ship Comfort we think will help obviously as we take some of the more seriously wounded from the hospitals, like the Israeli hospital and the Argentinian hospital, which has been operating. I mean, when the crisis occurred, the Argentina hospital was essentially the only one that was really able to take much, and it very quickly was overwhelmed obviously because of the magnitude of the crisis.

What happened with the hospital that was being flown in, as a number of them were that got turned away, I mentioned the airport being a single runway and a single taxiway. The way the airport has to be

managed is we have to give aircraft a slot time. Within about 24 hours after opened, President Preval turned over the control of managing the airport to our Air Force, which allowed us to set the slot time.

Before that, we didn't have the authority to do that, because the government of Haiti still had it. So from a management of it, in terms of being able to manage the air flow coming in.

So when we set the slot times with the international aviation, modems and everything, you're able to file and get a slot time to land.

And you're only allowed to stay on the ground for two hours. And obviously, we're trying to put as many aircraft on the ground as possible in order to get maximum things here. So that means if an airplane that lands doesn't take off on time, somebody else gets delayed.

And what happened in this case, an airplane that was scheduled to take off did not for whatever reason. I do not know if it was a maintenance reason or if it was trying to load something back on. And when that happens and the aircraft gets delayed, you essentially are waiting and burning fuel, the pilot has to make a decision at some point if he's got enough fuel to wait or if he has to divert to another airfield. And in most cases, they divert to the Dominican Republic.

As I understand it in this particular case, they diverted to the Dominican Republic, and they find themselves having to come overland. That's extremely unfortunate, and it certainly is not what we want to see. And clearly, we wanted that field hospital on the tarmac.

But beyond landing them on the main runway and shutting down the entire airport for a couple of hours, there weren't many options because of the design of the airfield.

So this has happened a number of times. This isn't the first time. And it happened quite a bit in the first few days, because, quite frankly, we were going from an airport that was landing 13 a day, now we're landing upwards to 100. Every day we've landed more and more.

And now that we're seeing pilots understand the situation better now, they understand it's in everybody's interest to get here, get off and take off and not hinder the airflow. And as a result, today we had zero delays, and that's a tremendous credit to everybody who's bringing folks in here.

But we had some unfortunate in all countries. I mean, the U.S. has had a number of aircraft turned back as well as a number of other nations. And every one of them is bringing either emergency critical supplies in or field hospitals in or critical people, like doctors, in, so there are no flights coming in that are not important.

That's why the priority of the flow is determined by the government of Haiti. And obviously, they look at that in terms of what we've got on the ground and determine what we have to have in order to get the most critical need out.

So we work off of that priority and try to manage it accordingly. Now, we also had a problem initially where the aircraft were not necessarily declaring on the modems what cargo they had. So it was difficult to know, if you had three airplanes up there and you only had time to bring one down, which one had the most critical equipment onboard. The airman that's controlling it doesn't know.

So we think we've fixed that by emphasizing to everybody we need to know in these categories what you've got. So if you have to make a decision like that, it can be made with the best knowledge possible.

So that's not a good answer, but it's just basically the way it's been happening. Now, this has only been going on now -- we're six days into it. And like I said, every day we're making progress, and it's getting better. And the flow of supplies and everything has stepped up every day.

Q I'm sorry, if I could just follow up. So are you saying it's the Haitians who are deciding and not the U.S. Air Force who is deciding who's landing?

GEN. KEEN: No, no, no. The Haitians -- the government of Haiti decides what the priority that's needed on the ground. And obviously, they do that in consultation with all the international communities and the donor nations and working with the U.N. to determine, okay, do we need medical supplies and equipment the most right now, or do we need water? I mean, we got pretty critical on water at one point.

And sometimes it's, okay, the priority are these three things. So we take our priorities based upon we being the air traffic control. And the air traffic control, it's not just the U.S. controllers at the airfield. He's sitting side-by-side. We have government of Haiti officials with them, even though they're controlling, doing the air traffic control function to bring the airplane on the ground.

DR. OHAB: Thank you. The next is Kristi Degn. Kristi, are you there?

Q Hello?

GEN. KEEN: Hello?

Q Hello?

DR. OHAB: Hello, Kristi, you have the next question. All right, to Dale Kissinger.

Q Good evening, General. This is Dale Kissinger, a very proud airlift airman. And I thank you for those kind words about the guys working there at the airport.

I do have a question on the flow. And are you going to (especially ?) bring in C-17s with more capability than C-130s?

GEN. KEEN: Well, we've been bringing in C-17s all along. I mean, this, from the first day in fact some of the first things we brought in because we knew we needed some heavy forklift. We only had one forklift on this airfield. This is a big, long runway of 10,000 feet. So the Air Force, when they brought in their air traffic STS team, special tactics air traffic control teams, they knew they needed some heavy forklifts. So those came in on C-17s.

Q Super, thanks. I had only seen 130s so I was curious if they were coming in. Thank you.

GEN. KEEN: Yeah. We're getting as many that are available, bringing C-17s in.

DR. OHAB: Next up is David Axe.

Q Hi, General, thanks for taking the time. I've heard a lot about corporations trying to get involved in a big way, especially in the logistical problems in getting aid distributed. (I talked ?) to FedEx about their efforts working with USAID to handle some humanitarian logistics. Are you interfacing at all with corporate partners in this relief work?

GEN. KEEN: Well, we are integrated obviously with our interagency partners, USAID and, of course, the Office of Defense Disaster Assistance here in the embassy. They are the primary lead for contacts with public-private organizations and nongovernment organization to determine when they offer assistance like this so we can facilitate and help if it comes to transporting something in order to enable that to happen. But we aren't out in the lead in that. Our effort in this is in support of USAID.

Q Okay, great. Thank you.

DR. OHAB: Next up is Nathan Hodge.

Q Hi, General. Nathan Hodge with wired.com. Just to follow on David's question, would you consider or is there any talk about establishing some kind of different military operations center that could serve as a way of sharing information with NGOs and international organizations?

GEN. KEEN: Well, what we have established is essentially the same concept. We're calling it a humanitarian coordination center. When Secretary Clinton was here earlier in the week, I briefed her and said one of the major things we needed to do with the government of Haiti and the United Nations is to establish a central coordination center. And the name of humanitarian coordination center was selected.

President Preval immediately said, absolutely, we've got to do that. So what we are doing in the United Nations and MINUSTAH headquarters, we're establishing this coordination center which is built around that concept that you mentioned where the principal donor nations

are part of sort of a steering committee. And the requirements are offered to that body, and they are bounced off of what the requirements are and the prioritization so there can be decisions made out of that on what is most needed and what should come forward.

That didn't exist obviously when the crisis occurred. And it's very immature right now. In fact, I've put my lead there. I've got a general officer who is in charge of this particular group for me, who is interfacing with the United Nations to form this center and the Brazilian command commander, Major General Floriano Peixoto, who commands the U.N. force MINUSTAH, we're using his facilities. And he's proving manning for it as well.

And then we hope that all the nations who are here with forces will participate and join that center, because that's where we need, one, to get the strategic level guidance of what the priorities are and what requirements come from above and then what requirements maybe come from below and then what things are being offered for different folks. So you've got one phone number or several phone numbers that go into this center. If you've got something to offer, it can be looked at and determined, is that needed or is not needed?

And if it's needed, where should it stack in terms of getting here in the full context of things? We don't have that totally functioning right now, but we're pushing as fast as we can to get it up and running, because that's going to be increasingly important as we go into the following weeks and months and try to deal with the enormous generosity around the world of people trying to offer assistance and we need some way, as you note. There's lots of great lessons learned on the fact that you need something like this to help you make some key decisions.

DR. OHAB: Thank you.

Paul McLeary, you're up next.

Q Hi, General. Paul McLeary from DTI. As far as the humanitarian coordination center goes, how are you bringing in various NGOs into the fold? Who's really taking the lead on it, the U.N. or the U.S. military?

GEN. KEEN: Well, the U.N., as I understand it. And again, I was here on a pre-planned visit when it occurred. And I've gotten to know the U.N. and MINUSTAH real well over the last six days. And I've gotten to appreciate the great and tremendous work that they were doing here in Haiti before the earthquake.

And they do have an office that has been working with the nongovernment organizations here in Haiti before, so that office is still functioning and working.

And in that regard, I think we were fortunate that we had a U.N. mission here, obviously. And of course, they were hit hard from the earthquake. So they're picking themselves up, quite frankly, and trying

to establish themselves again. But they do have a mechanism to communicate and reach out to the NGO community.

But other nations do the same. I mean, the USAID of the American embassy has a mechanism to do the same. So I think what we hope to do in this coordination center is bring together all the different pieces who happen to have these connections, so we'll have the U.N. in this coordination center, we'll have the U.S. represented obviously with USAID as our lead. And then I will have a rep in there based upon our capability to deliver the humanitarian assistance supplies. So that would be where I think a lot of this would be sorted out.

DR. OHAB: Thank you.

Next is Ward Carroll.

Q Hi, General. Ward Carroll with military.com. Thanks for your time tonight. You mentioned earlier that, along with the rest of the population, the rebels and gangs are dusting themselves off. Is any part of your strategy to proactively go after those elements? And if so, what is the ROE?

GEN. KEEN: Well, I mentioned earlier that the mission of security and stability is in fact the U.N. forces. And they've been doing that for a number of years, and they've had great success, particularly in places like Cite Soleil which I was walking through on Monday with the ambassador, with a minimal amount of security.

And I was amazed at the progress they've made in Cite Soleil since I was here previously in July 2006, I think.

So the MINUSTAH and the commander are looking at those situations, I think, very hard right now to determine what things need to be done in order to ensure stability continues and that these gangs don't reestablish themselves. I mean, they never went away. I mean, they were able to make a great impact on them, but there are still obviously elements of them. And I think we have to deal with them.

With respect to our mission here, I mentioned earlier my mission is to provide humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and security in order to execute delivery of that. And so we are working in partnership with the U.N. forces as we go forward to do that.

DR. OHAB: All right. The next question is Scott Murphy.

Q Yes, sir. Thank you. General, just a couple of questions about the Air Force. Specifically first, how many airmen are involved in this operation?

GEN. KEEN: I believe right now -- and I would say don't quote me, but that's what you're listening to me for, I suppose -- (laughs) -- yeah, on the ground, the first 100 military that were on the ground here that I welcomed were the United States Air Force. And it was in fact

from the 1st Special Operations Wing and 12th Air Force Contingency Response Group.

I believe now the numbers of Air Force -- and the Air Force's commander just showed up today to put the Air Force command over all of this Air Force, because again we've been building this, and getting that in was not the highest priority a few days ago. I believe we're up to about 300, but I may be off some.

But we're able to get now is obviously we're putting a command structure on our joint task force. The Air Force commander will take over the entire responsibility of running the airport entry, if you will, which includes obviously much more than just landing the planes. It includes the managing of the whole airport. We are evacuating the citizens there. We've got just a lot of logistical issues obviously, as you know, as an airman that he's got to deal with, plus security of the airport.

Now, the outside security of the airport is being handled by, as I mentioned, by MINUSTAH and U.N. forces. And there are contract guards on that, much of it. But inside, where we're operating, we have to provide our own security. And that's going to be one of his responsibilities.

So again, as we each day get farther, we establish ourselves a little bit better.

Q And one quick follow-up question. It's going to be about the airport. You mentioned now that they're doing 24-hour ops. I know that initially the airport was only open during the daytime. Can you give me a little bit more information about the status? Are they able to take instrument approaches? Are they operating 24 hours?

GEN. KEEN: Yes. Just to give you a feel, the earthquake happened, I think, at 16:52 on Tuesday, round about there. The airfield (opening ?) team landed around 21:00 the next night. Within 30 minutes, he had the airfield operational, which meant he was able to verify -- we already knew the runway was okay, but he had to verify the landing lights were already working. But he was able to get the approaches up and get things going very quickly.

Now obviously, we were doing it out on the grass that first night. They moved that into an adjacent building, because the tower, it wasn't collapsed, but it was severely damaged, and the airport terminal is not usable right now. We've got to get structural engineers in to determine whether or not it can be reoccupied, because it doesn't appear that it can by just looking at it. But we've got to get engineers. So the terminal is not being used at all.

So yes, it's been operating at night, which it wasn't before since the night after the earthquake, due to the Air Force capabilities. And that was one of the first requests of President Preval at about midnight the night of the earthquake was, can you get my airport up and operational 7/24, because he knew that it was going to be critical. And we told him, absolutely.

And we made the call at that moment to SOUTHCOM, and they put things in motion to get those airmen here.

DR. OHAB: Now, General, I know that you have somewhere to be in just a few minutes, so I wanted to defer to you in terms of getting a couple more questions in.

GEN. KEEN: Sure.

DR. OHAB: Okay, you have time for a couple more?

GEN. KEEN: Yeah.

DR. OHAB: All right. The next was Rob Neipel (ph). Rob, are you there? All right. We will --

Q I am, but I did not have a question. I'm sorry.

DR. OHAB: Okay, thank you.

Sharon Weinberger, do you have a question.

Q Yes. General, this is Sharon Weinberger with AOL news. I just wanted to go over -- can you give the total number of troops you expect to be in Haiti, U.S. troops, in the next couple of weeks? You were talking about another 5,000, so just the total number, both onshore and aboard ship.

And then you expressed concerns about the footprint. Is there a number at which point you would be concerned it's too many?

GEN. KEEN: Well, I guess I don't have a concern about the footprint except to say I'd prefer to have the smallest footprint possible on land, because it consumes things that otherwise can be pushed out to the population, because we require our own logistics, obviously -- water, food, things like that. So it's a balance.

But we have to have what we need to do in order to accomplish our mission. And that's what I meant. So rather than putting helicopters on land, if I've got the aircraft carrier, I keep them on the aircraft. So that's why you see the numbers you do. Like, the aircraft carrier has about 3,600 sailors on it, and they're basically running air operations in support of us and obviously run the ship.

We're expecting to see the strength of (JTFH ?) grow over the next few weeks to somewhere around 10,000. Of that, I expect about 50 percent or somewhere around 5,000 to be with boots on the ground in Haiti. And that will be principally the troops who are going to be performing the preponderance of delivering aid to the people of Haiti. It's going to be the 82nd Airborne Division, a brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division, which is quickly closing right now, and the 22nd MEU which is formed around one battalion landing team, which will have about 800 Marines.

And that brigade that I talked about has about 3,500 paratroopers. So that gives you a feel. And then the rest of the strength that's going to be boots on the ground are folks like me who are trying to do our part by helping to organize and coordinate with the government and everybody and working with the country team. And then the logistics of it and obviously the airmen that run the airfield.

And we've got a Navy component here that's absolutely essential, like I said, not just those that are running the ships, but with also doing the port opening pieces of this.

And there are Coast Guardsman obviously that are running the support that they do with their cutters and able to respond with a MEDEVAC. So it's taken our entire military plus our Coast Guard, from a military perspective, to do this. And we're building up each day. I hope that answers your question.

Q Yes, General, it does. Thank you.

DR. OHAB: We are just about out of time. We have a couple of minutes left. But I want to thank you all for your questions and your comments today.

Before we wrap things up, General Keen, if you have any final comments, go ahead. Do you have any final thoughts, sir?

GEN. KEEN: Just thank you for your time. And we appreciate all the thoughts and prayers of all the Americans and all of you as well as people around the world and all of the support that you continue to push toward Haiti. And what I can commit to you is we're going to do our very best to help the Haitian people and get what they need as fast as we can.

DR. OHAB: Thank you again, sir, for being here.

GEN. KEEN: Okay.

DR. OHAB: Today's program will be available online if you would find the bloggers link at dodlive.mil where you'll be able to access the story based on today's call, along with source documents such as biographies, this audio file and print transcripts.

Again, thank you, gentlemen and our blogger participants. This concludes the event. Feel free to disconnect.