

# Aristide flees Haiti, U.S. Marines head to capital

U.S. Marines will attempt to enforce order in Haiti, where at least 100 people have died since Feb. 5

By Nancy San Martin, Trenton Daniel and Martin Merzer  
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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — The first of several hundred U.S. Marines left Camp Lejeune, N.C. for Haiti's chaotic capital Sunday night, the vanguard of a multinational force to calm the rebellion that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in less than a month.

A transitional government assumed power, without much initial success. As word spread of Aristide's resignation and flight to asylum, hundreds of residents ignited a new orgy of revenge and opportunism, killing several people, looting countless businesses and torching the homes of Aristide loyalists. Men identifying themselves as rebels, some dressed in civilian clothing, others in camouflage, were seen in the capital.

The Marines, perhaps as few as 100, were expected to land late Sunday at Port-au-Prince's airport, with more to follow on Monday. Fifty members of a Marine security team moved into the capital last week to help secure the U.S. Embassy.

"I have ordered the deployment of Marines, as the leading element of an interim international force, to help bring order and stability to Haiti," President Bush said.

Abandoned by the United States and other foreign governments and under pressure from advancing insurgents, Aristide signed a letter of resignation early Sunday and flew into exile at 6:15 a.m. with his wife and a black-uniformed security detail aboard an unmarked white airplane. State Department spokesman

Richard Boucher said that the United States "facilitated" Aristide's departure. Other administration officials said U.S. Ambassador James Foley offered Aristide a destination and a secure way to leave the country.

Aristide's destination was believed to be the Central African Republic, according to a senior State Department official who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

It was the second such humiliation for Aristide, who was ousted by a military coup in 1991 and restored to power in 1994 by 20,000 U.S. troops.

"If my resignation prevents the shedding of blood, I agree to leave," Aristide, Haiti's first democratically elected president in 200 years of independence, wrote Sunday.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Boniface Alexandre, a widely respected figure in Haiti, was sworn in as head of the transitional government. "I assume it because the constitution indicates it," Alexandre said during a news conference.

He urged the 8 million residents of Haiti to refrain from further violence.

"The task will not be an easy one," he said. "Haiti is in crisis. ... It needs all its sons and daughters. No one should take justice into their own hands."

This appeal didn't work. In recent weeks, pro-government militants had warned foes that if Aristide left, they would "burn down their houses and cut off the heads," a rallying cry that Haiti's founding father Jean-Jacques Dessalines aimed at the French 200 years ago, and on Sunday a new episode of violence ravaged the capital.

Bullet-riddled bodies were seen on city streets. Angry crowds of Aristide supporters gathered at the presidential National Palace and roamed elsewhere through Port-au-Prince. Bursts of gunfire reverberated through the streets. Looters plundered banks,



Tom Burton Orlando Sentinel

Haitians gather outside the National Palace on Sunday after learning President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled the country the previous night.

police stations and supermarkets. Smoke billowed over the capital.

Mobs reportedly burned down the homes of Aristide loyalists, including Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and spokesman Mario Dupuy.

The new death toll couldn't be determined, but at least 100 people have died in the rebellion that began Feb. 5.

Later Sunday, police finally moved into action, sometimes in association with rebels, and the violence subsided.

Aristide's most outspoken political critics offered few details about their next step.

"Right now we're in the stage of

making sure violence doesn't continue and that people put down their guns," said Andy Apaid, a spokesman for the political opposition.

Rebel leader Guy Philippe, who turned 36 Sunday, said he endorsed the arrival of U.S. and other international troops. "I think it's a good decision," Philippe told CNN. "The people of Haiti need it and the country needs it. They will be welcome." At the United Nations, diplomats worked Sunday evening on a resolution to authorize an international military force.

U.S. officials, meanwhile, swiftly ordered the Marines into action.

"We have been informed that several other countries are prepared to move quickly to join this mission," said Boucher.

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