

HAÏTI

REUTERS 

U.S. Sees 1-Year Stay for International Haiti Force

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The international peacekeeping force could be in Haiti a year or longer until a local police force can be trained to take over in the troubled nation, a top U.S. official said on Wednesday.

The United States also rejected a plan by the Haitian government to incorporate armed rebels into the police force, saying the international community would balk at providing financing and technical assistance to such a force.

A U.N.-sanctioned force of 3,500 moved into Haiti to restore order after a violent uprising in which at least 200 were killed and ended the presidency of Jean-Bertrand Aristide on Feb. 29.

Roger Noriega, assistant secretary of state for the Western Hemisphere, said that the exact period for the force would be set by the U.N. Security Council and could be renewed.

"But I think there's a recognition that we need to maintain a presence for a period of time until the Haitian National Police is stood up," he told the American Enterprise Institute think tank.

"And that process will take at least, I would think, nine to 12 months, to get people identified" for the force.

The United States, France, Canada and Chile have contributed to the

force, led by the U.S. Marines. Noriega said Aristide ruined the old police force by filling its ranks with gang members that supported his government.

Since the revolt broke out in early February, the Haitian National Police has dwindled from about 5,000 to around 2,000 and lacks proper leadership, according to the Organization of American States (OAS).

Noriega said the multinational force will oversee a process of "shadowing" and "mentoring" the new police force as it is being created.

The Haitian government said it has a plan to incorporate armed rebels into the police force, raising concerns that human rights violators could end up in uniform.

Noriega said members of Haitian security forces should be subject to a "very close vetting" for past criminality.

"Participating in a rebel group, for example, would not necessarily disqualify a person but it wouldn't automatically move him into the security force. That's not an acceptable formula."

The U.S. and the financial community would not support "financially or technically that kind of a police force," he said.

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