

Peacemaking, Complex Emergencies, and Disaster Response: What Happens, How Do You Respond?

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Summary

In this paper we examine some of the requirements for disaster relief operations.

This paper is part of a larger project for Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT) examining the ability of afloat naval forces to respond to disasters and other emergencies in the CINCPACFLT area of interest. Other papers in this series examine different aspects of afloat forces assisting in disaster relief operations. . . .

In this paper we attempt to answer three interrelated questions:

- What disasters are likely to occur in CINCPACFLT's area of interest?
- How do these disasters evolve?
- What response is required, and who meets those requirements when the military does not show up?

If you expand CINCPACFLT's area of interest to include those regions where CINCPACFLT may be called on to resource forces in support of another CINC, it turns out that almost every type of disaster occurs in CINCPACFLT's area of interest. They range from natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, droughts, typhoons) in the Pacific basin, to complex emergencies along the east coast of Africa and the Asian subcontinent (Afghanistan).

Although many disasters occur that CINCPACFLT may be interested in, military forces become involved in only a few of them every year. This winnowing process occurs across the spectrum of possible response; only the indigenous disaster management organization (if any) is guaranteed to respond to a particular disaster. The international community, the U.S. government, and the U.S. military respond to only a fraction of the disasters that occur.

Disasters evolve along a well-known trajectory. We have looked at the timelines for various types of disasters. Actual disaster data show that there is often a delay between the point of which it is inevitable that the disaster will strike, and the arrival of the first response. For com-

plex emergencies, this time difference can be considerable; it can be days or a week for even rapid-onset disasters.

Afloat forces can exploit this time difference to mitigate against their need to sail (vs. fly) to a disaster. If they begin moving at the first sign of trouble, they may arrive at about the same time as aircraft. However, this also means that afloat forces are more dependent on information about where and when a disaster will strike that could involve U.S. military forces.

Many participants in international disaster response are beginning to develop disaster prediction and tracking capabilities. These include predicting floods and droughts, mapping vulnerable populations, and analyzing vulnerability to natural disaster. The key finding is that afloat forces, because they are so dependent on rapid prediction and understanding of when and where they will need to respond, need to incorporate these models and prediction tools into their daily intelligence collection, dissemination, and operations process.

Requirements for disaster response can vary widely according to the type of disaster, but vary less between events of the same general type. In other words, relief requirements for hurricanes resemble those for typhoons and other storm events more than they resemble those for droughts or earthquakes. But overall, the requirements for transportation of relief goods is a consistent requirement across the spectrum of disasters. Likewise, the need for basic relief supplies—food, water, and shelter—is consistent across disasters. It is in the specialty requirements, such as medical care, that disaster relief efforts will differ the most.

Another consistent fact we find in examining disaster relief operations is the growing capability of the non-government and international communities to respond. International organizations are beginning to build sophisticated command, control, and logistics information systems to allow disasters to be predicted and relief operations tracked. Likewise, the use of aircraft, ships, and land vehicles owned or leased by the relief agencies is a common practice.

Developed and developing countries are beginning to build indigenous relief capabilities. Most disaster relief is handled by organiza-

tions internal to the country where the disaster occurs. Developing countries, aided by the international development community, are working towards indigenous disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts. Developed countries are increasingly drawing on the experience of the United States in dealing with large national disasters in developed economies.

With the growing number of organizations that can bring significant capability to relief efforts, the areas where military forces provide *unique* capabilities include:

- Armed conflict. There is still no substantial non-government capability to protect relief operations from hostile actions. Relief organizations routinely scale back or abandon operations in areas where there is substantial threat to their workers.
- Large-scale disasters. Disasters that overwhelm a region or country, destroy large portions of its infrastructure, or debilitate its social and economic structures can present problems on a scale that only military forces with their self-sustainment, organization, and mobility can effectively deal with.
- Niche support. The military services can contribute some capabilities in great numbers (helicopters, for example) or in unique ways (airborne and sea-borne command and control, for example). These niche capabilities, if configured, trained, and resourced for the mission, can provide significant on-call resources to relief operations with unique requirements.