

Japan-U.S. Alliance Management:

Natural Disaster Response Cooperation with the U.S. Forces in Japan

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Approved by:

September 2014

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barry Howell".

Dr. Barry Howell, Director
Warfare Capabilities and Employment Team
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Foreword

In 2012, the Okinawa Peace Assistance Center (OPAC), a security-oriented think tank in Naha, Okinawa, began a study, “Japan-U.S. Alliance Management: Natural Disaster Response Cooperation with the U.S. Forces in Japan,” funded by the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (CGP). OPAC asked the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) to partner in this effort due to our previous experience analyzing U.S. military contributions to overseas humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) operations. In conducting this study, the OPAC-CNA team focused on the implications of a large-scale tsunami striking Okinawa Island in Okinawa Prefecture. A large-scale tsunami would devastate the relatively small island of Okinawa, and its aftermath would require coordinated efforts by civilian and military authorities there.

Okinawa is unique among Japanese prefectures in terms of its location, geography, and demography. It is the southernmost Japanese prefecture, and it is geographically separated from the rest of the Japanese archipelago. In the event of a large-scale natural disaster, the islands of Okinawa Prefecture could easily become isolated from the rest of Japan. Critical to this study is the presence of U.S.-leased military bases of all four U.S. armed services on the main island of Okinawa. These bases cover a substantial portion of the landmass on Okinawa Island. They also are important for disaster preparedness, disaster risk mitigation, and HA/DR operations in the aftermath of a natural disaster: their open space could be used for safe havens, and those bases that occupy high ground would be needed for staging HA/DR response operations.

But the presence of U.S. military bases on Okinawa also poses a set of challenges for civilian and military emergency planners. First, U.S. military forces not only will be first responders in the aftermath of a natural disaster, but also will likely be disaster victims. Second, there are tens of thousands of U.S. military family members and associated personnel on Okinawa who might also become victims in the event of a natural disaster. Third, there is an anti-base grassroots movement in Okinawa that opposes any form of cooperation between local or prefectural government entities and U.S. base personnel. This anti-base sentiment enjoys broad-based support on Okinawa and creates a political problem for elected officials who seek to develop closer ties with U.S. military commands on Okinawa. The key to saving lives and

mitigating property damage in the event of a natural disaster is effective preparation; however, the political climate in Okinawa makes this a sensitive issue.

The practical result of these challenges is that civilian and military authorities have achieved only limited cooperative disaster preparations on Okinawa. This is problematic because, in practice, the civilian and military communities live and work in close proximity. U.S. military families live in Okinawan communities, and Okinawans work on and close to U.S. bases. The reality on the ground thus strongly suggests that the communities begin joint preparations for future natural disasters.

This study examined ways in which the two communities can work together toward meeting the identified need for disaster preparedness in Okinawa Prefecture. During our research, the study team met with a broad range of Japanese local, prefectural, and national officials. In order to gain an understanding of effective civil-military cooperation in disaster preparation and disaster relief operations, we met with officials from regions affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 and officials from prefectures with strong ties to local U.S. forces, including the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. These officials gave us insights into effective civil-military cooperation both prior to and in the aftermath of natural disasters.

The full final study report can be found in Japanese at the following link: <http://www.opac.or.jp/report/pdf/cgp-final.pdf>. This summary paper includes the introductory letter from Mr. Reiji Fumoto, the OPAC Executive Director, and the policy recommendations from the report. The policy recommendations provide a road-map for U.S. civilian and military decision-makers and Japanese decision-makers at the national and prefectural levels to follow as they begin disaster preparations that will make the Japanese and American citizens living on Okinawa safer in the event of a large-scale natural disaster there.

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Introduction

The Great East Japan Earthquake struck at 2:46 p.m. on March 11, 2011. With a magnitude of 9.0, it is the most powerful earthquake on record ever to strike Japan. Its epicenter was off the coast of Sanriku, and it rocked the lands of Tohoku. Shortly afterwards, a huge tsunami hit the coastal area of Tohoku, not only taking many lives but also causing a nuclear accident. Thus, Japan was faced with a combination of disasters: earthquake, tsunami, and radioactive contamination.

The United States, as Japan's only ally, executed an extensive relief mission—Operation Tomodachi—to help Japan. U.S. forces deployed right after the earthquake, and, as soon as they received an official request from the Japanese government, they quickly dispatched units to conduct search-and-rescue operations, transport personnel and relief supplies, and help Sendai Airport resume operations. U.S. Marines based on Okinawa also conducted a full-scale relief operation that helped the isolated Oshima Island of Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture. Not only people from the disaster-hit areas, but also many Japanese citizens all over the country, were encouraged by the relief activities conducted by the U.S. forces.

If a major earthquake and tsunami were to hit Okinawa Prefecture, which consists of many islands distant from mainland Japan, its geographic isolation would complicate relief efforts. Consequently, it needs to utilize every relief resource available within the prefecture to build a scheme that would save as many lives as possible. Having the prefecture work in cooperation with the U.S. military, which has abundant knowledge and experience in both humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, would help improve the prefecture's overall ability to deal with natural disasters. However, it is a political challenge to fully recognize the U.S. troops as a useful resource of the local community, and to incorporate the U.S. forces into local disaster response measures, given the fact that there are sensitive political issues related to the U.S. military bases in Okinawa. Nevertheless, disaster countermeasures that directly affect people's lives should be handled separately from political issues to the greatest extent possible. In order to facilitate the disaster management cooperation between the U.S. forces and the local governments, it is necessary to build a new framework through the efforts of both parties.

Based on an awareness of these concepts, the Okinawa Peace Assistance Center (OPAC) conducted a two-year bilateral research project, "Japan-U.S. Alliance Management: Natural Disaster Response Cooperation with the U.S. Forces in Japan,"

funded by the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership. The report is a summary consisting of policy recommendations and research results, with a particular focus on the disaster response cooperation with the U.S. forces on Okinawa. We hope this report will serve as an aid to enhance Okinawa's capability and measures for disaster risk management.

Lastly, we would like to thank everyone who has supported us in this project. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the Ishinomaki and Kesenuma cities of Miyagi Prefecture, officers in charge of disaster prevention at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, officers from the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, officers in charge of disaster prevention at the Okinawa Prefectural Government and the local governments in Okinawa where the U.S. military bases are located, and doctors of the Japanese Red Cross hospitals. We would also like to thank those members of the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors, who gave us valuable insights and suggestions.

April 2014

Reiji Fumoto
Executive Director
Okinawa Peace Assistance Center

Summary of Policy Recommendations

Coming from the perspective of Japan-U.S. alliance management, this research group examined disaster prevention and response measures for a large-scale tsunami on Okinawa. We found that, in short, the key to effective disaster management there is to increase the local governments' abilities both to resist and respond to disasters and to access external assistance. Given that Okinawa consists of a number of islands distant from the mainland of Japan, it is important to enhance the local governments' capabilities to supply self-help, mutual aid, and public assistance in order to minimize damage from a disaster. At the same time, it is vital for Okinawa to stabilize itself quickly so that it will be ready to receive external assistance and facilitate relief and recovery operations.

Moreover, the island hosts a large U.S. military presence, including approximately 50,000 U.S. military personnel and dependents, and effective disaster preparations cannot ignore this population. Until now, local disaster management measures on Okinawa have tended not to adequately take the U.S. military presence into account. However, in order to improve Okinawa's comprehensive disaster response capability, local planners must (1) regard the U.S. military-related population as members of the local community, and (2) consider ways to use the U.S. military's disaster response capabilities to increase the local community's resilience to disaster. If U.S. military bases and related personnel were not involved in local response efforts, and lives were lost as a result, a dark shadow would be cast over the Japan-U.S. alliance.

While U.S. forces were a major contributor to disaster assistance following the Great East Japan Earthquake, their role would be different in Okinawa's case. In a disaster on Okinawa, they would be involved both as victims and as responders—and, in both capacities, they would have a direct impact on the local area's resilience and response capability.

Based on the above considerations, we examined prompt and effective bilateral disaster-response cooperation between Japan and the United States from various viewpoints. We concluded that the top priority should be to strengthen the local disaster resilience capability in the anticipated disaster-affected areas. In order to reduce the damage to a minimum level, the research group formed 11

recommendations. These recommendations focus on the disaster preparedness stage of the disaster cycle—in other words, they are steps that should be taken now.

1. When it comes to disaster preparedness, think about the role of U.S. forces on Okinawa apart from other political issues. Okinawa is faced with various political issues related to the U.S. military bases; however, those U.S. forces stationed on Okinawa can be the key to reducing the impact of a disaster.
2. View the existence of the U.S. forces on Okinawa (facilities and personnel) as a community asset that would help reduce the impacts of natural disasters and be indispensable in protecting the lives of the people of Okinawa.
3. Establish a mechanism that would enable the U.S. forces and Japan Self-Defense Forces on Okinawa to cooperate in a mutually complementary way during a natural disaster, and conduct joint disaster response drills on a regular basis.
4. Designate the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma as the regional hub for disaster response. Its function as a hub for receiving disaster relief should be retained after it is returned to Japan, and there should be prepositioning and storage sites for relief supplies, fuel, and equipment essential to emergency response and recovery activities in preparation for a major disaster on Okinawa. (Japan and the United States could also use such supplies to extend international emergency relief operations to the Asia-Pacific region.)
5. Because many U.S. military bases border more than one municipality in Okinawa, the Okinawa Prefectural Government (OPG) needs to assume leadership for disaster prevention and response cooperation between the U.S. forces and municipalities on Okinawa. The OPG also should exercise its leadership in building the foundation for such cooperation.
6. Conclude a comprehensive agreement for disaster prevention and response cooperation between the OPG (municipalities as well) and the U.S. forces on Okinawa. Also, re-examine the basic plan for disaster risk management in order to better incorporate the U.S. military presence on Okinawa, and conduct regular joint disaster response drills between the OPG (including the Japan Self-Defense Forces) and the U.S. forces on Okinawa.
7. In a joint disaster response exercise, conduct a specific scenario-based table-top game to examine a possible arrangement for sharing information and damage assessment, and the coordination mechanism between the OPG and the U.S. forces on Okinawa. Next, based on the findings drawn from the table-top game, conduct a field exercise with a focus on the initial response period (the first 72 hours after disaster impact).

8. In order to strengthen mutual cooperation between the OPG (and its municipalities) and the U.S. forces, revise the “Mutual Disaster Cooperation Plan between OPG and the U.S. Forces in Okinawa” in accordance with the findings of the joint exercises. Furthermore, ensure that the conclusions of disaster cooperation agreements, such as local implementing agreements, between the local authorities and the local U.S. forces are facilitated.
9. Establish a disaster preparedness network between the OPG and the designated authority of the U.S. forces on Okinawa. The designated authority of the U.S. forces on Okinawa, Okinawa Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of Japan), and Consulate General of the United States in Naha should take part as observers in the Okinawa Prefectural Disaster Prevention Council and “Okinawa disaster prevention network” of the Okinawa General Bureau of the Cabinet Office.
10. Set up a military base affairs and disaster management coordinator under the OPG Deputy Director General in Charge of Military Base Affairs and Disaster Prevention, to coordinate with the Okinawa Disaster Prevention Council and Okinawa Disaster Prevention Network. Build a working-level network for disaster risk management which includes U.S. forces and Japan Self-Defense Forces on Okinawa.
11. Set up a disaster risk management coordinator within the U.S. forces on Okinawa to enhance their cooperation with OPG. In addition, set up a disaster risk management liaison officer at each U.S. military installation to be the conduit to local authorities. (In case of a disaster, the disaster risk management liaison officer should be dispatched to the disaster countermeasures headquarters of the affected municipalities.)

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