

The U.S. Foreign Disaster Response Process

How It Works and How It Could Work Better

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Since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and 2005 Pakistan earthquake relief efforts, much has been written about what went right and what went wrong, and how a future U.S. response to a foreign disaster could be made more effective. A critical first step to improving the overall process, however, is to understand how an initial decision to respond is made and implemented. What are the criteria for responding? What are the procedures for authorizing a response? When is it appropriate to request military help? How can the responsible parties make sure that military assistance is provided when and where it is needed and in the proper scale? Perhaps most importantly, are the policies and procedures now in place, some of which were designed and authorized thirty to forty years ago, still relevant to current and emerging requirements for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance?

Answers to these questions have never been as obvious and pro forma as one might think, in part because the formal U.S. process for approving foreign disaster relief efforts and, most specifically, military support has often been bypassed in favor of an informal, back-channel process that is not always exacting, well informed, or consistent. Moreover, new procedures and organizational structures introduced largely as a result of the 2004 tsunami and 2005 earthquake experiences have caused many to question the relevance of past practice via either process for deciding when and how to respond. So, too, policies and funding mechanisms put in place to cope with an occasional large-scale disaster have proven to be inadequate for responding

to the rising number of small- and medium-sized disasters of recent years, none of which approach the scale of the tsunami or earthquake noted above, but nonetheless require the prompt provision of targeted military and non-military aid. One of the consequences, however, is that there could be precious little money left in the DoD kitty for any large-scale disaster that might occur, prompting in turn an earlier than expected need for supplemental funding the approval of which can not be guaranteed.

As noted in the introduction, moreover, current thinking with respect to disaster relief planning has become increasingly intertwined with and influenced by broader discussions on stability operations, with its emphasis on coordinated military and civilian support to nations in need across a wide spectrum of relief, recovery, and reconstruction activities. As a result, those charged with responsibility for preparing and managing disaster relief operations – and for absorbing lessons learned to improve the effectiveness of future operations – are increasingly taking a longer-term perspective that places as much emphasis on preventive measures that may be initiated before and after a disaster has occurred to reduce the damage and the costs of future incidents as it does on the provision of emergency relief in the midst of a disaster. This shift in perspective has in turn underscored the critical importance of coupling relatively short-term disaster relief efforts with humanitarian assistance programs aimed at building local capacities over time to cope with sudden disasters. Hence, traditional notions of what a

properly framed foreign disaster relief policy really ought to include and emphasize, and the manner in which it should ideally be executed, have begun to change quite significantly over the past few years.

The goal of this chapter is to clarify how the U.S. decision process is likely to unfold from this point on, given reforms now or soon to be in place. This chapter also highlights a number of improvements that still could be made to ensure that America's participation in foreign disaster relief efforts – and any decision to deploy U.S. military assets in support of such efforts – at least begins on the right foot and then paves the way to disaster prevention and damage limitation via targeted humanitarian assistance. Obviously, when both objectives can be achieved more consistently, the overall relief operation, from first response to recovery and reconstruction, is likely to be more successful and the military component in particular more cost effective.

State as the Lead Federal Agency

For foreign disaster relief operations, the Department of State serves as the U.S. lead federal agency (LFA), relying on the regional bureau responsible for the area where the disaster has struck and on the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to coordinate the overall response. Once the government of a disaster-stricken nation has requested assistance, the local U.S. embassy reaches out immediately to the Operations Center within the Executive Secretariat of the State Department via a disaster declaration cable.¹ For large-scale events, the U.S. ambassador will probably also contact the relevant U.S. military regional combatant command (COCOM) directly, such as U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) in Honolulu, though this depends largely on the personal ties between the ambassador

in question and the COCOM commander. For its part, the Operations Center, which maintains a twenty-four hour watch on emerging or rapid-onset crises overseas, will quickly set up an interagency standing committee (or IASC) led by the appropriate regional bureau to monitor the situation and facilitate interagency coordination.²

In addition to staff from the regional bureau, the State Department's IASC generally includes representatives from the bureaus of political-military affairs, consular affairs, diplomatic security, and public affairs, as well as personnel from USAID, the National Security Council (NSC), and the Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and Defense, each of which establishes a parallel departmental joint task force (or JTF) that is linked to the White House and all other relevant agencies through the Operations Center. Given the numbers involved, managing and directing the interactions among all the relevant offices and agencies can be a very time-consuming and labor-intensive process, especially during major disasters. In response to the 2004 tsunami tragedy, for example, the Operations Center operated twenty-four hours a day for seventeen days, with over 280 people rotating through in shifts (Schoff 2005, 63). Moreover, the NSC chaired a daily video conference with the various JTF heads that focused on operational issues, led by the NSC's director for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) in the International Economic Affairs section.³

In the field, USAID works closely with the U.S. embassy and the local USAID mission in the affected country (assuming that USAID has a mission there) to assess the humanitarian situation and determine priority needs. Within USAID, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) is the primary party

1 Under U.S. law, to set a formal disaster relief operation in motion, the cable must meet three criteria: 1) the disaster must be beyond the ability of the host nation to handle on its own; 2) the host nation must formally request U.S. assistance; and 3) such assistance must be in the strategic interests of the United States.

2 The State Department's lead-agency role for non-military incidents was confirmed in presidential directive/NSC-27, January 19, 1978. <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/pddirectives/pd27.pdf>.

3 This approach to the management of a "complex contingency operation" is similar to that outlined in the May 1997 presidential decision directive (PDD) 56, in which the deputy secretaries of relevant departments established appropriate interagency working groups (normally an executive committee at the assistant secretary level) to supervise the day-to-day management of the operation. <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd56.htm>.

responsible for coordinating the U.S. government response to both natural and man-made disasters overseas, including those arising from civil conflict, acts of terrorism, or industrial accidents. Insofar as disaster relief operations more specifically are concerned, then, OFDA actually serves as the operational-level LFA within the broader State Department community. Within twenty-four hours of a disaster declaration, OFDA provides up to \$50,000 to the U.S. ambassador in the affected country for the purchase of local relief supplies (OFDA 2006, 10), though this amount can be quickly increased to \$100,000 without much difficulty. If the scope of a disaster merits it, OFDA deploys a regional advisor and a disaster assistance response team (DART) to the affected area to conduct rapid assessments of the disaster situation, analyze the existing capacity of the host nation and other relief agencies, and, if required, coordinate operations on the ground with the affected country, other private donors and international organizations, and, when present, U.S. and foreign militaries.

OFDA teams include specialists from a variety of disciplines, including experts in disaster relief planning, damage assessment, search and rescue, water and sanitation, nutrition, shelter, logistics, contracting, communications, and medicine. As no two disasters are alike, DARTs generally are tailored and scaled to the crisis at hand, drawing in non-State Department experts as required. During the 2004 tsunami response, for example, OFDA dispatched over fifty-five DART members and one hundred field-based USAID staff to India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Through fifteen airlifts of emergency relief commodities, OFDA delivered hygiene kits to meet the emergency needs of more than 80,000 people, water containers for over

143,000 people, and emergency medical kits from the World Health Organization (WHO) with sufficient supplies for 10,000 people for three months (OFDA 2005, 16). The response to tropical cyclone Sidr that hit Bangladesh in November 2007, on the other hand, was far more limited in scale and timeframe, but nonetheless vital, including the dispatch of a five-person DART team the day after the storm and the provision of USAID emergency funding for much-needed fresh water supplies and for airlifting plastic sheeting, hygiene and sanitation kits, and medical supplies to key distribution points. In early March 2008, a similarly small but essential response to heavy flooding in Ecuador involved a single C-130 cargo plane (from the Kentucky Air National Guard) delivering some 162 flood cleanup kits, 9,000 alcohol pads, 2,250 bio-hazard waste bags, and 9,000 disposable vinyl gloves.

All requests for assistance from OFDA staff and DARTs in the field are relayed to an on-call response management team (RMT) in charge of emergency operations based back in Washington. Logistics officers from the RMT coordinate the delivery of initial relief supplies, such as plastic sheeting, hygiene kits, health supplies, water containers and purification units, and blankets, from one of OFDA's commodity stockpiles located in Dubai, Italy, and Miami. The RMT also serves as the logistics liaison to other crisis centers and task forces involved in a U.S. government response, including the State Department's IASC. Project officers in Washington also review and fund flash appeals from partners in the field, mostly UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) active in disaster-prone areas, such as UNICEF, CARE, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. In total, OFDA funds to local and international NGOs and UN agencies providing

relief to tsunami-affected countries reached over \$84 million (OFDA 2005, 17). OFDA support to relief agencies operating in Pakistan and India after the 2005 earthquake totaled more than \$69 million (OFDA 2006, 7).

So, too, OFDA works closely with other parts of USAID, such as the Office of Food for Peace (FFP), the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), the Office of Conflict Management and the Mitigation (CMM), the Office of Military Affairs (OMA), and the appropriate USAID regional bureau, to ensure that the immediate needs of the affected population are met. OFDA collaboration with these organizations extends to establishing the groundwork for longer-term recovery and reconstruction assistance, including development projects and cash-for-work activities, such as waste management, debris removal, and shelter construction. Moreover, USAID has standing contracts in place with private contractors whereby it can charter commercial aircraft (both fixed- and rotary-wing) to provide lift support, ship relief supplies, and conduct search and rescue operations. That said, when the evolving requirements of a particular relief effort cannot be met by civilian assets contracted or chartered by USAID, or by the UN, local and international NGOs, and various donor countries, OFDA (and the State Department more generally) is authorized to work with the Department of Defense (DoD) to identify and direct the use of military assets (if deployed) for HA/DR missions overseas. In most cases, this involves the provision of additional air- and sea-lift support, but it may also include a broader array of special military assets and expertise in the communications, engineering, water production and purification, and medical support arenas, among other contributions.

Traditionally, if it is determined that military assets are indeed necessary to respond

to a disaster, OFDA will submit a formal request for military assistance to the State Department's Executive Secretariat, which will in turn forward the request to the Executive Secretariat of DoD. Following an intensive intra-DoD review process, the secretary of defense or deputy secretary may order the deployment of military assets to the disaster zone in support of OFDA efforts, signing what is called a "third party waiver" to allow U.S. military goods and services to be used in a non-military operation to assist a "third party." On the basis of such a waiver, over fifteen thousand U.S. soldiers and sailors were deployed as part of the 2004 tsunami response to work alongside OFDA in the affected regions. More specifically, the U.S. military provided twenty-six ships, eighty-two planes, and fifty-one helicopters to help deliver more than 24.5 million tons of relief supplies and enable USAID and other disaster relief agencies to move much-needed aid to inaccessible areas affected by the tsunami (OFDA 2005, 17). But DoD assistance may be as limited (if nonetheless crucial) as the dispatch of a single C-130 to deliver supplies to a disaster zone, or the diversion of a nearby ship to assist in the evacuation of people at risk or injured. In theory, the criterion for both levels of response is that no commercial alternative exists or is readily available.

However, despite the formal process for requesting military assistance, local U.S. ambassadors and country officers in the relevant regional bureau at the State Department have often requested DoD assistance directly, leaving USAID and OFDA out of the loop. Moreover, some officials at State are neither familiar with disaster management issues and procedures nor even aware of USAID's and OFDA's role as the LFA for foreign HA/DR activities. For instance, in response to flash floods in

the Horn of Africa in 2006, State issued a request for DoD assistance. When personnel from DoD spoke with the relevant regional bureau at State, they found that staff at the bureau were unaware of OFDA's role or that USAID was in fact the LFA, and needed to provide the justification for DoD assistance. Still worse, DoD actually had to give bureau officials the contact information for the proper USAID/OFDA representatives (interview 2007a). Examples such as this illustrate the conundrum facing DoD: How does the military (meant primarily as a resource of last resort) respond to requests for assistance when State Department officials may not yet have properly coordinated with USAID/OFDA to fully assess the availability of civilian options, including cheaper, commercial alternatives? In an effort to avoid such situations in the future, USAID, DoD, and State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (State/PM) are drafting new HA/DR guidelines to clarify how State should respond to and handle overseas disasters, and to improve the State-DoD assistance request process.

OFDA, of course, is generally quite willing to request the mobilization of military assets for overseas relief missions, and to give DoD relatively wide latitude to work directly with its counterpart in the affected nation. This is especially true when that nation lies within a region of strategic interest, as was the case during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, the 2006 Philippine mudslide, and the 2007 Bangladesh cyclone. That said, increased calls for DoD involvement in HA/DR missions have pushed the military to operate less as an instrument of last resort in support of civilian relief agencies and more as a regular contributor, intimately involved in a broad range of humanitarian work. Increasingly, U.S. forces are on the ground, working

alongside host nation officials and military personnel to eliminate sources of instability and improve livelihoods through various development and capacity-building projects. In the Horn of Africa, for example, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) established the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in 2002 to promote regional stability and protect coalition interests through disaster relief, humanitarian support, medical and dental assistance, and construction and water development projects. CJTF-HOA also provides military-to-military training in counterterrorism and in border and maritime security. In 2008, the U.S. government will establish a new unified combatant command responsible for Africa known as Africa Command (or AFRICOM) to expand CJTF-HOA civil affairs efforts and similar projects elsewhere on the continent. For their part, U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and PACOM already run similar programs in their respective areas of responsibility (or AORs), such as Joint Task Force-Bravo (JTF-Bravo) in Central America and Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P).

Yet, despite the military's accomplished record and expanding portfolio in the HA/DR arena, it still lacks the necessary skills to conduct a number of essential non-military activities, such as camp management for displaced persons, medical assistance for women and children, and child protection. In contrast, USAID, along with the broader humanitarian community, has been working in the field for some time now, and is generally better able than the military to determine the longer-term needs of an affected community, particularly with regard to gender and pediatric issues, nutrition assistance, and infrastructure development. Therefore, military engagement in HA/DR missions still needs to be careful-

ly coordinated with host nation (HN) personnel, USAID, UN staff, local and international NGOs, and private sector partners to identify priority local needs and to ensure that the various stakeholders in a disaster relief effort focus on areas where they have a comparative advantage: security, logistics, and transport for militaries, and recovery, reconstruction, and rehabilitation for aid workers. With more fully integrated planning and response strategies, the military and civilian components of HA/DR activities should be able to remain distinct but nonetheless closely aligned, thereby enabling a seamless transition from relief to recovery and a harmless military exit.

In an effort to formalize a closer working relationship with DoD as well as with foreign militaries, USAID established the earlier mentioned OMA in 2005 to serve as the focal point for USAID interaction with military planners during disaster response activities and stability operations. To date, OMA has facilitated the establishment of a joint USAID and DoD emergency supply warehouse in Bulgaria, provided pre-deployment briefings to U.S. military units en route to Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines, and served as a liaison between the humanitarian community and DoD during disaster response efforts in Pakistan. With OMA help, USAID also updated its *Field Operations Guide for Disaster Assessment and Response* in 2005, which included reference material for OFDA staff working with U.S., coalition, and multinational military forces, including NATO. And while OMA tends to focus on policy issues related to U.S. civil-military coordination (CMCoord), yet another group within OFDA concentrates on the operational aspects. This group, the Operational Liaison Unit (OLU), conducts training on joint humanitarian operations in coop-

eration with the U.S. military regional commands, and it dispatches CMCoord officers to onsite locations to assist with coordination in actual relief efforts. Some senior USAID staff are assigned as well to regional combatant commands, especially those – such as PACOM and SOUTHCOM – that oversee defense operations in disaster-prone AORs.

Of course, initiatives to enhance CMCoord for disaster relief operations (about which more is said in chapter 4) will be inadequate if similar efforts are not made to improve how State's regional bureaus and its Executive Secretariat coordinate disaster relief efforts with USAID/OFDA. In this sense, intra-State coordination is just as important an objective as interagency coordination. One step toward that goal was taken in January 2006, when the secretary of state created the Office of the Director of Foreign Assistance (DFA) as a way to align more effectively the foreign assistance activities promoted and carried out by various main State Department offices and those of USAID (which is better seen as an independent agency that nonetheless reports to State). The DFA has authority over most State and USAID foreign assistance programs and provides guidance to other agencies that manage foreign aid activities.⁴ The DFA also serves concurrently as the USAID administrator.

In May 2007, USAID and State jointly released their Strategic Plan for FY 2007-12, which defines the primary aims of U.S. foreign development assistance as 1) achieving peace and security, 2) supporting just and democratic governance, 3) investing in people, 4) promoting economic growth and prosperity, 5) providing humanitarian assistance, 6) promoting international understanding, and 7) strengthening U.S. consular and management capabilities (U.S. Department of State/ USAID 2007, 10). With regard to providing hu-

4 Some foreign aid programs, such as the Millennium Challenge Account, the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator, and the Office for Reconstruction and Stabilization, will remain outside the scope of the DFA.

manitarian assistance, the new framework proposes to provide life-saving disaster relief assistance in emergencies, prevent and mitigate disasters by developing local and global mechanisms to anticipate and respond to natural or man-made disasters, and help build the capacity of foreign governments to manage problems associated with displaced persons and refugees. To accomplish this, the Strategic Plan identifies the Departments of Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, and Defense as key government partners with which State and USAID plan to coordinate to help implement future foreign assistance activities.

At this point, it is unclear whether these and other recent efforts to restructure the cumbersome and fragmented U.S. foreign assistance program will improve once and for all how State coordinates future HA/DR efforts with USAID. Some argue that since the DFA also serves as USAID administrator, USAID will likely participate in the policy and budget decision-making process to a greater extent than it does at present (Veillette 2007, 2). On the other hand, some critics fear that the role of USAID is being steadily marginalized in favor of the Department of State, with some of its responsibilities being usurped by main State bureaus and offices. Either way, State and USAID need to improve internal HA/DR procedures so that both are operating with the same understanding and assumptions when it is time to turn to the military for additional disaster relief assistance.

Requesting Department of Defense and Military Assistance

For their part, DoD, service staff, and COCOM planners are exploring various ways to enhance military readiness for and involvement in HA/DR activities, as military support to

disaster relief operations has become an increasingly prominent part of America's diplomatic repertoire. In late 2005, for example, after the Pakistan earthquake, the Pentagon introduced DoD directive 3000.05, "Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations," essentially elevating stability operations to a core military mission comparable to traditional combat missions.⁵ Simply put, the directive makes the provision of military aid in support of HA/DR-related programs a central DoD policy objective, though much remains to be done to educate defense officials and military commanders on the strategic value of such missions, how best to implement them in concert with non-DoD civilian authorities, and what the implications may be for force structure and military procurement. The creation of a new deputy assistant secretary of defense for stability operations capabilities (ODASD/STB) in early 2007 should help in this regard, but the work of this office is only in the early stages and its influence is unclear. As a sub-branch of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(P)), ODASD/STB can urge the individual military services to plan and acquire capabilities for stability operations, including disaster relief, but it can not require them to do so.

Meanwhile, as requests for U.S. military and broader DoD assistance in support of foreign disaster relief have steadily risen in recent years, so has the need to ensure that those requests are grounded in sound strategic assessments, communicated to DoD in a useable format, and based on a demonstrated need for unique military capabilities not (or no longer) available from civilian or commercial sources. All too often, State Department officials will simply request a specific type and scale of military support (for example, sea-

⁵ DoD's formal definition describes "stability operations" as an overarching term encompassing various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment and to provide essential government services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian assistance, of which disaster relief is an integral part (U.S. Department of Defense 2006).

based transport helicopters for evacuating disaster victims) without thinking through the logistical support required to make that capability available, or the possible availability of more cost-effective alternatives. Rising interest in “getting the request process right” (which DoD officials believe would resolve at least 70 percent of the difficulties that bedevil the current process) coincided as well with a wholesale reorganization of OUSD(P) in January 2007 to better address the department’s growing emphasis on managing international military coalitions, equipping partner nations to fight terrorists, and improving U.S. and coalition responses to sudden disasters and humanitarian crises.

As part of this shakeup, a number of new assistant and deputy assistant secretary of defense positions were established, including, in addition to the ODASD/STB slot described above, an assistant secretary of defense for global security affairs (OASD/GSA), and, under this post, a deputy assistant secretary for partnership strategy (ODASD/PRT) and a deputy assistant secretary for coalition and multinational operations (ODASD/CMO). Together, these three new offices share responsibility for organizing the DoD response to natural or man-made disasters. These organizational changes have in turn prompted a top-to-bottom re-examination of the formal State-DoD disaster assistance request process as it is supposed to work, as well as a review of the informal, back-channel process as it has tended to unfold. The idea behind these reviews has been to introduce reforms to improve the process (commonly known to insiders as the Executive Secretariat process) and to make sure that military/DoD assistance is requested – and efforts made to make it available – only when it is truly necessary. The OUSD(P) reorganization for handling disaster relief and as-

sociated humanitarian assistance missions is described below, along with what the responsible officials are suggesting with regard to additional reforms and adjustments.

The Executive Secretariat Process and Recent Adjustments

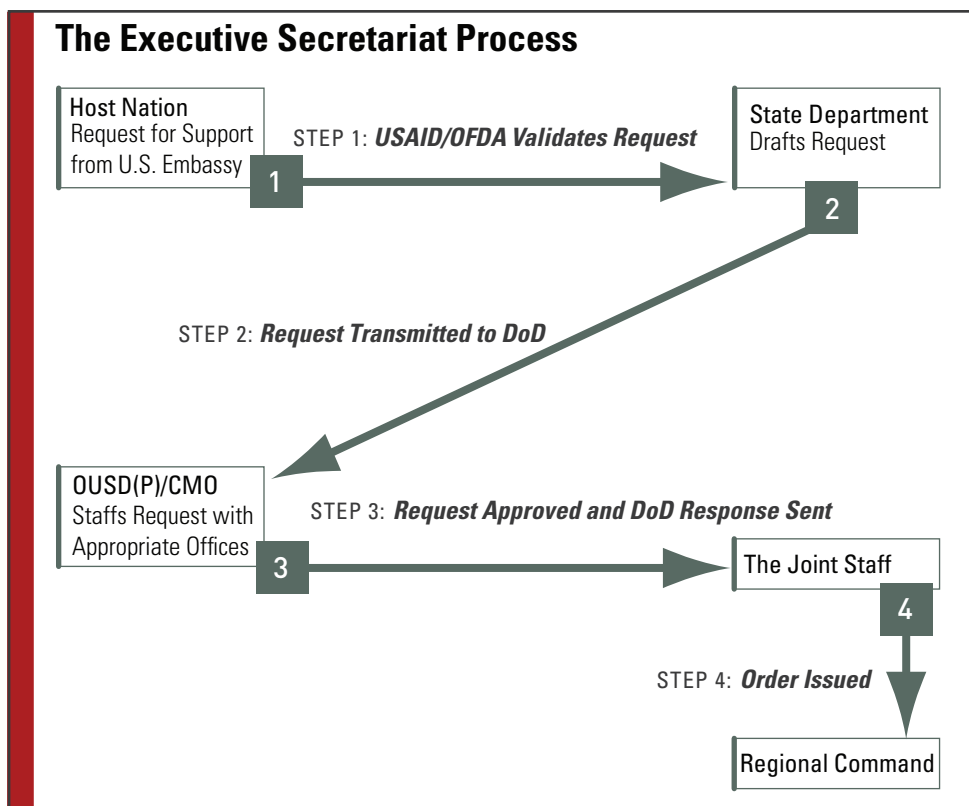
Within OASD/GSA, the office of coalition and multinational operations (CMO) has responsibility for handling DoD activities during the early weeks or initial emergency phase of a disaster relief operation. However, the Office of Partnership Strategy (PRT), also within OASD/GSA, directs longer-term assistance and recovery projects, focused on host-nation capacity building and rehabilitation, including education programs, medical and public health support, and HA/DR-related security cooperation (to create and/or strengthen local first responder teams). The ODASD/STB office is responsible for drafting DoD policy for stability operations and for studying measures to improve the interagency process, military training, and education exercises for post-conflict SSTR operations, and, to a certain extent, humanitarian and disaster relief missions. As its title suggests, ODASD/STB also appears poised to play a role in promoting the utility and eventual acquisition of SSTR-related capabilities, many of which would be appropriate for HA/DR, though little appears to be happening on this front at the moment. All three offices work closely together and with other DoD bureaus and agencies, as well as with the Joint Staff (for tasking specific military units/commands to respond), via the intra-DoD and the broader interagency policy review process. However, this arrangement is fairly recent and has yet to be tested against a serious, large-scale catastrophe.

Once an overseas crisis erupts, DoD may, if asked, decide to deploy military assets in

support of civilian relief agencies and foreign governments if 1) the response capacity of the host nation and international community is overwhelmed, 2) all other commercial options have been exhausted, and 3) there exists no comparable civilian alternative to the use of military and civil defense assets. These three basic standards essentially replicate what are known as the Oslo Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defense Assets in Disaster Relief developed by the UN (UN OCHA 2007). The decision to request the use of military assets is formally made by the Department of State, validated by USAID/OFDA, and approved by DoD. As mentioned earlier, once the host nation has requested assistance from the local U.S. ambassador, who in turn has issued a disaster declaration cable back to State via the appropriate regional bureau and the Executive Secretariat (where the operations center resides), OFDA deploys to the disaster site to assess the situation and determine the type of emergency relief needed. If OFDA decides DoD involvement is called for, it will inform State's Executive Secretariat, which will forward the request for military assistance to the Executive Secretariat at DoD.

Interestingly, while DoD representatives – generally drawn from the local embassy's Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) or from a nearby U.S. forward base or smaller military facility – may participate in the OFDA assessment as DART team members, DoD does not have the legal authority to con-

duct an alternative assessment as to whether military aid is truly required and should be requested. Given OFDA's role as the LFA for foreign disaster relief, the DART teams are supposed to have the final word on such matters. In practice, however, forward-deployed military units are often the first to arrive on scene as part of a DoD humanitarian assistance survey team (or HAST), and such teams may very well conduct the first in-depth assessment of conditions on the ground, including making initial recommendations with regard to the type and level of military support required. This is especially true when disasters occur in countries quite distant from the United States.

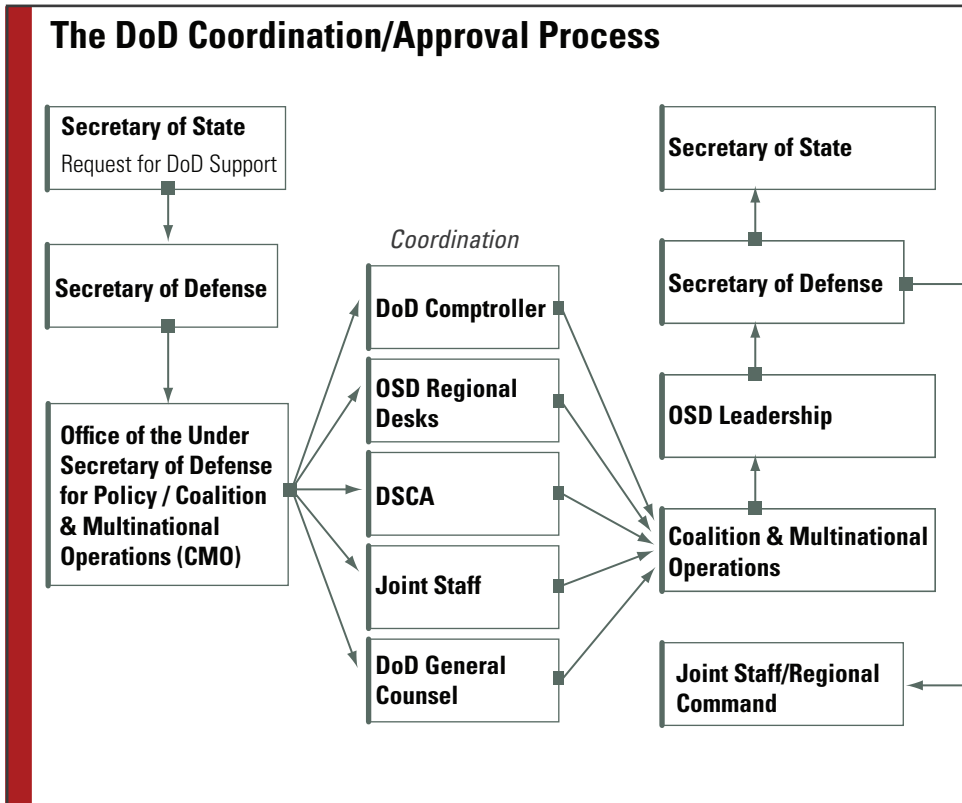


When cyclone Sidr hit Bangladesh in November 2007, for example, a twenty-three-person HAST unit from the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) based on Okinawa arrived well before any DART team members from Wash-

ington, and immediately began to develop a plan, in coordination with Bangladeshi government and U.S. embassy officials in Dhaka, for how best to provide essential U.S. military

support through the in-house bureaucratic process. Through an intra-DoD review process that it manages, this staff collaborates with other DoD offices, including the appropriate regional desk, the Joint Staff, the Office of the Comptroller, Legal Affairs, and the

Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), to organize and propose a military response or to deny the request. Even in the event of a large-scale disaster likely to require a substantial DoD/military response, this review can be accomplished within two to three hours, after which a draft plan is sent back up the chain of command in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) for final review and approval by the secretary and/or deputy secretary of defense. Once approval (which would include the third-party waiver discussed earlier) is given,



assistance (Dube 2007; Force Public Affairs Office 2007). That said, the official request for such aid must still be agreed to by USAID/OFDA experts and forwarded to DoD based on a DART recommendation, albeit one that may have been definitively shaped by a prior HAST assessment.

Only DoD, however, can actually commit military assets in support of an OFDA-approved assessment, having first reached a conclusion that appropriate assets are indeed available and that there are no overriding military mission requirements elsewhere for the use of said assets.⁶ Within DoD, the humanitarian operations staff based in the CMO office takes the lead in moving a request for military

the Joint Staff orders the appropriate regional combatant command, such as PACOM or SOUTHCOM, and, if necessary, a functional combatant command, such as U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) or Joint Forces Command (JFCOM), to respond to the crisis and provide both humanitarian assistance and any needed on-site organizational support.⁷ Meanwhile, throughout this entire process, the CMO experts will have been coordinating planning efforts informally with their counterparts in the main State Department, USAID/OFDA, the local U.S. embassy in the disaster-stricken country, and other relevant agencies and departments, to determine the necessary extent of the operation and the

6 Specific guidance for DoD and military involvement in foreign disaster relief is set forth in DoD directive 5100.46, "Responsibilities for Foreign Disaster Relief Operations," <http://www.js.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/510046p.pdf>.

7 Support from functional COCOMs may be requested if, for example, additional airlift or sealift from TRANSCOM is needed, or if regional COCOM forces need to be reinforced with forces based in the continental United States (CONUS) under JFCOM control.

optimal military deployment, given the evolving situation within the disaster zone.

Since the 2007 OUSD(P) reorganization, this back-channel coordination process has also forestalled a frivolous or inappropriate request for military assistance on more than one occasion. For example, when State and DoD were discussing how best to respond to the March 2007 floods in Bolivia, GSA/CMO officials got wind of, and were then able to head off, an impending request from State that DoD airlift three bailey bridges (pre-engineered, ready-to-assemble steel bridges often used by the military) to hard-hit areas, a response that would have been out of proportion to the damage on the ground, overly expensive, and of dubious utility to the local population even if delivered. During the same crisis, SOUTHCOM, at the request of the U.S. embassy in La Paz, was preparing to airlift relief supplies (such as blankets and plastic sheets) found at a Miami-based USAID warehouse to the disaster area, but, again, timely GSA/CMO intervention helped USAID to identify a less expensive alternative – shipment by Federal Express. Reaching these decisions took a good deal of back and forth, largely via email, between State and DoD, but the process demonstrates that DoD can and does exert considerable influence behind the scenes to shape and, if necessary, redirect State Department requests for military assistance, even if it can not always prevent ill-considered requests in the first place.

Several factors, however, may prompt either the U.S. ambassador or the regional COCOM commander to side-step both the formal and informal request processes described above and to set in motion a military response to a local disaster without a prior request for DoD assistance from State's Executive Secretariat or, in some cases, without wait-

ing for DoD approval of such a request. First, a COCOM commander already has a limited degree of authority to act alone (generally in the first forty-eight hours) to provide emergency assistance when a rapid response is seen as vital to saving life, limb, and property. In such cases, the COCOM commander may deploy military and civil defense assets under his or her control to the disaster site without prior DoD approval, though such assistance normally must be capped at \$100,000 in value. Moreover, once the immediate crisis has been stabilized, further action requires formal DoD guidance via the CMO and the wider intra-DoD/interagency process. For instance, within hours of the Indian Ocean tsunami tragedy, the U.S. Navy deployed P-3 *Orion* reconnaissance aircraft to assist with initial search and rescue efforts and to assess the extent of the damage. All subsequent military action, however, was directed through the appropriate channels and chains of command.

Second, even before a regional COCOM acts, a U.S. ambassador in the COCOM AOR may reach out directly to the COCOM commander and ask for assistance (though, as suggested earlier, the likelihood of such a request would depend largely on any personal relationship already established between the ambassador and the COCOM commander). At a minimum, such a move would preempt the formal planning and interagency decision-making processes of the Departments of State and Defense, including OFDA, processes that, as noted above, are already susceptible to being short-circuited or incorrectly followed. Unfortunately, in some cases where this has occurred, the eagerness of the U.S. ambassador, the COCOM commander, or both, to show clout, engage in humanitarian activities, and promote the U.S. image abroad has generated decisions whose implications were

8 Since it could take up to six days to get a ship with the necessary assets from Hawaii to the Solomon Islands, and as long as seven to ten days to complete the Executive Secretariat approval process, it might be two weeks or more before help arrived if PACOM had waited for formal approval before deploying.

not fully considered, especially with regard to the utility and necessity of the military support provided or the level and source of funding needed to underwrite it. The inclination to act in a somewhat more precipitous manner than may be warranted, moreover, would seem to be particularly strong in AORs (such as the Asia-Pacific theater) where the distances and travel time can be quite long between potential military responders and the disaster site in question.

For instance, in response to an undersea earthquake and tsunami in the Solomon Islands on April 2, 2007, the U.S. ambassador to Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, Leslie V. Rowe, requested urgent military assistance from PACOM Commander Admiral Timothy J. Keating, including helicopter support that had proven so popular and effective in both the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2005 Pakistan earthquake relief efforts. Though relatively minor compared to the death and destruction caused by these two larger disasters, the damage wrought by the Solomon Islands earthquake and tsunami was viewed by local officials as the most extensive to be suffered by the islands since the battle-related damage of World War II, much of which, in the eyes of the indigenous population, had been imposed by American military operations. Drawing perhaps on the example set in Pakistan (where U.S. helicopters came to be seen as “angels of mercy” by Pakistanis who had previously expressed hostility towards America), Ambassador Rowe hoped that the rapid deployment of helicopter-carrying U.S. naval platforms to the Solomons would trigger an equally welcome degree of goodwill toward the United States among the islanders while also providing timely relief assistance of a more practical and necessary sort.

In response to Ambassador Rowe’s request, PACOM immediately pre-deployed the USNS *Stockham*, which carried a contingent of the ship-borne helicopters so desired by Rowe (in this case, SH 60F *Sea Hawks*), so that the helicopters would be nearby and ready to provide some medical-related lift assistance as soon as formal DoD approval came through.⁸ However, in this particular case, the decision to request and send U.S. military equipment was premature. USAID/OFDA did not believe, and OASD/GSA later agreed, that the scale or scope of the disaster, as bad as it was for the islands, really warranted DoD involvement, especially since Australia and New Zealand were closer and already assisting militarily (interview 2007a). In the end, the *Sea Hawks* aboard the *Stockham* did provide some medical-related transport and lift assistance, and, somewhat ironically, they were used to “rescue some rescuers” when Red Cross relief workers traveling on a Taiwanese freighter got caught up on some off-shore reefs. For the most part, however, local officials and NGO teams ashore had no idea how to use the *Sea Hawks* as part of the initial relief effort, and there were almost certainly cheaper and perfectly adequate ways to provide what help the *Stockham* and its crew eventually did provide. After some deliberation, USAID determined that no more than \$200,000 worth of non-military U.S. assistance was really required, and PACOM had to absorb most of the costs of deploying the *Stockham*. Hence, even though the *Stockham* proved useful once it was on the scene, it was not essential, and the entire episode illustrates how calling on U.S. military assets prematurely and/or unnecessarily can waste scarce resources and burden an already over-taxed military.

As a general rule, GSA/CMO officials argue, the U.S. military should be viewed as

a resource of last resort, not a resource of first resort. It should be called on to assist when the civilian response capacity has been overwhelmed and the military can provide a unique service for which no other comparable civilian alternative exists. However, even though USAID is the LFA for overseas disaster assistance, it is often viewed as an LFA in name only, and its expertise and responsibilities ignored. As likely happened in the Solomon Islands case, the local U.S. ambassador and the country officers in the relevant regional bureau at State, who are not normally well versed in HA/DR issues and procedures, tend to drive the process for requesting DoD assistance and to bypass USAID. Moreover, since a request for military assistance via the Executive Secretariat process must be sent from one Cabinet-level office to another (in this case, from the secretary of state to the secretary of defense), USAID's authority and interaction with DoD are often subordinated to that of the U.S. ambassador, the regional bureaus, and, more specifically, State's Executive Secretariat (which is also staffed largely by regional bureau/country team veterans). As a result, the COCOMs sometimes provide services (or are pressed to do so) even when OFDA assessments have concluded, or would if consulted, that such assistance, though useful, may be unnecessary.

This is not to suggest, however, that ambassadors, COCOM commanders, and others on the front lines of a sudden disaster are wrong to try to expedite the process, nor that following the Executive Secretariat process to the letter will produce the best and most effective response when time is of the essence. Indeed, unless there is high-level political pressure moving the process along, as there almost always is for large-scale disasters such as the Pakistan earthquake, the Executive Secretar-

iat process can be cumbersome and time-consuming, even when it unfolds as it should via the appropriate experts at OFDA and DoD. For the more common small- to medium-scale disasters, however, such pressure is often absent, and requests for very specific, time-urgent military assistance can get unnecessarily bogged down in red tape, even if proper procedures are being followed.⁹ To some extent, this was the case during the Solomon Islands crisis, and it seemed likely to become an ongoing problem during a rash of similarly small-scale, but nonetheless quite devastating, disasters that occurred within fairly narrow geographic zones during the summer and fall of 2007, including an August earthquake in Peru, flooding in Nicaragua in September as a result of hurricane Felix, widespread wind and water damage in the Dominican Republic in November due to tropical storm Noel, and later in November the impact of cyclone Sidr on Bangladesh. Clearly, relying on an Executive Secretariat review process that could take anywhere from seven to fourteen days to complete was not ideal for handling back-to-back disasters of this magnitude. Something had to be done to accelerate the provision of essential military assistance in these lesser, but still serious, cases, when essential aid could not be found from local or international civilian sources, and the prompt and targeted provision of American military assistance could make a world of difference.

Fortunately, lessons learned from this series of back-to-back crises have prompted a real breakthrough in how requests for military assistance will be handled in the future for small- and medium-scale disasters. When such an event occurs, the appropriate officers from the main State Department, USAID/OFDA, OSD, and the local regional COCOM will have a four-way dialogue (mostly via

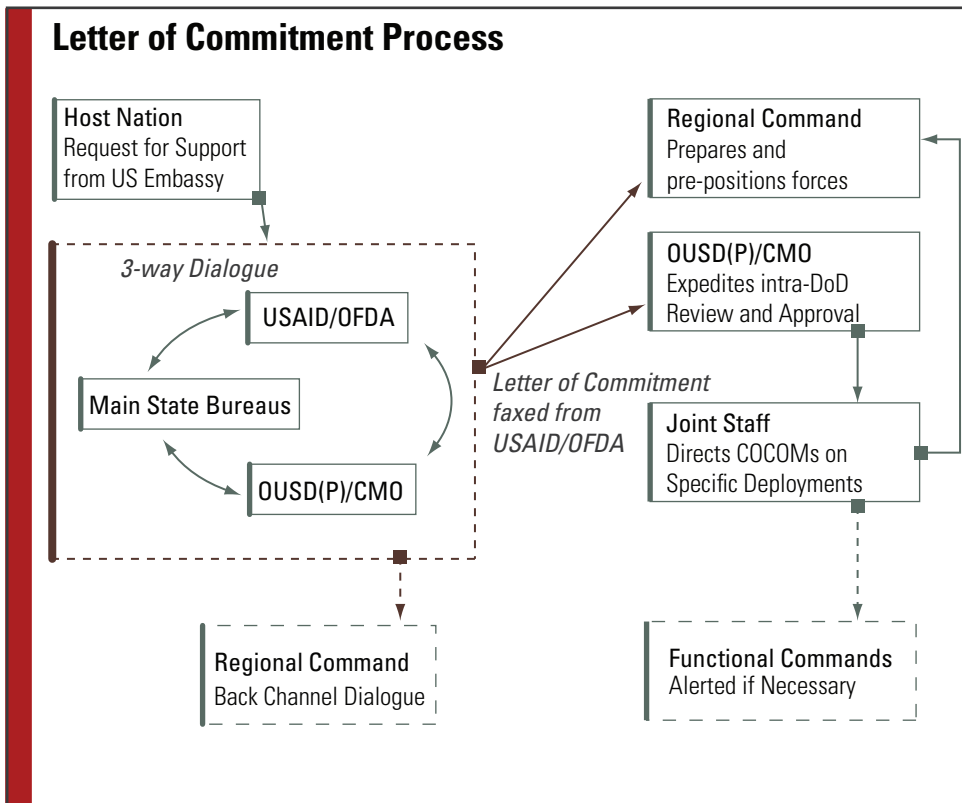
⁹ Though admittedly somewhat arbitrary, disaster response planners in DoD define small- to medium-scale disasters as events that cost around \$2 million or less, and in which no more than two thousand to three thousand (and normally considerably fewer) people die and no more than a few thousand are displaced. In contrast, a large-scale disaster might involve tens of thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of displaced persons, while imposing costs of tens or hundreds of millions of dollars.

email) to determine if military assistance really seems to be required. If the answer is yes, then USAID/OFDA will fax a one-page “letter of commitment” stating that this is indeed the case to the regional COCOM, a copy of which is sent simultaneously to the CMO office in OSD. CMO authorities then will expedite the intra-DoD coordination they would normally begin when military assistance is requested, facilitate a DoD decision on a proper course of action, forward that decision to the secretary or deputy secretary of defense for formal approval (and the third-party waiver), and then transmit that approval to the COCOM, which will already be organizing the required response on the basis of the faxed letter of commitment. The goal is to complete this whole process, from initial request to deployment, in less than twelve hours, and recent experiences suggest that it can often be done even faster. Operating with only a skeletal crew the

day before Thanksgiving in 2007, for example, it took DoD no more than ten hours to get the requested military aid headed to Bangladesh after cyclone Sidr hit, and it took only fifteen minutes to get the assistance needed on its way to the Dominican Republic during tropical storm Noel (interview 2007b). For comparison’s sake, under the traditional Executive Secretariat format, it can take two to three days just to complete the State-USAID-DoD coordination process, and up to seven to ten days to get any approved military assistance to the actual disaster zone.

Since late 2007, then, decisions on DoD’s provision of foreign disaster relief have in theory been guided by a new two-tier process. In the event of a large-scale disaster such as a massive tsunami or earthquake (perhaps involving tens of thousands killed, hundreds of thousands or even millions displaced, and the likely depletion of DoD’s quite small annual

funding line for disaster response), the more deliberative Executive Secretariat process will be followed. This makes perfect sense given that the military component of any response is likely to be quite diverse and sizeable, and will almost certainly play – as it did in the responses to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2005 Pakistani earthquake – a prominent management role in the early relief phases of such operations, which must be carefully coordinated across interagency lines and aligned with broader international efforts. Making sure to cross as many of the t’s and dot as many of the i’s



as possible in the initial requests for support and deployment decisions will make the response that follows that much smoother and more effective. On the other hand, when one or more smaller disasters occur, the task is not so much one of marshalling a huge multi-agency, cross-institutional response over a wide geographical area, but one of getting very specific assets and supplies, such as search and rescue helicopters or fresh drinking water, very quickly on the scene. For this more limited but still very essential type of operation, the letter-of-commitment process will be preferred, as it allows a timely and targeted response.

Capacity Building over the Longer Term

In addition to such efforts to reform and streamline the State-DoD request for assistance process (discussed more fully under “Initiatives to Improve and Institutionalize the Interagency Process,” below), OASD/GSA planners are taking steps to improve the overall impact of military-led humanitarian assistance activities by shifting DoD’s focus from short-term recovery projects and high-profile, time-limited initiatives to longer-term capacity-building activities to enhance local and regional skills and resources. Each year, DoD receives about \$60 million for overseas humanitarian, disaster, and civic aid (OHDACA) projects, some \$40 million of which is targeted for longer-term capacity-building efforts that include medical and logistical assistance, the construction of schools, clinics, and roads, and training in disaster planning and preparedness.¹⁰ Even with the best of intentions, however, the desired outcome can prove difficult to achieve and sustain. For example, as the U.S. military relief effort in Pakistan after the earthquake came to a close, the de-

cision was made to donate to the Pakistani 67th Medical Battalion a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) that had been set up in Muzaffarabad. The MASH unit had treated over twenty thousand patients, conducted some sixteen thousand immunizations, and filled close to thirty-eight thousand prescriptions, and the idea was that it could now play an equally crucial role in addressing future local needs during the recovery period. Unfortunately, the MASH unit was soon abandoned as the Pakistani military was not sufficiently trained or equipped to sustain it, and all the operational manuals that might have helped had somehow been lost soon after the donation. The U.S. Army, moreover, had already mothballed the remaining MASH units in its own possession and shifted to a more modern field hospital system, so access to spare parts would have become a problem in the relative near future even if the Pakistanis could have sustained operations.

Humanitarian assistance specialists in OASD/GSA’s Partnership Strategy Office argue that similar inefficiencies and failures to take a longer-term perspective have tended to limit the overall utility of the highly publicized medical missions undertaken by the U.S. Navy’s hospital ships, the USNS *Mercy* and the USNS *Comfort*. The thirty-day deployment of the USNS *Mercy* hospital ship in Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami is a case in point. While it led to immediate jumps in local approval ratings for the United States among the countries visited (some of which were home to large Islamic populations), the cost of the deployment plus all the services provided amounted to between \$26 million and \$30 million, and many argue that most of the benefits of these visits – including the needed medical support and the

¹⁰ Of the \$60 million, roughly \$40 million is earmarked for humanitarian assistance programs, \$5 million for the humanitarian mine action program, and \$17 million for foreign disaster relief and emergency response. For more information, see U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Security Cooperation Agency (2007). Funding issues are discussed in more depth in the last section of this chapter.

11 Some experts argue that this could be especially troublesome when dealing with the island communities of Oceania and the Western Pacific where “gift culture” traditions, most notably the felt need to “repay” a gift or service provided by a visitor, are deeply ingrained. In this context, when providing aid and humanitarian assistance, one should be careful, these experts argue, not to make the recipients feel incapable of reciprocating in some meaningful way, because of the scale and/or nature of the support provided.

12 The current chief of naval operations, Admiral Gary Roughead, USN, speaks strongly in favor of such funding for carefully planned medical ship deployments and other naval humanitarian activities that are programmed well in advance. From his perspective, such efforts – which he calls “proactive humanitarian assistance” -- offer better opportunities to bring to bear the full range of the navy’s HA/DR capabilities (e.g., medical aid, engineering, lift, training) in support of useful projects that will have a lasting impact (interview 2008).

boost in American popularity – simply sailed away or atrophied once the *Mercy* left port. Moreover, among some societies, it has been further argued, such operations can create dangerous dependencies among the populations served that might produce over time the opposite effect of what is desired – local resentment over a level of American assistance that could never be adequately repaid or developed indigenously.¹¹

More recent medical and “health diplomacy” missions undertaken in 2007 by the USS *Peleliu*, an amphibious assault ship equipped for the first time to conduct a medical mission, in Southeast Asia and Oceania and by the USNS *Comfort* in the Caribbean and South America have attempted to redress some of these shortcomings. The missions have integrated a number of off-ship civic assistance and educational programs into the operational plan and begun to establish partnerships, when possible well before the ship deploys, between on-board civil support teams and NGOs based ashore. Such efforts (discussed in more detail in chapters 3 and 4) may well lay the groundwork for more sustainable projects that help build local capacity within the countries visited, all of which could, in turn, help to reduce the damage suffered and the outside assistance needed in the event of future disasters. The cost of each operation, however, has hovered in the \$20 million range, and the projected costs for similar operations in the future are not expected to decline. Funding at that level is clearly beyond the scope of DoD’s annual OHDACA budget, so the U.S. Navy, whose leadership views these deployments as crucial tools for engaging key foreign countries and improving America’s image among their citizens, is now hoping to build into the navy’s 2010 budget, (and the future-years defense budget, of which it will be a part)

a line item for up to four such missions a year, for a total of \$80 million. In the meantime, the navy appears willing to continue to underwrite such costs as part of its annual operations and maintenance (O&M) expenditures, but it remains to be seen if it will continue to do so if special line-item funding is not approved for 2010 or maintained in subsequent years (interview 2008).¹²

With these considerations in mind, OSD planners in the GSA/PRT office are turning increasingly to the experiences of the NGO humanitarian assistance community for guidance on the design of cost-effective projects that may have a longer-lasting impact on local capacities to manage and recover from disaster events. The conclusion these planners seem to be reaching is that a smaller amount of money more wisely spent may have a larger overall impact – including on local attitudes toward America – than high-profile, one-off, photo-op events that don’t directly help the local population help itself and that may or may not be repeated. Future initiatives should also focus, these planners say, on leaving something more permanent behind and on what happens after the mission ends. In this context, particular note was made of a month-long health education program run by the Red Cross in East Timor that pulled fifty health-care officials from fifteen districts together for a two-week intensive course, took the top 20 percent for more in-depth training within their home districts, and finally drew them all together again for a broader health policy course, all for a total cost of just \$110,000.

To be sure, hospital ship visits can be of great service, especially during the early days of a disaster and during the immediate recovery phase, and in view of the successful cruises of the *Peleliu* and *Comfort* in 2007, a more multi-mission approach with greater activity

ashore promises to be the wave of the future regarding the navy's annual humanitarian assistance activities in key regional theaters. That said, for U.S. military and broader DoD engagement efforts with vulnerable countries in the periods before and after a disaster strikes, smaller-scale, capacity-building programs may yield better "disaster diplomacy" returns. As the more successful provincial reconstruction team (PRT) programs in Afghanistan and Iraq are proving, such efforts to address local needs in a sustainable way could also prove to be critical in turning back efforts by local insurgents or terrorist groups to exploit the dire circumstances that often prevail after a disaster to advance their own agendas.

Initiatives to Improve and Institutionalize the Interagency Process

As mentioned above, given the shortcomings of the State-DoD military assistance request process as practiced in recent years (especially in Executive Secretariat format), disaster relief specialists in OSD's CMO office have focused since the office was created in January 2007 on introducing a higher degree of professionalism and standardization to the overall process. To a large extent, this has involved greater efforts on DoD's part to educate regional bureau and Executive Secretariat personnel at the State Department on the rules and proper procedures for assessing a foreign disaster and organizing a properly scaled and composed response that includes the military. This is a vital first step toward improving State-DoD and broader interagency coordination, and it needs to be pursued on a regular, institutionalized basis, given that there is no established, functional equivalent at State to OSD's CMO operation. Indeed, since the OH-DACA funding began in earnest in 1996, per-

sonnel now assigned to CMO have developed considerable expertise in disaster relief and humanitarian operations, but the non-USAID personnel they must interact with at State have relatively little background in HA/DR issues and procedures, including for many a limited understanding of the State/USAID role as LFA. To help bridge this information gap, CMO has developed a detailed briefing, "Foreign Disaster Response," that it has been presenting primarily to regional bureau personnel. The briefing is essentially a primer on the overall U.S. foreign disaster response decision-making process, but with an emphasis on DoD's role, authority, and organizational structure in the area of HA/DR operations.

In part as an outgrowth of these briefing activities, DoD and State (with CMO and USAID/OFDA, respectively, in the lead) have set up a joint working group aimed at reforming and professionalizing the much-discussed Executive Secretariat process, which remains the preferred approach for larger-scale disasters. A key DoD objective in the working group is to promote reforms to current practice that would require State to confirm that DoD assistance is in fact "necessary and essential" (and not simply "desirable" or "useful to have") and to vest in USAID, and OFDA specifically, the authority to make that determination. At present, USAID and OFDA, despite their putative LFA expertise, are only required "to check a box" (along with other main State Department offices) simply confirming that military assistance would be "useful," a confirmation that USAID and OFDA are generally quite willing to give once a request gets this far, as it would normally mean fewer demands on the USAID budget to underwrite support that DoD and the military would otherwise provide.¹³ To help boost USAID/OFDA authority, the CMO office in OSD also supports

¹³ Similarly, DoD never really wants to refuse a serious request from State for military support, in part as such support is seen as an increasingly important mission in what is now called phase 0 (pre-conflict) military operations aimed at shaping the security environment in key regional theaters (and engaging potential allies and coalition partners) so as to prevent future crises and/or to prepare for an effective response. Hence, the importance of ensuring that there's a real need, lest scarce DoD resources, including funding, for disaster relief be misapplied.

the adoption of a national security presidential directive (NSPD) that would give USAID Cabinet-level authority, given that the State-to-DoD request for military assistance under the Executive Secretariat process must proceed as a Cabinet-level exchange. Clearly, this will not happen in the near term, but if it ever does, OFDA assessments of the need (or lack thereof) for military/DoD assistance, which more often than not are quite similar to those made by disaster relief experts in OASD/GSA/CMO, would presumably hold sway over those of State's Executive Secretariat and regional bureaus, who tend to support the requests of the local ambassador, however inexperienced he or she may be. For smaller-scale relief operations, of course, the newly instituted letter-of-commitment process already assures USAID and OFDA a more central role in authorizing and coordinating a military/COCOM response.

Meanwhile, DoD's focus, both in the working group and more generally, will be on educating the non-expert community at State on the criteria for determining whether or not military assistance is essential and on the correct procedural steps to request and secure such support, be it via a letter of commitment or the more formal Executive Secretariat process. Toward that end, another key objective of the CMO office has been to develop a template for the Department of State to use when requesting DoD assistance, so that such requests will provide information that DoD can use in deciding on a course of action. Rather than make a specific request for a particular military capability (which State officials, including those at OFDA, tend to do), the template would lay out a more detailed description of the situation on the ground, such as the scale and type of physical damage, the level and nature of casualties, the status of any

displaced persons or refugees, the condition of transport infrastructure, and the overall security conditions. The request would leave it to OSD, the Joint Staff, and ultimately the regional and functional COCOMs to determine what military assets to provide, where they should be drawn from, when they should depart or be supplied, and under what rules of engagement. Working together with main State and USAID/OFDA specialists, CMO officials are also putting together a one-day training course and a longer course module on the foreign disaster relief decision process that will soon be integrated into the core curriculum of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). Ideally, once the diplomats so trained are assigned to various regional bureaus and/or posted overseas, the ideas presented in these educational materials will be sustained by efforts now underway at the State Department's Bureau for Political-Military Affairs to publish a first-ever guidebook on HA/DR policies and procedures.

Over at the Pentagon, recent efforts to update OSD policy guidance with regard to foreign disaster relief should also make for a smoother, better-coordinated interagency process. For example, the CMO office is in the midst of substantially updating DoD directive 5100.46, "Responsibilities for Foreign Disaster Relief Operations," a key DoD document last updated in December 1975. The current effort will bring DoD's stated policy more fully into accord with the strategic realities of the post-9/11 world, and ensure that the sections of the directive that detail which DoD offices and agencies have lead responsibility for organizing and implementing any U.S. military support to a foreign disaster relief effort reflect the organizational changes instituted at OUSD(P) in January 2007. Further, the updated directive will require COCOMs to file care-

fully structured after-action reports following any disaster relief operation they are involved in, so that the primary lessons learned with regard to operational challenges, capability needs, requirements for interagency/multi-national coordination, and the like are captured on paper and filed in a central location, even if they are still not fully embraced by those responsible for disaster relief planning and preparedness. Moreover, while DoD directive 5100.46 has been undergoing revisions, the Partnership Strategy Office at OASD/GSA has been crafting a new DoD directive on humanitarian assistance, outlining procedures and assigning responsibilities for DoD relief efforts and disaster prevention programs that may be set in motion after the initial crisis response. Such a document (a final draft of which should be ready by mid-2008) has never existed before, and the need for one now is but one more illustration of DoD's growing role in post-disaster recovery and capacity-building efforts, all of which must be closely coordinated with those of the Department of State, other federal agencies and international organizations that become involved in foreign disasters, and the nongovernmental humanitarian-aid community.

At a broader policy level, the PRT office is also leading a DoD effort to integrate the secretary of defense's Security Cooperation Guidance (which includes military training, exercise, and assistance projects by the COCOMs to help build foreign partner skills and capabilities) with his Contingency Planning Guidance (which focuses on military service requirements to cope with primary warfighting scenarios). The end result, tentatively referred to as the Guidance for the Employment of Forces (or the GEF), would presumably accord a higher degree of importance in military planning circles to non-warfighting, engage-

ment-type missions such as disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, just as the earlier-mentioned DoD directive 3000.05 elevated stability operations as a whole to the level of a core military mission on par (for planning purposes at least) with combat operations. Whether or not the GEF or some variant of it will eventually be adopted and embraced by the military services and COCOMs remains to be seen, but, if it is, the incentives to develop better procedures and improved capabilities to support foreign disaster relief operations, including mechanisms to enhance interagency coordination among all primary participants in such operations, would certainly receive a boost. Ideally, this would help as well to reinforce recent calls by Congress that DoD and the COCOMs make greater efforts to identify potential capability gaps in the stability operations realm (which, again, includes HA/DR missions), together with proposals for how to more effectively leverage existing DoD/military assets in concert with those that may be provided by non-DoD/civil contributors to foreign disaster relief (U.S. GAO 2007, 24-33).

As is discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters of this study, clarifying capability needs and interagency coordination requirements will be no easy task. Moreover, as imperfect as the State Department's understanding of DoD procedures and capabilities for HA/DR missions may be, many of the roadblocks that now inhibit smoother State-DoD and broader interagency coordination can be traced to shortcomings in DoD policies and organizational structures. Among the COCOMs, for example, efforts to facilitate interagency participation in contingency planning for HA/DR missions and other stability operations – principally through each COCOM's Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) – have met with limited

success so far, not the least because of the relatively small number of qualified personnel from non-DoD agencies and organizations who are trained and available to participate in JIACG planning sessions. For example, CENTCOM's JIACG, which is by far the largest in terms of proposed staffing, had a total projected membership of fifty-six in 2007, consisting of forty-nine DoD employees (forty-one military, eight civilian), two FBI agents, and only one representative each from State, DEA, Homeland Security, Treasury, and USAID (U.S. GAO 2007, 28). Similarly limited representation from beyond DoD was projected for the EUCOM and PACOM JIACGs, and in all cases competing commitments elsewhere and travel funding constraints rendered the presence of even these few non-DoD personnel an uncertain proposition. As one COCOM wag summed it up, "It's awfully hard to promote interagency coordination when the people attending interagency meetings are almost all DoD personnel" (interview 2007c).

Other DoD-related constraints include the fact that DoD policy generally discourages the sharing of DoD contingency plans with non-DoD agencies or offices unless the secretary of defense explicitly authorizes it. Moreover, COCOM commanders normally must pass the interagency elements of any contingency plan (including those for HA/DR operations) through the Joint Staff to the National Security Council (NSC) for interagency staffing and plan development (U.S. GAO 2007, 32). In addition to the coordination challenges that such a cumbersome and hierarchical process presents, the planning cultures of DoD and non-DoD officials are often quite divergent, leading to false expectations in DoD with regard to the approach that other federal agencies are likely to take in tackling a common problem and to underestimations with regard to the

level of resources they would or could assign to its resolution. DoD maintains a very robust approach to planning, supported by dedicated career personnel with access to substantial resources compared to what is available to other executive departments, and trained to anticipate and prepare for all manner of plausible scenarios in any given situation (U.S. GAO 2007, 31). The State Department, by contrast, tends to focus more narrowly on current operations and the immediate task at hand, an approach that, among other things, has left it with a relatively small pool of planners to support COCOM planning activities. As partial remedy, State Department officials have proposed that the COCOMs "virtually include" State planners, using electronic communication tools, and they have suggested as well that DoD revise its policies to allow COCOM commanders to reach back directly to State and other government offices (bypassing the Joint Staff and the NSC) for input as HA/DR and other stability operations are being organized (U.S. GAO 2007, 32).¹⁴ EUCOM is apparently testing the "virtual linkage" idea with State, but broader adaptations to DoD policy to allow for more direct COCOM reach-back to non-DoD assets have yet to be taken.

That said, there are signs of movement toward longer-term solutions on the specific issue of interagency coordination for foreign disaster relief, including the new interagency working group known for now as the Foreign Disaster Relief Standing Committee. This group was created in mid-2007 as a way for the true experts and practitioners from the U.S. government's four main disaster relief offices (OASD/GSA/CMO, USAID/OFDA, and both the Political-Military Affairs (PM) Bureau and the Refugees, Population, and Migration (RPM) Bureau at the main State Department) to gather on a regular basis to compare notes,

14 CNO Admiral Roughead has taken a step in that direction by initiating a series of discussions and briefings with the State Department's various regional bureaus to bring key personnel up to speed on the navy's plan for future HA/DR missions (especially via *Mercy*-, *Comfort*-, and *Peleliu*-type ship visits) and to encourage wider participation by interested foreign service officers (interview 2008).

float proposals, coordinate policies, and identify key areas for further improvement. Within the Pentagon, the CMO office has prepared as well an in-depth review section on HA/DR planning and operations for DoD's standard action officer training course, held several times each year, that will provide new staff with a comprehensive overview of the key players and their roles, at both the national and international levels. A similar CMO brief with a more focused DoD pitch will be integrated into USAID's Joint Humanitarian Operations Course (JHOC) that OFDA presents on a regular basis to COCOM staffs. According to DoD officials, these JHOC presentations, which began in February 2007, have helped to bring COCOM personnel up to speed on the HA/DR responsibilities and capabilities of non-DoD agencies, while making sure that they also understand proper procedures and decision-making channels for requesting and approving DoD and COCOM assistance for foreign disaster relief beyond the initial emergency response that any COCOM commander may authorize.¹⁵

So, too, recent adjustments at the Department of State signal a more determined effort to foster State-DoD and broader interagency coordination in the stability operations arena, including HA/DR activities. In February 2007, the relatively new Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization and (S/C/R&S) was removed from the main State Department's organizational structure and placed under the foreign-aid coordinator (who also heads USAID), a shift that brought the S/C/R&S enterprise squarely within a policy planning community that is deeply committed to (if not always adept at) the civil dimensions of stability operations. With support from the foreign-aid coordinator, this consolidation should eventually help the S/C/R&S office to

attract much-needed funding increases and more personnel, both of which could help ease a number of the State-DoD coordination difficulties noted above, such as limited staff for JIACG meetings. For example, plans to have on hand by 2008 an active response corps of about 30 R&S technical experts, and perhaps as many as 250 sometime in the future, who could be deployed to crisis spots overseas within forty-eight hours, together with proposals to create a much larger civilian reserve corps (possibly in the thousands) that could mobilize for deployment in four to six weeks, may eventually pave the way to closer and more effective civilian and military collaboration across a range of stability and reconstruction missions (Hegland 2007; IFPA 2007; Lopez 2008).¹⁶ By definition, this would include operations aimed at building up local capacity in countries that have been destabilized or have become vulnerable to instability as a result of natural or man-made disasters. The prospects for such collaboration seem particularly bright if still somewhat distant when note is made of the fact that S/C/R&S officials, in contrast to their State Department "cousins," appear to have adopted a robust approach to operational planning similar to DoD's (*Joint Force Quarterly* 2006, 82-83).

In the end, then, while there are clearly specific improvements to be made in current HA/DR planning and implementation procedures, solving interagency challenges at the broader stability operations level may be the real key to solving these same challenges at the more specific level of individual HA/DR operations. Both sets of activities, HA/DR missions and stability operations overall, confront a common underlying reality, namely that the tasks they must manage can not be accomplished by the military alone, but rather require a multifaceted interagency, and of-

15 USAID personnel may not formally present or explain DoD briefing material included in the overall JHOC course material, but they can (and do) provide it to COCOM JHOC attendees as a key "leave behind." This would include clear organizational charts and decision trees, detailing primary POCs and telephone numbers/email addresses for key OSD officials who manage DoD/COCOM contributions to disaster relief operations (interview 2007a).

16 Initial efforts to boost civilian R&S capabilities along these lines were outlined by Ambassador John E. Herbst, the State Department's coordinator for reconstruction and stabilization, at a June 13, 2007, Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis (IFPA) workshop in Washington, D.C..

ten multinational, team. That team, moreover, must be tailored to fit the changing needs of the overall operation (for example, moving from initial crisis response to stabilization, recovery, and reconstruction), drawing from a mix of civil and military, national and international, and governmental and nongovernmental assets, including private sector sources. This is discussed further in chapter 4 (especially in the sections dealing with HA/DR operational concepts and civil-military coordination, or CMCoord, as it is now called), but the main point here is that policy reforms and organizational shifts now in place or proposed for the State/DoD disaster relief decision-making process will never be as effective as planned or expected unless or until the diverse interagency and institutional contributors that increasingly are drawn into foreign disaster relief operations, particularly large-scale ones such as the 2005 Pakistan earthquake response, really learn to collaborate and achieve a unity of effort.¹⁷ And this, most American disaster relief specialists never tire of saying, could require nothing less than the equivalent of a Goldwater-Nichols Act for the interagency and its likely partners outside the U.S. government.¹⁸

The Issue of Funding

Even if impediments to interagency coordination are reduced significantly, the ever-present challenge of securing and sustaining adequate funding for military support to HA/DR operations will likely remain. On the surface, money issues would not appear to be overly problematic. USAID, elements of the main State Department, and DoD all control a variety of funding lines that are either earmarked for or could be used to underwrite foreign disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. In recent years, total U.S. government spending

in support of such operations has averaged about \$2.3 billion per year, and that figure could easily increase by \$1 billion or so if a sudden crisis of major proportions were to occur (Straw 2006).¹⁹ However, only a relatively small percentage of that money – until FY 2008 no more than \$60 million to \$63 million per year – is set aside via OHDACA funding to help finance DoD and COCOM activities in the HA/DR realm, and a smaller percentage still (recently about \$17 million per year) for specific foreign disaster relief and emergency response initiatives (U.S. Department of Defense/Defense Security Cooperation Agency 2007). Much of the OHDACA funding, moreover, is programmed for specific activities planned well in advance, allowing limited flexibility to respond to unanticipated events or to direct funding toward new, possibly more promising, opportunities for HA/DR collaboration with foreign partners as they arise.

That said, despite their limitations, OHDACA appropriations provide the lifeblood for a family of DoD HA/DR programs authorized under Title 10 of the U.S. Code (which deals with the structure and operations of America's armed forces), and it is through a strengthening of this OHDACA vehicle that increased funding for these baseline programs could most easily be secured. A brief overview of OHDACA-funded programs and a proposed expansion, therefore, is perhaps a necessary prelude to any further money-related discussion.

To begin with, OHDACA funding has focused for a number of years on three core programs: humanitarian assistance (HA), foreign disaster relief/emergency response (FDR/ER), and humanitarian mine action (HMA). Funds for all three programs are managed for DoD by DSCA in consultation with State and USAID. As stated on the DSCA website, the actual pro-

17 In this context, unity of effort could be defined as the existence of a common understanding among the various participants in a disaster relief operation of the overall purpose and concept of operations, based on closely coordinated plans and policies and a solid foundation of mutual trust and confidence (U.S. GAO 2007, 24-25).

18 The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 reworked the command structure of the United States military, placing new emphasis on joint, cross-service planning and operations (as opposed to service-specific activities that were often uncoordinated). Given the new emphasis now placed on civil-military coordination across various departments in support of stability operations and similar activities, some now call for the passage of legislation that would encourage and facilitate interagency collaboration in the same way that Goldwater-Nichols paved the way to joint force collaboration across the military services.

19 In May 2005, the U.S. Congress approved emergency supplemental appropriations for FY 2005 in the amount of \$907.34 million, \$656 million of which went to the various tsunami relief and recovery projects with most of the remaining funds (over \$250 million) going to DoD, both for OHDACA and O&M expenditures.

grams are planned and executed by the COCOMs for two primary purposes: 1) to shape the international security environment in a manner that dissuades would-be aggressors and reassures allies and friends via low-level cooperation (when other programs are not available to do so), and 2) to respond rapidly and effectively when called upon to assist victims of natural or man-made disasters (U.S. Department of Defense 2008). Generally, some \$40 million of the total budget is reserved for HA, with the bulk of the rest (as referenced above) now going to FDR/ER after being split fifty-fifty with HMA for a period of time. In an emergency, such as a sudden earthquake or tsunami, funds can certainly be reassigned by the COCOMs from one program to another, but that normally means that money is made available for one worthy initiative at the expense of another. To the extent that HA funding is shifted to the FDR/ER category, it could also mean that longer-term capacity-building and goodwill-development efforts will be sacrificed to immediate short-term needs, without any assurance that those funds and the programs they support will ever be reimbursed or restored.

A quick rundown on specific activities in each program, especially in the HA and FDR/ER categories, is sufficient to illustrate how intertwined and reinforcing they often are, and how disruptive taking from one to pay for another can be. HA projects, for example, are aimed at averting humanitarian crises, promoting regional stability, and facilitating recovery from conflict by donating excess non-lethal DoD property and providing on-the-ground civil support by U.S. military personnel. Typical projects include building schools, clinics, and roads, as well as providing medical, technical, engineering, and logistical assistance. Increasingly, however, such aid

has also included targeted investment in disaster preparedness and mitigation programs in vulnerable countries, so that future demands for emergency disaster assistance from the United States (including from DoD and the COCOMs) may be reduced. For FY 2008 alone, the four major foreign area COCOMs (CENTCOM, EUCOM, PACOM, and SOUTHCOM) had identified some 880 HA projects the total cost of which was estimated at over \$83 million, twice the amount normally approved by Congress. So even before any potential reassignments of money might be considered, programmatic trade-offs must be made that are likely to complicate disaster relief planning over the long haul.

As for FDR/ER initiatives, the operational focus is on providing timely and effective disaster relief to nations in a COCOM's AOR, thereby reducing the possibility of increased instability after a disaster occurs (including efforts by local terrorists or insurgents to exploit post-disaster chaos and fear to their advantage). Not surprisingly, typical activities funded under this category of assistance include air or sealift to transport emergency supplies to the disaster area, forward logistical support to facilitate distribution of supplies, search and rescue missions, and medical evacuation. Similar to the HA category, FDR/ER expenditures could also include programs to boost the disaster response capabilities of local governments and relief-minded NGOs, thereby decreasing future requirements for outside help. In theory, the availability of funding from the FDR/ER account means that the COCOM commander need not draw on his own O&M funds and thus decrease overall command readiness to provide such emergency assistance. In reality, however, the level of funds normally available, which must be shared among all COCOM AORs, is quite lim-

ited (again, only about \$17 million in recent years), sufficient only for small-scale contingencies or to provide seed money for much larger operations, in which case funding for non-emergency capacity-building projects would be severely limited, if not consumed altogether, by the crisis at hand. The end result, of course, is that as requests for DoD disaster relief have increased, COCOM efforts to tap whatever FDR/ER monies are made available each year have also risen, often to an aggregate level well beyond what has been appropriated. This, in turn, has led to some very difficult – and, from individual COCOM perspectives, rather arbitrary – decisions about which military responses do and do not qualify for OHDACA funding, and to the short-changing of a number of longer-term investments in local capabilities that could eventually ease the overall COCOM burden by building in-country response and recovery capacities.

The third major OHDACA program is the humanitarian mine action initiative, aimed at educating civilian populations in participating countries to identify and report mines and other unexploded ordnance and at training a local demining cadre. HMA remains a fairly small effort in monetary terms at about \$5 million per year, and one that is very specifically tied to a particular set of activities. Hence, it can not be readily tapped for supplemental funds to finance additional HA or FDR/ER requirements as they emerge. In an effort to alleviate annual funding shortfalls in either category, therefore, DoD budgeteers requested in 2007 the creation of an entirely new OHDACA funding category for FY 2008-09 entitled the Building Partnership Capacity Initiative, to be funded at an initial level of \$40 million. In the first instance, these new monies, it was proposed, could be used to buy necessary disaster relief supplies (such as wa-

ter, tents, blankets, plastic sheeting.) and to cover the costs of transporting emergency relief personnel and supplies to the scene of any disaster. However, since DoD proposed that these funds should also be considered “two-year money,” if the funding for FY 2008 was not used for foreign disaster efforts, it could then be used, so the argument went, to help finance unfunded HA projects, for which, as noted above, there is never enough money. It is perhaps no coincidence, in this context, that the additional \$40 million would be just enough (when combined with the \$40 million regularly appropriated) to underwrite all 880 HA projects identified by the foreign area COCOMs in 2007 (U.S. Department of Defense 2007).

As it happened, the 2008 defense appropriations bill signed by the president on November 13, 2007, included the \$40 million increase in OHDACA funds, but the timing associated with their expenditure and the potential restrictions placed on monies earmarked for disaster relief activities may afford less flexibility than was initially hoped. While the total OHDACA budget was increased to \$103.3 million (from an expected budget of about \$63 million for FY 2007), \$63.3 million was authorized as “two-year money” (available through September 30, 2009) and \$40 million (presumably the new “partnership” funds) was authorized as “three-year money” (good through September 30, 2010). The bill stipulated, however, that the \$40 million was to be used “solely for foreign disaster relief and response activities,” so the option of shifting any unused portion to support unfunded HA projects may be foreclosed (U.S. House of Representatives 2007). Moreover, while the boost in funding targeted specifically for foreign disaster relief is certainly welcome and should alleviate some of the cost constraints

that have emerged in recent years as DoD responses have become more frequent, funding shortfalls still could arise – and possibly be quite acute – in FY 2010, for example, if there are one or two fairly large-scale events to respond to in FY 2008 and FY 2009, or even a greater than expected number of medium-scale events, in addition to the dozen or more small-scale disasters to which the military almost certainly will be asked to respond to each year. So, too, as baseline funding for OHDACA has hovered in the \$60 million range per year, HA initiatives, which have generally cost at least \$40 million per year (with FDR/ER and HMA taking the rest), could be underfunded by as much as \$20 million over the FY 2008-09 timeframe, unless additional monies are appropriated for FY 2009. The key may rest in the degree to which selected HA projects can be interpreted as falling within the definition of “foreign disaster relief and response activities,” but this possibility remains highly uncertain, given that the three-year \$40 million funding line is entirely new and that there is no precedent as yet with regard to how it may actually be spent.

One option, therefore, to which the COCOMs and their service components increasingly may turn to help fund HA and FDR/ER activities (but especially the HA component) is to draw upon their own O&M budgets, as the U.S. Navy already does to underwrite the costs of its hospital ship deployments and newly-instituted “grey hull” medical missions. In that event, however, concerns with regard to the potential negative impact on other priority operations would most likely increase. Both in the military and in Congress, for example, there are those who will argue that the benefits of diverting O&M funds to cover HA/DR-related missions are not worth the costs in terms of reduced command readiness, espe-

cially as such missions can be quite expensive. Indeed, while they may be unique in scope and scale, future *Mercy, Comfort*, and grey-hull medical missions are projected to cost at least \$20 million each, equivalent to about one-third of previous OHDACA annual budgets for just one HA event.²⁰ For this reason, perhaps the least controversial move by the COCOMs and their components would be to utilize more creatively and purposefully annual funds authorized for humanitarian civic assistance (HCA), which, like HA, FDR/ER and HMA, is managed by DSCA, but charged to service O&M accounts (rather than to OHDACA monies) because HCA must be directly tied – or legally interpreted as being tied – to an overseas training or exercise opportunity for U.S. military forces (U.S. Code 2006). In other words, HCA projects can not be undertaken solely for humanitarian purposes.

Within the confines of this particular restriction, however, there is a fair amount of leeway insofar as project focus is concerned. Most HCA events have a medical and/or engineering focus – commonly referred to as a medical civic action program (MEDCAP) or an engineering civic action program (ENCAP) – such as minor surgery and dental care, vaccination of children and animals, well digging, and the construction of roads, schools, and clinics, but measures to enhance disaster preparedness (such as training first responders and building or repairing warehouses) may also qualify for HCA funding. That said, annual funding levels for HCA remain rather limited (ranging from some \$4 million to \$7 million for all COCOMs in recent years), and, since it must be used in the context of planned military training, exercises, or operations, it could not easily be drawn upon to help support emergency measures in response to a sudden disaster or to help fund HA activities by service

²⁰ In view of these costs, the fact that the U.S. Navy leadership is now aiming to conduct at least four such medical missions each year confirms the impossibility of covering such an expansion in service-tied HA via the classic OHDACA route. Further details on this initiative can be found in chapter 3.

21 In early 2007, DoD proposed a new initiative, commonly known as the Building Global Partnerships Act, under which it could provide up to \$750 million per year to “train and equip”-type missions anywhere in the world, and do so free of the funding restrictions (such as adherence to certain human rights regulations) that often accompany monies provided under the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA). Congress refused to approve this request, and legislation that supports the current 1206 program is due to expire on September 30, 2008. Not surprisingly, in his April 2008 testimony to the House Armed Service Committee, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has called on Congress to make this program permanent and to increase 1206 funding to the \$750 million level requested in 2007 (Pincus 2007b; Valero 2008, 1).

22 Congress did approve an additional \$500 million in CERP funds to be used anywhere in the world as part of the FY 2007 Iraq supplemental appropriations bill, but the bill was vetoed by President Bush and sent back to Congress (Pincus 2007b). Appropriations legislation proposed in the Senate in March 2009 for fiscal year 2009 includes provisions to make the CERP program permanent and global in coverage, but no particular funding line was proposed (U.S. Senate 2008). The fate of the CERP program, like that of the 1206 program, will be determined largely by the broader debate over the degree to which DoD should assume foreign aid and humanitarian assistance responsibilities that were once primarily the responsibility of the State Department.

units when they are out of rotation from their primary mission deployments (for example, the *Peleliu* medical mission in 2007). Moreover, precisely because they are considered to be standard O&M expenses, HCA costs are not reimbursable (as are many humanitarian-related expenses incurred by the military during a disaster relief operation). In a number of ambiguous circumstances (for example, a COCOM or service component decision to offer emergency aid when a disaster unexpectedly strikes during a military exercise in or near the disaster area), this has led to unhelpful wrangles between forward-based commanders and Pentagon-based lawyers as to what was and was not legally permissible, rendering timely assistance to disaster victims all the more complicated and reducing any incentive to offer such aid in the future.

That said, since 9/11, HCA activities, together with HA, HMA, and FDR/ER efforts, have increasingly been viewed as key military tools in the global war on terror, helping to ease local conditions (including disaster-related damage) in overseas communities that may be vulnerable to radicalization and political instability. Accordingly, DoD and the regional COCOMs have begun to explore alternative sources of O&M monies to help fund HA/DR initiatives, including both emergency assistance and capacity-building efforts. One possibility that remains controversial is to leverage more fully funding provided under section 1206 of the 2006 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which currently authorizes DoD and the COCOMs (with State Department concurrence) to spend up to \$300 million per year to train and equip foreign militaries to undertake counterterrorism and stability operations, the latter of which (as discussed earlier) could be interpreted as including a variety of HA/DR-orient-

ed missions (Pincus 2007a).²¹ Another option might be to utilize funds made available under the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP), which now authorizes U.S. military commanders operating in Iraq and Afghanistan to spend up to \$500 million a year of O&M monies, provided via supplemental funding, on local humanitarian assistance and construction projects such as rebuilding schools and roads, setting up clinics, digging wells, and the like. More to the point, the Pentagon hoped to increase CERP funding in FY 2008 to \$1 billion and to receive authorization to spend that money in countries other than Iraq and Afghanistan, but neither this proposal nor a more limited version – either of which might well have eliminated overnight a host of funding problems related to HA/DR programs – was able to secure congressional approval (Pincus 2007b).²²

Beyond HCA, section 1206, and CERP considerations, there are a few additional, but rather small, pockets of O&M funds that COCOMs may tap to provide a degree of financial relief on the HA/DR front. The Developing Countries Combined Exercise Program (DC-CEP), for example, allows DoD, after consultation with State, to use O&M funds to pay the incremental expenses that are incurred by a developing country while participating in a bilateral or multilateral exercise with U.S. forces, while the Personnel Expenses (PE) program allows DoD to pay the travel, subsistence, and personal expenses of defense personnel from developing countries in connection with their attendance at a bilateral or regional conference, seminar, or similar meeting. Perhaps even more useful, the Exercise Related Construction (ERC) program permits U.S. forces to carry out low-cost infrastructure improvements in host countries to support military exercises overseas, including site adaptation,

training facilities, security fencing, and the storing of supplies that could also be used in disaster relief-oriented operations. Together, all three programs offer useful opportunities to boost foreign partner country HA/DR capabilities via exercises and training with U.S. forces and to enhance disaster preparedness by means of warehouse construction and the pre-positioning of essential supplies.²³ At current levels of funding, however, they can provide no more than a partial and largely accidental solution to what are expected to be increasing demands in the years ahead for HA/DR-related funding.

In the event of a truly major disaster, of course, the president has the power, under subsection 506(a) (1) of the Foreign Assistance Act, to draw down (i.e., redirect) up to \$100 million in any fiscal year from previously programmed DoD funding for unspecified emergencies that require immediate military assistance. This is what happened in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, and most of the funds so expended have been reimbursed to DoD (or soon will be) by Congress via special supplemental appropriations. Presidential draw-downs, however, are exceptional measures, offering no possibility of relief from the everyday limits that now exist and will only grow on HA/DR-related funding for smaller-scale contingencies. What is really needed is a sustained increase in OHDACA funding along the lines originally proposed for FY 2008-09 (an annual baseline of some \$60 million, plus another \$40 million in two-year funds that could be flexibly billed), though even a more modest increase could have a significant beneficial effect on HA and FDR/ER activities, most if not all of which would also provide, in the words of one senior PACOM commander, “vital axle grease” to help advance DoD and COCOM

theater security cooperation (TSC) objectives (interview 2007c). A doubling of traditional OHDACA funding lines to some \$120 million per year, which remains a relatively modest amount of money in the context of the defense budget as a whole, would likely eliminate any money shortages for some time to come, providing ample flexibility to cover both sudden emergencies and out-of-cycle opportunities to work with allies and partner countries in the HA/DR realm.

If accompanied by relatively small-scale increases (for example, less than \$10 million per command) in COCOM O&M funds that could be used for TSC projects (to include HA/DR initiatives), the positive impact of OHDACA increases would simply be magnified and rendered longer-lasting. Dedicated steps in this direction, however, may be difficult to set in motion before a consensus is reached at the higher policy level between Congress and the administration on the rising role of DoD and the military services in foreign aid activities, including with regard to the scale and global applicability of section 1206 and CERP appropriations. Until then, even with the \$40 million in three-year money earmarked for disaster-related operations in the FY 2008 defense appropriations bill, DoD approval for FDR/ER operations and related HA initiatives will always include a larger than desirable element of “robbing Peter to pay Paul,” with the hope that the new guidelines now being codified by the GSA/CMO office in OUSD(P) will hold to a minimum any approval of DoD and/or COCOM expenditures that are not truly required or appropriate.

Conclusion

Looking ahead, then, the U.S. foreign disaster response process – and, most particularly, that portion dealing with the provision of

23 Such improvements, it needs to be stressed, can be extremely cost-effective. According to one informed observer, every dollar invested in preparedness could achieve an eight-dollar reduction in disaster relief costs. See remarks by U.S. Ambassador to Croatia Ralph Frank at the Southeast Europe Disaster Preparedness Conference in Dubrovnik on March 21, 2006 (Ferrare 2006).

DoD/military support – should run far more smoothly and predictably once the reforms proposed and/or already adopted with regard to the State-DoD Executive Secretariat dynamic really take hold, and the new procedures for authorizing military aid for small- and medium-scale disasters become standard operating practice. The higher priority both State and DoD now place on stability operations and humanitarian assistance as key components of the war on terror and the “diplomacy of deeds” also suggests that current problems with respect to interagency coordination – problems that bedevil disaster relief missions as much as any other SSTR-type operation – will eventually get the attention they deserve. After that, the key challenge for HA/DR planners and practitioners at DoD and the COCOMs will be to make sure that these policy and operational adjustments are matched by the necessary increases in funding. Only then will it be safe to assume that the capabilities and skills needed to implement a major U.S. disaster relief effort overseas will be available when and where they are required and in sufficient quantity.

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