IN TIMES OF CRISIS
U.S.-Japan Civil-Military Disaster Relief Coordination

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A Publication by
The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, Inc.
In Association with The Fletcher School, Tufts University
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The succession of large-scale natural disasters and ambitious nation-building projects that have occurred or have been undertaken globally in the last several years has focused attention on the potential value of deploying national military assets in support of disaster relief and recovery efforts, as well as on the challenges that international disaster relief agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) face when working closely with dispatched military units. In the United States, this has led to a serious discussion in government circles about possible ways to adjust the military structure and training regimen in order to enhance the military’s effectiveness in certain complex or catastrophic cases, including the development of a dedicated response capability and the enhancement of joint planning or training with non-military groups.

The goal of these adjustments is relatively straightforward: to improve U.S. government and military readiness for domestic or overseas relief missions to which Washington will inevitably be called on to contribute. The motivation behind this goal, however, is more complex, especially when it comes to overseas operations, since it is recognized that such missions are increasingly connected to national security and diplomatic objectives. For similar reasons, Japan is examining ways that its civil society and military sectors can contribute more directly to disaster relief efforts and so-called international peace cooperation activities, making this an important time to foster dialogue and cross-fertilization of related ideas and initiatives between the two allies and beyond.
Both U.S. and Japanese policy makers understand that leveraging military resources in times of crisis is first and foremost an opportunity to do good, to save lives and property, and to help maintain stability and prosperity in affected communities and nations. This is particularly true in the wake of catastrophic disasters that quickly overwhelm the response capabilities of the affected nation and the international organizations it reaches out to for assistance. But Washington policy makers in particular recognize that responding effectively can further U.S. foreign policy goals by helping to eliminate sources of instability, building or restoring cooperative military ties with host and contributing nations that can prove useful in other mission areas, and establishing goodwill in countries where it has been latent at best. This was at least a small part of the U.S. government’s calculation when it responded ardently to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, the 2006 Philippines mudslides, the 2008 cyclone disaster in Burma (Myanmar), and the catastrophic earthquake in Sichuan, China that same year. Moreover, a failure to respond adequately can be devastating to the affected communities and will inevitably lead to charges of abandonment, indifference, and isolation on the part of America and its allies, which can undermine their interests and international cooperation more broadly.

For all of these reasons, U.S. policy makers are seeking to strengthen America’s contributions to international disaster relief efforts, and they cannot ignore the attention being given to enhancing civil-military coordination (CMCoord) for these operations. It is quite clear that international military involvement in relief operations has saved countless lives in recent years, and it is not unreasonable to expect that strengthening CMCoord could further improve response to large-scale disasters. This experience also demonstrates, however, that many organizational, legal, and cultural obstacles can impede cooperation among the many actors who respond to a crisis, preventing the full realization of this CMCoord potential. The challenges are numerous and include command and control issues, information sharing, and field coordination.

In addition, U.S. civilian and military officials have given mixed signals regarding their intentions and motivations, with some more focused on the “do good” opportunity in disaster relief missions, while others suggest a broader interest in Washington for strengthening CMCoord
in support of diplomatic objectives (or even force protection), particularly when this involves so-called stability operations in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. These signals have led to worry by some at the United Nations (UN) and among NGOs that the United States is politicizing CMCoord and potentially threatening their impartiality in volatile areas.

In Japan, the discussion regarding CMCoord has not developed as far as it has in the United States, but this situation is changing as Japanese NGOs and Japan’s self-defense forces (SDF) expand their involvement in disaster relief and international peace and reconstruction activities, as they did for the tsunami relief effort and the Pakistan earthquake, as well as in Afghanistan and Iraq. New NGOs are being formed in Japan that are specifically designed to provide assistance to these kinds of operations.¹ Japan’s National Defense Program Guideline (NDPG) for FY 2005 and After paved the way for the country to become more proactive in overseas emergency assistance and peace cooperation activities, supported by new procurements, training programs, and a joint command structure formed in 2006. This culminated in early 2007, when Japan’s Defense Agency was upgraded to a full ministry, and overseas missions became primary duties of the new ministry, as opposed to secondary.² Japan’s new NDPG in 2009 is expected to build upon this trend.

To support these changes, several Japanese government agencies and universities have launched studies of CMCoord, and these organizations have been cooperating with the United States bilaterally and within multilateral frameworks through various workshops, seminars, and tabletop exercises. Although public support in Japan for the SDF’s participation in international disaster relief missions has increased in the last ten to fifteen years, disagreement remains within the government and among civil society about how extensive the SDF’s involvement should be. Japan is interested in joining the CMCoord debate to enhance its own understanding of the issues and to contribute to improving cooperation with the United States in ways that strengthen its own civilian and military institutions.

Of course, the debate about enhancing CMCoord is not limited to Washington and Tokyo, as this is truly a global phenomenon driven by

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¹ These include Japan Mine Action Service in 2002 and Engineers without Borders in 2005.
² These changes were accomplished by passage of the Law Concerning Partial Amendment of the Establishment of the Defense Agency on December 15, 2006.
the combination of persistent human vulnerability and a greater technical and financial capacity on the part of wealthy nations to respond. This response capacity, however, is not centralized, so large-scale disaster relief missions are often conducted by loose, ad hoc coalitions of international organizations, NGOs, and national aid agencies and militaries, as opposed to being managed almost exclusively by the UN and its affiliated agencies and organizations. This arrangement places a premium on nation-to-nation communication and cooperation during a crisis, even though these networks are not fully developed.

CMCoord and related policies are therefore at a critical stage in the United States and Japan, as well as in the international community. Success in these efforts can contribute not only to more effective relief and recovery operations, but also to greater interaction and mutual understanding among national militaries and the NGO community. Further, effective CMCoord can strengthen international and regional organizations by giving them access to more synergistic civil-military coalitions. The United States and Japan are by no means the only two countries engaged in this effort, but they can play a unique role by virtue of their financial power (in terms of their contributions to the UN and other international organizations, and direct overseas development assistance) and their strong security relationship, which features frequent joint training opportunities and a high degree of interoperability.

Together with a handful of other key countries in Europe and East Asia, the United States and Japan can help form a valuable crisis core group that cooperates in support of large-scale, UN-led disaster relief operations. This kind of core group (of perhaps four to six nations) is generally more effective at making decisions and harmonizing policies and procedures than either a large collection of dozens of countries or uncoordinated efforts by individual countries, and it could play an invaluable support role to the UN or to host nations in the early days following a disaster. An important part of making this core-group idea work, however, is achieving greater mutual awareness and understanding about these issues among a wide variety of policy makers, military officials, and academics in the United States and Japan, which is a primary objective of the research and dialogue project described in this report.

Our project focused on improving the ability of the United States and Japan to effectively pool civilian and military resources and to re-
spond together (bilaterally or as part of a broader coalition) in support of host nations and international relief agencies to alleviate suffering and to speed recovery in a time of crisis. Indeed, it is the pressure of time (an integral part of any crisis) that underscores the value of extensive dialogue and preparation in advance of a coordinated response to a natural or man-made disaster. The ability to respond in a timely fashion requires an ongoing regimen of effective planning and communication, which in turn relies on strong personal and institutional relationships between the two countries and with other partners. Our project sought to strengthen and diversify these relationships with the aim of helping the individuals and organizations involved to be better prepared, to respond more efficiently, and to improve over time as they incorporate lessons from shared experiences.

The In Times of Crisis project was a multi-year joint effort of the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis (IFPA) and the Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP) at Osaka University, together with a number of individual scholars in Japan. Project team members examined both domestic and international characteristics of the CMCoord debate from the two countries’ points of view, in order to explain how CMCoord is developing in each country, as well as how each country (or various institutions within the country) views international CMCoord developments and how they relate to their participation in future multilateral operations. The project team’s goal was to build linkages between the two countries across the spectrum of NGOs, government officials, scholars, and military officers. In addition to archival research and one-on-one interviews, the team organized a day-long bilateral workshop in Washington, D.C., on December 12, 2006, and another in Tokyo on October 28, 2008, that brought together government and military officials from relevant agencies, along with UN officials and American and Japanese NGOs, and policy specialists to discuss these issues.

This report generally draws a distinction between CMCoord for disaster relief operations and CMCoord for stabilization and reconstruction missions (such as in Afghanistan and Iraq). Part of the reason for this distinction is the fact that some real differences exist between the two types of missions, in terms of the kinds of activities carried out by the responding organizations, the speed with which the activities are carried out, and the overall environment in which they operate. It is also true
that stability operations are much more political and controversial by nature, and there are a number of legal questions regarding how involved Japan’s SDF can be in certain dangerous situations. That said, the personal networks, communications infrastructure, and many key capabilities and operating procedures often apply to both types of CMCoord, so it is neither practical nor advisable to ignore stabilization/reconstruction situations altogether. Therefore, while the IFPA-OSIPP project focused primarily on CMCoord in disaster relief and consequence management situations, some mention of stabilization/reconstruction CMCoord issues is unavoidable. This report details the key findings from the project, and it serves as a primer for CMCoord in the two countries and related policy reforms. The report also identifies the most promising areas for bilateral cooperation within international frameworks.

The authors are grateful to key members of the project team for their contributions to this project to date: Dr. Hoshino Toshiya (OSIPP), Dr. Robert Eldridge (OSIPP), Dr. Atsumi Tomohide (Osaka University), Dr. Yoshizaki Tomonori (Japan’s National Institute for Defense Studies), Dr. Nagamatsu Shingo (then at the Disaster Reduction & Human Renovation Institution), Dr. Uesugi Yuji (Hiroshima University), and Dr. Charles M. Perry and RADM (Ret.) Eric A. McVadon USN of IFPA. The authors also thank the officials and specialists who have given their time in interviews and through presentations or comments at the workshops, in particular those who serve as unofficial advisors to the project, including Ms. Nancy Lindborg (Mercy Corps), Ms. Linda Poteat (InterAction), Ms. Seki Kaoruko (UN-OCHA), Mr. Rabih Torbay (International Medical Corps), Ms. Yamamoto Rika (Peace Winds Japan), and Mr. Takamatsu Koji (then of Japan Platform). Other specialists, officials, and military officers who generously gave of their time and expertise in interviews and workshops include Chuck Aanenson, Tom Baltazar, Samina Bhatia, Leo Bosner, Pete Bradford, James Castle, Steve Catlin, Kathleen Connolly, Tom Dolan, Paul Fujimura, Lt Gen (Ret.) W.C. “Chip” Gregson USMC, Brian Grzelkowski, Bailey Hand, Lt. General Hayashi Kazuya JGSDF, Hayashi Ryoji, Heff Hensel, Colonel Hiroe Jiro JGSDF, Horie Yoshiteru, Colonel Horikiri Mitsuhiko JGSDF, Major General Isobe Koichi JGSDF, Iwasaki Naoko, Lt. Col. Brett Jackman USMC, Vice Admiral Kaneda Hideaki JMSDF, Kawakami Takashi, Brendan Kearney, Kiyama Keiko, Colonel Kudo Takahiko JGSDF, Kuwana Megumi, James Lawler, Simon Lee, Rear
Introduction

Admiral Michael LeFever USN, Kate Stone Legates, Colonel Mark Losack USMC, Marui Kentaro, Matsumoto Sayaka, Matsuura Misaki, Mikami Emiko, Douglas Meffert, Gary Oba, Ohue Hirofumi, Colonel Okimura Yoshihiko JGSDF, Barry Pavel, Allan Reed, Scott Rolston, Sano Hiroaki, Sato Masaru, Colonel Shigemura Kazuyuki JGSDF, Shiina Noriyuki, Ken Staley, Rob Thayer, Tokuchi Hideshi, Phil Wilhelm, Colonel Jeffrey Wiltse USA, Lt. General (Ret.) Yamaguchi Noboru JGSDF, Lt. Colonel Yamamoto Yutaka JGSDF, Yamanouchi Kanji, and Yokoi Yutaka. Valuable assistance at IFPA came from Nakai Aki, Charles Lister, and Koga Kei (research), Adelaide Ketchum (editing), and Christian Hoffman (graphic art and publication design). The entire project team is grateful to the Japan Foundation’s Center for Global Partnership (CGP) for its financial support, advice, and encouragement throughout this entire project. In this report, Japanese names appear with the family name first and the given name second, as is the Japanese custom.
The United States and Japan are seeking to strengthen their countries’ contributions to international disaster relief efforts, and they cannot ignore the value that civil-military coordination (CMCoord) brings to these operations. International military involvement in relief operations has saved countless lives in recent years, and strengthening CMCoord could further improve responses to large-scale disasters. This experience also demonstrates, however, that organizational, legal, and cultural obstacles impede cooperation among the many actors who respond to a crisis, preventing the full realization of this CMCoord potential. The challenges are numerous and include command and control issues, information sharing, and field coordination. In addition, military support for disaster relief operations and related missions should not encroach upon the humanitarian space occupied by NGOs, UN agencies, and civilian government organs that are the primary tools to aid communities and nations in times of crisis.

CMCoord and related policies are at an important stage, and improvement in this area can contribute not only to more effective relief and recovery operations, but also to greater interaction and mutual understanding among national militaries and the NGO community. Further, effective CMCoord can strengthen international and regional organizations by giving them access to more synergistic civil-military coalitions. The United States and Japan are not the only two countries engaged in this effort, but they can play a unique role by virtue of their financial power (in terms of contributions to the UN and other international orga-
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nizations, and direct overseas development assistance) and their strong security relationship, which features frequent joint training exercises and a high degree of interoperability. U.S.-Japan CMCoord can create opportunities to contribute to global stability and prosperity, and at the same time it can strengthen the alliance relationship in a variety of ways that will prepare them for other important missions.

U.S.-Japan bilateral cooperation on these issues (together with other partners in the region) can help build more diverse and sophisticated alliance relationships that bring together a wider range of ministries, departments, and agencies to address common challenges of all types. This will ultimately serve to improve the ability of the alliance to work with other countries on these issues through multilateral initiatives and with international organizations. Enhancing CMCoord for disaster relief operations is a beneficial alliance exercise because:

- CMCoord is useful
- The need for CMCoord is constant
- CMCoord is inherently an interagency or “whole-of-government” responsibility in collaboration with NGOs and international bodies (so it “exercises” these increasingly important alliance “muscles” that can be valuable in a variety of regional contingencies)
- CMCoord is “exportable”: it can help protect the homeland and third countries overseas, contributing to regional stability and multilateral security cooperation
- CMCoord is not politically controversial

The United States and Japan approach the CMCoord issue from different positions of strength and experience. The U.S. military is well funded and extremely capable, but it has been drawn into the disaster relief role in recent years at times reluctantly, given the combat and counter-insurgency demands it has faced since 2001. Japan’s SDF has a very high tempo of domestic relief operations, but it has relatively little experience overseas and limited projection capability. U.S. NGOs are better funded and have more international experience than their Japanese counterparts, but in Asia Japan’s NGOs often have complementary networks of local staff and technical expertise. Moreover, Japan’s disaster relief teams can be a valuable asset.
Core Crisis Group
Together with a handful of other key countries in Europe and East Asia, the United States and Japan can help form a valuable core crisis group that cooperates in support of large-scale, UN-led disaster relief operations. This kind of core group (of perhaps four to six nations) is generally more effective at making decisions and harmonizing policies and procedures than either a large collection of dozens of countries or uncoordinated efforts by individual countries, and it could provide invaluable support to the UN or to host nations in the early days following a disaster.

Maintaining CMCoord
Thinking about and taking steps to maintain CMCoord across the lifecycle of an event—from first response to last act of assistance—remains central to the concept of continuous operations that is so vital to a well-managed relief effort, since it is the military sprinters who buy the time that the civilian marathoners need to fully mobilize and eventually assume command in the recovery and reconstruction phase of an HA/DR operation.

It is probably too difficult (and unnecessary) to try to bridge the gaps between the military and civilian sectors for disaster relief situations in a comprehensive way. In other words, U.S.-Japan military-to-military interactions and parallel civilian-to-civilian interactions are likely to be much more productive than trying to integrate civil-military dialogues and policies across the alliance with any sort of regularity.

Of course, these parallel civilian and military interactions need to be connected to each other in some way in order to set complementary goals and maintain communication and mutual awareness as they progress, but it is not necessary to impose common CMCoord solutions on the alliance. In this sense, American CMCoord and Japanese CMCoord will be like two different doors that open with their own key, but there should be a master key that can work both doors when the need arises. Developing this link between the two, in conjunction with the UN and other partners in the region, is a prime objective.

Overall, this linkage and these interactions should focus most on planning, preparation, communication, and assessment issues related to disaster relief, since actual operations are more likely to be carried out separately by U.S. and Japanese forces and civilian teams. Promot-
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ing joint U.S.-Japan disaster relief operations, therefore, should not be a specific goal of alliance managers, but more efficient and productive coordination of U.S. and Japanese contributions to these multinational operations is a worthwhile objective. This can start at the far end of the preparation and planning spectrum, including coordinated disaster reduction and capacity building through development assistance to disaster-prone countries, as well as adjusting (or perhaps adding to) pre-positioned stockpiles of disaster relief supplies throughout the region.

Bilateral cooperation in this area can also move into more detailed planning tasks by identifying complementary specialties or a viable division of labor in certain circumstances, standardizing information flows (such as scripting requests for assistance and collaborating on advance contracting arrangements), and harmonizing damage- and needs-assessment procedures.

Increasingly this kind of so-called theater security cooperation (TSC) involves more than just two allies working together, as shared interests in regional stability, open trade, anti-piracy and counterterrorism, disaster relief, and similar objectives are prompting more frequent collaboration amongst a wider variety of increasingly capable players. These joint exercises can include, it is worth noting, the construction of warehouses, supply depots, airstrips, and port facilities to which the allies might be granted access during future contingencies (as a part of “exercise-related construction”).

The budgets supporting TSC and related training activities are relatively modest, however, and TSC is often perceived as competition for “real” needs. This kind of joint training, however, is an important part of training forces to conduct military operations in the challenging environment of coalition politics. At the tactical and operational level, knowing how to work with forces from different cultural backgrounds and different doctrinal schools is critically important and difficult to learn from a book (interview 2004). The value of these training investments can be enhanced through more effective and timely coordination between the military and civilian officials and specialists.

Cataloguing Assets, Roles, and Resources

Another step in improving the ability of the United States and Japan to effectively pool their civilian and military resources in response to
humanitarian crises is to identify and catalogue what assets (civil and military personnel, material and equipment, and support assets) are available to each country for HA/DR activities, particularly in Asia. This process should help familiarize U.S. and Japanese officials with one another’s capacities to respond to a crisis, without necessarily committing either party to exchange logistics support and services. This exercise could also go beyond pinpointing available military assets, such as heavy-lift helicopters, naval vessels, and surveillance equipment, to reach into private-sector and NGO capabilities. Private-sector capabilities are particularly well suited to the areas of communication, damage assessment (involving commercial satellites and local NGO staff), and transportation.

Understanding the roles and resources of each actor involved in disaster relief creates familiarity at the strategic and operational levels of a mission, as well as helping to identify critical gaps in each country’s disaster response capacities. In time, this process may lead to the development of a disaster management database, similar to OCHA’s Central Register of Disaster Management Capacities. A bilateral inventory list specifying the civilian and military assets, support services, and personnel available for or, at minimum, trained for complex emergencies could enhance the capacity of the United States and Japan to respond, either alone or together, to an emerging crisis. Exchanging information on the availability of military assets would also help U.S. and Japanese planning efforts. But a bilateral effort in this area should be well coordinated with OCHA and other regional efforts, such as the contact points for the disaster relief database compiled by the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Databases such as these are notorious for becoming quickly outdated and inaccurate, and there is significant room to improve database development and management; this could be a productive area for enhancing efficiency through bilateral cooperation within multilateral frameworks.

**Mutual Assistance and Support Agreements**

Another means to improve government and military relations with NGOs and the private sector, as well as to enhance U.S.-Japan cooperation overall, is the establishment of mutual assistance and support agreements, or memorandums of understanding (MOUs), for disaster re-
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lief operations. The current U.S.-Japan Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement enables U.S. and Japanese forces to provide mutual logistics support, exchange supplies—including food and fuel—and use each other’s transportation and communications equipment, for reimbursement either in cash, replacement in kind, or equal value exchange. But the potential applicability of this agreement is not well understood in the broader disaster relief community, and although it can be used in disaster relief situations, it is not specifically designed to do so.

In addition to military-to-military MOUs, the two countries might study the benefits of signing MOUs with humanitarian and private-sector organizations. UN agencies, for example, have signed MOUs with several NGO and private-sector organizations, such as the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, OXFAM GB, and Deutsche Post World Net, the parent company of DHL, an international express and logistics company.

Standby arrangements for disaster management and emergency response between U.S. and Japanese civil and military partners would also enhance the ability of the two countries to mobilize resources quickly. A standby arrangement would commit each party to maintain specified resources on standby, such as technical and logistics resources, field staff, and material and equipment. Joint capacity-mapping exercises could help identify the allies’ strengths and weaknesses, reveal which areas require additional investment, in terms of resources, personnel, and training, as well as determine which assets U.S. and Japanese forces should make available to one another to avoid duplications in assistance efforts. Moreover, this process could identify how best to integrate the UN, NGOs, and private-sector companies into disaster preparedness plans and relief efforts.

For now, standby arrangements for military capabilities might be difficult to implement, but introducing bilateral standby arrangements between U.S. and Japanese government agencies, NGOs, and private-sector companies is more feasible. OCHA has had in place standby arrangements with governments and humanitarian organizations for the provision of emergency staff and equipment during disasters, and the UN Department of Peacekeeping has in place a similar arrangement, the UN Stand-by Arrangement System (UNSAS). Forums in East
Asia have proposed establishing similar arrangements for regional disaster response and humanitarian activities, but the degree of U.S. and Japanese involvement in these programs has been limited, and neither is well aware of the other’s national agreements, such as they are. The allies could compare and, when appropriate, further develop bilateral standby arrangements with relief agencies and commercial aircraft carriers and shipping companies, with an eye toward establishing an element of reciprocity with each other and perhaps with other nations and organizations.

**Information Management**

Information management is an overriding challenge for CMCoord, though this seemingly simple objective can mean slightly different things to different stakeholders. For many at OCHA, greater standardization of how information is provided by and managed among crisis response partners is the top priority for improving CMCoord. From their perspective, this includes information about the availability and capability of certain assets or personnel, the terms of their deployment, standardization of assessment reports and procedures, and a high degree of interoperability among the contributing organizations and governments.

For some this is a process of developing compatible systems, but others might emphasize training people to understand different responding organizations’ capabilities and how they operate. Still others take this a step further and emphasize the personal relationships among responders in the field as the key factor. All of these perspectives are valid, but each of them suggests a slightly different focus for CMCoord training and cooperation in a bilateral (or mini-lateral) context.¹ Developing practical options to increase and strengthen U.S.-Japan peer-to-peer interactions on CMCoord issues, while maintaining connections between these groups, should help the two countries to clarify how they can best contribute to the process of CMCoord improvement.

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¹ The term “mini-lateral” refers to multilateral activities with relatively few players (usually just three or four), as a way to differentiate from larger multilateral initiatives involving many more countries.
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Conclusion
Overall, strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance for disaster response may increase the two countries’ participation in regional and multilateral HA/DR missions, which will be a good thing for affected nations and for the alliance. Harmonizing policies and procedures among close allies would improve how they cooperate together or as members of a coalition, as well as pave the way for achieving a more efficient international framework for disaster response and recovery. Finally, opportunities for enhanced U.S.-Japan civil-military cooperation in disaster management and emergency response can serve as a catalyst for greater cooperation throughout the Asia-Pacific region for missions such as peacekeeping, counterproliferation, counterterrorism, and maritime security.
The succession of large-scale natural disasters and ambitious nation-building projects that have occurred or have been undertaken globally in the last several years calls attention to the potential value of deploying national military assets in support of disaster relief and recovery efforts, as well as to the challenges that disaster relief agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) face when working closely with the military. Both U.S. and Japanese policy makers understand that leveraging military resources during a disaster is an opportunity to save lives and property, to help maintain stability and prosperity in affected nations, and to promote the allies’ diplomatic interests, but it must be done carefully to maximize efficiency and avoid undermining humanitarian principles.

Together with a handful of other key countries, the United States and Japan can help form a valuable crisis core group that cooperates in support of large-scale, UN-led disaster relief operations, but effective civil-military coordination is essential to making this work. The In Times of Crisis project was a multi-year joint effort of the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis (IFPA) and the Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP), involving practitioners and policy makers from both countries, the United Nations, and NGOs through interviews and bilateral workshops. This monograph explains the team’s findings and ways to improve the allies’ ability to effectively pool civilian and military resources and to respond together (bilaterally or as part of a broader coalition) in support of host nations and international relief agencies to speed recovery in times of crisis.

ISBN: 978-1-59797-406-6. $25.00