

Perfect Strangers: An Examination of Contemporary Military Involvement in Humanitarian Affairs

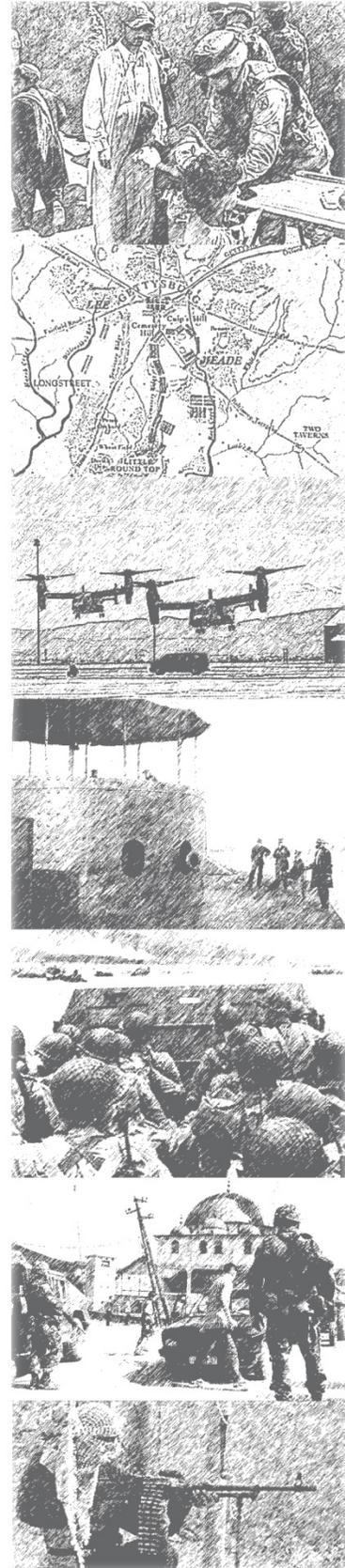
Wiley C. Thompson†
Assistant Professor

ABSTRACT

Modern humanitarian assistance and disaster response efforts occur in complex environments in terms of the operating conditions and the array of participating actors. In addition to those affected by a hazard, civilian humanitarian groups and military disaster responders often comprise the majority of these actors. Each group may have differing motivations and objectives, but often intersect in their interests to mitigate the effects of the hazards present and speed rescue, relief, recovery, and rehabilitation. Despite intersecting interests, involving military personnel and resources in the humanitarian realm is a contentious issue. This article surveys contemporary views of military participation in post-disaster environments from the perspective of both humanitarians and the military. The article then examines recent activity in Haiti as a framework to assess the value of conducting a complete cultural landscape analysis during humanitarian assistance operations.

Keywords: *Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Response, Civil-Military Coordination, and Humanitarianism*

† Department of Geography and Environmental Engineering
United States Military Academy
West Point, New York



Perfect Strangers: An Examination of Contemporary Military Involvement in Humanitarian Affairs

• Introduction

DURING THE PEAK DEPLOYMENT IN SUPPORT of the Haitian earthquake response, the United States (US) military responded with 58 aircraft, 15 vessels, and up to 22,000 forces, with 7,000 of those forces on land (U.S. DoD 2010a). Military intervention in the normally civilian humanitarian realm has increased with the apparent greater number of disasters (Alexander 1999) that are occurring and are brought to the global community's attention by the media. While the humanitarian¹ community and civilian scholars continue to examine the issue of military involvement in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) at length, much less research and writing has been undertaken by military practitioners and scholars in this same area.² Military writings appear to peak following significant deployments, using the specific operation as their theme. This was evident following *Operation Restore Hope*, the U.S. military deployment to Somalia in 1993 and following *Operation Noble Anvil*, the U.S. military operation in support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia during the Kosovo War in 1999. On the other hand, writings from the humanitarian community, focused on the intrusion of military forces into the humanitarian sphere, are rather continuous. This article surveys contemporary views on military participation in post disaster environments from the perspective of civilian and military scholars. Although examples from combat and post-conflict environments will be discussed, the primary focus of this analysis is employment of military assets while operating in non-U.S. large-scale natural disasters. The goal of this research is to review the concerns of both parties and identify areas where improved understanding can reduce operational friction, creating a more coordinated operating environment for all actors.

Joint Publication (JP) 3-07.6, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Foreign Humanitarian Assistance*, defines humanitarian assistance as operations with the purpose to “relieve or reduce the results of natural or manmade disasters or other endemic conditions such as human suffering, disease, or privation that might present a serious threat to life or loss of property” (U.S. DoD 2001b, vii). The publication further goes on to describe foreign humanitarian assistance operations as those “other than war conducted outside the United States and its territories and possessions” (U.S. DoD 2001b, vii).

Humanitarian-focused non-governmental organizations (NGOs) possess extensive experience in the humanitarian realm and are generally better skilled than military forces at working with local populations and helping to build capacity. Military forces, which possess specialized skills and have critical

¹ The term, “humanitarian” is used in a general sense to differentiate between civilian groups who have a primarily humanitarian focus from others groups such as domestic or foreign military forces utilized in support of humanitarian assistance missions. Humanitarians in the context of this article include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private volunteer organizations (PVOs), segments of the United Nations, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), though these suggestions are not exhaustive.

² Military publications almost exclusively use the terms “disaster relief” and as such this terminology will be used throughout the article. However the author and many other scholars specifically prefer the term “response” as that term includes both rescue, the first requirement following a disaster, and relief, the follow-on action.

resources, will rarely have extensive organizational humanitarian training and/or resident humanitarian experience or expertise. Although individuals assigned to a military unit may have previously participated in humanitarian assistance missions, military forces are largely transient actors, operating as a veneer on top of society. In contrast, NGOs may have had a presence in a region for many years and are able to operate within the social fabric of a community.

An example of a specialized military skill would be in the area of logistics. Lange (1998) noted that one of the greatest inadequacies of the humanitarian community, specifically the United Nations (UN), is logistical capability. This was evident in Haiti and confirmed in conversations by the author with UN World Food Program (WFP) personnel. Funding the WFP, which runs the logistic cluster, and other humanitarian organizations to the point whereby each organization could meet their logistical needs on a fulltime basis would be prohibitively expensive. Military forces have proven, time and again, that they not only have the logistical expertise, but also the equipment and training to overcome the inertia present in standing-up a humanitarian operation (Figure 1). Many authors have noted that military forces are capable of filling a void in, or complimenting or enhancing the capabilities of humanitarian organizations (Cuny 1983; Walker 1992; Gaydos and Luz 1194; Alexander 1999; Anderson 2005; Telford and Cosgrave 2007).



Figure 1. U.S. soldiers work with Pakistani military forces and local men to load injured earthquake victims into an awaiting U.S. Blackhawk helicopter following the 2005 South Asian earthquake. U.S. military aviation resources were able to reach isolated communities. Source: Author.

Consequently, until a proposed civil relief force, intended to perform logistics and other support functions is funded, formed, trained and equipped (see Booth 1995), foreign military forces will continue be called upon to fill this resource gap. This assertion was validated during recent disaster response efforts following the Indian Ocean tsunami (2004), South Asian earthquake (2005), and Haiti earthquake (2010). While not desired by all, military involvement in HA/DR may be viewed as a necessary measure to fill an identified gap in skills, capacity and resources. Yet, even while attempting to contribute in a positive manner, many on the civilian side will have concerns.

• The Civilian Perspective

Concerns of the civilian community regarding military intervention into the humanitarian realm are well documented. Consequently, this article will briefly examine key themes and focus on: 1) long-standing civilian concerns that participation in HA/DR is the wrong mission for the military and; 2) the belief that military encroachment into the humanitarian sphere during HA/DR contributes to the erosion of humanitarian principles.

Should NGOs use military resources when providing disaster response? Almost two decades ago, Walker (1992) examined this question because he saw an “increased military profile in disaster relief” as well as “an increased political profile for disasters” (Walker 1992, 1). What Walker focused on were the conditions that allow an NGO to maintain independence in international humanitarian operations when military organizations (foreign or domestic) were present. Humanitarian organizations must remain impartial, neutral, and independent. This allows them to meet the needs of each person or group requiring assistance while minimizing risk to humanitarian security.

Walker (1992) also brought up the concern about military accountability during humanitarian assistance. He encourages accountability through monitoring, preferably by integrating the military command and control system with civilians that are leading the relief effort. Acknowledging that different styles (even organizational culture) of operations may create conflict, this method will allow for increased transparency. This was done well during the South Asian earthquake in 2005 (Thompson 2010). When the military is involved, there may be a monetary cost associated with those efforts. Consequently, Walker (1992) suggests NGOs clarify who is paying for the military effort. While situations where those needing military resources would be billed are very rare, at the national level, funding may be diverted from long-term development to short-term relief.

Finally, taking a much longer-term perspective, Walker (1992) asks if the use of the military can damage prospects for recovery following the disaster. Military resources should be limited in scope and duration as prolonged presence may hinder long-term rehabilitation and development efforts. *Joint Publication 3-07.6, Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Foreign Humanitarian Assistance*, written nine years after Walker’s (1992) work addresses this concern. The joint publication addresses the longevity of the military presence and the scope of the tasks that will be performed recommending that humanitarian assistance be the primary responsibility of civilian organizations with the military having a role that will “supplement or complement” the response (U.S. DoD 2001b, I-1).

Many problems involving military assets in humanitarian assistance missions stem from the fact that these missions are often introduced to support policy objectives and therefore cannot be impartial or equitable in terms of aid distribution (Barry and Jefferys 2002). While the expansion of U.S. military

forces into more diverse operations may support national policy objectives and strategies, others see it as an encroachment into humanitarian space (Barry and Jefferys 2002). Bello (2006) has even suggested that the United States is dominating post-disaster relief and reconstruction in a relief and reconstruction complex—with the U.S. military playing a key role in this action. Barry and Jefferys (2002) offer three positions from humanitarians on this subject:

- The merger, which is inevitable, is also practical and desirable.
- Civil-military cooperation results in humanitarian objectives and principles being compromised.
- A policy framework should be created and used to negotiate contentious issues on a case-by-case basis.

Barry and Jefferys (2002) acknowledge that most solutions focus on better cooperation and dialog, with the intent of creating better understanding. However, this approach fails to address the most fundamental issue, which is the preservation of humanitarian principles. As military HA/DR assets are often employed in areas in which military forces have taken a side, these forces can never be truly impartial or independent actors. Impartiality and independence are core principles of humanitarian organizations. Therefore, any involvement by humanitarian organizations with military forces may appear to erode humanitarian principles and could possibly place works at risk. Another issue Barry and Jefferys (2002) raise is regarding the effectiveness of military humanitarian assistance. The authors suggest there is little evidence to proving that military involvement in HA/DR works. Furthermore, they question the necessity of employing military resources in an emergency – even going so far as to suggest that military involvement should be an “exceptional circumstance” and conform to the following conditions (Barry and Jefferys 2002, 17):

- Military are means of last resort: there is no other humanitarian option, and the absence of assistance would result in unacceptable human suffering;
- There is a significant level of need, as determined by civilian agencies, including the UN;
- Military assets and interventions must always remain under civilian control; and
- Military interventions are always clearly time bound.

What Barry and Jefferys (2002) do suggest is that humanitarian agencies clarify and define civil-military relationships and emphasize standards and guidelines. The *Oslo Guidelines* (UNOCHA 2007) for military implementation of humanitarian assistance, written after the work by Barry and Jefferys, addresses these concerns.

One of the more recent examinations of trends and issues in civilian-military humanitarian engagement was completed by Wheeler and Harmer (2006). While some of their observations are best applied in complex humanitarian crises, many are valid for HA/DR operations. The impetus to examine humanitarian-military engagement came from what they saw as a recent, renewed debate on the subject—a debate which again is evident in scholarly literature written by civilians, but not evident in military publications or scholarly literature written by military authors.

Wheeler and Harmer (2006) identify three trends, the most important of which in the context of this research examines what the increasing military role means for the integrity of humanitarian principles. The authors also identified what they call “civilianization” of military assets with civilian capabilities to

better respond to crises (Wheeler and Harmer 2006, 1). The last trend Wheeler and Harmer (2006) identified was the expansion of regional capacities. In this area, the authors they noted that “regional organizations have all become active military players in international crisis response” (Wheeler and Harmer 2006, 1). These organizations include the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. If the interaction, intended or not, between military and humanitarian organizations is increasing, then conceptually, negative impacts upon humanitarian principles could be on the increase and in an accelerated state.

Assuming there is increased interaction, can an appropriate relationship between military forces and humanitarian organizations be defined? Bredholt (2005) examined civilian relations with military forces in the context of humanitarian aid delivery and sought to describe an appropriate civil-military relationship. At the Caritas Conference in Rome (2005) attendees came to the consensus that each situation must be viewed within its “individual context and cannot be predetermined” (Bredholt 2005, 1). While military involvement may be vital to restoring some response capabilities following a natural disaster, the military presence may be viewed with suspicion. In Sri Lanka, some viewed the U.S. military humanitarian efforts as a cover for intelligence collection, prompting Caritas to turn down helicopter support (Bredholt 2005). In some cases, there may not be an acceptable relationship from the humanitarian perspective and as noted by Bredholt (2005), an examination on a case-by-case basis must be done. Consequently, humanitarians must examine the impact of military forces on their organization and its relation to those in need prior to establishing a relationship.

Franke’s (2006) research focused specifically on civil-military cooperation. He divided factors affecting civil-military cooperation into four categories—Cultural, Organizational, Operational, Normative. Differences in culture are important. There are considerable cultural and perceptual differences between military and humanitarian organizations, which can lead to “negative perceptions of members of the other group” (Franke 2006, 13). Possibly, due to a lack of cultural awareness, Franke points out that military members often fail to understand the distinctions among the variety of humanitarian organizations, as do humanitarians of the military.

Military units are “low context” organizations that rely on orders, standard operating procedures, and chain of command whereas the cultural and operational requirements in complex emergencies are “high context” and consist of “nonverbal signals, family or tribal status, age, gender or ethnic differences, or social roles” (Franke 2006, 14). In a traditional role, military forces would not be as likely to include focus on high context areas. However, one could argue that the U.S. (and other) militaries are becoming more “high context” in that military organizations are now routinely include local populace, cultural and community concerns, and tribal relationships in their mission analysis. Including socio-cultural factors is an essential component of conducting counter-insurgency operations. An increased emphasis on high context complexities is evident in the U.S. military’s employment of the human terrain system to better understand the human geography of an area and the attributes of place and space in that location. The human terrain system supports the military commander’s decision making with operationally relevant socio-cultural analysis of the operating environment (U.S. Army 2010).

Much of what occurs when conducting development projects and while working with local populations relates to high context conditions, an operational environment that the NGO is still much better suited for. Military forces rely on a vertical chain of command and absolute obedience whereas NGOs have a horizontal structure, seek consensus in decision-making, and give great autonomy to those

operating in the field. Military organizations insist on redundancy, whereas an NGO would see that as a waste of resources.

In humanitarian efforts, these traditionally high and low context organizations are increasingly being required to “occupy the same space” (Franke 2006, 6). This may result in the unintended consequences of military action overlapping or replicating functions that are already being provided by civilian humanitarian organizations. Military actions early on in *Operation Enduring Freedom* duplicated projects and efforts of NGOs, often creating resentment or worse (Franke 2006). In Afghanistan, military-led provincial reconstruction teams had a negative impact on humanitarian space, resulting in insecurity and were blamed by *Medicins Sans Frontieres*³ (MSF) for the death of five employees. (Franke 2006). While this instance did not occur specifically in an HA/DR scenario, it is germane as such co-occupance of space may create conditions whereby some groups may mistakenly believe that civilian aid workers are actually members of, or at least under control of the military command. Perceived alliances can place other humanitarian actors at risk who are at the same time working in contested areas.

Military and humanitarian actors cannot theoretically cooperate and coexist, as military action is always political in nature. Frank (2006, 18) recommends that the “military should complement rather than compete with humanitarian relief organizations.” This was previously noted in JP 3-07.6 and reinforces the suggestion that military forces should complement humanitarian organizations with their unique skill sets and logistical capability and allow humanitarian organizations to directly distribute aid. Franke (2006) sees improvement coming from integrating humanitarian operations topics into armed forces training. He also recommends improving socialization through staff exchanges and developing better communications mechanisms for use during field operations. This, he suggests, would reduce barriers and improve both operational efficiency and effectiveness. However, the flaw in this approach is that while some civilian organizations may find longevity in their employees or volunteers, the rate of turnover in the military is much higher and the routine commitment of specific organizations to a primarily HA/DR mission untenable.

• The Military Perspective

Military literature regarding better cooperation and coordination between military and humanitarian organizations comes from papers at the various service colleges and military journals. The literature generally favors using military assets in humanitarian operations, and unlike the writings from the civilian perspective, do not offer restrictions on the employment of military resources. The military perspective centers on a number of predictable themes for improving coordination and cooperation. These themes include:

- Joint Planning (Sihra 1994; Davidson et al. 1996; Swan et al. 1996; Lange 1998, Quarto 2005; Loughran 2008)
- Joint Training (Booth 1995; Arnold 1996; Davidson et al. 1996; Lange 1998, Couzens 1999; Archer 2003; Quarto 2005; Loughran 2008)
- Improved Communications / Information Sharing (Sihra 1994; Davidson et al. 1996; Couzens 1999; Loughran 2008)

³ *Medicins Sans Frontieres* or *Doctors Without Borders* is an international medical humanitarian organization.

Others even go so far as to suggest the creation of a special force for humanitarian operations (Booth 1995) and even a fully integrated civil-military approach to conducting humanitarian operations (Rollins 1999).

One trend seen in military literature is the use of the term “partner” or “partnership” when referring to the relationship between NGOs and the military during humanitarian operations (Sihra 1994; Hennessy 1998; Archer 2003; Quarto 2005; Wang 2008). The use of this term is often attributed to a speech made by then, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Shalikashvili. Even joint doctrine JP 3-57, *Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Operations* uses the term partnership when describing the relationship between military and civilian aid agencies. It should be noted that JP 3-07.6, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Foreign Humanitarian Assistance* only uses the term to describe relationships between U.S. forces and other coalition military organizations, including the UN.

A lack of cultural understanding is evident when military personnel call NGOs “partners” or “force multipliers.” These words ally the efforts of NGOs with the military forces, even framing humanitarians as a tool of military commanders and thus calling into question the neutrality or independence of NGOs (Quarto 2005, 14). Should NGOs choose to work with military forces, their choice may create the appearance that they have chosen a side. While those who use these terms may be well intended, the appearance of taking a side may place members of an NGO at risk by creating a perceived alliance between NGOs and military forces thus calling into question the neutrality or independence of humanitarian organizations.

An area where many military writers have begun to think more progressively is in the acknowledgement of the cultural differences between military and humanitarian organizations. A number of military authors suggest that this is an area where significant gains can be made (Swan et al. 1996; Hinson 1998; Lange 1998; Archer 2003; Loughran 2008). Arnold (1996) has suggested that the military has failed to understand how NGOs see themselves. Sieple (1996) believes that the cultural differences could result in a lack of appreciation by the military for the role of humanitarian operations. Hinson (1998) notes that military involvement in HA/DR is limited by a cultural desire to control the situation. Lange (1998) went so far as to describe the differences as a “clash of cultures.” Humanitarian organizations are horizontal, fluid, and often operate in an ad hoc manner. This may greatly frustrate military leaders, who are used to a vertical structure, detailed planning, and a desire to adhere to the plan during execution—these are cultural differences.

• A More Complete Analysis

When responding to a natural disaster, the physical environment represents an obvious element for analysis. The affected population – often the center of gravity—will also routinely be considered by military planners during their mission analysis and planning. This analysis will inevitably include the culture of the group examined. Culture is a term that describes the “tangible lifestyle of people” as well as society’s “values and beliefs” (De Blij and Muller 2007, 26). The lifestyles, values, and beliefs of the local population represent an obvious focus area. Deploying military forces and humanitarian organizations are coached and trained to be culturally sensitive. Not only does this create a better relationship between the serving and the served, but it also allows relief providers and development facilitators to better tailor actions and engage the population.

However, there is another group in a humanitarian crisis that military planners and leaders should include in their analysis, but may not be inclined to do so. This group is the non-local humanitarian actors, such as NGOs, that are operating in the area. This population represents another component or layer of the cultural landscape that has operational impacts. When military planners include the cultural attributes of the affected population, humanitarian actors, as well as the host nation government in their mission analysis, they will create a more comprehensive picture of the cultural landscape. As Palka (1995, 2005) and others have noted military missions are becoming increasingly diverse, not only in the tasks and services performed, but in complexity of task and diversity of actors involved. As such, the military leaders must make a more detailed analysis of what is arguably the most complex landscape – the cultural landscape.

Each group of actors within the HA/DR operational environment will have a distinct cultural makeup, which may influence their actions and objectives. As such, military planners should examine each group separately. As previously noted, several military authors (Swan et al. 1996; Hinson 1998; Lange 1998; Archer 2003; Loughran 2008) have acknowledged that there are cultural differences between military and humanitarian actors. These cultural differences, when understood and accounted for in humanitarian assistance operations may yield improved civil-military coordination.

Field observations by the author in Pakistan and Haiti during HA/DR support suggest that military forces over-estimate their depth of understanding of the beliefs, values, and attitudes of humanitarian actors. This suggestion comes from observing foreign military forces participate in two very large disaster response efforts and by examining military literature. A better understanding of the culture of humanitarians is crucial to assessing the potential synergy that can be achieved when a military organization attempts to engage other actors during a humanitarian effort. This was witnessed firsthand during the author's recent visit to Haiti, most notably while observing U.S. forces provide convoy and site security for a food distribution operation conducted by Islamic Relief of France (SIF -*Secours Islamique* – France) (Figure 2). SIF was one of a many NGOs in Haiti distributing food, and they, like other NGOs, coordinated with UN's WFP for the food aid and then conducted the distribution in cooperation with community leaders. Most distributions were assigned a security detachment from any number of foreign militaries in Haiti.

In discussions with U.S. soldiers providing security for SIF, the author learned that although the soldiers and their leaders had a firm understanding of local Haitian culture, demonstrated resourcefulness and were adept at adapting their previous training to a new situation, yet the military forces were not as well prepared to deal with the food NGOs and World Food Program actors as they could have been. Although the soldiers and leaders used much of what they had learned about working with local populations during counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and could plan and execute humanitarian operations as directed by their higher headquarters, they suffered from an institutional block in understanding the culture of humanitarian operators (Figure 3).

• A Better Understanding of the Culture of Humanitarian Actors

Humanitarian organizations in the classical sense embody Henri Durant's timeless humanitarian tenants of "humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence" (Stockton 1998, 359). The foundational belief of any humanitarian organization is the humanitarian imperative, which directs that human

suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The humanitarian imperative implies not only the right of those in need to receive aid, but also the right of all to provide aid and assistance. This imperative compels humanitarian actors to work with segments of the population that military forces may be less inclined to engage with, such as rebel groups or dissident political factions. Likewise, these segments of the population may be less inclined to accept assistance from domestic or foreign military forces.

For an NGO in a region in conflict, these humanitarian principles not only allow them to create and access humanitarian space (and consequently the affected population), the principles are tenants from which they derive their security. Humanitarian actors operate with the guiding principles of neutrality and impartiality. Since humanitarian actors carry no weapons, their neutrality is their security. In military parlance, these tenets give a humanitarian organization “freedom of maneuver.” Neutrality means one must not take sides. Consequently, military forces should not be offended when an NGO is hesitant to work with military forces or employ them only as a last resort.



Figure 2. A platoon leader from the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division coordinates with members of the food NGO, Islamic Relief of France (SIF -*Secours Islamique* – France) to setup and secure the site for food distribution to families in Tabarre, Port-au-Prince, Haiti in the aftermath of the 2010 Haitian earthquake. Source: Author.

Language can be an expression of culture. Like the military, humanitarian actors have a specific lexicon. Humanitarians use many terms that are seemingly familiar to military forces, but to each group the terms may have very different meanings. *The Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets In Disaster Relief*, more commonly referred to as the Oslo Guidelines (UNOCHA 2007) provide best

practices for employing foreign military and civil defense assets in a disaster response. It provides the following definitions of direct and indirect support:

- **Direct Assistance** is the face-to-face distribution of goods and services.
- **Indirect Assistance** is at least one step removed from the population and involves such activities as transporting relief goods or relief personnel.

The Oslo Guidelines (UNOCHA 2007) also define **Infrastructure Support** as providing general services, such as road repair, airspace management, and power generation that facilitate relief, but are not necessarily visible to or solely for the benefit of the affected population.



Figure 3. Residents of Tabarre, Port-au-Prince, wait in line for food. Soldiers provided order and security, but also used interpreters to keep crowds informed and calm. Community leaders handed out food tickets ahead of time and validated the tickets of each person prior to pickup. Source: Author.

Military forces performed each of these roles in Haiti, however, discussion and writings in the humanitarian community suggest that the most appropriate roles for military forces during HA/DR are indirect support and infrastructure support. The author's observations and discussions with humanitarian actors in Pakistan and Haiti suggest that military forces should be in a direct assistance role if: 1) military forces are the only assets that can get to an area or can get there quickest, or 2) security conditions inhibit using civilian aid agencies, or 3) the unique resources, skills or equipment which the military possesses are not readily available from civilian sources. One could argue the exception to this rule is that any time

a threat of violence may compromise security or medical evacuation or immediate medical attention is required to address a life threatening condition.

As conditions in the disaster area improve and capabilities of non-military relief and development organizations increase, military forces must handover direct assistance activities to civilian, host nation government, or humanitarian organizations. This reduces the perception of what has been termed the militarization of humanitarian aid and puts greater demand on humanitarian organizations to interact with the local population. It also prevents dependency of civilian actors on military resources that offer only short-term solutions. Furthermore, humanitarian organizations are better trained at providing direct assistance and they are vested in the longer-term prospect of development, which may not be an objective of the military or may be beyond their resourced capabilities.

Humanitarians provide relief and focus on development—it is culturally ingrained in them. Military forces on the other hand typically receive an order to provide rescue or relief with little thought, primarily from a lack of understanding, to implications of their actions on development and building local capacity. This was evident in the way military forces conducted food distribution early on in the Haiti mission. NGOs expressed concern that military forces would hand out food aid prior to conducting a complete assessment, thus giving aid to whomever appeared to need it the most, possibly creating equity issues and failing to ensure that all vulnerable community members were accounted for in their distribution.

Food NGOs and humanitarian workers noted that U.S. soldiers in Haiti quickly gave aid to whoever was carrying a small child or an elderly person, to the person who yelled loudest and often the person who spoke the best English. This approach demonstrated a lack of formal assessment, could have created equity issues and dependencies, may have missed vulnerable community members, and was not the best method for developing long-term capacity. Developing long-term capacity should start from the beginning of a humanitarian assistance or disaster response mission.

Failing to conduct a formal assessment or consider building local capacity while delivering aid can actually do harm. This is precisely why humanitarian actors attempt to adhere to the concept of *primum non nocere* or “first do no harm.” Humanitarians believe that they should try to do good, but in doing so, ensure first that no harm is done. The concept of doing no harm is also part of their culture and is a core belief of the humanitarian community. A humanitarian worker would never throw aid at those in need, but U.S. soldiers did in Haiti. Throwing aid at the recipients de-humanizes them and can also result in people being trampled, injured, or killed as hungry crowds push, scramble, or riot. That means that it is better to not give out any aid than to create conditions for violence.

Violence against women should be a paramount concern during HA/DR. Improperly setting up a food distribution point can impinge on the security of females in the community. For instance, not creating an area for females to meet a male member of her family to help her carry the aid home can result in aid theft, violence, and even rape.

An official from the World Food Program gave a lengthy discourse on this topic to the author. It may appear to be a bit surprising to be told that it is better to let a community wait one more day for food than to conduct a poorly planned distribution that creates the conditions for violence against women or other vulnerable persons, but it made sense in the context of enabling development and building local capacity.

A humanitarian group would also rather delay handing out food in order to empower community leaders and to begin rebuilding the community organizational structure. An NGO may arrive at a site

with aid and not hand out complete family rations, but instead gather community leaders and tell the leaders that they can have the aid once they come up with a distribution plan. The plan should address the varying needs of the community and it must specifically include how the plan will meet the needs of the most vulnerable community members. When community leaders develop a satisfactory plan, the NGOs will give them the food aid for distribution. This enables development by exercising community structures and making community leaders responsible for providing for the needs of all, not just their families or friends. It rebuilds and reinvigorates local capacity, which most argue when lacking, contributes to disasters in the first place.

These concepts are difficult to grasp for mission-focused military leaders, again highlighting cultural differences. Consequently, as military planners assign humanitarian missions, they must think about the longer-term consequences of military actions and not just the fact that people need food, tents, or medicine. This demonstrates that the operational methods may be more important in the long run than the type of mission military forces are performing. This also reinforces the previous assertions of the best roles for the military being those of indirect assistance and infrastructure support. Let humanitarian groups take the direct role whenever possible and if not, as soon as possible.



Figure 4. A U.S. Army soldier and native Haitians stop to pose with community members in the hills south of Petion-Ville, Haiti. U.S. soldiers with Haitian heritage were invaluable for their language skills, but also for their ability to educate members of the U.S. military on aspects of the local culture. Source: Author.

• Challenges to a Better Understanding

This article illustrates that there are challenges, which resist implementation of a more holistic assessment of the cultural landscape in HA/DR operations. While improvements in planning, training, and communications should increase civil-military coordination, high turnover in military organizations takes a toll. No unit or individuals are set aside to be the HA/DR experts. Unfortunately, those service members who have planned and trained or even worked with humanitarian organizations will rotate to another unit of assignment and may never participate in an HA/DR mission again. Sound doctrine, although codified in joint publications, may not be part of every leader's professional reading, especially in the compressed timeline of a short-notice deployment. Furthermore, the requirement for rapid preparation and deployment to a disaster stricken region mission may not allow for extensive learning within the organization.

Military leaders typically incorporate an understanding of the local culture into mission planning (Figure 4). As previously noted, the U.S. Army has employed the Human Terrain System to develop a better understanding of the nature and intricacies of the cultural landscape. Yet institutionally, military organizations need to reinforce the requirement to examine the entire cultural landscape in a deployment location to include all actors, local and non-local. In this manner each leader, will be forced to take into account the behavior, beliefs, and values of the other actors occupying their area of operations and thus better understand the role of the humanitarian and long-term needs of the local population in a disaster environment.

In 1995, Andrew S. Natsois, former administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development and Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance and Special Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan said, "Success in complex humanitarian emergencies will be determined by the degree to which all of the players can step outside of their individual cultures and value systems, surrender some of their autonomy, and seek the best, rather than the worst, in those with whom they must resolve the problems they will confront in a humanitarian emergency". Thus, it is recommended that military leaders, deploying on a humanitarian mission not only step outside their individual and organizational cultures, but seek to understand and conceptualize the motivations, beliefs, and ideas of all groups in a humanitarian crisis and not just those in need. In this manner, impediments to coordination can be removed or reduced and each party can more effectively and efficiently assist those in need. ★

• References Cited

- Alexander, D. 1999. *Natural disasters*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Anderson, E. 2005. Disaster management in the military. In *Military geography from peace to war*, eds. E. Palka and F. Galgano, 215-228. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Archer, S. 2003. Civilian and military cooperation in complex humanitarian operations. *Military Review*. March-April: 32-41.
- Arnold, L. 1996. Cooperation or conflict: The interaction of U.S. military forces and non-governmental organizations in military operations other than war. Masters Thesis. Command and General Staff College: Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

- Barry, J. and A. Jefferys. 2002. *A bridge too far: Aid agencies and the military in humanitarian response*. London, U.K.: Humanitarian Practice Network at the Overseas Development Institute.
- Bello, W. 2006. The rise of the relief-and-reconstruction complex. *Journal of International Affairs*. 59 (2): 281-296.
- Booth, D. 1995. *The United States military and humanitarian operations*. Unpublished Research Manuscript. Washington, D.C.: National War College.
- Bredholt, N. 2005. Some southern views on relationships with the military in humanitarian aid. *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*. 30: 34-36.
- Chandler, D. 2001. The road to military humanitarianism: How the human rights NGOs shaped a new humanitarian agenda. *Human Rights Quarterly*. 23 (3): 678-700.
- Couzens, D. 1999. The UK military and civil-military cooperation. *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*. 19: 55-56.
- Cuny, F. 1983. *Disasters and development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Davidson, L, M. Hayes, and J. Landon. 1996. *Humanitarian and peace operations: NGOs and the military in the interagency process*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press.
- De Blij, H. and P. O. Muller. 2007. *Regions, realms and concepts*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.
- Franke, V. 2006. The peacebuilding dilemma: Civil-military cooperation in stability operations. *International Journal of Peace Studies*. 11 (2): 5-24.
- Gaydos, J. and G. Luz. 1994. Military participation in emergency humanitarian assistance. *Disasters* 18 (1): 49-57.
- Hennessy, M. 1998. *Optimizing unity of effort during humanitarian assistance operations: Civil-military operations centers inside and outside the wire*. Unpublished Manuscript. Newport: Naval War College.
- Hinson, D. 1998. *U.S. military interaction with humanitarian assistance organizations during small-scale contingencies*. Unpublished Manuscript. Montgomery: Air Command and Staff College.
- Lange, J. 1998. Civilian-military cooperation and humanitarian assistance: Lessons from Rwanda. *Parameters*. Summer: 106-122.
- Loughran, R. 2008. *Who's in charge here? Civil-military coordination in humanitarian assistance*. Unpublished Manuscript. Newport: Naval War College.
- Palka, E. 1995. The U.S. Army in operations other than war: A time to revive military geography. *GeoJournal* 37 (2): 201-208.
- . 2005. Decades of instability and uncertainty: Mission diversity in the SASO environment. In *Military geography from peace to war*, eds. E. J. Palka and F. A. Galgano, 187-214. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Quarto, F. 2005. *U.S. military/NGO interface a vital link to successful humanitarian intervention*. Unpublished Manuscript. Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College.

- Roberts, A. 1993. Humanitarian war: Military intervention and human rights. *Journal of International Affairs*. 69 (3): 429-449.
- Rollins, J. 1999. Operational models for civil-military cooperation: Possibilities and limitations. *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*. 19: 52-54.
- Seiple, C. 1996. *The U.S. military/NGO relationship in humanitarian interventions*. Peacekeeping Institute Center for Strategic Leadership, Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College.
- Sihra, B. 1994. Relief agencies and the U.S. military: Partners in humanitarian operations. *Marine Corps Gazette*. 78 (3): 43-44.
- Stockton, N. 1998. In defence of humanitarianism. *Disasters* 22 (4): 352-360.
- Swan, G., R. Beardsworth, R. Kikla, and P. Shutler. 1996. *Uneasy partners: NGOs and the U.S. military in complex humanitarian emergencies*. A Senior Service College Fellow research paper. JFK School of Government, Harvard University.
- Taylor, A. 1986. Co-ordination for disasters. *Disasters*. 10 (1): 70-73.
- Telford, J. and J. Cosgrave. 2007. The international humanitarian system and the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunamis. *Disasters*. 31 (1): 1-28
- Thompson, W. 2010. Success in Kashmir: A positive trend in civil-military integration during humanitarian assistance operations. *Disasters*. 34 (1): 1-15.
- UNOCHA, 2007. *The use of foreign military and civil defence assets in disaster relief - "Oslo Guidelines."*
http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/UD/Vedlegg/FN/Multidimensional%20and%20Integrated/Oslo_Guidelines_Nov06_Rev1.pdf. (last accessed: 13 September 2010)
- U.S. Army. 2010. Human Terrain System Homepage. <http://humanterrainsystem.army.mil/Default.aspx> (last accessed: 4December 2010).
- U.S. Department of Defense. 2001a. *Joint publication 3-57: Joint doctrine for civil-military operations*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- . 2001b. *Joint publication 3-07.6: Joint tactics, techniques and procedures for foreign humanitarian assistance*.
- . 2010. Southcom completes Haiti disaster response.
<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=59423> (last accessed: 13 September 2010).
- Walker, P. 1992. Foreign military resources for disaster relief: An NGO perspective. *Disasters* 16 (2): 152-159.
- Wang, B. 2008. *Time for a new dance partner: Phase zero engagement of NGOs in PACOM's security cooperation plan*. Naval War College research paper. Newport: Naval War College.
- Wheeler, V. and A. Harmer. 2006. *Resetting the rules of engagement: Trends and issues in military-humanitarian relations*. London: Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute.