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**Matching Objectives in Disaster Relief Efforts:
A Critical Evaluation of the U.S. Response in Haiti**

**by
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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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3 May 2010**

Contents

Introduction	1
Who's Really in Charge?	3
Security Responsibilities and Challenges	8
Perception is Reality	10
Analysis	13
Recommendations	14
Conclusion	16
Selected Bibliography	18

List of Illustrations

- | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 1. | Figure 1. Clusters-HACC-JOTC Relationships | 5 |
| 2. | Figure 2. Joint Task Force-Haiti Command and Control Structure | 6 |
| 3. | Photo 1. American Troops Assisting in Aid Distribution | 13 |

Abstract

The U.S. response to the catastrophic earthquake that devastated Haiti on January 12th, 2010, contains several examples of how the United States military failed to effectively translate the defined political objective into a clear and concise operational objective. As a result, our international partners, global and national media, and the Haitians themselves were left to wonder what the U.S. intentions were in response to the natural disaster that affected nearly three million people. The United States must be aware of these misperceptions and determine how they can prevent them in future missions. Through a more comprehensive strategic communications plan and better interagency collaboration, American political objectives are achievable.

Introduction

As humanitarian assistance becomes a more publicized and prominent part of American military capabilities, the missteps and miscues of senior leadership have become magnified by the press and the public. While engaged in two highly criticized wars in the Middle East, the United States must work even harder to eliminate any confusion as to our intentions during disaster relief efforts. This fact was reemphasized as the United States was the subject of great scrutiny during humanitarian assistance operations in Haiti following the 7.7 magnitude earthquake that devastated the country in January.

In conflicts around the world and throughout time, lessons have been learned and relearned regarding the transformation of political objectives into strategic objectives and then subsequently into operational objectives. For the United States, foreign humanitarian assistance operations support the political objective to promote effective democracies¹ through international cooperation and recognition. Strategically, "the goal of humanitarian assistance operations is to save lives, alleviate human suffering, and minimize the economic costs of conflicts, disasters, and displacement."² Synchronizing these objectives with the operational objective is critical to the success of the mission. In fact, some of the most notable battles and wars provide textbook examples of the process, although in some cases, they are examples of how the process failed. Just as historic wartime examples are studied to prepare for future conflicts, it is equally important to evaluate other-than-war missions to ensure the same political/strategic/operational mismatch that plagued nations in the past does

¹ U.S. President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, DC: White House, 2006), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2006/> (accessed 24 April 2010).

² USAID, "Strategic Goal on Providing Humanitarian Assistance," Fiscal Year 2008 Annual USAID Report, http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/apr08/apr08_ha.pdf (accessed 27 April 2010).

not occur. Specifically, the United States military must further evaluate their role in humanitarian assistance and their integration into the process.

The response to the catastrophic earthquake that devastated Haiti on January 12th, 2010, contains several examples of how the United States' military failed to effectively translate the defined political objective into a clear and concise operational objective. As a result, our international partners, global and domestic media, and the Haitians themselves were left to wonder what the U.S. intentions were in response to the natural disaster that affected nearly three million people. For two weeks headlines criticized military response while the heroic efforts of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other, non-governmental, agencies went virtually unreported by the media. And although many of the success stories could not have been possible without the presence of the U.S. military, the good deeds were overshadowed by the misguided press reports. An aggressive media campaign was needed to subvert the negative publicity and highlight the positive work that was being accomplished in Haiti.

Even with its significant assistance capabilities, the United States must remain mindful of the history with these nations when involved in humanitarian relief efforts. Regardless of any specific requests made by the host nation, the U.S. Government cannot lose focus on the world's perceptions. Haiti has been understandably cautious regarding American intentions given its history with the United States, which included a nineteen year occupation of the country from 1915-1934 and the intervention to restore President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to office in 2004.³ In a similar manner, Haiti's neighboring countries have also remained skeptical of American actions.

³ Juan Forero, "U.S. Military Role in Haiti Met with Mixed Emotions," *NPR*, 25 Feb 2010, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124052139> (accessed 27 March 2010).

The mismatch between national and operational objectives was evident through many aspects of American government response. Firstly, press conferences and briefings demonstrated an inconsistent and often confusing organizational structure between the U. S. military, USAID, and other international and non-governmental organizations. Secondly, the sudden shift on Day 5 of the response to incorporate security teams on the ground was contradictory to previous statements of the situation in Haiti and the American recognition of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti's jurisdiction. Lastly, the use of advanced technological systems and the large number of American troops that responded to the relief effort were misinterpreted as a military action rather than humanitarian assistance due to ineffective strategic communications by the lead and supporting agencies and ineffective information operations by the joint task force.

Who's Really in Charge?

It was nearly impossible for an outsider to distinguish who was in charge of the American response in Haiti, known as Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE. The mission statements of organizations and the commander's intent dictated in intra-governmental briefings identified the roles very clearly, but, during the two months of military involvement, the roles and authority appeared much more fluid and undefined. Through a combination of misspoken comments, various conflicting presentation illustrations, and the conduct of press conferences and briefings, it was unclear who was the supported and who were the supporting organizations.

In order to distinguish military and non-military aid, Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act in 1961 establishing USAID as an independent federal government agency to

administer foreign economic assistance programs.⁴ As a bureau of USAID, the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) is the lead coordinator of U.S. Government responses to disasters in foreign countries. The Geographic Combatant Commander recognized his subordinate position and awaited the request for forces from OFDA and the Department of State before any official actions were taken.⁵ The United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) situational update brief given approximately thirteen hours after the earthquake occurred, coupled with the Congressional mandate, indicate that this was a very well-defined organizational structure. In practice, however, the actions of these organizations did not adhere to such strict formality. Although it is possible that a poor choice of words on several occasions was the reason for the confusion over identifying the lead agency, the fact that the military allowed room for misrepresentation and misinterpretation is not the fault of the media. In fact, in many cases, the military itself seemed to be confused about their relationship with USAID, OFDA, and the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). In a mission update brief provided by Joint Task Force-Haiti (JTF-H) on January 21st, 2010, USSOUTHCOM correctly identified their mission as work *in support of* (my emphasis) USAID, while JTF-H incorrectly identified their priority as support to the Government of Haiti, MINUSTAH, and USAID in distribution of humanitarian assistance to the Haitian people.⁶ Also on the same slide were three separate boxes for USAID, USSOUTHCOM, and JTF-H, each describing their priorities. The

⁴ United States Agency for International Development, "USAID History," http://www.usaid.gov/about_usaid/usaidhist.html (accessed 23 April 2010).

⁵ USSOUTHCOM, SOUTHCOM Disaster Relief: Haiti Earthquake Situational Update, 13 January 2010, [https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/haiti/Crisis%20Documents/SOUTHCOM/Haiti%20HDR%2024ht%20COA%20\(3\)\[1\]%20SOUTHCOM.pdf](https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/haiti/Crisis%20Documents/SOUTHCOM/Haiti%20HDR%2024ht%20COA%20(3)[1]%20SOUTHCOM.pdf) (accessed 23 Mar 2010).

⁶ Ryan J. Roberts, "Mission Update Brief - Operation Unified Response," Powerpoint, 21 January 2010, <https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/haiti/Crisis%20Documents/SOUTHCOM/Mission%20Update%20Brief%20translated%2021-Jan-10.pdf> (accessed 23 March 2010).

organizations were not shown in any hierarchy nor were USSOUTHCOM and JTF-H's priorities exclusively supportive of USAID's priorities. Ironically, the fourth item on USSOUTHCOM's priority list was Unity of Effort.⁷

In another example of the identity crisis that existed among international and U.S. government agencies operating in Haiti, the organizational diagram in Figure 1 was provided by the Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord) Officer in a briefing to USSOUTHCOM to clarify the task organization. Of particular interest is the fact that USAID is not represented at all on the diagram and that the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Center (HACC) is illustrated as the primary coordination element of the United States. This brief was given following three weeks of recovery efforts and is a clear indication that the international community was just as confused regarding American leadership in Haiti.

Clusters-HACC-JOTC Relationships

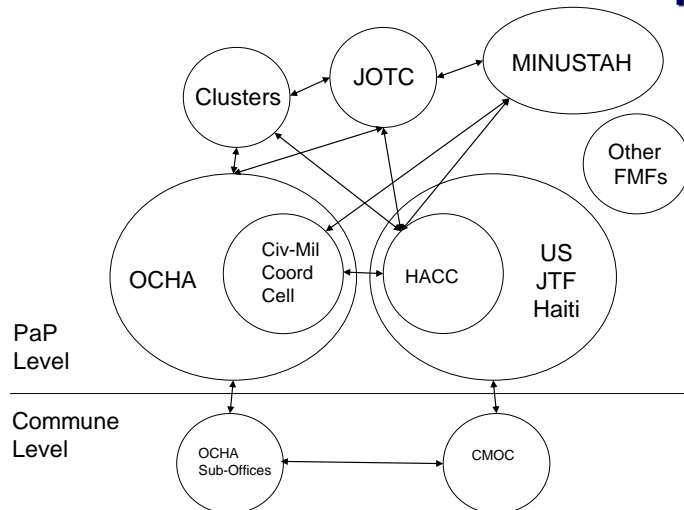


Figure 1. Slide developed from United Nations Civ-Mil Coordination Cell demonstrating their primary liaison with the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Center (HACC) under JTF-Haiti.⁸

⁷ Ibid.

As further evidence of the confusion, JTF-H presented the organizational chart in Figure 2 in several briefs to illustrate the military command and control structure. This was a wiring diagram that evolved throughout the operation to show the various organizations that became involved, but it also changed slightly in the reporting structure within JTF-H and between JTF-H and USAID. Even in this presentation given on Day 37 of the relief effort it does not illustrate a direct support relationship with USAID, although the provided legend allows for that distinction. Rather, it shows a myriad of organizations that JTF-H coordinates with on a variety of efforts.

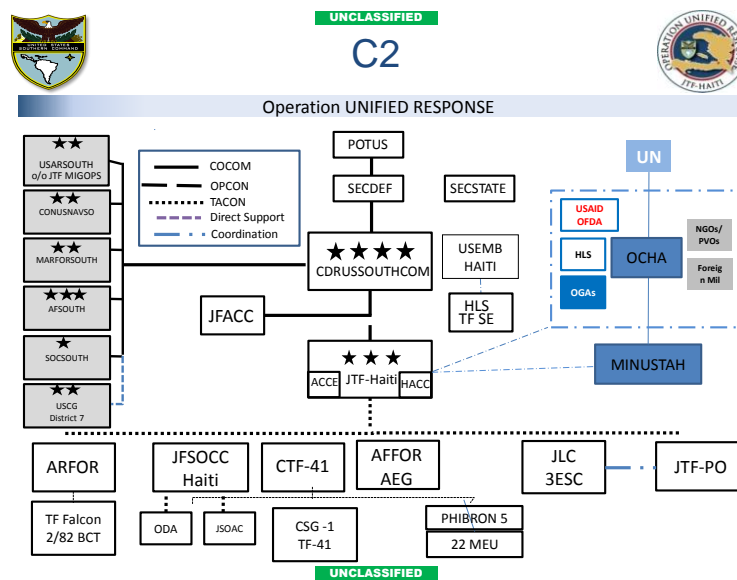


Figure 2. JTF-H organizational chart⁹

The confusion over the lead agency was evident in press conferences conducted throughout the operation but especially in the initial stages of response. The first briefing on the situation in Haiti, held on January 13th, was chaired by the Department of State and

⁸ Ronaldo Reario, Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord) in the Haiti EQ Response, Powerpoint, 3 February 2010, [https://schqanon.southcom.mil/DIRANDLNOS/PFACC/haiti_hadr/doclibJ9/Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination \(CMCoord\) in the Haiti EQ Response.ppt](https://schqanon.southcom.mil/DIRANDLNOS/PFACC/haiti_hadr/doclibJ9/Humanitarian%20Civil-Military%20Coordination%20(CMCoord)%20in%20the%20Haiti%20EQ%20Response.ppt) (accessed 23 March 2010).

⁹ Lt Gen P. K. Keen, Naval War College Brief - Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE, Powerpoint, 18 February 2010.

included three key - and equal - contributors: Cheryl Mills, Counselor to the Secretary of State; Dr. Rajiv Shah, USAID Administrator; and General Douglas Fraser, Commander of USSOUTHCOM. In his opening remarks, General Fraser stated, “*In conjunction with* (my emphasis) USAID and with the entire U.S. Government, we have a significant effort undergoing to support this.”¹⁰ In numerous cases, both written and oral, Department of Defense (DoD) representatives stated that the military was working *with* rather than *in support of* USAID and OFDA.

In addition, the military appeared to participate in many more press conferences and news specials than USAID representatives. USSOUTHCOM hosted several press conferences at their headquarters in which USAID representatives were present in the background but were never introduced nor did they speak. Lieutenant General P. K. “Ken” Keen, JTF-H Commander, individually participated in interviews on Fox News Sunday, Pentagon Channel, CNN’s State of the Union with John King, and others. Dr. Shah also participated in interviews including CNN’s Larry King but was most often interviewed alongside military officials. OFDA, perhaps the most qualified individuals to discuss the situation in Haiti, could not be found in any media coverage. It is a reasonable assumption that OFDA was too involved in providing assistance to hold press conferences. An additional consideration is that DoD significantly outnumbered OFDA in Haiti, but USAID did not sufficiently represent the efforts of their local bureau. As the operation matured, it was apparent that the military recognized the misperceptions that were generated as a result of

¹⁰ Gen Douglas Fraser, State Department Press Release. Briefing on the Situation in Haiti, Powerpoint, 13 January 2010. <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1943818801&Fmt=3&clientId=18762&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed 27 March 2010).

these media appearances and they attempted to correct the problem, but by the time it was realized, the image of the U.S. military at the forefront of Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE could not be reversed.

Perhaps one of the most telling pieces of information comes from staffers who issued a Senate Foreign Relations Committee trip report approximately one month after the earthquake. The report cited that while the ambassador was conducting an effective job of coordinating recovery and relief efforts in the country, “it [was] much less clear who was in charge in Washington, D.C.”¹¹ This was, of course, from the perspective of people who presumably understand the infrastructure of American government. It is, therefore, unreasonable to expect outsiders could grasp who was in charge.

Security Responsibilities and Challenges

The security situation in Haiti proved to be another area of difficulty. Although recent humanitarian assistance operations in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the tsunami in Indonesia showcased the need for a robust security force in post-disaster relief efforts, the American military was not immediately requested to perform this function. Rather, this duty was fulfilled by MINUSTAH which was formed when nation-wide armed conflict forced Haitian President Bertrand Aristide into exile in 2004.¹² The United Nations tasked MINUSTAH to ensure a safe and stable environment, promote the legitimacy of the Haitian government, and support the human rights of Haitian citizens¹³, but the catastrophic

¹¹ Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “Staff Trip to Haiti,” 19 February 2010, http://www.politico.com/static/PPM130_haiti_trip_report_-_022310.html (accessed 23 March 2010).

¹² United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, “MINUSTAH Background,” <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minustah/background.shtml> (accessed 22 April 2010).

¹³ United Nations, Security Council, “The Question Concerning Haiti,” S/Res/1542, 2004, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/332/98/PDF/N0433298.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 8 April 2010).

events left a gap in the security throughout the country. Subsequently, DoD's shortsightedness exposed the United States to additional scrutiny.

Upon first notification of the tragedy in Haiti, USSOUTHCOM generated staff estimates for DoD involvement which included a security force element for the humanitarian response in the country.¹⁴ But after the official request for forces was received the requirement disappeared, presumably because of MINUSTAH's presence and established relationship with the Government of Haiti prior to and during the earthquake. In a press briefing given on January 14th, General Fraser reemphasized the security responsibilities stating, "The security situation in the city and the country remains calm. The United Nations' mission, MINUSTAH, has been providing that security for a number of years. They continue to provide that security, and the situation remains calm."¹⁵ Neither SOUTHCOM nor JTF-H realized the impending need for additional security forces.

As a consequence of the magnitude of this catastrophic event and initially unbeknownst to the joint task force, MINUSTAH's effectiveness was severely degraded by personnel casualties, family tragedies, and environmental conditions.¹⁶ JTF-H failed to recognize the problem because of initial reports and field assessments that characterized the region as stable. The sense of calm, however, was short-lived and probably a direct result of the shock felt by the population. When the shock wore off a sudden unforeseen shift in the temperament of some of the local population occurred, and looting and violence erupted.

¹⁴ ¹⁴ USSOUTHCOM, SOUTHCOM Disaster Relief: Haiti Earthquake Situational Update, 13 January 2010, [https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/haiti/Crisis%20Documents/SOUTHCOM/Haiti%20HA-DR%2024ht%20COA%20\(3\)\[1\]%20SOUTHCOM.pdf](https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/haiti/Crisis%20Documents/SOUTHCOM/Haiti%20HA-DR%2024ht%20COA%20(3)[1]%20SOUTHCOM.pdf) (accessed 23 Mar 2010).

¹⁵ Gen Douglas Fraser, "Gen. Fraser briefing on Haiti relief ops," 14 January 2010, <http://www.southcom.mil/appssc/audioVideo.php> (accessed 27 March 2010).

¹⁶ United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, "Restoring a secure and stable environment," <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minustah/> (accessed 17 April 2010).

The humanitarian assistance organizations, and in large part, DoD, was unprepared for this rapid change. As the situation escalated and relief efforts were impacted, JTF-H immediately began supplementing MINUSTAH security forces and requested more troops be sent to the country.¹⁷ The additional forces were needed to protect the individuals that were providing aid to the population, but the numbers were perceived as a much larger effort for a much larger mission. In response to the surge of American forces, one French official in charge of humanitarian aid rebuked, "This is about helping Haiti, not occupying Haiti."¹⁸

In retrospect, it is logical that the unrest among the population was inevitable. The failure of the task force to critically analyze and plan for this eventuality caused them to miss the opportunity to distribute the needed manpower requirements to other contributing foreign military forces and shape the perceptions of the media and the international community. Regardless of MINUSTAH's ongoing presence in the country, the U.S. was still blamed for an insufficient security response in the initial phase and then scrutinized for an overzealous response in the second phase.

Perception is Reality

An important part of humanitarian assistance operations is managing the expectations of the general populace. The providers reassure the populace when they share timelines and information on relief efforts, and the providers, in turn, receive respect and gratitude from the recipients. In this case, however, it was just as important for DoD to manage the expectations of the international community and the media to help them understand capabilities and limitations of military response.

¹⁷ John J. Kruzal, "Security Role in Haiti to Gain Prominence, says Keen," *American Forces Press Service*, 17 January 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=57574> (accessed 23 March 2010).

¹⁸ Jerry White, "Criticism mounts over US response in Haiti disaster," *International Committee of the Fourth International*, 26 January 2010, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/jan2010/hait-j26.shtml> (accessed 23 March 2010).

The United States' most scrutinized action in Haiti was their management of the Toussaint L'Ouverture International Airport in Port-au-Prince. Despite the fact that the Government of Haiti requested assistance from the U.S. military to increase the efficiency of the airport, the strict control and explicit measures that were put in place created difficulties for foreign governments and non-governmental organizations to deliver humanitarian aid. In a specific example, U.S. forces in control of the airport diverted an airplane equipped with an emergency field hospital to the Dominican Republic while Secretary Clinton landed to meet with Haitian President Rene Preval.¹⁹ This action resulted in significant media attention and caused outrage around the world. French Ambassador to Haiti, Didier Le Bret, remarked that the Port-au-Prince airport was "not an airport for the international community. It [was] an annex of Washington."²⁰ More frequently, aircraft were diverted because they did not meet the fuel requirements to facilitate a quick offload and takeoff. These circumstances could have been avoided if Haiti and the United States had properly disseminated the plan and expectations. And while fuel and unloading requirements were necessary and the timeline was extremely constrained, neither organization was effective in countering the accusations of preferential treatment of military aircraft versus humanitarian aid equipment. The Department of Defense once again underestimated the importance of strategic communications and was forced to resort to reactive rather than proactive media coverage.

The United States also did not show proper appreciation for the environment by their unprecedented use of technology in one of poorest nations in the world. In Haiti, DoD introduced unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) into a new theater of operations when they

¹⁹ Mary Beth Sheridan and Michael E. Ruane, "Friction between nations rise over struggle of getting aid to Haiti," *Washington Post*, 17 January 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/16/AR2010011602921.html> (accessed 17 April 2010).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

employed them to monitor the security in the region. In order to prepare the distribution points Predator UAVs alerted regional security teams of potential problems so that an appropriate security force could be sent to maintain order and discipline and allow for the safe and efficient distribution of humanitarian aid.²¹ The new technology was not received favorably by the Haitians or the international community and further supported perceptions that the United States was gathering information for an occupation of Haiti. At the very least, the technology and expensive support equipment required for the Predator likely brought resentment and uncertainty, leaving their benefit to the mission questionable. Wayne Parent, Department of Homeland Security Advisor to the Department of Defense, agreed, "UAVs do attract attention and can therefore be counterproductive to national policy. In a non combat zone there are generally many other ways to collect overhead [situational awareness] at much lower cost."²²

Another factor that contributed to the misinterpretation of DoD presence in Haiti was the seemingly overwhelming force projection in the area. Various newspapers, websites, and news programs showed pictures of American military among calm crowds but armed for warfare as shown in Photo 1. This photograph promoted the incorrect image of American forces and reinforced some governments' perceptions of a U.S. military occupation of Haiti. In fact, almost all photographs showed American troops, excluding those involved in medical assistance, carrying small arms weapons, so it is also likely that Haitian citizens had the same image of American "assistance".

²¹ United States Southern Command, <http://www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/factFiles.php?id=138> (accessed 23 March 2010).

²² Wayne Parent (Department of Homeland Security Advisor to the Department of Defense), interview by the author via email, 31 March 2010.

Troop strength also misguided the perceptions of the global community. At its highest point, nearly 22,000 soldiers and sailors were dedicated to Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE, some of which had been diverted from their deployments to the Middle East to assist in the stabilization of the country and the distribution of humanitarian aid.²³ But instead of this being publicized as a show of solidarity and compassion for the tragedy that befell Haiti, the international community twisted the United States' assistance into an "occupation" of the troubled country. The rapid influx of soldiers and sailors occurred approximately one week after the tragedy due to the changes in the security situation which further emphasizes the point that a more effective communications plan would have prepared the global community for the additional troops.



Photo 1. U.S. soldiers assist with aid distribution in Port-au-Prince.²⁴

Analysis

Given the fact that the U.S. military continues to be involved in two different wars half-way around the world, some argue that the importance of dispelling ill-informed or

²³ Juan Forero, "U.S. Military Role in Haiti Met with Mixed Emotions," *NPR*, 25 Feb 2010, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124052139> (accessed 27 March 2010).

²⁴ Tony Hawkins, U.S. Army, <http://www.southcom.mil/AppSC/photoGallery.php>(accessed 23 April 2010).

misguided public perceptions is a trivial or inconsequential battle. Unfortunately, in the rapid and evolving world of global media, now, more than ever, perception is reality. Blind ignorance to the potential impact of journalism is not an effective defense. In today's world more of the population relies on media headlines and photographs to get their news and less on the substantive information that allows for critical thinking. The U.S. military must take a more proactive approach to educating the public about the positive influence it makes throughout the world in order to achieve the nation's political objectives. Humanitarian assistance, by its nature, should be a relatively benign environment for military criticism. The tragic circumstances and devastation that inflicted innocent, unknowing people has been the center of attention in the past, but DoD found itself fighting a new enemy in Haiti – public perception. While the United States should not be looking for glory because of the contribution it makes in helping neighbors, it should be able to expect a deviation from the harsh scrutiny it receives on the battlefield.

The Haiti earthquake is a profound example of the dynamic nature of politics and exemplifies the importance of critical analysis. No operation should be entered into without a close evaluation of the potential pitfalls and a plan to mitigate those identified. Although more difficult in the unpredictable environment of disaster relief, a thorough review of the critical vulnerabilities will lessen the risk to the operation, improve the likelihood of mission accomplishment, and, ultimately, achieve the political objective. Governmental agencies must be fully aware of the images they portray to the international community and focus their attention on eliminating misperceptions. If the United States is ineffective at sending a message of solidarity and cooperation, our political involvement in humanitarian assistance operations is futile.

Recommendations

It is well within the capability of the U.S. government to prevent similar scrutiny and criticism in future humanitarian assistance operations. Time must be invested in determining the lessons learned from Haiti and developing courses of actions that can be applied to disaster relief efforts and possibly other military operations.

The first and most important lesson to be learned is the value of a well-understood and well-coordinated command and control structure. In this case, the command structure was there but it lacked the proper coordination that facilitates unity of effort. USAID and by extension the USAID's cognizant bureau, OFDA, remains the logical choice as the lead agency in response to humanitarian assistance relief efforts due to their presence in the region both before and after these types of catastrophic events. They have developed a rapport with the agencies in country and are better positioned to maintain a consistent message regarding U.S. response. Furthermore, due to the nature of the work that DoD is expected to provide when a request for forces is made, the presence of the U.S. military will likely be for a much shorter period of time than international and non-governmental organizations such as OFDA. Continuity is a key factor in gaining the trust of local government, and it will eliminate, or at least reduce, the propensity for the media to confuse the military's purpose or position of authority.

As the lead organization, USAID must also be readily identifiable as the primary coordinator during these crisis events. One way for USAID to ensure they maintain recognition as the lead organization is to be provided with a permanent military liaison. As already established, the military's role in humanitarian assistance will likely continue to grow. It makes sense that DoD dedicates a full-time position to ensure the relationship

between the military and USAID continues to develop. A symbiotic relationship cannot be expected to mature from only the random and unpredictable disasters that occur throughout the world. Without coordination or mutual understanding of each organization's capabilities and structure, future efforts cannot be expected to have any better results. The military liaison would provide updates to USAID on theater assets and relief effort progress during catastrophes and would improve processes and communications during more stable periods. This simple change would significantly improve command and control during humanitarian assistance operations.

Another recommendation that would benefit from the assignment of a permanent military liaison is the effort to stabilize the region after a catastrophe occurs. Security is obviously a top priority in any disaster response, but it must be planned and executed properly. Identifying the need and then utilizing the proper assets and quantities to fulfill that need are essential, but those are not the only elements. Close coordination with the host nation, as well as any other standing forces, must occur in the initial stages. Then the U.S. must clearly state that they are a supplementary force and will assist in stabilizing the region. Again, USAID/OFDA should be the facilitators of this effort, but DoD will need to coordinate the specifics in order for this to be effective.

Lastly, political objectives must have a clear strategic communications plan that the military can develop into an equally clear and executable information operations plan. Although the military appears to be learning this lesson in conflicts around the world, they have yet to grasp its significance in the broader range of military operations. This process requires as much effort, if not more, to promote the policies of the United States and dissuade misperceptions by international partners and the global media. The plan should evaluate the

need for every service member to be armed taking into consideration the security situation in the region but giving perception an equally important vote. In most cases a compromise would likely benefit both arguments. In addition, use of highly technical equipment may be counterproductive; a critical cost/benefit analysis should achieve the correct balance of efficiency and cooperation without jeopardizing the objective.

Conclusion

In a perfect world, the United States would not have to make a concerted effort to manage the perceptions of the international community and global media during disaster relief efforts; however, in this world, it is something that must be considered in every step. Just as in war, the strategic and operational objectives of humanitarian assistance operations must support the political objective. Humanitarian assistance requires the close coordination of various organizations, but it is the cooperation between the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Defense that will ultimately determine its success in major disaster relief efforts. A whole-of-government response can still be achieved with an effective distribution of responsibilities, but it cannot compromise the unity of effort which is best supported by a strong, and clearly understood, unity of command. Security requirements must also be anticipated and thoughtfully executed through close coordination with the host nation and other pertinent authorities. Lastly, a strategic communications plan that leans forward in promoting the positive impact of the U.S. Government is essential to maintaining focus where it should be. With proper planning, expectation management, and effective communications the question of government intentions should never be a factor.

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