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US Army Involvement in Domestic Humanitarian Operations

MSG Richard R. Anderson

United States Sergeants Major Academy

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SGM Del Hoyo

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The U.S. Army has been involved in domestic humanitarian operations since the inception of the Army, mostly in the role of providing disaster relief. To use the U.S. Army to conduct domestic humanitarian and disaster relief is in the United States' national interest. The U.S. Army is designed to deploy to any country in the world but this also gives them a unique capability and assets to function anywhere in the United States and provide support to local civilian agencies. Hurricane Katrina was a prime example of the U.S. Army's capabilities to restore order, provide logistical support and medical aid to a disaster area.

Domestic Humanitarian Operations and the National Interest

The Army's primary mission is to defend the United States and its interests. Conducting domestic humanitarian operations helps the Army enhance its wartime skills. Having a well-trained and equipped Army is in the nation's national interest. Tragic as some domestic disasters can be, it provides the Army with real-world opportunities to test its abilities to provide support. The Army conducting domestic humanitarian operations is key to the nation's well-being. As the world's superpower, we must be able to support ourselves but many local government agencies are not large enough to support local disasters by themselves. Also, when a natural or other type of disaster hits an area the local agencies charged with providing relief are themselves damaged by the disaster and can't provide the required support. When the Army goes to a disaster area it provides hope to the victims of that disaster, which in-turn increases national pride a key element to the national will of a country.

After the Civil War, the Congress created the Freedmen's Bureau with-in the War Department to help provide stability. During the westward expansion the Army provided support to local governments and sometimes conducted governmental affairs until the local government

was stable and viable. In both of these instances it was in the nation's national interest to have the Army involved.

The U.S. Army Role and Capabilities

Providing military assistance to state and local governments during domestic support operations is the primary responsibility of the Army National Guard (FM 100-19, 1993). When state and National Guard resources are not able to provide the necessary support, the state's governor can request assistance from the federal government with direction from the National Command Authority (NCA). The Army can be used at all levels of government; federal, state and local to provide support. During large disasters the Army can be directed by the Federal Response Plan (FRP) to support various levels of government after a natural disaster such as; earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, and fires. The Army and other governmental agencies have assigned specific emergency support functions (ESF) by the FRP (Bonn & Baker, 2000). When the President of the United States declares an area a federal disaster, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the agency "in-charge" of conducting and coordinating support operations. Normally the Army commander coordinates with the civilian emergency manager, which is known as the "coordinator of emergency services", in some smaller areas this can be the local police or fire chief (FM 100-19, 1993).

The total Army, including Active, Reserve, National Guard and DA Civilians have a long history of being involved in providing support to domestic humanitarian operations. Although the primary responsibility for developing plans and supporting state and local governments is the state's National Guard, the other components of the Army can provide benefits to domestic operations (FM 100-19, 1993). Each component has different and important capabilities that it can provide to domestic support operations.

The National Guard and Army Reserve have most of the total Army's combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) units. Having CS/CSS units gives them the capability to provide the necessary logistical and medical support for domestic humanitarian operations. CS and CSS units consist of logistics, transportation, medical, military police, communication and civil affairs, all critical to humanitarian operations. These units have the ability to mobilize and deploy quickly to any place in the United States.

The governor of each state has the authority and capability to call up the National Guard to provide humanitarian assistance or disaster relief at any time for their state. The capability for the governor to activate the National Guard is in the effected state's interest. The National Guard Soldiers providing the support are from the local community and have a vested interest in ensuring their family and neighbors are protected. National Guard units are spread throughout every state, which allows them to react quickly to provide support. Also, each state has specific natural disasters that happen each year with-in their state such as; California fires, Florida hurricanes, Kansas tornadoes, etc. The Soldiers assigned to the National Guard are normally from that state so they have the experience necessary to support these types of operations. Also, the unit commander's are provided special equipment from the state governor not normally authorized for their unit. Many units have chainsaws, commercial generators, large tarps, sand bagging equipment, and other equipment to better support disaster relief. When a state's National Guard Soldiers conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations it gives that state the ability to provide for itself.

The Army Reserve is another great option for providing domestic humanitarian operations based on their capabilities. The majority of the Army's transportation and logistic units are in the Army Reserve. These units are equipped and trained to support the Army during

combat operations, this is the same support needed to a community during humanitarian operations. The Army Reserve is a federally mandated component which means that the President of the United States has to authorize their activation. Normally, the governor of an effected state requests federal support or the President declares a federal emergency before these units are called into action (FM 100-19, 1993). The federal government funds the Army Reserve which provides the state with additional support, if necessary, without costing them a dime. Army Reserve units are located throughout the United States which allows them to react quickly to a natural disaster with-in a state, similar to the National Guard.

The active component of the Army provides additional assets that don't require activation, as they are already on active duty. Also, the Soldiers on active duty work with each other everyday and can easily adapt to different missions. Even though active Army units are not in every state they can be rapidly deployed due to their status, no activation is required. The active Army has a large aviation capability, which can easily augment the National Guard and Army Reserve's aviation assets. Normally, the active Army is not involved in domestic humanitarian operations unless a state experiences a medium or large disaster such as Hurricane Andrew or Katrina.

Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina is the latest and largest domestic humanitarian operation which involved all three components of the Army. Hurricane Katrina hit landfall in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama on 29 August 2005 as a Category 4 Hurricane. The Louisiana Governor activated about 6,500 National Guard Soldiers prior to the landfall of Hurricane Katrina but did not request federal support. On 30 August 2005, a second levee in the city of New Orleans was breeched and flooded over 80% of New Orleans with a population over one

million people. The Louisiana Governor requested additional Army support from the President of the United States on 31 August 2005. Joint Task Force Katrina was set-up on 1 September 2005 at Camp Shelby, Mississippi with LTG Russell Honore, 1st Army Commander, in charge of coordinating DoD support of disaster relief efforts (Global Security, 2005). The Army had started initial establishment of this task force prior to the governor's request for support. By 02 September 2005, over 30,000 National Guardsmen from seventeen different states were activated and sent to provide disaster relief. On 06 September 2005, 41,500 National Guardsmen and Army Reservists were activated in support of Hurricane Katrina recovery (Global Security, 2005). Also, over 17,500 active servicemen were deployed in support of disaster relief. Initially the air support the Army provided was used to conduct search and rescue operations to save stranded citizens from houses and buildings. Command, control and coordination was a serious issue in the first few days of the operation, the Army advised and "took control" of operations to restore law and order in New Orleans. Due to the devastation to the city many of the support elements, to include the police, left the city or were effected by the hurricane causing civil disorder. On top of that, many evacuees did not have water or food for days; the Army was tasked to transport and distribute meals and water to the evacuees.

Over 1,800 people died as the result of Hurricane Katrina, as tragic as that number is, many more would have died if the Army was not involved in domestic humanitarian operations. There have been many lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina, one of them being that the Army is fully capable of providing domestic humanitarian assistance and was essential to its overall success. Due to the police leaving, Soldiers were charged with providing law and order but only National Guard Soldiers are allowed to perform this mission based on the Posse Comitatus Act; federal forces are not allowed to enforce civilian law with-in the United States. The Act

may need to be amended, allowing the President more freedom with federal forces to implement law and order. Another lesson learned is not waiting for a state governor to request federal support before taking federal action.

Conclusion

The type of domestic humanitarian operation or disaster relief mission dictates which type of Army component or asset is needed to provide the best support. The Army is and will be the key to successful domestic humanitarian operations and the past has shown us that it is in the nation's national interest for the U. S. Army to be involved in such operations.

References

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