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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

HA/DR: Is USPACOM “Ready on Arrival”?

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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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
OPERATION UNIFIED ASSISTANCE	2
The Importance of the HA/DR Operation	5
Aging and Obsolete Assets	8
Training and Readiness	9
Interaction with NGOs	12
Counterargument and Rebuttal	13
Conclusion	14
Recommendations	15
Endnotes	19
Bibliography	21

ABSTRACT

The recent inclusion of the core capability, Humanitarian Aid/Disaster Response (HA/DR) to the 2007 document, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power* invites a crucial discussion as to how prepared the maritime forces of the United States military, specifically USPACOM (United States Pacific Command) are to respond to the next disaster that strikes the region. By taking a thoughtful look at the recent 2005 OPERATION UNIFIED ASSISTANCE (OUA), the United States was able to deduce the critical importance of HA/DR to overall Theater Security Cooperation (TSC). Not only did it prove vital to the people it brought aid to – saving countless lives, it also allowed for the opportunity to develop close relationships with other countries within the region. Although largely successful in hindsight, many valuable lessons were learned because of OUA. Of glaring importance was the fact that the operation demonstrated to USPACOM just how unprepared it was to conduct such a large and complex HA/DR operation. While subsequent changes have been made as a result, USPACOM unfortunately is still not adequately prepared for the next disaster that occurs within their area of responsibility (AOR). In order to support the thesis of this paper, the paper will first examine the aging and technologically obsolete assets available to USPACOM to conduct HA/DR operations. Next, it will assess the current training and readiness of USPACOM's maritime forces, discussing not only the importance of training opportunities within the region that allow for vital mil-to-mil relationships, but also relationships with NGOs (non-governmental organizations). Finally, the paper will conclude with recommendations for USPACOM, suggesting how it and the rest of the United States' maritime forces can better prepare themselves for the next HA/DR operation in the region.

INTRODUCTION

Our challenge is to apply seapower in a manner that protects U.S. vital interests even as it promotes greater collective security, stability, and trust. While defending our homeland and defeating adversaries in war remain indisputable ends of seapower, it must be applied more broadly if it is to serve the national interest.¹

A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower

The recent devastation left behind by the December 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia showed the world the amazing capabilities that the United States' maritime forces can provide in support of Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) operations. Despite their impressive initial reaction and subsequent efforts during OPERATION UNIFIED ASSISTANCE (OUA), United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) clearly demonstrated that it was inadequately prepared for such a large-scale HA/DR operation – revealing serious deficiencies in proper equipment, planning, and training. From the outset, “on the fly” planning and execution became the norm, leading to large amounts of confusion and frustration. Despite numerous lessons learned and improvements to HA/DR preparation as a result of OUA, USPACOM is *still* not adequately prepared to effectively respond to the next large disaster that strikes their area of responsibility (AOR).

With the October 2007 release of *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power*, the maritime forces of the United States took on a new approach in which to conduct themselves in situations of both war and peace. While the main goal of the U.S. military remains the protection of the homeland and its vital interests, recent events such as OUA have placed maritime forces in other areas of the range of military operations (ROMO). Favorable outcomes from humanitarian aid operations have proved beneficial, ultimately enhancing U.S. Theater Security Cooperation (TSC). Not only have they provided opportunities to change regional opinions within various theaters, they have also given the

United States the ability to enhance relationships with both historic allies and potential partner nations. With these important opportunities in mind, coupled to increases in climate change due to rising seas, the U.S. military may find itself involved in HA/DR operations on a more regular basis.

With HA/DR now at the forefront of U.S. maritime strategy, USPACOM must make a comprehensive effort at preparing itself for the next catastrophic event that strikes their AOR. First, and foremost both USPACOM and its maritime forces must take an in depth look at the assets available to them and determine whether they can carry out the mission effectively. Second, USPACOM must demonstrate a more concerted effort on HA/DR training, readiness, and education, allowing for increased involvement in joint, coalition, and multinational HA/DR training opportunities. Finally, USPACOM must continue to work and train closely with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) so that future relationships during HA/DR missions are fluid and less constrained.

OPERATION UNIFIED ASSISTANCE

“There is no other organization in the world that can get there, remain on station, and provide a number of support functions for relief efforts.”²

Author, Michael J. Rice speaking about the U.S. Navy and its ability to respond to HA/DR operations

On December 26, 2004, at 7:58 AM local time (00:58:53 UTC), the second largest earthquake ever recorded on a seismograph struck the Indian Ocean floor just west of Sumatra, Indonesia, measuring between 9.1 and 9.3 on the Richter scale.³ According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the amount of energy expelled by the large tremor was equal to approximately twenty-three thousand Hiroshima-type atomic bombs.⁴ Although various

figures emerged as a result of the horrific earthquake and subsequent tsunami, the latest United Nations' numbers have placed the toll at: 229,866 people lost, 186,983 killed, and 42,883 missing.⁵ The power of the natural disaster was astonishing, affecting multiple continents, "destroy[ing] cities, towns, and huge coastal areas in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, the Andaman and Nicobar islands, the Maldives, the Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, and Kenya."⁶

Two days after the catastrophe (28 December 2004), USPACOM established Joint Task Force (JTF) 536 at the Royal Thai Navy Base in Utapao, Thailand. In command of the hastily constructed JTF was Lieutenant General Robert R. Blackman, Jr., Commanding General of the III Marine Expeditionary Force already in theater. The name given to the operation was OPERATION UNIFIED ASSISTANCE (OUA), with the USPACOM mission statement reading: "USPACOM provides assistance to the governments of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and other affected nations to mitigate the impact of the recent earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Conduct of operation is in support of USG [U.S. Government] lead agency, and in coordination with international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and partner nations."⁷

Within days of the horrific disaster, the enormity of the situation emerged, and on 3 January 2005, due to the large multinational effort brought to the operations ongoing in Sumatra, JTF-536 was renamed Combined Support Force (CSF) 536. In addition to the healthy contribution provided by the U.S. military, forces from the affected nations of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand also lent aid. Furthermore, a large coalition of Australian, French, Japanese, Malaysian, Russian, and Singaporean forces joined in the humanitarian efforts.⁸ According to Lieutenant General Robert R. Blackman, Jr., the

uniqueness of the military operation was likened to a “family vacation [in that] you were trying to pack the car and decide where you were going while you were driving down the road.”⁹ In essence, you were “planning, assessing, deploying and executing concurrently.”¹⁰

From start to finish, OUA was unlike any other operation that U.S. military forces had ever been involved in. Despite its chaotic start however, OUA ended up being an extraordinary success for the military. All told, 26 ships, 58 helicopters, and 43 fixed-wing assets were involved in the operation. Combining both manpower and machine, CSF-536 delivered approximately 10 million pounds of food and water to the affected region. Additionally, medical care was administered to some 2,500 patients.¹¹

The entire operation, in terms of military involvement lasted approximately six weeks. By 10 February 2005, the major assets of *USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN* and its supporting ships departed the area. Two days later, on 12 February 2005, CSF-536 closed its doors in Utapao, Thailand, and by the end of the month (23 February 2005) OUA was over.¹² In the end, according to Army Colonel Gary Keck, a Pentagon public affairs officer, the “contribution was not cheap, ultimately six million dollars a day . . . [making] the American military’s contribution to the humanitarian effort quite possibly the ‘largest in history.’”¹³

From start to finish, guidance from the region’s military leaders was vague. Carrier Strike Group Nine’s (CSG-9) staff communications officer, Lieutenant Commander Jason Carter put it best when he referred to the haphazardly assembled operation as a “typical navy response, as [we] weren’t sure what the mission would be but we’d do it when we got there.”¹⁴ This was particularly true, since the U.S. military had never found itself involved in such a large humanitarian operation, nor were its personnel adequately trained to carry it out. Despite these inefficiencies, simple orders, such as the two words offered by Rear Admiral

Doug Crowder, USN (CCSG-9) of: “Do good,”¹⁵ resonated amongst the personnel involved in the HA/DR operations on Sumatra. Although ruled a success in the end, OUA showed that the U.S. Navy and USPACOM were under-prepared in many ways to conduct the mission efficiently: “document[ing] the requirement for enhanced communications, and humanitarian assistance training, and the necessity for a timely response.”¹⁶

Without a doubt, operations could have been streamlined with better preparation and training. Many of the lessons learned from OUA forced immediate changes to USPACOM’s CONPLAN for HA/DR operations as well as to the Navy Warfare Development Command (NWDC) TACMEMO 3-07.6: “*Foreign Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) Operations Planning*”. USPACOM’s original HA/DR CONPLAN for instance, only “focused on a single country, not a regional disaster.”¹⁷ Despite these necessary steps, the U. S. Navy and thus USPACOM, still find itself undertrained and ill-equipped functionally to conduct the mission appropriately. This presents a problem for USPACOM too, since the most recent maritime strategy has coined HA/DR operations as one of the U.S. Navy’s new core concepts. With this in mind, USPACOM and the rest of the navy must take steps *now* to enhance its abilities before the next disaster strikes the region.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HA/DR OPERATION

“‘Hard power’ assets, like the aircraft carrier and support ships provided by the U.S. Navy, in conjunction with air support and personnel from the Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force, provided tremendous ‘soft power’ effects.”¹⁸

The world has changed drastically since September 11, 2001, and with it so has U.S. military policy. The “Overseas Contingency Operation” continues to spread U.S. military

forces thin across the globe. American servicemen and women now find themselves in an extremely complex world conducting military missions of both “hard” and “soft power”. Taking a thoughtful note of the new environment that the U.S. military found itself in, U.S. maritime forces took the initiative in 2007 releasing a new document, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power*. One of the strategy’s most enduring slogans was: “preventing wars is as important as winning wars.”¹⁹ It went further to say that, “maritime forces must contribute to winning wars decisively while enhancing [its] ability to prevent war, win the long struggle against terrorist networks, positively influence events, and ease the impact of disasters.”²⁰

OUA provided the United States an invaluable opportunity to use “soft power” and enhance overall TSC. For instance, following OUA, “a dramatic shift in public opinion was measured in Indonesia’s Aceh province [where] approval ratings for the U.S. went up from 25% to an astounding 75%.”²¹ This was of particular relevance because “Indonesia is the world’s most populous Muslim country.”²² Author, Kenneth Ballen agrees that the HA/DR mission is extremely important: “The American response to the devastating 2004 tsunami in Indonesia – led by the U.S. Navy – resulted in favorable attitudes not only toward the United States but also concomitant declines in support of Osama bin Laden and suicide attacks.”²³ Furthermore, HA/DR efforts have allowed “local communities a slightly better understanding of the vision of the U.S. people [and as a result] the terrorists, the demagogues, the tyrants, and the fanatics of the world have greater difficulty convincing innocents to join their cause against the United States.”²⁴

The benefits of the HA/DR operation do not end there either – relationships between the United States and other countries within the region have also become more open. OUA

“dramatically improved U.S.-Indonesian government-to-government and military-to-military relations, and so furthered the goals of the global war on terror [now the “overseas contingency operation”] and of regional cooperation.”²⁵

U.S. maritime forces will find themselves involved in HA/DR operations on a more regular basis, too. Many scientists have documented that climate change is causing the world’s oceans to rise, and with it, the potential for disaster. In fact, scientists have recently warned that, “Rising sea levels triggered by global warming pose a far greater danger to the planet than previously estimated.”²⁶ Moreover, “there is now a major risk that many coastal areas around the world will be inundated by the end of the century because of Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets melting faster than previously estimated.”²⁷ The new maritime strategy recognizes this as a problem as well: “The effects of climate change may also amplify human suffering through catastrophic storms, loss of arable lands, and coastal flooding, lead[ing] to loss of life, involuntary migration, social instability, and regional crises.”²⁸ Since “a full two-thirds of the world’s population – 4 billion people – live within 400 kilometers [240 miles] of a seacoast [and] just over half the world’s population – around 3.2 billion people – occupy a coastal strip 200 kilometers wide (120 miles),”²⁹ there exists an increased potential for large-scale HA/DR operations involving the maritime forces of the U.S. military.

AGING AND OBSOLETE ASSETS

“[The Hospital Ships] are wonderful ships, but they’re dinosaurs, they were designed in the 70’s, built in the 80’s, and frankly, they’re obsolete.”³⁰

**Vice Admiral Michael L. Cowen, USN
Navy Surgeon General, 2004**

With a dwindling number of assets Navy-wide, USPACOM has fewer ships to call on in the event of a disaster requiring relief in their AOR. Furthermore, the capabilities and technology of some of these assets are sometimes obsolete in terms of being able to effectively and efficiently respond to the mission. Without a thoughtful evaluation of the assets that the maritime forces of the U.S. military currently employ, USPACOM will continue to have problems conducting HA/DR operations in the most appropriate manner.

First, and foremost, it is obvious that the aircraft carrier is not the most appropriate ship for HA/DR operations. The aircraft carrier is built to conduct “hard power” operations with its embarked carrier air wing and not “soft power” operations such as humanitarian aid. That being said, it does provide: deck space, command and control, water production, and manpower. On the other hand, the aircraft carrier is not appropriately equipped for HA/DR operations, as it does not have enough of the necessary medical infrastructure onboard, nor is it configured to take care of large numbers of patients. Furthermore, it is extremely expensive, costing six million dollars a day during OUA alone.³¹ If the aircraft carrier is the only asset available in theater, USPACOM should utilize it until a less costly or more suitable asset can relieve it.

The obvious choice for HA/DR operations would be the U.S. Navy’s hospital ships. Unfortunately, the U.S. Navy only has two, the USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) and USNS Comfort (T-AH 20). These converted oil tankers are extremely old and, although they provide sufficient medical facilities onboard including: “12 fully-equipped operating rooms, a 1,000

bed hospital facility, radiological services, medical laboratory, a pharmacy, an optometry lab, a cat scan and two oxygen producing plants,”³² they also have many negative qualities.

Drawbacks begin with their inability to get to a disaster location quickly. With a top speed of only 17 knots, they are considerably slower than most other navel assets and would take an excessive amount of time to arrive in theater. Moreover, the ships are stationed far away from most of USPACOM’s AOR: Baltimore, Maryland and San Diego, California, furthering inefficiency. Although they are designed to be hospital ships, they are not well equipped for patient transfer either as access by sea is “not considered reliable [as] in rough seas, [where] ship-to-ship patient transfers can be unsafe.” Furthermore, “helicopter transport to hospital ships [is also] problematic . . . because each ship [only has] one landing pad.”³³ As recently as mid-2004, Vice Admiral Michael L. Cowan, then Navy Surgeon General and Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, referred to the ships as “dinosaurs . . . designed in the 70’s, built in the 80’s, and frankly [now] obsolete.”³⁴

TRAINING AND READINESS

“Unfamiliarity with USPACOM’s disaster relief plan and HA/DR missions and relationships reduced the initial efficiency of USPACOM’s response.”³⁵

**PACOM Lessons Learned
OPERATION UNIFIED ASSISTANCE**

Addressed earlier, USPACOM and U.S. maritime forces have taken several steps to improve their HA/DR reference documents. Both the USPACOM CONPLAN for HA/DR operations, as well as the Navy Warfare Development Command (NWDC) TACMEMO 3-07.6: “*Foreign Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) Operations Planning*”, have seen considerable revisions since the end of OUA. That being said, USPACOM and its

maritime force still fail to address the preparation piece of the puzzle. Specifically outlined in USPACOM's, *"Improving Preparedness, PACOM Lessons Learned"* discussion (following OUA) were two salient recommendations: 1) "Improve the training/exercise programs to address dedicated multi-national HA/DR scenarios to include HA/DR operations in the UNCLASSIFIED domain"; and 2) "Conduct periodic Disaster Response Plan reviews/exercises with country teams throughout the region."³⁶

Occasional multinational opportunities to train such as PACIFIC LIFELINE and COBRA GOLD do exist in USPACOM's AOR, however they are few and far between. The purpose of these exercises is to allow for interaction between the U.S. military and partner nations, instilling trust and confidence amongst the participants should a future disaster occur within the region. Unfortunately, U.S. maritime forces are sometimes found uninvited or absent altogether due to operational constraints, thus severely affecting their overall readiness to conduct HA/DR operations effectively and efficiently in the event that a crisis does occur. This is a problem too, considering that maritime assets are usually the first ones available to conduct the mission when one does arise.

The Hawaiian exercise, PACIFIC LIFELINE was conducted for the first time in 2008. Although beneficial to the HA/DR mission overall, no maritime assets participated in the exercise – only U.S. Air Force and Army personnel participated alongside foreign nations, IGOs, and NGOs.³⁷ The region's other major exercise, COBRA GOLD, has been taking place quite a bit longer and has employed members of the maritime services, both Marine and Navy. Starting in 1982 as a bilateral exercise between U.S. and Thai armed forces, the exercise has subsequently expanded into a much larger multinational exercise. In fact, COBRA GOLD 2004 proved to be hugely beneficial when the tsunami struck in

December, as partner nations within the region had already “fostered relationships and developed skills”³⁸ during the exercise. Despite, the benefits of these multinational exercises, there are still not enough opportunities to practice HA/DR operations. Although both exercises prove to be invaluable, neither draw from a large maritime contingent, nor are they numerous and frequent enough to adequately prepare all USPACOM personnel for potential HA/DR operations.

Currently, U.S. maritime forces, specifically the U.S. Navy, do not currently include HA/DR training in their Training and Readiness matrix. Neither the latest Surface Force Training Manual (SFTM) Instruction 3502.1D³⁹ nor the Navy Mission Essential Task List (NMTL)⁴⁰ include HA/DR preparedness. Therefore, most personnel do not even receive the most basic training on HA/DR until they find themselves involved in an actual operation. Although, the U.S. Navy has proven that it can and will provide assistance despite insufficient knowledge and inadequate training, all would be better served if personnel were more organized and prepared for the mission when a disaster occurred.

Lack of HA/DR training does not end in the operational environment either – U.S. maritime forces still do not adequately prepare their warfighters for the HA/DR mission in the classroom. HA/DR is rarely discussed at an operational or tactical level amongst maritime officers. To this day, there appears to be no formal schooling in the navy for the conduct of the HA/DR mission. Alternately, the U.S. Army employs such a school. Offered at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, at Fort Benning, Georgia, a “49-week course, the longest course of some 20 offered at the institute, is geared toward battalion and brigade commanders, to teach them how to work effectively with nongovernmental organizations that often participate in humanitarian and peacekeeping

operations.”⁴¹ There is little doubt that maritime operational commanders would benefit greatly from such an education.

INTERACTION WITH NGOs

“One of the most intractable problems is the cultural difference between NGOs and military forces. Although ex-military people are well represented in many NGOs, some NGOs come from a religious, sometimes pacifist tradition and are naturally suspicious of the military. Conversely, some military personnel are wary of NGOs, sometimes seen exasperated by an apparent lack of coordinating, and can be scathing – often justly – about the ability of NGO employees to live in the field.”⁴²

Another area that the Department of Defense (DoD) continues to struggle with is in its relations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) during HA/DR operations. This presents a problem since both DoD and numerous NGOs tend to find themselves interacting with one another when disaster strikes. The root cause for discontent in most cases revolves around command and control (C²) structures. While the U.S. military historically has relied on a formal structure, most NGOs do not. Furthermore, the approach to planning could not be more different between the two. The military organization’s approach to planning is “generally top-down [where] the focus of transition is passing responsibility from military to civilian organizations”⁴³ prior to the reconstruction phase. On the contrary, NGOs involved in humanitarian relief operations have a propensity to plan bottom-up, encouraging a collaborative group effort. Their focus during transition “is moving from relief phase to recovery and reconstruction.”⁴⁴ This was particularly apparent during OUA where “the CSF had to understand that relief agencies and, especially, partner-nations did not adhere to the C2-type structure the military worked under and that CSF success would be achieved through member cooperation and coordination.”⁴⁵ Additionally, the U.S. military forces during OUA had a tough time with the transition phase of operations due to the often-strained

relationships with the various civilian NGOs involved. Breaks in communication and data inconsistencies thus made it very difficult for USPACOM to definitively decide when they had accomplished their mission during OUA.

Moreover, many NGOs are critical of some military motives when it comes to HA/DR operations and therefore shy away from interaction. For example, “Nobel Peace Prize recipients Doctors Without Borders do not support or work with military organizations . . . [citing] a fundamental difference in objectives between government or military operations and NGOs.”⁴⁶ Multiple NGOs have also said that “aid workers or volunteers lose their neutrality when they are working with a military organization, which may make them vulnerable to attack or violence,”⁴⁷ furthering dissention between the groups.

COUNTERARGUMENT AND REBUTTAL

Some critics may argue that the maritime forces of USPACOM are in fact “ready on arrival” to conduct HA/DR operations in their AOR. Their position would center on the fact that military forces have conducted such missions in the past with little or no training, and therefore would be able to do it again should the occasion arise. Furthermore, many of these critics are skeptical of the use of U.S. military assets for HA/DR operations in the first place, citing that they should be used for “hard power” means, leaving humanitarian assistance and “soft power” missions to the Department of State (DOS).

However, these arguments are shortsighted. As seen with the 2004 tsunami, the good will gained by U.S. relief efforts helped not only open doors to countries that the U.S. previously had poor or lukewarm relations with, but also helped enhance world opinion of the United States. Many of these countries are some of the same states where anti-American

sentiment has helped embolden al-Qaeda's global network. It is therefore easy to see why the 2007 maritime strategy recently placed HA/DR as one of its core missions, emphasizing its importance for overall TSC.

Moreover, as the sole world power today, the U.S. military has a moral obligation as well as the essential means to attend to such operations should a crisis arise. Addressed earlier, it is apparent that USPACOM's maritime forces are not adequately trained to carry out the vital HA/DR mission, demonstrating that the "come as you are" mentality is an unsatisfactory approach to the problem. While the accomplishments of U.S. maritime forces during OUA may have been impressive, an established organizational structure combined with adequate training and knowledge, might have brought aid to more people, cost less money, and taken a shorter amount of time to complete. In summary, it is imperative that USPACOM invest the time, energy, and money now to perform this important mission more effectively and efficiently in the future.

CONCLUSION

A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power has laid out a new framework for the maritime forces of today's modern day military. According to the author of the article, "*Cry 'Humanitarian Assistance,' and Let Slip the Dogs of War*", "each member of the armed forces is a servicemember, a policeman, a diplomat, and an international aid worker."⁴⁸ The author, Sharad A. Samy is correct in his assessment – as the most powerful nation on earth, the United States must be prepared to carry out a wide variety of missions across the full spectrum of the ROMO. The HA/DR operation is one of them, and one that is extremely important allowing for TSC and an array of partnerships across the globe. In order to better

prepare itself to carry out the mission in the most resourceful manner, USPACOM must exercise great scrutiny in its assessment of overall mission readiness. In doing so, it must not only take a hard look at its available maritime assets, but also its approach to overall training and readiness. In addition, it is of vital importance that USPACOM take a hard look at first understanding, and then improving interoperability with others (military and civilian) who also carry out the HA/DR mission. Until a thorough evaluation is conducted, USPACOM although already proven able to conduct the mission, will continue to do so in an inefficient manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To better prepare USPACOM's maritime assets for HA/DR operations many changes need to occur. USPACOM must take a thoughtful look at its maritime assets and how viable they are to conduct the mission. Second, they must institute a more stringent training and readiness program for its individual forces while at the same time further promoting a collective increase in multinational HA/DR exercises. Lastly, USPACOM must increase interaction through exercises and face-to-face meetings with NGOs so that relationships and capabilities are better understood, ultimately leading to more simple and efficient execution of HA/DR operations.

Maritime Asset Overhaul. Previously mentioned, most of the maritime assets that USPACOM currently has to perform the HA/DR mission effectively are inefficient. Thus, it is essential that the U.S. military develop or reassign a current asset built for the sole mission of HA/DR. Although aircraft carriers can be a formidable asset with regard to HA/DR (reference OUA), they are too expensive to operate for any extended period; furthermore,

they are not equipped with adequate medical facilities onboard. The Navy's hospital ships are also outdated and carry with them almost as many negative aspects with them as they do positive. Further, destroyers (DD/DDG), cruisers (CG), and frigates (FFG), are altogether inadequate for the mission.

Without having to design anything else, the perfect asset for HA/DR appears to be the big deck amphibious ships: the LHA (Landing Helicopter Assault) or the LHD (Landing Helicopter Dock). Already employed in the HA/DR arena before, these ships have brought many positive capabilities to the table. Both LHAs and LHDs are smaller, more suitable, and much less costly to operate in the HA/DR environment than aircraft carriers and hospital ships alike. The LHA specifically, offers state-of-the-art command, control, and communications capabilities. Coupled with available deckspace for landing and refueling up to ten helicopters (the hospital ship is only able to land one), it also employs a floodable well deck for LCAC (Landing Craft, Air Cushioned) operations, greatly enhancing its support to HA/DR missions. Lastly, the ships have the ability to hangar aircraft for maintenance, an ability that hospital ships currently lack.⁴⁹

Although these ships already employ some robust capabilities, there still exists some room for improvements. One suggestion would be for selected aging big deck amphibious ships to be reconfigured as hospital ships for the sole mission of HA/DR by enhancing both their medical suites and technology and further increasing the number of hospital beds onboard. In addition, the retrofitted ships could be permanently forward deployed to USPACOM's AOR for rapid response capability to disaster areas.

The U.S. Navy also has one other formidable asset in its inventory, the High Speed Vessel (HSV). This ship is very capable and extremely fast, allowing it to arrive on station

in a short amount of time. Although it is much smaller than the LHA and LHD, it is far less costly to employ. Moreover, it is much more technologically advanced and more maneuverable than the larger amphibious ships.

The last alternative would be to build a new ship from the ground up with the sole mission of HA/DR in mind. Whatever the alternative is, any of these suggestions would pay huge dividends for CDRUSPACOM when disaster strikes the region again, effectively cutting costs and resourcefully delivering aid at the same time.

Training and Readiness. Increased scrutiny toward training and readiness for the inevitable HA/DR operation is absolutely necessary for USPACOM and its maritime forces. First, HA/DR capability needs to be a core competency for all U.S. maritime forces, not only in USPACOM's AOR, but across all of the CCDRs. Due to the increased visibility of the HA/DR mission in the new maritime strategy, CDRUSPACOM should also invite further multinational training within the region, adding to currently existing exercises. Previous exercises such as COBRA GOLD have proven to play a significant role with regard to interoperability between nations conducting HA/DR: “[putting] in place the basic training, the habitual relationships, [and] standard operating procedures that apply to a wide range of contingencies and crises.”⁵⁰ That being said, large multinational exercises such as the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) should also take advantage of the invaluable ability to interact with one another on a yearly basis creating perfect opportunities to hone HA/DR skills with partner nations. At the very least, discussions and possible HA/DR planning exercises can be conducted during RIMPAC so that when an actual crisis does occur, nations have already had important face-to-face interaction.

Second, HA/DR training and readiness should be added as a core competency to not only the Surface Force Training Manual (SFTM) Instruction, but also the Navy Mission Essential Task List (NMTL). This would allow for the increased ability to educate sailors, Marines, and coastguardsmen alike, only enhancing their ability to respond effectively to the next HA/DR mission. In addition, formal schooling and increased discussion in the classroom with regard to HA/DR amongst maritime force commanders would also prove advantageous.

NGO Interaction. With an increase in HA/DR training and multinational exercises, NGOs should also have the opportunity to participate as well. Poor relations in the past between not only the U.S. military, but also governmental organizations such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) with various NGOs have sometimes “threatened to undermine the smooth working of the relief mission.”⁵¹ Just as important, the U.S. military must be mindful of the potential strengths that certain NGOs bring to the situation, as many “have valuable cultural and logistical knowledge and experience working in a particular region,”⁵² making them an invaluable asset to the HA/DR operation. As a result, the increased interoperability and solidification of relationships between the U.S. military and NGOs today could only further enhance future HA/DR operations within USPACOM’s AOR tomorrow.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹² Bruce A. Elleman, "Waves of Hope: The U.S. Navy's Response to the Tsunami in Northern Indonesia," 89.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.
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- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.
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