



RESTORE HOPE

Coordinating Relief Operations

By JONATHAN T. DWORKEN

Summary

Joint force commanders and their staffs can expect to be called on to coordinate with humanitarian relief organizations (HROs). Restore Hope in Somalia exposed problems between the military and relief agencies in everything from operational planning to organizational culture. Such difficulties in the future could endanger the mission if relations between JTF officers and relief workers are not more firmly established. The military operated under a U.N. mandate to create a secure environment in which humanitarian assistance could be delivered. In turn, some officers saw HROs as supporting the military in distributing food and perceived relief workers as disorganized do-gooders. HROs, on the other hand, saw their role as delivering supplies to the Somali people with military support. They found the military rigid and bureaucratic, unable to tackle the complexities of relief work, and consumed by a fear of “mission creep.” Both sides sparred over policies on security, convoys, and weapons confiscation because of deep institutional differences.

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Medical civic action in Mogadishu.

U.S. Navy (Terry Mitchell)

How well do joint force commanders coordinate humanitarian assistance operations with relief organizations? In every relief mission from Provide Comfort in northern Iraq to Sea Angel in Bangladesh such coordination has been both necessary and extensive. It also has been difficult. Dealing with humanitarian relief organizations (HROs), an umbrella term which embraces various types of relief groups, can be rewarding as well as frustrating.

Operation Restore Hope in Somalia was no exception. Although military-HRO cooperation was sufficient to enable the military to accomplish its mission of improving security, and for HROs to provide relief, relations were strained. Each saw the other as uncooperative. This review of the relationship between the military and HROs in Somalia identifies ways in which JTF commanders can better coordinate with relief agencies. Since there are likely to be more military humanitarian assistance operations in the future, joint commanders can facilitate them by fostering cooperative relations with HROs. The question remains how.

The Military and HROs

With the fall of the Somali government in 1991, the country split into more than a dozen factions. Fighting among them and banditry created widespread starvation. To alleviate suffering HROs tried to deliver relief supplies but faced serious difficulties.¹ It was hard to get supplies to major ports in light of widespread fighting and general lawlessness. Some organizations delivered food to coastal towns by ship but then could not reach the interior where starvation was the worst. Airlifts could only haul a small amount of supplies, were extremely costly, and could only be made to secure areas. Cross-border HRO convoys from Kenya brought food to the towns of southwest Somalia, but not farther north. Problems in delivering food increased the rate of starvation (some 350,000 died prior to military intervention) and shaped the conduct

of subsequent relief operations as well as the course of military-HRO relations.

The United Nations sent a force to Somalia that was too small and limited by its mandate to end the violence. As the situation deteriorated, the Security Council authorized a U.S.-led military intervention. The Commander in Chief, Central Command, established JTF Somalia in December 1992 to mount Operation Restore Hope.² Its purpose, according to one HRO official, was to stop images of bloated babies and walking skeletons from appearing on American television. To do so, the JTF had to ensure that relief agencies could get supplies to those who needed them most.

From a JTF viewpoint there was a clear division of labor between the military and HROs. The former would create a secure environment in which to deliver supplies by protecting the HRO distribution system, from the ports and airfields where the supplies entered the country, to the road networks over which the supplies moved to distribution points. The latter would get the supplies in country, transport them overland, and distribute them. Thus, the mission statement was drafted carefully to reflect that ideal division of labor.

When directed by the National Command Authorities, CINCCENT will conduct joint/combined military operations in Somalia to secure major air and sea ports, to provide open and free passage of relief supplies, to provide security for relief convoys and relief organization operations, and to assist the United Nations/non-governmental organizations in providing humanitarian relief under U.N. auspices.³

The JTF commander—who was the commanding general of the First Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF)—set up headquarters in Mogadishu and assumed control over all Marine and Army forces, various Air Force and Navy assets, and coalition troops from almost twenty countries. The JTF divided southern Somalia into eight areas, surrounding each major town that would serve as a distribution point, and later carving out a ninth area. The military called these areas “humanitarian relief sectors” rather than military sectors to emphasize the nature of the operation.

Overall the division of labor worked. The military secured the ports and airfields, ensured that HRO convoys were not attacked or looted by factions and bandits, repaired the

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as the operation improved security in general, the HRO presence almost doubled

road network, and guarded distribution points. Also, as the operation improved security in general, it was easier to provide relief

and the HRO presence almost doubled between December 1992 and March 1993.⁴ The relief agencies included both nongovernmental and private voluntary organizations like CARE, international groups like the Red Cross, and U.N. agencies like the World Food Program. They distributed food, ran clinics, and worked on long-term projects such as infrastructure, education, and agriculture which greatly lowered the death rate.

Humanitarian Operations Centers

When operational planning started, the JTF staff knew they would need to cooperate with HROs. To ensure close coordination they established humanitarian operations centers (HOCs) in Mogadishu and smaller ones in other sectors. Their general mission was to plan, support, and monitor the delivery of relief supplies.⁵ Each HOC had three supporting functions: to develop and implement relief strategy, coordinate logistic support for HROs, and arrange military support for relief agencies. The key to HOC success was the daily meeting among HROs and representatives of the military, United Nations, and a disaster assistance response team (DART)—specialists from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), U.S. Agency for International Development, to coordinate American relief efforts.

The official HOC organizational structure included a director, both a civilian and a military deputy, and associated groups. The director was a U.N. official on loan from the relief agency CARE. The civilian deputy was the DART leader and the military deputy was from the JTF. Core groups coordinated the efforts of HROs in areas such as agriculture and sanitation. A Standing Liaison Committee was, at least in theory, a policymaking forum for humanitarian relief affairs. The HOC director chaired the committee, and its members included representatives of the United Nations, JTF, DART, and HROs.

With few exceptions, however, members of HOCs did not answer to each other; instead they coordinated among themselves. HOC directors reported to the United Nations, civilian deputies to the U.S. Liaison Office (the State Department presence in Somalia) and to OFDA in Washington, military deputies to the JTF, and the HROs to their national headquarters. The resulting command relationship could be best depicted by overlapping circles rather than by a schematic diagram.

The Mogadishu HOC was both the national HOC and the HOC for the city's humanitarian relief sector. It was collocated with U.N. headquarters, not with JTF headquarters, because there was a reluctance to give HRO workers access to the JTF compound and because the United Nations, and not the U.S.-led JTF, had the overall task of organizing relief efforts in Somalia.

Each HOC had a civil-military operations cell (CMOC) manned by JTF officers and headed by the center's military deputy. CMOCs coordinated military support to relief groups by validating HRO requests for assistance and asking the JTF to task subordinate commands to fulfill requests. CMOC officers worked with DART officials, drawing on their expertise in managing humanitarian assistance and dealing with relief organizations.

Military-HRO Coordination

The military and relief agencies had to coordinate policy on various issues, of which three stand out: convoy escort, security for HROs, and weapons confiscation. One JTF staff member referred to these three issues as "the good, the bad, and the ugly." It was an apt characterization.

Convoy Escorts. On average the military escorted 70 convoys carrying 9,000 metric tons of supplies from Mogadishu inland each month. This ensured that relief reached those who needed it and was not looted. The effort also greatly decreased the cost of transport for HROs who had previously airlifted supplies or relied on highly paid, armed Somalis and expensive truck rentals. Convoys worked well, but communications problems arose because CMOCs were not located with the force headquarters that notified the appropriate commands to furnish escorts.

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U.S. Navy (Terry Mitchell)

Unloading equipment in Mogadishu.



Drilling for water, Somalia.

Security. HROs requested that the military provide security for their facilities against two different threats: continuing sporadic banditry and HRO guards themselves. The latter threat was due to the widespread banditry prior to military intervention when relief agencies hired guards for personal and compound security which, in many instances, was not voluntary—guards demanded to be hired or would attack compounds. For the same reason, HROs found they could not fire the guards. When relief

workers needed security, they contacted the local CMOC which notified JTF headquarters which in turn tasked U.S. or coalition forces to assist. Providing security was not easy, especially in Mogadishu. Communication problems were compounded by the fact that the city's CMOC, where incoming requests were received, was not collocated with JTF headquarters which directed support to HROs. Relief agencies were also widely dispersed. In Mogadishu alone they had 585 offices, residences, warehouses, feeding centers, and clinics that could require security.⁶

Weapons Policy. The most contentious issue was weapons confiscation.⁷ Most vehicles rented locally to deliver supplies came with armed drivers to protect them from bandits. To pick up supplies, HROs took vehicles into areas like ports and airfields which were controlled by the JTF. To deliver supplies, they had to cross humanitarian relief sector boundaries and pass checkpoints. At the same time, however, the JTF was trying to disarm warlords, bandits, and large segments of the population. Some soldiers had difficulty in distinguishing bandits from local HRO drivers and impounded any weapon they saw, including those belonging to HROs. Others, thinking that most drivers took the weapons home at night and became bandits, confiscated their weapons purposely.

The first solution to this problem was for the JTF to issue pink identification cards to HRO drivers in Mogadishu. But this proved to be ineffective since the cards lacked pictures, the military did not fully disseminate the rules, and the confiscation policy varied by sector. Marines continued to expropriate weapons. Without their weapons drivers would not operate the vehicles themselves nor allow relief workers to drive them unescorted. Several HROs were thus paying large sums for vehicles (upwards of \$2,500 a month) which remained idle as relief supplies went undelivered.

The JTF thus decided to issue blue identity cards—with photos to prevent fraud. HROs vouched for their Somali drivers who received these cards from CMOCs. Once issued, the drivers could enter ports and airfields, cross sector boundaries, pass daylight

roadblocks, and have limited numbers of weapons. The JTF disseminated the rules widely, but then the Marines initiated a new disarmament policy in Mogadishu which called for confiscating any visible weapon.⁸ When HRO vehicles passed checkpoints, marines would look inside, see weapons, and seize them. (The HRO drivers carried weapons in their laps for access; keeping them on cab floors or in car trunks would not have allowed them to defend their vehicles.)

Even with blue identity cards, marines confiscated many HRO weapons. During one week in Mogadishu, for example, 84 weapons were seized, 54 from HROs because they were visible. Relief agencies were upset since even if weapons were wrongly seized it took four days for them to be returned. The JTF eventually redefined the term *visible* to allow drivers to carry weapons in their laps and distributed new policy cards widely in early April. This clarified the policy on HRO weapons by indicating in which positions guards and drivers could carry them. Although putting such information on easy-to-read cards for the benefit of the military and relief workers appeared to resolve most problems, the cards were not circulated until immediately before the U.S.-led JTF transferred control of the operation to the newly formed U.N.-led military force.

Why the Problem?

There were more differences between the military and HROs in Mogadishu than in outlying areas because there were more military personnel and relief workers in the capital and the security situation was worse there than in other sectors. So marines in Mogadishu, not as familiar with individual HRO workers, focused on confiscating weapons more actively than elsewhere. But the weapons confiscation issue and other differences between the military and HROs reflected a deeper tension between the two communities which was attributed to a series of factors.

First, there was no clear military-HRO command relationship. No single organization had control over relief issues. While neither the military nor HROs could control the other's actions, this had been less of a problem previously where either the military or the relief agencies—under a U.N. organ or

DART—was in the lead with the other in a supporting role. But in Restore Hope neither one clearly had the lead. Military officers accustomed to command and control mechanisms and wiring diagrams were frustrated. They found operating with HROs under an assumption that a chain of command existed was like trying to put a square peg in a round hole. Instead, what was needed was constant negotiation with everyone involved at every step in the operation.

Second, JTF officers had differing views on the mission and the role of supporting HROs. The mission statement identified four objectives. The first two centered on improving security in general, the third on providing security for HRO convoys and activities, and the fourth on assisting agencies in delivering humanitarian relief. Some officers, especially those on the Marine and JTF staffs, held that the military was to assist HROs indirectly through overall security, thus allowing HROs to provide relief. Those with this view focused on the security aspect of the mission statement as a whole. Others, especially JTF officers on CMOC staffs, believed that the military was there to help HROs, directly and indirectly. They cited the final line of the statement (“to assist the United Nations/non-governmental organizations in providing humanitarian relief”) and stated that helping HROs was the basic reason for being in Somalia. Who was right? The intent was for the military to provide security, but the concluding phrase of the mission statement was added to give the JTF commander authority to do more if required, and it was meant to be permissive, not directive. Few JTF staff officers, however, were aware of this fact. The problem was not in gearing the mission toward the HROs, but rather disagreement over how much to assist them. Relief workers, used to military officers who cooperated with them, were frustrated by the attitude of JTF officers who believed in a more restrictive mission and viewed their agencies as intransigent.

Third, the Marines in Mogadishu were not as accountable to HROs as were forces located in outlying areas. There was no Mogadishu humanitarian relief sector because the local HOC was also the national HOC for all of Somalia. Thus JTF officers from I MEF manned the Mogadishu CMOC—the military side of HOC—and not officers from

many HROs held unrealistically high expectations of military support

the unit controlling the Mogadishu relief sector (1st Marine Division). In other sectors, in contrast, officers from local headquarters manned CMOCs. So if local forces confiscated weapons, their officers had to deal with HRO complaints and thus worked to avoid unnecessary seizures. In Mogadishu, however, Marine officers were to a certain extent insulated from HRO complaints.

Fourth, many HROs held unrealistically high expectations of military support, perhaps due to the significant help which was being provided in northern Iraq at that time. The relief agencies in Somalia expected the military to rid the southern part of the country of bandits and warlords so that they could provide humanitarian assistance. At least they thought the JTF should provide blanket security and allow them to keep their armed guards. But many of these agencies did not—or could not—take steps to help the military improve security, such as consolidating facilities in Mogadishu, firing Somali guards hired before intervention, and ensuring that their local drivers followed rules on carrying weapons.

Fifth, competition and hard working conditions led to high turnover rates among HROs. Many arrived after the military intervention and knew little about what had gone on beforehand and thus exaggerated the significance of differences. Also, since HROs must appear to be effective to raise funds, they sometimes compete rather than collaborate. This can make cooperation difficult.

Sixth, there was insufficient planning. In several instances the military and relief agencies failed to involve each other in decisions that required cooperative military-HRO operations. During cease fire and disarmament planning, for example, military officers committed agencies to provide relief at certain sites before coordinating the locations and the requirements with HROs. Similarly, agencies did not inform the military of their decision to establish soup kitchens in Mogadishu, even though the military may have been called upon to provide security. Why didn't they include one another in planning? The JTF officers took their plans and operations to be primarily military and saw HROs as occupying a supporting role.

And relief workers viewed their plans and operations as humanitarian and regarded the JTF as having a supplemental role. Neither side went out of their way to bring the other into their planning process until it was almost complete.

Organizational Culture

Many problems noted above could have been successfully overcome. They were not, in large part due to organizational culture. The way a group is organized and operated is a reflection of its culture—those values and methods of operation which characterize an institution. Militaries have characteristics that arise from a specific culture. They have rigid rules, hierarchical structures, planning systems, and processes for selecting experienced officers for positions of command in the field. HROs, in contrast, are flexible, independent, unstructured, and adaptive organizations that tend to employ young workers in the field.

There are good reasons why both types of organization have developed different cultures. The military needs certain qualities to function in combat. HROs face changing circumstances, rely on uncertain local support, work in difficult environments, and have small numbers of indigenous employees. They do not need military values and in fact could not operate with them. The military and HROs attract disparate people. Why do differences in organizational culture matter? For one thing, they make working together a challenge. Varied practices and dissimilar personalities can lead to misunderstanding. The military penchant for detailed planning, for example, made HROs believe that the JTF wanted to take over every aspect of the operation.

Perhaps more importantly differences in organizational culture create negative stereotypes. The military was frustrated by what they viewed as disorganization and waste growing out of a tendency not to conduct detailed planning. Individually, they saw relief workers as young, liberal, anti-military, academic, self-righteous, incompetent, expatriate cowboys who came to an area for a short time to “do good” without fully considering the consequences. Officers simply did not see women in their late-twenties with Berkenstock sandals and “Save the Whales”

most differences can only be handled indirectly by increased military-HRO interaction

T-shirts as experts worthy of consultation. At the same time, many relief workers saw military officers as inflexible, conservative, and bureaucratic. They found them insensitive to Somali suffering and viewed their concern over “mission creep” as obsessive, an excuse to do the minimum and go home.

Finally, with the JTF and HROs seeing one another as hostile, the job of CMOC officers became extremely difficult. To their peers they were suspect for working with HROs. Phrases like “going native” and “Stockholm syndrome” were often used to describe CMOC officers who also fared no better with HROs at the time.

Representing JTF positions, such as following weapons rules, resulted in CMOC officers being regarded like the other officers who did not understand HROs.

Improving Relations

Though some problems can be addressed directly, most (especially overcoming differences in organizational culture) can only be handled indirectly by increased military-HRO interaction. To do so, a JTF commander facing a humanitarian assistance operation can take the following steps:

- ▼ Establish HOCs and CMOCs. Having the military and HROs in one place makes the job of coordination easier than moving liaison officers among various headquarters.

- ▼ Collocate HOCs and CMOCs with JTF headquarters to increase interaction, help the military and HROs learn more about their respective operations, and facilitate planning.

- ▼ Staff CMOCs with officers experienced in humanitarian assistance. Assigning such officers would allow JTF commanders to draw on their expertise.

- ▼ Involve officers from local military forces in CMOCs. Placing such officers there could make them responsive to HRO needs and ensure that they are not insulated from HRO complaints.

- ▼ Increase the stature of CMOCs and the visibility of HRO coordination. Giving CMOC directors the status and access accorded special staff section chiefs reporting to JTF commanders would demonstrate the importance of relations with HROs.

- ▼ Ensure clarity of mission. The mission statement, commander's intent, policy guidance, et al. should make clear the role of humanitarian assistance, what priority the commander places on assisting HROs, and how the military relates to HROs.

- ▼ Ensure that the military and HROs both understand how the other operates. Soliciting information from relief workers and briefing them on doctrine, standard operating procedures, and capabilities could help form a basis of knowledge for cooperation.

- ▼ Involve relief organizations in military decisionmaking. Getting HRO input would help a JTF commander make better decisions and make HRO acceptance of military plans more likely.

- ▼ Ensure that JTF officers see relief agencies as partners. Stressing relations could help convince officers to take HROs seriously and not regard them as nuisances.

- ▼ Use the DART. Involving DART members in planning and operations would allow JTF officers to draw on their expertise and use them as intermediaries in dealing with HROs.

Tension between the military and HROs during Restore Hope had little operational impact. But in future missions, when more direct support to relief agencies may be needed or more serious threats may arise, coordination and cooperation must be closer. Military officers can improve this relationship. But relief workers have to meet them halfway. The efforts by a JTF commander to improve coordination with HROs is likely to yield greater cooperation. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Frederick C. Cuny, “How the U.S. Military Could Assist Relief Operations in Somalia,” *Intertect*, August 1, 1992.

² For different views, see “JFQ Forum: Mission to Somalia,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 2 (Autumn 1993), pp. 37–70.

³ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Somalia OPLAN,” p. 5.

⁴ UNITAF briefing, “Civil-Military Operations Cell,” March 1993.

⁵ Except where indicated information on HOCs and CMOCs is from a UNITAF briefing entitled “Humanitarian Operations Center,” January 1993.

⁶ UNITAF, “Civil-Military Operations Cell.”

⁷ UNITAF, “Differences between the Humanitarian Community and UTF and How to Resolve Them,” January 27, 1993; F. Lorenz, “Weapons Confiscation Policy during Operation Restore Hope,” unpublished paper, August 1993.

⁸ CJTF Somalia, 081200Z January 1993, “UTF Somalia—Commander's Policy Guidance, no. 3 (Weapons Confiscation and Disposition).”