

## COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR DISASTERS: THE MPAT PROGRAM

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### **Keywords:**

Humanitarian Assistance, Military, Coordination, Multinational, Tsunami

### **Abstract**

There is great need in the world today to do whatever necessary to enhance our ability to respond to catastrophic disaster in a multinational fashion. In late 1999/early 2000, the Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command initiated an innovative process to bring together the Chiefs of Defense of many Asia-Pacific region militaries. In this fashion, the Multinational Planning Augmentation Team (MPAT) Program originated. It grew from 5 nations in 2000 to 33 nations in 2005. The basic concept was to enable the rapid establishment of a Multinational Force Headquarters (MNF HQ) to allow multilevel interoperability at the operational level.

A key component is this international relationship is the development of concepts and procedures without formal policy constraints that can impede multinational interoperability. The four operational objectives of MPAT are:

1. Increase speed of initial crisis response by a Coalition Task Force (CTF) in the Asia-Pacific region.
2. Improve the interoperability of coalition or combined forces
3. Improve overall MNF HQ mission effectiveness.
4. Build Unity of Effort.

The brilliance of the MPAT achievement is routinely bringing together a small group of planners from throughout the region so they get to know each other and become proficient in common crisis response planning procedures. Thereby, improved speed and effectiveness are accomplished.

The purpose of this presentation is to examine the current structure and efforts of MPAT, as well as its recent activities and successes. This is especially true in relationship between MPAT and the Joint Task Force (JTF) 536, which was renamed as the Combined Support Force (CSF) 536 subsequently, to respond to the South Asian Tsunami of 2004.

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## **Introduction and Thesis**

Throughout history, nations have suffered disasters that have gone well beyond their capabilities and resources to respond and recover. Whatever the society or culture, whether through circumstance or decision, survival requires acceptance of risk. This may come through living on one of the great fault lines (such as on the west coast of the United States), on the slopes of dormant volcanoes, in a swath of land aptly named “tornado alley, in a city below sea level that is constantly threatened by hurricane winds and flooding, where devastating snowstorms are common, or in cities with their risks of crimes and terrorist activity. It should surprise no one when some of these risks yield their bitter fruit.

Most developed nations, have advanced significantly in their disaster preparedness activities, focusing on the areas of preparedness (vulnerability analysis, surveillance and early detection), response, and (to a lesser degree) activities related to recovery. However, it is only in recent years that issues surrounding coordinated international aid to assist those nations undergoing a major disaster have been addressed. Not surprising to those within the disaster management environment, the greatest difficulties arise in the areas of communication and coordination. Our ability to respond to these issues was severely tested in the South Asian Tsunami of 2004 (Morrow, 2006).

## **Sources of Information**

### History of Humanitarian Responses

In the United States, research into the natural history and societal response to disasters began in the early 1950’s, through the National Research Council’s Disaster Committee. Periods defined were: warning, threat, impact, inventory, rescue, remedy, and recovery. Except for the notable absence of the preparedness phase, more recent attempts to analyze the process also follow these steps. It is important to note that early research considered the psychological and societal effects of a disaster to be temporary and short term. There had been controversy concerning whether there has been a decreased ability to physically and psychologically cope with crisis and change, or whether these needs were just overlooked and denied in our earlier society’s perspective of self-sufficiency. It is now understood that there is a greater need for crisis intervention and mental health programs during and following disasters than was believed previously (National Mental Health Information Center, 2007).

In our new lexicon, disasters have taken on a meaning having greater depth and scope. There have always been man-made disasters, whether from fires in chemical plants, reactor meltdowns, accidents involving all forms of transportation, tanker spills of oil, or accidental release of chemicals. To that mix, we now must add the fearful specter of weapons of mass destruction being unleashed on broad populations. It has also been suggested that the horrors of civil war and genocide be added to our list of disasters to address.

What are the reasons that other nations become involved in assisting in international response and recovery efforts in a disaster? This paper deals with international involvement in a humanitarian response, a response mounted to assist individuals and countries that can no longer handle the situation and have asked for help. As defined, these are humanitarian efforts because they “improve the lives of mankind and reduce suffering” and “promote fraternity among nations”. There is truly no one definition of humanitarian, except that it deals with the value of man. By our definition, a humanitarian effort must be non-coercive and selfless, it must be of no benefit to any except those we seek to assist, and it must be based on action, not talk. Even more difficult is that to be truly humanitarian, such actions

must be devoid of political self-interest, military motives, profit, and promotion of any one form of government or ideology.

Historically, a multinational response to disaster involves at least four major groups (Schoenhaus, 2002): governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), military, and international civilian police (CIVPOL) who are sponsored by organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and regional security organizations around the world.

It is important to recognize the levels of actions that might be taken by the international participants in a humanitarian response. These phases mirror the sequence of events found in any action plan. First, there need to be policies created regarding what needs to be done or activated. Second, there must be a concerted effort at the operational level to create and coordinate plans based on those policies, and third, those plans must be executed in an organized and effective manner.

Multinational humanitarian responses would be appropriate if the disaster is internal to national borders, but beyond the capabilities of that nation to handle, if the disaster itself is multinational in scope, or if a nation is intensely affected by events that occur outside of their borders. The most recent multinational disaster, and the largest in scope, was the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004.

#### History of MPAT

The Commander of the US Pacific Command recognized in the late 1990s that there needed to be better cooperation and coordination between the militaries of that area (Weidie, 2006). He called together the Chiefs of Defense to discuss several issues, one of which was to look for improvement in the area of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). One major outcome of this work was the creation of the Multinational Planning Augmentation Team (MPAT), to strengthen relationships between planning staffs (Griffard, et al, 2006), and to enhance cooperation and coordination (U.S. Pacific Command, 2006) at the operational level during disasters.

One unique, and critical feature of this group of military leaders is that it is based on consensus, not on formal agreements or formal oversight. Lack of bureaucratic requirements leads to quicker decision making processes and implementation. Early meetings indicated the immediate need for Standard Operating Procedures (MPAT Portal, 2007) based on the foundation of three basic principles.

1. There needed to be operational starting points to enhance speed and effectiveness of the operation.
2. The need to agree or “agree to disagree: based on information available and frames of reference.
3. There needed to be a Command Task Force (CTF) planning structure to assure that plans were carried through the execution phase. Detail can be found in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and five starting points.

The MPAT is comprised of experienced military planners who are adept at facilitating the rapid and effective establishment and/or augmentation of Multinational Coalition Task Force Headquarters (CTF HQ) Standard Operating Procedures. There were five operational starting points of importance.

1. Common terminology.
2. The lead nation concept of who will be in charge of coordinating the multinational response.

3. Nations agree in principle for the need for a common command and control relationship framework.
4. Creation of a CTF headquarters template of positions and people as a starting point.
5. Creation of a CTF common process for general planning and military decision-making.

#### Use of the Conceptual Framework in the Indian Ocean Tsunami

There was an opportunity to utilize some of the MPAT concepts in the multinational response to the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004-5. It is in the coordination of US forces with other countries participating in humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) efforts that MPAT exerts its influence. This type of cooperation is essential to keep in perspective the fact that the military should always be in a supporting role to the host nation. An existing bi/multinational security relationship can enhance and accelerate needed response activities. MPAT, as well as the Asia-Pacific Area Network World Wide Web portal (APAN) were integral in the multinational response to the Asian Pacific tsunami.

#### Findings: Use of MPAT in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami

The MPAT program was first tested in response to the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 (Weidie, 2006; Weidie, 2007; Wolfowitz, 2005). MPAT contributed to the creation of the Combined Coordination Centers (CCCs) that held a “seat at the table” for all military and interagency liaison officers during Operation Unified Assistance, the name given to the US military response to the 2004 tsunami. General Gary North, Director of Operations for the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) during the tsunami, called MPAT a “huge success because we were able to put together planners who had worked together in peace time in a non-stressful organization and environment; they were able to start talking to each other irrespective of what country you came from, or what uniform you were wearing or what language you spoke (Lerooux, 2005). An orchestration of cooperative efforts resulted. MPAT was a key element in coordinating rapid military support among the 13 nations involved. Some of those involved in the civil-military operations were representatives from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme, UN Joint Logistics Center, and the World Health Organization. It was a safe venue in which to address common concerns without overt US or military leadership.

An MPAT Secretariat, representing all MPAT nations, had been created to develop and implement the program. The Secretariat deployed a cadre of planners to a lead position, initially designated Joint Task Force 536 (JTF 536). Upon orders from the National Command Authority, the commander of the U.S. Pacific Command had ordered the standing up of Joint Task Force 536 on December 28, 2004. This was 48 hours after the earthquake, with a magnitude of 9.0 on the Richter scale, devastated northwestern Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Maldives, and several nations in the area of responsibility. Between December 29 and December 30, initial relief supplies were transported in country with disaster relief (DR) assessment teams. The forward element of Joint Task Force 536 arrived at the Royal Thai Navy Air Base in Uthapao, Thailand. The command element of III Marine Expeditionary Force arrived from Okinawa, Japan, and was designated as Combined Support Force (CSF) 536 on January 3, 2005. MPAT was focused on improving multinational interoperability at the operational level of command.

What was apparent to all at the outset was that the needs of the three most-affected nations were unique and did not share much commonality. The United Nations, the International Red Cross, and other IOs and NGOs were not mature in a coordinated or economic sense. Medical assets from the deployed USS Abraham Lincoln made early visits to Indonesia and provided

preliminary reports and assessments by their medical team. It was apparent early on that hundreds of thousands were killed outright by the tsunami. Interestingly and quite fortunately, only a small fraction of all affected were seriously injured. More were homeless, separated from family members, or unable to travel to their homes because of impassibility of the roads.

CSF 536 was organized to respond effectively to the uniqueness of support needed by the three different countries. This was performed by assigning each of the three major countries (Indonesia, Thailand, and Sri Lanka) its own team, or combined support group (CSG). Each CSG was tailored for that particular nation's unique needs.

The CSGs were on the ground in their respective countries and had close tactical relationships with local U.N. representatives, NGOs, and foreign military assets already in place. The CSGs also interacted closely with the host nation's political and local infrastructure and with that country's U.S. embassy. A most important liaison made early on was with the U.S. embassy of the affected nation. Within each embassy is a group of specialists who facilitate U.S. support activities at nearly all levels. These are called "country teams."

A command coordination center (CCC) was located at CSF 536 headquarters in Utaphao, Thailand (Cossa, 2005). This organization became the center of coordination and a vetting body when responding to and addressing the hundreds of requests for support from the tactical levels.

One delightful observation was made during this large and unprecedented combined HA/DR response. A coherent symbiotic relationship with strong leadership can work well when the differences are seen as strengths and not weaknesses. One major point that was obvious to all in CSF 536 from the outset was that the United Nations, the WHO, the World Food Program, IOs, and most NGOs are positively superb in their field of responding to devastated populations of people during a disaster.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Where the military, the U.S. military in particular, made its most significant impact was in its ability to respond in a timely manner at all levels. The civilian organizations cannot do this effectively. CSF 536 provided hands-on leadership and coordination of efforts immediately. The term "fog of relief" describes the uncoordinated massive duplication of efforts and redundancy in HA/DR. It nearly stopped logistical relief efforts in Indonesia by blocking airlift movement at one Banda Aceh airport. Thousands of tons of supplies were accumulated because of uncoordinated incoming lifts from many countries coupled with an embryonic outgoing distribution capability. It is in this arena that CSF 536 military participation was valuable. CSF 536 provided logistical expertise and support at all levels, communications, and early medical forensics support. Advanced surgical teams from the 3rd Medical Battalion were offshore if that need was requested. More than 2,200 helicopter lifts and 1,300 C-130 sorties were flown to deliver appropriate relief supplies or needed personnel. The 9th Engineering Support Battalion from 3d Force Services Support Group opened critical roads and restored public health infrastructure in Sri Lanka. This allowed that country to return to its baseline level much more quickly.

One valuable piece of CSF 536 support that greatly benefited HA/DR efforts was the practical design and use of the "request for assistance" (RFA) process. This process streamlined the request procedures and allowed for each country's needs to be addressed at the appropriate level in the most timely fashion. The "fog of relief" was minimized by use of the RFA process. Simply put, it allowed for supportive needs to be met at the lowest level that could address those requests. Appropriately vetted needs for higher-level support were routed rapidly to the next level. This approach streamlined resource allocation and economically allowed for maximal attention to be directed where it was needed most. It also promoted constant

surveillance of assets and capabilities, because each RFA went through singular analysis and vetting by subject matter experts at each particular level.

We live in a world of increasing disasters, both natural and man-made. Any effort that reduces human suffering through humanitarian means must be utilized and optimized. This is even more important if those efforts transcend national ideologies and borders for the common good. In dealing with disasters in the most effective, efficient, and expedient manner, we are faced with a paradox. The governments and military machines of nations are created to protect the land and welfare of the people they serve. The wide and varied NGO's and humanitarian agencies propose to provide goods and services to those in need. Humanitarian responses are fraught with the difficulties of lack of coordination, resource deployment issues, interagency communication, security, exploitation by others, and many other problems they are not trained to address. The paradox exists in the fact that it is within the military structure and training that we best find the ability to cope with these issues. The MPAT concept provides a framework for the intersection of these realities. Its effectiveness is obvious and has been demonstrated. From the very first workshop in Manila in 2000 (Duncan, 2000) to the Emerald Express 06-1 gathering (2006), MPAT continually increases its insight and understanding of HA/DR. We we look forward to its future as an integral component of the humanitarian response and recovery efforts so needed by our world in responding and recovering from the disasters it will face.

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## Author Biographies

**Dr. James Hagen** is Professor and Director of the Public and Non-Profit Management Program at the Graham School of Management, Saint Xavier University in Chicago. He is also Director of the Disaster Preparedness and Management Certificate Program that provides education and training for those responsible for helping their organizations prepare, respond, and recover from both manmade and natural disasters. Dr. Hagen is a Professor of Public Health and Epidemiology, and served as Deputy Executive Director of the DuPage County Health Department from 1999 to 2005. Dr. Hagen is a licensed Nursing Home Administrator, and works to prepare long term care organizations for the special needs of vulnerable populations. He is a certified Emergency Response Coordinator, a Certified Public Health Administrator, and is certified by the Department of Homeland Security as a Master Exercise Planner.

During the federal TOPOFF 2 full-scale exercise in the Chicago area during 2000, Dr. Hagen served as a public health Incident Commander. He was a presenter for the TOPOFF 3 National Biological Seminar, moderator of Advanced Distance Learning Exercise panels, and a mentor for the New Jersey Venue. He works to train hospitals in several emergency preparedness areas, including communication, isolation and quarantine, and SNS issues. In 2005, Dr. Hagen worked as consultant during the Alaska Shield/Northern Edge Military Exercise in Alaska. He also worked in post-Chernobyl, post-Soviet Union Ukraine with the health ministry to study recovery issues and to assess public health needs.

Dr. Hagen is a graduate of Michigan State University and obtained his M.S. from the University of Montana. He was trained as a research microbiologist at Loyola University Medical Center, where he earned a Ph.D. He also holds a Master's Degree in Public Health from Benedictine University, and a Master's Degree in Business Administration from Saint Xavier University.

**Brigadier General RS Ahluwalia (Retd)**, an alumnus of the 1970 National Defence Academy batch, is a graduate of the Army Aviation Course, the Long Gunnery Staff Course

and the Defence Services Staff College. He has been an instructor at the School of Artillery, The Junior and Senior Command Wings of The Army War College. He retired as the Deputy Assistant Chief of Integrated Defence Staff at New Delhi, in September 2006. He headed the Directorate of Operational Logistics. The Directorate is the nodal agency to coordinate Armed Forces Assistance for Disaster Relief operations.

He has handled the Armed Forces assistance for Tsunami, the floods in central India, aid for Katrina victims in USA, the J & K earthquake in 2005, the aid to Philippines in Feb 06, assistance to Indonesia in May 06 and to Lebanon in Aug 06.

He represented India at the Disaster Management Seminar at Chang Mai, Thailand in May 05. In Aug 05 he was part of the international team at Honolulu, Hawaii, US PACOM to evolve the Multi National (MPAT) SOP for Disaster Management for the Asia and Pacific Region. He hosted the International Seminar on Disaster Management- “Emerging Challenges for the Armed Forces” at New Delhi in Dec 05. Thirty participants from overseas participated in addition to 300 Indian delegates. He has attended the United Nations Civil Military Coordination Course for Humanitarian Assistance at Manila, Philippines in Feb 06 and the United Nations Civil Military Coordination Staff Training Course at Geneva, Switzerland in Mar 06. He is a member of the core group constituted by NDMA to evolve the National Concept and Policy for Nuclear Disasters

He has presented papers at a number of National and International seminars/conferences. He has also delivered lectures at the Benedictine University in Lisle, USA, the Inderprasta University in Delhi and the National Institute of Disaster Management. Presently, he is on an assignment with The United Nations OCHA as a consultant for disaster management and is a visiting professor with the Inderprasth university, Delhi, India.