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CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION DURING HA/DR IN CONFLICT: BEST PRACTICES FOR JOINT TASK FORCES (JTFS)



Series of Best Practices Pamphlets by CFE-DM



- Civil-Military Coordination in Foreign Disaster Relief: Best Practices for Affected & Assisting States
- Civil-Military Coordination in Foreign Disaster Relief: Best Practices for Information Sharing
- Civil-Military Coordination in Foreign Disaster Relief: Best Practices for Joint Operations Centers (JOCs)
- Civil-Military Coordination in Foreign Disaster Relief: Best Practices for Joint Task Forces (JTFs)
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Cover photo: Special Ops Joint Task Force-OIR (Iraq/Syria), 7 Sep 2018, U.S. Soldiers conduct the 32nd independent, coordinated patrol along the demarcation line outside Manbij, Syria. Image source: <https://twitter.com/SOJTFOIR/status/1038064246683250688>

Executive Summary

Purpose: To provide a condensed set of best practices for civil-military coordination, especially in support of humanitarian assistance or disaster relief efforts, during Complex Emergency (conflict) missions for joint task forces.

Key Points:

- Understand the complex political, social, and cultural nuances of the affected parties; the formal and informal relationships between parties; the separate government, humanitarian, and adversary objectives; and the informal territorial boundaries, that are all interacting within the operational environment.
- Ensure the Rules of Engagement provide the operational flexibility and protection to forces necessary for mission accomplish, yet do not alienate the JTF from the humanitarian organizations providing relief.
- Develop a trust-based relationship with the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) operating within the operational environment by understanding their purpose, synchronizing operations, and facilitating continual coordination, communication, and collaboration.
 - Maintaining a clear distinction between the roles and functions of humanitarian actors from that of the JTF is the determining factor in creating an operating environment in which humanitarian organizations can execute their responsibilities both effectively and safely.
- Protection and Security Missions will take on a greater portion of the JTF's foreign disaster assistance mission but must be thoroughly understood as to the impact this security support will have to the humanitarians and their access to vulnerable populations.
- Ensure close and continuous communication, coordination, and collaboration with the US Country Team and the Humanitarian Country Team.
- Develop a Transition/Termination Plan early in the operation, coordinated with the US Country Team, that best postures the affected nation, the US Country Team, and the International Humanitarian Community for post-emergency operations while achieving national objectives.

Introduction

Complex Emergency: The United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s (IASC) definition of a complex emergency, which United States Joint Doctrine closely aligns with, is “a humanitarian crisis in a country, region, or society where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing UN country programme (sic).”

Characteristics of a Complex Emergency:

- National governmental authority deteriorates to a point where public services disappear or are significantly degraded.
- A disturbed or destroyed economy that suffers from hyperinflation and destruction (or complete devaluation) of currency, a large decline in the gross national product, unemployment reaches depression levels, and markets collapse.
- Civil conflict may reflect dimensions of ethnic, tribal, and religious animosities and accompanied by widespread atrocities.
- Extensive violence and loss of life; vulnerable populations at risk; widespread damage to societies and economies; potential for cultures, ethnic groups, and religious groups at risk of extinction;
- The need for large-scale, multifaceted humanitarian and multi-dimensional responses composed of political, diplomatic, intelligence, humanitarian, economic, and security components;
- Increased competition for resources between conflicting groups;
- Increased migration of refugees or internally displaced populations; and
- The hindrance or prevention of humanitarian assistance that may pose significant security risks for humanitarian relief workers in some areas.

Multiple scenarios can cause a complex emergency, like the civil wars in Syria and Yemen, the man-made political crisis in Venezuela, or the public health and conflict crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), a higher percentage of people face death, hunger and disease in Yemen than in any other country and, in 2019 80% of the country’s population required some form of humanitarian assistance, with a staggering 14 million people in acute humanitarian need. In Syria, of the estimated 11.7 million people in need of multi-sectorial humanitarian assistance, 5 million people are living in areas where the overall levels of need are considered to have reached catastrophic, critical, or severe levels.

The current crisis in Yemen provides an example of the highly complex operational environment that a JTF may be required to operate. A Lessons

Learned Exercise for the Logistics Cluster operation in Yemen from March 2015-December 2016 painted this picture of the situation when the World Food Program commenced operations: “Political instability, insecurity, access restrictions, and bureaucratic impediments were major constraints to capacity and operations on the ground. Programmes (sic) were implemented in an active war zone and any movement of life saving supplies or staff required significant negotiations and coordination with the actors involved in the conflict. Access to the country had been challenging as the conflict spread across a greater geographical area, and international sea and air commercial cargo carriers discontinued transportation services to Yemen. Road transportation of relief items had been encountering considerable security risks and was at times impossible even when roads were physically accessible. Infrastructure was often inadequate or damaged, and predictions of fuel availability in the country unreliable.”

Best Practices

CFE-DM Best Practices Pamphlet Series

CFE-DM’s Best Practice Pamphlet Series on civil-military coordination during foreign disaster relief (FDR) operations for Joint Task Forces (JTFs) and Joint Operations Centers (JOCs) remain applicable when conducting operations in support of a complex emergency. It is highly encouraged that leadership and key planners review these pamphlets to gain a solid understanding of the key mechanisms, best practices, and organizational considerations necessary to conduct foreign disaster response operations since the same advice applies to complex emergencies. Some of the key points from these pamphlets are:

Joint Task Force

- Set up a JTF to operate as part of a broader coalition and US Government interagency approach.
- US Lead Federal Agency in foreign disaster response is USAID’s Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA), which was previously the Office of US Foreign Disaster Affairs (OFDA).
- For the JTF Commander, a key counterpart is the leader of the Disaster Assistance and Response Team (DART), deployed by BHA.
- JTFs in foreign disaster response will likely interact with third party nations also responding to disaster in affected state.
- Be prepared to deploy various Liaison Officers (LNOs) who ideally have some experience working in foreign disaster relief, in a multinational environment, and/or humanitarian organizations.
- In this 24/7 information environment where transparency is a critical part of public messaging, Public Information Officers (PIOs) are a critical part of the mission and should be staffed adequately at all levels.

Joint Operations Center

- Conduct foreign disaster relief operations with respect for humanitarian principles - providing aid impartially and neutrally, based on needs in order to save lives and alleviate suffering.
- DoD assets should be used in foreign disaster relief when they provide unique capabilities and civilian assets cannot meet specific needs.
- JOCs should regularly incorporate BHA into briefings.
- JOCs should include information from humanitarian information-sharing platforms; NOT rely on DoD platforms and resources.
- JOCs should keep information unclassified as much as possible, and ensure that information-sharing platforms are accessible, and used, by all involved agencies.

Understanding the Operational Environment

Complex emergencies result in profound social crisis in which a large number of people die and suffer from war, disease, hunger, and displacement. They involve multiple dimensions of political, development, humanitarian, human rights, rule of law, social and cultural chasms, and security aspects. The integration of national and international entities towards the achievement of a common design and implementation strategy is based on a shared understanding of the environment. Factors that can be measured when developing an understanding of the operational environment in a complex emergency are: Fatalities from violence; the mortality of children under five years of age; the percentage of underweight children under five; and the number of external refugees and internally displaced persons. Furthermore, the JTF needs to assess and understand whether the affected nation can direct or oversee operations; provide access to affected areas; maintain situational awareness and assist in actions.

Best Practice: Understanding the cause(s) of a disaster and consequent emergencies will enhance mission accomplishment and force protection.

The JTF, for its part, must understand the complete network of humanitarian assistance, which includes international organizations and local, national and international NGOs that work with national staff and local partners, and the JTF's role within that construct. This assessment should include a description of the relief organizations (NGOs, international organizations, host nation, and private sector), foreign governments and military forces, United Nations agencies, and other relevant actors; what relationship exists between them; and the effectiveness of the organizations in place.

Assets available to the JTF to gain their understanding of the operational environment are:

- US Country Team
- Combatant Commander Country Books
- CFE-DM "Best Practices for Information Sharing" pamphlet

- Recent USAID/BHA situation reports
- UN Secretariat assessments
- The UN's ReliefWeb Internet site
- UN Cluster System Assessments
- Pacific Disaster Center's (PDC-Global) Asia Pacific Natural Hazards and Vulnerabilities Map
- Relief organizations already operating in the area
- Special Operation Forces Assessment Teams

Rules of Engagement/Law of War

Status of Forces Agreements, rules of engagement, fiscal law guidance, and any special agreements or memoranda of understanding with the affected nation assume a much greater level of importance when conducting operations in support of a complex emergency. Due to the potential break-down of societal norms, rule of law, external influences, and varying degrees of humanitarian and combat situations common in a complex emergency, the rules governing JTF actions, activities, operations, and conduct require detailed attention by the JTF leadership. One misstep can take on cataclysmic proportions to the success of the JTF's mission. At a minimum, rules of engagement should address force protection, and the range of authorized actions in the event of looting, rioting, or other criminal conduct.

Best Practice: Understanding the legal status of the JTF mission is incumbent upon every member of the JTF.

National sovereignty issues can affect JTF mission planning from operational, legal, and fiscal perspectives. The laws and rules under which the JTF forces operate in a complex emergency may be significantly more restrictive than in a permissive foreign disaster response scenario, particularly those rules relating to the use of force by military personnel. Additionally, and despite the possible breakdown of administrative and functional authorities of the affected nation, and unless otherwise superseded, the laws governing import, duties and taxes, procurement, prohibitions or restrictions on types of weapons, and health, safety, and labor laws may remain valid and, therefore, should be understood by the JTF. Significant and complex international and domestic legal issues in a complex emergency can include the law of war, the law of the sea, the status of persons encountered during the mission, affected nation law, fiscal law, military justice, claims, and intelligence oversight. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' "Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance," also known as the IDRL Guidelines (International Disaster Response laws, rules, and principles), is an important document for the JTF planners and lawyers to review. Although the IDRL Guidelines are meant to assist governments in managing the many legal hurdles and pitfalls during an international disaster response, it can

also be beneficial to the JTF as it assesses the operational environment. Even in a complex emergency, there remains the responsibility of international responders to comply with existing laws of that state. The US Country Team can assist the JTF in gaining a greater understanding of the legal status and pitfalls of the affected state.

Best Practice: Include the US Country Team in the discussion of the JTF rules of engagement.

Humanitarian Community Relationships and Coordination

In the chaotic response to a complex emergency, especially across the gulf between civilian and military organizations, cultural differences along with an increase in miscommunication between parties and misunderstandings surrounding each organizations' operations, actions, and activities are only exacerbated. Nevertheless, the differences in capacities, approaches, and needs of both civilian and military efforts require coordination to ensure that the affected populations receive the aid and support required.

Successful relationships with Non-Governmental Organizations and International Organizations are based on a number of factors, to include a mutual understanding of each other's goals and objectives, planned operations and schemes of maneuver/support, support requirements, coordination procedures, information sharing, individual and organizational capabilities, and an appreciation of the separate missions and humanitarian principles that guide humanitarian action. The primary objectives of most NGOs responding to complex emergencies are to reduce the mortality rate; lower the level of physical, emotional and psychological suffering; provide stable food and clean water sources; provide for services of displaced populations; and to generally assist national governmental or international efforts to stem large-scale suffering and humanitarian tragedy. More than 90 percent of aid coordinated by the United Nations is provided by NGOs.

A typical complex emergency may involve a number of humanitarian organizations ranging from the United Nations; the national Red Cross or Red Crescent Society; International Committee of the Red Cross; International and local Non-Governmental Agencies involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance, human rights activities, and conflict resolution activities; military organizations operating either under a United Nations or a regional organizational mandate; and agencies controlled by or associated with the warring factions.

Best Practice: Increased communication, coordination, and understanding between humanitarian organizations and the JTF require knowledge of each other's mandates, capacities, and limitations.

Due to the shared and unique challenges both the JTF and the humanitarian organizations will face when operating within the same geographical area, and the subsequent blurring of lines between the humanitarian space and the military space in a complex emergency, there must be a shared consensus between the two that the application of the humanitarian principles will not compromise the achievement of the JTF's operational and tactical mission, and the JTF's operations will not impede on the humanitarian community's mission(s).

Generally, civil-military coordination ranges from **cooperation in a permissive environment**, where the focus is on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the combined military and humanitarian efforts, to **co-existence in an uncertain or hostile environment**, where the focus is on minimizing competition and de-conflicting operations within the shared space. As the situation transitions from permissive to hostile, humanitarian actors may desire a transition from cooperation to co-existence with the military. For a complex emergency, the JTF should develop mechanisms to still enable adequate communication and coordination when humanitarians will likely shift toward a “co-existence” strategy that may entail liaising only through a 3rd party interlocutor.

Best Practice: The JTF *must* co-exist with the International Humanitarian Community to coordinate, and if possible, synchronize and align actions, activities, and operations in shared or contiguous spaces.

According to the United States Institute of Peace, coordination that will minimize the risk of confusion between the JTF and humanitarian actors in a hostile or potentially hostile environment are:

- Participation of liaison officers from the humanitarian community (e.g. UN-CMCoord Officers from OCHA) in unclassified security briefings conducted by the JTF.
- Unclassified information sharing with the humanitarian community liaison officer on security conditions, operational sites, location of mines and unexploded ordnance, humanitarian activities, and population movements, insofar as such unclassified information sharing is for the purpose of facilitating humanitarian operations and the security of staff and local personnel engaged in these operations.
- Liaison arrangements with military commands prior to and during military operations to deconflict military and relief activities, including for the purpose of protection of humanitarian installations and personnel and to inform military personnel of humanitarian relief objectives, modalities of operation, and the extent of prospective or ongoing civilian humanitarian relief efforts.
- Military provision of assistance to the humanitarian community for humanitarian relief activities *in extremis* when civilian providers are unavailable or unable to do so. Such assistance will not be provided if it interferes with higher priority military activities.

Best Practice: Coordination between the humanitarian community and the JTF should facilitate, secure, and sustain, and not hinder, the humanitarian community’s neutrality and impartiality, and the JTF’s operational success.

Liaison arrangements and clear lines of communication between the JTF and the humanitarian community should be established at the earliest possible stage and at all relevant levels. Due to its possible impact on the perception of humanitarian operations, it may be reasonable not to publicize the liaison or coordination agreements between the humanitarian community and the JTF, (if only) to ensure accessibility to the humanitarian space and safety of the humanitarians. However, this decision must be weighed against the balanced requirement for accountability, transparency, and openness towards the affected population as well as the donor nations.

The following assessment questions, derived from the UNOCHA publication “*Civil-Military Relationships in Complex Emergencies*,” may assist in determining the size, scope, level, and frequency of the civil-military coordination mechanisms adopted and employed in a complex emergency:

- How should the liaison arrangements between the humanitarian community and the military be conducted: in confidence or in transparency?
- What would the implications be of public knowledge of such liaison arrangements on the perception of the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian activities?
- How can transparency of the civil-military liaison arrangements be ensured while maintaining the understanding of a clear distinction between the military and humanitarian actors?
- How can incorrect perceptions and conclusions be prevented regarding the nature and purpose of civil-military liaison arrangements?
- Which circumstances call for formal liaison arrangements? When is it better to maintain liaison on an ad-hoc basis?
- What is the appropriate size and structure of the civil-military liaison component?
- Since co-location of humanitarian and military actors is rare in conflict, when would humanitarian and military liaison officers utilize liaison visits versus interacting through an interlocutor?

Best Practice: Both the humanitarian community and the JTF need to balance accountability, transparency, and openness when operating in shared or contiguous spaces.

Humanitarian Protection/Security Missions

In light of conducting operations in a complex emergency, the JTF is postured to provide both humanitarian protection and conduct security missions in support of the overall humanitarian effort. From a DoD and USAID perspective,

humanitarian protection refers to “the measures to safeguard the rights of populations by seeking to prevent or end patterns of violence or abuse; alleviate the trauma and related effects of violence or abuse, identify and promote durable solutions; foster respect for refugee, humanitarian, and human rights; and ensure humanitarian actions uphold human dignity, benefit the most vulnerable, and do not harm affected populations.” (JP 3-29)

Due to a potential breakdown in the administrative authority of an affected nation in a complex emergency, the security of serviceable ports, air terminals, roads, and railways may be questionable (e.g. the WFP in Yemen). In these circumstances, the JTF needs to have the capability to provide security at these sites, to include storage facilities, as well as accomplish tasks that require providing routine route clearance, security, and escorts for convoys and personnel delivering emergency aid; protection of shelters for dislocated civilians; and security for multinational forces, NGOs, and international organizations. The most visible difference between a JTF responding to a foreign disaster in a country/region with a functioning government(s) and one where the JTF is supporting humanitarian operations in response to a complex emergency is the level of security missions that the JTF may have to execute.

Best Practice: Civil-military coordination must not jeopardize the longstanding local network and trust that humanitarian agencies have created and maintained.

Susceptibility towards local sensitivities and adherence to actual and perceived impartiality and independence are pivotal in any humanitarian operation. The humanitarian agencies must not only maintain their ability to gain access to all vulnerable populations but also negotiate such access with all parties to the conflict. For example, the use of military armed escorts for humanitarian convoys is an extreme precautionary measure that should be taken in exceptional circumstances and on a case-by-case basis. When considering providing armed or military escorts to a humanitarian organization, the “*Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defense Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies*,” identifies the following criteria that should be met before armed or military escorts to a humanitarian organization are exercised:

- **Sovereignty** - The sovereign power or local controlling authority is unwilling or unable to provide a secure environment without the use of military or armed escorts.
- **Need** - The level of humanitarian need is such that the lack of humanitarian assistance would lead to unacceptable human suffering, yet assistance cannot be delivered without the use of military or armed escorts.
- **Safety** - Armed or military escorts can be provided in a way which would provide the credible deterrent needed to enhance the safety of humanitarian personnel and the capacity to provide assistance to intended beneficiaries

without compromising the security of beneficiaries and other local populations.

- **Sustainability** - The use of an armed or military escort would not compromise the longer-term capacity of the organization safely and effectively to fulfil its mandate.

Best Practice: Humanitarian convoys should not use armed military escorts as a general rule, except under exceptional circumstances.

US Country Team and UN Country Team Coordination

By their very nature, complex emergencies are a confluence of competing agendas; complicated and somewhat convoluted relationships between parties that may include proxies; national, regional, and international concerns; economic impacts that can spill across borders; and grave humanitarian issues that grab the attention of national and international senior leaders. Consequently, they often receive extensive public scrutiny, legislative debate, and media coverage. Any government assistance will almost assuredly be swept up in political controversy. Therefore, it is of extreme importance that the JTF establish relationships with the US Country Team and the Humanitarian Country Team, to ensure that missteps are minimized, strategic objectives are understood from all parties, and the JTF fully understands the criteria for termination and transition.

The more complex the emergency, the more traumatized the affected population, the more chaotic the political, economic, and social upheaval, and the greater the importance to ensure that the key stakeholders are aligned to achieving the humanitarian objectives. It is important to discuss, and collectively understand, the political consequences of the separate stakeholder strategies in order to mitigate those consequences. These political consequences range from the affected nation's loss of credibility when they believe their sovereignty is challenged to an assisting nation's belief that operating independently of the affected nation is the only way to achieve success.

Diplomatic activity by neighboring states, powerful states and others seeking to achieve a cessation of a conflict, prevention of cross-border activities, or continuance of the crisis to serve national interests, is a common feature of many complex emergencies. In addition, a number of neighboring and powerful states may take a national interest in the course of the emergency and possibly seek to influence the outcome by overt or covert means. Therefore, it is an operational necessity that the JTF fully understand and appreciate the various stakeholders that may influence the outcome of the mission.

For its part, the IASC, chaired by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), is a primary mechanism through which UNOCHA discharges its coordination

functions at the headquarters level. IASC facilitates inter-agency decision making in response to complex emergencies primarily by developing and agreeing on system-wide humanitarian policies; allocating responsibilities among agencies in humanitarian programs; advocating common humanitarian principles to parties outside the IASC; identifying areas where gaps in mandates or lack of operational capacity exist; and building consensus between humanitarian agencies on system-wide humanitarian issues. Understanding these policies as they relate to the specific operation will assist the JTF in gaining the requisite situational awareness and operational assessment to coordinate with the lead UN agencies and humanitarian community.

Best Practice: Establish a permanent presence with the US Country Team throughout the JTF operation and ensure continual contact with the lead UN Agency.

Termination/Transition of Operations

The termination of JTF operations and the transition to post-emergency response efforts must be managed carefully, taking into consideration local political, economic, and social conditions. As such, the US Country Team, led by USAID/BHA, is a key partner when the JTF is determining the termination/transition criteria. The development of the termination/transition criteria should be incorporated as early as possible in all aspects of the operational planning. It is vitally important that the JTF and the US Country Team fully concur on the implementation of the accepted termination/transition criteria as they relate to the operational end state, the timely and orderly redeployment of the JTF, and the continuity for long-term relief operations that will be overseen, managed, and coordinated by the US Country Team.

Best Practice: Termination/Transition planning is a dual JTF and US Country Team effort that directly reflects the National Command Authority's commitment to the crisis.

Terminating JTF operations and transitioning those JTF functions to another organization is made more difficult by the nature of operating in a complex emergency. The goal of this effort is to ensure seamless transition of functions to the requisite organization(s) while ensuring continuity of operations without any loss of support or international commitment. However, the affected nation government agencies may not exist or they may not have the ability to accept those functions; the United Nations agencies may not be fully prepared to accept functional responsibility, and/or the humanitarian organizations do not have the depth to accept those functions. Therefore, when developing the criteria for termination and transfer of functions, the JTF needs to involve the stakeholders (as much as possible) as the timeline and criteria for transfer are planned. The JTF should educate, orient, train and/or familiarize the parties on the function(s) of the JTF operation that will be transitioned to ensure alignment

and synchronization during the termination/transfer phase. The objective of this effort is to incrementally increase ownership of that function while proportionately decreasing the level of involvement by the JTF. A collective understanding of the criteria used to transition functions will facilitate the integration of the parties by building mutual support for the functional tasks.

Best Practice: Orient, familiarize, and include the humanitarian community, UN agencies, and affected nation (if functioning) in the transition planning.



US and Turkish troops during the first joint ground patrol in northeast Syria, September 8, 2019.

Image source: @tcsavunma/Twitter via

<https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/09/08/us-turkey-patrol-syria-buffer-zone/>

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