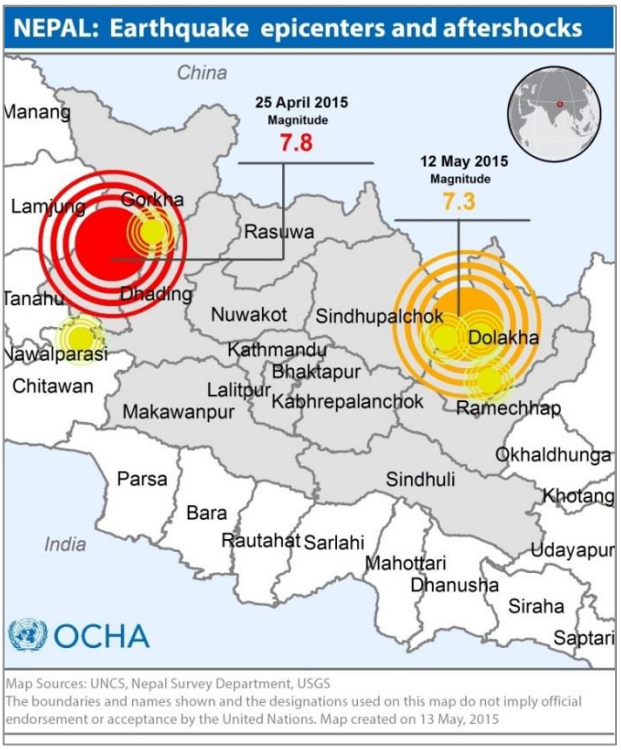
Introduction

The Gorkha Earthquake of April 2015

On April 25, 2015, a powerful 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, leaving over 8,700 people dead, over 21,000 injured and destroying over 600,000 houses. The epicenter was located in Gorkha district, around 81 km (50 miles) northwest of the capital, Kathmandu with a depth of 15 km (9.3 miles). The quake affected 22 out of 75 districts in the country, as well as Kathmandu. On May 12, another strong 7.3 magnitude aftershock struck near Chilankha village in Dolakha District, causing additional damages and leaving at least another 150 people dead. Out of the country's 22 affected districts, the Government of Nepal (GoN) classified 14 districts as being severely affected and in need of urgent assistance.[1]

Because of the extent of the damage, the Government of Nepal requested international assistance, including foreign military assets (FMA). Along with the international humanitarian community, which included the United Nations (UN), International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), and 34 assisting nations from across the globe, at least 18 foreign militaries helped respond to the earthquake.



Map Credit: UNOCHA
Source: Nepal: Earthquake 2015, OCHA Situation Report No. 14 (as of 13 May 2015), *https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHANepalEarthquakeSituationReportNo.14%2813May2015%29.pdf*

The 18 foreign militaries included Algeria, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Canada, China, Israel, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Poland, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand, UK, and the US.[2] The military forces added considerable response capabilities to the Nepalese-led response effort, particularly in the areas of search and rescue (SAR), medical assistance, airlift and engineering support.

As part of Nepal's overall relief efforts, the Nepalese Army (NA) played a significant role in the disaster response. The NA's response operation was dubbed "Operation Sankat Mochan" ("Liberation from Crisis"). As part of foreign military relief efforts to the Government and people of Nepal, the U.S. military operation under U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) was dubbed "Operation Sahayogi Haat" ("Helping Hands").

1 CFE-DM Disaster Information Reports – Nepal Earthquake 2015, https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Publications/Reports-and-Studies/CDIR-Nepal-EQ-2015
2 MNMCC daily update 0800 hrs 18 May 2015

This brief case study looks at the response from the military of the affected state (Nepalese Army) and from the perspective of a foreign military providing assistance--in this case, the USPACOM response to the earthquake. Some of the information reviewed for this study is from the Nepal Army's After Action Review on Operation Sankat Mochan ("Nepal Army Experience and Lessons Learned," *http://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/engsankatmochan.php*) and U.S. Pacific Command's "Operation Sahayogi Haat Joint After Action Review Executive summary" (*https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Publications/Reports/Nepal-EQ-JAAR*). Please access these reports for further observations and lessons observed from the disaster response that go beyond the scope of this brief case study. It is CFE-DM's hope that the new U.S. military responder as well as civil-military practitioners will benefit from some of the observations from this paper.

Nepalese Army (NA) response:

Nepalese Army ethos: "Mission first and people always"

Immediately following the earthquake, the Nepalese Army (NA) became among the first to respond to the calamity in line with Nepal's National Disaster Response Framework (NDRF). Other government security forces, including Nepal's Armed Police Force and the Nepal Police, also served as primary responders. Initially, the operation order for "Operation Rahat" ("Operation Relief") was issued and the NA was mobilized for search and rescue (SAR) and relief efforts. However, as further assessments of the damages from the earthquake were completed, Nepalese officials felt the need for a larger scale operation and the operation was replaced by "Operation Sankat Mochan".[3] Although NA personnel were affected by the earthquake themselves, 66,069 members, or some 90 percent of troops, were quickly mobilized to assist with relief efforts.[4] Of these, 52,870 personnel redeployed from less affected areas to 594 sites in 14 of the most affected districts.[5]

It should be noted that under Nepal's "National Disaster Response Framework – 2013," the NA is given prime responsibility for coordinating multinational and bilateral military humanitarian assistance. The NDRF is a guide for a coordinated national response in case of medium and large scale disasters in Nepal. The document also assigns primary and secondary responsibilities for key Nepalese stakeholders during a disaster response.[6]

During the response, the NA primarily assisted with search and rescue operations and coordination of multinational military assistance, but also played a leading role in the treatment of the injured, the management and distribution of relief materials, coordination of non-military support from assisting nations, debris management and management of temporary shelters.[7]

3 Manish Thapa, "Out of Barracks: Civil-Military Relations in Disaster Management: A Case Study of Nepalese Army's Humanitarian Response during 2015 Earthquake in Nepal, https://www.upeace.org/uploads/file/Ideas01.pdf (June 2016).
4 Ibid.
5 "Nepal Army Experience and Lessons Learned," pgs. 34-35, http://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/engsankatmochan.php
6 "National Disaster Response Framework," http://un.org.np/reports/national-disaster-response-framework (accessed on July 17, 2017)
7 "Nepal Army Experience and Lessons Learned," http://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/engsankatmochan.php

As part of rescue and relief efforts, the NA rescued a total of 23,594 people and provided initial medical assistance to 85,954 people. Additionally, the NA helped distribute 5,707 tons of relief supplies.

Rescue operations were assisted through support teams from 34 countries, which included the 18 military and 16 non-military teams. The Multi National Forces (MNF) in close coordination and co-operation with the NA via the Multi-National Military Coordination Centre (MNMCC) (See MNMCC paragraph below for more details) supported this operation. A total of 4,316 foreign military personnel from various teams (SAR, Engineering, Medical and Aviation) participated in the operation.[8]



A Nepalese soldier carries a young earthquake victim from a U.S. Marine Corps UH-1Y Venom helicopter assigned to Joint Task Force 505 to a medical triage area at Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Photo Credit: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Gunnery Sgt. Ricardo Morales/Released
Source: *https://www.marines.mil/Photos/igphoto/2001047652/*

Nepalese Army (NA) Operational Plan and Phases of Relief

The NA's Operational Plan had the following objectives for "Operation Sankat Mochan":

- To save lives as a priority
- Maximum utilization of all available resources and at the same time coordination with local authorities to ensure maximum effectiveness of rescue and relief operations
- To ensure maximum effectiveness of rescue and relief operations by ensuring reach down to and conducting operations at the Village Development Committee level in affected Districts
- To establish effective cooperation and coordination with all government and nongovernment organizations, humanitarian organizations and foreign military teams involved in rescue and relief
- To identify and open Main Supply Routes (MSRs).[9]

The operation was conducted in three phases:

Phase 1: Immediate Activities

- Objective: Save lives and carry out the initial assessment of damage.
- Major Activities: Prompt mobilization of troops for rescue and aerial reconnaissance to assess the damage.

Phase 2: Coordinated Rescue and Relief Activities

- Objective: To save lives and distribute relief materials to those affected.
- Major Activities: ¬Based on the concepts outlined in the emergency plan, a Field HQ jointly manned by representatives of all the security services was immediately established at the Nepalese Army HQ. This HQ executed the requests/tasks originated by the National Emergency Operation

8 "'Operation Sankat Mochan' After Action Review (AAR)," http://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/view-news.php?newsid=160&type=news&year=http://
9 "Part – 2 Operation 'Sankatmochan,' http://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/opssankatmochan/english_part2.pdf

Centre (NEOC). Rescue and relief operations were launched in most of the municipalities and Village Development Committees (V.D.C.s) of the affected Districts. In the same way, a Multi-National Military Coordination Centre (MNMCC) was established to coordinate and mobilize the international military humanitarian assistance and army representatives were sent to the NEOC to further coordinate the rescue and relief operations…

Phase 3: Reconstruction and Recovery

- The Nepalese Army aimed to undertake reconstruction and recovery activities as per the directions laid down by the Nepalese Government.[10]

The Multi-National Military Coordination Center (MNMCC) and foreign military coordination

A key element of any successful multi-national response is coordination amongst the various foreign military actors and the affected state's military. As mentioned earlier, the NA is charged with coordinating foreign multinational military response, per the NDRF. Thus, in an effort to effectively communicate and coordinate with the various foreign military elements on the ground, the NA established the Multi-National Military Coordination Center (MNMCC) in NA headquarters soon after the earthquake struck. Most multinational military coordination occurred under the MNMCC.

Early in the response, the MNMCC was vital in helping to coordinate the various international military search and rescue teams. A liaison officer from the NA was assigned to each of these teams to help mobilize them in a coordinated manner. Per the NDRF, the MNMCC, aside from coordinating efforts between the national military and foreign military forces, also tied into the National Emergency Operations Center (NEOC).

It should be noted here that the MNMCC is often commonly referred to as the Multi-National Coordination Center (MNCC) during other disaster responses in the region. An MNCC was stood up and utilized in the 2013 response to Super Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. Although the names are slightly different, both coordination centers are stood up to help the national military of the disaster affected state coordinate relief efforts with international assisting militaries. The name would simply be the prerogative of the affected nation setting up the coordination center. No matter what they are called, these coordination centers all serve to help the national military coordinate efforts with other military actors in order to best utilize Military and Civilian Defense Assets (MCDA).

Additionally, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and the Logistics Cluster urged the NA to establish an integrated planning cell (IPC) within the MNMCC that could:

1. "Enable an integrated response in support of the Government of Nepal
2. Ensure joint situational awareness

10 Ibid., pgs. 7-9

3. De-conflict support operations in the same geographical area of operations
4. Provide a single entry point to prioritize and task requests from the HC to access national /foreign military efforts in support of the GoN." [11, 12]

The IPC was eventually stood up a couple of weeks into the relief effort and became an integral part of the MNMCC.

Civil-Military and Civilian Coordination

While the MNMCC helped coordinate military response, the UNOCHA-led On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC), helped coordinate civilian responders.



Humanitarian and military staff members use the Multi-national Military Operations and Coordination Center (MNMCC) and the Humanitarian-Military Operations Coordination Centre (HuMOCC) in Nepal to coordinate relief operations after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck the nation.
Source: *Liaison-VII-2, Fall 2015, https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Portals/0/liaison/Liaison-VII-2.pdf*

UNOCHA defines the OSOCC as: "…a rapid response tool that provides a platform for the coordination of international response activities in the immediate aftermath of a sudden onset emergency or a rapid change in a complex emergency. It is at the same time both a methodology and a physical location for on-site emergency response coordination. The OSOCC is designed to work in support of the Government of the affected country and is a tool for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to carry out its mandate of coordination and information management in emergency response, particularly at the field level. The nature of the OSOCC enables the concept to be utilized by other organizations when responding to emergencies, including international response organizations and Governments."[13]

As there was a delay in the establishment of the UNOCHA-led OSOCC, the MNMCC initially undertook the function of coordinating international civilian search and rescue teams as well as military teams until the OSOCC was stood up.[14]

Humanitarian-Military Operations Centre (HuMOCC)

Another coordination center was also stood up, part of a relatively "new" coordination strategy by the UN. Shortly after the disaster struck, a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team was deployed to Nepal with four United Nations Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CMCoord) officers. The team was invited by the NA to have a liaison function within the MNMCC to help facilitate coordination and information sharing. According to UNOCHA,

11 UN-CMCoord Response for Nepal Earthquake Humanitarian Military Operation and Coordination Center (HuMOCC) Meeting Minutes, 06 May 2015https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/humocc_meeting_-_6_may_2015.pdf
12 CFE-DMHA Disaster Information Report, Nepal Earthquake, 15 May, 2015, CDIR No. 21, https://www.cfe-dmha.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=uARC08PMISk%3D&portalid=0
13 On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC) Guidelines 2014, https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/2014%20OSOCC%20Guidelines_FINAL.pdf)
14 Liaison Magazine Vol. VIII-1 2016, "'Mission First & People Always': The Nepal Army's AAR on Operation Sankat Mochan." Pg. 16. https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Portals/0/liaison/liaison-2016-VIII-1.pdf

the team developed a civil-military coordination strategy for Nepal that included the establishment of a Humanitarian-Military Operations Centre (HuMOCC) co-located with the MNMCC.

According to UNOCHA, "The HuMOCC's objective was to provide a predictable humanitarian-military-police coordination platform. Complementary to the On-Site Operations and Coordination Center (OSOCC), the HuMOCC provided the physical space dedicated to facilitating the interface between humanitarian actors, national / foreign military actors, as well as the national police present in country."[15]

Requests for MCDA were discussed in the HuMOCC and then submitted to the MNMCC. The HuMOCC helped facilitate the rapid development of requests for assistance (RFAs) and Requests for Information (RFIs), allowing humanitarian responders to access military assets and also facilitated information sharing between civilian and military responders.[16]

Lessons regarding the use of the MNMCC for the Nepal earthquake response have been highlighted by UNOCHA: "Military-military coordination mechanisms such as the MNMCC in the context of the Nepal earthquake response should have the capacity to contribute to achieving common situational awareness, facilitate joint planning and clarify task division. This means that humanitarian priorities are given the first opportunity for the use of FMA in the absence of civilian alternatives during the critical period."[17]

Although the MNMCC generally worked well at the national level, UNOCHA also noted that civil-military coordination did not work as well at the sub-national level: "Another identified lesson is the limited understanding of the national military forces at the sub-national level about the presence of humanitarian actors and FMA present in the area. This resulted in a minimum level of coordination between the humanitarian actors and FMA on one hand, and the national military on the other hand."[18] Therefore, it was recommended that a civil-military coordination cell be established at the sub-national level to better improve civil-military coordination at all levels.

Another notable development in the international response is that major partners were assigned specific sectors in Nepal: India took the West sector, China the North sector, and the United States the East. While each nation was assigned a specific sector, coordination at the MNMCC helped facilitate efficient delivery in all sectors using the most capable platforms in Nepal.[19]

It was mentioned earlier that foreign militaries often bring in unique capabilities to a disaster-affected country that national militaries may lack for a disaster response. The NA said that air support was the most important type of foreign military assistance received during the response. It was also noted that

15 Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination, Issue No. 5, May-June 2015. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CMCoord%20Newsletter%20-%20May%202015%20%28Issue%205%29.pdf
16 Ibid.
17 Liaison Volume VII Fall 2015, "The HuMOCC Typhoon Haiyan, Cyclone Pam and Nepal Earthquake: Observations and Lessons identified in Humanitarian-Military-Police Coordination and the Use of Foreign Military Assets," https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Portals/0/liaison/Liaison-VII-2.pdf#page=5
18 Ibid.
19 CFE Disaster Information Reports (CDIR #11) – Nepal Earthquake 2015, https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Publications/Reports-and-Studies/CDIR-Nepal-EQ-2015

by July 15, 2015, an additional 19 people were rescued, most beyond the rescue capabilities of national teams.[20] The NA also noted that "The presence of highly equipped international teams also helped reassure public confidence. These foreign teams worked in close cooperation and coordination with the NA."[21]

According to the NA, international teams from 34 nations, which included the 18 military teams, provided rescue assistance, provided medical treatment to 27,390 people, evacuated 3,493 people and delivered 966 tons of relief under close coordination with the NA.[22]

Foreign military assets included a much needed 23 helicopters, including 13 from India, 3 from China and 7 from the U.S. A total 966 tons of relief materials were delivered by foreign aircraft. A total of 27,390 people were treated by the foreign military medical teams. The foreign SAR teams rescued a total of 19 survivors and extracted 135 dead bodies, according to the Nepalese Army. All the MNF personnel returned home by June 4, 2015.[23]

The Nepalese Army (NA) officially concluded Operation Sankat Mochan on July 16, 2015.

Nepalese Army After Action Review (NA AAR)

Shortly after transitioning from response operations to recovery, the NA released a 52-page after action review (AAR) on Operation Sankat Mochan. The AAR was released in four parts – the first section covers "Nepalese Army and Disaster Management;" The second part covers "Operation Sankat Mochan;" the third discusses the "Use of Technology for HADR Operations;" while the last section covers "Feedback and Recommendations."

It has been generally expressed that the NA-led MNMCC successfully helped coordinate foreign military assistance. However, the NA did note some suggestions and lessons observed. For example, the NA AAR notes that in the future, the National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC) would provide the guidance to a military command center that would coordinate the operations of foreign military teams and the OSOCC would coordinate the efforts of civilian search and rescue teams.[24] "The need for an enhanced military command center, beyond the cell envisaged within the framework of the NEOC was found to be necessary," the report states.[25]

Other highlighted recommendations for the coordination of foreign military teams from the Nepalese AAR included:

- "The NA notes that bilateral and multilateral agreements for military humanitarian assistance are required prior to a disaster, especially in areas such as search and rescue, medical and air supply of relief materials. The NA notes that as national capacity in these areas are limited, Nepal should accept this type of assistance from foreign nations during a disaster."

20 Liaison Magazine Vol. VIII-1 2016, "'Mission First & People Always': The Nepal Army's AAR on Operation Sankat Mochan." Pg. 17. https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Portals/0/liaison/liaison-2016-VIII-1.pdf
21 "Nepal Army Experience and Lessons Learned," http://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/engsankatmochan.php
22 Ibid. Pg. 35.
23 "'Operation Sankat Mochan' After Action Review (AAR)," http://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/view-news.php?newsid=160&type=news&year=http://
24 Liaison Magazine Vol. VIII-1 2016, "'Mission First & People Always': The Nepal Army's AAR on Operation Sankat Mochan." Pg. 16. https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Portals/0/liaison/liaison-2016-VIII-1.pdf
25 Ibid. Pg. 17

- "To effectively coordinate and utilize the resources brought in by foreign military teams Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the MNMCC must be developed. The SOP could be utilized to prevent problems faced in the past such as foreign military teams bringing weapons or not coming in self-sustained."
- "In addition, sites for establishing camps for foreign military teams should also be identified in advance."[26]

These lessons observed by the NA are not entirely unique to the Nepal earthquake response and should be seriously considered for adoption and use by the region's foreign military responders to help improve upon future disaster response operations and coordination in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. In particular the use of bilateral and multilateral agreements and SOPs prior to the onset of a disaster.

While the NA AAR takes a detailed and comprehensive look at the Nepalese Army's disaster response operation, with topics such as the role of the NA in disaster management in Nepal, to the use of technology for HADR operations, these topics are not discussed in detail for this particular case study. Therefore, for more observations and recommendations, please access the NA AAR at: "Nepal Army Experience and Lessons Learned," *http://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/engsankatmochan.php*

U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) and U.S. Government response

As mentioned earlier, a number of foreign militaries' provided significant support to the response operations in Nepal following the earthquake, including the U.S. military under U.S. Pacific Command. Soon after the earthquake struck, the Government of Nepal (GoN) requested international assistance and declared a state of emergency in affected areas. The international community quickly mobilized, providing support for the GoN. As part of the effort, foreign countries began sending military personnel to assist in the response, comprised of SAR and medical teams, as well as military cargo planes carrying plane loads of relief assistance.



U.S. Marines and Nepalese soldiers unload tarps off of a UH-1Y Huey at Orang, Nepal, during Operation Sahayogi Haat, May 19, 2015.
Photo Credit: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Isaac Ibarra
Source: *https://dod.defense.gov/Photos/Photo-Gallery/igphoto/2001104761/*

The U.S. Embassy in Nepal headed the U.S. effort, with USAID as the lead federal agency for the response. USPACOM worked closely with both to determine how the Department of Defense (DOD) might best support the overall U.S. government response to this disaster.

26 Ibid. Pg. 17

With U.S. military assistance, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) sent a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) and two Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams, which arrived via U.S. Air Force C-17 cargo aircraft on April 28.[27]

The DART had about 125 staff in total that arrived in Nepal to assist the GoN and response efforts. A DART is a forward-deployable team that coordinates and manages the U.S. government's response in a disaster-affected country. The DART included the two USAR teams, one from Los Angeles County and the other from Fairfax County, Virginia.[28]

Throughout the disaster relief operation, in addition to working in close coordination with the GoN, the U.S. military continued to work closely with USAID/OFDA, the lead federal agency for the U.S. response, and in close coordination with the DART.

U.S. Special Forces

A U.S military Special Forces team was on the ground in Nepal for a training exercise when the earthquake struck and quickly transitioned to begin supporting disaster relief, including medical assistance to the injured. The soldiers also provided logistical help and helped in search and rescue along popular trekking routes, including the Mount Everest Base Camp, an area that was also affected by the earthquake.[29]

Joint Humanitarian Assessment Survey Team (JHAST)

Other forms of early support from USPACOM included the deployment of a Joint Humanitarian Assessment Survey Team (JHAST) with approximately 20 military personnel from Kadena Air Force Base Okinawa which reached ground on April 29 to work with the USAID DART team in Nepal to carry out coordinated assessments.

In general, a JHAST team offers expertise in communications, intelligence, medical, logistics planning, public affairs, aviation, ordnance, contracting, operations, protection, engineering, military police, and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear situations.[30]

During relief operations, the JTF 505 JHAST advised the DART on DOD capabilities and assets available to support the response and helped assess appropriate DOD missions. Additionally, both the JTF 505 JHAST and DART conducted joint assessments, including focusing on airport operations at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA). The team also helped coordinate the response to USAID/OFDA validated requests from the GoN in coordination with the U.S. Embassy. The JTF 505 JHAST was led by Marine Brig. Gen. Paul Kennedy, Commander of 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade (3rd MEB).[31]

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27 "USAID Arrives in Nepal, Earthquake Response Efforts Begin," https://blog.usaid.gov/2015/04/usaid-arrives-in-nepal-earthquake-response-efforts-begin/
28 "USAID, U.S. Pacific Command Assist Earthquake Relief in Nepal," http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/Article/588508/usaid-us-pacific-command-assist-earthquake-relief-in-nepal/
29 "U.S. Military Role in Assistance to Nepal" http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/Article/587121/us-military-role-in-assistance-to-nepal/)
30 "8th TSC Troops Prepare for Pacific Theater Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team Mission, Demonstrate Expeditionary Capability," http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/Article/564235/8th-tsc-troops-prepare-for-pacific-theater-humanitarian-assistance-survey-team/
31 "PACOM Joint Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team Deployed to Nepal," http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/Article/586969/pacom-joint-humanitarian-assistance-survey-team-deployed-to-nepal/

Joint Task Force (JTF) 505

In response to a major foreign disaster, a Unified Combatant Command (UCC) may typically form a Joint Task Force (JTF). On May 1, Marine Corps Forces, Pacific (MARFORPAC) was directed by USPACOM to activate JTF 505 and assume operational responsibilities as the U.S. supported commander in Nepal. U.S. Navy Adm. Samuel J. Locklear III, commander of USPACOM, designated Marine Corps Lt. Gen. John Wissler, commanding general of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF), as the JTF commander.

"We are here at the request of, and in support of, the government of Nepal as they deal with this terrible tragedy," JTF Commander Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Wissler said. "We will continue to provide support as part of the overall U.S. government and international response as long as our unique capabilities can support the government of Nepal and remain in partnership with the Nepalese army."[32]

Joint Publication 3-29 Foreign Humanitarian Assistance 03 January 2014 defines a JTF as: "…a joint force that is constituted and so designated by SecDef, a CCDR, a subordinate unified commander, or an existing commander, joint task force (CJTF)…The adaptive nature of the C2 structure, the unique component capabilities, and their ability to deploy quickly to execute a variety of FHA [Foreign Humanitarian Assistance] missions make a JTF ideally suited to perform FHA…The JTF normally operates at the operational level; however, there may be instances requiring the CJTF to focus at the tactical level…The JTF organization for FHA is similar to traditional military organizations with a commander, command element, and mission-tailored forces."[33]

JTF 505 was stood up to provide unique capabilities to assist Nepal and activation of the JTF followed the initial U.S. military response to support Nepal's government, joining the efforts already underway by the JHAST, the special forces team, other U.S. government agencies such as the OFDA DART, and the U.S. USAR teams who traveled to Nepal via Air Force C-17's.

Joint Task Force 505's forward headquarters in Nepal coordinated U.S. military relief efforts. JTF 505 Forward consisted of approximately 300 U.S. military personnel on the ground in Nepal, while JTF 505 Main in Okinawa, Japan, and an Intermediate Staging Base (ISB) in Thailand (discussed below) consisted of approximately 590 U.S. military personnel.[34] The JTF began to work closely with the U.S. State Department, USAID and other U.S. agencies to coordinate the U.S. response to requests by the GoN soon after it was activated. The JTF also began working with the MNMCC regarding prioritization of HA supplies and the process to deliver to affected areas.

The JTF initially supported ongoing disaster relief operations with a U.S. Air Force contingency response group (CRG) (discussed in the next section), three Marine Corps UH-1Y Huey helicopters, four Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, four Air Force C-17 Globemaster III transports and two

32 "Joint Task Force Activates for Nepal Earthquake Relief," http://www.315aw.afrc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/587898/joint-task-force-activates-for-nepal-earthquake-relief/
33 Joint Publication 3-29 Foreign Humanitarian Assistance 03 January 2014. Pg. II-22. http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_29.pdf
34 "Nepal Earthquake Relief Effort Named 'Operation Sahayogi Haat'," http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/Article/588303/nepal-earthquake-relief-effort-named-operation-sahayogi-haat/

Marine Corps KC-130 Hercules aircraft, as well as various ground and aviation command and control capabilities. [35]

36th Contingency Response Group (CRG)

The U.S. military deployed the 36th Contingency Response Group (CRG), a rapid-deployment unit with the capability of securing, operating and managing an airfield, to Kathmandu, Nepal on May 5. The 42-person team, attached to JTF 505, was based out of Guam. The CRG was comprised of airmen along with security forces, anti-terrorism personnel and medics. A CRG has the capability to respond anywhere in the world, survey an airfield and establish a base of operations to support disaster relief missions.[36]

As one of its first tasks, utilizing its unique capabilities and logistical expertise, the 36th CRG and members of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal teamed up to conduct an assessment and necessary repairs to TIA. Prior to supporting relief operations in Nepal, the 36th CRG provided assistance to the Philippines after Super Typhoon Haiyan struck in late 2013.

Intermediate Staging Base (ISB)

In support of the operation, and to ensure the flow of relief and personnel to and from Nepal, the JTF helped set up an intermediate staging base (ISB) at Utapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield in Thailand. At the ISB, JTF personnel monitored communications with other JTF 505 components throughout the region and supported air operations. The JTF mission in Thailand was able to successfully move tons of cargo and hundreds of support personnel into Nepal. Additionally, Royal Thai Armed Forces worked with the JTF at the ISB to coordinate relief support with the Government of Thailand.

U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Michael Minihan, the JTF 505 Joint Air Component Coordination Element commander, explained the role of the mission: "We've set up an intermediate staging base that can help airpower and airlift, specifically U.S. Marine and Air Force air [capabilities], and rapidly move those unique capabilities in and out of Nepal," Minihan said. "This JTF 505 is significant because it shows that the partnerships in this region are important, and all the exercises and engagements that we do throughout this region have a real-world application so that when an incident happens like the earthquake in Nepal, we can rapidly come together...and instantly have a positive impact and do what we need to do for the government and the people of Nepal."[37]

Redeployment of JTF 505

Over time, requirements for foreign militaries' unique capabilities diminish as more civilian air and ground capabilities become available for relief operations. As part of its redeployment (or exit strategy), JTF 505 began drawing down its relief operations as the Nepalese government and international aid agencies began pivoting towards long-term recovery and reconstruction efforts. Other foreign militaries began redeploying home starting around May 9.

35 "Joint Task Force Activates for Nepal Earthquake Relief," http://www.315aw.afrc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/587898/joint-task-force-activates-for-nepal-earthquake-relief/
36 "36th Contingency Response Group Expands US Military Support to Nepal," http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/Article/587959/36th-contingency-response-group-expands-us-military-support-to-nepal/
37 "Joint U.S. Forces Support Nepal Earthquake Relief Efforts in Thailand," http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/Article/588317/joint-us-forces-support-nepal-earthquake-relief-efforts-in-thailand/

As part of redeployment efforts, the JTF 505 transitioned CRG tasks to the Nepalese civil aviation authority and other international organizations, including training Nepal Airlines employees and Nepal Army personnel.[38]

JTF 505 participated in a press conference on May 20 with U.S. Ambassador Peter Bodde, USAID's DART team leader, Bill Berger, and Nepal Chief of Army Staff, General Rana, to formally announce the completion of JTF 505 operations and subsequent redeployment. Nepal announced its transition from relief operations to the recovery phase of disaster response on May 21, 2015.



U.S. Marine Corps Capt Mathew Phelps works in the Joint Task Force (JTF) 505 Joint Operations Command Center (FWD) on May 6, 2015.
Photo Credit: Chief Warrant Officer Clint Runy
Source: *http://www.pacom.mil/Media/Photos/igphoto/2001046082/*

JTF 505 Deactivates

JTF 505 deactivated on May 26 after redeploying from Nepal to Utapao Royal Air Field in Thailand in support of Operation Sahayogi Haat.

About 900 U.S. military and civilian personnel from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps contributed to the relief efforts under JTF 505. About 300 of the JTF 505 personnel worked in Nepal, 320 at the main headquarters in Japan, and 280 at the intermediate staging base in Utapao, Thailand.[39]

By the end of its mission, as part of the JTF, the 36th CRG helped unload more than 200 aircraft in Nepal and helped reduce the backlog of aid stockpiles accumulated during the early stages of the response. Additionally, the 36th CRG helped train members of the NA and airport personnel during their ongoing operations.[40]

During its deployment, the JTF 505 worked with 24 different countries to provide relief. In coordination with the GoN and USAID, the JTF delivered about 120 tons of relief supplies. The task force also transported 553 personnel and conducted 69 casualty evacuations. JTF 505 unique capabilities included the contribution of three Marine Corps UH-1Y Huey helicopters and four Marine Corps MV-22B Osprey tilt rotor aircraft to the relief effort. Additionally, four Air Force C-17 Globemaster IIIs, four Air Force C-130 Hercules and four Marine Corps KC-130J Hercules aircraft, as well as various ground and aviation command and control assets were utilized.[41]

38 "Joint Task Force 505 begins drawdown in Nepal,"http://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/589300/joint-task-force-505-begins-drawdown-in-nepal/
39 Ibid.
40 "Guam Contingency Response Group Assists in Typhoon Recovery," http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/Article/613516/guam-contingency-response-group-assists-in-typhoon-recovery/
41 "Nepal Earthquake Response Task Force Deactivates," http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/589705/nepal-earthquake-response-task-force)

"We, people, are men and women of the armed forces," said Maj. Gen. Binoj Basnyat commandant of the Nepalese Army's Command and Staff College, as JTF 505 operations wound down. "We understand each other; we know what the need is. So it has been a tremendous help for us while you were here, and helping us to get things in the proper direction. It's been a great help."[42]

USPACOM Operation Sahayogi Haat Joint After Action Review (JAAR)

Under the direction of USPACOM, the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management (CFE-DM) conducted a Joint After-Action Review (JAAR) of Operation SAHAYOGI HAAT, completed in January 2016. The report analyzed the USPACOM response and the purpose for this review was to inform future operations, actions, and activities, and to help USPACOM to respond more effectively to future regional foreign disaster response events.

"Nepal's response to the disaster, although constrained by limited resources and a very difficult geography, was largely effective. While international civilian and military efforts filled critical gaps and reinforced the Government of Nepal during the initial crisis, Nepal bore the primary burden for coordinating and responding to this disaster."
– USPACOM JAAR Executive Summary

Findings/Recommendations:
One of the key findings of the report was that while responders faced many challenges in the response, Nepal's response overall was considered to be effective. (See adjoining text box)

Other select findings from the USPACOM perspective were:

- "U.S. Pacific Command security cooperation engagements and capacity building exercises were vital in preparing the Nepal Army for its role during a major earthquake response…."

- "Pre-disaster civilian-military theater engagements with regional partners, organizations, and international agencies facilitated a reasonably collaborative, foreign disaster response."

- "The multi-year, pre-disaster planning effort led by Joint Task Force 505 (III Marine Expeditionary Force Command Element) provided situational awareness and positively influenced civil-military coordination. The Ambassador and U.S. State Department country team were familiar with the deploying commander and principal staff due to previous planning and senior leader activities."

- "Building more continuity of knowledge regarding previous Nepal earthquake disaster response planning and the Joint Task Force 505 Nepal Concept Plan would have facilitated the initial U.S. Pacific Command crisis planning and increased situational awareness."[43]

Findings and recommendations useful for foreign military responders in general include:

- "The identification and staging of key military enablers (e.g. aircraft, airfield operations capabilities, Operational Contract Support stakeholders, etc.) facilitated a more timely and efficient response to the affected state."

42 "Nepal Joint Task Force Begins Drawing Down," https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/604680/nepal-joint-task-force-begins-drawing-down/
43 "U.S. Pacific Command Operation SAHAYOGI HAAT Joint After-Action Review Executive Summary," https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Publications/Reports/Nepal-EQ-JAAR

- "The Intermediate Staging Base at Utapao, Thailand was essential for posturing U.S. forces. Overflight, immigration, and border-nation coordination remain a challenge and require proactive, speedy action…"[44]

For additional findings/recommendations please access the USPACOM Nepal JAAR report at: *https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Publications/Reports*

Much of the response lessons observed in both USPACOM and the NA after action reviews reveal mostly affected state or assisting state observations unique to each experience, however there are a couple of lessons observed which the USPACOM JAAR found to be in common with the NA AAR. These are:

1) Bilateral agreements. Both reports agree that having agreements in place before a disaster occurs would help in smooth military-military coordination. The USPACOM JAAR states:

- "Assisting states responded on a bilateral basis. This challenged Nepal Government coordination and reduced efficiency, particularly during the immediate response to the initial earthquake."
- "A Status of Forces Agreement, Logistics Support Agreement, or Acquisition and CrossServicing Agreement with Nepal would have enhanced the U.S. Pacific Command disaster response."[45]

2) MNMCC as a coordination platform. Both reviews agreed upon the importance of the establishment of the MNMCC and the vital role it played primarily in military-military and also in civil-military coordination during the response:

- "…The Nepal Army's Multinational Military Coordination Center (MNMCC) was the primary mechanism for coordinating the Nepali government and the international disaster response efforts during the chaotic first week after the earthquake struck."[46]

Conclusion

This case study was a brief look at the response by the Nepalese Army and the support provided by USPACOM as well as identifying key lessons learned from each militaries' perspective and identifying common observations and recommendations. While this brief case study looked primarily at the perspective of the NA and USPACOM response, lessons from each military can help forge best practices for all regional militaries that may be involved in future responses in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

The support by assisting foreign militaries was vital in helping the response led by the GoN and Nepalese military, although Nepal bore much of the burden for coordination and relief efforts, and led the overall success of the response. Foreign militaries provided additional unique capabilities where the NA did not have the national capacity for, including search and rescue, additional airlift, and specialized equipment.

Contributing factors to the overall success of this response was the collective efforts of the 18 foreign militaries (And of course, the many other generous non-military contributions from other assisting

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.

states and the international humanitarian community) who worked closely with the Nepalese Army, resulting in the saving of additional lives and the easing of the suffering of a populace that had to deal with the devastation from two powerful earthquakes within just weeks of each other.

Early establishment of a coordinating mechanism or center for military coordination, in this case, the MNMCC, as well as the establishment of other civil-military coordination centers—the HuMOCC and OSOCC--for the overall communication and coordination between foreign militaries and civilian responders, was key to the success of the response.

Although not discussed in depth here, both AAR's and responders to the earthquake note that capacity building exercises, engagements and simply getting to know and network with other potential responding militaries and HADR actors in the region prior to a disaster occurring, is important in preparing and coordinating military and civilian responders for a disaster response.

It is essential for after action reviews to capture observations and lessons from each operation, however, it is even more vital for military responders to carefully note these lessons and put them into use as best practices going forward for future generations of responders. Some lessons may turn out to be entirely unique to a particular disaster response, while others may turn out to be a common recurring theme or challenge. It is crucial for militaries in the region to quickly capture and identify these potential shortcomings in an effort to improve military-military and also civil-military coordination in the future.

This and other CFE case studies are structured to help inform future USPACOM and other foreign military response and civil-military coordination in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, or at the very least, identify areas in need of improvement that can be bolstered by continued or increased information sharing, research, training, education and bilateral and multilateral engagements.

Questions for Discussion

1. *What lessons/observations from the Nepalese Army and US Pacific Command could be used for future military disaster response? What would you say are the most important lessons learned? Is there anything you would do differently? Why?*
2. *What are the critical gaps USPACOM and other foreign militaries helped fill during relief efforts?*
3. *Who is the lead U.S. federal agency in a disaster response? Why is it important for U.S. military forces to follow this lead federal agency?*
4. *What is the importance of establishing a coordination center, such as the MNMCC, early on in a multi-nation military response? How important are the other coordination centers? (i.e., OSOCC, HuMOCC, etc.)*
5. *A JTF is often stood up to help respond to a major disaster. What capabilities does a JTF bring to a response? At what stage is it appropriate for a JTF to deactivate and redeploy? What are the roles/functions of smaller military units such as the JHAST and CRG?*
6. *Why is it important to follow the lead of the affected state in a disaster response?*
7. *How are prior bilateral and multilateral military engagements and exercises useful when faced with responding to a real-life natural disaster?*

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