

Introduction

On January 12, 2010, a massive earthquake struck southwest of Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. The magnitude 7.0 earthquake,¹ the strongest to strike Haiti in 200 years, lasted for 35 seconds, killing 230,000 people, injuring 300,000 and displacing 1.6 million.²



The day following the earthquake, U.S. President Barack Obama ordered a whole of government response to the disaster. The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), part of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) led the massive undertaking, marshalling the collective resources of the entire U.S. interagency community, to include the U.S. Department of Defense. Ultimately, over 22,000 members of the U.S. armed services participated in Operation Unified Response, the name of the U.S. military's effort in support of the Haitian people.

"I have directed my administration to respond with a swift, coordinated, and aggressive effort to save lives. The people of Haiti will have the full support of the United States in the urgent effort to rescue those trapped beneath the rubble, and to deliver the humanitarian relief -- the food, water and medicine -- that Haitians will need in the coming days. In that effort, our government, especially USAID and the Departments of State and Defense are working closely together and with our partners in Haiti, the region, and around the world."

-President Barack Obama, January 13, 2010³

This case study provides an overview of the U.S. military effort in support of Haiti. As you read through the report, consider the following questions: Who were they and what roles did the U.S. military's interagency partners play in Operation Unified Response? What are the unique capabilities that the U.S. military brings to foreign disaster response? Can you identify the individual strengths that ground, maritime and air assets can bring to disaster relief efforts? What lessons can be learned from Operation Unified Response that might inform future U.S. military responses to sudden-onset natural disasters?

¹ US Geologic Survey: M – 7.0 Haiti region, January 12, 2010, accessed March 24, 2019 at <https://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eventpage/usp000h60h/executive>

² Independent Review of the U.S. Government Response to the Haiti Earthquake, March 2011, accessed March 19, 2019 at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacr222.pdf

³ C-SPAN. Presidential Remarks on Haiti Relief Efforts, January 13, 2010, accessed March 19, 2019 at: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?291294-1/presidential-remarks-haiti-relief-efforts>

History and pre-quake political situation

Haiti, *land of high mountains* in the language of the indigenous Taino people, is situated less than 700 miles (1,100 km) from the U.S. mainland. Approximately the size of Massachusetts, it occupies the western portion of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic.⁴ Discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492, Hispaniola was claimed as a Spanish colony.⁵ Under the Spanish, the small indigenous population was enslaved and exploited in gold mines, and virtually annihilated in the quarter century following discovery.⁶ Beginning in 1519, the Spanish began importing African slaves, over 800,000 being brought over in the next 30 years alone. Their lives were short under brutal conditions, with an estimated 10 percent dying each year.⁷ This was driven by the colonial masters finding it cheaper to buy new slaves from Africa than keep alive the ones they had.⁸ Sugarcane and cattle farming eventually replaced exhausted gold mines as the economic mainstay of the island. Haiti was once known as the Pearl of the Antilles in regard to its natural beauty and was the richest colony in the West Indies. In 1697 Spain ceded the western third of the island to the French. Continued colonial exploitation by the French followed. However, inspired by the French Revolution, a slave-led revolt began in 1791. Historically the only major slave revolt to have succeeded, it resulted in the nation's independence in 1804. Haiti thus became the second independent country in the Western Hemisphere after the United States.⁹ However, post-independence Haiti was challenged from the outset. Partially due to the threat other slaveholding nations perceived from the successful slave revolt, Haiti was embargoed and denied recognition, including by the United States. In the next century, France demanded millions in gold payment (billions in today's dollars) for an indemnity, due to Haitian independence causing France to lose its most valuable wealth-producing colony.

The United States first invaded in Haiti in 1915. Haiti had already been experiencing turmoil prior to that, with six presidents having been overthrown in the preceding four years alone.¹⁰ The U.S. subsequently occupied the nation from 1915 to 1934. Instability and dictatorship characterized Haiti from 1934 until the 1991 democratic election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. However, later that same year



Source: CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/ha.html>

4 CIA: The World Factbook – Haiti, accessed March 24, 2019 at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ha.html>

5 National Geographic: Keeping Hope Alive in Haiti, January 14, 2011, accessed March 24, 2019 at <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/news/keeping-hope-alive-haiti/>

6 Raviola, Giuseppe, et al: The 2010 Haiti Earthquake Response, 2013, accessed March 25, 2019 at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0193953X13000658?via%3Dihub>

7 Katz, Jonathan M. *The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, p. 38.

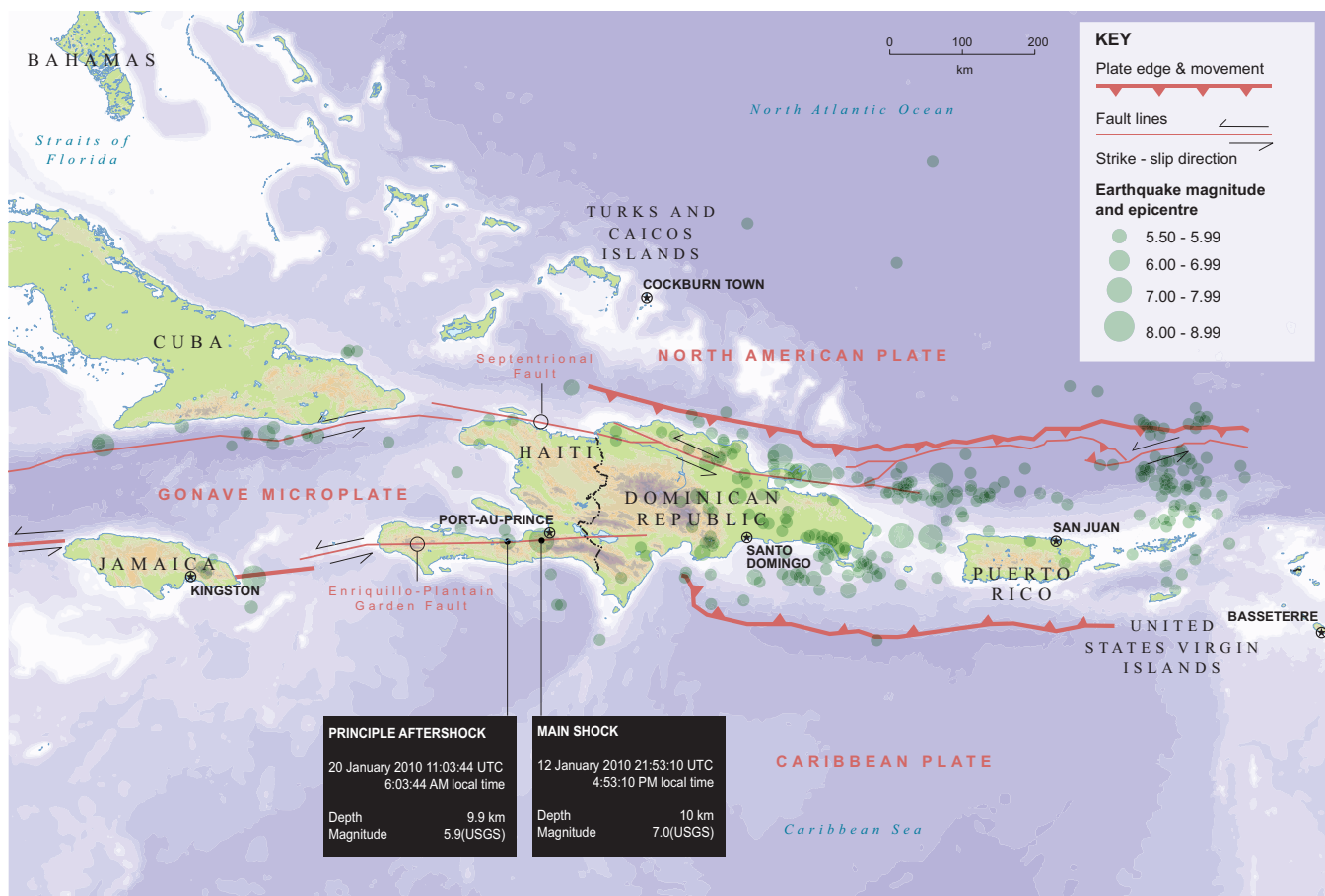
8 Dubois, Laurent. *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, Metropolitan, New York, 2012, p. 21.

9 U.S. Department of State: The United States and the Haitian Revolution, 1791–1804, accessed March 21, 2019 at <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/haitian-rev>

10 Katz, Jonathan M. p. 39.

Aristide was overthrown in a coup. In 1994, a diplomatic delegation led by former President Jimmy Carter and including Senator Sam Nunn and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell, convinced the military junta to step down and allow the democratically-elected Aristide to return to power. Operation Uphold Democracy was the parallel military effort poised to enter the country that gave teeth to the diplomatic push. Additionally, General Powell's personal relationship with the main coup leader, General Joseph Raoul Cédras, served to convince the junta to give up power peacefully. Powell knew Cédras when the latter was a student at the "School of the Americas" as a young military officer.¹¹

Despite the military being formally dissolved during his first term, a coup by ex-army paramilitaries in 2004 forced Aristide from power a second time. Instability then led to the establishment of a UN peacekeeping mission that same year, the United Nations Stabilization Mission for Haiti (known by its French acronym, MINUSTAH). Despite economic reforms and a reduction in chronic unemployment, Haiti continued to be plagued by political instability and deep poverty. Prior to the earthquake, Haiti, population 10 million, was among the poorest countries in the world, ranked 145th out of 169 countries on the Human Development Index.¹² MINUSTAH thus remained in Haiti until 2017 and was present during the January 2010 earthquake and subsequent response.¹³



Source: CGIAR, United Nations Cartographic Section, ESRI, GBCO, Natural Earth, USGS.

11 U.S. Department of State: Intervention in Haiti, 1994–1995, accessed March 21, 2019 at <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/haiti>

12 UNDP: Human Development Index, accessed March 25, 2019 at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>

13 United Nations: MINUSTAH Fact Sheet, accessed March 21, 2019 at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minustah>

The earthquake

At 4:53 pm local time on January 12, 2010, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck 25 km west of the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince.¹⁴ This was both the strongest earthquake to strike Haiti in 200 years and the largest ever recorded in the nation. The quake lasted for 35 seconds, killing 230,000 people, injuring 300,000 and displacing 1.6 million. Approximately three million persons, one-third of the population, were affected by the quake.¹⁵ In addition to supporting the massive whole of government response that was descending on the devastated capital, the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince coordinated the evacuation of over 16,000 American citizens who had been caught up in the disaster. This constituted the largest evacuation of U.S. citizens since World War II.¹⁶



Presidential Palace, Haiti Earthquake – 2010

Photo Credit: Photo shot by team sent by the FCC to assist communications recovery in Haiti.

Source: http://www.publicdomainfiles.com/show_file.php?id=13991290827556

The Haitian government was also a casualty of the earthquake. The Presidential Palace and fourteen of sixteen government ministries were destroyed. Hundreds of government officials lost their lives, to include nearly 20% of the police force.¹⁷ The affected state has primary responsibility and authority for coordinating the disaster response. Haiti was particularly challenged in this capacity, however, given the virtual dissolution of the Haitian government.¹⁸ This would lead to the necessity of other actors acting in an especially robust manner, in particular, USAID/OFDA and the U.S. military, in responding and providing assistance in support of Haiti.

The quake also took its toll among the political leadership of the United Nations. The UN's head of mission, deputy, and acting police commissioner were all killed in the collapse of their headquarters located at the Hotel Christopher.¹⁹ Altogether, 102 peacekeepers were killed.²⁰ MINUSTAH subsequently supported the efforts of the Haitian National Police in providing security throughout Port-au-Prince

14 US Geologic Survey: M – 7.0 Haiti region, January 12, 2010, accessed March 24, 2019 at <https://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eventpage/usp000h60h/executive>

15 Independent Review of the U.S. Government Response to the Haiti Earthquake, March 2011, accessed March 19, 2019 at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacr222.pdf

16 Ibid

17 RAND: The U.S. military response to the 2010 Haiti Earthquake: Considerations for Army Leaders, 2013, accessed March 24, 2019 at https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR300/RR304/RAND_RR304.pdf

18 CRS: Haiti Earthquake: Crisis and Response, May 6, 2010, accessed March 24, 2019 at https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R41023.html#_Toc261437589

19 UN News: Ban mourns deaths of top UN officials in Haiti quake, January 16, 2010, accessed March 25, 2019 at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2010/01/326752-ban-mourns-deaths-top-un-officials-haiti-quake>

20 UN: Memorial to UN Family Killed in Haiti Earthquake, accessed March 25, 2019 at <http://www.un.org/en/memorial/haiti/>

and other disaster-affected areas. In addition, MINUSTAH and UNOCHA created a Joint Operations Task Center (JOTC) to coordinate relief efforts, in particular requests for assistance from the vast array of actors in the broader humanitarian community in Haiti.²¹ The U.S. Joint Task Force, in turn, created a Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Cell (HACC) to liaise with this body.²²

“The careful coordination between the U.S. military planners, UN/WFP staff, GOH officials, and NGO community represented the pinnacle of civil-military coordination.”

-Independent Review of the U.S. Government Response to the Haiti Earthquake²³

Alongside the massive loss of life, the earthquake devastated critical transportation infrastructure, in particular roads, bridges and seaports. This damage would seriously hamper aid delivery in the coming weeks and months, dictating in large part the nature and mechanisms of the disaster response, in particular that of the U.S. military. Telecommunications infrastructure fared no better, with no landline and cell phone connections able to function following the earthquake. In addition, the vast majority of radio stations went off the air, hindering any communications regarding the extent of the damage as well as preventing any public service announcements such as where to go for shelter, medical aid, or food and water.



Stacks of supplies shipped by the World Food Program to Haiti frame the tail of an Air Force C-17 Globemaster III transport at the airport in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Photo credit: U.S. Air Force photo by Capt. Dustin Doyle

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/245313/joint-task-force-organizes-haitian-airport>



Airplanes wait for off-load to support in earthquake relief efforts at the Port-au-Prince International Airport.

Photo credit: Petty Officer 2nd Class Justin Stumberg

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/241020/haiti-relief-efforts>

21 ODI: Looking back, moving forward: Applying the lessons learnt from the Haiti Earthquake response, October 26, 2010, accessed March 25, 2019 at <https://www.odi.org/events/2466-looking-back-moving-forward-applying-lessons-learnt-haiti-earthquake-response>

22 UNDAC: Haiti Earthquake January 2010, accessed March 25, 2019 at https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/UNDAC%20Haiti%20Mission%20Report.pdf

23 Independent Review of the U.S. Government Response to the Haiti Earthquake, March 2011, accessed March 19, 2019 at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacr222.pdf

USG response - Washington

On January 13, one day following the earthquake, President Obama ordered a whole of government response to the disaster. The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), part of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) would lead the effort, marshalling the resources of the entire U.S. interagency community, to include the U.S. Department of Defense. An interagency task force composed of representatives from across government would coordinate the response at the national level.

OFDA is the US designated lead federal agency in foreign disaster response. OFDA, following a disaster declaration by the resident U.S. Ambassador, will direct any subsequent U.S. response, to include on the part of the Department of Defense. OFDA will also deploy their own Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DART) for damage assessment and coordination as well as stand up a Response Management Team in Washington to support DART teams in the field. It's OFDA that will determine if responding to the disaster is beyond the capabilities of the affected state, United Nations agencies, and broader humanitarian community. If so, OFDA, after exhausting commercial options, will then reach out to the U.S. military for the unique capabilities that only it can bring to foreign disaster response missions: logistics support (e.g., helicopters), specialty engineering (bridge repair, for instance), command and control (especially of damaged airports), etc.

Rajiv Shah, the Administrator of USAID, was sworn into office only five days prior to the earthquake. Later on he would observe that strong leadership by President Obama, backed by both Congressional and



Members of the Los Angeles County Fire Department Search and Rescue Team clear debris at a collapsed building in downtown Port-au-Prince.

Photo credit: Petty Officer 2nd Class Justin Stumberg

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/241022/haiti-relief-efforts>



The IOM coordinates with military personnel to distribute food aid in Haiti after the devastating 2010 earthquake.

Photo Credit: IOM

Source: The Liaison, Vol. VII, Spring 2015, p. 14. <https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Portals/0/liaison/liaison-2015-vol07.pdf>

public support, enabled stronger interagency coordination in Washington and ultimately a more effective disaster response effort on the ground in Haiti.²⁴ However, directing a “whole of government” response to a massive foreign disaster for the very first time constituted a major departure for USAID, expanding its roles and responsibilities, but also challenging its resources, capabilities, and management processes.²⁵

On January 13, a seventeen-person DART deployed to Haiti to direct the forthcoming wave of U.S. aid. That same day the White House directed the Department of Defense to support the OFDA-led response. According to then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, President Obama sought a swift, highly visible response to the disaster, but was also understandably concerned about U.S. forces getting bogged down providing security.²⁶

“Since... the first hours and days are absolutely critical to saving lives and avoiding even greater tragedy, I have directed my teams to be as forward-leaning as possible in getting the help on the ground and coordinating with our international partners as well.”

-President Obama, January 13, 2010

USG response - Port-au-Prince

Lieutenant General Ken Keen, Deputy Commander, U.S. Southern Command, happened to be in Haiti during the earthquake, having arrived that very morning for meetings with Haitian government officials and U.S. Embassy staff. He was at the official residence of the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti, Ken Merten, when the earthquake struck. Undamaged, the Ambassador’s residence became the unofficial headquarters for the U.S. response in Haiti.

Lieutenant General Keen and the MINUSTAH Commander, Major General Floriano Peixoto, demonstrated the importance of relationships cultivated prior to the onset of disaster. Keen and Peixoto met each other in 1984 during Keen’s exchange program with the Brazilian Airborne Brigade. They became fast friends, neither knowing that they would be working alongside one another a quarter century later responding to a devastating earthquake in Haiti.²⁷



U.S. Army Lt. Gen. P.K. Keen, deputy commander of U.S. Southern Command and commanding general of Joint Task Force-Haiti, and Brazilian military Gen. Floriano Peixoto, commander of United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, sit for a brief from U.S. Soldiers with the 82nd Airborne Division March 11, 2010, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. U.S. Soldiers from the 82nd Airborne were some of the first to respond after an earthquake destroyed parts of the Port-au-Prince area.

Photo credit: Senior Chief Mass Communication Specialist Spike Call

Source: <http://www.defenseimagery.mil>, <https://goo.gl/Jc4oXS>

24 Guha-Sapir, & Kirsch, D. S. (2010). Haiti Earthquake Interagency Lessons Learned. Washington DC: USG workshop.

25 Independent Review of the U.S. Government Response to the Haiti Earthquake, March 2011, accessed March 19, 2019 at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacr222.pdf

26 Robert Gates: Duty – Memoirs of a Secretary at War.

27 Military Review: Relationships Matter – HADR in Haiti, May-June 2010, accessed March 25, 2019 at https://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20100630_art004.pdf

USG response – U.S. Southern Command

U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), headquartered just outside Miami, Florida, is responsible for providing contingency planning, operations, and security cooperation in Central America, South America and the Caribbean (excepting U.S. commonwealths, territories, and possessions). SOUTHCOM is also responsible for ensuring the defense of the Panama Canal. SOUTHCOM took responsibility for planning and organizing what became Operation Unified Response.



Mission Statement: Joint Task Force – Haiti

"JTF-Haiti conducts humanitarian assistance and foreign disaster response operations in support of USAID in Haiti to save lives, mitigate near-term human suffering and accelerate relief efforts to facilitate transition to GoH, UN, and USAID."

Operation Unified Response

Joint Task Force (JTF) – Haiti was established January 14, 2010, primarily from units of the XVIII Airborne Corps and 82nd Airborne Division. SOUTHCOM, undermanned at the outset of the crisis, was also quickly augmented from other combatant commands.

In order to guide planning, LTG Keen issued the mission statement for the forthcoming operation: ***"JTF-Haiti conducts humanitarian assistance and foreign disaster response operations in support of USAID in Haiti to save lives, mitigate near-term human suffering and accelerate relief efforts to facilitate transition to the Government of Haiti, United Nations, and USAID."***

The first major challenge was obtaining adequate damage estimates from which to determine key tasks for U.S. military forces. The following were established as Mission Essential Tasks:

- Conduct Command, Control, Planning, and Coordinate the Response/Relief Effort in support of USAID as Lead U.S. Agency
- Open and Manage the Airfield; Repair and Open the Port
- Support Search and Rescue Operations
- Provide Emergency Medical Assistance
- Support the Distribution of Water and Food
- Provide Humanitarian Assistance to Displaced Persons (DP) Camps
- Provide Engineer Support to UN and NGOs. Clear routes, rubble, structure assessments, IDP camps

Compared with past and future foreign disaster response missions, this mission was far more expansive, owing to the scale of the damage and inability of the affected state to assume full responsibility for the response. Physical proximity to the continental United States also meant that significant assets were available to military planners.

In the first few days following the earthquake, multiple US agencies, including the Department of Defense, conducted surveillance missions in order to determine the extent of damage. The first U.S. military asset utilized was a U.S. Navy P-3 Orion that flew to Haiti the morning after the earthquake. Additional aircraft employed included the unmanned aerial vehicle Global Hawk.²⁸ These initial surveys confirmed the overwhelming destruction of government ministries, residential housing and transportation infrastructure.²⁹

U.S. Coast Guard Cutters *Forward*, *Mohawk*, *Tahoma*, and *Legare* were the first U.S. assets to arrive on scene one day after the earthquake. These units provided air traffic control for military aircraft, conducted damage assessments of the port, and ferried supplies and injured people with their embarked boats and helicopters.^{30,31} The U.S. Coast Guard, America's maritime first responder, is part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in peacetime, but can be transferred to the Department of the Navy in wartime.

The earthquake caused severe damage to the main seaport at Port-au-Prince, obliterating the North Pier outright and destroying over half of the South Pier. Prior to the quake, 95% of all goods came into Haiti via this port. Army and Navy engineers, assigned to Joint Task Force Port Opening, set to work repairing the damage. The port was reopened ten days after the quake and capacity was soon doubled. Repairs to both piers allowed for the delivery of over 8,000 shipping containers worth of relief supplies.³² Joint logistics over the shore (JLOTS), a suite of unique military capabilities, filled the gap until port operations could resume. JLOTS is a combined Army and Navy capability to both load and unload ships without the use of proper port facilities.³³



An RQ-4 Global Hawk, like the one pictured above, was launched from Beale Air Force Base, Calif., Jan. 13, 2010, to assist with the humanitarian aid mission in Haiti after the country suffered a 7.0 magnitude earthquake Jan. 12, 2010.

Photo credit: U.S. Air Force

Source: <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/118024/beale-officials-send-global-hawk-to-aid-in-haiti-earthquake-relief-efforts/>



Coast Guard line handlers on the pier assist crewmembers of Coast Guard Cutter *Forward* with mooring up to the north pier at Base Support Unit Portsmouth when they arrive after a 52-day patrol, Thursday, Feb. 18, 2010. During the patrol, the crew participated in a cooperative drug bust with Bahamian authorities, and they served as the first Coast Guard responders to the earthquake in Haiti Jan. 12.

Photo Credit: by Petty Officer 3rd Class Mark Jones.

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/1094336/cgc-forward-returns-home-haiti>

28 U.S. Air Force: Beale officials send Global Hawk to aid in Haiti earthquake relief efforts, January 14, 2010, accessed March 26, 2019 at <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/118024/beale-officials-send-global-hawk-to-aid-in-haiti-earthquake-relief-efforts/>

29 U.S. Air Force: Military preps for broader Haiti relief mission, January 13, 2010, accessed March 26, 2019 at <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/118039/military-preps-for-broader-haiti-relief-mission/>

30 Coast Guard Compass: Update – Coast Guard Response to Haiti Earthquake, accessed March 26, 2019 at <https://coastguard.dodlive.mil/2010/01/update-coast-guard-response-to-haiti-earthquake/>

31 U.S. Coast Guard: 2010 – The Haitian Earthquake, accessed March 26, 2019 at <https://cgaviationhistory.org/2010-the-haitian-earthquake/>

32 Stars and Stripes: Rebuilding Haiti's demolished port is no small task for U.S., February 28, 2010, accessed March 26, 2019 at <https://www.stripes.com/news/rebuilding-haiti-s-demolished-port-is-no-small-task-for-u-s-1.99687>

33 Fisher, R.F. (2013). The relevance and future of Joint Logistics Over The Shore (JLOTS) Operations, National Defense University Joint Forces Staff College, accessed March 26, 2019 at <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a581316.pdf>

The hospital ship USNS Comfort was deployed to Haiti from January 19 to March 10. Over the course of seven weeks, the ship's U.S. military and civilian medical personnel treated 871 patients, receiving one patient every six to nine minutes at the height of the recovery effort. Comfort's medical staff also performed 843 surgeries aboard the ship, treating more than 540 critically-injured earthquake survivors within the first 10 days. Comfort's medics also treated U.S. and international military personnel transferred to the ship by physicians on the ground for surgical and non-surgical care.³⁴

The military crew of the Comfort was augmented by 240 medical volunteers from nine different humanitarian NGOs, among them Project Hope, Operation Smile and the Orthopedic Trauma Association. These volunteers provided critical orthopedic trauma, surgical, nursing and anesthesia support to military physicians.³⁵

During their mission, Comfort's crew also worked closely with Haiti's Ministry of Health to secure follow-on care for patients recovering from their injuries. This was not Comfort's first deployment to Haiti. Comfort visited Port-au-Prince in April 2009 as part of Operation Continuing Promise 2009, a four-month humanitarian and civic assistance deployment to seven nations in the Caribbean, Central and South America.³⁶

Within 24 hours, the heavily damaged but still usable Toussaint Louverture International Airport was hosting units from the 1st Special Operations Wing based in Florida. These units focused on restoring air traffic management for the forthcoming flood of military and civilian aircraft bringing in



A fully operational port as seen March 22 shows a steel gray Brazilian Navy vessel, center, loading equipment belonging to Brazilian soldiers assigned to the MINUSTAH. The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti was established, June 1, 2004, by Security Council Resolution 1542. The catastrophic damage caused by the Jan. 12 earthquake brought the port to a standstill. United States Army and Navy units arrived mid-January and immediately began conducting Joint Logistics Over The Shore. "JLOTS consists of loading / unloading of ships without fixed port facilities, in friendly or nondefended territory, and, in time of war, during phases of theater development in which there is no opposition by the enemy." (Source: Global Security.Org) "The great benefit of JLOTS during this operation was two-fold," said Col. Charles Maskell, commander, 7th Sustainment Brigade. "First, it allowed us to bring in life saving aid over the shore when it was most needed and the port was unavailable. Secondly, it took pressure off the port's South pier so that the Army divers and Navy underwater construction Sailors could reinforce it. The repair of the South pier may be our most lasting legacy at the main seaport in Port au Prince."

Photo credit: Sgt 1st Class Kelly Jo Bridgwater

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/262982/haitian-port-sky>

34 U.S. Navy: Hospital Ship USNS Comfort Completes Important Relief Mission in Haiti, March 9, 2010, accessed March 26, 2019 at https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=51807

35 U.S. Navy: Project Hope Volunteers Leave NAS Jacksonville For USNS Comfort, January 29, 2010, accessed March 26, 2019 at https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=50932

36 U.S. Department of Defense: Clinton Observes Continuing Promise at Work in Haiti, April 17, 2009, accessed March 26, 2019 at <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=53976>

relief supplies. Prior to the earthquake, the airport averaged 13 flights per day; however, from January 16 to 18 alone, 330 aircraft landed. The initial relief effort drove was underpinned by what became the largest single-runway operation in history, with 4,000 takeoffs and landings, one every 5 minutes, in the first twelve days following the earthquake.³⁷ The U.S. Air Force managed air traffic control functions until control of the airport was fully returned to the Haitian government on March 15.

With no military and having lost upwards of 20% of its police force, the Government of Haiti lacked the capacity to provide security for the growing camps of internally displaced persons (IDPs). However, LTG Keen was understandably concerned about U.S. troops directly assuming such a sensitive mission. He therefore ordered his forces to indirectly assist IDP camp operations. This was accomplished by supporting the security mission of both MINUSTAH peacekeeping forces and the Haitian police. The U.S. military also worked alongside USAID and the humanitarian community to develop plans for moving IDPs at risk due to the upcoming hurricane season. JTF-Haiti also conducted assessments and executed multiple engineering projects to mitigate flood risks and thus reduce the number of people who would require relocation.

Cholera

The reintroduction of cholera to Haiti was an unfortunate result of the international presence supporting Haiti's security and reconstruction.³⁸ Cholera is an infectious, water-borne illness that causes an acute-onset, watery diarrheal illness that can lead to rapid dehydration, shock and, if not treated immediately, death.³⁹ The first cases appeared in the Central Plateau in October 2010 and have, to date, sickened over 800,000 Haitians in every department



PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - The U.S. Naval hospital ship, USNS Comfort, provides a platform for a U.S. Coast Guard HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter during a medical evacuation, Jan. 20, 2010. After a 7.0-magnitude earthquake destroyed much of Haiti's capital city. Multiple Coast Guard assets deployed to Haiti to provide humanitarian relief and provide medical evacuation and assistance.

Photo Credit: U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Brandon Blackwell.

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/1094161/haiti-earthquake-relief>



Combat controllers from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla., talk to aircraft circling the Toussaint L'Ouverture International Airport in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Jan. 23, 2010. In the initial days of Operation Unified Response air operations were similar to the Berlin Airlift with aircraft landing every five minutes.

Photo credit: U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Desiree N. Palacios

Source: <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/117884/combat-controllers-crucial-to-haiti-earthquake-relief/>

³⁷ Robert Gates: Duty – Memoirs of a Secretary at War.

³⁸ MSF: Emergency response after the Haiti earthquake: Choices, obstacles and finance, July 8, 2010, accessed March 25, 2019 at <https://www.msf.org/emergency-response-after-haiti-earthquake-choices-obstacles-and-finance>

³⁹ CDC: 2010 Haiti Cholera Outbreak & CDC Response, accessed March 19, 2019 at <https://www.cdc.gov/cholera/haiti/2010-outbreak-response.html>

of the country, killing over 10,000.⁴⁰ It's likely the true burden of illness is vastly higher due to underreporting of illness and deaths outside the formal healthcare system.⁴¹

Cholera had been eradicated from Haiti over a century prior. However, it was inadvertently reintroduced into Haiti via the improper disposal of untreated sewage from a United Nations peacekeeping base.⁴² Sadly, the cholera epidemic that was sparked in October 2010 continues to this day, as the disease has become endemic, sickening thousands every year. Cholera persists in Haiti primarily due to the lack of clean water and adequate sanitation facilities.⁴³ The cholera outbreak in Haiti has only been surpassed by the ongoing epidemic in Yemen, where nearly 1.1 million persons have become infected, with well over 2,000 associated deaths.⁴⁴

While unprecedented, the cholera outbreak in Haiti is nonetheless worth considering as an example of the second and third order effects that are possible with foreign military interventions. While neither national security decision makers nor military planners can foresee all such eventualities, the potential for such effects should ideally inform both deliberate and crisis action planning at all levels.



Marines with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit work with a MINUSTAH member to provide security during the food distribution Feb. 2 in the Carrefour district of Port-au-Prince. This was one of 16 distribution points that will be actively providing humanitarian assistance in and around Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Photo credit: U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Victoria Meyer
Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/249330/haiti-relief-efforts>



Joint team conducts drop zone survey. Makeshift shelters serve as homes for many as tents dot the open landscape in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Jan. 24, 2010.

Photo Credit: U.S. Air Force photo/Master Sgt. Jeremy Lock
Source: http://www.publicdomainfiles.com/show_file.php?id=13509195618196

40 National Geographic: The state of Cholera, and Water, in Haiti, August 6, 2011, accessed March 24, 2019 at <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2011/08/06/the-state-of-cholera-and-water-in-haiti/>

41 Yodeline Guillaume, Ralph Ternier, Kenia Vissieres, Alain Casseus, Maurice J Chery, Louise C Ivers; Responding to Cholera in Haiti: Implications for the National Plan to Eliminate Cholera by 2022, The Journal of Infectious Diseases, Volume 218, Issue suppl_3, 15 October 2018, Pages S167–S170, <https://doi.org/10.1093/infdis/jiy491>

42 Ibid.

43 WHO: Health response to the earthquake in Haiti, accessed March 21, 2019 at <http://new.paho.org/disasters/dmdocuments/healthresponsehaitiearthq.pdf>

44 WHO. Yemen Cholera Response, accessed March 19, 2019 at http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/yemen/week_26.pdf?ua=1

Lessons learned

In the months and years following the 2010 Haiti earthquake, many different actors undertook multiple after action reviews and studies of the response. Following are some of the most common challenges, recommendations, and lessons learned.^{45 46 47 48 49}

“The U.S. military’s planning capability is not the most expensive part, but it is probably the most valuable. The international coordination structure would not have stood up if they weren’t there – we tapped into the JTF planning capacity”

-United Nations Strategic Plans Officer⁵⁰

USG or U.S. military-specific

- **Roles and responsibilities:** Strengthening the role of USAID/OFDA as the lead federal agency in international disaster response
- **National Command Authorities:** Importance of the National Security Council in coordinating a “whole of government” response
- **Training:** Continued investment in HA/DR institutions and related training programs for military planners
- **Planning capabilities:** Consideration of U.S. combatant commands establishing Joint Task Force-capable forces prepared to support international disaster response operations
- **Humanitarian principles:** Military actors must better understand the requirements and humanitarian imperative that USAID, NGOs and the broader international humanitarian community abide by
- **U.S. Embassies:** Empowering field missions to coordinate the disaster response vice decision-making being centralized in foreign capitals
- **Information sharing:** Importance of unclassified information sharing tools to better integrate and support the humanitarian community, public and private sectors and foreign military responders

45 Independent Review of the U.S. Government Response to the Haiti Earthquake, March 2011, accessed March 19, 2019 at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacr222.pdf

46 National Defense University: Operation Unified Response – Haiti Earthquake 2010, November 2010, accessed 24 March 2019 at https://jpsc.ndu.edu/Portals/72/Documents/JC2IOS/Additional_Reading/4A_Haiti_HADR_Case_Study_revNov10.pdf

47 UN: Evaluation of OCHA response to the Haiti Earthquake, January 2011, accessed March 24, 2019 at <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/Evaluation%20of%20OCHA%20Response%20to%20the%20Haiti%20Earthquake.pdf>

48 Guha-Sapir, & Kirsch, D. S. (2010). Haiti Earthquake Interagency Lessons Learned. Washington DC: USG workshop.

49 Harvard-NATO: The Haiti Case Study – Toward a comprehensive response to health system strengthening in crisis-affected fragile states, 2012, accessed March 25, 2019 at http://www.jallc.nato.int/products/docs/haiti_case_study.pdf

50 UN: Evaluation of OCHA response to the Haiti Earthquake, January 2011, accessed March 24, 2019 at <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/Evaluation%20of%20OCHA%20Response%20to%20the%20Haiti%20Earthquake.pdf>

General

- **Trust:** Importance of developing trust with partners (civilian and military) in pre-crisis workshops and exercises
- **Flexible planning:** Not all humanitarian contingencies are the same, therefore planning must remain flexible
- **Urban environment:** Unique challenges of disaster response in an urban setting, especially with respect to internally displaced persons
- **COP:** Importance of establishing unity of response by utilizing a common operating picture (COP)
- **UN cluster system:** Importance of inter-cluster coordination, reducing delays in standing up functional clusters
- **Coordination:** Integrating and linking coordination at the national and local level remains problematic
- **Humanitarian community:** UNOCHA's ability to coordinate the many disparate players (local, national, international) in the broader humanitarian community remains a challenge



A C-130 Hercules transport lands as Air Force aerial porters move cargo at the airport in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Photo Credit: U.S. Air Force photo by Capt. Dustin Doyle)

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/245312/joint-task-force-organizes-haitian-airport>

Conclusion

The overall U.S. Government response to the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and the U.S. military response, in particular, stand out for a variety of reasons. Both the magnitude of the destruction as well as the proximity to the U.S. mainland dictated a whole of government approach underpinned by the massive logistical effort that was Operation Unified Response. Conversely, most U.S. military disaster response operations are limited in scope and time, often secondary to the tyranny of distance, other responders in the broader international humanitarian community, and the capabilities and resilience of the affected state itself. However, history teaches that other large scale disasters in the Western Hemisphere are not only possible, but likely, and could prompt a similar large scale disaster response similar to that of Haiti. Thus, despite its exceptional nature, Operation Unified Response remains a worthy subject of study by the military planning community.

Looking ahead

It's critical that key lessons are captured from each disaster response. However, it's even more vital for military and civilian responders to carefully note these lessons and incorporate them into procedures and training exercises such that mistakes aren't repeated. While some lessons may well turn out to be unique to a particular disaster response, others quite often highlight recurring challenges.

Quote: "I can honestly say that ... we have not had any problems sharing information. One of the key reasons for this is that from the outset of this crisis, we at the SOUTHCOM Headquarters decided to classify our Operations Order as UNCLASSIFIED. This classification gave us ease of transmission across the military, civilian sectors and with our partner nations."

-BG Garza, USSOUTHCOM Chief of Staff, February 3, 2010 (JCOA, 2010)

This and other CFE case studies are intended to better inform U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and their military and civilian partners in anticipation of future disaster preparedness and response operations. It's hoped that the civil-military coordination and information sharing challenges enumerated herein, as well as their potential solutions, can be applied in future emergencies, thus increasing the speed, volume and effectiveness of response, in turn, saving lives and alleviating human suffering.

Questions for Discussion

1. *What lessons can be learned from U.S. Southern Command's experience in Operation Unified Response that might inform future U.S. Indo-Pacific Command responses to natural disaster? What lessons should pointedly not be drawn?*
2. *Why is it important or even necessary to follow the lead of the host nation / affected state in a disaster response?*
3. *Who is the lead federal agency in disaster response and what is their role in coordination with the U.S. military?*
4. *Both U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and U.S. Southern Command suffer from a tyranny of distance. How is this best mitigated?*
5. *Who were they and what roles did our U.S. interagency partners play in Operation Unified Response?*
6. *What are the unique capabilities that the U.S. military bring to foreign disaster response?*
7. *What are the most urgent needs in any major sudden-onset natural disaster?*
8. *What is the importance of thinking about transition from the very beginning of an operation?*
9. *How can regional arrangements strengthen future disaster response efforts?*
10. *What international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations might you expect to collaborate with in a future disaster response in the Asia-Pacific? Does the private sector have a role to play?*



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