

Introduction

Historically, and in the vast majority of cases, when natural disaster strikes overseas, the U.S. military will only act as a responder of last resort. This means that the affected state and humanitarian community are overwhelmed by the scale of the disaster and unable to address the immediate needs of the affected population without foreign military support. Prior to any U.S. military response commencing, however, the U.S. Ambassador to the affected state would typically declare a disaster. At this point, the lead federal agency in foreign disaster response, the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA), in close concert with the U.S. Ambassador and Country Team, will step in to guide any subsequent U.S. response. OFDA will determine, for instance, if responding to the disaster is beyond the capabilities of the affected state, United Nations agencies, and humanitarian community. If so, OFDA, after exhausting commercial options, would then reach out to the U.S. military for the unique capabilities that it can bring to foreign disaster response missions: logistics support (i.e., helicopters), specialty engineering (bridge repair, for instance), command and control (especially of damaged airports), etc.

What follows are three examples of “exceptions to the rule,” instances where U.S. military forces responded to disasters that did not meet the above criteria. This often occurs when U.S. military forces are already deployed within the affected state (as with the Kumamoto earthquake), happen to be in the region for another purpose (as in the New Zealand earthquake), or are sent with the express intent to demonstrate goodwill (as in the case of the floods in Sri Lanka).

In some cases, USAID/OFDA and/or the U.S. Embassy may have minimal or no involvement in the response, while U.S. military forces are called upon to provide direct support. This is seen in the U.S. Forces Japan response to the Kumamoto earthquakes where no disaster was declared by the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo and the response was not led by USAID/OFDA. Similarly it also occurred in the Kaikoura earthquake response where no disaster was declared by the U.S. Embassy in Wellington and U.S. Navy forces provided support to the New Zealand government, without USAID/OFDA playing the role of lead U.S. Federal agency. The Sri Lanka flood response differed from the other two case studies in that the U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka did declare a disaster and OFDA immediately provided U.S.\$100,000 to a local partner non-governmental organization (NGO) to implement relief on the ground. USAID/OFDA staff in Bangkok and Washington D.C. monitored the situation in coordination with the U.S. Embassy and USAID staff in Colombo.

As you read through the following cases studies, consider the following questions: what discrete lessons can be derived from the above “exceptions to the rule?” What are the unique capabilities that the U.S. military brings to foreign disaster response? What synergies can allies potentially bring to such missions? Can you identify the individual strengths that ground, maritime and air assets can bring to disaster relief efforts? How are prior bilateral and multilateral military engagements and exercises useful when faced with responding to a real-life natural disaster?

Part 1: Kumamoto Earthquakes, Japan April 2016

Introduction

The following case study is an example of U.S. military forces deployed in the affected state prior to the onset of a natural disaster. U.S. military forces have been stationed in Japan since the conclusion of World War II, their role today codified in the Security Treaty between the United States and Japan, which went into effect in 1952. In concert with the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF), U.S. military forces contribute to the security of Japan as well as maintaining international peace and security throughout the Asia-Pacific.

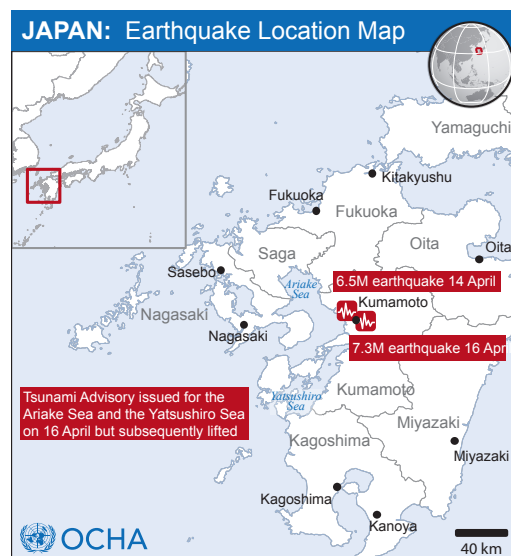
Background

In April 2016, a series of earthquakes struck the Kumamoto region of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan’s major islands. The first, a magnitude 6.5, occurred at 9:26 pm on April 14, followed by hundreds of smaller aftershocks. Two days later, a second magnitude 7.3 earthquake, 16 times more powerful than the first, struck the same area at 1:30 am, leading authorities to classify the 6.5 temblor a foreshock. Both quakes were within six miles of the surface, resulting in severe shaking and infrastructure damage, in particular to roads, bridges and tunnels. Major landslides also cut off remote villages.¹

Seventy-two persons were killed and over 2,000 injured. Nearly 200,000 persons were subsequently evacuated and housed in temporary shelters. Over 160,000 structures sustained serious damage. While over 100,000 homes lost power, nuclear power plants were thankfully unaffected. Complicating the response, damage at Kumamoto Airport temporarily halted flights. Moreover, heavy rains in the days after both impeded relief efforts and led to fears of additional landslides and dam ruptures.²

¹ The Guardian. “Japan hit by second powerful earthquake,” April 16, 2016, accessed February 25, 2019 at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/16/japan-hit-by-second-powerful-earthquake-with-fears-of-more-to-come>

² The Japan Times. “Caught off guard by deadly quakes, Kumamoto still learning lessons one year on,” April 13, 2017. Accessed February 28, 2019 at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/04/13/national/caught-off-guard-deadly-quakes-kumamoto-still-learning-lessons-one-year/#.XHRN3uhKh7g>



Map credit: UNOCHA

Source: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/JPN_eq_160416.pdf

Extensive damage to residential structures and transportation infrastructure generated 180,000 evacuees.³ Many people were forced to spend several nights in their cars amid cold temperatures before adequate shelter was identified.⁴

Authorities even turned to housing evacuees in large ferries as an interim solution. Interagency coordination between the military, national authorities, and local government was therefore critical in order to most effectively provide assistance to the thousands of people forced into well over 700 evacuation centers. Once the displaced were housed, it then became a massive logistical effort to feed and sustain them, particularly the elderly and those with chronic disease or disabilities. In addition to government authorities, the Japanese Red Cross provided medical teams to evacuation centers.^{5, 6}



Yokota Air Base, Japan (April 18, 2016) - Master Sgt. Christopher Bergstrom, 374th Logistics Readiness Squadron air transportation specialist, speaks to a Japan Ground Self-Defense Force member at Chitose, Hokkaido. The 374th Airlift Wing airlifted vehicles and personnel to the island of Kyushu after it was struck by a devastating earthquake.

Photo credit: Michael Washburn

Source: <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/Article/723642/yokota-aids-government-of-japan-with-earthquake-relief/>

The Government of Japan estimated that damage could ultimately top USD \$40 billion.⁷ The quake was the most powerful and damaging natural disaster since the March 2011 Tohoku earthquake, tsunami and radiological (Fukushima) disaster. Additionally, the second, more powerful earthquake's magnitude of 7.3 matched the Great Hanshin-Awaji (Kobe) earthquake of January 1995.⁸

Japanese Military Response

One hour after the first quake, the Governor of Kumamoto requested assistance from the Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF) stationed in North Kumamoto. Across the next six weeks, over 20,000 personnel, composed of elements from the Japanese ground, maritime and air forces, delivered life-saving support to the relief operation.⁹ Over one hundred aircraft were ultimately called upon to support the effort. Owing to the quick restoration of electricity, water, gas, etc., the Joint Task Force formed to support the response was disbanded three weeks later.

3 Ibid.

4 BBC. "Japan quake relief work continues amid aftershocks, April 19, 2016." Accessed February 27, 2019 at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36079483>

5 "UNOCHA: OCHA Flash Update - Japan Kumamoto Earthquake, 21 April 2016," accessed February 28, 2019 at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/japan/ocha-flash-update-japan-kumamoto-earthquake-21-april-2016>

6 IFRC. "Japanese Red Cross Society at the forefront of Kumamoto earthquake emergency response efforts, April 15, 2016," accessed February 28, 2019 at: <http://www.ifrc.org/es/noticias/noticias/asia-pacific/japan/japanese-red-cross-society-at-the-forefront-of-kumamoto-earthquake-emergency-response-efforts--72125/>

7 Nikkei Asian Review, Sept 7, 2018, "Earthquake and typhoon expose Japan's disaster risks," <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Earthquake-and-typhoon-expose-Japan-s-disaster-risks>,

8 The Japan Times. "More powerful magnitude-7.3 quake rocks Kumamoto, kills dozens," April 16, 2016. Accessed February 27, 2019 at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/04/16/national/more-powerful-magnitude-7-3-quake-rocks-kumamoto-kills-dozens-more/#.XHbwTYhKh7j>

9 "2016 Kumamoto Earthquake." Japan Ministry of Defense, 2016. Accessed February 25, 2019 at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000423.html

U.S. Military Response

U.S. military forces stationed in Japan were called upon to complement the Japanese relief effort. From April 18-23, U.S. C-130, MV-22 and UC-35 transport aircraft delivered 36 tons of food, water and relief supplies to Minamiaso Village, its overland connections cut off by massive landslides generated by the earthquakes.^{10, 11} Military assets from Sasebo Naval Base, Yokota Air Base, and Marine Corps Air Station Futenma participated in the response. Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, the closest U.S. base, served as a joint hub for operations. Approximately 130 military personnel in total contributed directly to the relief effort.¹²

The U.S. assistance was both highly visible and had a meaningful impact on those affected by the disaster. The Associated Press quoted 60-year-old evacuee Tatsuyuki Aramaki saying that deliveries were "hugely appreciated." He continued, observing that "we had been living on rock-hard biscuits, old rice balls and bread. I heard Ospreys were coming to deliver supplies for us so I had to come and see. I couldn't wait."¹³

U.S. Forces Japan support to the Japan Self-Defense Forces was enabled via an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). ACSAs, negotiated on a bilateral basis with U.S. allies or coalition partners, allow U.S. forces to exchange the most common types of support, including food, fuel, transportation, and equipment.

On April 30, 2016, U.S. Ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy visited Kumamoto City to encourage local officials and residents in their recovery efforts following the earthquake. She traveled to Camp Kengun with Lt Gen Dolan, Commander, U.S. Forces Japan and Lt Gen Nicholson, Commanding General, III Marine Expeditionary Force. The delegation met with Japan Self-Defense Forces personnel and received a briefing on lessons learned from the outstanding U.S.-Japan cooperation during the disaster relief operations.

10 "Assistance for the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake Provided by the U.S. Forces in Japan." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 27, 2016. Accessed February 25, 2019 at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000423.html

11 The Guardian. "Japan hit by second powerful earthquake," April 16, 2016, accessed February 25, 2019 at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/16/japan-hit-by-second-powerful-earthquake-with-fears-of-more-to-come>

12 U.S. Department of Defense. "U.S. Military Delivers 30 Tons of Supplies for Japan Earthquake Relief," April 21, 2016. Accessed February 27, 2019 at: <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/739952/us-military-delivers-30-tons-of-supplies-for-japan-earthquake-relief/>

13 BBC. "Japan quake relief work continues amid aftershocks," April 19, 2016. Accessed February 27, 2019 at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36079483>



Yatsuhiro Bay, Japan (April 22, 2016) - An MV-22B Osprey from Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 265 (Reinforced) attached to the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit is loaded with relief supplies as an SH-60K Sea Hawk helicopter from the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force takes off from the destroyer helicopter ship JS Hyuga (DDH) 181. At request of the Japanese government, U.S. Forces Japan is providing airlift support to Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF). A JSDF task force of more than 25,000 personnel provided humanitarian and disaster relief assistance to the people affected by the magnitude 6.5 and 7.3 earthquakes that struck the Kumamoto area on 14 and 16 April 2016.

Photo credit: Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class James Mitchell

Source: <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/Article/742387/ospreys-conclude-earthquake-airlift-support/>

“Today I witnessed firsthand the coordinated efforts of civilian and military officials as they continue to respond to the needs of the people affected by the earthquake. I was inspired by the tireless efforts of General Ogawa, Governor Kabashima and Mayor Onishi and the strong desire of local residents to rebuild Kumamoto stronger and better than ever. The people of Kumamoto continue to be in our thoughts and I look forward to traveling to the region again.” said Ambassador Kennedy.¹⁴

“We had been living on rock-hard biscuits, old rice balls and bread. I heard Ospreys were coming to deliver supplies for us so I had to come and see. I couldn’t wait.”

-Tatsuyuki Aramaki, 60-year-old evacuee

Republic of Korea and International Response

In addition to the United States, two military transport aircraft from the Republic of Korea provided rice, water and other relief aid to those impacted by the earthquake.¹⁵ The Government of Japan also received messages of sympathy from multiple countries and international organizations. Though the Japanese government did not formally request assistance, its overseas missions accepted donations in support of earthquake relief.¹⁶



Republic of Korea (ROK) Armed Forces unload relief goods from military transport aircraft at Kumamoto airport
April 22, 2016

Photo credit: Japan Ministry of Defense (MOD)

Source: “Assistance from the Republic of Korea in Response to the Kumamoto Earthquake,” https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000423.html

Conclusion

U.S. military assistance to Japan during the April 2016 Kumamoto earthquakes illustrates the potential of U.S. military forces to augment and complement the military forces of the affected state. This was aided by the fact that U.S. military forces were already stationed throughout the affected country. Moreover, high levels of interoperability between U.S. and Japanese forces served to enhance the speed, volume and effectiveness of disaster response efforts, in turn saving lives and alleviating human suffering.

¹⁴ Ambassador Caroline Kennedy Visits Earthquake-stricken Kumamoto,” <https://jp.usembassy.gov/ambassador-caroline-kennedy-visits-earthquake-stricken-kumamoto/>

¹⁵ “Assistance from the Republic of Korea in Response to the Kumamoto Earthquake.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 27, 2016. Accessed February 25, 2019 at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000423.html

¹⁶ “Messages of Sympathy and Assistance from Foreign Countries, Regions, and International Organizations.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, July 8, 2016. Accessed February 25, 2019 at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/ms/m_c/page24e_000146.html

Questions for Discussion

1. *What lessons can be derived from the above case studies?*
2. *What are the unique capabilities that the U.S. military bring to foreign disaster response?*
3. *What synergies can two allies such as the U.S. and Japan bring to foreign disaster response?*
4. *How are disaster response operations conducted differently in highly developed nations vs. lesser developed nations? Urban vs. rural contexts?*
5. *How does infrastructure impact disaster response?*
6. *DoD Directive 5100.46 states that nothing shall prevent a military commander with assigned forces at or near the immediate scene of a foreign disaster from taking prompt action to save human lives. How would you define “at or near?”*
7. *Who is the lead federal agency in U.S. foreign disaster response and what is their role in relationship to the U.S. military?*
8. *A Joint Task Force (JTF) is often established to help respond to a major disaster. What capabilities does a JTF bring to a response?*
9. *How are prior bilateral and multilateral military engagements and exercises useful when faced with responding to a real-life natural disaster?*
10. *How can regional arrangements (including military) strengthen disaster response efforts?*
11. *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?*

Part 2: New Zealand Kaikoura Earthquake, November 2016

Introduction

The following case study is an example of U.S. military forces being at the “right place at the right time” to provide disaster relief support to a partner nation. In this case, it was the U.S. Navy’s guided missile destroyer, the USS Sampson, which happened to be steaming off the coast of New Zealand when an earthquake struck the country’s South Island in November 2016.



Background

On November 14, 2016, just after midnight, the Kaikoura area on New Zealand’s South Island, was hit by a magnitude-7.8 earthquake at a depth of 23km (14.2 miles). The area is located some 55 miles (93 km) northeast from Christchurch, on the east coast of South Island. Christchurch was hit by an earthquake on February 22, 2011 in which some 185 people were killed and thousands of buildings destroyed or damaged.

In Kaikoura, two people were killed and 58 others reported injured. Around 41 buildings were reported destroyed. Over a thousand tourists and hundreds of local residents were stranded in Kaikoura because a highway (State Highway One) that linked the area to other parts of the country was cut off by landslides. Early economic damage estimates ranged from NZ\$2 billion (U.S.\$1.40 billion) - NZ\$12 billion (U.S.\$8.4 billion) according to analysts.^{17, 18}

¹⁷ “New Zealand: Dozens of aftershocks follow deadly earthquake,” <https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/13/asia/new-zealand-earthquake/>

¹⁸ Ibid

The quake triggered tsunami waves of 2.49 meters (8 feet) above usual tide levels, according to Weather Watch New Zealand. The Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management (CDEM) immediately issued a tsunami land warning for the East Cape to Southland, including Wellington and the Chatham Islands, but it was ultimately cancelled. A state of emergency was declared in Kaikoura and evacuations were conducted along the coastal areas with local authorities leading the response. The National Crisis Management Centre was activated to provide support as required. The damage was exacerbated by heavy rains in Wellington, which brought flooding to affected areas.^{19, 20}

A local state of emergency was declared for the region of Canterbury.²¹ The capital, Wellington, was also reportedly affected by the quake. The tourist town of Kaikoura was home to around 2,000 residents and was a popular destination for whale-watching expeditions.²² Residents and tourists had to be airlifted out after landslides cut off the town. Air Commodore Darryn Webb, acting commander of the New Zealand joint forces, told TVNZ that some 200 people were the first to be airlifted out. There were an estimated 1,200 tourists in Kaikoura at the time.²³

Domestic Response

New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF)

In response, the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) immediately mobilized four RNZN ships and over 400 sailors, 30 Army personnel, and 11 helicopters and aircraft, plus 50 aircrew and some 200 ground support personnel from the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF).²⁴ Defence Minister Gerry Brownlee said the New Zealand Navy had immediately sent the HMNZS Canterbury and HMNZS Wellington to Kaikoura and would later send the HMNZS Te Kaha and tanker ship, HMNZS Endeavour.²⁵

Eventually, four air force helicopters airlifted people out of Kaikoura. A convoy of 27 army trucks carrying supplies were the first land forces to arrive in Kaikoura.²⁶ The HMNZS Canterbury began evacuation efforts to Lyttelton starting with 192 evacuees. Two RNZAF A109 helicopters were used to transport police to conduct checks in remote areas of North Canterbury.

Towards the end of the response, the NZDF had mobilized up to 615 people, 11 aircraft and four vessels to support the Government's earthquake response. It delivered about 250 tons of vital supplies to Kaikoura by land, sea and air, and had rescued nearly 1000 people from the seaside town.²⁷

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ “Asia and the Pacific: Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot (8-14 November 2016),” <https://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/asia-and-pacific-weekly-regional-humanitarian-snapshot-8-14-november-2016>

²¹ “Thousands stranded in New Zealand after earthquakes,” <https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/14/asia/new-zealand-earthquake/>

²² “HMCS Vancouver to provide supplies, transport equipment in area hit by earthquake, New Zealand officer says,” <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/hmcs-vancouver-to-provide-supplies-transport-equipment-in-area-hit-by-earthquake-new-zealand-officer-says>

²³ “New Zealand earthquake: Kaikoura evacuations under way,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37982395>

²⁴ “International navies respond to provide new Zealand earthquake relief,” <http://www.janes.com/article/65590/international-navies-respond-to-provide-new-zealand-earthquake-relief>

²⁵ “Ships heading south to aid earthquake response,” <http://www.vox.co.nz/politics/5/268387>

²⁶ “The aftermath of the 7.8 earthquake so far,” <https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/318002/the-aftermath-of-the-7-point-8-earthquake-so-far>

²⁷ “Kaikoura helicopter pilot takes supplies to earthquake victims,” http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11752338

Foreign Military Response

The USS Sampson was steaming off the coast of New Zealand with a flotilla of partner nation ships, including the HMAS Darwin (Australia), HMCS Vancouver (Canada), and New Zealand's frigate HMNZS Te Kaha and tanker HMNZS Endeavour. The Sampson was headed along with the other ships to participate in the 75th anniversary of the Royal New Zealand Navy in Auckland, called the New Zealand International Naval Review.

Following the quake, New Zealand Defence Minister Brownlee said that New Zealand had received offers of help from five nations attending the International Naval Review - the United States, Australia, Canada, Japan and Singapore. "The USS Sampson, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, has departed from the Hauraki Gulf and is now on its way to Kaikoura, where it will deploy two MH60 helicopters to help as required. The U.S. has also offered a P-3 Orion for surveillance flights," Brownlee said. The Australian Defence Force diverted the HMAS Darwin from her planned participation review. "The Darwin is expected to arrive off the Kaikoura coast on Wednesday evening and will deploy its Seahawk helicopter from offshore. Canada is sending its frigate the HMCS Vancouver," said Brownlee.²⁸

Foreign Military Assets used:

United States: USS Sampson, P3-C Orion

Australia: HMAS Darwin

Canada: HMCS Vancouver

Japan: P-1 Surveillance aircraft

In total, the foreign ships contributed about 660 sailors and four helicopters, while the NZDF had mobilized around 560 personnel, 11 aircraft and 4 vessels.²⁹



The commanding Officer of HMAS Darwin Commander Phillip Henry (second from left) together with personnel from Canada and the United States, receives a briefing from New Zealand Defence Force member Colonel Glenn King, about support to the New Zealand earthquake recovery efforts at Kaikoura, New Zealand, November 17, 2016

Photo credit: New Zealand defence force photo by Cpl. Amanda McErlich

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/2997637/new-zealand-earthquake-relief>



Cmdr. Timothy LaBenz, middle, commanding officer of Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Sampson (DDG 102), speaks with Royal New Zealand, Australian and Canadian Navy officers during a humanitarian aid brief.

Photo credit: U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Bryan Jackson

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/2997468/uss-sampson-ddg-102-offers-assist-kaikoura-nz>

²⁸ "Ships heading south to aid earthquake response," <http://www.voxo.co.nz/politics/5/268387>

²⁹ "International warships arrive to help with Kaikoura disaster relief after earthquakes," http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11750203

U.S. Military Response

Following the earthquake, the U.S. immediately offered assistance to New Zealand, including the use of military assets. “American presence matters, as shown yet again today,” said Adm. Harry Harris, commander of U.S. Pacific Command. “Our prayers go out to our friends in New Zealand as they deal with another devastating earthquake on the South Island. But more than that, our help also goes out. At the request of the New Zealand government, the USS Sampson and her two embarked MH-60R Seahawk helicopters will join the U.S. P-3 (maritime patrol aircraft) that’s already on station there in support of the disaster relief effort in New Zealand.”³⁰ U.S. military support was provided to New Zealand from Nov. 17–19.³¹

USS Sampson

The USS Sampson was enroute to Auckland, to participate in the Royal New Zealand Navy’s International Naval Review commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Royal New Zealand Navy when it was called upon to assist.

U.S. Sailors assigned to the USS Sampson (DDG 102) flew ashore November 18, 2016 to support the NZDF in providing assistance to rural areas of Kaikoura. Eighteen members of the Sampson crew, with backgrounds in mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, damage control, and medical treatment provided assistance. U.S. Sailors set up a food distribution center in an elementary school, others delivered toilets with self-contained sewage systems to homes without plumbing. Sailors also went door-to-door with informational pamphlets to help residents understand what services were available. Additionally, one of the Sampson’s embarked MH-60R Seahawk helicopters took the Kaikoura Mayor for an aerial survey of the damage. The Sampson, originally scheduled to pull into Auckland’s Waitemata Harbor, diverted course at the request of the New Zealand government to render assistance to those affected by the earthquake.³² The Sampson had a total of 2 Seahawk helicopters embarked.

The helicopters completed 14 flights lifting 11,000 lbs. of equipment and supplies to the shore from the HMAS Canberra. The crew of Sampson also supported transporting New Zealand citizens from Kaikoura to HMNZS Canterbury and 26 Sailors went ashore and



Kaikoura, New Zealand (Nov. 19, 2016) - USS Sampson (DDG 102) on station off the coast of Kaikoura. At the request of the government of New Zealand, Sampson arrived off New Zealand’s South Island Nov. 17 to offer assistance to those affected by the recent earthquake.

Photo credit: U.S. Navy photo courtesy of New Zealand Defence Force/Released

Source: “U.S. Navy Joins New Zealand Earthquake Relief,” <http://navylive.dodlive.mil/2016/11/17/u-s-navy-joins-new-zealand-earthquake-relief/>

³⁰ “USS Sampson to support New Zealand-led forces responding to earthquake,” <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/1005264/uss-sampson-to-support-new-zealand-led-forces-responding-to-earthquake/>

³¹ “USS Sampson concludes relief effort support to NZ,” <https://www.maritimeprofessional.com/news/sampson-concludes-relief-effort-support-298501>

³² “USS Sampson Sailors Assist New Zealand Residents Affected by earthquake,” http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=97761

assisted in cleanup efforts, and brought food, and care packages into Kaikoura.³³

P-3C Orion

At the request of the New Zealand Ministry of Defence the U.S Navy provided maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft to assist. A P-3C Orion assigned to Patrol Squadron (VP) 47 was participating in Exercise Mahi Tangaroa as part of the New Zealand International Naval Review when the earthquake occurred and was tasked with assessing the area surrounding Kaikoura. The P-3C operated from Royal New Zealand Air Force Base Auckland located in Whenuapai.³⁴ The VP-47 aircrew, accompanied by two Royal New Zealand Air Force airmen, identified impassable roads and assessed bridges that were damaged by the earthquake.³⁵ The P-3C is based at Marine Corps Base Hawaii.



Kaikoura, New Zealand (Nov. 18, 2016) - Cmdr. Timothy LaBenz (right), commanding officer of Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Sampson (DDG 102), and Kaikoura Mayor Winston Gray survey the damage to local infrastructure in a MH-60R Sea Hawk from the Battle Cats of Helicopter Maritime Strike (HSM) Squadron 73, attached to USS Sampson (DDG 102).

Photo credit: U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Bryan Jackson/Released

Source: "U.S. Navy Joins New Zealand Earthquake Relief," <http://navylive.dodlive.mil/2016/11/17/u-s-navy-joins-new-zealand-earthquake-relief/earthquake-relief/>

U.S.-New Zealand Nuclear controversy

The visit of the Sampson was historic and symbolic in that it ended a three-decade old dispute between the U.S. and New Zealand over nuclear weapons.

It was the U.S. Navy's first port call to New Zealand since the mid-1980s, when Wellington refused a port call by the USS Buchanan on grounds that the U.S. would not confirm if the ship was nuclear-armed. The U.S. responded by suspending training with New Zealand.³⁶

Under New Zealand's nuclear-free legislation, the prime minister must be satisfied that foreign military vessels are not armed with nuclear weapons before entering the country. Prime Minister John Key said that he was advised that the Sampson was not nuclear powered and thereby granted approval for the visit, allowing the U.S. to participate in the naval celebration and effectively ending the impasse between the U.S. and New Zealand.

³³ "USS Sampson concludes relief effort support to NZ," <https://www.maritimeprofessional.com/news/sampson-concludes-relief-effort-support-298501>

³⁴ "USS Sampson CO: Crew fully prepared for New Zealand earthquake response," <http://navylive.dodlive.mil/2016/11/15/uss-sampson-co-crew-fully-prepared-for-new-zealand-earthquake-response/>

³⁵ "U.S. Navy joins New Zealand earthquake relief," <http://navylive.dodlive.mil/2016/11/17/u-s-navy-joins-new-zealand-earthquake-relief/>

³⁶ "Destroyer will be 1st US Navy ship to visit New Zealand in 3 decades," <http://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/destroyer-will-be-1st-us-navy-ship-to-visit-new-zealand-in-3-decades-1.434597>

U.S Government (USG) Response

Similar to the Kumamoto earthquake response discussed previously, there was no U.S. disaster declaration. While the U.S. Ambassador to New Zealand, Mark Gilbert, did not issue a disaster declaration, he did send out a statement of support to the people and Government of New Zealand: "We quickly saw how New Zealand went into action with some of the best earthquake responses anywhere in the world. We offered and continue to offer our support to New Zealand wherever and whenever needed. To the loved ones of those killed, we offer our condolences, and to those whose lives were shaken or damaged, those who need assistance– we stand with you. New Zealanders have repeatedly weathered past earthquakes and are among the best prepared in the world. The United States Government stands by, ready to help all U.S. citizens, as well as to help our resilient Kiwi friends."³⁷

Because a formal disaster declaration was not issued, the U.S. Department of Defense funded the Kaikoura response from the Asia Pacific Regional Initiative (APRI), vice the Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) budget.

Canada

After the earthquake struck, New Zealand's Defence Minister Brownlee announced the Canadian frigate, HMCS Vancouver, was among the warships from five nations on the way to provide help. "The ship, with its embarked CH-124 Sea King helicopter and air detachment, will be a key asset in evacuating persons from the affected area and assisting in the transport of emergency supplies into the area as the majority of roads and rail lines have been severed,"

the Canadian Forces said in a press release. "It also carries basic Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief supplies onboard which may be used in post-disaster efforts if needed. These basic supplies include first aid kits, tents, generators, blankets, chainsaws and hand tools. The ship's company stands ready to support the operation as it develops."³⁸



A U.S. Navy MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter, assigned to the Battle Cats of Helicopter Maritime Strike (HSM) squadron 73, attached to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Sampson (DDG 102) arrives at Kaikoura, New Zealand.

Photo credit: New Zealand Defence Force photo by Cpl Amanda McErlich
Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/2997478/new-zealand-earthquake-relief>

³⁷ "Statement from U.S. Ambassador Mark Gilbert," <https://nz.usembassy.gov/statement-u-s-ambassador-mark-gilbert/>

³⁸ "HMCS Vancouver to provide supplies, transport equipment in area hit by earthquake, New Zealand officer says," <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/hmcs-vancouver-to-provide-supplies-transport-equipment-in-area-hit-by-earthquake-new-zealand-officer-says>

Japan

The Government of Japan, upon request from the Government of New Zealand, dispatched one Japan Maritime Self Defense Forces P-1 surveillance aircraft currently visiting New Zealand as a Japan Disaster Relief Team (JSDF Unit) to assist in recovery efforts. The P-1 aircraft, operated out of the RNZAF Base in Whenuapai, Auckland.³⁹ The surveillance aircraft from the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the U.S. Navy conducted aerial surveys of quake-damaged areas.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The USS Sampson was part of a multi-nation response to the earthquake which included ships from New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and a P-1 from Japan. All of the foreign ships participated in the 75th anniversary of the Royal New Zealand Navy in Auckland after relief operations concluded. As discussed earlier, the Sampson’s visit was the first US warship visit to New Zealand in over 30 years.

Although the Kaikoura earthquake was not a major disaster, because USPACOM had military assets near to the site of the disaster, military assistance was quickly offered by the U.S. and accepted by New Zealand. This is not always necessarily the case when a disaster strikes—U.S. military assets are not always in the neighborhood when a crisis strikes. However, the timing proved to be opportune as U.S. military assets were used successfully with fellow militaries from Australia, Canada and Japan, as well as with the NZDF. This case study illustrates the great potential of military forces being near the site when a disaster strikes and how such forces can be quickly utilized to provide a quick and successful response along with other foreign militaries as well as the affected nation’s military forces.

Questions for Discussion

1. *What regional militaries would you expect to respond to a disaster in the South Pacific?*
2. *What lessons can responding militaries learn from the earthquake response in Kaikoura, New Zealand?*
3. *Although the disaster was not a major disaster and could have likely been handled by the affected nation and its own military forces, the New Zealand government accepted assistance by foreign militaries participating in exercises and a military event that they happened to be heading to. Is it good for affected nations to accept a request for foreign military assistance in cases such as this?*
4. *In what ways can the U.S. military assist a foreign partner military in coordinating and responding to a disaster?*
5. *In what ways can the U.S. military and foreign partner militaries prepare for a disaster response ahead of an emergency?*

39 “Dispatch of JSDF Unit in Response to the Earthquake,” <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/AK1611/S00460/dispatch-of-jsdf-unit-in-response-to-the-earthquake.htm>

40 “International warships arrive to help with Kaikoura disaster relief after earthquakes,” http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11750203

Part 3: U.S. Military response to Sri Lanka Floods and Landslides, May 2017

Introduction

In June 2017, U.S. military personnel assisted the Sri Lankan government and military in the response to floods and landslides triggered by monsoon rains in the central and southern parts of the country in late May that year. More than 400 U.S. sailors from the USS Lake Erie assisted the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and wrapped up their mission on June 17, 2017.

This case study is somewhat unique in that the disaster itself, while devastating to the affected population, was not a major or mega-disaster, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami which affected Sri Lanka and about a dozen other countries, in which typically many foreign nations and their militaries are called upon to help assist the disaster-affected country. For the 2004 Tsunami response, at least Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, India, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Korea and the United States among other nations provided military personnel and assets to help with relief efforts.⁴¹ A total of 35 countries sent more than 30,000 military personnel to assist affected nations.⁴²

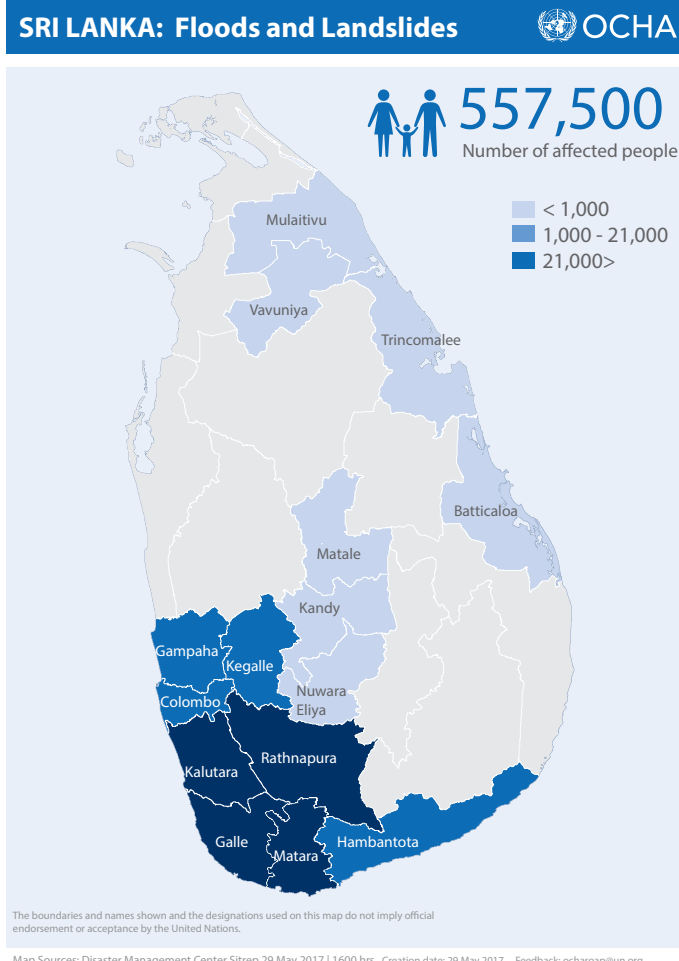
In this particular case, foreign military support was provided by the U.S. military, and Indian military. This section of the case study reviews the U.S. military response to the floods and landslides disaster in Sri Lanka in 2017.

Background

Starting on May 25, 2017, heavier than usual southwestern monsoon rains resulted in flooding and landslides across Sri Lanka, affecting more than 630,000 people in 15 of the 25 districts in the country, according to the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL). As of May 31, 2017, the GoSL said that there were more than 200 deaths, nearly 100 missing persons, and significant damage to agriculture and property due to

⁴¹ "The 2004 tsunami: civil military aspects of the international response," Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/.../coordination_civil_military.pdf

⁴² "Chapter 2: Indian Ocean Tsunami and International cooperation," www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/east-asia/pdf.../east-asia_e2006_02.pdf



Map credit: UNOCHA

Source: <https://reliefweb.int/map/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-floods-and-landslides>

the floods and landslides.⁴³ The rains were reportedly the worst since 2003 and came after two months of drought. The wettest time of the year in the country’s south is usually from May to September.⁴⁴

According to the United Nations in Sri Lanka seven districts were the most affected by floods and landslides, including Gampaha, Galle, Hambantota, Kalutara, Kegalle, Matara and Ratnapura districts. Galle, Kalutara, Matara and Ratnapura were the worst affected districts. The most severely impacted district was southern Galle district, where some 142,149 people (36,314 families) were initially affected.

On May 26, the GoSL made an initial request for international support, particularly for search and rescue (SAR) operations. The UN Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) responded to the request and mobilized relief supplies for distribution.⁴⁵ The situation in the country worsened over the next few weeks. On June 21, the UN Resident Coordinator’s (UNRC) Office estimated that 415,600 people were affected in 12 districts. Over 3,000 houses were reported destroyed and 21,000 were damaged.⁴⁶

Sri Lanka is prone to several types of natural disasters, including floods, landslides, cyclones, tsunamis and drought. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the previous drought in the country had exacerbated the effects of the flooding, which caused flash floods and landslides.

The HCT launched an Emergency Response Plan which discussed the support UN agencies and local and international NGOs aimed to provide the most affected people in seven districts: Galle, Gampaha, Hambantota, Kalutara, Kegalle, Matara, and Ratnapura.⁴⁷

Domestic Response

The GoSL led the humanitarian response to the floods and landslides, including the provision of cash, food, livelihoods, and shelter assistance, and requested international assistance to support the response. The GoSL immediately worked to evacuate communities in at-risk areas and deployed approximately 400 Sri Lankan military members to conduct rescue operations soon after the disaster struck.⁴⁸

The GoSL led response initially identified water and non-food items (NFIs) as priorities. Field teams from UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) confirmed that emergency shelter, NFIs, water, sanitation and hygiene, and health services were key immediate needs in the worst-affected divisions in Galle, Kalutara, Matara and Ratnapura.⁴⁹

43 “Sri Lanka: Floods and Landslides Emergency Response Plan (June – October 2018),” <https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-floods-and-landslides-emergency-response-plan-june-october-2017>

44 “Sri Lankan landslides, flooding kills 122, as nation appeals for international help,” <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-28/sri-lanka-flooding-death-toll-climbs-un-appeal-for-help/8566538>

45 “Sri Lanka: Floods and Landslides Emergency Response Plan (June – October 2018),” <https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-floods-and-landslides-emergency-response-plan-june-october-2017>

46 Ibid.

47 “Sri Lanka Floods and Landslides 2017,” <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/fl-2017-000057-lka>

48 “Sri Lanka,” United States Agency for International Development (USAID), <https://www.usaid.gov/crisis/sri-lanka>

49 “Sri Lanka: Floods and Landslides Emergency Response Plan (June – October 2018),” <https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-floods-and-landslides-emergency-response-plan-june-october-2017>

Sri Lankan military response

Military spokesperson Brigadier Roshan Senevirathne said that, in total, more than 2,000 military personnel, including members of the Army, Navy and Air Force, had been deployed to help police and civilian agencies in relief efforts.⁵⁰ The troops belong to 16 battalions and utilized 45 troop transport vehicles for rescue and relief operations in coordination with the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) and district and divisional secretariats. Army troops cleared roadways, including the 26km stretch of the Ratnapura – Kalawana road, and strengthened the flood retaining wall of the Nilwala River in the Thihagoda area.⁵¹ Military forces used boats and helicopters throughout the relief effort.



Matara, Sri Lanka (June 13, 2017)- Quartermaster 2nd Class Andrew Bowers assigned to the Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser USS Lake Erie (CG 70) displaces dirt to rebuild roads with the Sri Lankan Marine Corps to support humanitarian assistance operations in the wake of severe flooding and landslides that devastated many regions of the country.

Photo credit: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Lucas T. Hans/Released

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/3479553/uss-lake-erie-cg-70-rebuild-sri-lank>

Sri Lankan Army

The Sri Lankan Army deployed a total of 1600 personnel belonging to Security Force Headquarters – West (SFHQ-West). Army personnel deployed with troop carriers and army boats. Additionally, Army Health Services dispatched five army medical teams to affected areas. Army personnel had rescued more than 2,600 flood victims within the first 24 hours of relief efforts.⁵²

Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF)

Starting May 26, the SLAF deployed its Mi-17, Bell-212 and Bell-412 Helicopters for emergency rescue operations, medical evacuation, cargo and troop transport, and B200 Beachcraft for airborne reconnaissance in Colombo, Galle, Rathnapura and Kalutara. SLAF also supplied rations to the affected populations, from SLAF Base Ratmalana and SLAF Koggala. SLAF also setup a special relief supply collection center at the AirMovement Section of SLAF Base Ratmalana to assist flood victims.⁵³

Sri Lankan Navy

Sri Lankan Navy personnel helped remove debris blocking Wakwella Bridge at Baddegama, Galle district. Additionally, naval personnel also refurbished an embankment in Baddegama town due to water leakage.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ "Sri Lanka seeks international help after deadly flooding, landslides," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sri-lanka-disaster-idUSKBN18N0LT>

⁵¹ "Sri Lanka Army continues with rescue and relief operations," May 29 2017, http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=Sri_Lanka_Army_continues_with_rescue_and_relief_operations_20170529_01

⁵² Army continues with relief work," May 28, 2017, http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=Army_continues_with_relief_work_20170528_03

⁵³ "SLAF assists flood victims," May 28, 2017, http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=SLAF_assists_flood_victims_20170528_04

⁵⁴ "Navy assists to remove debris clogged in Wakwella bridge," May 28, 2017, http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=Navy_assists_to_remove_debris_clogged_in_Wakwella_Bridg_20170528_06

In total, the navy deployed over 109 relief, search and rescue teams comprised of 643 personnel and 109 boats in affected Southern and Western provinces. Aside from the distribution of food rations, Navy members rescued thousands affected by the floods.⁵⁵

Foreign Military response

Along with the U.S. military response, India also sent military assets to help respond to the floods and landslides.

India: Sent three navy ships with medical teams and relief supplies:^{56, 57} These included the INS Shardul, INS Kirch and the INS Jalashwa.⁵⁸

- The **INS Kirch** arrived first (May 27) with a crew of 120 and relief supplies and began helping the Sri Lankan navy in relief operations at Udugama and Galapatha in Kalutara district.^{59, 60}
- The **INS Shardul** arrived in the port of Colombo on May 28 carrying 4 small boats, 127 crew members, a medical team and divers and rescue teams, along with relief supplies.

Foreign Military Assets used:

India: 3 Ships - INS Shardul, INS Kirch and the INS Jalashwa

United States: USS Lake Erie, USPACOM Augmentation Team (PAT), U.S. Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), Special Operations Forces

U.S. Military response

Following the international request for assistance by the GoSL, U.S. Pacific Command deployed forces and other military assets to assist in the response. Navy Adm. Harry B. Harris Jr., USPACOM commander said: “We share in the sorrow of the Sri Lankan people at the loss of life and devastation brought on by this disaster...Friends help friends, and the United States stands with Sri Lanka during this difficult time. U.S. forces will coordinate with our Sri Lankan counterparts to support recovery efforts. We will work closely with our interagency partners from the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development and others to ensure continued, timely and swift responses to requests from the government of Sri Lanka.”⁶¹

USS Lake Erie

The USS Lake Erie arrived in Sri Lanka on June 11, 2017 to assist with disaster relief operations.⁶² More than 400 U.S. Sailors from the USS Lake Erie (CG 70) participated in the mission. The sailors spent a week working alongside local government agencies and the Sri Lanka Red Cross (SLRC) to assist communities with cleanup, food distribution, and dewatering of wells. Major projects included a three-day irrigation repair in Matara Province and a groundwater well rehabilitation in Kalutara. A total of 125

⁵⁵ “Navy assist flood relief operations,” May 28, 2017, http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=Navy_assist_flood_relief_operations_20170528_02

⁵⁶ “Sri Lanka floods: Nearly 500,000 displaced as death toll rises,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40070660>

⁵⁷ “Sri Lanka seeks international help after deadly flooding, landslides,” <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sri-lanka-disaster-idUSKBN18N0LT>

⁵⁸ “Sri Lanka floods: Battle to rescue stranded as death toll tops 180,” <https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/29/asia/sri-lanka-floods/index.html>

⁵⁹ “Second Indian ship, INS ‘Shardul’ arrives for flood relief operations,” May 28, 2017, http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=Second_Indian_ship_INS_Shardul_arrives_for_flood_relief_operations_20170528_05

⁶⁰ “Indian naval ship ‘Kirch’ arrives with relief assistance,” May 27, 2017, http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=Indian_Naval_Ship_Kirch_arrives_with_relief_assistance_20170528_01

⁶¹ “U.S. Service Members Aid Sri Lanka after devastating floods,” <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1211928/us-service-members-aid-sri-lanka-after-devastating-floods/>

⁶² Ibid.

wells were repaired in Colombo and Galle.⁶³

The sailors worked alongside the newly established Sri Lankan Marine Corps, and Sri Lankan Navy liaison elements coordinated efforts with local officials. Local officials, like the Sri Lankan Red Cross, also assisted.⁶⁴

The sailors from the Lake Erie completed their disaster response mission on June 17, 2017. A small group of military specialists remained in Sri Lanka for a while to assist the U.S. Embassy and relevant government agencies with the final phases of relief operations.⁶⁵

USPACOM Augmentation Team (PAT)

The USPACOM Augmentation Team (PAT) helped coordinate and provide support to the GoSL. The PAT is comprised of six U.S. military personnel. The Civil-Military Support Element (CMSE), comprised of the CA soldiers, took the lead of the PAT. The CMSE leveraged their network of military leaders, government officials, and UN and NGOs in Sri Lanka for the response. The PAT began leveraging assets in the country and began assessing where they could best assist Sri Lankan military forces who had already deployed to affected areas. The PAT decided to focus on local schools because it was decided that it was the best way to locate families and to decide who was missing. The PAT began to locate schools and to make the schools usable, while reaching out to villagers to let them know to come to the schools for aid. Additionally, the PAT linked up with Sri Lankan military forces, particularly the Sri Lankan Marines.⁶⁶

63 "USS Lake Erie Sailors, Personnel Complete Relief Mission in Sri Lanka," <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1218907/uss-lake-erie-sailors-personnel-complete-relief-mission-in-sri-lanka/>

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 "Crisis Response in Sri Lanka," October–December 2017, Special Warfare, pgs. 54–55, https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/SWmag/archive/SW3004/30-4_Oct_Dec_2017_vWeb.pdf



Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sailors aboard the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Lake Erie (CG 70) and their counterparts from the Sri Lankan Navy work together to secure mooring lines as the ship arrives in Colombo, Sri Lanka, June 11 to support humanitarian assistance operations in the wake of severe flooding and landslides that devastated many regions of the country.

Photo credit: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Joshua Fulton

Source: <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/Image-Gallery/igphoto/2001761344/>



Fire Controlman 2nd Class Jason McEntire from the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Lake Erie (CG 70) works with Sri Lankan Marines to repair levees in Matara, Sri Lanka, June 12, 2017 during humanitarian assistance operations in the wake of severe flooding and landslides that devastated many regions of the country.

Photo credit: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Joshua Fulton

Source: <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1211414/uss-lake-erie-us-service-members-render-assistance-in-sri-lanka-after-devastati/>

Meanwhile, the CMSE coordinated with the Sri Lankan Disaster Management Centre and de-conflicted relief efforts with the UN Humanitarian Country Team. Additionally, team members reached out to other DOD assets visiting in the country and found an annual multi-lateral Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) ongoing. This enabled the PAT team to link up with Special Forces Soldiers who were involved as well as ROTC candidates (mentioned below). The team began making their way through the local community and cleaned more than 1,000 wells and refurbished five major irrigation systems. Additionally, the PAT, along with the Special Forces team, conducted assessments while the ROTC cadets and other military personnel focused on the schools. The PAT also worked with Sri Lankan Emergency management officials to begin a project on improving emergency communications.⁶⁷

U.S. Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)

A unique part of the response occurred when the U.S. Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) cadets and the U.S. Embassy’s Pacific Command (PACOM) Augmentation Team cleaned and repaired flood damage at schools in the Kalutara district in coordination with CMSE and local officials.⁶⁸

Special Operations Forces

Special Forces Operational Detachments-Alpha (ODA) was in Sri Lanka, participating in the JCET when heavy rains triggered the widespread flooding. Major Joseph Quinn, Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC), began to immediately plan relief efforts. Major Quinn coordinated with the 1st SFG (A) Command Team, SOCPAC, and the U.S. Embassy for ODA 1333. The ODA partnered with the CAT and the MIST, and split into two elements and assisted in restoring essential services such as re-opening a school and refurbishing drinking wells with the Sri Lankan Red Cross. The team began addressing areas away from population centers and beyond the operational reach of many aid agencies due to the team’s ability to operate with minimal external support. The teams conducted assessments, and surveyed local medical facilities, and potential helicopter landing zones.⁶⁹



Sailors assigned to the Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser USS Lake Erie (CG 70) and the Sri Lankan marines rebuild a levee during support humanitarian assistance operations in response to severe flooding and landslides that devastated many regions of the country, June 13, 2017.

Photo credit: Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Lucas T. Hans

Source: <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1218907/uss-lake-erie-sailors-personnel-complete-relief-mission-in-sri-lanka/>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “American People Contribute LKR 350 Million for Sri Lanka Flood Relief,” <https://lk.usembassy.gov/american-people-contribute-lkr-350-million-sri-lanka-flood-relief/>

⁶⁹ “Flood Response,” October-December 2017, Special Warfare, pgs. 56-57, www.soc.mil/swcs/specialwarfare

Pacific Partnership (PP)

Just a few months earlier, in March, U.S. Navy doctors and civil engineers aboard USNS Fall River (T-EPF 4) visited Hambantota, Sri Lanka for Pacific Partnership, a two week humanitarian and disaster relief preparedness mission. This served to establish key relationships with the Sri Lankan Navy and civil service agencies in the country. Officials say the established relationships help U.S. military personnel integrate into the disaster response mission.⁷⁰



Colombo, Sri Lanka (June 12, 2017)- Sailors assigned to the Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser USS Lake Erie (CG 70) work in conjunction with Sri Lankan citizens to pump water wells to support humanitarian assistance operations.

Photo credit: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Lucas T. Hans/RELEASED

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/3474418/uss-lake-erie-cg-70-pumps-well-sri-lanka>

Pacific Partnership is the largest humanitarian and disaster response preparation mission in the Indo-Asia-Pacific. PP started in 2006 and PP 2019 will be the 14th iteration of the mission. PP began in response to the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. The mission has evolved from a direct area mission to being focused on building partnerships through subject matter and civil-military exchanges. In 2018, the USNS Mercy conducted missions in Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Japan, while the USNS Brunswick made separate stops in Yap, Palau, Malaysia and Thailand, conducting 765 host nation engagements covering medical, HADR, engineering and community relations.⁷¹

United States Government (USG) Response

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and its Office of Foreign Disaster Assessment (OFDA) and the Civil-Military Support Element (CMSE) attached to the U.S Embassy helped organize U.S. response efforts and conducted assessments.⁷² On the ground, USAID worked closely with local implementing partner Sarvodayalanka.⁷³

On May 27, 2017, U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Atul Keshap, declared a disaster due to the effects of the floods and landslides. In response, OFDA provided U.S.\$100,000 to a non-governmental organization to support relief efforts, including distribution of relief commodities and hygiene supplies in disaster-affected communities. USAID/OFDA staff in Bangkok, Thailand, and Washington, D.C., continued to monitor the situation in coordination with USAID/Sri Lanka, the U.S. Embassy in Colombo, the GoSL, and humanitarian partners during the response phase.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ “U.S. service members aid Sri Lanka after devastating floods,” <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1211928/us-service-members-aid-sri-lanka-after-devastating-floods/>

⁷¹ “Pacific Partnership 2018 Concludes,” <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1557065/pacific-partnership-2018-concludes/>

⁷² “American People Contribute LKR 350 Million for Sri Lanka Flood Relief,” <https://lk.usembassy.gov/american-people-contribute-lkr-350-million-sri-lanka-flood-relief/>

⁷³ “Sarvodayalanka,” <https://twitter.com/sarvodayalanka>

⁷⁴ Sri Lanka,” USAID, <https://www.usaid.gov/crisis/sri-lanka>



Colombo, Sri Lanka (June 11, 2017)- Charge d’Affairs Robert Hilton, left, is greeted by Capt. Darren McPherson, commanding officer of the Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser USS Lake Erie (CG 70), upon the ship’s arrival in Colombo, Sri Lanka, June 11 to support humanitarian assistance operations.

Photo credit: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Lucas T. Hans/RELEASED

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/3470439/uss-lake-erie-cg-70-arrives-sri-lanka>

In this disaster it was decided that no USAID/OFDA Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) team would be sent for the effort. A DART team coordinates and manages the USG response, and works closely with local officials, the international community, relief agencies, UN and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Additionally, Mission Tasking Matrix (MITAM)’s were not used for the response. OFDA works with the U.S. Embassy, affected state, the humanitarian community, and the U.S. military to validate requests for assistance (RFAs). OFDA utilizes MITAMS to validate as well as track RFAs. Validated requests for military assets are forwarded to the DOD for review and execution. OFDA

validation is required in order for the military to be reimbursed for providing assistance through Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) funds. This response was eventually funded by OHDACA funds after debate and discussion in Washington D.C. Overall, in this Sri Lanka disaster response case, this was a good example of direct military support to the U.S. Embassy team in Colombo.

In remarks later in 2018, U.S. Ambassador Keshap said: “I am proud that in 2017 USAID/OFDA provided shelter and other emergency items to more than 40,000 Sri Lankans and helped construct 240 rainwater tanks that benefited more than 8,000 people. The United States also donated critical equipment to public hospitals to diagnose and monitor dengue patients after the floods, helping save many lives.”⁷⁵

USAID has provided assistance to Sri Lanka during natural disasters since 2001. “To date, USAID/OFDA has provided more than 13 billion Sri Lankan rupees (U.S.\$85 million) in response to natural disasters in the country,” Ambassador Keshap reported.⁷⁶

In addition, USAID/OFDA funds a number of disaster risk reduction initiatives in the country, including flash flood and landslide early warning systems.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ “U.S. and Sri Lankan Governments Discuss Disaster Preparedness Ahead of South-Western Monsoons,” <https://www.usaid.gov/sri-lanka/press-releases/may-23-2018-us-and-sri-lankan-governments-discuss-disaster>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ “Sri Lanka,” USAID, <https://www.usaid.gov/crisis/sri-lanka>

Conclusion

The heavy monsoon rains in May 2017 which sparked the widespread flooding and triggered landslides across Sri Lanka were reportedly the worst the country had seen since 2003. The disaster prompted the GoSL to seek and accept international help. Among other nations providing help, the militaries of India and the U.S. provided valuable foreign military assets needed for disaster relief and to help fill in gaps in the response. Foreign military aircraft, ships and personnel with logistical, medical, communication and engineering skills assisted the overall response operations. Both domestic and foreign military assets were used to help overcome logistical challenges due to areas cut off by the floods and landslides.

Although this report focuses on the U.S. military response to the disaster, this response was also assisted by the lead federal agency for foreign disaster response, USAID/OFDA, who worked closely with the CMSE to help coordinate an overall USG response to the relief efforts.

Although this response was not considered a typical U.S. military response to a major disaster, this particular USINDOPACOM response illustrates an effort to respond to a disaster that is typically more commonly seen in the region. Floods and landslides are one of the most prevalent natural disasters to occur in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Area of Responsibility (AOR) and as such, this response may provide a blueprint for any potential future DOD response in the region for a similar disaster. This could help future planning for a disaster response most likely to be seen and experienced by U.S. military personnel in the Indo-Asia-Pacific.

Questions for Discussion

1. *What regional militaries do you think would participate in a response in South Asia and why?*
2. *What are some challenges to responding to a disaster in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in South Asia?*
3. *What lessons can responding militaries learn from the response to the floods and landslides in Sri Lanka?*
4. *How important is it for foreign militaries to train together for HADR and other missions? Did it help with the response to the Sri Lanka floods?*
5. *What are some best practices the U.S. and other foreign militaries can put in use for the next disaster response in South Asia?*
6. *By coincidence, there were several different U.S. military units on the ground in Sri Lanka. How did this help the overall U.S. military response?*



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