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U.S. PACIFIC COMMAND OPERATION SAHAYOGI HAAT
JOINT AFTER ACTION REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
JANUARY 2016

The Center for Excellence in Disaster Management conducted a U.S. Pacific Command directed Joint After-Action Review of Operation SAHAYOGI HAAT, the command's response to the 25 April 2015 Nepal earthquake. The purpose for this review was to inform future operations, actions, and activities, and to posture the U.S. Pacific Command to respond more effectively to future regional foreign disaster response events.

This report analyzed the U.S. Pacific Command response by addressing three primary questions:

1. How well did the United States military respond to the devastating Nepal earthquake?
2. How can the United States military improve its capacity to support foreign disaster response operations?
3. How can the U.S. Pacific Command assist the Nepalese Military's efforts to improve its capacity for supporting a whole of government disaster response?

As with all foreign disaster response operations, unique and specific circumstances affected the overall execution of the mission. In the case of Operation SAHAYOGI HAAT, these influences had a definite impact on the decision cycle at the combatant command level, and the deployment and employment of a joint task force. The combination of the sensitive geopolitical situation in Nepal (India and China military deployments) and Thailand (government transition), the relative inaccessibility of Nepal, and the need for overflight rights and associated political complexities made Operation SAHAYOGI HAAT a most challenging operation.

Whereas all these influences created operational challenges and decisions unique to the Nepal situation, the lessons derived from exploring the U.S. Pacific Command's Operation SAHAYOGI HAAT nonetheless provide an opportunity to determine common themes resident to foreign disaster response operations in the Asia Pacific Theater.

The following paragraphs summarize the most significant findings from the report:

- Nepal's response to the disaster, although constrained by limited resources and a very difficult geography, was largely effective. While international civilian and military efforts filled critical gaps and reinforced the Government of Nepal during the initial crisis, *Nepal bore the primary burden for coordinating and responding to this disaster.*
- U.S. Pacific Command security cooperation engagements and capacity building exercises were vital in preparing the Nepal Army for its role during a major earthquake response. The Nepal Army's Multinational Military Coordination Center was the primary mechanism for coordinating the Nepali government and the international disaster response efforts during the chaotic first week after the earthquake struck.
- Pre-disaster civilian-military theater engagements with regional partners, organizations, and international agencies facilitated a reasonably collaborative, foreign disaster response.



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- Assisting states responded on a bilateral basis. This challenged Nepal Government coordination and reduced efficiency, particularly during the immediate response to the initial earthquake.
- The multi-year, pre-disaster planning effort led by Joint Task Force 505 (III Marine Expeditionary Force Command Element) provided situational awareness and positively influenced civil-military coordination. The Ambassador and U.S. State Department country team were familiar with the deploying commander and principal staff due to previous planning and senior leader activities.
- The evolution of the U.S. Pacific Command Foreign Humanitarian Assistance Concept of Operations shaped disaster response planning and execution. Development of a U.S. Pacific Command Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response Concept Plan, as the next step in this planning evolution, would improve collaboration and timeliness.
- Commander's guidance remains the key means for facilitating effective staff planning and making the transition from the standing U.S. Pacific Command functional component command structure to a service-led task force or joint task force.
- A Status of Forces Agreement, Logistics Support Agreement, or Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement with Nepal would have enhanced the U.S. Pacific Command disaster response.
- The identification and staging of key military enablers (e.g. aircraft, airfield operations capabilities, Operational Contract Support stakeholders, etc.) facilitated a more timely and efficient response to the affected state.
- The Intermediate Staging Base at Utapao, Thailand was essential for posturing U.S. forces. Overflight, immigration, and border-nation coordination remain a challenge and require proactive, speedy action by the U.S. Pacific Command staff and U.S. country teams.
- Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment is critical for military decision makers and responding units during a disaster response. While there are unique aspects to an humanitarian assistance and disaster response operation, the military decision-making and intelligence cycles do not change.
- Building more continuity of knowledge regarding previous Nepal earthquake disaster response planning and the Joint Task Force 505 Nepal Concept Plan would have facilitated the initial U.S. Pacific Command crisis planning and increased situational awareness.

Joint Task Force 505 and the U.S. Pacific Command played an important, but supporting role in this disaster response. This report focused on the U.S. military response to the Nepal Earthquake. The extensive international disaster response and the major U.S. Government effort led by the U.S. Agency for International Development are subjects for other reports.