

Abstract

This case study covers the response to Typhoon Doksuri (as referred to internationally; also called Typhoon Egay in the Philippines), in particular the role of the United States (U.S.) Department of Defense (DoD). Typhoon Doksuri struck the Philippines on 26 July 2023, leading to at least 39 people dead and flooding and landslides across multiple regions. U.S. Marines were already on the ground for the bilateral Marine Aviation Support Activity (MASA) 23 exercise on Puerto Princesa, Palawan. When the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) requested U.S. military assistance through the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group to the Republic of the Philippines (JUSMAGPHIL). The U.S. DoD responded, referencing the commander's immediate response ("72-hour") authority following extensive coordination with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM). This was unique as it was not a whole-of-government response led by the U.S. Agency for International Development, but the DoD primarily responding to AFP's request while U.S. military personnel were still on the ground following an exercise.

Introduction

The Typhoon Doksuri response was unique for the U.S. as the DoD responded to the AFP's direct request for assistance, in contrast with typical U.S. foreign disaster relief coordinated by the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. The U.S. Embassy in the Philippines did not issue a declaration of humanitarian need following Typhoon Doksuri/ Egay, which would start the typical U.S. process for foreign disaster relief led by the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), as was done following the Mayon Volcano eruption in June 2023, multiple tropical storms in 2022, and Super Typhoon Rai (Odette) in December 2021.¹ Instead, the AFP directly requested assistance from the U.S. DoD.

The Philippines is among the most disaster-exposed countries in the world. It is situated along the Pacific Ring of Fire between two major fault lines, thus experiences high levels of seismic and volcanic activity. Additionally, it is situated in the Western Pacific tropical storm region, with an average of 20 cyclones affecting the country each year, triggering floods, landslides, and storm surges that frequently result in the loss of lives, damage to infrastructure, and a severe effect on livelihoods. Figure 1 depicts the Philippines (colored green, located in the circle) in the path of the storm tracks of some of the most intense and frequently occurring tropical cyclones recorded over nearly 150 years, with the most intense storms depicted in red and orange.²

Tracks and Intensity of All Tropical Storms

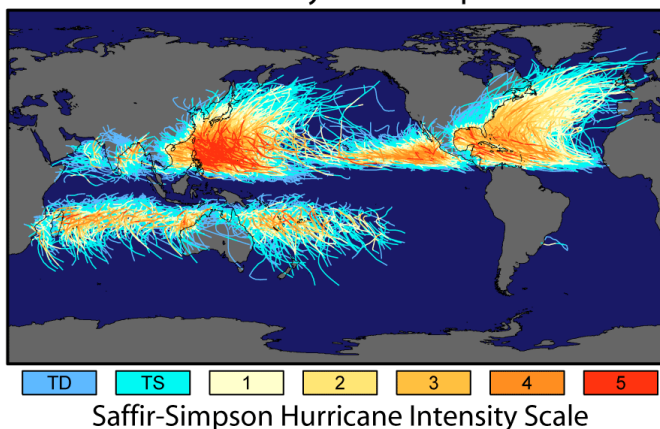


Figure 1: Philippines in Path of Intense and Frequent Tropical Storm Tracks for Nearly 150 Years

While the Philippines has amassed an incredible amount of disaster management experience and capacity in dealing with these hazards, their frequency and intensity still pose a significant challenge.

The Philippines is one the five U.S. treaty allies in the Pacific. The security cooperation relationship between the two countries is strong and is built upon a mutual defense treaty, reciprocal agreements regarding visiting forces, enhanced defense cooperation agreement, mutual logistics support agreement, and numerous exercises, events, and high-level dialogues.³ That close relationship, combined with the opportunity presented with U.S. DoD personnel already on-the-ground at the end of an exercise, contributed to the AFP directly requesting the U.S. DoD to assist with the typhoon response.

Overview

- Typhoon Doksuri (known in the Philippines as “Egay”) made landfall on Northern Luzon and outlying islands on 26 July 2023.
- U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific (MARFORPAC) unit, VMM-163, was in Palawan for the MASA 23 Exercise with 4 x MV-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircrafts and 4 x CH-53 Super Stallion helicopters.
- Request for DoD assistance was made unofficially by the Secretary of National Defense on 28 July, which was relayed to JUSMAGPHIL via the Armed Forces of the Philippines
- No official request for assistance from the Government of the Philippines and the U.S. Ambassador did not issue a declaration of humanitarian need.
- Authority for DoD to execute support to the AFP was granted referencing commander’s immediate response authority (“72 Hour Rule”) on 30 July.
- Operations executed for 72 hours from first flight: 14:30, 31 July – 14:30, 3 August
- Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) sites used, namely Lal-lo Airport
- Challenges during execution: fuel, weather

Background Of Typhoon Doksuri/Egay

Typhoon Doksuri/ Egay, made landfall in the vicinity of remote northern Fuga Island, Aparri, Cagayan at approximately 3:10 a.m. local time on 26 July 2023.⁴ The 435-mile-wide super typhoon had wind gusts up to 235 kilometers per hour (kph; 146 miles per hour, or mph), battered 15 municipalities, and spurred local governments to declare a province-wide state of calamity.⁵ The storm had intensified rapidly, becoming a severe tropical storm on 23 July with maximum wind speed between 87 to 117 kph (54 to 73 mph), and a super typhoon on 25 July with maximum wind speed exceeding 185 kph (115 mph), as categorized by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Association.⁶ It made landfall with winds of about 220 kph (140 mph), equivalent to a category 4 Atlantic hurricane. The typhoon slowly moved away from Dalupiri Island on 26 July at 17:00 local time. It maintained its strength as it moved west-northwest and on 27 July exited the Philippine Area of Responsibility.⁷

The tropical cyclone resulted in the deaths of at least 39 people in the Philippines. At least 13 people were killed as the typhoon brought flooding to five regions and triggered more than a dozen rain-induced landslides.⁸ Another 26 people died after a boat capsized on 27 July 2023, close to reaching Talim Island, southeast of the capital Manila, according to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG, Tanod Baybayin ng

Pilipinas). The boat had a capacity for only 42 people but had at least 66 people on board.⁹ Additionally, another 52 people were reportedly injured, almost 313,000 people displaced,¹⁰ and a reported 974,454 families (or 3,617,340 persons) affected in 5,678 barangays in the following regions: NCR (National Capital Region/ Metro Manila), I (Ilocos), II (Cagayan Valley), III (Central Luzon), Calabarzon, Mimaropa, V (Bicol), VI (Western Visayas), VII (Central Visayas), VIII (Eastern Visayas), XI (Davao), XII (Soccsksargen), CAR (Cordillera Administrative Region), and BARMM (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao).¹¹ Among those affected, at least 15,566 families (57,281 individuals) sought shelter in 763 evacuation centers.

Doksuri triggered rainfall in parts of Southern Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, as it intensified the

effect of the Southwest Monsoon or Habagat, which brings seasonal wind, heavy rainfall and storms from the southwest direction from May to September. More than 38,855 houses were damaged across the regions of Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Soccsksargen (formerly Central Mindanao), Bangsamoro, and the Cordillera Administrative Region. Typhoon Doksuri also caused up to PHP 1.36 billion (US\$24.4 million) in crop loss and agricultural damage affecting more than 91,268 farmers. The affected commodities included rice, corn, high value crops, livestock and poultry, and fisheries in the Cordillera Administrative Region, Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Western Visayas, and Central Luzon. Infrastructure and transportation systems in the affected areas sustained significant damage, with 397 road sections and 33 bridges affected. Additionally, power supply was disrupted in 306 cities or municipalities. Figure 2 shows of map of Typhoon Doksuri/ Egay's path and affected areas targeted for assistance by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).¹²

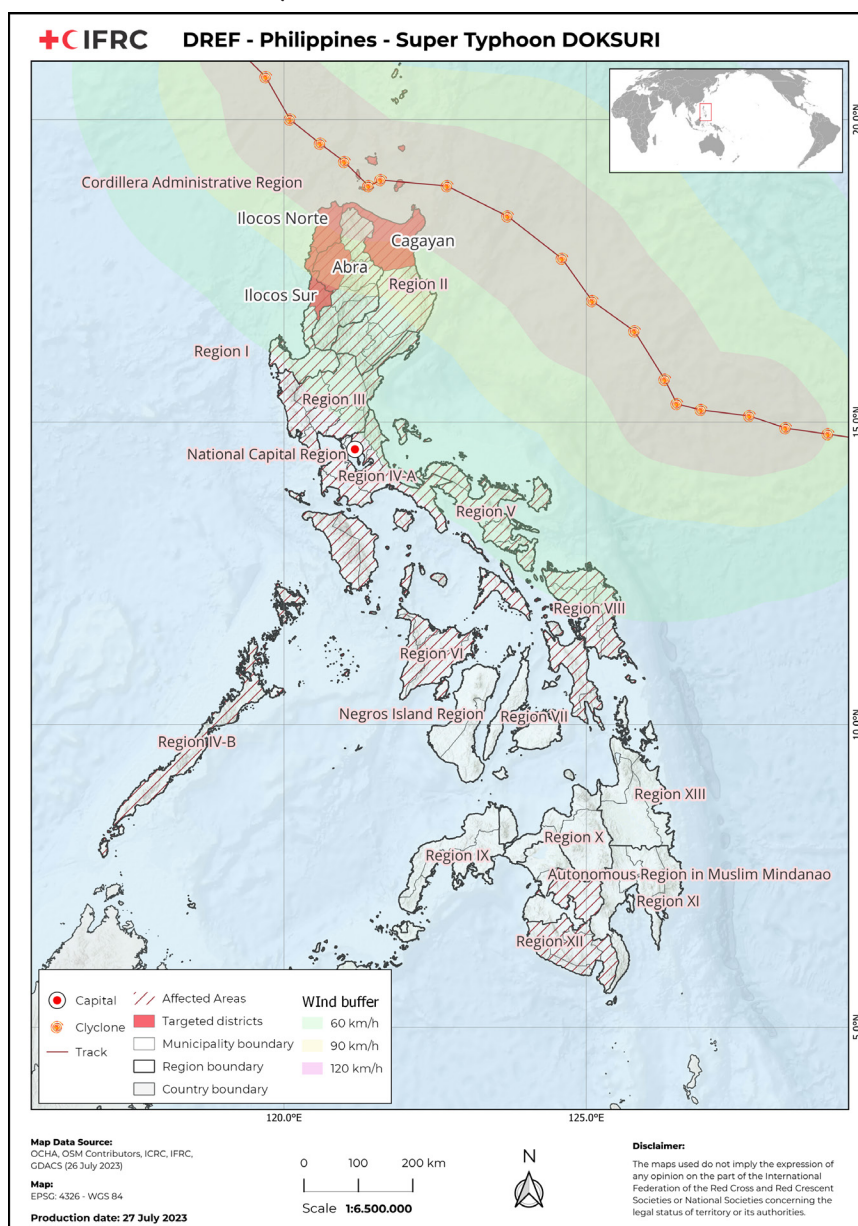


Figure 2: Map of Typhoon Doksuri's path.

Recovery was ongoing for months. On 12 October 2023, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) announced it started distributing P1 billion worth of Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) assistance to affected families and would continue until November. According to DSWD, the assistance goes to 178,396 qualified beneficiaries in Cordillera Administrative Region, Mimaropa, and Regions I (Ilocos), II (Cagayan Valley), and III (Central Luzon). ECT is an adaptive strategy to bridge gaps between immediate disaster relief and early recovery support by providing cash to disaster-affected families in the disaster area. According to DSWD Assistant Secretary for Strategic Communications Romel Lopez, the ECT reduces the financial and administrative costs associated with delivering food and non-food items. “The ECT program minimizes security risks for personnel and logistical demands since it utilizes financial service providers for the conduct of digital payouts,” said Lopez. ECT is under DSWD’s Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation program, with the cash assistance disbursed directly by authorized Special Disbursing Officers (SDOs) of their respective DSWD Field Offices.¹³

Responders To Typhoon Doksuri/Egay Philippines Civilian Agencies

Philippine government agencies significantly involved in Typhoon Doksuri/Egay disaster response includes National and Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Offices, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Office of Civil Defense, Department of Health (DOH), and Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD), which were all involved in coordinating response efforts and providing relief supplies following Typhoon Doksuri/Egay. These Philippine civilian government agencies provided the vast majority of the relief supplies that the U.S. DoD helped transport to affected areas.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) is the agency tasked to prepare for, and respond to, natural calamities, including typhoons and earthquakes. It also monitors human-induced emergencies, such as armed conflicts and maritime accidents. The NDRRMC is a policy-making body that uses strategies to mitigate the impact of disasters and increase national and local government resiliency.¹⁴ In a 30 April 2023 Executive Order, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. created the Disaster Response and Crisis Management Task Force (DRCMTF) on top of the NDRRMC with a stated need for a task force “that focuses only on disaster preparedness and response, and a clear unity of command to lead the government’s efforts in confronting the challenges brought about by natural disasters using evidence-driven and science-based approach in crisis management.”¹⁵ The task force, comprised of 10 government agencies or offices, can convene NDRRMC members to declare or lift a state of calamity and organize Quick Response Groups, among other tasks.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development’s role in supporting domestic disaster response was strengthened following a December 2021 strategy review, following which a strategic focus included a new position in disaster management to enhance DSWD response capacities towards improved disaster response capabilities.¹⁶ In the aftermath of Typhoon Doksuri/Egay, the DSWD continuously augmented family food packs (FFPs) to residents in severely affected areas, in line with the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to ensure that disaster-affected families did not experience hunger. From 26 July 26 to 10 August, the DSWD had released 550,688 boxes of FFPs to Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, and Central Luzon regions. The FFPs were delivered by 367 wing van trucks to local government units (LGUs) in the three northern and central Luzon regions most affected by Typhoon Doksuri/Egay as well as another typhoon and the enhanced monsoon. This was a record-breaking delivery of FFPs in a two-week period

for the National Resource Operations Center, DSWD's main disaster response hub. By 10 August, DSWD had released 293,191,436 PHP (US\$5.2 million) worth of humanitarian assistance to typhoon-affected regions. The DSWD stated it was scheduled to release close to one million food packs by 20 August.¹⁷

The Philippine Red Cross Society mobilized 2,130 personnel involved in the response operation in Luzon areas, including 20 personnel to conduct Rapid Damage Assessment and Needs Analysis in Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, Cagayan, and Abra. Various chapters dispatched their Emergency Response Units volunteers and rescue equipment to augment emergency needs, conduct rescue operations, and conduct clearing operations to provide access. Ambulance teams were also dispatched to augment provision of immediate first aid and medical transport. The Philippine Red Cross provided a range of relief supplies, including 37,879 hot meals, 1,049 bottles of water (330ml/11 oz.), 504 hygiene kits, sleeping kits for 200 families, and reached 638 individuals with psychological first aid.

International Civilian Agencies

The international response was not on a large enough scale to spur a collective response from the Humanitarian Country Team. However, individual United Nations (UN) agencies and other organizations engaged in responding to the situation, particularly those that already had an established country presence or strong relationships.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) supported the Philippines Red Cross in response operations. The IFRC is the lead Shelter Cluster Coordination in the Philippines and provides coordination, technical guidance, information, and materials to the 27 shelter implementing member agencies in the cluster, including the Philippine Red Cross. The IFRC also provided coordination among the participating National Societies – Spanish Red Cross, German Red Cross, Netherlands Red Cross, American Red Cross, Canadian Red Cross, and Finnish Red Cross – that supported the Philippine Red Cross. The IFRC budget for the response to Typhoon Doksuri and the southwest monsoon was 271,035 CHF (Swiss Francs, US\$ 310,460).¹⁸

The UN World Food Program (WFP) supported the Government of the Philippines in the emergency response to Typhoon Doksuri/ Egay through logistics support. The WFP helped the Department of Social Welfare and Development transport 11,000 family food packs to Isabela and Cagayan provinces, and, through existing USAID disaster preparedness funding, mobilized seven trucks to support thousands of affected families, the U.S. Embassy reported on 29 July.¹⁹ Throughout August 2023, WFP mobilized 37 trucks to transport 52,500 family food packs and reach 262,500 people in response to Typhoon Doksuri and Mayon Volcano unrest.²⁰ Throughout September 2023, WFP mobilized 11 trucks to transport 143 metric tons of non-food items (NFIs), such as hygiene-, sleeping-, and family emergency kits, from the DSWD and the Office of Civil Defense to affected communities in response to Typhoon Doksuri/ Egay, Typhoon Saola/ Goring, and Typhoon Haikui/ Hanna.²¹ WFP has a country strategic plan with the Philippines to support the Government in achieving food security and reducing malnutrition for vulnerable groups, focusing on the Bangsamoro Region in its post-conflict transition but also preparing for disaster and climate change impact nationwide. WFP provided some of the delivery trucks in collaboration with the DSWD and also supported the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) with two very-small-aperture terminals (VSATs, two-way satellite ground stations with a dish antenna).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) responded to a request from the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development to supply approximately 2,000 tarpaulins, 300 modular tents, and solar lamps to the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Region 1 (Ilocos), and Region 2 (Cagayan Valley).

The European Union (EU) allocated 500,000 EUR (US\$550,200) through their existing emergency funding requirement with international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to support the ongoing relief efforts.²²

Amity Foundation, a Chinese Christian voluntary organization, secured funding from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's government disaster relief fund and carried out the distribution of relief supplies in Quezon City on 16 August 2023 in partnership with the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). A reported 269 households received supplies of drinking water, rice, and canned foods. Five more distribution events were planned for the period 22-28 August.²³

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)

AFP – HADR Line of Effort

Various units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines conducted disaster response operations in areas hit by Typhoon Doksuri/ Egay. On 25 July, the Philippine Army mobilized its Disaster Response Unit (DRU), as well as military equipment and assets for deployment, transportation assistance and evacuation, as shown in Photo 1.²⁴

On 25 July, the 525th Engineer Combat Battalion (525ECBn) of the 51st Engineer Brigade (51EBde) mobilized troops and equipment, including Disaster Response Operations TEAs (Tools, Equipment, Accessories) for possible deployment to conduct rescue, relief, and clearing operations in typhoon-affected areas.²⁵



Photo 1: The Philippine Army mobilized its Disaster Response Unit on 25 July.

The AFP reported on 25 July that soldiers from the Philippine Army's 91st Infantry Battalion (IB) prepared to conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster response operations in anticipation of floods or landslides in Aurora province. 91st IB troops, in coordination with Local Government Units (LGUs), conducted Mobile Patrol and continuously monitoring the weather situation.²⁶

On 25 July, the Marine Battalion Landing Team-10 (MBLT-10) conducted pre-emptive evacuations in Santa Ana and Gonzaga, Cagayan. A total of 17 families and around 100 individuals were relocated to a safer place.²⁷ MBLT-10 coordinated and collaborated with the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Offices (MDRRMOs) of Cagayan, and deployed to several municipalities.²⁸ The Disaster Response and Rescue Team of MBLT-10, 4th Marine Brigade, evacuated 100 individuals including 25 children along the coastal areas of Barangay Caroan in Gonzaga, Cagayan.²⁹ The 20th Marine Company evacuated 17 families, comprising 67 individual, in Barangay Port Irene, Cagayan and relocated them to the Barangay Casambalangan Gymnasium. The Philippine Navy, through Naval Forces Northern Luzon's Disaster Response Teams (DRT), also carried out multiple evacuation operations in Cagayan and La Union. The Joint Task Group Sagip participated in the 25 July operational briefing at the San

Fernando City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (CDRRMO) in La Union province, which was crucial for updating and strategizing response in the province.³⁰ The Navy's Disaster Response and Rescue (DRR) Teams evacuated approximately 140 civilians in Gonzaga and Mira Cagayan on 25 July.³¹

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) stated on 26 July that it had deployed its disaster response units (DRUs) to rescue thousands of individuals from vulnerable areas in various parts of the country. The DRUs, comprised of personnel from the Philippine Army (PA), Philippine Navy (PN), and Philippine Air Force (PAF), assisted local government units in the evacuation of typhoon-affected residents. These included approximately 100 individuals from Barangay Caroan in Gonzaga, Cagayan who were taken to a temporary shelter by the DRU from the 30th Marine Company, Naval Forces Northern Luzon, and 67 individuals evacuated by the 20th Marine Company in Barangay Port Irene, Santa Ana, Cagayan. At Camp Atienza, the 525th Engineer Combat Battalion of the 51st Engineer Brigade deployed its personnel and disaster response operations tools, equipment, and accessories (DRO-TEAs) to assist stranded passengers in Libis, Quezon City.³²

On 26 July, MBLT-10 assisted Barangay Tangatan by ensuring the operation of their genset (generator set, used to provide energy), thus enabling free cellphone charging services to meet the communication needs of Barangay Tangatan residents.³³ Disaster Response and Rescue Teams of Marine Battalion Landing Team 8 (MBLT 8 Peacemaker), 4th Marine Brigade (4MBDE) together with the local MDRRMO, carried out evacuation of civilians along the coastal areas of Barangay Pasaleng in Pagudpud, Ilocos Norte and Barangay Dagueray and Namuac in Sanchez Mira, Cagayan.³⁴ On 27 July, MBLT 8 collaborated with the Local Government of Sanchez Mira in conducting clearing operations in Barangay Centro 1.³⁵

AFP reported on 26 July that 350 Search, Rescue and Retrieval (SRR) teams were deployed to typhoon-hit areas in Northern Luzon, led by the AFP's Northern Luzon Command (NOLCOM). The teams – consisting of 1,992 highly-trained SRR personnel, 813 Civilian Active Auxiliary, and 197 reservists – provided aid to affected communities. NOLCOM activated 158 mobility assets, 27 naval assets, and 2 air assets to extend necessary assistance and relief. Also on 26 July, the 98th IB of 5ID, the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Conner, Apayao, and the Office of Civil Defense, prepared relief goods for distribution to affected people. The 17th IB, in cooperation with Philippine government agencies, provided security and assisted in road clearing operations. They also distributed food packs to affected families in areas of Northern Luzon.³⁶

On 27 July, Philippine Navy DRR Teams rescued more than 50 families in Vigan City, Bantay Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur, and delivered 6,500 boxes of relief good in Laoag, Ilocos Norte. On 28 July, the DRR Teams engaged in search and rescue operations in the flood-stricken areas of Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, and Abra. The Navy assisted in lifting an overturned vehicle in Vigan, and transporting relief goods to Santa Maria, Ilocos Sur. Naval forces and the 4th Marine Brigade's rescue teams, in coordination with local government units, delivered relief goods to residents in Laoag, Ilocos Norte.

By 29 July, the Philippine Navy reported that it had dispatched 27 Disaster Response and Rescue Teams throughout its Naval Forces Northern Luzon area of responsibility in Cagayan, Ilocos Norte, and Ilocos Sur.³⁷ The Philippine Marine Corps on 29 July worked with TV5 Alagang Kapatid Foundation, Maynilad Company, Bikers for a Cause, and Adamson University in conducting relief operations for Calayan and Fuga Islands. The Marine units in the area were to coordinate with local governments for the distribution of relief goods including 200 sacks of rice, 220 boxes of bottled water, noodles, and canned goods.³⁸

On 7 August, the MBLT-10 reported that it, together with Philippine Navy and Marine Corps Reservists, Santa Ana Municipal Police Station, and Santa Ana Bureau of Fire Protection in partnership with AYALA Foundation, distributed more than 230 relief packs to affected residents in Baranguay Rapuli, Diora-Zinungan, Santa Cruz, and Tangatan, all of Santa Ana, Cagayan.³⁹ On 9 August, the 122nd Naval Combat Support Squadron Reserve (NCSSR) reported that it had participated as emergency responders in working with the Christian Bible Baptist Church to clear a landslide-affected area in front of the church near the Philippine Military Academy in Baguio City. The reservists had also assisted the City Disaster and Risk Reduction and Management Office (CDRRMO) on 31 July and 1 August in transporting relief goods.⁴⁰

On 9 August, the MBLT-8 and barangay officials delivered aid provided by TV5 and Alagang Kapatid Foundation, Inc. to the residents of Fuga Island. MBLT-8 worked with local officials distributing 350 food packs, 350 hygiene kits, 10 water filters, and 100 clothing items and toys for affected families.⁴¹

On 10 August, MBLT-10 reported that the One Meralco Foundation, PLDT SMART Foundation, TV5 Alagang KAPATID Foundation, Metro Pacific Investment Foundation (MVP Group of Companies) and MBLT-10 distributed relief to affected families in Abulog, Calayan Island, and Santa Ana, Cagayan.⁴²

Photo 2 portrays SRR personnel assisting affected residents in Northern Luzon. Photo 3 shows AFP personnel assisting with the transport of relief goods provided by the Department of Social Welfare and Development in Northern Luzon.⁴³



Photo 2: AFP Search, Rescue and Retrieval Personnel assist affected residents in Northern Luzon.



Photo 3: AFP assists with transport of relief goods provided by the Department of Social Welfare and Development in Northern Luzon

AFP – Search and Rescue for Coast Guard personnel Line of Effort

Four Philippines Coast Guard (PCG) personnel went missing at 4:00pm on 26 July, the day the Typhoon Doksuri/ Egay made landfall. They had set out as part of a rescue mission for the tug boat Iroquois, but the PCG boat capsized off Abulug in the vicinity waters of Aparri. The four PCG personnel were last seen clinging to their capsized aluminum boat before they were swept away by the current. The seven crew members of M/Tug Iroquois were later found safe on 29 July by the Office of Civil Defense Region 2 passing by Camiguin Island.⁴⁴ The province was under typhoon signal number 3 and a gale warning was up in the area at the time the four PCG personnel were trying to cross the waters of Aparri to get to the M/Tug Iroquois. Search activities for the four PCG personnel was initially delayed by bad weather, but the PCG stated on 27 July it had launched a search and rescue operation, which would include deployment of its helicopter from Coast Guard Aviation Force.⁴⁵ On 31 July, authorities reported that they found the four PCG members' aluminum boat, AB 065, on 30 July in Barangay Fuga in Aparri, but not the missing PCG personnel.⁴⁶ The U.S. planned to provide support to maritime search and rescue

by the MV-22s as they returned from Basco, Batanes on 31 July.⁴⁷ The U.S. Embassy stated on 1 August that the U.S. is supporting the Philippine Coast Guard's search and rescue efforts over Babuyan and Camiguin islands.⁴⁸ Per a report on 4 August, Philippines National Police Air Unit chief PCol. Serafin Petalio II said they conducted aerial search between the waters of Cagayan, Aparri and Camiguin utilizing four helicopters.⁴⁹ The PCG continued search operations at least through 9 August for its four missing Coast Guard personnel.⁵⁰

U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)

The U.S. DoD utilized the 72-hour Commander's immediate response authority to provide assistance in response to Typhoon Doksuri, which was executed from 31 July 2023 at 14:30 to 3 August at 14:30.

Following the conclusion of Marine Aviation Support Activity 23 (MASA 23) exercise, DoD personnel on the ground were re-tasked to provide logistical and transportation support to the typhoon response efforts. The MASA 23 exercise took place in the Philippines from 6-21 July 2023, with U.S. Marines and Sailors from I and III MEF working with the Philippines Marine Corps.⁵¹ MV-22B Ospreys and CH-53E Super Stallions from Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 163 deployed to Antonio Bautista Air Base for exercise activities held on Puerto Princesa, Palawan.⁵² Bautista Air Base is one of nine Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) sites at Philippine military bases, where U.S. troops and equipment have facilitated access and the U.S. assists with infrastructure upgrades to enhance capabilities.

Between 25 and 28 July, there were various discussions on whether there would be an official request for assistance, which, if approved, would have seen the USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) in the lead coordinating role within the U.S. government per U.S. policy. However, the Government of the Philippines did not make an official request through its Department of Foreign Affairs to the U.S. Embassy. The national government assessed it generally had the capacity to handle the response.

Secretary of Defense Teodoro, who had previous experience working with the U.S., was aware that U.S. forces were already in the country for an exercise. On 28 July, a request for U.S. military assistance was sent from AFP staff to DoD via JUSMAGPHIL at Camp Aguinaldo. This direct request largely influenced military-military coordination featuring prominently in this response operation.* U.S. DoD determined it could assist AFP and authority to support the disaster response was ultimately granted, referencing Commander's immediate response. In accordance with DoD Directive (DODD) 5100.46, the colloquially known "72-hour authority" or "life and limb clause" allows commanders with assigned forces at or near the immediate scene of a foreign disaster to take prompt action to save human lives.⁵³ On 30 July, USINDOPACOM's operations (J3) directorate gave a verbal order to MARFORPAC and JUSMAGPHIL to provide support to AFP for a 72-hour period, commencing from the beginning of the first flight. The initial flight departed on 31 July at 14:30, thus the period for DoD to support AFP lasted through 3 August at 14:30.

At the request of the AFP, Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 163 (VMM-163) (Reinforced), Marine Aircraft Group 16 (MAG-16), 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (3rd MAW), I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), were tasked to support relief efforts in the northern Philippines. A reported 35 Marines and Sailors, four MV-22B Ospreys, and four CH-53E Super Stallions transitioned from preparing to redeploy to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, California from the Philippines, after completing MASA-23, to supporting relief efforts in response to Typhoon Doksuri/Egay. The unit was re-tasked on 30 July and, within 24 hours, all eight aircraft were airborne from Antonio Bautista Air Base, Puerto Princesa,

* While this was not strictly a military-military activity in the sense that AFP operated in support of Philippine civilian government agencies, DoD involvement did rely heavily on military-military interaction as the U.S. and Philippine militaries worked closely together throughout the operation as shown in the photos.

Palawan, to Subic Bay International Airport to begin loading and delivering relief supplies that were provided by the Government of the Philippines.⁵⁴

Initially, three of the CH-53s had to divert to the Danilo Atienza Air Base at Sangley Point across the bay from Manila, as the weather was bad at Subic. However, all aircraft made it to Subic by 1 August.

Figure 3 lists relief supplies positioned at logistics hubs with intended destinations. Relief supplies were provided by the Government of the Philippines and transported by the U.S. military.⁵⁵

STAGING/PICK UP POINT	Drop off point	Call Sign / Frequency	Items	Quantity	Unit	Dimension	TOTAL WEIGHT	AGENCY
51QUV 65774 51134 Tuguegarao Air Port	GC: 51QUB 41025 30078 Calayan, Cagayan	ANNIAH (Basco) ANNIAH 3 (Calayan) HF3 - 8.73 PT	Family Food Packs	1,750.00	boxes	13cm x 30cm x13cm	14,525 kgs	DSWD
			Solar lamp	417	pcs			
			Hygiene Kits	64	Pail			
			Jerry Cans	30	pcs			DOH
			Medicines	2	boxes	20"x7" (Box 1) 15.5"x11" (Box 2)		
			Tarpaulin	200	unit			DHSUD
	GC: 51Q UA 28859 85828, Brgy Fuga, Aparri, Cagayan	SYDNEY 1 HF-8.73 PT VHF - 41.50 PT	Family Food Packs	650	boxes	13cm x 30cm x13cm	5,395 kgs	DSWD
			Solar lamp	250	pcs			
			Family Pack	20	boxes	H: 49 cm L: 74 cm W: 57 cm	600 kgs	OCD
			Hygiene Kit	50	Pail	H: 440 cm W: 268mm	100 kgs'	
			Portable Stove with butane canisters	10	box		40 kgs	
			Modular Tent	4	sacks		64 kgs	
			Shelter Repair Kit	30	unit		360 kgs	
Vigan City 51QTV 19364 43098	51QTV 5695986809 Brgy Renedius, Cervantes, Ilocos Sur	DEFENDER 59.15500 PT	Family Food Packs	1,000.00	Boxes	13cm x 30cm x13cm	8,300	OCD1/PD RRMO Region 1

Figure 3: U.S. DoD helped transport relief supplies provided by Philippine government agencies.

During the three days of relief efforts, VMM-163 delivered approximately 64,000 pounds of food and water, provided by the Government of the Philippines, to remote, affected communities.⁵⁶

Challenges included weather and refueling. Inclement weather hampered operations during 1-2 August 2023. The weather delayed an MV-22, which had transited to Lal-lo for fuel but was unable to proceed to the logistics hubs at Tuguegarao or Vigan as both airfields were temporarily closed due to weather. Fueling also posed challenges at the smaller airports. Aircraft were unable to refuel at Laoag as the airport was not prepared to deal with the sudden influx of U.S. military aircraft. Many regional airports in the Philippines only maintain enough fuel to service scheduled domestic flights. Therefore, the MV-22 refueled at Lal-lo Airport in Cagayan, where it was delivered in barrels and hand-pumped into the aircraft.⁵⁷ Lal-lo served as an important refueling station for U.S. military aircraft carrying the relief supplies.⁵⁸ The I MEF Multinational Logistics Officer worked with the AFP to procure additional fuel using the Military Logistics Support Agreement between the U.S. and the Philippines.

Communications relied heavily on the “Signal” smartphone app. Among Philippine responders on the ground, phone apps played a huge role in communications, especially “Signal”. Bilateral communications largely took place via use of the Signal app.⁵⁹ Most cases where the U.S. DoD is supporting a disaster response in a foreign country will involve the majority of communications transpiring over open civilian platforms and networks. Key U.S. military personnel will need to have the ability to communicate on the platforms primarily being used by the host nation in a disaster response it is supporting. Lessons learned from previous DoD support to foreign disaster response efforts indicate that DoD platforms and policies need to be flexible enough to enable multinational and interagency communications. As a recent example, when the U.S. Marines supported USAID/ BHA-led foreign disaster relief in Papua New Guinea in July 2023 in response to a volcanic eruption, they experienced a significant hindrance in that U.S. government-furnished equipment did not allow “Whatsapp,” the globally-used smartphone app that was heavily utilized in that Papua New Guinea response.⁶⁰

Figure 4 depicts how U.S. DoD provided assistance in moving relief supplies by air with a hub-and-spokes model; the Northern Luzon transit “hubs” are red (Vigan, Tuguegarao, Lal-lo), and the Northern Luzon destination “spokes” are gray (Cervantes, Fuga Island, Calayan, Basco).⁶¹



Figure 4: Northern Luzon airfields utilized in transporting relief to affected areas.

Lal-lo Airport in Cagayan played an important role in the operation. At Lal-lo, 1,200 food packs and 56 solar panels were loaded onto U.S. aircraft, a V-22 Osprey and a CH-53 Sea Stallion, at Lal-lo Airport for transport on to Fuga and Calayan islands. Lal-lo is significant for being an Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) site where U.S. military aircraft refueled, and Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro and AFP Chief of Staff General Romeo S. Brawner Jr. both personally visited the site during operations. Designated an EDCA site in April 2023, the use of Lal-lo shined a spotlight on the role of EDCA sites in boosting disaster response capabilities and fostering mutual assistance. The boxed inset explains more about the significance of EDCA.

Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (Edca):

Lal-lo, which was used for transit, refueling, and other air logistics support in the Typhoon Doksuri/Egay response, was identified in April 2023 as an Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement site agreed upon between the Philippines and the U.S.

The Philippines has operated five EDCA base locations since 2014, with four new sites announced in 2023 including Lal-lo. The five EDCA sites existing since 2014 are Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, Basa Air Base in Pampanga, Antonio Bautista Air Base in Palawan, Mactan-Benito Abuen Air Base in Cebu, and Lumbia Air Base in Cagayan de Oro. The four new sites proposed are Naval Base Camilo Osias, Lal-lo Airport, Camp Melchor Dela Cruz, and Balabac Island.⁶²

The 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement enables the U.S. and Philippine militaries to train together, better respond to natural and humanitarian crises, and achieve modernization goals. To achieve this, EDCA provides a legal basis for Philippine and U.S. service members to undertake security cooperation exercises, pursue joint and combined military training activities, and rapidly respond to humanitarian assistance efforts from agreed locations in the Philippines, on a rotational basis. EDCA sites have been used by U.S. and Philippine forces during Kamandag and Balikatan military exercises. The 2014 EDCA agreement builds on the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty and 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement. EDCA is one of the bilateral defense agreements that provide the foundation for security cooperation between the two countries, as cited in the 3 May 2023 bilateral defense guidelines between the Philippines and U.S.⁶³

The Philippines has sovereignty and control over EDCA sites. The U.S. and the Philippines decide upon EDCA locations together, with Philippine leadership providing final approval. The U.S. has allocated over \$82 million towards EDCA implementation at all five existing locations to support 21 projects and enable the U.S. and the Philippines to build lasting security infrastructure to promote long-term modernization, build a credible mutual defense posture, maintain humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capabilities, and enhance the strength of the alliance. The U.S. has awarded the majority of contracts supporting these projects to Philippine companies, generating local economic growth.⁶⁴ These include the following projects at the 2014 sites:

- Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija (US\$11.4 million allocated)
 - Humanitarian assistance and disaster response warehouse
 - Command and control infrastructure
 - Urban combat training facilities
- Basa Air Base, Pampanga (US\$66.57 million allocated)
 - Humanitarian assistance and disaster response warehouse
 - Command and control infrastructure
 - Fuel storage
 - Runway improvements
 - Aircraft parking

- Antonio Bautista Air Base, Palawan (US\$1.8 million allocated)
 - Ammunition warehouse
 - Storage warehouse renovation
 - Fuel storage
 - Command and control infrastructure
- Mactan-Benito Abuen Air Base, Cebu (US\$2.7 million allocated)
 - Fuel storage facility
- Lumbia Air Base, Cagayan de Oro (US\$3.7 million allocated)
 - Humanitarian assistance and disaster response warehouse
 - Runway lighting improvements⁶⁵

On 1 February 2023, the Philippines and U.S. announced plans to accelerate the full implementation of the EDCA with the agreement to designate four new Agreed Locations in strategic areas of the country and the substantial completion of the projects in the existing five Agreed Locations.⁶⁶ On 3 April 2023, the four new locations were announced as:

- Naval Base Camilo Osias in Santa Ana, Cagayan;
- Camp Melchor Dela Cruz in Gamu, Isabela;
- Balabac Island in Palawan; and
- Lal-lo Airport in Cagayan.⁶⁷

The addition of the new EDCA locations allows for more rapid support for humanitarian and climate-related disasters in the Philippines, and for better response to other shared challenges. The enhanced cooperation under the EDCA aims to strengthen interoperability, including through infrastructure improvements; enhanced joint use of facilities; advancement of additional maritime security, maritime domain awareness, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capabilities; and rotational U.S. access to Agreed Locations.⁶⁸ U.S. forces at these sites will be rotational, non-permanent forces.⁶⁹ The announcement of the sites had been delayed by opposition from some local government leaders due to concern over being caught up in potential future conflict between the U.S. and China. Carlito Galvez Jr., Secretary of the Department of National Defense (DND),⁷⁰ called the sites “very strategic” and emphasized the Philippines’ responsibility to the international community in the South China Sea. “That’s a trade route... where more or less \$3 trillion trade passes (annually),” he said. “Our responsibility to collectively secure that is huge.”⁷¹ Plans for the new EDCA sites includes upgrades on Balabac Island, adjacent to the South China Sea. Balabac Island had only hosted a small naval and littoral monitoring station, but upgrade plans to better accommodate Philippine and U.S. troops include the construction of a 3-kilometer-long Balabac Military Runway and a series of projects at Naval Station Narcisco Del Rosario. Construction had started on the Balabac Military Runway prior to the island’s selection as an EDCA site. The runway is intended for dual use between civilian and military aircraft, similar to EDCA projects at Mactan-Benito Ebuen and Antonio Bautista Air Bases. Department of Public Works and Highways planned contracts relating to the air base include a command and control building.⁷² Philippine Ambassador to Washington Jose Manuel Romualdez anticipated the four new 2023 EDCA sites would be operational in one year.⁷³ The U.S. will allocate more than \$100 million in infrastructure investments at the new and existing EDCA sites by the end of fiscal year 2023, as U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III stated in April 2023.⁷⁴ On 19 October 2023, AFP Chief of Staff General Romeo Brawner said 63 more projects were being added to the nine EDCA sites, including the construction of roads, warehouses and drainage systems.⁷⁵

Photo 4 shows Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr., AFP Chief Staff General Romeo S Brawner Jr. arrive in Lal-lo, Cagayan via Philippine Air Force's Black Hawk helicopter.⁷⁶

Photo 5 depicts U.S. and Philippines military personnel at Lal-lo airport loading relief goods onto a V-22 Osprey.⁷⁷



Photo 4: Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. and AFP Chief Staff General Romeo S Brawner Jr. arrive in Lal-lo.



Photo 5: U.S. and Philippines military personnel loading relief goods onto a V-22 Osprey at Lal-lo.

Photo 6 shows Filipino and American troops loading relief goods at Lal-lo Airport bound for Fuga and Calayan Islands.⁷⁸

Photo 7 depicts U.S. Marines and Philippine servicemembers and citizens offloading relief supplies provided by the Government of the Philippines from a U.S. Marine Corps CH-53E Super Stallion at Lal-lo Airport/ Cagayan North International Airport, Cagayan province, on 3 August 2023.⁷⁹



Photo 6: Filipino and American troops loading relief goods at Lal-lo airport bound for Fuga and Calayan Islands.



Photo 7: U.S. Marines and Philippine servicemembers and citizens offload supplies provided by the Government of the Philippines at Lal-lo.

Photo 8 depicts still shots from an AFP-edited video montage, with the text summarizing one approximate division of tasks, where U.S. military aircraft delivered relief goods provided by the Philippine government and AFP aircraft transported Philippine personnel.⁸⁰

Photo 9 shows U.S. Marines with 3d Marine Littoral Regiment, 3d Marine Division, assisting with offloading equipment provided by the Government of the Philippines, at Laoag International Airport on 29 July 2023.⁸¹



Photo 8: AFP-edited video montage using DoD photos.



Photo 9: U.S. Marines help offload equipment provided by the Government of the Philippines at Laoag International Airport on 29 July.

Photo 10 depicts U.S. Marines with 3d Marine Littoral Regiment, 3d Marine Division, and Philippine Marines providing road clearing assistance at Laoag International Airport on 29 July 2023.⁸²

Photo 11 shows U.S. Marines with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 163 (Reinforced), Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, and Philippine Marines offloading food and water provided by the Government of the Philippines from an MV-22B Osprey in Basco, Batanes province on 31 July 2023.⁸³



Photo 10: U.S. Marines and Philippine Marines provide road clearing assistance at Laoag Airport.



Photo 11: U.S. Marines and Philippine Marines offload supplies provided by the Government of the Philippines in Basco, Batanes.

Photo 12 portrays Philippine Marines, Soldiers, Fire Fighters, and Policemen offloading food and water provided by the Government of the Philippines from a U.S. Marine Corps MV-22B Osprey with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 163 (Reinforced), Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing in Basco, Batanes province on 1 August 2023.⁸⁴ The U.S. Marine Corps helped transport nearly 5,500 kilograms of food and water to Batanes using U.S. military aircraft.⁸⁵

Photo 13 portrays a Filipina woman passing along relief supplies provided by the Philippine Department of Social Welfare and Development and delivered by a U.S. Marine Corps MV-22B Osprey with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 163 (Reinforced), Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing on Fuga Island on 3 August 2023.⁸⁶



Photo 12: Philippine security and first responder personnel offload water and food provided by the Government of the Philippines from a MV-22B Osprey in Basco.



Photo 13: A Filipina citizen passes along relief supplies delivered by a MV-22B Osprey on Fuga Island.

Photo 14 shows U.S. Marines, Philippine Marines, and Filipino citizens taking a group photo after conducting emergency relief efforts on Fuga Island on 3 August 2023.⁸⁷



Photo 14: U.S. Marines, Philippine Marines, and Filipino Citizens Conclude Relief Efforts on Fuga Island

Conclusion

Typhoon Doksuri made landfall in the Philippines on 26 July 2023, leading to the deaths of dozens of people and widespread flooding and landslides. The U.S. DoD provided assistance from 31 July to 3 August. The request for assistance was unique in that it came directly from the AFP to the DoD through JUSMAGPHIL. The request was timed with U.S. military personnel still being located in the Philippines for the bilateral MASA-23 exercise on Palawan, allowing for support to be provided before they redeployed out of the country.

The DoD supported relief efforts by providing airlift of relief goods. Four MV-22B Ospreys, four CH-53E Super Stallions, and 35 Marines and Sailors who had completed the MASA-23 exercise transitioned from preparing to redeploy back to the U.S. toward supporting relief efforts in response to Typhoon Doksuri. During the three days of relief efforts, the Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 163 transported approximately 64,000 pounds of food and water, supplied by the Government of the Philippines. Supplies were flown across 3,900 nautical miles to affected communities as far as the remote Batanes Islands located north of Luzon in the Philippine Sea.⁸⁸

The U.S. military refueled in coordination with the Philippines government at expeditionary locations, including Lal-lo Airfield, which was notable for being a recently designated EDCA sites. EDCA sites are jointly agreed upon facilities where the U.S. invest in infrastructure and capacity development and the Philippines allows access to U.S. troops to enhance mutual security cooperation. One of the benefits of EDCA sites is the ability to better support disaster relief efforts in the region.

Questions for Discussion

- *What are the primary objectives of U.S. military–foreign military engagements?*
- *What synergies can two treaty allies bring to disaster response, particularly with the U.S. and the Philippines having a bilateral security agreement?*
- *What is the significance of Enhanced Defense Cooperation sites, such as Lal-lo?*
- *What are the considerations for the U.S. military that much of the local communication and coordination was done via apps, especially the “Signal” app in this case?*
- *How can the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) between the Philippines and the U.S. facilitate disaster relief operations? (This is alternately referred to between the U.S. and other countries as Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreements.)*

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