

Civil and Military Cooperation in International Humanitarian Operations

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Cooperation between civilian and military organizations saves lives during humanitarian crises, but their cultural and organizational differences often hinder effective coordination. Civilians who serve in humanitarian organizations tend to focus on relieving human suffering or improving the long-term quality of life in regions where they work. Military organizations, in contrast, focus on security and stability, contributing to humanitarian operations as secondary goals that support broader action planning.

What can be done to improve civilian and military working relations? We asked experts in disaster response, peacekeeping, economic development, and inter-cultural relation-building. They identified several aspects of civil-military cooperation that influence the quality of a joint response, including:

- Different civilian and military cultures, histories, routines, and patterns of operating which may pose challenges in international operations. Knowing those possible barriers may help overcome them.
- Routines and ‘ways of doing things,’ some explicit, but many implicit, that develop uniquely in each organization. Routines include forms, procedures, conventions, and technologies in organizations as well as beliefs, frameworks, paradigms and codes (Leavitt and March, 1996). Dimensions of differences embodied in routines can include perceptions of power, cultural norms, and tendencies towards uncertainty avoidance.
- Communication and collaboration across dissimilar national cultures. Broad differences in ‘east vs west’ mindsets, as well as regional distinctions, influence the way organizations operate in (often subtle) ways.

These (and other) challenges are important for organizations to be aware of when they operate internationally. As you read the following stories, it might be useful to ponder:

- how do you see these challenges manifested, and are there ways to overcome them?
- how do your own experiences relate (or not)?

Worldwide Disasters and Humanitarian Operations

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Natural disasters affected 569.4 million people and caused US \$154 billion of damage worldwide in 2016

Guha-Sapir, Hoyois, Wallemacq, and Below, 2017

More high-impact disasters occur in Asia than on other continents, largely because of earthquakes

Raja, Irshad, and Sukarno, 2017

Among natural disasters, tropical cyclones cause the highest number of deaths in the United States

National Centers for Environmental Information, 2017

Increasing military involvement in humanitarian responses requires strategic civil-military coordination

The Sphere Project, 2011

Military versus Civilian Purposes and Perspectives Regarding Humanitarian Operations

Jesse Wolfe is a Regional Civil-military Coordination Advisor for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). He believes that it is crucial to understand the distinct purposes of humanitarian and military organizations. “One of the things to start with is the idea that the military and the humanitarians ultimately are doing what they are doing for different reasons. The humanitarians are doing disaster related work, humanitarian assistance, out of the humanitarian imperative and based on the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality and operational independence. The military, as much as they often think that they are providing humanitarian assistance for purely humanitarian reasons, ultimately there is a political and security reason behind why they are doing those activities. They can’t ultimately claim to be neutral—at a minimum—in terms of what they are doing. So, we often find that the military, actually quite easily, thinks of themselves in a humanitarian hat, especially those that are coming from a civil affairs background or something like that.

“But, they are still not humanitarians because they are doing in service for foreign policy-related objectives or national security-related objectives. So, even though they have more training and a better understanding of all the different stakeholders that they are working with and programming different activities, if they are not being directed for some national security objective or foreign policy objective, they wouldn’t be doing what they are doing. Whereas the humanitarians are going in wherever there is an identified need, regardless of the political dynamics, at least in principle. So, interestingly enough, talking to the military, a lot of times there is a lightbulb coming on for them because they tend to think they can kind of slide along the spectrum, especially if it’s just disaster relief in the Philippines, which is something that happens relatively frequently in this peacetime context. They see themselves as doing that purely for humanitarian reasons. The humanitarians on the other side, have a much more difficult time understanding the military role in this. They certainly don’t have trouble seeing the difference between the reasons they do what they do and the military. We actually find, working with the military, that they have an easier time looking through the lens of the humanitarians.”

Ryan McGovern, Disaster Management Analyst from the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DM), shared another angle on the disparity between civilian and military attitudes. “I think the military sometimes don’t distinguish the difference between humanitarian lifesaving assistance and long term development, and they just kind of merge those things together. So, when they are working on an active disaster, it’s pretty straight forward what the military needs to do. They need to provide those military assets, unique capabilities—airlift. I don’t think anybody disputes the need for those because these NGOs don’t have those kind of things. I think it’s when you get into those complex emergencies, like conflicts, that’s when you can start to see those differences and those different sort of demands. You know, the military may see humanitarian assistance and stability as kind of the same, so they almost view humanitarian assistance as being a way to combat terrorism, and humanitarians would never think that.”

Is an NGO suitable for collaboration? Considerations for military leaders

“It is imperative that the following questions about the organization are answered: 1) what is its stated mission and is it making progress in fulfilling it, 2) where does its loyalties lie and how is it funded, 3) are the personnel representing the NGO on the ground credible, and 4) will a perception of collaborating with the military harm the NGO?”

Major Sean Dixon, U.S. Special Forces

Médecins Sans Frontières: Neutral, Impartial, and Independent

Médecins Sans Frontières provides assistance to populations in distress, to victims of natural or man-made disasters and to victims of armed conflict. They do so irrespective of race, religion, creed or political convictions. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) observes neutrality and impartiality in the name of universal medical ethics and the right to humanitarian assistance and claims full and unhindered freedom in the exercise of its functions. Members undertake to respect their professional code of ethics and maintain complete independence from all political, economic or religious powers.

Médecins Sans Frontières Charter

“They are fiercely protective of humanitarian principles, to the point that they don’t align with national governments. Like the International Federation of the Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Those three organizations fiercely protect those core principles and would do everything they can to ensure that others do it as well. I think that’s incredibly important. I think it’s equally important that the responders in the field understand that there is a coordination mechanism in place. There are principles in place that can guide and govern what that relationship looks like should the international humanitarian community require the foreign military assets that the United States or any other foreign government might be bringing to that disaster response. Oftentimes it works out incredibly well.”

Craig Jaques, Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance

Jesse also addressed effects of context. “The peacetime natural disaster context is the point in which the military and the civilians are mostly closely aligned in objectives and why they are doing what they are doing. Accordingly, their ability to work closely together is easier in that environment. As you move along the spectrum into a complex emergency environment where there is a conflict dynamic, because of those humanitarian principles, particularly neutrality and operational independence, there is by necessity a greater divide between the two, because the military is usually in those environments of conflict because it is a party to the conflict in some way. Because it’s a party to the conflict, the humanitarians need a greater degree of distance from them in order to maintain the neutrality and independence that they want. They don’t want to become a force multiplier or a tool for the military’s political and security objectives. So, the context and understanding where you are in that spectrum is incredibly important in understanding the relationship that can occur or exist between the two. So, as we normally define it within a natural disaster response in a peacetime setting, you have something very close to cooperation between the two sides. The far end of the spectrum, such as Syria represents at this point, you have a coexistence type of situation where you may have both actors on the ground in the same area. But, any coordination that’s occurring is to a very minimal degree, to keep that space that the humanitarians in particular need. That’s especially critical for them in places like Syria because the humanitarian actors are unarmed. They usually rely on a level of acceptance from the local population in order to go in, access those in need, and deliver their assistance. That acceptance of them is based on the perception of their neutrality and their independence from the armed actors. So, if they lose that perception of neutrality, it then compromises their ability to access those that are the most vulnerable and most in need. That is playing out in the most extreme way in Syria right now, where the United Nations is playing an intermediary role between the two actors.”

Building Collaboration for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance

The Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DM) was established in 1994 “to help bridge understanding between civil and military responders” and to build expertise between U.S. forces and partner nations in the Asia-Pacific region. Collaboration is the cornerstone of CFE-DM’s operational practice, both within the Asia-Pacific region and across the globe. Dr. Alberto Morales, Jr., who goes by “Mo,” is the Branch Chief for Applied Research & Information Sharing. Mo has helped during a variety of natural disasters, both as a Marine and later as a civilian. He learned early about the restrictions on military interventions and some of the challenges that coordination poses. Responding to a hurricane in Puerto Rico, “I think that’s the first time when we got into these situations in which you have different regulations, different policies, different directives that govern you differently. All of a sudden it gets thrown into this cornucopia of disaster response. You have got to watch ‘okay, where are my limits, where is my right, my left. Can I do this? Can I not do that? Is that your job? Or is it his job?’ One of the key things is realizing that you are not the controlling factor.

“I had a friend that works in the International Federation of Red Cross. She used to say ‘Mo, don’t get angry at us,’ because they have to exhaust every single mean before they can ask the military to do a certain thing. So, when we come in and say, ‘Hey, do you want this helicopter? We can put that generator in there and bring it back.’ Then it’s ‘no.’ Then an hour later, ‘yes, if you could do that.’ Then it’s like ‘I just offered this to you an hour ago!’ and it’s because they have certain rules that they need to adhere by and then we have certain rules to go by as well. So, we just can’t authorize a taxi or anything else like this. When you start demystifying those different mindsets or policies, you can start to work a little better together.”

Ryan also mentioned control issues. “The NGOs are implementers and the military is there for support. That’s the pretty clear relationship. I think a lot of times the military aren’t used to being in that support role, especially commanders. Like they go into a situation where OFDA shows up, and they are the lead federal agency. Maybe you get some really young guy trying to tell some colonel how it is. That supporting role gets lost sometimes, especially with the military culture.”

Military and civilian responders don’t always respect each other, and overcoming negative feelings between them can be difficult. Victoria Hart, senior disaster management research analyst at CFE-DM, formerly served as a civil affairs officer (a civilian position) in a UN peacekeeping mission. She explained that her association with peacekeeping sometimes strained her relations with members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). “I had a good friend who worked in an NGO who asked me; ‘Victoria, have you ever thought about working for an NGO?’ I replied, ‘Yes, I have thought about it. If the opportunity comes up, I would love to give it a shot.’ She followed with, ‘Well, why are you working for the mission? The peacekeeping mission?’ I gave the usual spiel of ‘I am trying to do good things... consolidate the peace process... doing my part in civil affairs...’ She finally exclaimed, ‘No, why are you working for the dark side?!’ You know, it didn’t matter that I was a civilian, it mattered that I was working in a peacekeeping mission with, not a humanitarian mandate but a political mandate, which military actors also help to implement. So, we talk in terms of military versus civilian. Although I think that anecdote is much more for an integrated mission context, still, sometimes it’s not that black and white as just military or civilian without considering different objectives.”

Communication with local civilians can be crucial as well. Mo emphasized “that you need to listen to the people that are on the ground. You need to listen to those farmers. You have situations in which their cattle are important, because that’s their livelihood. They may need a vet. You know, instead of something else. Maybe their society is tribal. Maybe their society might be matriarchal. Maybe it’s something we are approaching differently. We have to take time to really understand the sociopolitical structures that are in the town. Listen to the locals, in essence, and have them involved in pre-mitigation and mitigation

meetings. Ask them what is the biggest concern here. Ask them what is needed. Sometimes we will come in, and we always have that tendency to say ‘okay, I have got all this stuff here. I want to hard charge.’ But you know what? Maybe that’s not what they need. Did anybody really say; ‘okay, local sheriff person, or tribal leader, what is it that you actually need?’ When we do this, let’s invite them to the main talks. I remember when we went to Thailand, we talked about the regional humanitarian partnership forum that we just went to in Bangkok. They were talking about, ‘there are too many silos.’ Sometimes you have to be careful, in my opinion, that inadvertently you create an intellectual silo by using all of these catchphrases and all of these big terms in which the local populace says, ‘what are you talking about?’ So, it’s critical, what I have seen—and I have been to [Hurricane] David, [Hurricane] Hugo, I even did the Tomodachi (that’s the Japan earthquake) with PACOM—is that you need to bring those individuals in, those key individuals and really find out what is it that you need in a language that they understand.

“We are getting better all the time. The dialogues are starting to come in there. They understand what our capabilities are. We understand that we all have our own missions. We all have our own specialties. We have the capabilities that are not endemic to any other areas... The future is going to be civ-mil.” Several of the experts at the CFE emphasized the value of outlining a common framework for the international humanitarian community to respond to disasters, and they recommended the Sphere Handbook for everyone involved in large-scale humanitarian operations. Noting a lack of references to civil-military coordination, however, the CFE team is helping to develop a new chapter for the Handbook, specifically addressing civil-military coordination.

Surprises, Mistakes, and Learning to Communicate

Myanmar, 2008: Working with Local Businesses

There is a local market. That’s one of the things that I think is a misperception, especially on the military side, that when there is a disaster, you just need to come in with thousands of food supply kits and water bottles and bring it all in. What that can end up doing is actually hurting the local economy because one of the things that people need is money, and small businesses do actually often have supplies still there. It depends on the situation. But, in the case of Myanmar, you had a delta, the Irrawaddy Delta that had been enormously affected. However, you had right outside the delta the capital city that still had plenty of food and other supplies. So, even though the military in Myanmar had locked down the area and was not letting in many aid workers, a lot of the local business owners, civil society organizations, local NGOs, had already put in place a fairly robust effort at getting supplies into the delta. So, we were able to actually coordinate boat loads of supplies that were sourced right there in the Yangon area and deliver them down into the affected communities. We didn’t have to bring anything in from outside the country. So, it actually worked very well. I was very, very impressed with the response that had been mobilized just from local Burmese organizations and small business owners. You could drive down many of the roads and see stacks of timber and building materials that had just been kind of staged along the road at different areas that had not been brought in by the government or the military, but businesses and people had brought them in to help people get started rebuilding.

Jesse Wolfe, recounting his experience as a program manager for an NGO in Southeast Asia.

Communication is crucial when civil and military people try to coordinate with each other. A former State Department official who preferred to remain anonymous emphasized differences in language that can lead to misunderstandings. “When you say the word ‘security,’ a military guy thinks force protection, which is guns pointed out towards the bad guys. When a humanitarian hears security, they define it in a much more holistic way—human security, food security, food insecurity, security which impacts the folks in the markets, and all those sorts of things. So, there is a whole list of different things when you say something, a humanitarian hears ‘x’ and a military guy hears ‘y’... They often talk about the State Department and Department of Defense not understanding one another. It’s a huge disparity, and so many people in the State Department haven’t had the opportunities that I have had to go to the Naval War College and work at US Pacific Command, or work alongside military in places like Afghanistan, to actually learn their language. So, even within the military, within our own government, we are sometimes not communicating. It’s on almost a weekly basis we find some example of where the right hand is not knowing what the left hand is doing.”

Professor Jessica Ear, from the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, highlighted the broad nature of the civil-military divide, which occurs in most countries. "When I worked at the State Department, [an Asian partner-nation's] foreign affairs used to get information about their military through our embassy and vice versa, because they don’t really talk to each other. Right? So, what we were working on with ASEAN, we were having a little bit of a tug of war between the foreign affairs and the armed forces, for example, because they need to come together. What it takes is the right people to come into an environment that is set for them to bond, to collaborate, to feel safe in doing so."

Craig Jaques, Global Health Security Advisor at the CFE, has extensive experience working with non-governmental organizations, including Project Hope, which did a lot of civil-military related work. “I was deployed on the USNS Mercy, USNS Comfort, and the USS Boxer, as a humanitarian working with the military. Our board of directors and our leadership at that organization, some of which had backgrounds in the military, were military-friendly. They didn’t have an aversion to them. Saw it as a good partnership for being able to conduct something that we otherwise wouldn’t be doing on our own. We provided at any given time around 140 volunteer health care professionals to assist with augmenting the mission. These were very well experienced humanitarian healthcare practitioners, whether those were medical doctors, RNs, PAs. We were part of the pre-deployment site survey team, so we were going to the sites along with our military counterparts at the time to take a look at the sites where the ship was going to come in, conduct a fairly comprehensive needs assessment. Our NGO in particular was looking at health education and training activities that we conduct while being ashore...

“Some of these sporadic med/den/cap type scenarios, providing primary care to the communities, while that is very well intentioned—and I think the military has gotten much better about this, at least since I have been a part of it—was in its beginning stages undermining some of the local economy. The local physicians, the local dentists, local healthcare personnel weren’t always invited to be a part of it, and it took away from their practice. So, instead of their consistent patients coming to them, they would come to the large scale medical/dental/civil action program (that’s what they were called at the time) to receive care from an American physician and American healthcare personnel. So, those were some of the unintended consequences that were identified right off the bat with these missions... The whole idea of do no harm kind of became a more important theme for those missions as they continued to evolve. Our idea as an international NGO was to have long term connections and long term public health capacity-building programs in these countries rather than spending a lot of our time augmenting these one off medical, dental, civil action programs. We would go there leveraging our host nation staff in identifying some training needs where we could build very meaningful capacity with the personnel that were coming aboard or that were represented by the ships. We conducted a few different seminars... When the ship was there, we could have an educational augmentation team that could head out to that hospital or head out to a clinic and conduct the training that was identified as a need for those healthcare professionals.

“Of the international healthcare volunteers that came aboard with our organization, some were more accustomed to military culture than others. For some of them it was a very abrupt change of culture to be aboard a ship, where they really didn’t have as much control as they were used to having. So, mustering and reporting in, and kind of falling in line with the military. Some of them found it to be a fascinating experience. Others found it to be less than fascinating, I guess. That culture change didn’t always work out, depending on the personality. I was the operations officer for the organization on those ships. So, I was just working with the personnel constantly and seeing their interactions and trying to make it as smooth as possible. We set their expectations appropriately, so that when they stepped their foot onto the ship they knew exactly what would happen from that point forward. Of course, no matter how much information you provide on the front end, sometimes the circumstance takes a very different scenario. That was the case a lot of times, and it could be frustrating for a lot of the volunteer healthcare professionals, but I think overall what they found was this fantastic commonality with all of their counterparts in the military, which is everyone is there to provide care for, in this case, the communities that the ship was going to. I think everyone rallied behind that as the most important goal of the mission. That in and of itself lends itself to providing a pretty valuable mission to those communities. There was a lot of passion driven behind that, and there was a lot of mutual respect built between the two very different groups that were coming from two very different cultures. In a way, that’s exactly what we were dealing with when we were looking at civil/military coordination mechanisms in natural disasters and complex emergencies, too. It’s these two very, very divergent cultures that are trying to find a way to respect the humanitarian principles, but also interface in a meaningful way to better serve the affected population in the disaster or the conflict that they are a part of.”

Victoria has seen positive and negative results from military efforts to provide humanitarian relief. “If they know where they fit in best, they can really do the most help, and also do the least harm in the follow-on after they leave. Usually it’s with the best of intentions, trying to take on things that aren’t traditionally in the military sphere. You know, getting involved in a lot of direct assistance, handing out things... If there are host nation personnel that can do that, or NGOs, UN agencies, Red Cross/Red Crescent personnel that are available, it’s just a much better fit. I think it also protects the military if they understand that, because the last thing I think that a captain wants is to have to tell his commander, ‘I kind of accidentally signed us up for distributing water for the next six months.’ You know, mission creep.”

Ryan worked for OFDA on the Syria response. “That whole thing was characterized by remote management and all sorts of different players, and there are different lines of control on who can do what. But, there is a huge demand for information about Syria. Everybody wants to know everything that’s going to go on, even if it’s not actionable—the higher ups want to just know everything, and that’s fine. So, we spent a lot of our time tracking down these details and feeding them up the chain. It takes a lot of effort, but I realized very quickly that the military and the NGO community have much different sources and they get much different information. We would be hearing something from NGO partners about a certain situation that’s really bad. In the military, they go through other channels, mainly through the host government, host military, and they were saying totally different things because they have their own objectives and their own reasons to maybe make a situation seem like it’s not as bad or make it seem worse, depending on their needs. But despite that everybody knows that we are getting a totally different thing, and they are getting a whole other set of different information, there is never that moment where everybody comes together and shares all that stuff. There have been different mechanisms where they try to improve that. They even have embedded military teams—people inside interagency teams—but it didn’t really help a whole lot, I would say. So, everybody understands the point that you need to share information, but in practice, it doesn’t seem to work very well.”

Due to lack of knowledge among military liaisons and inability of humanitarians to speak in military terms, the humanitarians in Syria often felt that it was pointless to try to explain basics to the military liaisons. “I knew people that were staunchly anti-military in the NGO world and just the idea of talking to a military

guy, they wouldn't do it. Often times the military and humanitarians, because their cultures and mission are different, they often view the other party as some stereotypical caricature. The word that often gets thrown out is "tree-hugger" from the military side. Both groups are diverse, and these views are just a byproduct of having limited exposure to each other."

Beyond interpersonal communications, several people talked about logistics complications caused by unnecessary donations. As Mo explained, "Sometimes we will come in with all of this stuff and they will be like, 'We don't need that, thank you very much.' Same with some of the people that they send supplies straight to— at one time they sent these pork and bean cans, and it was in a Muslim area. They don't eat pork. You have got to be careful that what you have does not clog up the logistics chain by sending the wrong thing. It's like all of a sudden, we have all these things, and now the stuff that you really need is backed up. So, that's where those logisticians come in—you need to be really coordinated in all aspects."

Viewpoints on the Security Sector

Experts at the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies specialize in Pacific Rim partnerships, providing executive education and workshops for people from the region. Jessica identified concerns about neutrality and impartiality that arise when military organizations respond to humanitarian crises in the region. "Our militaries would say they are doing humanitarian operations, and I think the intent is that they are trying to help the goodwill of those affected. But, the humanitarian community, especially the international community and the Red Cross, don't like the mixing of terms because humanitarian to them means you abide by these principles. By nature of being military, you can never be neutral because you wear a uniform and you stand for that country. So, just the inherent nature of it already gives conflicting interests. So, how do we overcome that? That's the big question that everyone wants to talk about when they talk about civil-military relationships. The biggest thing, even though it sounds a little bit kumbaya, but it's true, is attitude. Our general has said that she has experienced a lot of these missions in complex environments like Haiti and Afghanistan and Iraq where the attitudes of the individual can create good relationships or bad relationships, and if you look at the other side as untrustworthy, fearful, and kind of resentful, then you breed that type of relationship, versus if you look at them as potentially helpful and as part of the team and include them."

Jessica explained that many organizations provide structures "to get people to talk to each other, to work with each other, to liaison with one another. But, the common thing about this community and about this region, it's not as big as people think it is. Even though there are numerous structures and frameworks and mechanisms, people actually know one another, and that's a positive thing. The positive about getting to know each other is that when you have real life response needs, you can cut through a lot of the hardship of trust and getting to know each other because that relationship is already pre-established. The Philippines have done this very effectively because the US and the Philippines have always had good relationships when it comes to military-to-military engagements. During the midst of these exercises one year, the Leyte mudslide happened. Everyone who was exercising this together just engaged into the actual response. When you have that type of working relationship, it's really important. We can't stress how important that is. The hard thing that we see, the issue that we see on the US side as well as on the other side of that joint response, is that you have people who rotate, especially in the military. So you have military positions that are only stationary for three years, four years. On the civilian side you have longer longevity, but then again there is political will in that country that changes the person out of that position as well. That's the hard part -- any new person that comes in has to relearn the whole thing. It's not an easy thing to learn overnight."

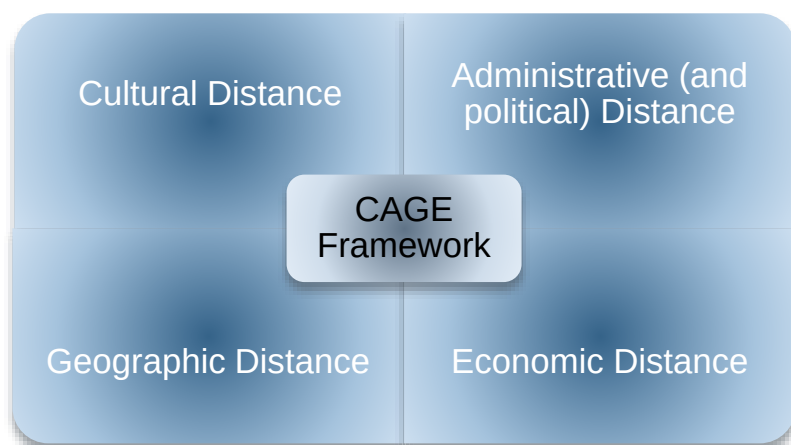
The former State Department official mentioned similar concerns. "Another thing that really bedeviled our efforts, and to this day, is just the high turnover of military guys and even at the State Department, officers at the embassy coming in during one year. So, you take six months getting up to speed. You are smart for about three months, and then you start thinking, 'I am out of there in three months.' You start thinking

about your next assignment. Oftentimes, there is no actual overlap where you can hand over contacts and introduce your successor to your portfolio.”

Jessica similarly identified loss of institutional knowledge as a negative result of job rotation and political turnover. “This regional organization of Association of Southeast Asian Nations has been very proactive in putting together agreements and programs and frameworks and structures and mechanisms to respond to disasters in their own region. They are moving into a new era of self-sufficiency where they have established the ASEAN humanitarian assistance center five years ago in Jakarta. They are staffing it to have about 35 folks. They have a brand new office and so forth. The thing that was noted by their executive director, and I agree with her, is that there isn’t a culture of writing things down. Right? So, I don’t know if it’s because from an eastern point of view, there tends to be more of a history, an oral history, versus a written history. I am not sure, if you are an anthropologist you could make that analysis to say Western culture tends to write everything down and so forth, but Eastern cultures tend to be more oral. But now the effort is how to document all the lessons learned, all of the information that they gain in every disaster they go through. So, she particularly has been pushing to put out these reports, put out these lessons learned after every disaster that they respond to. That’s an ongoing effort. A lot of their filing systems are just that. Large filing cabinets. I went to India a few years ago, and to get anything approved, they pulled out these ledgers (and there were stacks of them) and they looked for certain things that they have documented. Still very manual. It’s not what we see in the US. That’s the difficult state that we have, which leads me to the next issue: countries in the region are becoming further differentiated as far as their developmental growth. So, you have countries like Singapore, Malaysia, like Japan, South Korea. Very technologically astute, and capabilities are high when it comes to something like that. Then you have countries like Laos, Bhutan, even Mongolia. You know, Cambodia. Those countries are nowhere compared to these other countries. So, the dynamic region itself and the way it’s developing is creating a range of different capacities that on the US side we need to recognize because you can’t clump every country into the same needs basket. Some countries are in a state of being able to or wanting to be able to exhibit the ability to take care of themselves. China is a good example, right? We need to be mindful of that and give them space to do that. It makes a lot of sense on the US side to want the region to be stable, secure, and capable... the attitude in the military side would be ‘okay, HADR operations, let’s promote interoperability, let’s promote our goodwill.’ That’s all great on the military side. I see that. But then, if you are going back to the argument of let’s create space for them to do their own response and we shouldn’t be so hard to push our help onto others, if you have other objectives of pushing our help onto others beyond helping people, you know, if you have interoperability as your objective—I am not saying that’s wrong or right—but I am saying that there are conflicting objectives here... the government doesn’t do everything. It’s the nongovernmental organizations—the community groups, the religious groups, all those people pitch in. Without that, you lose a large part of that civilian capacity to respond.”

The CAGE Framework

The CAGE Framework (or CAGE distance) was developed to illustrate how (business) organizations tend to trade with each other based on their similarities or differences on certain dimensions. According to Ghemawat (2001), who developed the CAGE distance framework, interactions between organizations are usually easier if they are similar along four dimensions. In the areas of international business and (strategic) management of globalization, similarity between two countries makes it easier to manage expansion between those countries. Overall distance between two countries, reflecting differences along these dimensions, creates potential barriers to expansion that require the organization going abroad to modify its organizational strategy accordingly. The framework and the commonalities and differences it emphasizes are relevant also in the context of civilian government, military, and humanitarian organizations responding to disasters. Identifying the differences is a first step towards identifying (and overcoming) barriers resulting from these differences.



Elements within the CAGE dimensions:

- Cultural Distance: Language, norms, religions, etc.
- Administrative / political distance: Governmental regulation; political and financial and legal institutions
- Geographic distance: Borders, infrastructure, transportation, resources
- Economic distance: Income differences; tax base

Adapted from Ghemawat, 2001

Different industries are affected by these dimensions in different ways; but they all need to be aware of the differences. For example, when Walmart first expanded into China, they used the business model which had been very successful in the US – with large hubs and big stores in rural areas catering to people's preferences for large quantities of cheap products – but the lack of infrastructure and the different consumer preferences meant that the organizational and strategic model that worked in the US didn't work as well in China. Another example is McDonald's. While their core products and the key to their competitive advantages in the US (and much of the West) are Big Macs and potato fries, they had to adapt to local consumer preferences and customs when expanding abroad (for instance, vegetarian items in India).

While the dimensions were developed in the context of business organizations, they can usefully be applied to understanding some of the challenges that organizations in the international humanitarian field face, especially when collaborating with (local) organizations. Every country and region has its own unique 'organizational DNA' that influences their ways of doing things. Organizations having to collaborate and operate in places with great differences and distances must be able to understand and adapt to those (often tacit and embedded) differences.

Dr. Miemie Winn Byrd teaches at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, and she routinely addresses differences in culture, government administration, geography, and economy among nations that her organization works with. Through short courses and workshops, Miemie helps participants find common spaces, viewpoints, experiences, and insights. Together, these shared perspectives enable people from disparate backgrounds and organizations to develop supportive relationships. The result? "Many of our alumni, they stay in touch with each other across boundaries. Somebody from India and somebody from Pakistan, they become friends after six weeks and then they keep in touch, so there have been instances where our alumni are calling each other to reduce the heat. Then in the 2004 tsunami, it was our alumni calling each other from Thailand to Indonesia to Australia, starting to move the effort of relief, even before their formal structure was able to respond."

Lessons Learned

When coordination between civil and military organizations seems particularly challenging, structural or relational approaches might help to facilitate better communication and cooperation. An example of a structural approach is to set up a humanitarian operation coordination center. As Craig explained, "That would provide a means to interface with some of those military counterparts in a way that would not be compromising the core humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence, which are very, very important to respect for the INGOs. Because, if they inadvertently become associated with a foreign military, a foreign military's efforts and also helping out in the same disaster, that could put all of

those core humanitarian principles at risk. Which is why UNOCHA created the Humanitarian-Military Operations Coordination Centre (HuMOCC) system, which is almost like a neutral ground to interface, but it doesn't put at risk those humanitarian principles. So, having very defined roles for foreign military assets, mostly on the logistics side of the house in most disasters, and working in that kind of very defined interface where everyone that was in that HuMOCC understood what those humanitarian principles were. That was an ideal situation. Some of the more realistic scenarios that we found in the field, sometimes those types of HUMOCC wouldn't have been established in time."

Jesse broadened the discussion of UN coordination to include governmental organizations such as USAID, emphasizing the diversity of the various stakeholders whose efforts need to be coordinated. "UN OCHA has a very, very, very challenging task of working with, in many cases, a very diverse array of stakeholders that all have different objectives, different agendas and resources, and principles behind what they are doing. It's not as clean as just military and humanitarians. You also have civilian donor agencies like USAID, and you have the civilian government ministries that all have a piece in this as well. There aren't always clear lines between the two and you have competing narratives or agendas even within governments. So, USAID may see things very differently than the Department of Defense on certain issues. It can be a very complicated or complex space that UN OCHA is trying to fill in coordinating between all of these different actors.

"One of the things to understand about the humanitarian context is that you have got a very diverse group of NGOs. Many of them may be very, very small organizations. They only work in a small geographic area, at a very local community level. But, they can operate very autonomously, they can get into areas that government actors may have great difficulty getting into, and sometimes that's just because they are under the radar because they don't have any political affiliations. Then, you have very large international NGOs that represent a much more professionalized community of humanitarians. I think across the spectrum though, on the humanitarian side, very, very few have any understanding of how the military operates, or its role within these environments. Often, how governments are making decisions or the processes for coordinating the activities with the governments, that knowledge just isn't there on the NGO side. So, I think when military members go into an environment where humanitarian assistance is being provided, especially if it's kind of a chaotic environment with a lot of different actors that's relatively sudden onset—it's not a long, protracted thing where people are working there for a long time—they may find it challenging to find out where and how the coordination should be occurring with those humanitarian actors. They may be surprised at how little there is of an understanding of why the military is there and what they can bring and how they might be able to support the humanitarians. The key for militaries is what are the unique and critical capabilities that the militaries have for humanitarians?"

Beyond the formal coordination plans, informal relation-building can contribute to better cooperation. Jessica talked about third parties facilitating better relations between civil and military organizations from partner countries. "So, that's the delicate balance of diplomacy when you realize that your partner, who is from the one country, has political tug of wars going on between the civilian and the military side as well. We don't want to upset that balance. We want them to work together. So, we end up being kind of like the enabler for them to work together. I come from an Asian upbringing, so I understand where you could be subtly suggestive in persuading somebody to do this or that. I always try to approach it from an Asian point of view because that's how they approach it, and that's how they view everything. So, we never want to be disrespectful for one side or the other side. We want to always go through the right channels. Anything we say that's not within that right channel is really just between the two people. So we don't bring it up in a public forum, and let them kind of work it out themselves giving them the space to decide. We try to be patient about it. The most important thing that I don't think a lot of us in the US government recognize, but we should and some of us do, is that when you put them both in an environment where it's nonthreatening and there are opportunities to know each other and work together, like this [CFE] course for example, and

it's non-attribution and so forth, their relationship improves and then they actually become closer and better able to work together when they go home."

When international organizations respond to an immediate humanitarian crisis, they may also have an opportunity to introduce social ideas and organizational practices to the local military and civilian government. To be successful, Miemie emphasized the importance of working within the local culture and circumstances. For example, because the Burmese military has no experience protecting human rights, Miemie tries to link human rights with traditional beliefs, organizational goals, and interests and desires of the military personnel. She draws on their history to find foundations for improving government's treatment of civilians, and she tries to broaden their perspectives via exposure to the way that people live in other countries. "In Burma, the whole thing about human rights, they have never seen what is done right. So, they don't have a picture, a mental picture in their head what the right looks like." To help with this, the international community, both military and civilian, can provide role models and examples that build on the experience of the people living in the region.¹ Common understandings with local leaders provide the connection that is needed to support positive change.

Common challenges and goals can also create foundations for cooperation between international civil and military personnel. Craig explained that attitudes can improve quickly when people work alongside each other with the common goal to provide assistance. "I have found in almost every single one of my experiences that it's ended up working out pretty well once people get to know each other, and it's almost like breaking bread over a couple of dinners and talking about the circumstance. Once you realize that everyone is experiencing the same circumstance, although from a different background or organization, it's still the same experience that they are experiencing. That type of commonality is, I think, very strong with human nature and lends itself to creating this level of teamwork where you aren't looking at the organizational cultures. You are just looking at working together and thinking through how they can best work together while respecting humanitarian principles, as well to benefit the population in need." Clearly, better communication between civil and military people, at the individual level, goes far toward enabling cooperation between their organizations.

¹ See the appendix for further information about building civil-military cooperation in Myanmar.

Thoughts to Consider

How can cultural misunderstandings and well-intended over-reach in provision of aid create challenges? How can they be reduced?

How might common frameworks help reduce the barriers and difficulties in civil-military collaborations? What are the mechanisms by which frameworks reduce organizational, cultural or interpersonal coordination difficulties?

How does the CAGE Framework apply to your own experiences? (examples of living abroad; or being part of an international humanitarian operation requiring collaborations across organizations and cultures)?

What are the pros and cons of informal relation-building between organizations versus formal coordination mechanisms?

Read the appendix and try to identify key challenges in building cooperation between Myanmar's military and civilian government. What can we learn from Miemie's approach?

How can joint education build shared understanding or propensity to collaborate?

Can you think of additional ways to overcome coordination difficulties and achieve 'jointness' in operations?

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Appendix: Building Cooperation between Myanmar's Military and Civilian Government

Dr. Miemie Byrd, a U.S. citizen born in Burma before the ruling regime renamed the country Myanmar, has an affinity for the Burmese people. She teaches workshops to help the military and civilian branches of their government become more collaborative, and she has worked extensively to improve healthcare, education, and economic opportunities in Myanmar.

Miemie's experiences in Myanmar illustrate civil-military tensions that can't be addressed through simple interventions. Factors contributing to the civil-military divide include divergent goals, mutual distrust, and lack of organizational mechanisms to overcome social and structural barriers. She explained, "They don't have the history of collaborative governance. The civilian and military are at odds because of this whole transition, so they don't have healthy civ/mil relationships because many of these problems are complex. They are not one entity, one organization. So, they are having a hard time even coordinating within the government and plus on top of it because of the historical distrust. Then on top of that, the Myanmar government, the civilian side, just came into power. They redid all the structure so they don't have all these mechanisms in place for them to cooperate and collaborate on these issues.

"Now you have two sides, but two sides don't talk to each other because they are unsure of each other to say the kindest way. In the Myanmar government system the military is still very powerful and especially in their parliament. They have 25% of the parliamentarians are military parliament. They are not elected. So, the civilian government has always wanted to get them out of there into more of a normal parliament. That has always been the contention. Then on top of it, military still holds the leadership of three major powerful ministries—border affairs, home affairs, and ministry of defense. They have a lot of budgets, and so there is always a little bit of contention relationship to say the least. Because of that, it impedes on their ability to coordinate and cooperate, and all of these things need that cooperation. A lot of the people, the ministers and the people that are working in these ministry, they spent the last 17 years, 20 years in jail. They were jailed by the military side that they have to now work with.

"So, they don't come together. Then especially when it comes to security in the Myanmar case, it is a part of the military and then also a part of the civilian. Whenever they hear security, it's military's job. The military will go 'oh, it is ours. Stay out of it.' So, in their education system, they don't have majors on security studies, political studies, that can educate the civilian side and increase their capability. So, many of the government people that are working, they don't understand the issues relating to security, what that means. The civilian side, right now they are just trying to get the feel of what their jobs entail and even the scope of their work. They don't have protocols. They don't have processes. They don't have actual logistics in place to get that if something happens... Those type of coordination mechanisms, civil relations, just interagency you know, is not there."

One of Miemie's solutions is to offer joint workshops, to include both military and civilian participants. The goal is exposure that helps each person understand more about the way the others think. "Our longest was six weeks, now it is down to five and a half weeks. So, you know, people can get away for five and a half weeks and develop enough trust and enough understanding. If not trust, understanding. 'Oh, I know why they think the way they do.' Then go back with that appreciation.

"Many of our alumni, they stay in touch with each other across boundaries. Somebody from India and somebody from Pakistan, they become friends after six weeks and then they keep in touch so there has been instances where our alumni are calling each other to reduce the heat. Then like in 2004 tsunami, it was our alumni calling each other from Thailand to Indonesia, to Australia. Start to move the effort of relief, even before their formal structure was able to respond. So, we want a similar informal network between the Myanmar government based on this model here. I am kind of pushing them a little bit out of their comfort zone, so this whole piece is just opening up the military education outfit to civilians. We create this environment to talk about hard stuff in a very safe way. You know? It's a very safe way. But, all our

workshops at the end they have to come up with a set of recommendations. It's not one person's recommendation, it's a workshop recommendation.

"One of the things with the Burmese military is they are known for human rights violations. Their tactics or their doctrine is old. Most of the officers that are serving today went to China, Russia for military education. So, we [foreign governments] are sitting on the side and saying 'get better, get better. We will engage with you once you get better.' But they are looking at human rights ideas and concepts and on the ground tactics, insurgency they have to fight—they don't know how to match it. So, that's why I want to get into the curriculum to show them how, being in civil affairs, how we have a special force that specifically train and are purposed for protecting civilians in time of conflict.

"At one point, Burma military was considered the people's military. They loved it. They would walk into a town or people would come up with leis and lei them and give them flowers. Right? Then the military officers always were the first choice for the young ladies to want as a husbands' choice. There is a Burmese saying that they are the rose that is desired by all young women. So, they want to go back to that. They miss the time that Burma military was loved and adored by the people. I don't talk about change or reform. I put it as a modernization. I draw a lot on their history and understanding where they are—they want to regain the love and adoration of the people—and then what we've got to do. How do we have to integrate human rights into the tactics?

"Right now, the military sees the work a different way than the civilians see it. So, they have different interpretations, and it is further colored by the fact that they don't trust each other. So, you know, they can't come to a common goal. Right? To get to common goals. When you are seeing two different things then you don't trust each other. You can't even go to common goals until you define the problem in a common way.

"Hopefully the Westerner, we are being more enlightened and more educated. We have more opportunity to see things more broadly because we travel more. You know, most Burmese never left. Some of these military officers, it's their first time out of the country. They are like, 'wow!' So, we who have that privilege should have a little bit more burden on us to make sure we don't just go in and bulldoze everything. We have more opportunity to be more aware in our education system, whereas they don't have those opportunities. In Burma, the whole thing about human rights, they have never seen what is done right. So, they don't have a picture, a mental picture in their head what the right looks like."

A key foundation in Miemie's approach is to assess the internal motives and perspectives in the different groups so she can frame consistent messages in ways that each stakeholder group can relate to. Frustrating the efforts to build collaboration between Myanmar's civil and military organizations has been a US government policy that sidesteps interaction with the military. "They want to discount completely military. But military is still very influential; it is not powerful like they used to be when they were under military authoritarianism, but they are still a major player. So if we just don't work with them, I think that we can't move everybody forward. Really, you can't go in and say, 'oh you are wrong and you are doing bad and just get better!' You might have to say 'okay,' understanding what they want and see how I can present what we have to do in that framework." In fact, part of Miemie's role as a bridge-builder is to bring cultural sensitivity to the U.S. outreaches across cultures. "When I am giving talks in Burma, I say US military is powerful, and it's also under the civilian government. And the second piece is that we are powerful not because of our guns and planes and ships. It's because of the people, and I use myself [as an example]. I am adding additional capability to the US military because I am different."