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Bridging the Gap in Civil-Military Coordination to more Effectively Support Humanitarian Relief Operations

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### Abstract
The U.S. has increasingly been involved in the support of complex contingency and humanitarian relief operations throughout the world. History is replete with lessons learned citing disjointed interagency coordination as the prime culprit for lack of unity of effort in many of these operations. In May 1997, President Clinton signed Presidential Decision Directive–56 (PDD-56) in an effort to formalize the interagency planning process and improve civil-military coordination. The directive involved the implementation of a comprehensive political-military plan to provide strategic-level guidance and ensure effective interagency coordination. Three case studies (Operation Sea Angel, Operation Uphold Democracy, and Operation Fuerte Apoyo) are analyzed to support the theory that implementation of PDD-56 can significantly impact the tangible and intangible costs associated with an operation by improving interagency coordination and unity of effort among multiple actors.

### Subject Terms
Interagency Coordination, PDD-56, Operation Sea Angel, Operation Uphold Democracy, Operation Fuerte Apoyo, Complex Contingency Operations, Humanitarian Relief Operations

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Bridging the Gap in Civil-Military Coordination to more effectively Support Humanitarian Relief Operations.

by

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____________________________

09 Feb 2004

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Since the beginning of the post cold war era, Military Operations Other than War (MOOTW) have become the most frequent contingencies for which the United States has been called on to respond. Many of these operations have involved significant humanitarian relief efforts varying in the degree of complexity and extent of U.S. intervention. Complex contingency operations (CCOs) conducted in areas such as Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo, Bangladesh and Rwanda have been analyzed in detail for key lessons learned to be incorporated into future operations. After review of these lessons, a common theme has emerged in the literature citing disjointed coordination among the military and multiple civilian, governmental and non-governmental agencies (NGOs). Such lack of coordination among multiple actors has been credited for the inefficient utilization of resources, duplication of efforts, delayed response times and extended military involvement. Shortfalls in command and control and unity of effort (refer to Table 1) have repeatedly been cited in the literature as prime culprits for our limited progress towards more efficiently and effectively achieving the desired end state. A cyclic pattern has emerged, as history has become replete with similar lessons learned and varying recommendations to improve upon interagency coordination in support of complex contingency and humanitarian relief operations.

In 1995, lessons learned from Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti proposed the establishment of interagency planning doctrine and procedures to formalize the planning process and facilitate more effective civil-military coordination. A potential solution emerged as the result of this recommendation when in 1997 the Clinton administration published Presidential Decision Directive-56 (PDD-56). This document, designed to
coalesce all agencies across the U.S. government, aimed to enhance interagency coordination through the promulgation of a comprehensive political-military plan.

- Lack of involvement of civilian agencies in early planning for operation
- Lack of knowledge of capabilities of multiple organizations involved
- Civil-military command arrangements ad-hoc
- Conflicting priorities of organizations
- Lack of situational awareness
- Unclear lines of responsibility
- Isolated relief efforts by individual agencies
- Failure to understand who is in charge of the operation

Table 1: Common problems encountered in civil-military relations

Since its inception, the plan has been implemented sporadically in support of various CCOs. Relief efforts which have implemented prepared political-military plans to guide U.S. activities, such as operations in Bosnia, Eastern Slovenia and Central Africa, have encountered “strengthened situational awareness, interagency planning and civil-military coordination.”^ii^  

Conversely, humanitarian relief efforts such as those in post-war Iraq have already been plagued with several lessons from the past, and strategic guidance to formalize interagency coordination has been relatively ineffective. Comments by Anthony Cordesman, a Middle East military expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), support this assertion:

“We have to understand that it was the function of the National Security Council (NSC) to insure that the interagency process worked. Failure must be placed at the level of the NSC and the president.”^iii^
Up until the appointment of Paul Bremer as the chief administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority for U.S. humanitarian and reconstruction efforts in Iraq, agreement regarding what should be done and who should be responsible for doing it was a heated source of debate between the State Department and DoD.iv While leadership wavered, millions of Iraqis were threatened with epidemic disease as access to their water supply and electricity was cut off for days.

Failure of comprehensive strategic and operational planning in support of relief missions is a costly mistake. As the world has witnessed in Iraq, these costs are not exclusively monetary, but impact the number of forces needed to support the mission and the length of time they are required in theater to achieve the desired end state. In support of Humanitarian Relief Operations (HROs), the implementation of an integrated political-military plan as outlined in PDD-56 can significantly enhance unity of effort by promoting more effective civil-military and interagency coordination. With improved unity of effort, more efficient utilization of resources can significantly reduce the tangible and intangible costs associated with these operations. The following discussion will analyze how effective civil-military coordination can impact an operation and how this coordination can be further improved through PDD-56.

**Operation Sea Angel – Bangladesh**

Operation Sea Angel occurred in April of 1991, after Cyclone Marion swept through the coast of Bangladesh claiming 138,000 lives and rendering 2.7 million people homeless.v The operation exemplified how a synergistic relationship between the military and multiple NGOs can accelerate progress towards the desired end state. U.S.
military relief efforts, spearheaded by Major General Henry Stackpole III as the Joint
Task Force Commander (CJTF), began on 16 May 1991 and ended with the transfer of
full responsibility to the Bangladesh government on 15 June 1991, less than five weeks
after the operation began. Table two outlines the mission and phases of this operation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission – Support Logistics and restore Infrastructure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Phase I</strong>: Stabilize life-threatening situations and reduce loss of life (14 days).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Phase II</strong>: Restore infrastructure to allow the Bangladesh Government to take full control of relief efforts (10 days).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Phase III</strong>: Transfer full responsibility to the Bangladesh government and withdraw U.S. forces (5 days).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Several elements of interagency coordination significantly impacted the success of this operation. In working with the host nation, political considerations were of utmost importance given the tenuous nature of the Bangladesh democratic government which had been newly elected only months prior to the disaster. Out of respect for Bangladesh’s sovereignty, the CJTF subordinated itself to the host government to avoid the appearance of being in charge. This was an essential step to limit U.S. involvement and facilitate the transition from phase II to phase III of the operation. With the establishment of a Relief Activities Coordination and Monitoring Cell, “daily meetings were held with the Bangladesh government, NGOs and the JTF to match requirements with capabilities, set priorities and orchestrate coordinated relief efforts.” While this helped alleviate duplication of effort, smooth-working relationships between the multiple agencies did not occur spontaneously. Organizations such as CARE and the Red Crescent Society had been operating in Bangladesh for years and were accustomed to working on their own terms. The interface between the CJTF and the U.S. Agency for International
Development (USAID) was especially strained as USAID’s confidence in the military was overshadowed by the perception that the CJTF would destroy all their original work and preparation for the effort. Understanding the capabilities of the JTF and achieving consensus among competing organizations required considerable education and training to facilitate cooperation and mutual trust.

Also essential to the mission was an understanding by the military of the capabilities that NGOs could bring to the effort. Had the infrastructure not been so completely devastated, NGOs may have been able to coordinate the relief effort independent of JTF intervention. Distribution of supplies was a key challenge in this mission and effective civil-military coordination was essential to ensure adequate supplies were delivered to thousands of residents on remote coastal islands. Knowledgeable about local customs, attitudes and ground conditions, the NGOs were adept at procuring supplies and identifying needs. Prior to the arrival of the U.S. military, these agencies were working independently and felt obliged to provide their own transportation and distribution system. The NGOs did not fully trust the Bangladesh military, and the government was reluctant to hand over control to these agencies. With the assistance of the JTF, an effective distribution system was established using the NGO’s refined understanding of where relief supplies were needed in conjunction with the JTF’s transportation and communication assets to move supplies.

As a result of this synergistic relationship, Operation Sea Angel was a phenomenal success and costs in time and force to the U.S. military were minimized. Several future CCOs requiring U.S. intervention have failed to achieve such success. Perhaps the
then-recent operational experience of III MEF (to include augmentation in Desert Shield and the completion of two key joint exercises) could be largely credited for the effectiveness of this effort.

The Combatant Commander of U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) took advantage of this experience as he established the joint task force with a nucleus of experienced in-theater operational commanders. He further augmented the CJTF nucleus with members from the PACOM staff to promote a joint orientation for the duration of the operation. While superb planning efforts occurred at the theater-strategic, operational and local levels, integrated interagency planning and guidance at the strategic level was lacking in support of this operation. One may speculate that the reason for Operation Sea Angel’s success was a result of an experienced team that understood not only joint operations but how to effectively integrate with multiple non-governmental agencies. The fact that so many subsequent CCOs have failed at effective civil-military coordination speaks to the need for the improved guidance and integration at the strategic level to facilitate success at the operational and tactical levels. Could a cadre of staff experienced in civil-military operations at the strategic level be the key to success in support of humanitarian missions?

**Operation Uphold Democracy - Haiti**

Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti was one of the first evolutions in which an attempt at integrated strategic-level planning was pursued. This operation was understandably a challenge in terms of planning because of the dynamic and evolving political situation, which was ultimately driving U.S. military intervention. Former
President Jimmy Carter’s last minute visit with the Haitian military in an attempt to resolve the conflict peacefully was a commendable diplomatic success, and significantly impacted the military mission which then shifted from a forced entry to one that was largely unopposed. Consequently, prior planning efforts for this mission were frustrated by security concerns which led to the development of two separate Operations Plans (OPLANs), one calling for a permissive entry and one for an opposed entry. The resultant effect was the compartmentalization of these two planning processes, which delayed finalization of plans and contributed to incomplete interagency coordination.\textsuperscript{xvi}

At the strategic level, the formation of an Executive Committee (Ex-Com) under NSC leadership to coordinate integrated planning efforts did not materialize until May 1994, only four months prior to actual military intervention. As the planning process evolved, appropriate interagency dialogue within the Ex-Com was realized once all relevant players were in attendance and the first attempt at the formation of a comprehensive political-military plan ensued.\textsuperscript{xvii}

The top-secret classification of this plan and the resultant late timing of its disclosure led to last minute decision making and delayed strategic-level guidance, which in turn impaired effective coordination between the strategic and operational levels. This disconnect translated into deficient civil-military planning at the operational level, as commanders had insufficient time to develop an integrated OPLAN with a clear mission and objectives. While initial steps were taken to establish a Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC) under USACOM, untimely guidance from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff combined with a lack of strategic-level interagency cooperation stifled effective vertical planning. As a result, poor civil-military coordination led to multiple
problems, one of which occurred with the merging of the Time Phased Force and Deployment Data (TPFDD). Reluctance on the part of several NGOs to become involved in the planning process and their lack of familiarity with the DoD transportation system left them unable to access strategic lift for civilian agency personnel and logistics.xviii

Lateral coordination at the operational level was also significantly impaired. Unaware of the capabilities and limitations of multiple civilian agencies, the military expected they would be immediately ready to engage in nation building activities and failed to understand their lack of surge capability. The NGOs looked upon the military with suspicion, concerned that close involvement in civil-military coordination would compromise their neutrality. In addition, they were unfamiliar with the concept of command and control and the establishment of timelines for execution of projects.xix

Confusion regarding roles and responsibilities and who should be in charge led to two parallel command structures with the Ambassador in Haiti overseeing civilian operations while the Force Commander assumed control of the military. Although efforts to coordinate were attempted, they failed to establish a mechanism whereby effective integration and follow-up could be achieved.xx Overall, neither side understood how to work together in support of a developmental program.

Despite deficiencies in planning at both the operational and strategic levels, execution at the tactical level was a success as a result of ad hoc coordination between military and civilian personnel on the ground. Nevertheless, unity of effort suffered for failures in integration and planning at higher echelons. The lessons learned derived from these planning efforts led to a more formalized process and the development of a directive known as PDD-56.
Presidential Decision Directive-56

PDD-56 evolved upon analysis of Operation Uphold Democracy and was formulated incorporating a multitude of lessons learned from past CCOs to break the repetitive cycle of disjointed civil-military coordination to which so many of these operations have fallen prey. The directive calls for a sub-cabinet level committee to supervise U.S. participation and provide strategic level guidance for departments and agencies tasked to execute a complex contingency operation. Under the current administration, the Deputies Committee, a subordinate committee of the National Security Council, is responsible for crisis management. “In the event of a complex emergency, the Deputies task the appropriate functional or regional Policy Coordination Committee (PCC) as the principle coordinating mechanism of interagency activities.”

Once the process is initiated, the PCC will develop a political-military plan in coordination with relevant interagency participants and provide planning and oversight for the operation. This plan will then become the centerpiece for the integrated planning process and will articulate essential elements of the operation to include the mission, desired end-state and objectives. The plan ensures the delivery of coordinated strategic level guidance for successful execution at the operational and tactical levels. In addition, the plan ensures synchronization among individual agencies, enhances understanding of capabilities and resources offered by each agency, and generates overall interagency consensus regarding key elements of the operation.

Effective coordination and planning at the strategic level is critical and can have a domino effect on the success or failure of execution at the operational and tactical levels. The benefits of a well-conceived political-military plan can have a profound impact on
invested monetary costs and can significantly limit the commitment of U.S. forces especially during the post-hostilities phase of an operation. Implementation of PDD-56 involves an investment of time and effort up front to offset the chaos and confusion that so frequently results when clear strategic guidance is lacking. At times the benefits of this investment may not be realized among higher echelons (within the National Security Council) when more visible planning requirements in other areas of the world take priority.

Inexperience with PDD-56 and the formulation of a comprehensive political-military plan are additional reasons accounting for failed implementation of this process. xxiv Such lack of familiarity combined with the perception that generous monetary support can offset the time investment necessary to endure the interagency coordination process has proven an unfortunate miscalculation in many CCOs. According to Sarah Archer, a subject matter expert on humanitarian assistance and public health, the significance of effective civil-military coordination in support of CCOs is sized up in the following passage:

“Host nation, international, bilateral government, non-government civilian organizations and military forces are essential partners in restoring and maintaining peace following a complex emergency. Until these organizations can work together to facilitate civilians’ ability to run their country in a peaceful and reasonably effective manner, the military must remain as peacekeepers or occupation forces. Effective civil-military interdependence is the military’s ticket home from Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other complex emergencies yet to come.” xxv

Clearly the benefits of effective interagency coordination at the strategic level outweigh the phenomenal costs to the U.S. military and government in general that
results when this planning becomes subordinate to priorities elsewhere. The following case study brings to light the multitude of problems encountered when integrated interagency planning at the strategic level fails.

**Operation Fuerte Apoyo – Central America**

Hurricane Mitch hit the coast of Central America in October 1998 and became the fourth most powerful Caribbean hurricane of the 20th century. Sustained winds of 180 miles per hour claimed over 10,000 lives and devastated large sections of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Torrential rains followed by mass flooding and mudslides wiped out entire towns, demolished infrastructure and isolated large numbers of people from relief.xxvi

Foreign assistance in response to the disaster was immediate, with over 40 countries offering relief. Prompt U.S. military intervention originated from General Charles Wilhelm, the combatant commander of SOUTHCOM, who immediately deployed Joint Task Force (JTF) Bravo to the scene independent of a Joint Chiefs of Staff directive.xxvii U.S. rescue efforts ensued as JTF–B put all aircraft in the air to conduct lifesaving measures removing people from rooftops and flooding waters to safe havens. These measures were initiated without any warning or execution order from SOUTHCOM and preparations for the effort were ad hoc.xxviii Less than two years after the signing of PDD-56, Operation Fuerte Apoyo went into full effect and this elaborate plan, critical to the promotion of interagency teamwork, sat dormant while history repeated itself with lessons from the past.

Hurricane Mitch was a very high-profile event and the massive media coverage or so-called “CNN effect,” appeared to drive early U.S. response as opposed to doctrine and
Initial actions at the strategic level included the formation of a task force co-chaired by the NSC and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). White House Deputy Chief of Staff Maria Echaveste was designated as the lead coordinator for the effort. Under normal circumstances, the Agency for International Development (AID) through the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) assumes the lead role for interagency coordination. Echaveste’s appointment, politically motivated as a result of the high-profile nature of the disaster, led to coordination efforts at the strategic level in lieu of day-to-day management and oversight by a single operational agency.

Speculation in the literature as to why PDD-56 was not implemented suggests unfamiliarity among senior officials with the political military planning process. Preoccupation of the National Security Council, with political-military planning for both Iraq and Kosovo at the time, may have been another reason. Within the first 10 days of the contingency, the President authorized two DOD drawdown requests by the task force totaling $75 million. These actions supported the mentality that “throwing money at the problem was more expedient than the wearisome and drawn out interagency process called for in PDD-56.”

Whatever the true reasons for failure to implement PDD-56, the consequences of such inaction were grave. A key finding in the after action review of Hurricane Mitch asserted, “Unity of effort requires an executive-level management structure that works to ensure continuous cooperative planning and execution among the relevant U.S. civil-military team members.” Lacking this key element of coordination (i.e. a plan based upon PDD-56-type coordination of government departments), a domino effect occurred in vertical planning that further impacted lateral coordination at the operational...
and tactical levels. Without a formal plan, the desired end state became elusive as no clear mission was defined while guidance for developing an exit strategy was issued before forces even began to deploy. Furthermore, no assets were identified, funding issues remained unresolved, individual agency responsibilities were left unsettled and guidance to key players at the operational level was not transmitted.\textsuperscript{xxxiv}

As a result of ineffective vertical planning, disjointed efforts in the field became a significant problem. Command and control was critically impaired as the age-old question of “Who is in charge?” remained unresolved.

“….there were a lot of people in charge of various things at various times—depending on the politics of clout. People who were in theory in charge (e.g. USAID) got blown away in the real political situation.”\textsuperscript{xxxv}

This “ad-hoc” planning led to unfortunate and unnecessary duplication of effort as multiple agencies failed to understand the capabilities their counterparts could bring to the table. The “stovepipe” effect was painfully evident as over nine agencies conducted separate damage assessments during the disaster for lack of an effective horizontal integration mechanism.\textsuperscript{xxxvi} Each agency pursued individual agendas obtaining information from the confines of its own limited resources. As a result, coordination of information was severely impaired.

“Shared, common information acts as a bridge “to unite people toward a common goal, even though they may not share the same mission or funding base.” Lateral sharing of information promotes early situational awareness, optimizes operations, stops repetition and allows a tailoring of force structure—all common denominators that were missing during the initial phases of Hurricane Mitch.”\textsuperscript{xxxvii}

This essential “bridge” was clearly non-functional and U.S. information sharing and coordination was often untimely, contradictory and reactive in nature.
While interagency relationships remained blurred and confused, lead and supporting role relationships between the U.S., civilian relief community and host nations were equally ambiguous. These relationships, influenced by the political environment and individual personality traits, significantly impacted situational awareness or rather lack thereof. The blustering winds of Hurricane Mitch wreaked havoc through four Central American Nations, yet the only organization to perceive this disaster from a regional perspective was SOUTHCOM. The remaining players approached each individual nation as a separate entity. Overall, failure to implement PDD-56 affected unity of effort at ALL levels of command and the ad hoc planning that replaced this instrument translated into excessive tangible and intangible costs associated with the operation.

Conclusion

The analysis of Operation Sea Angel sheds light on how effective civil-military coordination can impact unity of effort and thus accelerate progress towards the desired end state. Lessons learned from subsequent operations however have revealed that effective lateral coordination is often difficult to reproduce. Operation Uphold Democracy clearly established that timely, integrated strategic-level guidance and vertical coordination are the keys to effective lateral planning at the operational and tactical levels. The development of the political-military plan became the vehicle by which this process could be accomplished in future operations. This vehicle was refined, incorporating multiple lessons from the past into a final product entitled PDD-56. Implementation and consistent use of PDD-56 has hinged on familiarity among senior level planners with the political-military planning process, perceived time constraints,
competing worldwide contingencies, and underlying political tones associated with an operation.

Operation Fuerte Apoyo was a clear demonstration of the aftermath that occurs when effective guidance and civil-military integration at the strategic level fails. The “domino effect” in this case was profound as subsequent operational planning and integration collapsed and tactical level planning became ad-hoc. The resultant lack of unity of effort and unclear command and control precipitated extended U.S. involvement and while in the end, relief efforts were commended; they could have been much better.

One argument used to forgo implementation of PDD-56 (i.e. NSC pre-occupation with Iraq and Kosovo) should have actually been the supporting rationale for its implementation. This option, while initially time intensive, would most likely have minimized the amount of forces used in theater and the time commitment invested once on scene. These forces may have then been allocated elsewhere to support higher priority contingencies such as Kosovo and Iraq.

There is promise for the future that improved civil-military integration will become a reality in subsequent Humanitarian Relief Operations (HROs) as the proposed Standing Joint Force Head Quarters (SJFHQ) materializes in FY 2005. Should this force coalesce in support of HROs, an appropriate regionally assigned Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG), trained in the political military planning process outlined in PDD-56, could almost guarantee effective strategic level guidance and civil-military integration. This would greatly increase the probability that future operations would model the success experienced with Operation Sea Angel.
Bridging the gap in civil-military coordination in support of HROs requires the skillful application of operational art. A framework has been developed to facilitate mastery of this art but it has been underutilized and poorly understood. That framework is PDD-56.

Notes


xiii Ibid., p. 10.

xiv Ibid., p. 40.

xv Ibid., p. 23.

Relevant players to include the Departments of State, Defense, Justice and Treasury, the CIA, AID and the Joint Staff. See Margaret D. Hayes and Gary F. Wheatley, p. 52.


Ibid., pp. 51-52.

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