

USAID/OFDA Engagement with DOD in HA/DR

International disaster response efforts

by LtCol Sergio Luna

The global environment is dynamic, fluid, and ever changing. Today's threats include issues impacting the security of the United States and the ability of the Nation to respond to worldwide humanitarian crises. The U.S. military must consider these security threats and their impact on humanitarian crises given the United States' position as the world's primary superpower with countless unique capabilities. During an international disaster, the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) serves as the lead Federal coordinator for the U.S. Government's (USG) international disaster response efforts.¹ Under this role, USAID/OFDA has the ability to call upon other USG agencies to facilitate an efficient and effective USG response to a disaster affected country. USAID/OFDA's humanitarian experts know how to identify the most urgent needs and have experience in working alongside local governments to save lives after disaster strikes. They also understand and work daily within the international humanitarian system, forming the clearest understanding regarding when support from other USG agencies, including the DOD, is or is not required. Often, smart military leaders plan for desired outcomes in situations the DOD may either be not welcomed or wish to remain uninvolved. Humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) is no exception and determining which unique DOD capabilities are ap-

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propriate to employ should be done in coordination with, and in support of, USAID/OFDA.

To ensure knowledgeable counsel exists across the DOD, USAID/OFDA embeds humanitarian assistance advisors/military (HAA/M) at each of DOD's combatant commands (CCMD), with U.S. Northern Command covered by the U.S. Southern Command HAAM. The subject-matter expertise provided by USAID/OFDA helps guide DOD in its understanding of the humanitarian space, and it should be a requirement to embed a USAID/OFDA HAA/M at each CCMD. This expertise should not replace or discount the amount of knowledge already existing at the CCMD level, but since the U.S. military rotates personnel every few years, the continual turnover tends to disrupt DOD's historical HA/DR institutional knowledge. The USAID/OFDA HAA/M at the CCMD offers the necessary humanitarian assistance expertise to fill this knowledge gap and effectively coordinate response efforts by providing a level of continuity within the U.S. military's structure. The USAID/OFDA HAA/M provides expertise needed to guide the commander and his staff, ensuring consistency and alignment of understanding—ul-

timately providing a unified USG effort before, during, and after humanitarian response.

Although the USAID/OFDA/CCMD relationship is vital, it is only one key linkage for the overall system to work effectively. It is critical to have a USAID/OFDA touchpoint (i.e., HAA/M) at every level of command if there is a foreign disaster response that requires the DOD's unique capabilities. For example, if a joint task force (JTF) is stood up in response to a foreign humanitarian disaster, the JTF commander will be making decisions on where and how to employ the force based on humanitarian needs identified by USAID/OFDA in a given area. These needs will be relayed to the JTF by a USAID/OFDA HAA/M on the ground with the JTF. During an international disaster response, the USAID/OFDA HAA/M vets, validates, and prioritizes DOD disaster relief missions in country, often via the Mission Tasking Matrix (MITAM), which details requested support missions.² The JTF commander will benefit greatly from having a USAID/OFDA HAA/M as part of his special staff because they enable direct access to, and continuous dialog with, the lead USG coordinator of international disaster response, as well

as with the humanitarian community. This will establish the right level of U.S. military involvement and help to avoid mission creep during a foreign disaster response. In the past, excessive military presence has created friction within the humanitarian community when other supporting organizations already have the means to respond to the foreign disaster. Additionally, by having a USAID/OFDA HAA/M with the JTF, the JTF will have subject matter expertise at hand, which may allow as close to a “textbook response” as possible.

Many of these best practices are already being implemented in international disaster responses where DOD support has been formally requested by USAID/OFDA. During the October 2016 Hurricane Matthew response, U.S. Southern Command stood up JTF-Matthew and flew missions from the USS *Mesa Verde* and USS *Iwo Jima* into Port-au-Prince and the hard-to-reach communities of Haiti’s southern peninsula.³ With USAID/OFDA’s Disaster Assistance Response Team already responding on the ground in Haiti, multiple USAID/OFDA HAA/Ms were physically located at the Port-au-Prince airfield and were able to integrate directly with U.S. military operators on the ground. This allowed face-to-face coordination, prioritization, and validation for all DOD logistical support missions and immediate control of any related issues that arose. The key takeaway is that USAID/OFDA and DOD need to ensure continuation of these practices to guarantee seamless coordination in future foreign humanitarian crises.

The U.S. military’s unique ability to rapidly employ wholesale logistical capabilities is the most frequently requested type of support from USAID/OFDA during the early stages of a disaster response and may be utilized until the host nation and other civilian relief agencies can adequately address the issues themselves.⁴ Each USAID/OFDA HAA/M possesses humanitarian background and contacts to understand incoming capabilities and when they are expected to be operational on the ground. This information can be fed to the CCMD and JTF commanders, not only for effective operations but also

to help recognize and plan early for an appropriate exit strategy of those operations. Streamlining in this way will help to better support the affected country and allows DOD to implement a transition strategy. Providing vital inputs to synchronize at the various levels of military command lays the groundwork for a smooth and efficient response.

Other means by which USAID/OFDA is able to help educate the DOD is through the Joint Humanitarian Operations Course (JHOC), taught directly by USAID/OFDA HAA/Ms. This two-day course (joint certified by DOD Joint Staff for 1/2 Joint Qualified Officer points)⁵ covers the international humanitarian space, USAID/OFDA’s policies and mandates, and highlights civilian-military coordination and DOD’s roles and responsibilities in supporting USAID/OFDA in foreign HA/DR missions when the DOD’s unique capabilities are requested by USAID/OFDA. The JHOC audience is primarily military but may often include other USG interagency and foreign entities. This training assists DOD in building a better understanding of the humanitarian environment at the strategic level, but the education also trickles down to operational and tactical levels—helping to further clarify DOD’s unique role at every level of operations in an evolving and growing humanitarian space.

The biggest JHOC return on investment comes from educating service members who may respond to a humanitarian crisis, allowing them to understand roles, responsibilities, and coordination in an effort to create USG efficiency when providing humanitarian operations. This course can set the stage for efficient and effective future humanitarian operations. DOD schoolhouses should be the prioritized audiences for this course. HA/DR training needs to be part of every U.S. military officer’s curriculum starting early in their career. Although it may not be feasible during initial training, company grade officers could potentially receive the training, or a variant thereof, as part of their PME requirements. This should be reinforced again as they advance to progressively higher levels of PME. If this humanitarian educa-

tion and training becomes engrained, DOD decision makers will have the tools to make better informed decisions during humanitarian crises with DOD involvement. This educational structure, coupled with the USAID/OFDA HAA/M expertise embedded at each level of military command, will allow for effectiveness not only during execution but also during the military planning process and when multiple courses of action are being developed.

Building upon the existing humanitarian knowledge base within the DOD and integrating this expertise at the right levels will lead to a more effective and efficient interagency response as a whole—not just the DOD. Understanding the viewpoints of various collaborating organizations will lead to significant synergistic achievements. Avoiding inefficiencies and harmonizing existing information is critical when faced with the complexities of the humanitarian world, where saving lives and alleviating human suffering is the desired end state. With this in mind, working together and understanding how vital it is for USAID/OFDA and DOD to engage together in steady state, as well as in HA/DR operations where USAID has requested DOD support, will enable the success of the USG when responding to foreign disasters and as the humanitarian space continues to evolve.

Notes

1. USAID/OFDA, *OFDA Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015*, (Washington, DC: 2015).
2. Secretary of State John Kerry, *USAID’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance: Guidance for Disaster Planning and Response – FY 2017*, (Washington, DC: October 2016).
3. USAID/OFDA Press Office, *Caribbean Hurricane Matthew – Fact Sheet #3*, (Washington, DC: October 2016).
4. Department of Defense, *DoDD 5100.46, Foreign Disaster Relief*, (Washington, DC: July 2012).
5. Joint Staff Memorandum for Director USAID, *Joint Certification of the Joint Humanitarian Operations Course*, (Washington, DC: August 2015).

