

Beyond Haiyan: Toward Greater U.S.-Japan Cooperation in HADR

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In his State of the Union address, President Barack Obama described the U.S. military's participation in relief efforts in the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan as both the morally right thing to do and a positive contribution to security in the Asia-Pacific. Japan's first national security strategy, issued in December 2013, likewise calls for the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to engage in "proactive contributions to peace" in the region and globally.

The armed forces of both states played important roles in the response to Typhoon Haiyan last November. More needs to be done, however, to plan and execute effective bilateral coordination for future humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations. Such cooperation is integral to the alliance mission of ensuring peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific and should be one area of discussion in the planned revision of the Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation presently underway.

A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR U.S.-JAPAN RELIEF EFFORTS

U.S.-Japan cooperation in response to the March 2011 "triple disaster" in Japan, coined Operation Tomodachi, showcased the remarkable degree of coordination between the two militaries in response to a major natural disaster and its aftermath. Officials in both countries extolled the virtue of this cooperation as well as the almost unlimited potential to build on the experience of Operation Tomodachi to catapult the bilateral alliance into a new era of cooperation and coordination, particularly in the area of HADR.

This vision of the alliance was emphasized in a joint statement last December by Vice President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that called on both allies to prioritize HADR cooperation as a main pillar of their "global alliance." The accompanying [fact sheet](#) emphasizes the following points in regard to bilateral HADR cooperation:

- *Regional disaster response.* "The United States and Japan share a strong mutual commitment" to HADR, as demonstrated by their joint response to Typhoon Haiyan, and will work to strengthen cooperation to support HADR training and capacity-building in Southeast Asia.
- *Disaster risk reduction.* "The United States and Japan will coordinate the establishment of an emergency information transmission system on natural disasters in ASEAN countries." In addition, "the United States also will support Japan's role as host of the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) in Sendai, Japan, in March 2015."

While these measures are to be applauded, there is much that Tokyo and Washington can do to add more substance to their vision for enhanced HADR cooperation.

At a recent workshop on U.S.-Japan-Philippines disaster relief cooperation organized by Peace Winds America, officials from all sides outlined their respective responses to Typhoon Haiyan and proposed areas for improved coordination. The United States and Japan responded rapidly and impressively on their own to the relief efforts for Typhoon Haiyan. U.S. forces responded within hours, providing emergency food, medical, and transport assistance. Japan dispatched the largest contingent of SDF personnel to an overseas mission to date: about one thousand personnel were involved. The SDF focused largely on providing vaccinations and preventing the spread of disease, in addition to transporting relief supplies to affected areas and people away from the affected areas. Both allies engaged in information-sharing

and coordination of relief efforts in tandem with Philippine officials and other aid providers.

Field operations between the two militaries, however, were relatively modest. The unprecedented landing of a Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey on the Japan Maritime SDF helicopter carrier *Ise* was an impressive show of joint capabilities, symbolically highlighting the interoperability of the U.S. and Japanese militaries. In future disaster responses, this interoperability potential could be more directly applied to actual field operations where both militaries engage in HADR efforts side by side.

LESSONS FROM THE RESPONSE TO TYPHOON HAIYAN

Several lessons can be derived from the Haiyan response experience that could lead to deeper coordination between the United States and Japan:

- There should be greater harmonization of resources between the two militaries in the field. Joint relief efforts, such as actual airlift operations involving Osprey launched from Japanese ships, could be one type of joint operation. Further, U.S. military and Japan SDF personnel could be deployed to the same ground operation to double the number of personnel serving in medical relief teams.
- Officials from the Japan International Cooperation Agency and USAID, in conjunction with diplomats from both countries, could work more closely in the wake of disasters to develop better mechanisms to share information on the range of damage and assess what particular resources both sides can and should deploy. This would reduce the chance of redundancy and duplication of efforts in the field and could ensure that the right resources are directed for the right needs.
- The two allies could also better coordinate the timing of their humanitarian missions. While the U.S. military is known for being the first to arrive at a disaster and the first to leave, the SDF is known for arriving and

staying later. This approach may have its advantages. If so, missions should be more thoroughly analyzed and planned with these differences in mind so as to maximize effectiveness and resources in the field.

- Another important consideration—albeit secondary in the midst of a major disaster—is to better coordinate bilateral messaging to highlight the merits of joint HADR operations. Although humanitarian missions should not be politicized, such missions ultimately help promote goodwill between donor and host nations. In that sense, U.S.-Japan HADR missions are an important means of demonstrating that the bilateral alliance is a force for good in the Asia-Pacific rather than a strictly strategic bulwark against potential security threats.

In order to improve future bilateral HADR cooperation, these lessons from U.S.-Japan joint operations during Operation Tomodachi and in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan should be incorporated into the new Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation expected later this year and other future collaborative efforts. ♦

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