Toward an International Response Framework:

Emergency Preparedness in the Asia-Pacific

Conference Report

October 9, 2013

BANYAN ANALYTICS
An ANSER Institute

Informing Decisions that Shape the Nation's Role in the Asia-Pacific

Banyan Analytics is an institute focused on the Asia-Pacific region. The institute uses analysis to inform decisions that shape the Nation's role in the Asia-Pacific, aiding the U.S. government with the implementation of programs and initiatives involved in regional engagement efforts. The institute is a valuable partner to government offices and other organizations that operate in the Asia-Pacific, leveraging over five decades of ANSER experience supporting the U.S. government with objective research and analysis in addressing challenges that are inherent in coordinating and executing complex initiatives.

I. Background

While conducting a case study of how the U.S. Government responded to the March 11, 2011, earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear incident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant in Japan, Banyan Analytics interviewed many U.S. Government officials involved in the response. Research and these interviews have revealed that U.S. Government agencies with a traditional focus primarily on domestic disaster response had limited familiarity and experience working with agencies focused on international disaster response, and vice versa. The U.S. Government applied its National Response Framework internationally ad hoc, but there was no organized framework for responding internationally.

Our interviewees have indicated that, at present, the coordination of military and civilian operational response entities in an international environment remains somewhat ad hoc and piecemeal. If a large-scale disaster, especially one with chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) effects, occurs in the near future, it is likely that the U.S. response entities will encounter the same problems as before. We feel there are gaps worth exploring and that an international response framework (IRF) could help the U.S. Government prepare for future natural disasters or CBRN emergencies abroad. Experts writing about the lessons learned from the Japanese earthquake and tsunami have pointed toward the need for an IRF that mirrors the National Response Framework.

It is our hypothesis that if the U.S. Government could create an effective model of preparedness and response in Asia based on an all-hazards approach, such a model might well function globally. This includes the creation of a high-level, interagency framework into which different and ever-changing components of the U.S. Government (including the facilitation of private and non-governmental organization responses) would fit. Planning and coordination mechanisms, budget development, foreign governmental engagement, preparedness, training, exercising, and measuring effectiveness would all flow from this framework.

On October 9, 2013, Banyan Analytics hosted a public conference that focused on the possible creation of such a framework, based on the future case of responding to a foreign CBRN event or other disaster. The conference featured a variety of speakers and panels whose purpose was to shape the

discussion on the subject of an IRF. We organized the event around the particular needs of the Asia-Pacific, soliciting information on what a notional IRF would look like in order to be most useful. Our intent in hosting this conference is not merely to capture and record the conference proceedings but to follow up by conducting research and undertake analysis in order to produce a blueprint for decision makers on the creation of an IRF for the U.S. Government.

"If we're going to make progress on a truly effective international response framework, we have to get input from those that we'll be working with."

Mr. Mark Bartolini
Former Director of USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance

II. Key Findings

1. Purpose

Saving and preserving human lives is a core value in emergency preparedness.

Among the diverse perspectives that participants shared throughout the conference on emergency preparedness in the Asia-Pacific, one principle that emerged as both a unifying premise for the discussions and a core value among the participants was the importance of saving and preserving human lives. In their remarks, many panelists underscored this as an important consideration in the Asia-Pacific particularly because of the many lives that are affected each year by the various disasters and crises that strike the region. For instance, in the Philippines alone, natural disasters have impacted more than 100 million people at a cost of about $200 million annually since 1980.

Looking ahead, the Asia-Pacific is likely to confront both manmade and natural disasters of increasing complexity, intensity, and scale. Changes in the environment, such as rising sea levels, combined with tectonic activity in the region will contribute to more frequent and severe storm and earthquake patterns. Countries throughout Northeast and Southeast Asia are constructing more nuclear power plants each year, and accordingly the likelihood of disasters with nuclear and radiological components will also increase over time. One of the conference speakers warned that in light of the many nuclear energy facilities being constructed in Asia, it is inevitable that the region will face another crisis like the one that struck Japan on March 11, 2011. Enhanced response planning, preparation, and mitigation will be important factors in saving and preserving human lives.

Emergency preparedness is an area ripe for international cooperation.

In addition to the urgency of saving lives, when it comes to international cooperation, emergency preparedness in the Asia-Pacific is an area of low-hanging fruit. This is not to say that it is an easy multilateral issue to tackle, but that it is an area with strong potential for cooperation in comparison to many other contentious issues in the region. Disasters can be destabilizing and can lead to conflict: they can take lives regardless of state borders, cause damage and disrupt commerce and economic activity, and occur frequently. Thus states in the region have a

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Dr. Kurt Campbell
Former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2009 - 2013

"We can begin to strengthen our capacity to save lives abroad on a scale, and with an effectiveness, that otherwise would not be possible, by looking at an especially promising way forward: the creation of an international response framework."

Dr. Paul Stockton
Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Americas' Security Affairs, 2009 - 2013

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vested interest in working together to mitigate the impact of disasters that could cause instability.

U.S. interagency coordination can be improved.

Finally, the United States is one of the most important players in international disaster response. To the extent possible, observations and lessons learned from previous U.S. responses to disasters should be applied to increase U.S. government agency coordination for more effective and efficient responses in the future. A comprehensive, official report of the U.S. government response to the disaster in Fukushima has yet to be produced, and there was some agreement among conference participants that little is truly understood about the events that unfolded in Japan, particularly with regard to the nuclear and radiological effects of the crisis. Given the United States' critical role in international disaster response, improving U.S. interagency coordinated response is a topic worthy of further exploration.

2. An Emphasis on Complex Disasters

A new framework should emphasize enhancing preparedness and resilience to the cascading effects of complex disasters.

Throughout the conference there was a general emphasis on the need to address "complex disasters." One particularly concerning attribute of complex disasters is the phenomenon of cascading effects in which a failure or breakdown in one area such as infrastructure, public utilities, or communications leads to additional breakdowns in other areas. The result is often a more serious crisis that incurs greater damage and puts more lives at risk. Moreover, the cascading effects of disasters tend to create severely disrupted environments that make disaster response operations all the more challenging to carry out.

In the example of Haiti, the earthquake had destroyed the pier where energy and other assistance would normally have been delivered. Public utilities, including electricity, were disabled, which in turn impaired air traffic control, causing yet another disruption in the supply chain of aid and resource delivery. Moreover, immediate disaster response operations on the ground were severely debilitated because the critical command and control functions provided by MINUSTAH were crippled as a result of its key leadership being killed, and the building in which they were housed, destroyed. These and other issues that arose during the crisis also weakened public health functions and the delivery of medical aid.

Cascading effects intensify the threat posed by a disaster, and it is important to understand how countries can become more resilient to these effects, which are inherent in complex disasters.

There are gaps in understanding how to deal with CBRN effects of disasters.

One of the biggest challenges for the international community in emergency preparedness is regarding how to respond to a foreign disaster with CBRN components. In the international community, there are considerable gaps in understanding how to deal with each of the CBRN components, and this remains a significant area of concern.

Disasters with CBRN components are especially challenging due to the harm they cause to society long after a disaster has struck. Nuclear and radiological effects, for instance, last for many years after the initial incident occurs. Moreover, unlike natural disasters which are often cyclical and tend to strike the same geographical areas in similar ways, there are no early warning systems in place to anticipate CBRN events or enhance their predictability. With natural disasters, on the other hand, there is a certain level of anticipation that can be measured through the observation of weather patterns, understanding the impact of certain disaster events in causing additional disaster effects (e.g. earthquakes that may trigger typhoons), monitoring areas of high risk or impact for disasters, and other means.

There has been very little investment in the Asia-Pacific to prepare for CBRN-related events, which leaves the region ill equipped to address the growing risks posed by the increasing development of new nuclear energy facilities in the region. Even in the current Hyogo Framework for Action, which is coordinated by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), no guidelines that assist countries in dealing with CBRN effects exist. Sharing U.S. expertise and enhancing state capacity can improve CBRN preparation in the region.

3. U.S. Coordination

The United States is an essential player in disaster response, but it can improve its activities via a new framework.

When it comes to responding to international disasters, the United States is a critical player, particularly in cases of major catastrophes. No country is more equipped or better trained than the U.S. to assist other countries with response to crises. For example, in the case of Fukushima, the U.S. contributed the vast majority of foreign assistance, providing a variety of resources, from expertise to aid supplies. In fact, according to one conference speaker, U.S. assistance amounted to more than the sum of total aid provided by all other countries combined in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. Within 24 hours of the incident, the U.S. had nuclear experts on site, and USAID personnel were operational on the ground helping to gather information. The U.S. Department of Energy and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission also deployed over 100 workers to assist in the disaster. Other foreign responders contributed as well, but they were generally slow to respond and challenged by logistical limitations. Noting this fact is not meant to discredit other foreign assistance efforts, but rather to underscore the reality that the U.S. delivered the most capable and timely assistance.

Although the U.S. government abounds with capabilities for responding to disasters, it still confronts challenges and has shortcomings. For instance, sometimes political and diplomatic considerations can complicate efforts to find the right solutions amid a foreign disaster, and those who have the expertise to make the best decisions are not always present from the onset of key discussions or decision-making processes. Even when experts are present, there can be surprising disparities in the perspectives of the experts from different institutional backgrounds, which can make it difficult to gauge how to properly respond. Clarity about funding also tends to become an issue during a disaster response, which can disrupt the timely delivery or execution of foreign assistance. To the extent possible, these are some areas that could use improvement and better cooperation.

The U.S. Government can improve its response to disasters abroad by enhanced funding and interagency coordination.

Since the United States is an essential player in international disaster response, there could be value in improving the coordination and cost-effectiveness of the U.S. Government's disaster response overseas, especially in a constrained budget environment. Conference speakers noted that the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, which coordinates the United States government's responses to disasters overseas, and the U.S. Department of State, which manages intergovernmental political engagements, both operate with small budgets. Utilizing resources more efficiently would enable the U.S. to better respond to foreign disasters in spite of limited funding.

Conference speakers also pointed out that U.S. government agencies involved in foreign disaster response are not currently synchronized and do not work together as effectively as they could. Although the U.S. has the right tools at its disposal, it could reconsider how it uses them by developing a framework that coordinates and leverages those tools more effectively. The U.S. government could improve its foreign disaster response through expanded training and exercises; faster on-the-ground presence of experts from the onset of a disaster or crisis; exploring public-private partnerships; and deeper U.S. state-level involvement.

4. Host Nation Coordination

Host nations would benefit from improving their capacity to take in foreign assistance.

Enhancing emergency preparedness is a two-way street in that the improvements made by the U.S. should also be complemented by improvements in host nation capabilities. Conference participants asserted that from the U.S. perspective, the inhibitions to supporting foreign nations in a disaster are substantial and that the first layer of complication often comes from the host country itself. For instance, even if they are close allies, the governments of host nations are reluctant to allow the U.S. military to operate in their territory. While this is an understandable concern, the U.S. military is a critical entity in a disaster, able to provide unequalled capabilities for assistance. In this case, it may be best to resolve host nation reluctances before a crisis strikes, rather than amid a crisis.

Host nation response could benefit from an enhanced capacity to take in foreign assistance. During a crisis in a country, the good will of the international community in offering assistance is often overwhelming, and it leaves host nations with the difficult task of determining who the best providers are, what they are able to offer, whether to provide access to first responders, and other questions. Learning to manage the push and pull of disaster assistance is an important task of the host nation, and critical to ensuring the assistance offered by the U.S. and other foreign nations is used efficiently.

Host nations could improve internal processes and communications.

In a crisis, gaps in the internal planning of host nations often become apparent. For instance, communications may become impaired and the exchange of accurate information may emerge as a challenge, particularly when a host nation's industries, government ministries, or other stakeholders are not clear on the priorities that need to be addressed. Therefore, the presence of an effective requirement identification system in the host nation is important for an effective response. The responsibility falls largely on the host nation to be able to assess the unique risks and needs of its crisis-stricken state and communicate them to others. In the example of the Philippines, the government has adopted legislation that takes a holistic approach to disaster response by incorporating a diverse set of priorities including gender equality, poverty reduction, and private sector inclusion. The law is also customized for the archipelagic geography of the country. Collectively, these are some of the factors that drive risk assessment and disaster response preparation in the Philippines. A framework for U.S. response could assist host nations in understanding how to interact with donor nations thereby improving these processes.

5. Government-to-Government Engagement

The triple disaster in Fukushima revealed weaknesses in communication between U.S. and Japanese governments.

Throughout the conference, keynote speakers and participants often used the triple disaster in Fukushima, Japan, as a point of reference on the topic of government-to-government engagement. Since the experience tested the limits of the alliance and the strength of the bilateral relationship amid a complex crisis, several insights were drawn from the interactions between Japan and the United States.

Despite the strong alliance between Japan and the United States, it is clear that there were significant areas of miscommunication. "Stovepipes" of communication existed not only between the respective ministries and agencies of each government, but also among the various components within each national government. This ultimately caused the flow of information to be disjointed. There were instances where individuals who needed to know certain kinds of information about the crisis (in order to appropriately respond) were not able to receive critical data. Moreover, high-level political interactions did not always run parallel to the technical interactions.

An additional layer of miscommunication emerged from a general misunderstanding about the intentions of each country. While the United States tried to respect the sovereignty of the Japanese government, it eventually grew frustrated with the way the Japanese government assessed risks and shared information. The Japanese, on the other hand, wondered whether the United States was genuinely trying to protect American expatriates in the area or to collect information on the ground in Japan for other purposes. Both countries also applied different evacuation protocols, and confusion resulted from the U.S. government's decision to establish a larger evacuation zone for American citizens than the Japanese government's for its citizens. This action caused Japanese citizens to distrust their government's instructions, which appeared to be less stringent. In addition, issues such as liability, costs, and strategic approach also arose between the two governments.

To fix some of these problems that arose out of miscommunication between the two nations, the U.S. and Japan created the Hosono Process which helped improve communication, and therefore coordination, between and among the agencies of the two countries.

Conference participants noted that managing expectations in advance of disasters and crises could prove useful moving forward, and may improve intergovernmental engagement in the future. For example, identifying roles and responsibilities of the U.S. military and government agencies, and managing expectations with regard to what foreign assistance the United States is prepared to offer, could mitigate some of initial layers of intergovernmental miscommunication. To the extent possible, establishing common ground on procedures (e.g., how and when to deploy resources) and standards (e.g., how to evaluate risks, or which country's protocols to follow) could also be helpful.

"International response is unlike a national response where it's … predictable who's going to be there, [and] what assets you have. In the international realm, everything changes by the second. You have different actors coming in. You have governments demanding different types of response. It's a much more complex situation and you have to be flexible."

Mr. Mark Bartolini
Former Director of USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance

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III. Recommendations for the Way Ahead

Speakers and participants at the conference felt that a foreign disaster response framework could enhance future assistance, and discussed its requirements and characteristics. Throughout the presentations and discussions, they suggested a wide range of recommendations, guidelines, and considerations for developing a framework. The following list captures some of those remarks and suggestions.

Guiding Principles

- Saving and preserving human lives should be a core, guiding principle of a framework.
- U.S. interests, such as American entities (e.g. citizens, organizations) and equities (e.g. assets) both abroad and at home, should guide the development of a framework.

Underlying Purpose and Attributes

- A framework should aim to enhance coordination on all levels, including agency-to-agency, government-to-government, and public-private partnerships.
- A framework should be simple and not hinder or stand in the way of effective disaster response.
- A framework would serve as a helpful mechanism for foreign disaster preparedness, not as the ultimate solution.

Important Considerations

- A framework should be simple in structure.
- A framework should be able to evolve. The U.S. and the international community are still learning from experiences, and best practices should guide the future progress and development of a framework.
- A framework should be flexible and adaptable. The U.S. has great tools and resources at its disposal to respond to crises, and these elements should be adapted, case by case, to meet all types of situations.
- A framework should have the U.S. government at its center in order to be useful. Given the scope and scale of a framework, the White House should convene key stakeholders such

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as the National Security Staff. Developing a framework below this level will not be effective.

- A framework should respect the sovereignty of countries. For the framework to be effective, building bilateral trust should be a core element of the framework.
- A framework should be civilian-led, not led by the military.
- A framework should not be subsumed by a political agenda; doing so will undermine its credibility and efficacy.
- A framework should be developed with foreign and international perspectives in mind.
- A framework for U.S. interagency coordination may need to be an entirely separate framework from one for international coordination.

Possible Components

- A framework should identify, "what," "why," and "how."
- A framework should clarify roles and responsibilities of relevant actors.
- A framework should be developed to leverage U.S. state-level capabilities.
- A framework could be based on the NRF, but it would need to be adapted and augmented since the NRF is designed specifically for U.S. domestic disasters.
- A framework should emphasize a humanitarian lead for disaster response.
- A framework should deeply incorporate the private sector.
- A framework should prioritize the establishment of clear lines for communication on all levels, including intergovernmental and interagency communications.
- A framework should incorporate training and exercises.

"We live in a complex environment…at the political, at the economic, [and] at the trade levels, with and among organizations that are both inherently governmental and those that are not… Then the question is how do we best manage those things? I think frameworks provide a useful mechanism to think about it, but also recognizing they are not the answer to all of the problems – they are but a mechanism to get at it. And they have to evolve and they have to grow and they have to work in concert with the environments that they exist within."

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