MCDA deployment in Natural disasters and health crises

Case study Nepal

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Map of Nepal

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List of Acronyms

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chase OT</td>
<td>Conflict and Humanitarian affairs Operational Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIMCoord</td>
<td>Civil-Military Coordination</td>
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<td>CMCS</td>
<td>Civil-Military Coordination Section</td>
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<tr>
<td>DART</td>
<td>Disaster Assessment and relief Team</td>
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<td>DG ECHO</td>
<td>European Directorate for Humanitarian aid and Civil Protection</td>
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<td>DfID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>DoD</td>
<td>Department of Defense</td>
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<td>EUCP</td>
<td>European Civil Protection Mechanisms</td>
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<td>FMA</td>
<td>Foreign Military Assets</td>
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<td>GAO</td>
<td>US Government Accountability Office</td>
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<td>GoN</td>
<td>Government of Nepal</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRG</td>
<td>Humanitarian Response Group (UK)</td>
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<td>HUMMOC</td>
<td>Humanitarian-Military Operations Coordination Centre</td>
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<td>IASC</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Standing Committee</td>
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<td>JHAST</td>
<td>Joint Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team</td>
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<td>JFTH</td>
<td>joint Task Force</td>
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<td>MCDA</td>
<td>Military and Civil Defense Assets</td>
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<td>MITAM</td>
<td>Mission Tasking Matrix</td>
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<td>MNMCC</td>
<td>Multi National Military Operations Coordination Centre</td>
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<td>MoD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defense</td>
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<td>MSF</td>
<td>Médecins Sans Frontières</td>
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<td>NDMA</td>
<td>National Disaster Management Agency</td>
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<td>National Emergency Operation Centre</td>
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<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>OFDA</td>
<td>Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance</td>
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<td>RRRRO</td>
<td>Resources Required for Rescue and Relief Operations</td>
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<td>SECDEF</td>
<td>Secretary of Defense</td>
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<td>SOFA</td>
<td>Status of Force Agreement</td>
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<td>UN OCHA</td>
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Nepal is exposed to several types of natural and man-made hazards (Government of Nepal, 2011). A wide variety of physiographical, geological, ecological and hydro-meteorological factors contribute to the high levels of hazards faced. With the high level of tourist activity and the country’s position as a buffer state between the two regional giants, this has meant that many stakeholders have an interest in Nepal. The risk of a major earthquake in the Kathmandu valley has put Nepal at the centre of DRR activities, including scenario planning of foreign military involvement. Several exercises by foreign military forces, including the US and the UK, have taken place over the last few years.

Nepal was struck by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake on Saturday 25th April 2015 with the epicentre located 81 km northwest of the Nepali capital Kathmandu at a depth of 15km. This was not the “big one” everybody had been fearing, and turned out to be more of a rural disaster than an urban one. Luckily, most people were at home in the city and were able to escape from their houses.

Luckily, the airport was unaffected and remained operational, but was rapidly congested. Most of the critical infrastructures of the city remained more or less functional, including telecommunications, electricity, and water, with only short disruptions. There were no major fires, despite the fact that these are often caused by earthquakes in urban settings. Most of the destruction took place in more remote rural areas to the west and east of Kathmandu.

In the hours after the earthquake, the Government activated its National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC), with the Ministry of Defence a key player. Indeed, in Nepal, as in many countries, the army is a central component of the disaster response capacity. The Nepali Army is relatively well prepared to meet the full spectrum of challenges to security and defence including disaster response. It has a series of helicopters, 4X4 vehicles and a large force that can be mobilized day and night. Operation “SANKATMOCHAN” (Liberation from crisis) was launched and was very effective but was seen by some NGOs as contrary to the “last resort” approach advocated in the Oslo Guidelines.

The Nepali army played a major logistical role providing ground and air transport for rescue and relief operations in difficult, mountainous areas. Its road repair and rubble clearing assets were also used extensively. It also played a key role in coordination with all other military deployments. A Multi National Military Coordination Centre (MNMCC) was established for this purpose, with close links to the NEOC.

Keen to strengthen its influence in Nepal, but also out of empathy for its suffering neighbour, the Indian Army launched ‘Operation Maitri’ or ‘friendship’ a day after the quake. It began to extend help to its neighbour. It provided air support to move large amounts of relief to Nepal, and fly 500 of its stranded citizens back from Kathmandu just after the earthquake. In addition, it deployed National Disaster Response Force teams with both a relief capacity and a road clearing capacity. This allowed the Kathmandu India road and the Kathmandu to Pokhara road to be reopened so that relief materials and equipment could be moved by road as well as by air.
Over the years, the US and UK military have established relations with Nepal in connection with post conflict and disaster preparedness activities, for both historical and geopolitical reasons. They were therefore relatively familiar with the context and had strong links with the Nepali military apparatus. Both came to Nepal with the lessons they had learnt from the Haiti earthquake and, more recently, from Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.

Among these key lessons, with the highest impact on operations, one can mention:

- The clear subordination of the military and MCDA to civilian bodies (OFDA and its DART for the US, DFID and its Chase OT staff for the UK). For instance, the US Pacific Command rapidly sent a 20-strong Joint Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team (JHAST) to carry out the first assessments, together with OFDA’s DART.

- The importance of coordinating properly with the national army and national NDMA (here the NEOC). Therefore all efforts were made to coordinate with the dedicated centre established by the Nepali Army, the Multi National Military Coordination Centre (MNMCC) and with the NEOC.

- The importance of air capacity in rough mountainous contexts.

- The importance of speed when an earthquake takes place in a cold context. The US Embassy in Nepal requested assistance from USPACOM (US Pacific Command) and the decision to send a team from JF 505 with a C130 was taken immediately.

- The importance of rapidly establishing a coordination mechanism with the civilian component of the global humanitarian response. A Joint Operational Task Force (JOTF) and its main tool: the Mission Tasking Matrix (MITAM) were put in place as a mechanism to coordinate military air and road transport MCDA and relief delivery. The OCHA CIM Coord team proved to be very useful in this context.
1 Description of the 2015 Nepal earthquakes

1.1 Nepal risk profile

A wide variety of physiographical, geological, ecological and hydro-meteorological factors contribute to the high levels of hazards faced in Nepal. Other factors, such as rapid population growth, slow economic development, high levels of poverty, lack of awareness of mitigation measures, and a lack of political and social commitment also contribute to making the country extremely prone to disasters.

The greatest risk of disaster is linked to the geological and climatic features of the country. The seismic record suggests that the risk of a strong intensity earthquake on the Modified Mercalli Intensity Scale (MMI X6) is high. The main source of seismic activity in Nepal is the subduction of the Indian plate under the Tibetan plate (the Himalayas).

There are a lot of small, fast-growing cities in Nepal exposed to a wide range of risks: floods, landslides and earthquakes, political unrest, epidemics and economic crisis. However, most of the efforts on risk profiling have taken place in the capital city, Kathmandu. It is located at an altitude of 1200m in the Himalayan mountain belt, which was produced by the collision between the Indian and Eurasian plates in the early tertiary period. Three major faults, the Main Central Thrust (MCT), the Main Boundary Thrust (MBT) and the Himalayan Frontal Thrust (HFT), run throughout the length of Nepal from east to west and have resulted in many earthquakes in the past in excess of moment magnitude M8. There is therefore a need to estimate possible hazards in order to engage in risk estimation. In 1934, the fault line that runs beneath the Kathmandu valley slipped. In the 20th century alone, over 11,000 people lost their lives in four major earthquakes. The 1934 earthquake destroyed 20 percent and damaged 40 percent of the building stock in the Kathmandu valley (NSET, 1999). In Kathmandu itself, a quarter of all homes were destroyed. Many of the temples in Bhaktapur were destroyed as well. Three earthquakes of similar size occurred in the Kathmandu valley in the 19th Century: in 1810, 1833, and 1866. The most damaging recent earthquake to take place before the earthquakes in 2015 was the earthquake of 1988. This magnitude 8.4 earthquake destroyed more than 80,000 buildings and claimed 8,500 lives. Since 1988 the city of Kathmandu has evolved enormously.

Kathmandu metropolitan area

Due to the evolution of the context in Nepal since 2000, Kathmandu has become one of the fastest-growing urban agglomerations in South Asia, with 5000 new concrete buildings built in the valley every year. Rapid population growth and urbanization due to migration to the Kathmandu Valley from different parts of the country has increased demand for housing, water, electricity, drainage, roads and other utilities (Bhattara and Conway, 2010), leading to infrastructure expansion and major pressure on the environment.

As is often the case, new urban constructions are built on the nearest agricultural land and along the roads leading to the city, land that does not have basic infrastructure (roads, water, drainage, etc.) but is more easily accessible to new migrants. Subsequently, local governments face increased demand for the provision of infrastructure after the construction of houses.

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1 All abstract from Groupe URD’s Nepal earthquake: a rapid review of the response and a few lessons learnt
Implementing infrastructure in these cases renders the housing on agricultural land more expensive in the long run than on urban developed land. Central government agencies and municipalities (with financial contributions from local communities) are responsible for providing basic services, but most often the agencies and municipalities are not in a position to expand their networks due to lack of funds, lack of management capacity, and lack of proper planning. Local authorities do not have the capacity to provide the appropriate infrastructure and services and their roles are limited to local-level infrastructure only.

Urbanization in the Kathmandu valley but also in other cities has been largely uncontrolled and even though building codes have existed since 1994, they have not been very effective in promoting earthquake resistant construction due to their poor implementation. Every year there is greater risk due to declining construction practices, uncontrolled urban development and a rapidly increasing population, which has now reached two million people in the urban agglomeration. If an earthquake were to take place, it could be even more deadly than the Haiti earthquake of January 2010.

1.2 The 2015 earthquakes

Nepal was struck by a 7.8 Magnitude earthquake on Saturday 25th April 2015 with the epicentre located 81 km northwest of the Nepali capital Kathmandu at a depth of 15km. This was not the “big one” everybody had feared, and turned out to be more of a rural disaster than an urban one. Luckily, most people were at home in the city and were able to escape from their houses.

Many people stayed outside in open spaces for a few nights, but the large fields where IOM and OXFAM had set up facilities were largely underused. There was less destruction in the Kathmandu valley than had been feared, and most people preferred to stay in their neighbourhoods to protect their belongings and remain with friends and relatives.

After a series of aftershocks (including a 6.7 magnitude earthquake and, on 2 May 2015, another 5.0 magnitude quake near Pokhara), another significant tremor of 7.3 magnitude affected another area west of Kathmandu on 12 May 2015. This caused further damage, and increased levels of fear and anxiety. Aftershocks continued for many months. It is estimated that around eight million people have been affected overall.

Luckily, the airport was unaffected and remained operational, but was rapidly congested. Most of the critical infrastructures of the city remained more or less functional, including telecommunications, electricity, and water, with only short disruptions. There were no major fires, despite the fact that these are often caused by earthquakes in urban settings.

As of 3 June 2015, the Government of Nepal (GoN) reported a total of 505,745 houses destroyed and 279,330 houses damaged by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake on 25 April 2015 and the 7.3 earthquake on 12 May 2015. The earthquakes killed 8,702 people and injured thousands more. By mid June 2015, an estimated 2.8 million people were still in need of humanitarian assistance.
2 The central role of the Nepali Army

2.1 Status and responsibilities

In Nepal, as in many countries, the army plays a central role in disaster response. The website of the Nepali army states that "The Nepali Army is a competent national force prepared to meet the full spectrum of challenges to security and defence." Besides safeguarding the nation from external aggression, it is well-prepared and fully competent in undertaking duties such as internal security, nation development, and nature conservation and disaster management. On several occasions, in response to both natural disasters, the Nepali Army has mobilized its specialized and disciplined manpower in rescue missions and has succeeded in saving the lives and property of the population under risk. The mega earthquake of 1934, the Udayapur earthquake of 1988, the massive floods of 1993 in the central region of Nepal, the flooding in the Koshi Barrage area in 2008, the epidemic in Jajarkot in 2009, the massive landslide in Jure of Sindhupalchowk and the avalanche and blizzards in the western mountainous region in 2014 are some of the major disasters where the Nepali Army was mobilized in rescue and relief operations.

2.2 The Nepali Army response

During the mega earthquake of April 2015, the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2006 was in force. Even though National Disaster Law was in the process of being revised, the Interim Constitution had provisions that made it possible to mobilize the Nepali Army for disaster management without prior authorisation from the parliament. The Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) therefore immediately mobilized the Army. The National Security Council subsequently made a similar recommendation to the President through the Council of Ministers, which was approved by the President on 20 May 2015.

The initial objective of the Nepali Army was to reach the affected areas as fast as possible and to save lives. Operation “Rahat” was launched with the immediate mobilization of Nepali Army personnel for search and rescue, and relief activities at all levels. When the nature, scale and magnitude of needs became clearer, in order to respond more appropriately to the disaster, the Nepali Army adopted a 3-pronged strategy:

- Mobilising Resources Required for Rescue and Relief Operations (RRRRO) from the dedicated budget line for priority-based procurement of rescue and relief equipment. The service personnel on leave were immediately called back to duty and all training was suspended to make maximum manpower available for rescue and relief operations. Similarly, equipment required for conducting rescue and relief operations was mobilised through bilateral military action.

- Re-establishing land communication as quickly as possible. Particularly important was bridging equipment and heavy duty machinery to help keep major lines of communication open, facilitate the dispatch of equipment to the most remote areas. The items received through bilateral assistance included equipment for search operations in urban areas with collapsed structures, water treatment plants and medical equipment, the rapid assembly Acrow bridge and flood rescue equipment from the USA, heavy duty equipment and mobile hospitals from China, air transport and aerial cableways from India.

3 The Nepali Army in the Aftermath of the Gorkha Earthquake of 2015
5 The new Constitution of Nepal voted in the Parliament after the earthquake also allows for the same.
- Mobilising the maximum number of aircraft for rescue and relief distribution activities. The army also procured two additional MI 17 helicopters, although a little too late to put them into operation at the peak of the response. They were fully operational as of 22 June 2015.

Operation “SANKATMOCHAN” (Liberation from crisis) was launched. It is important to keep in mind that for the Nepali Chief of Defense, who is the executive agent and coordinator of the Nepali Army response, it is part of the army’s duty to take part in relief efforts and to establish dialogue with humanitarian actors. This created some difficulties as it is contrary to the Oslo Guidelines’ last resort approach and humanitarian principles.

2.3 The coordination role of the Nepali Army

For years, with the risk for a serious earthquake in the Kathmandu Valley, serious thought has been given to the possibility of a response involving different armies, with a key consideration being the coordination role of the Nepali Army.

Several workshops and seminars have been organized to ensure that international military and non-military humanitarian assistance made available at regional, national and international levels are effectively managed, coordinated and used in the event of a disaster (e.g. “Tempest express”, “Joint endeavour”, “Unity of effort”, etc.). These involved representatives from foreign military services, international and national relief organizations and government offices. The importance of these preparedness efforts by the Nepali Army should not be underestimated. For example, China, India and the United States all actively participated in Exercise “Joint Endeavour”, a multinational exercise organized by the Nepali Army, and they were all major responders in the April 2015 earthquake.

A Field HQ jointly manned by representatives of all the security services was immediately established at the Nepali Army HQ. This HQ executed the requests/tasks formulated by the National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC). A Multi-National Military Coordination Centre (MNMCC) was established to coordinate and mobilize international military humanitarian assistance and army representatives were sent to the NEOC to further coordinate the rescue and relief operations.
3 The intervention of the Indian Army

3.1 Main characteristics of the intervention

The Indian Army named its operation in Nepal ‘Operation Maitri’ or ‘friendship’. Soon after the devastating earthquake, Army Chief General Dalbir Singh spoke to his Nepali counterpart General SJB Rana. They were deeply involved in carrying out reconnaissance of affected areas and road conditions. A Multi-National Coordination Centre was set up. In addition, headquarters were established for relief operations in Pokhara. India’s key contributions were:

- Air capacity - flights were rapidly cleared to land at the Tribhuvan airport in Kathmandu, but due to aftershocks⁶ and climatic turbulence over the airport, the first relief aircrafts were diverted to Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh. They managed to land relief material and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams in Kathmandu on Monday morning, 2 days after the earthquake.

- Relief supplies – the Indian Air Force flew in essential supplies (medical personnel and equipment, blankets and tents). It also airlifted over 500 of its stranded citizens from Kathmandu just after the earthquake. India also deployed National Disaster Response Force teams with both a relief and a road clearing capacity. This allowed the Kathmandu India road and the Kathmandu to Pokhara road to be re-opened so that relief items and equipment could be moved by road as well as by air.

- Part of this capacity was used to return the Indian under-14 girls’ football team to Delhi from Kathmandu.

The Indian Air Force mobilised its
- Ilyushin II-76
- C-130J Hercules (At least two deployed)[8]
- C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft (At least four deployed)[8]
- Advanced Light Helicopters (At least two deployed)[8]
- Mi-17 helicopters for Operation Maitri. Up to eight Mi-17 helicopters were used for missions such as air-dropping relief.

- 18 medical teams in addition to three field hospitals were deployed. One field hospital was deployed at Rajdalar near Lalitpur, with one orthopaedic specialist, one surgical specialist and one anaesthetist along with the attached medical staff. Additional doctors were tasked to cover an 80km radius around the base in two mobile teams. One Engineer Task Force made up of 40 personnel was sent rapidly, as well as Earth-Moving Equipment (Engineer Plant) and generators, which started functioning a few days after the quake.

3.2 Timelines

- **25 April 2015**: By the afternoon, ten teams from India’s National Disaster Response Force, totalling 450 personnel and including several search and rescue dogs had been sent. Ten additional Indian Air Force planes joined them later on with further aid. In the immediate aftermath of the quake, India sent 43 tons of relief materials, including tents and food.

⁶ A powerful aftershock measuring 6.7 on the Richter scale hit Nepal on Sunday afternoon. Another, of 5.4 magnitude, was reported a little before 10 pm. These caused panic among the population.
26 April 2015: Operation Maitri started on the day after the quake. The Indian Air Force evacuated over 500 of its own citizens from Nepal between the evening of the 25th and the morning of the 26th and hundreds more throughout Sunday. Ten flights were planned for Sunday. These airlifted army forward hospitals, teams of doctors, nurses, and paramedics, engineering task forces, water, food, National Disaster Response Force teams, medical personnel and equipment, blankets and tents.1 By the end of the 26th, India had dispatched a further 10 tons of blankets, 50 tons of water, 22 tons of food items and 2 tons of medicine to Kathmandu. Nearly 1,000 National Disaster Response Force personnel had also been pressed into service, and a "mass evacuation" of Indian citizens was underway by road. The government deployed 35 buses to evacuate stranded Indians in Nepal via two routes - Sonauli and Raxaul - along the Indo-Nepal border

27 April 2015: By Monday morning, the Indian Air Force had evacuated 1935 Indian citizens from Nepal using 12 aircraft trips. Indian Army sources said that six of the 18 medical teams tasked to help with the relief efforts in Nepal had been deployed. The Indian Army sent 10 engineer task forces with machinery to clear roads and debris. The troops took a further 10,000 blankets and 1,000 tents. The Indian Army also brought oxygen cylinders for distribution to medical teams.

28 April 2015: With the weather improving, the Indian Air Force and the Indian Army fanned out to remote areas while continuing to transport essential items from various bases to Kathmandu and evacuating distressed persons to India. A 41-member medical team, along with medical supplies, was sent to Nepal from Rajasthan. The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), or Border Armed Forces, dispatched over three dozen vehicles, including ambulances and water tankers to Nepal from its border camps. The Indian government dispatched a further 220 tons of food packets and dry rations, 50 tons of water, 2 tons of medicines, 40 tents and 1,400 blankets to Nepal.

3.3 Mount Everest avalanche

The Indian Army Everest Expedition was training at Base Camp when the earthquake struck. Their equipment was buried in the avalanche, but the team was unharmed and helped to recover the bodies of other foreign climbers. 19 bodies were recovered and 61 injured persons were rescued by the Indian Army Expedition Team. The Medical Officer treated a number of injured international mountaineers in addition to the 61 listed above and a considerable amount of medicine and rations were distributed from their resources available on site.

3.4 Issues at stake

3.4.1 Decision-making

“In keeping with its strategic interests and growing regional responsibilities, India can decide to intervene militarily in its neighbourhood when national interests are threatened”7

The Indian Army played a decisive role in the decision and its practical implications.

In early April, 2015, India had evacuated 5,600 displaced persons from Yemen under Operation Rahat (relief). Of these, 4,640 were from India and 960 from 41 friendly countries, including citizens of Britain, France and the United States (US). They were evacuated by air on C-17 aircraft of the IAF flying from Djibouti, Ethiopia; by Air India aircraft flying from Sana’a; and by sea on board ships of the Indian Navy from Aden, Al Hudaydah and Al Mukalla ports in Yemen. These operations were meticulously planned and efficiently executed. These were not merely humanitarian relief operations, but operations that showcased India’s military capabilities. It is not the first time that India has undertaken such operations. During the war in Iraq in 2003, the conflicts in Lebanon (2006), Egypt, Libya and Yemen (2011), and Ukraine and Syria-Iraq (2014), the Indian armed forces and civil aviation personnel evacuated beleaguered Indian citizens from war zones. While India would prefer to do so with a clear mandate from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and under the UN flag, it may not be averse to joining ‘coalitions of the willing’ when national interests that are threatened are ‘vital’ in nature and consensus in the UNSC proves hard to achieve. The aim of such operations will be to further India’s national security and foreign policy objectives, and join strategic partners to ensure security of the global commons.

The response to the 2015 earthquake in Nepal was largely triggered by a political imperative: to demonstrate the power and the presence of India in the region and to counterbalance the influence of China.

Political problems between the Federal Government in Kathmandu and ethnic minorities in the Terrai plains bordering India led to the closure of the India-Kathmandu road a few months later. Unfortunately, India may have contributed to this conflict.

### 3.4.2 Needs assessment

The involvement of the Indian Army was extremely political from the outset. However, as they are familiar with the conditions in Nepal and its mountainous areas, and as the Indian Embassy was able to send information about the situation in Kathmandu quickly, India mobilized its armed forces rapidly, and sent:

- significant logistical means for medical evacuations and to dispatch relief in hard to reach areas;
- medical staff with a significant quantity of supplies for emergency operations;
- relief items.

### 3.4.3 Civilian capability gap analysis

The procedures under Oslo Guidelines would normally result into the mobilization of MCDA to be a “last resort” solution. Yet, the Indian Army is traditionally one of the principal actors domestically in disaster response. With its high level of discipline, its specific unit for Disaster Response and its logistical capacity, it plays the role of the first line of response in most examples in India itself. The sale reasoning was used in the deployment of MCDA to Nepal.

### 3.4.4 On-site coordination

In view of the political sensitivity of the political relations between India and Nepal, the Indian Army had to coordinate with the system put in place by the Nepali Army, the Multi National Military Coordination Centre (MNMCC). General Singh immediately dispatched two senior officers to proceed to Kathmandu and coordinate the Indian Army’s relief efforts hand-in-hand with the Nepali Army.

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8 Indian political analyst
During the whole operation, high ranking Indian Army officers were posted as liaison officers in the MNMCC in order to smooth out any issues that emerged. In accordance with the priorities expressed by the Nepali Army, a Task Force Headquarters was established in Kathmandu under Major General J S Sandhu, in order to coordinate supply and demand between the two armies (equipment and expertise rather than personnel). A satellite communication link between Nepali Army Headquarters and the Indian Army Engineer Task Force was rapidly established. In addition, a Movement Control Team was set up in Kathmandu to direct relief convoys to affected areas.

### 3.4.5 Drawdown of assets

As most of the equipment provided was either logistical support (heavy duty equipment), field hospitals or air borne operations, everything was brought back to India.

### 3.4.6 Evaluations and lessons learnt exercises

Several After Action Reviews took place within the Indian Military system. Journalists also monitored the operation and reported on it extensively.

The key lessons from the response were:

- The difficulty of operating in Mountainous regions and difficult terrains and the importance of airborne capacity in these contexts;

- The political challenges of operating in a region where conflicts and political tensions can always erupt;

- The significance of the mobilization of armed forces as part of the “disaster diplomacy” and the related attention to be paid to “inter-army coordination and dialogue”;

- The importance of “pre-disaster international exercises and joint simulations” as a way of creating confidence.
4 The US military response to the Nepal earthquake

4.1 Main characteristics of the US military response to the Nepal earthquake

The scenario of a major earthquake in Nepal, and particularly one affecting the Kathmandu valley, has been on the US military’s radar, and more generally that of the DoD and USAID, for a number of years. A planning and preparedness efforts have consequently been underway. Thus, when the earthquake hit Nepal on 25th April 2015, there was already a team in Nepal involved in a training exercise, comprising Defence Department personnel and an aircraft. These Army Special Forces teams, consisting of approximately 26 members, who just happened to be there as part of an earthquake preparedness plan when the earthquake struck, were immediately tasked to assist the Nepali Army in rescue and relief efforts. Some of these Special Forces soldiers contributed to efforts to rescue climbers on Mount Everest, who were stranded at base camps by an avalanche triggered by the earthquake.

It is important to keep in mind that the US military have been kept on a high level of alertness in this region. The 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), based in Okinawa (Japan), represents a significant standby capacity to be deployed. A Joint Task Force 505 team, deployed from USPACOM, played a central role in the US Military response to the earthquake. This was the beginning of Operation Sahayogi Haat, the US military response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake.

On Sunday April the 26th, the day after the earthquake, a US military plane departed from Dover air force base in Delaware. On-board were 70 personnel, including a US Agency for International Development disaster assistance response team, a Virginia-based search and rescue team and 45 tons of cargo.9

The U.S. sent additional rescue teams to Nepal on Monday April 27th with an Urban Search and Rescue Team and a Disaster Assistance Response Team from the U.S. Agency for International Development, which arrived on board a C-17 at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu on Monday. Another Air Force C-17 Globemaster flew from Joint Base Charleston, S.C., to March Air Reserve Base in California to pick up 57 members of the Los Angeles Fire Department’s Urban Search and Rescue Task Force 2. The task force then flew to Kathmandu on Monday afternoon. The U.S. had pledged $1 million in assistance to Nepal immediately after the earthquake. Secretary of State John Kerry announced $9 million more on Monday, as the death toll neared 4,000, to provide heavy equipment such as tractors, forklifts and dump trucks to assist in clearing rubble.

The topography of the country and the difficulties of gaining access to far-reaching mountainous areas underlined the importance of mobilizing helicopters, which were badly needed to rescue trapped people and distribute relief. The U.S Army sent four tilt-rotor V-22 Osprey aircraft along with conventional helicopters and 150 military personnel to Nepal to boost the relief effort. This significant additional capacity included Air Force personnel out of Guam Military Base in the Philippines, who are able to control air traffic, repair airfields and offload supplies with heavy equipment. The Ospreys and several UH-1 Huey helicopters were tasked with ferrying relief supplies and personnel from the international airport in Kathmandu to outlying areas.

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In addition to the Ospreys and three Hueys, other assisting U.S. aircraft included four Air Force C-17 Globemasters and two Marine Corps KC-130s. Some of the locations where the helicopters flew were 18,000 feet above sea level.

On Saturday 25th April, U.S. officials obtained permission from Nepali civil aviation authorities to help the country’s air-traffic controllers manage the flights. Among the Air Force personnel deployed were airfield specialists who worked closely with local air traffic staff.

4.2 Issues at stake

4.2.1 Decision-making

The strategic location of Nepal as a buffer state between India and China was instrumental in triggering the US response. This strategic and political interest is one of the reasons explaining the presence of US special forces involved in training at the time of the earthquake is one question.

As Nepal is a prime tourist location for Americans, there was significant media attention about the fate of U.S. citizens during and after the tremor. The military presence on the ground facilitated the search and it was possible to indicate quickly that four Americans had been killed by the earthquake and that the U.S. death toll was expected to rise.

By chance, a US military contingent was already deployed in Nepal to train the Nepali Army. The first objective for the US was to rescue its own soldiers. Then, based on the information that they were able to supply, the rest of the response was triggered.

The US Embassy in Nepal requested assistance from USPACOM (US Pacific Command) and the decision to send a team from JF 505 with a C130 was taken immediately.

4.2.2 Needs assessment

Since the tsunami of 2004 and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the DoD had been working mainly on sea-borne relief operations. But the risk of a dramatic event in a land-locked country, where logistics would represent an extremely significant challenge, compelled the US military to invest in scenarios such as Kathmandu. This turned out to be extremely useful.

The 3rd MEB sent its commander, General Kennedy, with a 20-strong Joint Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team (JHAST) to carry out the first assessments, together with OFDA’s DART.

One of the key findings was that Kathmandu Valley was far less affected then feared, and that the main problems were in the less accessible areas. Another was that search and rescue in destroyed buildings would be an exception, and that the most pressing need was to move relief goods to affected areas (which is very much in the capacity of armed forces and NGOs) rather than sophisticated INSARAG-type urban search and rescue.

4.2.3 Civilian capability gap analysis

In Nepal, the Disaster Management Act of 2005 provides the blueprint of the response set-up, with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) at the centre, and the State, Districts and Village Disaster Management Authorities at the periphery. As the state and the district level are the weak links in disaster management efforts, the civil administration has “got used to military and central help as a norm”. Therefore, very little time is devoted by the military to analysing the existing level of civilian capacity.
The fact that the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu was largely untouched helped a lot. The rapid deployment of aircraft and helicopters for assessments and aid distribution was an area where military capacity was considered to be very useful as civilian capacity is often slow to take off (apart from MSF), and very few agencies have the capacity to move fast until the establishment of a UNHAS program.

In view of the capacities of the Nepali health system, military field hospitals were not seen as a priority.

4.2.4 On-site coordination

The US army was extremely careful in its approach to coordination. As it operated far from its base and had invested a lot of resources to support the Nepali Army, a great deal of effort was made to coordinate with the dedicated centre established by the Nepali Army, the Multi National Military Coordination Centre (MNMCC) and with the NEOC.

The Joint Operational Task Force (JOTF) and its main tool, the Mission Tasking Matrix (MITAM), played a key coordination role on the ground. MITAM is an operational and tactical level system for validating, communicating, tracking and coordinating US Military missions during foreign humanitarian missions (a key element of the Humanitarian Assistance / Disaster Relief or HADR engagement of DoD under USAID/OFDA). It transferred requests for assistance from different sources (national, NGO, UN, etc.) through USAID/OFDA and then to the military for implementation (in particular for transport using DOD assets).

It is important to keep in mind that in order to facilitate coordination with the military regarding the use of MCDA, OFDA sent a highly-qualified coordinator to be hosted by USPACOM in Okinawa to maintain dialogue and monitor the operation from that angle.

4.2.5 Drawdown of assets

In May 2019, the JTF decided to terminate the operation and the MITAM process. Most MCDA, mainly air support, were withdrawn after a few days. A critical point in these situations is whether there are clearly identified goals at the beginning of the operation, which is rarely the case. In addition, the cost of such an operation (complex logistics in a land-locked country which is a long way from any sea-based support) and the risk of a heavy political footprint in a geopolitically sensitive zone meant that there was a strong incentive to withdraw rapidly.
4.2.6 Evaluations and lessons learnt exercises

For the sea borne model for large scale rescue operations developed after the 2004 Tsunami and the 2010 Haiti earthquake, a land based disaster response strategy has been developed and field tested in Nepal. The fact that the Kathmandu airport was not damaged was a key factor of this response. The question remains about what would have happened if it had been seriously damaged? This was considered to be the most probable scenario and the one on which most strategic preparedness plans had been based.

Many lessons were learned:

- The central role of the MITAM for tasking and coordinating operations both with USG institutions and with the broader humanitarian community;

- The importance of logistics when the operation takes place on difficult terrain. Relevant MCDA need then to be deployed, depending on the condition. In these circumstances, it is important to use the right MCDA. Helicopters will often be needed, as will small fixed-wing aircraft but helicopters should often be seen as priority.

- The importance of pre-disaster training in a given at-risk country.

USPACOM and JTF 505 organized their own After Action Review after the earthquake. The following paragraphs summarize the most significant findings from the report:

– Nepal’s response to the disaster, although constrained by limited resources and a very difficult geography, was largely effective. While international civilian and military efforts filled critical gaps and reinforced the Government of Nepal during the initial crisis, Nepal bore the primary burden for coordinating and responding to this disaster.

– U.S. Pacific Command security cooperation engagements and capacity building exercises were vital in preparing the Nepal Army for its role during a major earthquake response. The Nepal Army’s Multinational Military Coordination Centre was the primary mechanism for coordinating the Nepali government and the international disaster response efforts during the chaotic first week after the earthquake struck.

– Pre-disaster civilian-military theatre engagements with regional partners, organizations, and international agencies facilitated a reasonably collaborative, foreign disaster response.

5 The UK Military Response to the 2015 Nepal Earthquake

This section will outline the UK military response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake by giving an historical overview of the UK’s relationship with Nepal, the role of the Gurkha soldiers in the British Army, the press release and subsequent press release outlines. It will then cover the issues at stake in the intervention.

5.1 Main characteristics of the UK military response to the Nepal earthquake

The UK has a long-standing relationship with Nepal. Originating in the days of Empire and colonialism, the Anglo-Nepalese War saw invasion of the kingdom of Nepal by British military forces from 1814-16. Despite extreme brutality and loss of life, a mutual ‘warrior’ respect between Nepali fighters and British military forces developed. This triggered the voluntary recruitment of Nepali fighters – Gurkha soldiers – into the British East India Company’s army once a peace agreement was established in 1816.

The value of Gurkha soldiers to the British Army was evident during the partition of India in 1947. Settlement included the transfer of four Gurkha Indian army regiments into the British Army. There has been successive British Army Gurkha regiments and Brigades, with Gurkha soldiers fighting in the 1st and 2nd World Wars, as well as serving in Hong Kong, Malaya, Borneo, Cyprus, the Falklands, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, although much reduced in numbers, the Brigade of Gurkhas comprises The Royal Gurkha Rifles, The Queen’s Gurkha Engineers, Queens Gurkha Signals, and The Queen’s Own Gurkha Logistic Regiment, as well as two independent companies. Anglo-Nepalese relations have a long militarised history and interwoven relationship that currently extends beyond military cooperation, with many former Gurkhas now having the right to live in the UK.

The 25th April 2015 Gorkha Earthquake had an estimated epicentre 9 miles below the surface of Barpak, Gorkha, the historical heartland of the city-state of Gorkha. Under instruction from the Nepali government, the UN made the request for international humanitarian aid and disaster relief assistance. In the UK, this instigated a ‘whole-of-government’ response, as usual. The UK Department for International Development’s Conflict Humanitarian and Security Department (CHASE) sent personnel to support the DFID Kathmandu office. As the DFID Nepal Earthquake Response Business Case states:

“Initial support deployed by CHASE focused on: search and rescue and medical trauma teams; supply of military air assets (aircraft and helicopters) and civilian charter flights, which carried over 180 tonnes of supplies into Nepal; and unloading equipment and logistic support to ease the bottlenecks at Kathmandu’s main airport.” (DFID Nepal Earthquake Response Business Case, 2015)

Additionally, rapid funding was made available through the UK’s Rapid Response Facility. On the 26th April, the day after the earthquake, the UK’s former Prime Minister, David Cameron, announced that the Royal Air Force (RAF) would deploy to support the disaster relief effort.

11 http://www.army.mod.uk/gurkhas/27856.aspx
A joint MOD, DFID and FCO press release outlines the UK Military Asset Offers made to Nepal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Flew 33 British Nationals out of Nepal.</th>
<th>Flew in a team of British military Gurkha engineers to set up water purification infrastructure in Kathmandu.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 x RAF C-17 Starlifter</td>
<td>Used to transport 54 tonnes DFID humanitarian aid supplies, 1,100+ shelter kits, 1,700+ solar lanterns.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 x RAF C130 Hercules</td>
<td>Used to transport supplies from India to Kathmandu</td>
<td>Used to transport Chinook CH47 Helicopters to Delhi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 x Chinook CH47 Helicopters</td>
<td>Sent to India, Delhi, on two C17 Starlifters and one C130 Hercules</td>
<td>The Chinooks were supported by dedicated military personnel to assemble and maintain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further [unspecified] 200 military personnel in support of the mission</td>
<td>“Provide direct welfare support to the villages serving Gurkhas and their families, as well as Gurkha veterans. Military personnel will also provide immediate assistance to other Nepalese civilians in their Area of Operations”¹²</td>
<td>“Following the delivery of immediate care, the troops will construct permanent shelters and will assist in the repair of specific infrastructure. It is anticipated that they will be in Nepal for around three months.”¹</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional deployment of 92 British Army Gurkha Engineers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurkhas permanently based in Nepal</td>
<td>“Provided informal assistance to around 200 UK nationals at their base through first aid and logistical support before they were evacuated. They are now assisting in the more remote regions with reconnaissance missions. They are also able to provide language assistance to search and rescue teams as they speak both English and Nepali.”¹</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Timeline of UK Military Operations

- 25th April 2015: first earthquake measuring 7.8 on the moment magnitude scale.
- 26th April 2015: British Prime Minister David Cameron “tweets” that the RAF would be deployed.
- 30th April 2015: first team of Gurkha engineers arrive in Nepal on board the RAF C-17.
- 8th May 2015: Deployment of Operation LAYLAND, first stage deployment of 36 Engineer Regiment.
- 9th May 2015: Deployment of Operation LAYLAND, second stage deployment of 36 Engineer Regiment. Defence Secretary Michael Fallon announces the deployment of these 92 British Army Gurkha engineers.
- 12th May 2015: Aftershock with a magnitude of 7.3 hits Nepal (17 days after the initial earthquake).
- 12th May 2015: the UK's Guardian newspaper reports that the Nepali government have refused entry to the three RAF Chinook helicopters amid fears these helicopters would damage fragile buildings. However, with the aircraft stranded in Delhi there is speculation that lack of movement is being caused by India and China preventing foreign aircraft in and around their airspace.  
- May / July 2015: Operation LAYLAND transitions into Operation MARMAT ['Rebuild'] 1.
- 13th July 2015: the Financial Times reports that the three Chinooks remained stranded in Delhi and were not used in the relief effort, at the cost of £3million to the British tax payer.
- February 2016: 70 Gurkha Field Squadron, Queen’s Gurkha Engineers, return to Invicta Park Barracks, Maidstone, UK.
- February 2016: deployment of 69 Field Squadron, Queen’s Gurkha Engineers.

5.2 Issues at stake

5.2.1 Decision-making

From the open-access literature available, the UK Government’s decision-making process, and interpretations of the Oslo Guidelines in relation to how these military assets were chosen remains unclear.

Decision-making processes were led by two DFID teams: Humanitarian Response Group (HRG) and CHASE OT. A DFID Humanitarian Civil-Military Adviser, located within DFID but with a military background, sits on both teams and has the role of coordinating and liaising between DFID and the MOD. (There is an additional operations team that is privately contracted from Crown Agents.) Round table decision-making discussions either: a) provide recommendations to ministers, or, b) give ministers a range of options. Within this decision-making process, there are two recurring and important factors that come up in all contexts: a) the political imperative and the pressure that is brought to bear through this, and b) the profile. Details of the decision-making process during the meetings and conversations in response to the Nepal earthquakes were not open access. However, during this decision-making process the military was on rapid response call. The decision about how to respond was based on various needs assessments, see below section 5.2.2.

Decision-making is in general significantly influenced by financial considerations and constraints. Interviewees for this study indicate that this has been a hard lesson for the UK military, with the requirement to justify why they want to spend money and what they want to spend it on.

13 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/12/nepal-earthquake-raf-helicopters-refused-access-by-authorities
14 https://www.ft.com/content/fc3107c6-1bed-11e5-8201-cdbd03d71480
With DFID in the lead and in control of the HADR budget (DFID is the procurement hub) there is a Memorandum of Understanding with MoD, which is not a comfortable place for the military as they have many tools that they want to use. Essentially, there are joint discussions and then a decision is reached in relation to appropriateness. The Humanitarian Civil-Military Adviser then makes enquiries with the MOD and the MOD has four hours to respond with a package of what they could make available. Within four hours of this the Civil-Military Adviser will have a rough outline of costings, which is put together as a submission to be sent up to ministers for approval or amendment.

The need for a good decision-making process was highlighted in relation to the Nepali earthquake, specifically in relation to the deployment of Chinook helicopters. This shortcoming was due to political pressure (an impending general election in the UK) and Prime Minister David Cameron’s cabinet not sufficiently understanding or communicating effectively with DFID. This resulted in a public commitment to deploy Chinooks, which subsequently could not be used. The Prime Minister’s desire to respond “quicker, better, faster” meant that sometimes not enough strategy was applied to the problem at the outset. There is a reliance on senior civil-servant advisers to stand up to Prime Ministers. The long delay before Nepal accepted that the UK could bring in the Chinook helicopters resulted in intense frustration among aid workers and cost British taxpayers a considerable amount. This raises questions about the effectiveness of the services provided and the decision-making processes behind the deployment of these assets.

One of the key considerations during the decision-making stage was the UK’s exit strategy; this had been one of the lessons learnt during Operation Patwin, the UK’s response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013, which was considered a great success, receiving ‘green’ across the board from ICAI.

Given the historical relations between the UK and Nepal, it was assumed by the UK that they would be one of the main responders, with more freedom of movement than most. Given the magnitude of the disaster, the scale of the emergency situation, and the number of countries offering assistance, this proved not to be the case. This highlights the importance of considering the historical and political context during the decision-making process, and not assuming that a common sense decision in a non-emergency situation will apply in an emergency situation.

5.2.2 Needs assessment

In terms of needs assessment, Joint Doctrine Publication 3-52 Disaster Relief Operations (2nd Edition, 2008: 3-2) indicates that:

“DFID will make its own initial assessment, complemented by information from Her Majesty’s representative and other sources, including the military, where appropriate. Providing access to military intelligence material, such as infrastructure dependency analysis may be particularly useful to DFID staff. The DFID humanitarian assessment will include four main topics which consider: whether to intervene; the nature and scale of the intervention; prioritisation and allocation of resources; and programme design and planning. A vital aspect of needs assessment is communication with partners on the ground.”

DFID has a long history of working in Nepal. It was therefore rapidly informed about needs on the ground and communicated these to London and to the Ministry of Defence. For instance, DFID had been active in the Safe Hospital Policy in Kathmandu Valley and therefore had a clear idea of emergency health needs. As a result, it was able to advise the UK armed forces’ Health services that there was no need for emergency field hospitals in the Kathmandu Valley. The DFID Humanitarian Civil-Military Adviser took a strong role in leading needs assessment coordination with the military. The MoD 24/7 Operations Centre – Operation Reconnaissance Liaison Team (ORLT) - rapidly
coordinated with the DfID team leader, in order to establish what DfID needed.

The strategic and often complex relations between India and its former colonial power slowed down the deployment of UK helicopters (which would have had to fly over India). This had a significant impact on the UK’s capacity to assess the context and deliver assistance in Nepal.

Transporting fast evaluation teams across a devastated landscape (Haiti 2010 and 2016, Nepal 2015) is very important for the design of the relief response. The capacity to provide planes and helicopters for these assessments is one of the most important contributions that can be made in terms of MCDA.

5.2.3 Civilian capability gap analysis

Though the decision-making process is not open to public scrutiny, it is fair to say that the UK often considers military involvement as a first resort. Military personnel have highlighted that they have military skills in coordination, shown in the Ebola context and built on in Nepal. The civilian capability gap analysis focused on civilian coordination, but the UK military feels it can also contribute to cope with some of the response needs not covered by civilian actors.

Questions still remain about some cases where it took more than two weeks for aid to reach mountain villages despite the fact that major transport links (roads/bridges/airport) were still operational.

5.2.4 On-site coordination

Military informants highlighted the importance of relations established during previous global humanitarian summits (in particular those with a focus on disaster response, such as Kobé and Sendai) and training courses (notably the courses run by UN OCHA). The importance of networking is therefore invaluable. In Nepal there were several coordination hubs - the military hub, the OSOC hub, the National Emergency Coordination Centre and the OCHA/HC hub - that created a certain number of difficulties with regard to Civ-Mil relations. The Nepali Army control centre became the central coordination point for operations. From this initial role as command and control centre, ideas for a Humanitarian-Military Operations Coordination Centre (HUMMOC) evolved. The strong presence of DfID and the overall strength of the UK Embassy provided a strong framework for internal UK Government coordination and facilitated communication between DFID and the deployed armed forces.

There was a good collaborative, coordinated response between the British military Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) and the headquarters in Gurkha Nepal, UN clusters, UN OCHA, and the UK DfID Humanitarian Civil-Military Advisor. For the most part, individuals were suitably qualified with pre-established competence appraisals and experience, and were able to tap into this pool of resources. However, what emerged were strong military-military relationships, and less strong civil-military relationships. While many civilians had trained in exercises with the Nepali military, they were exasperated that when a crisis occurred the Nepali military focused on military-military liaisons rather than civil-military coordination. However, compared to the Ebola response, coordination was much clearer. The fact that there were fewer actors meant that it was more in the UK military’s comfort zone. It was a short, sharp intervention, whereas Ebola was a longer mission. UK informants highlighted the peculiar approach of the Americans, who, on the one hand, were seen to be cooperating with the Nepali authorities, but on the other, would then go and do their own thing. There was an assumption that the UK’s long-standing relationship with Nepal would bring special connections and access, but this did not happen in practice.
5.2.5 Drawdown of assets

The drawdown of assets is tied in with the decision-making process and the financial constraints of using military assets (which are billed to DFID). Several interviewees highlighted the fact that at a certain stage, they planned to leave, as the initial decision-making process included a length of availability of assets. The timeframes were kept to in Nepal. However, with the Nepali government/military revisiting the “leave date” each day, it is clear that a certain “dependency” syndrome got created, with an impact on the inception of the recovery phases. However, the recognition of this evolution very much depended on training and knowledge of military doctrine on disaster relief operations, and expert guidance, for example from DfID’s Humanitarian Civil-Military Adviser. As most efforts in military planning are for combat missions, there is very limited experience in planning for disaster relief or health crises. The Nepal post-earthquake operation underlined that transition and redeployment are not clearly planned for at the outset of the response. The drawdown of assets therefore depends on the intelligence or common sense of the Commanders, and/or the extent to which the assets are needed for another crisis.

5.2.6 Evaluations and lessons learnt exercises

The British military and DFID systematically carries out After Action Reviews after each operation, however many evaluations are not open-access. The key lessons that emerged during interview discussions were as follows:

- Just because something may have worked in one context, for example the Philippines, it did not mean that it would work in Nepal. This led to certain assumptions being made.
- The importance of careful thinking about the context, and the politics involved.
- Government ministers should listen to their advisers.
- The strength of the political imperative, and the fact that the military are exceptionally bad at understanding this.
- The military is not an NGO: DFID civil-military liaison officer constantly needs to police the boundaries. The role of the military is to support NGOs in delivering humanitarian relief.
- The UK MCDA deployment in Nepal once again demonstrated that in rapid onset large scale disasters, military assets would be used as a first resort.
- While there is some awareness of the Oslo Guidelines, these are just guidelines, giving some directions, but that the main issue is to remain relevant to a given context. It was noted that half of the world ignores them, with Asia-Pacific and MADRO Guidelines not acknowledging last resort.
- In the UK, at times there can be too much focus on demonstrating a cross-government and integrated approach, but there is a need to always come back to context and the appropriateness needs to be carefully weighed up, although at times the political imperative will overrule.
- While the UK is a highly respected contributor to humanitarian response, its experience is limited in comparison to the experience of disaster specialists from the Asia-Pacific region.
- The high turnover of full-time military personnel leads to skills and knowledge being lost. However, there is now a HADR focus for defence actors within JFHQ, with defence deciding to form a new headquarters in PJHQ. This HQ formation is being up-skilled to increase their networks and engage in the HADR space more so than ever before. Difficult in that don’t have enough disasters to properly train in “real life situations”. Challenge of military skill is that they fade if not put into practice. Here again the key issue is to secure enough resources to properly fund dedicated training.
- The military need to understand the importance of recognising different organisational cultures.
A number of issues emerged from the mobilization of MCDA to respond to the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal:

- Nepal is highly prone to disasters and thus has benefited from years of DRR and exercises involving different armies and civil protection institutions from the region and other parts of the world. As the US, UK, Indian and Nepali armies have developed longer term relations over the years, especially following the Haiti 2010 earthquake, the mobilization in Nepal was able to take place quickly, based on mutual trust, without too many drawbacks.

- One should not underestimate the importance of politics. The deployment of MCDA is a heavily charged decision which implies proper dialogue, even though this can slow down the deployment;

- Coordination with the National Army, NDMA and the other deployed international armies was extremely important. As such, the existence of SOFA prior to the disaster was a key asset. The creation of a special coordination mechanism by the Nepali Army proved extremely important.

- In contexts with difficult terrain, airborne capacity is essential and helicopters with the proper capacity to transport staff and relief are key assets. However, in the absence of properly identified landing spaces, these lose some of their effectiveness.

- The UK and US appear to have made progress in terms of the respective roles of military and civilian entities in a humanitarian context. During this response, the military of both countries operated under the authority of a civilian entity.
ANNEXES
ANNEX: Key consulted documents


The INSPIRE Consortium supports DG ECHO in developing policies through research, workshop facilitation and the dissemination of results.

The INSPIRE Consortium brings together four leading European institutions within the humanitarian sector: Groupe URD (France), as consortium coordinator, GPPi (Germany), IECAH (Spain) and ODI (UK).