



Tsunami Evaluation Coalition

Coordination of international
humanitarian assistance in
tsunami-affected countries

**The 2004 tsunami: civil military
aspects of the international response**

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Note on Civil-Military coordination

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The 2004 Tsunami: Civil Military Aspects of The International Response

1. The use of military assets in aid delivery has been the subject of controversy within the humanitarian community for many years. Most will be familiar with the reasons: politicisation of aid; diversion of donor funding from humanitarian organisations; cost; appropriateness; and blurring of identities resulting in heightened insecurity and difficulties in negotiating access to vulnerable populations. Many organisations and individuals have strong views on their willingness to engage with military forces, especially in conflict environments when even UN troops may be perceived as party to the conflict. In natural emergencies however, when the emphasis is on immediate life saving activities and relief of suffering, there is a greater acceptance, albeit with caveats, to work alongside military personnel.
2. Those countries most affected by the Tsunami were also in conflict. Whilst there have been other such instances (for example the earthquake in Afghanistan in 2002) none have seen such an unprecedented deployment of foreign military assets to assist in the relief operation¹. Many issues previously identified have been brought once more to the fore - not least the impartiality and independence of humanitarian assistance and the value (or otherwise) of the military contribution. That these issues are not new and yet there was still confusion and a less than optimal use of assets points to persistent problems and a lack of understanding within both the military and humanitarian community. This report will highlight these issues and suggest ways, many already identified in the various lessons learned workshops that have taken place in the wake of the Tsunami², they can be addressed.

Tsunami Context

3. The scale of the Tsunami and media coverage of its consequences brought the sheer horror of the tragedy into sharp focus. Not only did the disaster prompt action by the usual international response community but, it generated enormous public and international political concern and, the deployment of an unprecedented number of military forces. As is to be expected, national security

¹ According to OCHA MCDU some 35 nations contributed 75 helicopters, 41 ships, 43 fixed wing aircraft and more than 30,000 troops (including air traffic controllers, medical teams and engineers).

² Joint OCHA National Lessons Learned Workshops in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Medan, Indonesia (for the region); Cobra Gold 2005 Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster Relief Workshop; and WHO Tsunami Health Conference, Phuket Thailand.

forces (both state and non state³) were amongst the first to react despite having suffered casualties themselves. Their initial activities complemented other local efforts to help by those who had not been so affected directly. Common to every country, at least initially, was a desire to pull together to save lives and relieve suffering - even if this meant working with those whom previously the concept of mutual assistance had been anathema. Thus civilians and military worked alongside each other as did government security forces and rebel militias.

International Military Forces

4. Even prior to international military assistance being offered and accepted by affected nations, foreign forces had already begun planning their potential contribution to the relief effort. Amongst those quickest to arrive were regional partners; in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Australia were first on the ground on 28 December; in Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan responded very quickly; and, in the Maldives, the Pakistan Navy was already present on an official visit to the capital Male. Long standing relationships built up over many years (through participation in joint exercises such as the annual US Pacific Command Cobra Gold Exercise in Thailand; attendance on joint staff courses or at national defence colleges; and, exchange assignments) facilitated early contacts and established the acceptability of foreign military assistance. These initial contacts were then usually followed by rapid bilateral endorsement through respective foreign ministries. Thus, international forces deployed primarily to Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Thailand offered a headquarters base for the sizeable US commanded Combined Support Force (CSF)⁴ and accepted limited naval search and rescue assistance. Malaysia and Singapore, in addition to deploying military assets, also both offered the use of logistics supply hubs. The ships of many navys, notably the US carrier groups, already in the vicinity were diverted and sailed towards the Tsunami countries. One country requiring parliamentary assent for the use of national forces abroad immediately started that process whilst another proactively tried to ascertain how its assets could best add value to and support the overall relief effort.

5. Despite the media coverage, which naturally focused on the most accessible locations, real information on the extent and severity of the waves' (and in Aceh, earthquake's) effects was difficult to obtain. Communications networks were down and even the satellite systems appeared to have been affected. Access to the coastline closest to the earthquake's epicentre – the West Coast of Aceh – was severely affected with bridges and roads washed away and the limited number of airstrips and harbours damaged⁵. Amidst the initial chaos it was hard for anyone to gain a coherent picture of needs but obvious to the military were

³ e.g. the LTTE in Sri Lanka and GAM in Indonesia.

⁴ A speedy successor to the original and somewhat controversial "Core Group" of nations comprising the US, Australia, India, Japan and Canada.

⁵This road provided the primary arterial transport link along the west coast. Its destruction prohibited heavy vehicle access to settlements along it and to those communities connected to it. This situation contrasts markedly to Sri Lanka where the Tsunami affected a relatively narrow coastal strip but otherwise left unaffected the main arterial infrastructure of the country thus facilitating the flow of emergency assistance and personnel to affected communities. The isolation and location of the Maldives' many islands made even the initial estimation of damage and casualties more problematic.

the basics – food, water and medical provision including medical evacuation. It was on this basis that the majority of responding militaries acted, pushing those goods and services into the region. It was certainly a supply driven approach but in the circumstances, and without any refining direction and advice from the humanitarian community, understandable in the initial phase. However, it stayed thus for some weeks even when it was apparent that some services provided by the military were no longer critical to the overall relief and recovery effort.

6. Of the military forces that deployed specifically to assist the humanitarian response effort with naval, coastguard, fixed and rotary wing assets, and medical, engineering and CIMIC⁶ personnel, all acknowledged host country primacy in the relief effort. Under whatever guise forces deployed – support to the host government, support to the UN, support to a national donor - each military, negotiated on a bilateral basis with the government concerned⁷ for the deployment of its forces. This is of note not least because it facilitated co-ordination with the host government mechanisms and demonstrated, according to national interlocutors (and others), **a respect for the sovereignty** of each nation not in evidence amongst many civilian organisations.
7. Amongst official interlocutors from government, UN, INGOs and local NGOs there is near universal consensus that both national and foreign military forces made a contribution to the Tsunami response. **The picture is much more confusing at community level particularly in those areas where traditionally those in uniform were not/are not viewed as a benign presence.** Of course the perceived value of the contribution differs from country to country and amongst those commenting. In Sri Lanka, for example, the work of the military in rubble clearing and road restoration, whilst not considered essential by the humanitarian community was, nonetheless, appreciated by the local communities. Exceptional circumstances in Indonesia almost dictated the need for military logistics and manpower - thus the value of that aspect of their contribution. And in the Maldives, the logistics coordinating capacity of the National Security Service was an integral and much admired part of the government's response. The relatively short duration of the international military engagement, limited range of tasks and handover as planned to civilian counterparts, no doubt contributed to the perceived overall success of their interventions.

Civil Military Mechanisms

8. Civil military mechanisms varied from country to country according to the specific national arrangements put in train. In the Maldives, civil and military bodies were an integral part of the same response; in Sri Lanka, there were parallel tasking systems for each; and, in Indonesia, the TNI were in operational control, on behalf of the Government, of the response.

⁶ CIMIC – Civil Military Cooperation Teams, also referred to as Civil Affairs teams, comprising military personnel specialising in liaising with the civilian community at all levels in order to provide guidance to assist military commanders achieve their objectives.

⁷ Possibly the only exception to this was the despatch and employment in Northern Sumatra and Aceh of two Swiss military helicopters in an agreement negotiated with the UNHCR.

9. In all countries military forces worked alongside their civilian counterparts. Assets were put at the disposal of the humanitarian community, but the methods by which one actually gained access to those assets was not always obvious to those requesting them often resulting in uncertainty of supply. For example in Indonesia where logistics assets were essential to gain access to vulnerable communities a UN Agency representative reported having to go from one military to another to ask for help; another UN Agency Country Head was unable to persuade local commanders on the ground for helicopter support in assessing the scale of needs; and, even the USAID/WHO joint assessment from the USS Lincoln only took place some three weeks after the Tsunami.
10. Neither the humanitarian community nor the military forces were operating in failed states. So, instead of the usual civil military liaison involving only two main parties, host governments were in the lead. Thus any requests and agreements for foreign military support had to be endorsed by, or channelled through the national coordinating structure. The fact also that there were a large number of national contingents all acting on a bilateral basis was another complication so brokering support was not easy and required a real understanding of how the system worked. Stretched as they were it is unlikely that humanitarian workers had the time to gain that knowledge.
11. In both Sri Lanka and Indonesia, UN OCHA deployed members of its surge CMCOORD cadre on 4/5 January but their contribution, certainly in the important early days was either not valued or visible. This was not because such individuals were not needed: Indeed many have argued that the civil military function should be an automatic UNDAC function⁸. But, personal experience, knowledge of the UN, contracting arrangements, reporting lines, life support and management backup were less than optimal. Officially deployed from OCHA's Military and Civil Defence Unit (MCDU) standby roster, in support of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), they appeared to remain semi independent with reporting lines both through the Humanitarian Coordinators and through OCHA in Bangkok to Geneva. Unsurprisingly not all enjoyed the confidence of the Humanitarian Coordinators⁹ and thus they had very little authority vested in them to enable them to make decisions or speak on the HC's behalf with the military. **And civil military coordination will only work effectively if both parties can articulate a coherent view of their respective objectives and plans to reach them.**

The Regional Dimension

12. Regional Militaries: Of particular note in the international military response was the role played by regional militaries, many of whom had worked previously with the host nation's forces. Bangladesh, Brunei, India, Malaysia, Pakistan and Singapore from the immediate vicinity and Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the United States and South Korea from the Pacific region contributed ships, helicopters, fixed and rotary wing aircraft plus engineering, medical and logistics

⁸ As indicated, inter alia, by MCDU, UNDAC and military force representatives

⁹ According to the lessons learned workshops few senior UN officials including the RC/HCs appear aware of the CMCOORD function and according to one CMCOORD individual deployed one such senior UN representative declared he wanted nothing to do with CMCOORD.

personnel. In some cases, those from the immediate vicinity (e.g. Malaysia and Singapore in Indonesia) also had a proficiency in the local languages spoken. They were able, and were actively sought out, to provide advice to those military forces from further afield and act as interlocutors on their behalf. On the civilian side, UNJLC eventually and notably employed logistics experts from the region thus facilitating, because of their contacts and familiarity with local business practise, contract negotiation¹⁰. A regional response is generally advantageous in terms of speed, knowledge and existing relationships. However it cannot only consist of military forces but must also involve regional and national UN and INGO bodies **and**, most importantly, **members of local civil society** whose immediate contribution is of primary importance.

13. Combined Support Force 536: Also of note in the Tsunami Response was the Combined **Support**¹¹ Force (CSF) from US Pacific Command headquartered in U-Tapao, Thailand with its operational assets (the Combined Support Groups, CSGs and naval carrier groups) deployed to support Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Maldives. Military liaison officers, including from the affected nations, with the ability to contact capitals directly through respective defence ministries, were based at this headquarters. Although there was no direct command relationship over international forces participating, the Headquarters became the focus for the resolution of military support issues that could not be handled at field level. And it was here that any more strategic requests, direction or advice to military forces should have been channelled. The Headquarters provided a fora in first month of emergency operations for strategic discussions as to the optimum use of the international military assets in the region, particularly strategic air lift, available to the response. These discussions had also to be balanced with national response agendas which took financial and political factors into account. But, despite the presence of humanitarian representatives, there was no one available with vested authority to argue, on behalf of the humanitarian community, regarding the prioritisation of need across the region and the allocation of military assets to those areas¹².
14. Civilian presence CSF 536: The Headquarters housed representatives from the UN and donor community. The EU also seconded officers to this Headquarters to work under the auspices of the UN.¹³ Of those civilians present USAID, and UN OCHA CMCOORD officers took the lead. In the case of the latter, however, the same difficulties that had faced CMCOORD officers operating at a national

¹⁰ According to UNJLC Country Representative, Indonesia

¹¹ Here was an opportunity to influence the mainstreaming of the humanitarian agenda into military operations, unlike the usual practise of keeping humanitarian concerns to one side, dealt with by civil affairs officers (CIMIC specialists), so as not to impact on military operations.

¹² OCHA had a civil military representative in Washington who may have provided this strategic overview but this individual was not a part of MCDU. UN CMCOORD officers had no knowledge even of his existence let alone his role (Interviews UN OCHA Geneva and New York).

¹³ This, according to those involved on the UN side, was not a happy experience. Despite agreements negotiated in Brussels for their deployment under the UN umbrella, EU representatives insisted on being seen as separate from the UN, thus introducing a measure of confusion to all. Their attachment was very short lived at U-Tapao – two days for the first representative and the second was transferred to UNJLC in Jakarta.

level occurred but were probably exacerbated because of the seniority of military interlocutors, the potential support assets available and the constant demand for strategic direction and information. Little of this was available to those CMCOORD officers at U-Tapao – and they could not speak, or make requests (other than for ad hoc logistics delivery assistance) to the military on behalf of the Humanitarian Community in any country. They neither had the information (e.g. they were not copied in on RC country reports or had direct access to them in the field) nor the authority to do so¹⁴. They had deployed without the wherewithal¹⁵ to enable them to set up office facilities and consequently were reliant on others (primarily the US military) to provide them with the equipment they required.

15. USAID representatives too faced the same information challenges¹⁶. Fortunately in week four (approximately) the primary focus for military operations transferred from the regional to the national perspective.
16. UN: A UN OCHA presence (the senior MCDU officer and Head of the Emergency Services Branch from OCHA Geneva) was deployed to Bangkok but there remained a lack of clarity on the “Bangkok hub’s” role. CMCOORD and donor representatives interviewed, questioned its value on the civil military side given that there were no international military assets there.

Common Military Response Characteristics

17. With **logistics assets** and personnel on constant standby (although not always available for disaster response operations), and in some cases their own stores of relief items, military forces are able to react with **speed**. Unlike humanitarian agencies they do not have to enter into contractual negotiations for surge personnel and transportation, nor are they usually¹⁷ subject to the normal rules of supply and demand which, in the absence of a consolidated approach, can lead to price inflation.
18. Of equal importance to logistics resources, are the management and life support systems of contributing militaries, **the command and control procedures understood by all**, and a common language and sense of camaraderie which facilitates and smoothes military to military communication and co-ordination. This relative ease of communications and coordination¹⁸ has been developed over years and underpinned by **regular exercises, training and education**, often jointly with other nations, to consolidate understanding and iron out differences in non operational/crisis environments.

¹⁴ As witnessed by both UN and donor representatives in U-Tapao including the TEC civ mil adviser who was present at the time.

¹⁵ Ranging from communications equipment, to cash for local purchase, to pre deployment briefings (Ibid).

¹⁶ According to a USAID representative present

¹⁷ Increasingly military forces also make use of commercial assets when their own capacity is exhausted

¹⁸ Not always perfect as the Tsunami experience demonstrated

19. Usually, however, when military forces deploy in support of another nation or to work together in a coalition, time is taken to negotiate **Status of Forces Agreements (SOFAs) and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)**. These provide a baseline, agreed bilaterally, to guide relationships and set parameters for military action. In natural disaster response time to draw up such agreements is considerably compressed and may thus result in deployments without such agreements in place. It has thus been acknowledged¹⁹, as recommended in the Oslo Guidelines, that there is a need to draw up standing MOUs for use in the event that military forces are called upon to respond to rapid onset disasters.
20. The military approach is very **action oriented and task specific**. It has also been the way in which the military has traditionally measured its success – very much the “what”, and not the “how”, of assistance. Arguably this has its place in a disaster response scenario where the imperative is to save lives and speed is important. Delivery of basic items, and medical evacuation and trauma treatment can be quantified²⁰. What military forces do **not** do, and this was common in the Tsunami response, particularly as regards initial assistance, is to seek out and identify those most vulnerable and most in need. Thus broader protection issues, including gender sensitivities and concerns are seldom a priority – especially if the whole population is deemed at risk. All militaries consulted, recognise that this was not their strength and whilst willing to consider²¹ how to address this in the future believed that the humanitarian community is better qualified to make provision for this.

Issues/Queries Arising

Humanitarian

21. The fact that amongst the countries most devastated by the Tsunami, two were also affected by low level insurgency operations and ongoing conflict did throw up a number of issues regarding the military and humanitarian interface. A number of UN and NGO staff voiced concern over the reticence of the UN in the field to insist on the impartiality and independence of humanitarian action adopting instead a pragmatic approach more appropriate to natural disasters. This is a dilemma often faced by those in the field and judgements are made based on previous knowledge of the complexities of working in conflict environments and country experience. Not all who responded to the Tsunami had that knowledge or experience.
22. The **blurring of identities** that occurred in this response cannot be solely attributed to military forces – the misrepresentation or misuse of humanitarian emblems (e.g. the red cross and red crescent) and the willingness of some NGOs and Agencies to transport armed military troops in neutral vehicles probably did

¹⁹ Articulated in Lessons learned workshops and in ASEAN Regional Civil Military workshop, Makati, Philippines, Sep 05

²⁰ As can be rebuilding of schools and medical centres

²¹ See Chiang Mai Workshop report, May 2005

more to confuse than any independent action by military forces – many of whom are very familiar with the sensitivities of the humanitarian community²².

23. **The UN's Guidelines for the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Natural and Technological Disasters and Complex Emergencies**²³ have been endorsed by the IASC but do not cover the mixed environment in which the response took place. Nor do the guidelines offer practical advice but are “pitched” at a more principled and policy level that was of little value to those on the ground and particularly to those new to such work. Lastly very few actors had even ever heard of the guidelines. MCDU has been working on an operational handbook which should provide more practical guidance to commanders and humanitarian workers on the ground which can then be tailored to the specifics of the emergency at hand. In view of the lack of basic awareness of the Oslo Guidelines perhaps all of these documents and their dissemination to relevant actors should be reviewed?
24. Each agency, NGO, Red Cross Red Crescent organisation followed its own civil military policy guidance from headquarters. To military counterparts this was confusing enough but, some “humanitarian actors” by their actions appeared unaware of even the basic concerns regarding association with military forces perceived by some to be “party to a conflict”. This was potentially dangerous yet the UN, usually in the lead for articulating a position on this, took no obvious responsibility for doing so, nor did it proactively provide advice to those with little prior experience. This is an important role: should its inclusion as standard in the Terms of Reference for UNCMCOORD officers be considered?
25. **Access**, particularly where security forces controlled access to areas deemed “unsafe”, threw up a number of issues of general relevance to humanitarian response and civil military relations.
26. Access was granted and indeed funds provided to provide relief to Tsunami “victims”. Yet humanitarian assistance is delivered on the basis of need alone without regard to colour, creed or political beliefs on the basis of impartiality, neutrality and independence. Were **humanitarian principles** compromised by agencies and public and private contributors alike by restricting assistance, or being restricted, to those affected by the Tsunami when there were other needs evident, even within the same area, caused by conflict and poverty? Should there have been greater and earlier advocacy by the international response community to educate the public, broaden its remit and extend assistance to all in need?
27. Did restrictions on access, where it occurred, only reinforce a lack of trust between national military and humanitarian actors and, did it adversely affect the ability of the national authorities to manage the response? For example mention made by the Government of Indonesia of regulations limiting entry and duration of tenure were criticised, even when it was evident that there was a “boom economy” amongst those claiming to represent the humanitarian community to

²² According to a UN staff member present in Aceh, one foreign military force, whose vehicles had markings similar to those used by humanitarian agencies, provided those assets to armed members of the TNI.

²³ More commonly known as the Oslo Guidelines I and II.

the detriment of recipients and the reputation of the sector in general. In sensitive situations, and in consultation with the government, should the UN not have a role to play in the promulgation of good practise and the **neutral “arbitration” of registry regulations, accreditation, and entry controls?**

28. Is there a contradiction in what the international community expects of sovereign states as regards the **safety of humanitarian workers**? To refuse access on the grounds of security is regarded somewhat dubiously, particularly in situations of conflict, and yet to grant open access without imposing restrictions is also prone to criticism especially when people are hurt.
29. Is this an issue worth considering further and how might it relate, under other circumstances, with the “Right to Protect” principle? Is there a neutral body which might arbitrate or gauge a government’s true intentions on behalf of its people regarding access by the humanitarian community? The UN’s Department of Security Services co-ordinates secure access on behalf of the UN with military factions and government entities. It does so, on the basis of trust; any suspicion that it might also be engaging in the wider political arbitration of whether a government or faction is in reality engaged in behaviour unacceptable to the broader international community would expose DSS personnel to greater and unacceptable risk and perhaps place in jeopardy its primary role.

Military

30. Already mentioned in this report (and in country reports) is the **supply driven approach** adopted by most militaries in the Tsunami response. Some tried to refine those resources planned for despatch by carrying out recces (limited usually to infrastructure assessments in comparison to professional humanitarian needs assessments) on arrival in “theatre”. For example the Singapore Armed Forces highlighted on arrival the need for engineering support for harbour repair to Meulaboh in Aceh and for Air Traffic Control equipment and personnel in Banda Aceh. Many however relied on guidance from the humanitarian community for clarity on those needs and how the military could best support meeting them. Whilst this may have worked at a local level with militaries responding to ad hoc requests for logistics support from humanitarian organisations, more holistically and strategically it was seldom apparent. Whether military forces would have responded to advice from the humanitarian community is however an area that still remains contentious as the provision of military medical assets demonstrates.
31. Most militaries when confronted with contributing to an humanitarian emergency, immediately consider the need for and deployment of **medical assistance**. Given the speed of military response, this assistance may be critical in the early days of some natural disasters when trauma victims are in need of immediate treatment. In most emergencies however the need for trauma care diminishes very quickly and demand reverts to public and primary health care. This not particularly a military medical specialisation, and it is also very well served by the humanitarian community, particularly the NGOs, in close consultation with local medical personnel. Yet military medics, field hospitals and hospital ships are provided to disaster zones sometimes weeks after the event

itself: The Tsunami response was no exception. Whilst the dedication of military medics is not in doubt and the work they did of value to the community and those treated, one must question whether the fairly substantial deployment of these assets was vital to the relief effort.

32. Is this not an area where greater advocacy from the IASC could be usefully be employed? The Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) could also be more proactive in providing advice, through civil military channels, donors or host governments as appropriate, on the necessity of such support to specific crises. The confusion of the initial hours, however, may prevent accurate analysis of trauma needs and it may be hard to judge definitively whether such assets would be of value. It is only when, in the face of contrary advice, military forces continue to deploy such assets that the humanitarian community can legitimately criticise this “support”.
33. The demand for **humanitarian needs’ assessments** was not generally understood by military forces. In Aceh in particular, where geographic access was difficult, the use of military helicopter assets for needs assessment purposes was deemed by many in the military to be less important than the daily delivery of supplies – after all assessments actually did nothing to relieve suffering²⁴. One INGO interlocutor told of aid being “dumped” on the beach at Calang and only the somewhat heavy handed, but effective, presence of Indonesian Marines prevented a complete free for all. If this was typical of the early approach then even bulk deliveries of aid were deposited without particular attention being given to onward methods of **distribution**.
34. Had the relevance of such assessments and the importance of distribution mechanisms in terms of reaching those most in need been explained clearly to military commanders, it is possible that a more coherent and comprehensive picture of needs could have been produced and effective delivery mechanisms developed at an earlier stage. That there is no universal and simple assessment form (or common interpretation of such)²⁵ that could have been used by the military even in the very early days hampered systematic collection of basic information of relevance to both the government and humanitarian community alike.
35. **Military costs** charged to humanitarian or national development budgets have always been, and remain, a contentious issue yet there is a marked lack of transparency and uniformity in the way that this issue is handled and costs calculated.²⁶ In normal circumstances paying full costs for the use of military assets is more expensive than commercial equivalents because of the redundancy built into military systems. But it does depend upon what is being paid for. In the UK, for example, the payment by DFID for the use of military assets for humanitarian response is charged at a marginal rate (i.e. only those costs directly attributable to the operation such as fuel and not, personnel employment costs or

²⁴ As reported by a CIMIC officer present in Aceh

²⁵ Several organisations have their own forms. The variety of formats for gathering information makes more difficult the collation of baseline information and measurement of progress (See HIC comments).

²⁶ Please refer to TEC funding studies

capital depreciation)²⁷. Further it is deducted from the DFID budget only when DFID has directly requested military support.

36. In the absence of charging information it is more difficult to claim that the use of military assets is always more expensive than civilian equivalents. This is particularly so if contributing forces are already in the area, and it can be claimed that participation in response activities is considered part of necessary training and can be charged as such. That said, even marginal costs usually include charges for subsistence, usually amounting to more than local labour charges, thus justifying the accepted principle for international military assistance in humanitarian response – under exceptional circumstances only.

OCHA Civil Military Capacity

37. The IASC endorsed role of OCHA's Military and Civil Defence Unit, now renamed the Civil Military Coordination Section, is to provide:
 - Policy guidance on behalf of the humanitarian community in rapid onset and complex emergencies; and
 - Operational support to the Humanitarian Coordinator in liaising with military forces (and civil defence forces when appropriate).
38. A small unit (seven at its full complement) based in Geneva is responsible for drawing up policy guidance, running courses on civil military interaction (in keeping with humanitarian principles) and supplying CMCOORD personnel for rapid deployments. The unit is funded primarily on a project basis (i.e. not core UN funding) and as a result its officers are on temporary contracts (or are national secondees) and it relies on funding from a small group of core donors. The unit's size limited its ability to field members of its core staff to Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. As a result it relied upon its surge personnel roster of "trained" CM COORD officers, who were offered and released – sometimes only for a week – by key donor states. Thus not only were these officers not UN staff members but MCDU had no role in the selection of the individuals nominated nor in their deployment terms. This created difficulties in the field; the most valued civil military interaction was contributed by those with a working knowledge of the UN and its operational systems.
39. However OCHA Civil Military Capacity was not only limited by the shortcomings in its surge roster capacity (difficulties common to the UNDAC system too) but the lack of technical support it was able to provide to its personnel, questionable TORs and pre deployment briefings, and difficulties with emergency contracting arrangements and petty cash availability. MCDU personnel in the field were simply not self sufficient. All of which, understandably, hampers the provision of a professional service to the Humanitarian Coordinator (already sometimes difficult), and the wider humanitarian community. These are not new problems and officers have often found themselves subsidising the system just to get the job done²⁸.

²⁷ UK Government, Freedom of Information disclosure F2005/92,3/5/2005

²⁸ Information provided by MCDU personnel themselves

40. MCDU has been aware of these problems for some time and has produced a “Concept for CMCOORD” operations in the future. This was finally endorsed by the IASC in May 2005 but still relies on considerable member state support.

Common Services

41. UN CMCOORD capacity is not, however, the only HC or UN common service which experienced difficulties in contracting and staffing. Should consideration not now be given to bringing all UN support services - communications (email and voice), information (HIC), logistics (UNJLC and UNHAS), security (DSS), accommodation and office support (usually provided on an emergency basis by the Swedish Rescue Service (SRSA), and civil military liaison (MCDU) under one umbrella? This could potentially maximise impact, capitalising on the synergies between the services, taking advantage of management economies of scale and avoiding needless duplication. But it would require an umbrella organisation with professional management expertise and a mandate (authority), fully respected and, accepted as credible by all within the system.

An Humanitarian Logistics Capacity?

42. Some interlocutors have argued that rather than rely on military forces, the humanitarian community should develop its own strong logistics capacity so that it too is able to mount a speedy response. There is some merit in this argument in that military forces may not always be available, as they may be more urgently engaged in their primary role. The spectre of aid politicisation also looms large were the humanitarian community to become completely reliant on military support, and it would exacerbate suspicions and concerns that only those emergencies where there is something to be gained politically would attract the necessary response.
43. However, it is not just a strong logistics capacity that enables the military to respond quickly but the complete management and training package, and rapid identification of common objectives and priorities. This does not yet appear to exist within the civilian response community – unlike the military there is seldom “**someone in charge**”²⁹. Further could the humanitarian community afford, or more realistically donors fund, such a standing logistics capacity? The middle way must surely exist with a strengthening of co-ordination amongst the assistance community and a more cooperative approach to joint initiatives such as needs’ assessments?
44. But, there must also be a recognition that in those disasters when military support is vital (**and will not unnecessarily jeopardise the wellbeing of beneficiaries and humanitarian actors alike**) sufficient advice, direction and familiarity with each others’ approaches will provide the most effective and efficient response to those in need. **In preparation for those eventualities it is vital that the understanding between military and humanitarian bodies has already been enhanced through joint exercises and a more determined effort to accommodate the particularities of each institutional structure.**

²⁹ A question frequently asked by military commanders!

45. Both **ASEAN and SAARC** have indicated an interest in taking this forward as part of disaster preparedness initiatives for the region. Given recent UN and, growing, international political and development support (Kobe 2005) for such initiatives globally, consideration should be given as to how practically to build on these sentiments and prompt positive action e.g. through regional civil military exercises equally supported by the UN, the broader humanitarian system and military forces. Regional actors should and could play a major role in disaster relief activities. But, as the Tsunami demonstrated, the disaster may be of such magnitude that the rest of the international community must still be prepared to shoulder the response effort.

Summary of Recommendations

- **Greater willingness of humanitarian community engagement with military forces to jointly exercise and train and prepare for those contingencies where parallel deployments will be necessary or occur.**
- **Training of senior UN officials especially RC/HCs to increase awareness of the civil military liaison function and the importance of ensuring that OCHA's CMCOORD officers have the necessary information and support to enable them to provide a professional service.**
- **IASC to review the need for a senior humanitarian interlocutor with authority to represent the views and concerns of the humanitarian community with senior military operational commanders during disaster response operations and, in regional emergencies, to provide strategic advice on the disposition of military assets.**
- **Proactive UN support to Regional Organisations in Preparedness activities including the encouragement of local civil society participation and representation.**
- **Production, lead by the IASC but in consultation with military forces, of a standard needs assessment form for use by the latter.**
- **IASC review of the role of the military's role in rapid onset emergencies with a view to replacing the "in the last resort" sentiment to "in exceptional circumstances".**
- **Greater ongoing advocacy with government (beyond development agencies) and military forces regarding the appropriate use of military assets.**

Conclusion

46. In summary, the civil military experience in the Tsunami response has highlighted the operational need for greater, although sometimes discreet, interaction with military forces to provide advice on humanitarian concerns and to ensure the exchange of relevant information. As articulated in lessons learned workshops the need for greater mutual understanding to increase operational effectiveness cannot be developed during a crisis but must be built upon over a longer period through shared training. Lastly the Tsunami highlighted the contribution that military personnel and resources do make in saving lives and

relieving suffering. Those were objectives shared by the humanitarian community and grounds for a common partnership which should be nurtured in the event that such a disaster necessitating the exceptional use of military assets occurs again.