



REMARKS
BY

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for coming this evening. It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to discuss emergency relief. The goal of this working dinner is to start a process to find ways to improve our response to natural disasters, and in particular to discuss possible ways to make use of military and civil defense assets in relief efforts and the modalities and conditions for such operations.

In June, I made a presentation, here at IPI, on launching a humanitarian operation initiative. At that time, I said that there is no way to predict where and when the next natural disaster will happen.

Sadly, in the past few months there have been terrible fires in Russia, and a massive flood in Pakistan.

It seems that natural disasters are becoming more frequent and more severe. The earthquake in Haiti flattened whole sections of the country. The flood in Pakistan has displaced more than 6 million people; a third of agricultural crops are submerged. Forest fires have ravaged Greece, Russia and the United States. Therefore, no state is immune: Mother Nature does not distinguish between great powers and developing countries.

When disaster strikes, a huge gap opens up between needs and capabilities. People need food, water, shelter and medicine. But this is hard to deliver when infrastructure has collapsed, communications have broken down, and public services are disrupted. Very often emergency services are overwhelmed.

Increasingly, the military is being called into help. Indeed, military assets can make an important difference in supporting humanitarian organizations in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. But at the same time, questions have been raised about the modalities and conditions of their use.

Of course, the civilian nature of humanitarian operations should not be compromised. When military resources are used for disaster relief, they should be mobilized in a way that is predictable, structured, and timely, in line with humanitarian principles, and upon the request of the affected state. The point is to support, not replace, humanitarian actors.

That is why Qatar is interested in galvanizing the idea of making more effective use of military resources for disaster relief. Our inspiration

was to bring to life the Oslo Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief.

I am glad that the idea has generated a lot of interest. I am not surprised. Many states are already deploying military assets for disaster relief: At the time of the Tsunami, thirty-five countries sent military resources to support relief efforts. Last January, twenty-six countries deployed military assets in Haiti after the earthquake. Several countries also contributed military assistance following the flood in Pakistan this summer. The General Assembly has taken note of the Oslo Guidelines. Organizations, like the European Union, NATO and the African Union, are talking about enhancing their capacities in this field. So the time has come to discuss and implement this idea.

This is a global problem that requires a global solution. That is why the government of Qatar, with the support of IPI, proposes to reflect on how to make more effective use of military and civil defense assets. We intend to launch a consultative process involving interested Member States, the UN Secretariat – particularly OCHA – UN agencies, funds, and programs as well as humanitarian organizations, military experts, and the wider humanitarian community including civil society. I believe that the UN is the place where we should discuss it, and where we should act. Indeed, it goes to the heart of the general debate of the 65th session of the General Assembly, namely “reaffirming the central role of the United Nations in global governance”. The topic also relates to the Millennium Development Goals: natural disasters destroy development. However, effective disaster relief not only helps the victims, it can speed up the process of early recovery. So what should be done?

Qatar and IPI have drafted a concept paper which I hope that you have had a chance to study. It demonstrates the growing need for mobilizing military assets for disaster relief, and identifies some areas for improvement. I appreciate all the feedback that we have received. This dinner gives us an opportunity to discuss the issue further because after all, Qatar’s role is to facilitate the discussion among UN Member States, which we hope will ultimately agree regarding the feasibility, scope, application and details.

Of course, we cannot exhaust this subject over dinner. It is complex, there are many actors, and we recognize that there are some sensitivities and concerns that should be addressed, not least of which is the inviolability of the principles of national sovereignty and national security, in addition to the need to eliminate redundancy and coordination with the United Nations. Transparency regarding the modalities, funding, staffing and other strategic and logistical aspects is a priority.

This process should consider lessons learned, but also how to apply these lessons to improve the UN emergency response system.

Qatar has put forward one idea as a contribution to the debate: the establishment of a humanitarian operation force (which we propose to call HOPEFOR) which would provide a framework of cooperation for countries willing to contribute military and civil defense assets in emergency relief, under the UN umbrella that would arrive as quickly as possible, and stay no longer than 4 to 6 weeks.

Like the UN blue helmets, HOPEFOR could have distinctive markings that clearly distinguish them as a force for good. In order to prevent duplication, they must be plugged into the existing UN emergency relief system under the mandate of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The idea is sketched out in the Concept Paper, and will be explained in greater detail in a moment. The logic is to bring the HOPE of the humanitarian community together with the FOR of the military.

This is just one preliminary idea. I am sure that you also have other suggestions, and we need to discuss all options.

Let us start – here tonight – a dialogue on how we can do things better. Our goal is to strengthen multi-lateral responses and reinforce international standards for disaster relief. And we should bring the use of military resources into the mainstream of the UN emergency response system. For example, we must improve training (building on OCHA's good work), promote respect for humanitarian principles, improve coordination on the ground, and develop networks among practitioners. To this end, Qatar is ready to create, in Doha, a Centre of Excellence for Emergency Relief.

Ladies and gentlemen, if we do not tackle this problem now, we will have to tackle it in the future – and in the interim many more lives will be lost. At a time when natural disasters are becoming more frequent and more devastating, the world must be prepared to respond. We must therefore adapt our militaries to deal with the forces of nature, not just the force of arms.

Let us work together to create a force for good to help people in times of disaster.

Thank you for your attention and your engagement in this dinner.
