

ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment 2011

Addressing Opportunities and Challenges in the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA) to Support Humanitarian Response - Geneva, 20 July 2011

Side Event Summary

The panel discussion on Opportunities and Challenges in the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA) hosted by OCHA and moderated by the Chief of the Emergency Services Branch, Mr. Rudolf Müller, was seen as timely in light of the growing interest by all parties and addressed the importance of continued dialogue, awareness of and adherence to existing guidelines, and of MCDA deployments being demand- rather than supply-driven.

The session interventions called for high-level commitment to ensure mutual understanding and dialogue between Member States, military and humanitarian actors, illustrated by the choice of panellists: Dr. Eltje Aderhold, Political Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Germany in Geneva; Mr. David Horobin, Global Logistics Service Delivery Manager at IFRC; and BGen (ret) Jean-Philippe Ganascia, Senior Military Advisor at the Geneva Center for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF).

In his introductory remarks, Mr. Müller pointed to how lessons learned from the 2010 Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods had helped establish an early interactive and consultative process in the ongoing North Africa crisis. In Pakistan, existing country-specific guidance helped the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) to take a rapid and common stance with regard to the use of MCDA. The HCT in Haiti was finalising similar guidance as part of contingency planning. The ‘HOPEFOR’ initiative, co-sponsored by Qatar, Turkey and the Dominican Republic, was mentioned as an interesting consultative process.

Dr. Aderhold described the German civil response structure, with military assets being deployed only in exceptional cases as last resort and meeting critical needs. Sharing experiences from the Balkans, Afghanistan and Libya, she illustrated how important it is to respect humanitarian principles and to adhere to the Oslo and MCDA Guidelines. She pointed to the aim of improving humanitarian response capacities in complex and high risk environments and the need for “smart risk management” to gain access to affected populations, ideally not having to resort to MCDA, however also recognising that in reality they could play a role in ensuring effective humanitarian response. Dr. Aderhold gave examples of good practices, highlighting the important role of the ERC and OCHA as the overall humanitarian coordinator. Preparedness was seen as a challenge and she mentioned the recent GE/NL Corps initiative ‘Exercise Common Effort’ in this regard, as well as other initiatives aimed at promoting mutual understanding and shared responsibility. Bad practices were to be avoided, such as supply- or financially driven assistance, media pressure, and direct military assistance.

Mr. Horobin recognised that MCDA, notably logistics assets, could be helpful in specific settings as an enabling capability, as they were usually deployed early in an emergency without major problem. The challenge was how to ensure that what is deployed meets the needs of the humanitarian community, how best to coordinate and how to measure the cost impact. The principle of ‘last resort’ was another challenge, as it was often interpreted and perceived in

different ways especially when there is little demand analysis. Mr. Horobin spoke of the 'MCDA Logistics Working Group' created by the Consultative Group on the Use of MCDA and for which he was the Co-chair with WFP, which looked at the use of foreign logistics MCDA in large-scale natural disasters. The Group recommended the Oslo Guidelines as the primary guidance, a demand-led approach and respect for the civilian approach. The Group looked at three primary pieces of work: the format and scope of a global 'logistics MCDA guidance document'; a gap-fit and re-configuration of military enabling capabilities; and simulation/training exercises and dissemination of practical guidance. Mr. Horobin gave examples of good and bad practice, highlighting that it is the affected population and first responders such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent often working within a National Disaster plan that provide the fastest response. He pointed to the need for better understanding of the mandates of the various humanitarian actors and stressed that Member States should assume their responsibility to facilitate cross-border transportation of logistics MCDA.

BGen (ret) Jean-Philippe Ganascia talked about his experience as EUFOR Force Commander in Chad. In this highly complex environment, he prioritised efforts on the (re-)establishment of a positive and effective relationship with the humanitarian community. Several information-sharing platforms were established, enabling dialogue and mutual understanding of each other's mandates and activities. Efforts were also made to consistently coordinate requests for MCDA with the OCHA civil-military coordination officer, despite pressure from the Chadian authorities. BGen (ret) Ganascia regretted that humanitarian actors were not trained to understand the military mandate and way of thinking at the same rate as the military were trained and exercised about the humanitarian actors. He saw the "principled approach" as no longer being sufficient and in this regard also believed that the increasing role of private military and security companies could not be ignored.

The open discussion that followed triggered a lively and interactive debate touching on an array of issues related to civil-military coordination and relations and the use of MCDA, including: guidance for humanitarian evacuations on the Libya example; relationships between governments and the private sector; agreement on demand-driven assistance, but the dilemma when it is 'de facto' supply-driven; who bears the cost for the use of MCDA; the reality that in certain situations it is impossible or too time consuming to get proper insurance; coordination mechanisms through national authorities, clusters or other forums; the fact that in many countries national military are the first responders. Various opinions and confusion were expressed as to the planning for a EUFOR in the North Africa crisis context and possible impact on future coordination efforts. Mr. Müller clarified that in that particular context OCHA had ensured appropriate liaison and coordination arrangements with all concerned. Lessons learned would be looked at and he looked forward to continued dialogue and consultation with all partners.

In summary, no humanitarian operation was like any other and proper considerations had to be taken into account and adapted to each situation. There was a general wish for continued debate and dialogue. Many looked at OCHA for leadership and highlighted the usefulness not only of the Oslo and MCDA Guidelines, but also situation-specific guidance on civil-military relations and the use of MCDA. Most importantly, access to the affected populations was a key point in any humanitarian effort.

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