

# **MULTI-YEAR STRATEGIC EXERCISE PLANNING WORKSHOP**

**Kuala Lumpur – 7 and 8 April 2015**

## Session 1

Regional HADR Exercises – Identifying Priority Capabilities and Capacities

Lessons Learned by Regional and International Organisations

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Thank you for the invitation to join you for this important regional discussion. I am delighted that it is taking place given the concerns raised in Chengdu last year and the discussions we had in Japan earlier this year.

Simulations can give us a bird's-eye view of what works and what doesn't, help us to identify any additional shortcomings to the collective ability to handle crisis and, for us, work out how we can most effectively integrate our complementary efforts with those who lead response operations – principally Governments. We consider simulation exercises to be a tool to measure the impact of context specific response preparedness activities and trainings. Others may have a different perspective but that's our primary purpose in conducting simexes and in participating in simexes conducted by others.

I'd like to divide my brief presentation into two parts. Firstly some broad and general statements on where and how we might want to consider improving how we exercise, firstly general and then directly related to our experience from response operations and exercises over the last few years - and then a specific update on the regional consultative group on civil-military coordination that was established in October last year. Hopefully there will be no surprises since much of what I will cover was already suggested in the background paper that was circulated prior to the meeting.

So – OCHA's broad issues are these:

- Firstly, we need to be really clear on what we're trying to achieve here. We need an agenda which builds on preceding exercises. The challenges that we collectively face in large scale disasters have to be front and centre in our thinking about what we need to do to prepare and synergise our actions. To be frank what we have at the moment are actually a rather disparate set of exercises, which are a considerable resource burden on the region,

sometimes duplicative, often not synergized and with very different groupings. This challenge is clearly articulated in the discussion paper.

- Thus our suggestion would be that ASEAN and its partners should seek to consolidate these efforts into one or perhaps two major exercises which are clearly deconflicted with other major events. The principle of ‘the whole being greater than the sum of its parts’ applies here. Some consolidation and rationalisation of exercises will allow best use of planning and other capacities to support a coordinated framework for exercises – if I am not mistaken that’s what we’re trying to do here over the next two days.
- The starting point needs to be right and our observation is that there is additional benefit in having military and civilian partners working together, as they would in a response, rather than exercise separately. Let’s get as close to reality when we exercise as we’re going to have to be when we are in a response operation. The discussion paper mentions the need to fill gaps – we see this as one of the key gaps that needs to be filled.
- If this is a bridge too far for some then careful de-confliction of efforts should be the order of the day. This is now happening with the ARDEX and DIREX and is a very positive first step.
- Secondly, all partners need to be involved in exercise development and evaluation after the exercise. If we are all expected to participate in the exercise, and if the planning is considered to be important, then the preparations need to be jointly planned by those who will participate in the exercise. Thus our recommendation is that all partners should be involved in Initial, Middle and Final Planning Conferences (where resources allow) to make exercise constructs as useful as they can be to all parties. We also see a need for a more rigorous process of capturing the lessons. And where resources are tight the planning documents related to the exercise can be shared through a virtual platform or ‘community of practice’ so that the right assumptions are made in terms of scenario and/or injects. Also linked to the following point.
- Thirdly, and linked to my second point, is recognition of the fact that well planned and diverse exercises will ensure that all those who participate are exercised. This means all parties bringing their perspectives, skills and expertise into the planning process. An exercise that injects only military scenarios will benefit only the military, while others will scratch their heads and wonder why they are there. Per my point above, we do not respond in isolation and so should not exercise or plan in isolation.

- Fourthly, and in order to promote coherence across exercises we need a commonality of guidance. APC-MADRO hopefully can be used as a basis for this and as a building block for exercise guidance that can run through all of the regional level exercises that are undertaken. Alignment between APC MADRO and ASEAN's SASOP is desirable in this regard.
- Fifthly, as the discussion paper notes, we need a better way to ensure that the lessons learned from each of the exercises inform the development of scenarios, gap identification (at regional and national levels). Surely Chairs should have the leeway to decide what capabilities we focus on in specific exercises, but with due reference to lessons from foregoing exercises? Systematising this is challenging. OCHA evaluates every response that we are involved with – it's an arduous process, but essential if we are to learn. We have a variety of tools that we use for this process and would be happy to share them if that would be useful.
- Finally, exercises must become more than 'demonstrations of capability'. Exercises need to be a safe space where participants are briefed that it's actually OK to fail – because by failing we learn. We always learn from our failures in “real” disasters – better, surely that we do some of that failing in exercises where the results of our failure are only that we did not succeed – not that we lost lives unnecessarily or that we risked worse outcomes for affected people.

Let me turn now to lessons that we have learned from recent responses.

- Firstly, civilian governments lead. This may sound obvious, but needs to be central to our thinking. So Governments have to be in the room when we exercise – and they have to lead the exercise, as they will do in real life. National Disaster Management Authorities need to be realistically represented in exercise planning, implementation and evaluative processes.
- Secondly the requesting of support by Governments isn't as simple as we like to think. A decision to either seek or accept support is a highly political decision, often taken by the head of state. We should not oversimplify this element of exercises – it can cause delays and can also cause serious political damage if handled poorly.
- Thirdly, coordination doesn't just happen. Actually, the problem is that it sometimes does “just happen” –with all the wrong consequences. In a large scale operation it is essential that civilians and militaries get their collective act together as rapidly as possible. Exercising this realistically is important – as is having pre-planned coordination mechanisms ready to go when they are asked for.

- Fourthly, we have different rules of engagement. We need to tease these out in simulations so that we both respect and understand how the other works. We don't need to be surprised in the middle of the disaster.
- Fifthly we need to share information. In a disaster everyone is hungry for information. Supporting Governments in accessing the most accurate information is a key role that all those involved in providing assistance should factor into their planning. Situation reports, maps, assessment analysis – all of these are key pieces of information which need to be organised as quickly as possible. We struggle with this but through including information-management and sharing in exercise processes we can do better. The need to have an agreed information sharing platform is a key element of the process of coordinated operational planning.
- Sixthly – in this 24/7 news world media drives public interest in disaster response. If Governments seek outside help they may also welcome resource mobilization via the media. International responders need to be “on message”. Exercising media management should not be underestimated.
- Seventh – we need to be clear on roles and responsibilities. We assume that we know how things work and engage with national authorities on that basis. But at sub-national level it gets more complicated. Are there ways that we can better exercise this vital element of response?
- Finally – response operations are really complicated. Exercises need to recognize this and inject sufficient levels of complexity that the players come out of the exercise feeling drained. If they aren't then we haven't achieved anything that is realistic.

But I hope you will agree that simexes cannot be the totality of how we work together. Exercising needs to be based on careful planning – and not simply planning for exercises, but also planning for how we respond. You will recall the Asia-Pacific series of Conferences on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations (APC-MADRO) that took place over a five-year period. At the end of this process, the APC MADRO Guidelines were finalized and endorsed.

Building on the outcomes of those Conferences, the ASEAN-U.S. Informal Defence Forum, held in Hawaii in April 2014, highlighted that civilian and military personnel engaged in disaster management in the Asia-Pacific region need to work more closely together. Our Assistant Secretary-General proposed to organize a civil-military coordination workshop on the subject of disaster preparedness and coordinated operational planning in response to this call. This proposal was agreed and so we hosted a regional Civil-Military Coordination Workshop on 16 and 17 October last year, in Bangkok with 72 participants from 20 countries and regional organisations.

In addition to clear acknowledgement by participants of the need for better coordination, and agreement on how better joined up planning could be achieved in critical areas of disaster response, a key outcome of the workshop was the creation of a multi-stakeholder Regional Consultative Group (RCG) on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination for Asia and the Pacific - to take this planning forward at a practical level. The RCG will be the regional forum that brings together the humanitarian, civilian and military actors involved in disaster response preparedness planning and disaster response, including aspects related to civil-military coordination and the use of foreign military assets. The introductory session of the RCG on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination for Asia and the Pacific will take place next Wednesday in Singapore. Its draft terms of reference will include:

- Act as a regional forum that brings together the humanitarian, civilian and military actors involved in disaster response preparedness planning and disaster response, including aspects related to the field of civil-military coordination and the use of foreign military assets.
- Discuss response preparedness planning and make progress in the coordination of operational planning between civilian and military actors preparing to respond to major disasters in the region.
- Agree on the prioritization of countries where the process of coordinated operational planning between civilian and military actors should be implemented.
- Provide a platform for the exchange of information and ideas in order to enable well-coordinated, quality and needs-based efficient and effective disaster response to a broad range of humanitarian emergency operations.
- Identify and address emerging policy issues and gaps in the field of response preparedness and civil-military coordination; identify existing documents and address the possible need for updates or revisions.
- Work as a platform for gathering, disseminating and implementing civil-military coordination and disaster response related lessons learned and good practices.
- Establish linkages between the work of the RCG and other relevant forums, as and when appropriate, with an emphasis on the relationship with Regional Organizations and the Global Consultative Group on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination.

It is our earnest hope that this Group can support the outcomes of this workshop as it starts its work. One of the objectives of the Introductory Session of the RCG in Singapore is to set the agenda for the First Session in October 2015. May I suggest that the findings from this workshop could be presented on that occasion.

Thank you