HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

Mini MBA Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord): preserving access and principles with armed actors

Course handout · Week 4 : Disasters: requesting, coordinating and withdrawing foreign military assets

A programme of exactly 3 months (12 weeks, 144 hours) to coordinate humanitarian action with armed actors: principles, armed actors and their culture, the Oslo and MCDA Guidelines, foreign military assets in disasters, complex emergencies and integrated missions, armed escorts, humanitarian notification and information sharing, access negotiation, liaison and forums, protection, country-specific guidelines and dilemmas. Based on the public texts of OCHA and the IASC. Corrected numerical exercises, three monthly exams with case studies, and a verifiable diploma from the Humanitarian Academy. Independent course: it is not OCHA's official UN-CMCoord course, to which it refers, and it does not award any United Nations certification.

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Week 4 : Disasters: requesting, coordinating and withdrawing foreign military assets

Objectives

- Classify tasks given to military assets as direct assistance, indirect assistance and infrastructure support, and choose the most appropriate.
- Describe the path of a request for military support and the coordination platforms (multinational coordination centre, HuMOCC, OSOCC).
- Plan the exit of military assets from the moment they arrive.

The role of the affected State

In a disaster, the **affected State** leads the response. Its armed forces and civil protection are often the first mobilised, within its national disaster management plan. **Foreign** military assets only arrive at its request or with its consent, generally through bilateral agreements.

Many States have set up a **national coordination centre** or a **multinational coordination centre** (often called MNCC) that receives foreign forces, allocates them and links them to civilian authorities. The role of humanitarian CMCoord is to connect this system with humanitarian coordination (clusters, humanitarian country team, OCHA).

Three types of tasks

The Oslo Guidelines distinguish three types of assistance:

- **Direct assistance**: face-to-face distribution of goods and services (distributing food, providing care).
- **Indirect assistance**: at least one step removed from the population (transporting food to a warehouse, from where humanitarians distribute it).
- **Infrastructure support**: general services that benefit everyone but are not necessarily visible to beneficiaries (repairing roads, running an airport, restoring electricity).

The more **indirect** the assistance, the less it risks blurring the distinction between humanitarians and the military. As a general rule, infrastructure support and indirect assistance are preferred; direct assistance by foreign military personnel is avoided as far as possible, all the more so in a sensitive context.

The path of a request

A well-made request for military support starts from a **need**, not an asset. It specifies:

- the humanitarian need (what, for how many people, where, when);
- why civilian assets are not enough (last resort, unique capability);

- the expected task (for example, transporting 40 tonnes per day to two points) and not the resource ("two helicopters");
- the planned duration and end condition.

In the United Nations system, requests from humanitarian organisations go through the clusters (often the logistics cluster) to OCHA, which checks them, consolidates them and passes them on to the authorities or forces concerned. Each request is tracked: accepted, refused, completed.

Coordination platforms

- **OSOCC** (On-Site Operations Coordination Centre): set up by UNDAC teams to coordinate international responders in the first days.
- **HuMOCC** (Humanitarian-Military Operational Coordination Concept): an OCHA concept to bring humanitarians and the military together around a common space for planning and information sharing in disasters.
- **Multinational coordination centre** of the affected State: entry point for foreign forces.

Several regions have adopted their own guidance, for example the Asia-Pacific regional guidelines for civil-military coordination in disasters, developed within the Regional Consultative Group (RCG) on humanitarian civil-military coordination.

Planning the exit from arrival

Foreign military assets are temporary. Their departure must be planned from the start:

- **End criteria**: civilian capacities restored, roads reopened, functioning transport market.
- **Transition**: gradual handover of tasks to civilian actors, without gaps.
- **Timetable** shared with clusters and authorities.

Numerical example. Military helicopters carry 50 tonnes per day. Roads reopen gradually: civilian trucks carry 10 tonnes on day 10, then 10 tonnes more each day. From day 14, trucks carry 50 tonnes per day: the helicopters can withdraw, keeping a reserve for areas still isolated.

Exercise: drafting a support request

After a cyclone, 3 islands are cut off. Needs: 25 tonnes per day of food and water for about 10 days; no civilian boat available before 6 days; the national navy has a 30-tonne barge; a foreign navy offers two ships.

Write an 8-line support request in line with the Oslo Guidelines: need, justification, task, type of assistance, duration and end criterion.

Model answer. Need: 25 t/day for 3 islands. Justification: no civilian asset before 6 days. Task: transport 25 t/day from port X to the quays of the three islands (indirect assistance), with distributions carried out by humanitarian organisations. Asset: the national barge has enough capacity; the foreign navy would only be requested if the barge were unavailable. Duration: until the civilian boats arrive (day 6), with a 2-day overlap.

Key takeaways

- The affected State leads; foreign forces come at its request or with its consent.
- Prefer infrastructure support and indirect assistance; avoid direct assistance by foreign military personnel.
- A request describes a need and a task, not a resource, and justifies last resort.
- OSOCC, HuMOCC and the multinational coordination centre link humanitarians, authorities and forces.
- The exit is planned from arrival, with measurable end criteria.

Quiz

1. Transporting food to a warehouse from where NGOs distribute it is:
   A. Infrastructure support
   B. Deterrence
   C. Indirect assistance
   D. Direct assistance
2. Repairing an airport runway is:
   A. Indirect assistance
   B. Protection of convoys and warehouses
   C. Infrastructure support
   D. Direct assistance

3. A good request for military support describes:
   A. The need, the task and the planned duration
   B. The name of the air base commander
   C. The type of helicopter wanted and its crew
   D. The donor's budget for the operation

4. The HuMOCC is:
   A. A pooled donor fund
   B. An armed group active in the affected areas
   C. A humanitarian-military platform
   D. A radio system for convoys

5. When should the exit of foreign military assets be planned?
   A. At the end of the year
   B. Never: they stay
   C. From their arrival, with a criterion
   D. When the military ask to leave the country

Quiz answers : 1. B · 2. A · 3. D · 4. C · 5. D