



5.6 HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE/ DISASTER RELIEF AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN USSOUTHCOM

Captain Al Collins

On behalf of Rear Admiral Guillory, the Naval Forces U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) and General Fraser, USSOUTHCOM Commander, I thank you for this opportunity to speak. Today I will talk a little bit about who we are and what we do. A large portion of my presentation will center on the ongoing operations in Haiti. I will also say a bit about climate change, our humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) preparedness,

Captain Al Collins enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1972 and advanced through the rank of Operation Specialist Chief Petty Officer before becoming a commissioned officer. He achieved his education during off-duty hours at the University of South Alabama, National University, and the University of California at San Diego. He holds a master's degree in national resource strategy from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. Sea assignments include Combat Systems Division Officer, USS Pegasus (PHM 1); Combat Information Center (CIC) Officer, USS Truxtun (CGN 35); Operations Officer, USS England (CG 16); Commanding Officer, USS Gladiator (MCM 11); Commanding Officer, USS Ardent (MCM 12); Commanding Officer, USS Fitzgerald (DDG 62); and Commander, Destroyer Squadron One. Shore assignments include Test Director, Navy Tactical Interoperability Support Activity; Branch Head, Navy Compensation and Policy Coordination Division; Flag Secretary and Executive Assistant (EA) to Commander, Naval Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet; Chief, Network Operations Division, Operations Directorate (J-3), Joint Staff; student, Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF); Senior Fellow, Chief of Naval Operations, Strategic Studies Group; and Chief of Staff, U.S. Fourth Fleet (current assignment). Personal decorations include the Legion of Merit, the Joint Meritorious Service Medal, the Navy Meritorious Service Medal with two gold stars, the Navy Commendation Medal with three gold stars, the Navy Achievement Medal with three gold stars, and the Navy Good Conduct Medal with two bronze stars.

and preparations and some of our near-term threats. As the naval component to USSOUTHCOM, we have six principal lines of operation, the first four of which are (1) theater security cooperation, (2) counter illicit trafficking to include counter narcotics, (3) counter money laundering, and (4) transport (Figure 1).

Our two remaining lines of operation are exercises and Southern Partnership Station missions. Our exercises include signature events such as PANAMAX and UNITAS, which will be starting up within the next couple of months. We have a Southern Partnership Station mission ongoing right now. The oceanographic survey ship USS *Henson* is conducting oceanographic survey activities with Brazil; a few weeks ago, the *Henson* was working with Colombia.

Right now the USS *Carl Vinson*, which played a big part in the relief effort in Haiti, is sitting off the coast of Chile, having circumnavigated South America en route to its new homeport of San Diego. Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) *Freedom* is on its maiden voyage and is currently in port at Cartagena, Colombia. During its 45-day deployment to USSOUTHCOM, *Freedom* has been enormously successful in all of the endeavors so far, especially the counter-illicit trafficking mission. We hope to get the second LCS, the USS *Independence*, to USSOUTHCOM in the near future.

- Naval Component Commander to USSOUTHCOM
- Commands Naval Forces in the AOR
- Conducts Theater Security Cooperation and Counter Illicit Trafficking Operations to promote regional security
- Environmental, Humanitarian and Disaster Response Efforts

Plans and executes the full spectrum of Maritime Phase Zero operations under Partnership for the Americas strategy.



Figure 1. USSOUTHCOM Principal Lines of Operation

Fourth Fleet, which is about a year and a half old, serves as the operational arm of the naval component to USSOUTHCOM. Our principal focus is what we call “Phase Zero Operations.” What that really means in the short term is that we go out and we build partnerships. Such partnerships help us immensely in terms of our ability to respond to HA/DR-type events, as you will see when I talk about Haiti.

Security challenges are also a concern, of course. Although we are not talking about militaries massing on somebody else’s border poised to invade, there are a number of important threats in theater. These threats are not purely military or conventional, some are transnational in character, and some are asymmetric. Addressing these challenges invariably requires interagency coordination; they cannot be resolved by the military arm alone.

Let me move on to Haiti. Operation Unified Response, as it was designated, was divided into five phases. Phase one was the emergency response; phase two, the relief effort; all the way over to phase five, the restoration effort. A wide array of organizations were involved in this effort. Figure 2 shows the inherent complexity of that operation.

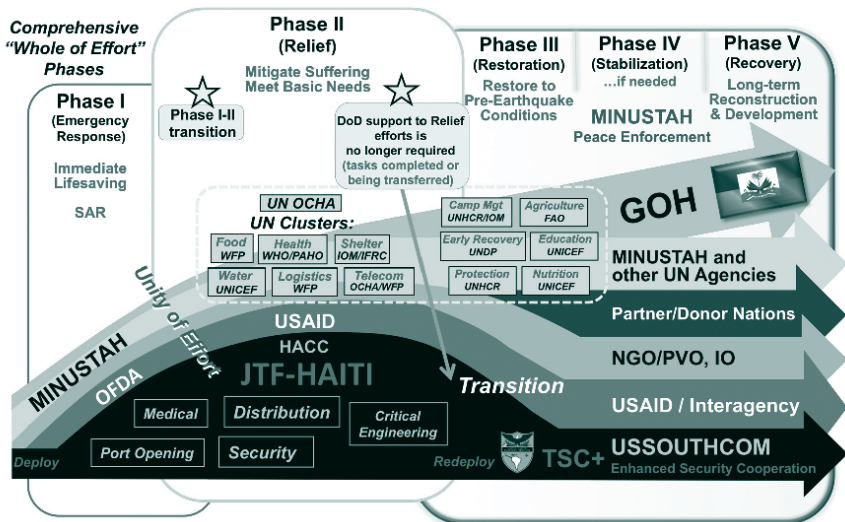


Figure 2. Operation Unified Response

At the bottom of Figure 2 you see the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the initiative. We are currently transitioning from phase two over to phase three as DoD efforts wind down and we redeploy assets. As DoD's effort trends downward, the activities of other agencies and the government of Haiti pick up.

The Navy, Army, Air Force, Marine, and Coast Guard components involved in the operation were simply providing support to the combatant commander. The combatant commander stood up a joint task force to manage this particular operation. Unfortunately, the deputy commander at USSOUTHCOM was actually in Haiti visiting the embassy at the time of the earthquake; one of his aides was killed there.

Within the span of 1 week, our staff at the Navy Forces South doubled. My staff went from about 150 people to just over 300. The Navy decided that additional effort and leadership would be required in this effort, so they sent five flag officers into the theater, including one to our staff to serve as deputy commander. As it turned out, the Navy was not the first one on the scene. That honor went to the Coast Guard, whose ships were already in the area. The Navy quickly ramped up and within 3 days had assets on scene providing relief.

In phase one, security was by far the largest concern, but that diminished quickly. After the first few days, we realized that everybody was in shock and people were not rioting and looting. So security went pretty low on the totem pole and distribution of food, water, and other relief supplies became the highest priority. With the impending arrival of the rainy season, ensuring that the Haitians have adequate shelter has risen to the top of the priority list. Unity of effort played a large role as we tried to harmonize the efforts of our many partner nations.

Listed in Figure 3 are the assets that the maritime component brought to the effort. As of today, the maritime force has essentially redeployed. The USS *Bataan* Amphibious Ready Group will depart the area toward the end of March. At that point, the only U.S. Navy surface asset in Haiti will be the USS *Grasp*, a diving and salvage ship. I would like to point out a couple of things about Figure 3.

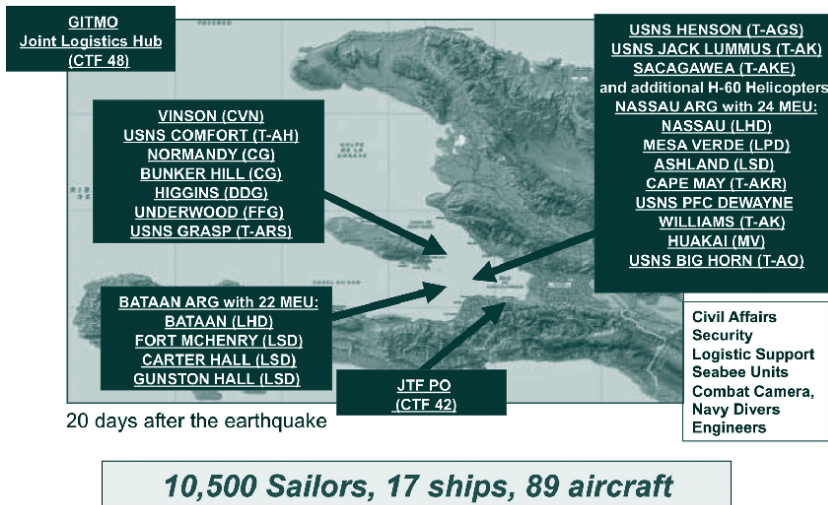


Figure 3. Maritime Assets Devoted to Effort in Haiti

The amphibious ship *Gunston Hall* was at sea preparing to go to Africa as the Africa partnership station when the earthquake occurred. Personnel and equipment from 19 of our European and African partner nations were embarked on the ship at the time. They were diverted to the Port of Prince area, where they operated for about 3 weeks. All 19 partner nations participated in the relief effort. The aircraft carrier *Carl Vinson* was doing routine operations in Norfolk when the earthquake occurred. Within days, they were on station providing relief support using their embarked CH-53 and H-60 helicopters.

The list shown in Figure 4 identifies our partner nations that provided maritime support to the effort. Support was also provided by the U.S. Air Force and Army. Although the Navy was not designated as a Combined Maritime Component Command, we served that function in many respects. Many of the foreign ships that came in sent liaison officers over to the carrier; we accepted them and provided them the necessary information to enable coordination of the relief effort.

The earthquake also severely damaged the two piers in Port of Prince, the island’s main port. The north pier was completely

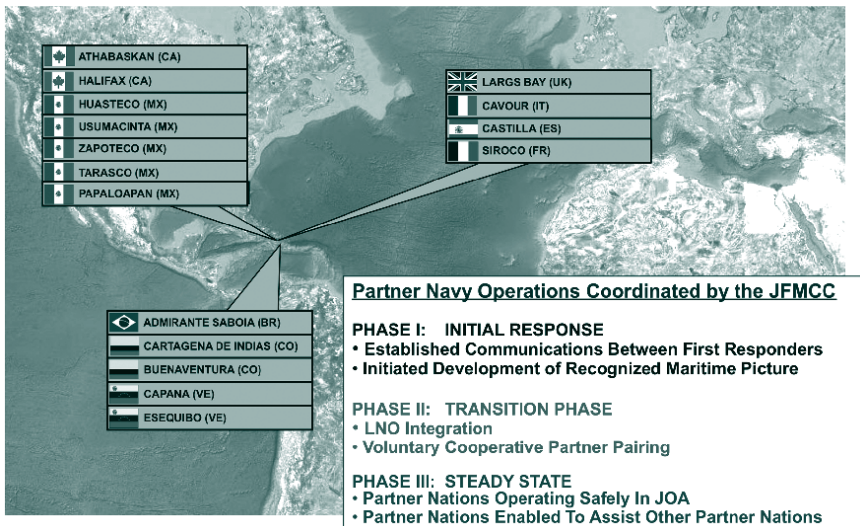


Figure 4. Partner Participation

destroyed and about 30% of the south pier was destroyed. By and large, port opening is an Army function. However, because the Navy was the only one on the scene at the time, we were tagged with that task. As the Joint Task Force (JTF) Port Opening Commander, Admiral Perez stood up the necessary capabilities. One of the most important of these was the big Navy float-in system called JLOTS, or Joint Logistics over the Shore. JLOTS does not require a pier. At the beginning of this disaster, Haiti had the capacity to offload about 230 containers per day. The JLOTS system alone is capable of transporting 300 containers per day, so we effectively increased the port's capacity. As you may recall, the airport was shut down for several days until the U.S. Air Force could come in and open it up.

A large portion of the U.S. response effort was provided by the hospital ship *Comfort*. This ship has a 1000-bed hospital and 12 operating rooms onboard. As part of the normal rotation, we deploy the hospital ship to the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility every other year. In the off year we bring in a large-deck amphibious ship with a pretty substantial medical capability in its own right. During that normal deployment, we tend to crew the ship with personnel from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Project Hope, Doctors without Borders, and the

like. For this effort, the Navy decided to crew the ship with all military practitioners because of the immediate need. *Comfort* set sail for Haiti just 4 days after the earthquake and was on station 3 days later. Interestingly, the ship actually started providing surgeries before they arrived in theater. We flew a number of severely injured patients out to the ship while it was en route. Once the ship was on station, we started rotating the military medical practitioners out and bringing in personnel from NGOs to provide care.

All in all, we had about 180 people from 9 different NGOs working on the ship to provide medical care. Although the ship has a 1000-bed capacity, we were unable to get that many patients on the ship. Other people, sometimes one, sometimes two or more, brought virtually all of the injured patients to the ship. We thought we should let those people stay, too, but they took up beds and effectively reduced our actual patient capacity by half or more. We soon realized that we just did not have the capacity to manage that. So we scaled back and adopted the policy that only one person could escort an injured person. By doing that, we were able to accommodate more patients. However, all of the beds eventually filled up because we did not have anywhere to put the people for aftercare. All of the hospitals in Haiti had either been destroyed or so severely damaged that they could not be reopened immediately. As a result, we simply had to keep our patients on the ship until they could be released.

Once the hospital ship was full, the throughput stopped until the NGOs and our military practitioners could get out and open up the hospitals so that we could move patients to other facilities. Once we had a place where patients could go, we were able to bring in additional patients and perform surgeries or other medical procedures. They actually performed 500 major surgeries within a 30-day period of time. Overall, they performed just under 1000 operations during the 9 weeks that they were on station. Ten babies were born on the ship, including one set of twins. I think many of you probably saw the CNN piece where Dr. Gupta performed brain surgery on a young Haitian girl.

Figure 5 includes a summary of the overall effort by the maritime component to the disaster. As indicated, sustainment was a

- Initial Response
 - Redirection of Ships to Haiti
 - JTF Port Opening Established
 - Partner Navy Coordination
- Sustainment
 - More Specific Capabilities Deployed
 - Logistics Hub Established
 - HSVs Employed
- Redeployment
 - VINSON turns over to BATAAN & NASSAU
 - Turnover to NGOs/OGOs



Figure 5. Summary of Overall Navy Effort in Haiti

very big piece of it also because, as a maritime component when we go somewhere on ships, we are automatically prepared to sustain ourselves. That is not the case with all the people that flowed into Haiti. All of their retail stores were virtually destroyed, so you could not run down to 7-11 and buy your toiletries or a snack or what have you. As a result, all of the people that the military had put in Haiti had to eat MREs for the first 30+ days because there were no restaurants or other places where you could run out and get a meal. Sustainment was a huge part of the endeavor. We also had 150 construction engineers, or Seabees, on the ground in Haiti providing both horizontal and vertical construction capability. We have construction divers who are rebuilding pylons for the pier that was destroyed; it should be at 100% capability by the end of March. And, as I mentioned, many of those forces are currently in a state of redeployment.

In retrospect, responding to this catastrophe necessitated a very large effort that included the participation of international partners and organizations such as the United Nations as well as a number of U.S. government entities including the State Department, DoD, and other agencies. As I said, we are now in the process of redeploying, but as the maritime component departs the Army is still

flowing people in to conduct restoration activities in support of phases three, four, and five. The United States will have a military presence in Haiti for some time to come.

On February 27, 2010, a major earthquake took place in Chile. Our response to that disaster was significantly different because Chile is a first-world nation in its own right. They are capable of providing their own relief effort, and they told us as much. However, they did ask us to send a facilities assessment team, which we were pleased to do. We sent a Navy group down to assess damage to port facilities and piers and things of that sort. After a week there, the team provided a report to the Chilean government. Once the government has reviewed the report, they may end up requesting specific assistance from the United States. We also sent down a 50-bed hospital within a few days of the earthquake. A summary of efforts in response to the Chilean earthquake is summarized in Figure 6.

As for climate change, Figure 7 shows what we see as some of the potential effects of climate change. Climate change certainly is a huge consideration within our area of responsibility. As is the case for our brethren around the North Pole, climate change

- 27Feb: 8.8 Earthquake and Tsunami struck central Chile. Concepción and nearby port facilities heavily damaged.
- 03Mar: Government of Chile requests U.S. Assistance.
- 05Mar: USSOUTHCOM directed to support USAID, the lead U.S. Agency in the Effort
- 08Mar: Navy Assessment Team in place
 - Medical Planner
 - Engineers
 - Underwater Salvage
 - Construction
 - Combat Camera



Figure 6. Summary of Efforts in Chile

- Increase air temperatures and temperature extremes
- Increased El Nino events
- Impacts to fishing and agriculture industries
- Increasing disease in higher elevations
- Increasing droughts
- Increasing rainfall, mudslides & flooding in eastern Brazil & higher elevations (Andes)
- Increasing ice melt in the Andes
- Antarctica ice belt melting altering precipitation patterns and salinity amounts
- Increasing coastal water levels

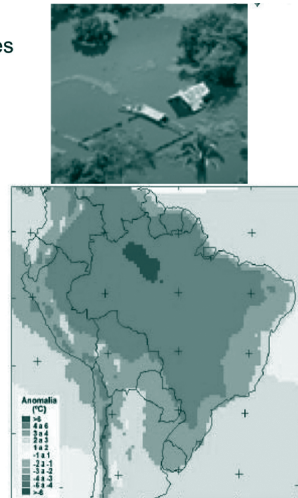


Figure 7. Potential Impacts of Climate Change

impacts us to the south as well. We know that we cannot predict when disasters such as earthquakes are going to happen, but in most cases we can determine where such disasters will occur. We know where the low-lying areas are that are likely to be flooded when the rains come.

In the case of Haiti, we have a head start before the rainy season arrives. About 3 weeks ago, Haiti got 3 inches of rain and 11 people perished due to flooding and mudslides. That is probably just an indication of things to come when the rainy season starts on April 1st and the hurricane season arrives a few months later. In 2008, there were four consecutive back-to-back tropical cyclones. As you well know, this region is prone to both tropical cyclones and earthquakes.