



*Consultative Group on the Use of MCDA  
Annual Meeting – 01 December 2010, Geneva, Switzerland*

Civil-Military Coordination Section (CMCS)  
Emergency Services Branch – OCHA Geneva

---

## **HPG Review on Military Engagement in Humanitarian Action**

---

### **I. Introduction:**

The Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at ODI is a team of independent policy researchers and communications professionals dedicated to improving humanitarian policy and practice in response to conflict, instability and disasters. HPG combines policy analysis with a capacity to act as a neutral forum for dialogue and debate.

HPG's policy research is built around five themes:

1. Principles, Politics and the Humanitarian System
2. Civilian Security and Protection
3. Displacement, Migration and Urbanisation
4. Livelihoods and Food Security in Crises
5. Transitional Programming

Based on these areas, HPG produces a biannual Integrated Programme (IP) of work that combines its different core activities within a coherent thematic framework. For the 2011–13 IP, HPG proposes to focus on:

1. Resilience and humanitarian action.
2. Humanitarian diplomacy in challenging political and security environments: supporting principled access.
3. Civil–military relations: the search for common ground.
4. Moving forward? Assessing learning and change in the humanitarian sector.

### **II. Civil–military relations: The search for common ground**

#### **Background and rationale**

In recent years, the expansion of military engagement in humanitarian action has generated significant, but not always coherent, discussion. Humanitarian actors have repeatedly questioned the rationale, objectives and nature of this engagement, particularly in contexts of armed conflict, and have expressed concerns about what they see as an encroachment on humanitarian space. In large-scale sudden-onset disasters there has arguably been a tendency amongst humanitarian actors to adopt a less stringent approach to the role of the military in facilitating and even delivering assistance. But whatever the scenario, the two sides have failed to reach a common understanding of the role that each plays and the challenges they face. Nor, critically, have they come to a shared understanding of the needs of affected populations, and how they can or should be addressed.

Previous HPG work in 2006 analysed emerging trends in civil–military relations at that time - see HPG Report 21, March 2006. Based on the changing nature of military engagement in humanitarian crises, this research concluded that, in order to achieve the overarching goal of saving lives and alleviating suffering, humanitarian and military actors must seek 'constructive common ground and

agreement on core issues of responsibility and competence'. Despite subsequent policy debate, more recent field research and operational experience in countries such as Myanmar, Haiti and Pakistan have demonstrated continuing weaknesses in the relationship, and key priorities for further research and action.

## **The project**

Given expanding international intervention in fragile and conflict-affected states, and the increasing frequency and intensity of sudden-onset climatic events globally, military engagement in humanitarian response looks set to stay. But what has been the impact of this engagement in these priority areas? As borne out in recent operational contexts, continuing debate around civil-military relations and the role of the military in humanitarian response has seemingly failed to address fundamental differences in priority and approach.

In 2011–2013 HPG will consider two key areas of responsibility and competence relating to civil-military relations in fragile and conflict-affected states, namely 1) the protection of civilians and 2) disaster response. The project will aim to:

- Increase awareness among military and humanitarian actors of the different roles that each plays in the protection of civilians and disaster response.
- Inform more effective coordination between humanitarian and military actors in addressing the needs of affected populations.
- Identify practical strategies for more effective protection of civilian populations in armed conflict.

The project will seek to address the following questions:

- How do military actors understand the broader crisis context and drivers of vulnerability? How do they adapt this understanding, and consequently their role, as the context changes?
- What policy and doctrinal framework do military actors use? How do these relate to the humanitarian imperative?
- What is the impact of military engagement on affected populations? How is this impact perceived by affected populations?
- How do humanitarian and military actors interact in operational contexts and in policy-making? What factors determine this? Do they value engagement with each other?
- How can humanitarian and military actors engage more effectively and more strategically with each other?

In answering these questions, the project will use a combination of both primary and secondary research, including a review of existing frameworks, field research, and action research.

Case studies (still to be determined) for theme 1: Protection of civilians

- *National militaries* (e.g. Pakistan, Colombia, Philippines) and *Regional peacekeeping* (e.g. the AU):
- *Action research on multilateral military operations* (e.g. ISAF, EUFOR)

Case studies envisaged for theme 2: Disaster Response

- *2010 flood response in Pakistan*
- *2010 earthquake response in Haiti*