Marines fighting fires in Salmon, Idaho.

2d Marine Division Combat Camera (Tyler J. Mielke)

Disengaging from Consequence Management

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Almost twenty years ago, Caspar Weinberger defined the uses of military power in remarks made before a luncheon meeting at the National Press Club. The Secretary of Defense outlined six conditions to be met before committing troops overseas. They required that any decision that put the Armed Forces in harm's way must be based on vital national interests, a clear determination to win, well-defined political and military objectives, a continuing reassessment of the relationship between force structure and objectives, a reasonable assurance of popular support, and the appeal to the use of force only as a last resort.

One does not have to be a fan of the so-called Weinberger doctrine to appreciate the benefit of ending military operations in a timely and decisive manner. Leaders value planning that enables disengaging from one operation and deploying to another. And the same capability is valued in domestic assistance. Indeed, it is notable that the current Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, has registered his reluctance to commit military assets to aid civilian authorities without a clear exit strategy. Although planning is a scarce commodity during the early stages of such operations, part of the process should be dedicated to exit planning as well as engagement planning.

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First responders at McGuire Air Force Base.

305th Communications Squadron (Scott H. Spitzer)

Like disengaging from overseas commitments, exiting domestic missions is not exclusively a military decision. But while the Armed Forces are supporting partners, they need not be passive. Active interagency partnerships are essential in creating an effective disengagement strategy.

Exit Strategies

In a high-end assistance requirement such as consequence management involving weapons of mass destruction, responding is the first priority. However, exit strategies are also essential in three ways: ensuring that military support is available for other domestic or foreign emergencies, enhancing return to normalcy in the disaster area, and maintaining civil-military relations.

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First, active or Reserve assets responding to events involving weapons of mass destruction will likely come from a variety of units, some dedicated to consequence management, some with expertise in responding to weapons of mass destruction as a primary mission, and many with dual or no explicit missions in this area. If units involved in such a mission are required elsewhere, it will take time to disengage, reconstitute, and move on. Accordingly, operations are well served by plans that enable quick partial or total disengagement for redeployment.

Next, the goal of Federal agencies in the response plan is assisting overwhelmed state and local governments. Ideally, military support ends as a community returns to normal, perhaps with state help, and is able to perform emergency services needed to save lives, protect property, and transition to recovery operations. If the military stays longer than required it violates the spirit of the Federal response plan, the letter of agreement among participating agencies, and assumptions that justify assistance to state and local governments. It can also hamper the return to normalcy, thereby doing a disservice to the people targeted for assistance.

Finally, effective civil-military efforts depend on forthright relationships among civilian and military agencies. State and local authorities must understand what the U.S. Government can do, including the limits on military assistance. Exit planning can deflect false expectations among state and local officials and the general population on the quality, magnitude, and duration of assistance. No one, especially citizens in supported areas, should be surprised when the military decreases and then ends support. A timely exit avoids competition between business and government agencies. In addition, particularly for the military, staying too long can risk

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Disaster control group, September 2001.

resentment, constitutional issues, and violations of civil liberties.

Contributions and ownership must be shared by all parties for an exit plan to be effective. In consequence management, the military plan must be integral to the overall Federal engagement and disengagement strategy, which in turn is linked to the request for assistance by state and local governments. The engagement strategy is embodied in the Federal response plan. The Department of Defense has clearly defined responsibilities. In large and complex operations, its role is more critical as a supporter of other agencies. The primary and support responsibilities dictate dual exit strategies, each with peculiar interagency relationships.

Federal Response

The process and structure for delivering assistance to address major disasters are contained in the Federal response plan, which designates primary and support responsibilities of emergency agencies and functions. The Department of Defense serves as the primary agency for public works and engineering (function 3) and as support agency for other functions. The plan addresses only those disengaging Federal agencies responsible for managing assistance to state and local agencies. Disengagement naturally focuses on completing emergency support requirements and releasing agencies with primary responsibility for coordination of that function.

The plan designates a lead organization, normally the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and a Federal coordinating officer, the senior official in charge of support. This officer, normally selected from a pool of designated, trained, and experienced officials, has responsibility for disengaging the Federal agencies called on to support an event. Now part of the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA is likely to remain responsible for providing Federal coordinating officers to execute consequence management.

The life cycle of a consequence management event is largely responsible for the dual role of the Department of Defense. Early in an incident, a fast and massive response is necessary across several emergency support functions. Primary agencies may exhaust their organic assets or more likely cannot mobilize or contract for resources to respond quickly and thus will call on the military to meet some or all of the requirements. Concurrently, the military must provide its own support. Logically, a disengagement strategy should return responsibility for emergency support functions to the primary Federal agency or complete the requirement, whichever occurs first. This transition becomes complex when eleven functions are supported, each at different stages of completion or transition to a primary agency.

Determining the status of a function requires coordination among at least three parties: the Federal coordinating officer, primary agency, and defense coordinating officer. Large operations may require establishing a joint task force, but the defense coordinator would remain the point of contact for the Federal coordinating officer. It is reasonable to expect, depending on the magnitude of the event and local capabilities, that this initial supporting effort for the eleven emergency support functions will be a sizable requirement that the Department of Defense is anxious to end. Yet it is during this phase that the military contribution is unique, because no other agency can mobilize the requisite assets as quickly or efficiently.

The follow-on disengagement is obviously secondary to providing immediate emergency services. Assistance for public works and engineering (function 3) comes from the Army Corps of Engineers as lead agency. In support of other functions, the Department of Defense relies on units with specialized or general support equipment.

Observation base, Afghanistan.

55th Signal Company (Milton H. Robinson)

Sometimes unskilled personnel are needed, but at other occasions a few technicians are adequate. In all cases, the defense coordinator remains the single DOD point of contact and requests appropriate military personnel and equipment.

In recent years the disaster life cycle has become fairly predictable for types and magnitudes of events. According to an experienced coordinating officer, and confirmed by recent consequence management efforts, the emergency response stage with heaviest defense commitments should last no more than 90 days. Disasters could be greater in magnitude and less predictable than events in the past. But after three months other Federal agencies generally have time to organize, contract, and begin recovery rather than simply managing consequences. Defense contributions in recovery operations are few and are rejected as a consequence management mission. Function 3 activities are likely to last longer, but their level is generally low and routine for the Corps of Engineers.

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State and local agencies may have plans, or at least expectations, on how and when Federal agencies disengage. But after submitting requests for Federal assistance, the plans do not directly affect disengagement; rather requests become part of the initial input to the Federal disengagement plan. Authorities give input to the Federal coordinating officer in many forms, including amended requests. All input is an important source of information for disengagement criteria and plans.

Current Strategies

The Federal response plan is not intended to provide details of disengagement for agencies and components of the U.S. Government. Because the Department of Defense is one of several support agencies, its disengagement is only partially self-determined and depends largely on state and local requests and taskings by the lead agency, under the direction of the Federal coordinator, directly or through another agency. It has developed a number of documents that provide guidance for affecting how that support should be provided and ended.

At the highest levels, there is concern over disengagement because it is situation-dependent. The Pentagon does not publish a plan for disengaging from the consequence management of events involving weapons of mass destruction, but related issues are addressed in DOD Directive 3025.1, which provides the response structure, agency relationships, transition strategies, and leadership responsibilities. This directive clarifies

U.S. Air Force (Robert Hortsman)

Battling blaze, Barksdale Air Force Base.

disengagement planning and gives the Federal coordinator overall responsibility for operational phases, including disengagement. Similarly, the Office of the Secretary of Defense or its executive agent—with the Joint Staff, U.S. Northern Command, and Directorate of Military Support on the Army Staff (a function that is being transferred to the Joint Staff)—will appoint a defense coordinator as part of the requirement for defense assistance. Under the Federal coordinator, this officer will orchestrate disengagement based on original and amended requests for assistance.

If the Joint Task Force-Civil Support (JTF–CS) has command responsibility, the defense coordinator may be under its operational control, but this still implements disengagement. Recent initiatives, such as the appointment of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and establishment of U.S. Northern Command, may lead to a dramatic reorganization, though one theme seems immune from change: the Federal coordinator must continue to be provided with a single DOD point of contact. It does not matter to which agency the coordinating officer belongs as long as he represents the Pentagon with one voice.

Joint Publication 3-07.7, *Doctrine for Civil Support*, has been a work in progress for several years, but the recent structural and conceptual changes have outpaced the publication cycle. The most recent draft contains a single paragraph on termination under planning considerations and notes that "termination of military support . . . is a sensitive phase that requires detailed planning" and that the agreed endstate defines when forces will be disengaged. The endstate is unlikely to be determined until the danger recedes and critical services are restored. It will be evident when local authorities are able to assume responsibility for the operation and, together with FEMA, consider the incident under control. This publication contends that disengagement criteria have an objective (capabilities) basis while recognizing the value of political consensus (subjective) basis.

The implementation plan reiterates that successful disengagement and the transition to civil authority are key to the JTF–CS mission and requires detailed planning and execution. It also states that the task force will not remain to conduct recovery operations, defined as long-term cleanup and relief efforts that are the responsibility of local and state authorities. The plan also recognizes the importance of identifying the endstate criteria for disengagement. The endstate should be based on agreements between the lead agency and combatant command before assigning forces. All parties must agree that local authorities can assume operational responsibility before Joint Task Force-Consequence Management will redeploy.

Aeromedical evacuation, Hurricane Lili.

2d Communications Squadron (Laura Smith)

The first JTF commander stated that disengagement is important but likely to be difficult. He also outlined a disengagement policy: begin developing a strategy as soon as the joint task force gets a tasking for civil support. In general, the criteria will call for creating a stabilized environment—moving from crisis to routine responses to requests for assistance. This process involves determining that civilian agencies can perform their functions. More specific criteria will be established to fit the event. He noted that "We will look to FEMA to be our advocate for disengagement."[1]

The *Domestic Operational Law Handbook* offers pragmatic rather than legal advice.[2] Like other sources, it recommends establishing endstates to mark the completion of disaster assistance missions and understand community objectives. Elaborating on endstates the handbook indicates that they must be attainable, developed from the national to the lowest level, and offer a road map to follow. Perhaps as important, it states that "the affected population must know when military operations will cease and local support organizations are to continue the mission."

The handbook also recommends that termination standards quickly be set that are objective, measurable, and understood by all players. They may be "expressed in terms of percentage of predisaster capability by specific function; for example, 70 percent of electrical power restored." The standard should represent the threshold by which the community agrees to have services restored to an acceptable level that can be sustained without Federal assistance.

Response Context

The Federal coordinating officer ultimately makes decisions on disengagement. The issue is ensuring that he has the understanding, motivation, and means to plan the effort. Understanding has been discussed, and FEMA has the mission to meet this requirement. Motivation prior to the event is found in the Federal response plan, which serves as the mission statement for coordinating officers, the urgency of being prepared to perform on short notice, and the responsibility derived from being the steward of scarce lifesaving emergency response assets. After the event, it is found in the specific requests for assistance, the mandate to return the communities to normalcy, and the need to manage the demands from local and state agencies and services provided by a mix of public and private agencies.

The means for planning exist in the numerous teams, groups, and officials that assist the coordinating officer.

- The catastrophic disaster response group is composed of representatives from all Federal agencies and operates on the national level to provide guidance and policy direction on response coordination and operational issues arising from Federal coordinating officer and emergency support functions response activities. It is normally located at FEMA headquarters.
- The disaster field office is the primary venue in affected states for coordinating response and for coordinating officers to collocate, along with Federal agency regional representatives and state and local liaison officers.
- The emergency response team is the principal interagency group supporting the Federal coordinating officer in the overall operation, located at the disaster field office.
- The Federal coordinating officer information and planning section collects, processes, analyzes, and disseminates information to support planning and decisionmaking on both the field and headquarters levels. It has a large section from the emergency response team and a smaller one from the emergency support team at the FEMA emergency information and coordination center.

All four assets are vital for Federal coordination, with information and planning being the logical lead agent for the exit strategy. This section is located on the national and local levels and has contact with interagency representatives, including the local defense coordinating officer. They also have access to state and local responders and sources of information about recovery needs and activities, are collocated in the operations section of the Federal coordinating office, and normally are in continual contact with the defense operations section. The information and planning section needs training to maximize its value for disengagement planning.

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Effective Strategy

Generally leaders understand the importance of disengagement and developing a strategy. Doctrinal documents on each level note the significance and sensitivity of disengagement. Doctrine treats it on the functional level, as if the department was the lead in performing emergency support functions rather than providing support. That approach neglects the duality of responsibility and results in disengagement criteria focused on only fulfilling functions; it oversees disengagement by handing off to other agencies. Fulfilling these functions is a worst case approach and has merit if functions are performed before lead agencies prepare to handoff. But planning for only the worst case may overlook an opportunity to disengage quickly, at least partially. Handoff also enables other agencies to fulfill their responsibilities and supports the intent of the Federal response plan.

Both Federal and defense coordinating officers are essential in maximizing disengagement strategies. If they recognize the duality of defense consequence management missions, they can plan to disengage by handoff or functional completion. That recognition will make handoff more likely by highlighting the responsibilities of other agencies and supporting a characterization of the DOD role as a notional ready reserve but not as the force provider of first resort.[3]

Coordinators are more likely to recognize the dual DOD mission when it is emphasized in doctrinal and training publications. The key documents need to be revised to increase emphasis on disengagement and expand strategies to include disengagement by handoff.

Revising documents is only the first step; training is equally important. But formal training for defense coordinating officers consists of a two-week overview supplemented by the continental army where they command the training support brigade. Exercises reinforce training. Both types of disengagement strategy should ideally be part of this process. They provide the opportunity for interagency players to understand the complexity of negotiating disengagement.

Most importantly, FEMA, with support from other agencies and its parent organization, the Department of Homeland Security, should define disengagement criteria under the response plan. Provisions should be made to ensure that the lead agency establishes a disengagement planning cell with governmental and nongovernmental agencies that have stakes in consequence management. Without the emphasis of the lead Federal agency and coordinating officer, subordinate agencies can do little for a successful transition. Planning cell guidance should establish measurable standards for disengagement, monitor and measure progress toward meeting the standards, adjust standards based on changes to requests for assistance, and inform all parties of the standards and timetable for decreasing and ending support.

The Department of Defense should follow the lead of the response plan by ensuring that it can fully support the disengagement cell. Joint Task Force-Consequence Management should take the doctrinal lead by expanding its implementation plan and ensuring that the final Joint Pub 3-07.7 has an expanded disengagement strategy.

DOD (R.D. Ward)

Ground Zero.

The establishment of the Department of Homeland Security provides an additional forum for policy level interaction among Federal agencies and other parties. The Department of Defense has representation on all levels of homeland security committee work. It is imperative that this new structure address policy issues but recognize that current relationships for executing consequence management are working well, especially between Federal and defense coordinators. Care should be taken to strengthen this cornerstone of effective interagency cooperation.

It is important to exercise disengagement. Without practice, state and local leaders are not likely to trust the process or be prepared to support disengagement planning. And without trust in the process, they are less apt to establish disengagement criteria or reach consensus on schedules. If local leaders are confident that the public and private sectors can resume support functions, they will be more inclined to accept the departure of Federal agencies. Exercising disengagement fulfills consequence management and demonstrates that a community can both respond to a disaster and then return to functioning normally. **JFQ**

This article is based on a paper written by the authors while attending the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

NOTES

[1] Interview with Brigadier General Bruce Lawlor, February 8, 2000, Washington.

[2] Peter Menk and Marsha Mills, *Domestic Operations Law Handbook* (Charlottesville, Va.: Center for Law and Military Operations, U.S. Army Office of the Judge Advocate General, 1999).

[3] Bradley Graham and Bill Miller, "Pentagon Debates Homeland Defense Roles," *The Washington Post* (February 11, 2002), p. 6.