The Sixth Annual USAWC Reserve Component Symposium
Achieving Unity of Effort in Responding to Crises

Workshop #4:
"Development and Dissemination of a 'Common Operational Picture' in Preparation, Response and Recovery Operations"

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"…the American people don't care about acronyms or organizational charts. They want to know who was supposed to do what, when, and whether the job got done."[1]

The frequently strained interaction between the active component and the National Guard during the military's response to Hurricane's Katrina and Rita in the summer of 2005[2] has led some to argue for a cultural migration away from strict "command and control" concepts toward a broader concept of "command, control, cooperation and coordination." Meanwhile, many experts believe that pandemic influenza or terrorist attacks employing nuclear or biological devices likely will result in death and economic or physical disruption that would vastly exceed the destruction wreaked along the Gulf Coast, that the destructive potential of hurricanes like Katrina and Rita actually represent the "lower end" of catastrophic events.

Seeking further means for achieving 'unity of effort' among all those envisioned to respond to any such catastrophe, not just within the military's active and reserve components, but also between the military and the multiple civil authorities that military is sworn to serve, the United States Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership hosted *Achieving Unity of Effort in Responding to Crises* as its Reserve Component symposium for 2007. Symposium participants represented a broad spectrum of the leading stakeholders: the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and America's Security Affairs, the Department of Homeland Security, the United States Northern Command, the National Guard Bureau, and the Office of the Chief of Army Reserve Affairs; the Adjutants General from the states of Georgia, Rhode Island and Texas; the Pennsylvania Director of Homeland Security; and multiple representatives of both the public and private sectors. All participants arrived armed with a wealth of experience in the area of defense support to civil authorities and with a compelling interest in the topic. Each added value to the exchange of concerns and understanding during the symposium.

SYMPOSIUM CONTENT AND METHODOLOGY

The symposium's approach was straightforward. After brief welcoming and introductory remarks, participants divided into four "workshops," each focused on one critical aspect of perceived response and recovery requirements for the military in support of federal, state and local government:

- Workshop#1: The Evolving Relationship Between The United States Northern Command and The Military's Reserve Component In Preparing For And Responding To Catastrophe

- Workshop#2: The Potential Need To Establish An Appropriate Mechanism For The Military To Accompany And Support Civilian Components Focused On Regional Response To Catastrophe

- Workshop#3: The Military's Role In Supporting An Evolving National Response Plan

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1. *A Failure of Initiative, Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina*, U.S. House of Representatives, pg. x, available at http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html
2. *A Failure of Initiative,*, pp 3-4, also pp 218-232, available at http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html.

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- Workshop#4: The Development And Dissemination Of A "Common Operational Picture" in Preparation, Response And Recovery Operations Between The Components Of The Military And Civilian Authorities at All Levels of Government

Each workshop began with a "Subject Matter Expert" presentation from individuals and organizations intimately involved in the particular focus areas that Workshop would address. Workshop groups then tackled a series of questions intended to frame and guide their topical discussions and interaction. Finally, each workshop group presented their observations and emerging insights to a "Blue Ribbon Panel" consisting of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, the Deputy Commander of the United States Northern Command, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Integration from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and America's Security Affairs, the Director of Operations U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Chief of the Army Reserve, the Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff for National Guard Affairs, and the Chief of Logistics of the National Guard Bureau.

The remainder of this paper focuses exclusively on emerging insights from Workshop#4 regarding development of a 'Common Operational Picture' among the components of the military and civilian authorities at all levels of government.[3]

WORKSHOP#4 INSIGHTS

Following a succinct, informative and well-received "USNORTHCOM Common Operating Picture" overview and analytical presentation,[4] members explored and analyzed their overall topic via dialogue on the following four constituent questions:

- Question #1: What specific purpose(s) is a Homeland Security 'Common Operational Picture' expected to serve?
- Question #2: With respect to 'Common': who is a member, who inputs information, who adjudicates or resolves disputes, and who protects and provides Information Assurance?
- Question #3: With respect to 'Operational': what levels and categories of information are presented, what level(s) of organization are users / inputers, for what purpose(s)?
- Question #4: With respect to 'Picture': how should information be organized or displayed, what mapping or graphical support is required, and what means of transmission and display are most appropriate for participating organizations?

All symposium participants had been asked to frame their discussions on the "two percent" of events that could qualify as Catastrophic Incidents with National Impact, however Workshop#4 members came to early consensus that the compelling need to "train as you will fight" meant that any Common Operational Picture had to be relevant and useable for *any* event and indeed be employed across the spectrum of military, interagency, and intergovernmental responders *frequently* if not *daily*. They felt attempting to *begin* using some sort of Common Operational Picture designed specifically for a major catastrophe during the incident itself would simply compound the difficulties of response.

PURPOSE OF A COMMON OPERATIONAL PICTURE

Participants easily reached consensus that the primary purpose of developing a Common Operational Picture [henceforth **COP**] was to "support decision making, coordination, and integration"; there was nonetheless a divergence on the specifics of that end. All agreed one key element of any **COP** framework was to gather data from multiple sources and make it available to multiple entities, thereby creating a "common database (COD)" as a precursor to any **COP** itself. Some participants argued that thereafter each

> **What specific purpose(s) is a Homeland Security "Common Operational Picture" expected to serve?**
>
> - Support decision making, coordination, and integration
> - Address Commander's / Executive's Critical Information Requirements
> - Provide a shared data base of situational information / awareness
> - Allow users to sort for relevant data
> - Facilitate the establishment of standards / framework / processes for information sharing and reporting (data / templates)
> - Provide accurate releasable information to leaders for public information purposes.
> - Identify requirements and capabilities
> - Link various cooperation/coordination process systems together, build a bridge

entity should be allowed to create its "*own*" **COP**, using whatever pieces of information from the COD assisted them to make good decisions. Others, however, disagreed, believing instead the principle purpose for developing a "*single*" **COP** was to provide the *same* context to multiple decision-makers so that they could, and were more likely to, act in concert (or at least not at cross purposes). In either case, a created **COP** should provide facts regarding requirements, capabilities, and capacities directly relevant to "critical" or "priority" information requirements (C/PIR) identified by the military and civilian leadership. And in both cases the **COP** was envisioned as a supplement to, and not a replacement for, the need for both those C/PIR and good "staff work."

Additional reasons for developing a **COP** included: reducing (*not* eliminating) the "fog of war" during crises; better enabling re-active or perhaps pre-emptive senior leader 'public information' capabilities (particularly regarding tactical activities); helping preclude federal actors' interference with state or local leaders or responders; assisting with implementation of the National Incident

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3. Similar papers for the other three workshops of the symposium can be found on the CSL web site at *http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usacsl/index.asp*
4. Provided by Colonel Robert Felderman, Deputy Director of Operations for Land and National Guard Matters, DJ3-NG, USNORTHCOM.

Management System and/or building a 'bridge' between the Military Decision-Making Process and various civilian decision-making processes; and providing a standard basis for information reporting such that users more easily know "what they are and what they are not actually seeing." Some saw this latter role as the **COP** as 'forcing function' -- successful creation would finally require (1) universal acceptance of *the* single responsible agent (most likely DHS) and (2) development and adequate resourcing of appropriate linkages between currently disparate command, management, and communications systems.

The **COP** is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

DEFINING COMMON

Potential – and likely – users of the **COP** include every level of leadership from local first responders thru community, state, regional and federal level; inability to realistically expect that a *single* **COP** would actually suit this broad audience drove many to argue that a common database is more likely to be useful than any particular common depiction. Nonetheless, most accepted that a requirement existed to transcend data alone; universal input had to be combined with an ability to filter, as well as with process(es) that convert data into 'information' and eventually achieve some degree of 'accepted' 'knowledge.'

Maximizing information sharing at an unclassified level is desirable and a clear **COP** goal; members grudgingly accepted, however, that there would always be some information that could not be shared with 'everyone' due to classification or situational sensitivities. To the greatest degree possible such **COP**–related issues of security classification and information protection need to be resolved by appropriate authorities in advance of the incident.

Additional obstacles to creating an accurate **COP** include simply the number of multiple "stovepipes" reporting data, differing institutional cultures, differing degrees of competence among those working the system, and underestimating the actual level of resource commitment required to create the system. Some members argued only Congressional legislation might force the greater interoperability and commonality of processes, systems, and equipment across the breadth and depth of the response communities required to create a truly "common" **COP**.

> **With respect to "Common": who is a member, who inputs information, who adjudicates or resolves disputes, and who protects and provides Information Assurance?**
>
> - Everybody? Local, Tribal, State, Federal, Private Sector virtual community of interests, (all source)
>   – Issues with classification and release
>   – Trusted partnerships
> - Need to evaluate information, cite source, level of reliability, who is responsible?
> - Someone has to convert data into info, and info into knowledge
> - Who owns it (COP)? ➤ DHS National Operations Directorate
> - Need for Goldwater-Nichols type legislation that mandates interoperability, defines relationships and standardize the COP

DEFINING OPERATIONAL

What specific information you want to see in a catastrophic response **COP** very much depends on where in the response architecture one resides. Clearly, however, the **COP** needs to be more than a handy geospatial picture; not simply what's going on *now* but also depicting those things that facilitate situational awareness over a longer term (readiness, logistics, future availabilities, etc.). Thus a correct title for the enterprise is indeed Common *Operational* Picture not Common *Operating* Picture.

Even so, time is a relevant data point throughout the **COP** process: with respect to data entries (ideally "real-time"), with respect to requirements identification, with respect to the likely availability of response capabilities, etc.

A **COP** is likely to best serve if USNORTHCOM's emerging emphasis on "cooperation and coordination" rather than strict lines of 'command and control' form the basis of its construct. It should be complemented with a consistently updated "Common Subject Matter Expert Contact List" to enable rapid verification of data and/or assistance turning tactical data into operational information.

> **With respect to "Operational": what level(s) and categories of information are presented, what level(s) of organization are users / inputers, for what purpose(s)?**
>
> - What you want depends on where you sit
> - Need a Common-SME-Contact-List
> - Filter data bases to build individually mission oriented COPs. Need to input and draw from universal data bases
> - Needs to be a daily use system to ensure effectiveness during crisis

A **COP** could have significant potential as an operational enabler of senior leader strategic communication – but only as a supplement to leaders really knowing and working the human elements at every level, perhaps to include borrowing where-and-whenever possible the idea of "embedded media."[5]

DEFINING PICTURE

No single extent or proposed **COP** entity[6] was perceived as the "best" answer, although there are some recognized critical elements common to each crisis. The need is for both a "big picture" provided by / for NORTHCOM / DHS and a lower

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5. The work group briefly discussed whether, and if so how, to incorporate direct news media inputs into the COP system; no specific conclusions were reached.

6. Although many references to – and a few demonstrations of – different technologies and systems were made during the workshop, the group made a conscious decision early on to refrain from becoming "potentially embroiled in the technological weeds"; the desire was to focus effort on concepts and ideas rather than hardware and software.

With respect to "Picture": how should information be organized or displayed, what mapping or graphical support is required, and what means of transmission and display are most appropriate for participating organizations"?

- All info should be presented in a way to show cause and effect (probability graphs, thresholds)
- Geographical Info System, customizable Dashboard, Drill Down Capability, Geographic Overlay, Real time feed
- Ability to customize to user's need
- Means of transmission - All, Internet, manual, phone, radio
- Establish processes, procedures and standards for data, templates, inputs to NIMS

level "picture opportunity" platform provided by / for the ARNORTH / Regional / State elements. Some members argued for an IT-enabled system fusing the multiple elements via a "button-driven" dashboard that incorporates local info to support "tactical/operational" decisions and resource allocations that is not necessary at the strategic NORTHCOM/HLS level. Such a **COP** can be best developed by creating accepted standards for inputs and outputs and providing analytical support that is readily accessible, rather than dictating the "picture content." Others agreed with the goal of information fusion but felt that a **COP** system should not rely solely on either the internet nor electric power availability since "those are the first to go in a disaster or catastrophe."

Nearly all agreed that DHS should "own" (and set standards for) any national **COP**.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Final Thoughts

- COP is a concept that is particular to the organization and mission
- Need multi-level security
- Need exportability to hand-held devices
- Need to mature all threats – all hazards
- Need to provide a continuum of training and op support
- Need interagency data standards and processes
- Need interagency plans
  - Focused on key decisions
  - Identifies critical information requirements
  - Operational data elements
- Need for enabling legislation that mandates interoperability, defines relationships and standardize COPs

The Workshop produced a better understanding for all participants of the current **COP** efforts and of **COP** challenges and opportunities in an increasingly untidy world. It was apparent that much more progress than many folks imagined already has been made pursuing a Common Operational Picture; those responsible deserve credit.

None of the issues regarding a **COP** for disaster and catastrophic response will simply go away nor fix themselves. The way ahead should include USNORTHCOM and/or the DHS sponsoring a follow-up seminar which incorporates full demonstrations and comparative analyses of the various instrumented displays, perhaps even later in this year.

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http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usacsl/IPapers.asp.

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