

NATO'S APPROACH TO NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF

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INTRODUCTION

All the problems associated with natural disasters have been of great concern to man throughout recorded history. Traditionally they have been dealt with by individuals working independently or in localized voluntary groups. In more recent times national states have undertaken to support research on causes of the natural phenomena that can produce disasters for mankind; to experiment with better forms of building construction to resist the onslaught of adverse natural conditions; to assume more and more responsibility for providing emergency relief and assistance in reconstruction for the victims of natural disasters; to legislate better building codes, stricter zoning or land use plans, insurance programs, etc., which would provide a stronger shield of support against the vagaries of Mother Nature. National private voluntary organizations have also worked abundantly and effectively, especially in emergency relief and in certain areas of basic research.

In the very recent past, concern for the

causes and consequences of natural disasters and possible safeguards against them has moved up to the level of international public bodies and international voluntary agencies. Groupings of private organizations with rather loosely centralized international structures, such as the League of the Red Cross Societies, functioned effectively to provide emergency disaster relief before the international public bodies began to address themselves to these problems. Since the early 1950's, several members of the United Nations family of organizations and some regional organizations, such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), have given more and more attention and growing financial support to solve problems of natural disasters. Research, experimentation with warning systems, conference deliberations for exchange of information, and direct aid to victims of natural disasters through emergency relief, sometimes followed by long-term reconstruction, have been receiving substantial and growing amounts of support in these international bodies.

NATO'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEMS OF NATURAL DISASTERS

President Richard Nixon, in an address at the NATO Ministerial Meeting in Washington,

D.C., on April 10, 1969, recommended that NATO countries develop a "third dimension" of program activity to deal with "our concern for the quality of life in this final third of the twentieth century". The North Atlantic Coun-

cil pursued this idea through discussions during the year and on November 6, 1969 created the Committee on Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS) and charged it with the question of how to improve, in every practical way, the exchange of views and experience among allied countries in the task of creating a better environment for their society and to consider specific problems of the human environment with the deliberate objective of stimulating action by member governments.

On December 8, 1969 the NATO Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS) held its first plenary meeting in Brussels. Since the thrust of the Council's charge to the CCMS stressed the need to create a better human environment it is not surprising that of the original eight specific subjects approved for CCMS study and actions, seven dealt with questions of water pollution, air pollution, highway safety, prevention of oil spills and other "environment" topics.

All of these seven subject areas were on problems directly related to the industrialization and modernization of society. They were concerned with the price paid for "progress" or were problems concomitant with "progress" although in ways not anticipated by the promoters of progress. The remaining topic of study approved at this first meeting of the CCMS was focused on the problems imposed on modern society by natural disasters rather than by the works of man.

Natural disasters certainly are not a modern phenomenon only and they are not peculiar only to industrialized or modernized societies. The impact of natural disasters has been increasingly heavy, however, on modern, industrial societies and the menace to those societies from natural violence is growing and compounding rapidly. This problem area, therefore, fitted clearly the mandate given to the CCMS and also was well within the broad language of Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty (April 4, 1949) charging the parties to the treaty with "promoting conditions of stability and well-being".

The Disaster Assistance Program which was endorsed by the CCMS on December 9, 1969 and approved by the North Atlantic Council on January 28, 1970, was adopted as a result of an initiative of the United States. General George A. Lincoln, Director of Emergency Preparedness in the Executive Office of the President, had stated the need for a NATO project of this kind at the first CCMS plenary meeting. He noted that although several other international bodies, public and private, have for many years provided help to victims of natural disasters, their financial resources and other capabilities had been quite limited. He expressed the opinion that "the massive resources available to NATO members acting in concert... can set NATO countries apart as a unique association for disaster assistance". The high degree of political, cultural and economic unity – and the organizational capability to research, to plan, and to respond operationally – contribute further to NATO's unique capabilities (CCMS, 1972a).

With these and other considerations and premises in mind the CCMS after endorsing the proposed subject asked the United States to serve as the "pilot nation" and Italy as the "co-pilot nation". Turkey was added later as a second co-pilot nation. Some analysis of the premises for this project is in order.

There is first of all the basic premise that natural disasters pose a potential and growing threat to all the NATO member states. No one could quarrel with that obvious situation. The evidence is well documented and increasingly abundant. The issue of natural disasters, their causes and consequences, obviously is an important issue but the critical question is how important is it *relatively*, alongside other current issues that confront the members of NATO? What is its salience for each of them in contemporary times?

The second basic premise is that NATO, through its fledgling Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society, could come to grips with the problems and needs arising from the recurrence of natural disasters in the NATO

member states and perhaps in other areas. This premise seems to be well founded by the Council's charge to the CCMS and by Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty but there are some pendant questions on this premise also. For example, how could the NATO states best meet the need for increased knowledge about natural disasters and for disaster relief assistance? If there are "massive resources available to NATO members" in contrast to the relatively limited resources of other international bodies concerned with exactly the same matters of causes and consequences of natural disasters, would not this need be as well met if NATO members put more resources into some of those older and more experienced disaster research and relief bodies?

All funds for all international bodies, NATO and non-NATO, after all, must come from the pockets of the citizens of the member states of these bodies or from these same citizens in the form of gifts to voluntary agencies concerned with disaster relief. The fact was, and still is, that the states with the greatest resources, public and private, that are members of NATO are also members of all the other international bodies in the UN "family" and outside of it which have dealt with some or all aspects of the significance of natural disasters for contemporary societies. There must be some special reasons then for the NATO members providing support for NATO's program of disaster assistance what could otherwise be as well or better used by non-NATO agencies. This brings us to two more premises advanced by General Lincoln and, by implication at least, endorsed by the CCMS and the North Atlantic Council.

These premises were that in NATO there is a "high degree of political, cultural and economic unity and . . . organizational capability to research, to plan and to respond operationally . . ." These attributes in fact were described as part of "NATO's unique capabilities". Were these premises valid as of December 1969? Have they been valid premises, in the context

of natural disaster affairs, in the years since the disaster assistance program was approved by the NATO Council? Are they valid premises for the near future?

These questions may have been in the minds of the members of the CCMS and of the North Atlantic Council. If they were they did not, obviously, keep the representatives from approving the Disaster Assistance Program. I have seen no documentation that suggests that such questions were discussed formally but very likely they were touched upon by some representatives in informal discussion.

ORGANIZATION AND PLAN OF OPERATION FOR THE NATO DISASTER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

As noted above the United States and Italy were designated the pilot and co-pilot nations for this project. They were appropriate leaders, of course, because both nations are probably the most disaster-prone members of NATO and are among the most disaster-prone of all countries. In variety, number and severity of natural disasters they are, to say the least, highly experienced and their national governments in recent years have been deeply concerned with the problems of the causes and consequences of natural disasters. Turkey, which became a second co-pilot nation later, also qualified on grounds of experience with natural disasters and very recently on governmental concern for a joint leadership role. As project pilot and co-pilots these nations assumed the responsibility to lay out plans for the program, fund most of its costs, see that action resulted from specific projects within a span of a few years and also be the reporter of such actions and of any follow-up activities in the NATO states resulting directly from the Disaster Assistance Program.

The U.S. delegation to the January 28, 1970 meeting of the CCMS set forth its concept of a NATO disaster assistance program. The suggested format for the proposed NATO disaster

assistance program was confined to four broad categories of activity (NATO, 1970a). These categories covered procedures for exchange of information about natural disasters; provision of technical advisers to work with national authorities in the event of natural and “man-made” disasters; a proposed NATO “pool” of relief supplies; and possible coordination of relief efforts by NATO members. It was agreed at this meeting of the CCMS to hold a program planning conference in Rome in early March of 1970, for the disaster assistance project.

On March 10–11, 1970, eight NATO nations interested in this CCMS program met in Rome, hosted by the Italian government, to discuss a possible set of objectives. Substantially the same objectives as those suggested by the United States were approved at Rome and a program of activities was agreed upon (CCMS, 1972a). The emphasis was put on NATO’s ready capability to assist in the coordination of disaster assistance activities among member nations and to stimulate greater interest throughout the NATO community and the wider international community in cooperative efforts designed to improve disaster assistance plans or preparedness programs.

No reference was made in the objectives agreed upon in Rome to the earlier U.S. proposal that NATO might act as a channel for the provision of technically competent advisers to work with national authorities in situations of “unusual” or “man-made disasters”. This was undoubtedly a wise deletion since the range of problems in natural disasters was surely broad enough for this CCMS program without taking on the whole bundle of disasters, “man-made” as well as natural. The Rome agreement also limited possible NATO coordination of disaster relief efforts to “requests for assistance from NATO member countries stricken by a major natural disaster”.

No reference was made specifically in the Rome agreement to possible exchanges of information on “disaster research and scientific advances related to disasters”. This important

objective may have been subsumed under the broader Rome language of “continuing exchange of pertinent information on disaster preparedness,” or in the charge “to recommend concrete, feasible actions, which individual nations could take either in anticipation of a major disaster or to mitigate its effects” (CCMS, 1970a).

A more emphatic endorsement of the need for more research and better distribution of research findings on the causes and possible consequences of natural disasters, might well have been made one of the project’s major objectives. NATO’s involvement directly and indirectly with the western world’s science community could have been a major asset to the program and one to be capitalized upon later for its overall purposes. This was an area of possible “unique capabilities” for NATO.

One other possible deficiency in the determination of the program’s objectives was the very basic question as to whether or not NATO nations, or other nations, really want their responses to disasters in other countries “coordinated” by any international body, public or private. A reading of the world press, and of official government statements, at the time aid is being sent to disaster-stricken countries often suggests quite clearly that governments perceive various possible political advantages in bi-lateral responses, or a decision not to respond, to requests for help by other nations.

There is much similarity in these situations to the ways in which governments have provided, or withheld, aid for economic development with a pronounced preference for full independence of choice of action, or inaction, and resort usually to bilateral arrangements for their participation. “Coordination” is a beguiling abstraction which, however, is often an unrealistic concept in the arena of world politics. The apparent logic of “coordination” is not always persuasive to the operators of power politics and disaster relief response, alas, is no exception in this regard.

The pilot (U.S.) and co-pilot soon happily

agreed upon an emphasis that offered “practical recommendations of general applicability” and decided to focus on two major areas of concern in the field of natural disasters, namely, flood mitigation and the reduction of hazards by earthquakes. It was agreed by the other national representatives at the CCMS Rome meeting that there would be an international symposium on flood mitigation to be hosted by Italy (at Venice) in October of 1970 and a meeting of experts on earthquake hazard reduction to be hosted by the United States (at San Francisco) in May 1971.

It was agreed also at the Rome meeting to undertake as a third program objective the updating of a 1958 North Atlantic Council policy document on “NATO Cooperation for Disaster Relief in Peacetime” (NATO, 1958). This document covers most of the concepts of information exchange and coordination of disaster relief efforts envisioned in the basic objectives of the CCMS Disaster Assistance Program so to a considerable degree its revision was not a new initiative nor one as sharply focused as the proposed two conferences on major types of natural disasters.

On June 2–3, 1970 representatives from seven NATO countries met at the NATO headquarters in Brussels to draw up an agenda for the meeting on flood mitigation. In the following two days a group drawn from five NATO countries met also in Brussels and drew up plans for the meeting of experts on earthquake hazard reduction. This speedy follow-up of the decisions of the Rome meeting augured well for both of these conferences despite the quite limited number of member nations participating in planning or offering suggestions for these meetings. Since major floods have been experienced in all NATO nations and disastrous earthquakes in about half of the member states, a larger number of participant planners might have been anticipated.

This perhaps was an early sign of the drawbacks of the “à la carte” approach to the projects of the CCMS as well as an indication,

perhaps, of something less than the amount of NATO unity which General Lincoln had claimed at the January 1970 meeting of the CCMS. Other current CCMS projects may have diverted the attention of some of the member states, but whatever the cause, the pattern of only partial participation by the NATO membership emerged at an early point in the history of this CCMS program on disaster assistance.

The Meeting of Experts on Flood Mitigation

From the 19th to the 23rd of October, 1970, some 90 experts from 12 NATO member states and from several other international bodies met to consider five major topics related to flood problems. The topics were: a) reduction of flood hazards; b) prediction and warning of floods; c) emergency operations resulting from floods; d) rehabilitation programs for areas suffering major floods; and e) the possible role of governments, universities, industry and voluntary organizations in researching and coping with flood causes and consequences.

Fifty-five presentations were made or summarized and later published (CCMS, 1971a), along with other short summaries of information on various topics related to floods, sea surges and tsunamis plus references to various governments’ published documents on these subjects. The papers varied greatly in subject matter, length and quality, some being careful, scientific studies while others were resumes of government laws and organizations for dealing with flood problems.

Half of the presentations were made by representatives or agencies of the pilot nation, the United States (12) and the co-pilot and host, Italy (15). Canada made 11 and Belgium eight, hence these four countries made about four-fifths of all the presentations and the remainder were made by Germany (4), United Kingdom (4), and the Netherlands (1).

Again, this is a revealing commentary on the breadth of the commitment of NATO member states to this pioneering project on a topic of

obvious importance to all. It was a less substantial response than the subject deserved and the commitment undertaken.

The *conference recommendations* stressed: a) the need for more research on the lower atmosphere in order to increase the precision of forecasting problems related to rapidly rising waters; b) a better system within NATO for exchanges of technical information and scientific personnel concerned with problems of flood mitigations; and c) more adequate procedures to coordinate international assistance, within NATO and outside, whenever major natural disasters occur. In brief, the conference conclusions were the familiar trilogy of needs: more research knowledge, more exchange of information and personnel, and more coordinated responses to the consequences of disasters, including better preparedness plans.

The CCMS approved the recommendations of the Venice meeting and the NATO Council subsequently (May 1971) noted the report of the meeting and accepted the conference recommendations (NATO, 1971a). Member states were asked to report later to the pilot country what actions were being taken to implement in their countries the recommendations of the Venice conference. Italy undertook to plan a meeting to consider methods used in low altitude meteorological forecasting but no date was set.

Meeting on Earthquake Hazard Reduction

Well before the conference on flood mitigation had taken place planning had been initiated for a spring, 1971, conference in San Francisco on earthquake hazard reduction. On June 4–5, 1970 representatives of five NATO nations met in Brussels to draw up an agenda for this meeting. Turkey joined the U.S. and Italy as co-sponsors of this meeting and as a co-pilot nation for the Disaster Assistance Program. Invitations to send observers to this meeting were extended to 20 non-NATO countries and to 15 international organizations.

The conference in San Francisco was held May 20–25, 1971 with some 170 listed participants comprised of engineers, seismologists, other scientists, urban planners, disaster relief experts and assorted public officials and representatives of various international organizations: There were more non-NATO nations (nine) represented at the meeting than there were NATO states of which there were only eight: Canada, Denmark, The Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Turkey, and the United States. For at least two of these eight (Greece and Denmark) representation appeared to be quite perfunctory by designating their consuls resident in San Francisco as their official delegates to the meeting. NATO states with very small delegations were Portugal and the Federal Republic of Germany. Iceland, which has suffered from earthquakes, was not represented, nor was France which had experienced several earthquakes of mild severity in 1968, and the violent quake in Arethe in August 1967. The non-participation of Belgium, Norway, and the United Kingdom was also notable since all three countries had experienced mild earthquakes in the previous five years with serious earthquakes recorded in their histories.

Perhaps this substantial non-participation in the San Francisco conference reflects a general characteristic of attitudes toward natural disasters and the concern they cause citizens and public officials alike. Traumatic natural phenomena are a sometime thing; they may have happened in the past, they *could* happen again, but everybody hopes he won't be the victim of such an event in the future, and that negative hope blunts the need to think and plan affirmatively for such an eventuality. Seemingly more urgent and apparently more obvious needs push back the priority standing of natural disaster concerns — even to the extent of non-participation in a unique conference such as this CCMS meeting in San Francisco.

Sixty-eight conference papers and references to relevant government publications were published by the CCMS (CCMS, 1971b). As

with the Venice conference, the papers were of very uneven quality but a number of good studies were presented. Some documents were only abstracts of previously published studies.

The recommendations growing out of this conference included: a) better land-use planning, b) more adequate structural design to reduce building vulnerability to earthquakes, c) stricter building codes to achieve more security from earthquakes, and d) improved warning systems. The need for more efficient emergency operations and better long-term recovery programs also were covered in the conference recommendations.

Inherent in many of the findings and recommendations was the obvious need for an increase in the number and the capability of persons engaged in research on the nature of earthquakes and how to reduce the hazards from such events. In this regard an international technical training center was proposed to train persons from earthquake-prone nations and to facilitate the exchange of information relevant to earthquake-caused disasters.

The report of the conference also recommended stronger support for the work of United Nations agencies, especially for the work of UNESCO in its seismological research; more advance warning and reporting programs; and for an expanded UN role in general in the area of disaster assistance. It might be noted here that the United Kingdom and Turkey had been prominent advocates in the UN (in ECOSOC especially) for a more prominent and more central UN role in international disaster relief work.

The CCMS accepted the conference report and it was formally approved in the North Atlantic Council on January 12, 1972. The United States, as pilot country for the Disaster Assistance Program, was charged with reporting periodically on follow-up action. Turkey offered "in principle" to provide the technical training center in Ankara in cooperation with other NATO countries and other interested international bodies (NATO, 1971b). As of late

1974 the center was still only in the discussion-planning stage.

Updated NATO Policy and Procedures for Disaster Assistance

As noted earlier it was agreed by the CCMS, at the planning meeting in Rome of March 10–11, 1970, to undertake a review and possible revision of the 1958 North Atlantic Council policy document (C-M(58)102) which had provided detailed procedures for NATO cooperation for emergency disaster assistance in peacetime. This document embodied policy and operational procedures developed by the NATO Civil Defence Committee dating back to 1953.

Following exchanges of correspondence and staff discussions between the NATO Directorate for Civil Emergency Planning and the U.S. pilot country, a draft "Standing Instructions for an International Staff Disaster Assistance Coordinating Officer" was ready for CCMS review by autumn 1970 (NATO, 1970b). Italy also participated as a co-pilot in the project as it proceeded through further review in late 1971. On February 25, 1971 the NATO Civil Emergency Planning Committee received a report by the pilot and co-pilot representatives and sent it on to the CCMS. After more reviews by other Council committees, the much reviewed and revised document was approved by the CCMS on November 10, 1971, and accepted by the Council on January 12, 1972 (NATO, 1971c).

The policy statement recognized the long-standing practice of bi-lateral governmental procedures for requesting and providing disaster relief. It proposed an improvement upon this traditional practice, especially for governmental activity, by using the NATO communications system for exchanges of information on the facts and consequent needs of specific disaster situations with a view to providing more of what the disaster victims need and avoiding duplication of effort and/or

delays that often result from ad hoc responses by governments and voluntary bodies.

The need for more effective national preparedness plans was recognized and the policy statement authorized NATO experts from its Civil Defence Committee to help provide guidance to interested nations in the improvement of their disaster preparedness plans. No commitment was made by this document for NATO to provide disaster relief supplies in specific disaster situations but support personnel might be authorized, however, if requested by a stricken member country.

When the Council approved in January 1972 this revised NATO policy statement on disaster relief assistance, the three projects agreed upon at Rome had been carried out although much remained to be done to follow up on the two conferences and to implement the new disaster assistance policy statement. Since less than two years had elapsed after the Rome planning meeting, this CCMS program was quite an exception to the usual dilatory pace of multilateral undertakings. The Disaster Assistance Program was declared officially completed May 15, 1972. It was the first undertaking by the CCMS to be so identified. As of late 1974 only the U.S., Italy, Turkey, Canada, Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Norway made significant reports (filed in the order listed) on actions taken to follow up on the recommendations of the Venice and San Francisco CCMS conferences and *Document CM(58)102*, 1971 edition. The first three listed were, of course, the pilot and co-pilot countries for this program. On October 4, 1974 the pilot country advised other CCMS members that it was terminating further formal follow-up reporting on this project (CCMS, 1974) after having filed two successive annual reports (CCMS, 1972b and CCMS, 1973).

The rather meager reporting of follow-up actions taken by the NATO states on the disaster prevention and/or response recommendations arising from this CCMS program under-

scores the factor of salience of this issue on a comparative scale with other pressing contemporary issues. Besides the issues addressed in the other CCMS pilot studies there have been, of course, many other high priority problems for all of the NATO countries. In all of them increased economic development for purposes of improved economic and social well-being and greater national strength tops the list of all current issues. This objective has been greatly compromised by the impact of energy shortages. Related to this profoundly important and pressing concern are sub-issues such as the flight of labor from some NATO countries to others; the critical problems of inflation; unevenly distributed economic benefits within the NATO states; and uneven overall economic development among different regions of individual countries and as between some members of NATO as compared with other member states.

Besides these economic problems of grave importance, many NATO states have been contending with pressing problems of political stability. Some governments at times have been almost paralyzed because of the general inability of very shaky coalition governments and hence unable to take decisive and sustained strong action on the economic and social problems they confront. Among the NATO states there have been serious political tensions severely straining the cohesion and effectiveness of the organization.

It should be noted also that by 1970–71, when the CCMS was started, many other international organizations were engaged in research; in drafting model building codes and studying other measures directed at problems related to floods (and other water-caused disasters), earthquakes and other types of natural disasters. To be sure much more needed to be done, but it might be argued that it would have been better to have put the same resources that went into the NATO conference projects to work in the existing multilateral bodies or national research agencies already engaged in

studying these same problems. "Scatteration" of limited resources rarely, if ever, produces better results or more satisfaction of recognized needs.

Within individual NATO member states there also was a very wide range of ongoing research activity by 1970–71 on the three problem areas that the CCMS Disaster Assistance Program chose for its agenda. A reading of the two conference reports (especially the papers by government officials) shows how much was being done to better understand and better cope with the phenomena of flooding waters or earthquakes. Much more needed to be done to develop more precise prediction and more adequate warning capabilities regarding these phenomena but the use of NATO for such purposes was a questionable decision.

Looking back, one can see that the CCMS program on disaster assistance was conceived with the highest motives, that it pursued its goals with abundant vigor and commitment by many officials of several of the NATO states and by several members of NATO's secretariat, and that it achieved much of its stated objective (as outlined in the Rome CCMS meeting in March 1970) in a remarkably speedy fashion. What the subsequent impact of all this effort and structure has been is much more difficult to measure or to forecast.

In the course of many interviews with government officials in national governments and members of the staffs of international bodies (UNESCO, FAO and WHO), and numerous individuals in the private, voluntary relief agencies, I found a common opinion that NATO's entry into natural disaster relief activity was unnecessary, somewhat presumptuous and a further dispersion of resources for such work. The image of NATO as a military organization turned off some observers, especially those active in voluntary relief agencies.

Some government officials recognized a possible role for NATO in disaster relief but were irked by the repeated calls from NATO (or the pilot country) for reports on actions

taken by their governments to implement the CCMS recommendations on flood control and reduction of hazards from earthquakes. They complained that their small bureaucracies could not keep up with the flood of NATO/CCMS recommendations for various actions and reporting on such recommended actions.

Will the efforts and zeal of those who produced the potentially helpful recommendations and guidelines for dealing with natural disasters be overlooked in the crush and crunch of more immediate and more pervasive economic and political crises? No one can answer for certain except much later in retrospect. Perhaps at this juncture one can best conclude that this NATO (CCMS) effort was well worth the making and the fruit of much labor is there for the using. Mayhaps, as with military preparedness, it is fitting to say of NATO's disaster preparedness efforts "It is better to be ready and not go, than go and not be ready." NATO at least is ready.

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*All documents listed are "unclassified" and were supplied to me by officials of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Brussels.