
Donor countries as aid recipients: the USA, New Zealand and the lessons of Hurricane Katrina

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Abstract: This study addresses the watershed case of the USA as large-scale international aid recipient following Hurricane Katrina, and its policy impact upon New Zealand's national disaster management planning in the same sphere. In both instances, countries more accustomed to playing the role of humanitarian benefactors were compelled to recognise a new global paradigm in which donor governments must also prepare for the contingency of being external aid beneficiaries. This paper further asserts that a binary approach of global donors and recipients is essentially irrelevant today and that all countries – wherever their position on the global wealth rankings – need to proactively develop sound legal and policy frameworks for incoming humanitarian assistance. To better appreciate this latter point, the study begins with a brief overview of contemporary global humanitarian assistance flows and motives for state aid offers and refusals.

Keywords: international assistance; disaster relief; humanitarian assistance; emergency management; Hurricane Katrina; Christchurch earthquake; New Zealand; aid donors; aid recipients; FEMA; federal emergency management agency.

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"Look, the fact is that we received a lot of very generous offers from people at the time of Katrina. It was a new circumstance. The United States is, frankly, not accustomed to receiving large-scale foreign assistance offers."

– US Secretary of State
Condoleezza Rice¹

"It was my impression that [Civil Defence in New Zealand] had fallen into slumber land ... It was the Boxing Day [2004] Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina that woke people up."

– New Zealand Minister of Civil Defence and Emergency Management
Rick Barker²

1 Introduction

Hurricane Katrina is ranked as one of the five deadliest hurricanes ever to hit the USA and one of the most destructive of any natural disaster in US history (Blake et al., 2011; Office of the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security, 2006). After striking southern Florida as a Category 1 on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale, this large storm traversed the Gulf Coast and made landfall in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana on Monday, 29 August, 2005. It came ashore as a Category 3 storm, with 115 miles per hour (mph) sustained winds and gusts topping 130 mph. While wind damage was significant, Katrina is also historically recognised as an extreme storm surge and flooding event, with surge rises between 20–30 feet. Ultimately 93,000 square miles would be devastated, particularly in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama (Office of the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security, 2006; Knabb et al., 2005). Hurricane Katrina was a disaster marked by 'hypercomplexity' as Lagadec explains:

“Katrina caused persistent flooding, a series of industrial disasters, critical evacuation challenges, widespread lethal pollution, the destruction of 90% of the essential utility networks (energy, communications, water etc.), unprecedented public safety concerns, concern over the possible loss of the port area (which is essential to the continent's economy), even uncertainty as to whether portions of the city could be saved.” (Lagadec, 2008, p.7)

The geographic and sectorial scale of Katrina's destruction was immense, but it was the photo images and video coming out of the city of New Orleans – a community built below sea level – which especially humanised the disaster and riveted Americans and the rest of the world. Katrina's eye actually passed to the east of the city, but its consequent storm surge was so massive, that it caused major sections of the city's 350 mile levee system to catastrophically fail. Eighty percent of the city became inundated, with flood depths reaching as high as 20 feet (Knabb et al., 2005). As the water submerged residences, many of them with only one floor, stranded citizens climbed out onto their rooftops and clung to trees, desperately waiting to be rescued. Local and federal authorities were underprepared for and overwhelmed by the extent of the destruction wrought by the storm along the coast. Moreover, cameras captured New Orleans' extreme social vulnerabilities along economic, racial and age lines: “News coverage of the aftermath in the city of New Orleans revealed that individuals and families left behind were overwhelmingly African American, low-income, and in poor health” (Berube and Katz, 2005).

Katrina's gripping images paired with a pervasive international media characterisation of a paralysed US Government response (Press Dismay at Katrina Chaos, 2005), galvanised an unprecedented worldwide outpouring of humanitarian aid offers to the USA. In total, over 150 countries and international organisations made relief overtures (Richard, 2006). The George W. Bush Administration found itself confronting an entirely new host of challenges related to the official Katrina response, its immense domestic concerns now compounded by a foreign policy predicament on an extraordinary scale: what to do with the greatest expression of international financial, material and technical assistance ever made to the USA?

Finding itself in the unfamiliar role of aid recipient following Katrina, the relief deluge profoundly challenged the USA legally, politically and administratively. Yet this paper will show that the 2005 disaster marked a major policy turning point for one of the world's most influential donor countries. Post-Katrina Washington recognised that its national emergency preparedness framework must also encompass readiness to receive external assistance. This study will also highlight the impact that the US experience had upon another major player in the international humanitarian sector, New Zealand. Heeding US lessons learned related to incoming assistance and revisiting its own policies in the same sphere, Wellington's updated framework was put to the test during its devastating 2011 Christchurch earthquake.

We contend more broadly that the US and New Zealand experiences are emblematic of a larger sea change within the international humanitarian aid landscape. In short, wealthier, disaster-affected countries can also be beneficiaries of external humanitarian aid. And while this dynamic existed prior to 2005 – including cases such as Japan's 1995 devastating Kobe earthquake – it was the sight of the USA as beneficiary that pivotally and irrevocably turned this traditionally held notion about who gets international assistance on its head. Accordingly, a binary approach of global donors and recipients is essentially irrelevant today and that all countries – wherever their position on the global

wealth rankings – need to proactively develop sound legal and policy frameworks for incoming humanitarian assistance. To better appreciate this latter point, the study begins with a brief overview of contemporary global humanitarian assistance flows and motives for state aid offers and refusals.

2 The old myths and new realities of global humanitarian assistance

One central quality in defining a disaster is that the event causes damage to such a degree that it outstrips the community's capacity to respond within the scope of its own available resources (United Nations International Strategy on Disaster Reduction, 2009). The community involved may be a small city or an entire country. In the latter case, international assistance may be required to manage the disaster's aftermath.

The outside aid can assume many forms, including monetary or material donations, or technical expertise, like search and rescue or emergency medical support. Distribution channels also vary. Assistance may be sent by foreign governments or by their citizens, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organisations and even private corporations. Aid possibly will be designated directly to the affected government, domestic private organisations or to the impacted population (Coppola, 2015).

Diverse aid conduits are just one subset of challenges making quantifying and comparing international aid patterns and trends exceedingly difficult. For decades, the standard reference point for identifying the major global aid players has been official monetary assistance provided by the member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC), which stands at 29 states as of 2014 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, nd). The long accepted maxim held that the significant aid players were always DAC countries while non-DAC states were perennial recipients. By the late 1990s, 90% of bilateral humanitarian funds (measured by sheer amounts, not adjusted per capita) were even more heavily concentrated than the overall DAC membership. Official aid was provided by just 10 DAC governments alone, with the USA responsible for over 30% of that total in 1998. The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK rounded out the top five (Development Initiatives, 2000).

However by the mid-2000s, the conventional wisdom regarding donor-recipient flows began to be challenged in several different respects. In 2005, an observable, longer range uptick of humanitarian assistance sent by non-DAC states was confirmed, even when adjusted for one time donations related to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Emerging players included the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Kuwait, Turkey, China and India (Development Initiatives, 2005). Humanitarian aid contributions from non-DAC member governments increased 20 fold between 2000 and 2010 (Whiting, 2012).

This overall trend has only continued to accelerate. In 2013, non-DAC members gave their highest level of total contributions ever, comprising 14% of total government assistance conferred that year. Among all DAC and non-DAC state aid providers in 2013, Turkey ranked third for individual country donors, while still just two years earlier it had received its highest levels of humanitarian assistance since 2000 (Development Initiatives, 2013, 2014; UNOCHA, 2013).

This blurring of traditional donor-recipient lines can be partly attributed to the growing economic and political influence of non-DAC states. It is also due to significant

changes in data collection from these governments in which previous giving may have been underreported related to international data models used by the OECD and other institutions (Smith, 2011). Nonetheless the mid-2000s also began to reveal new realities for the long established benefactors too. In 2005, when Hurricane Katrina struck, the USA was the overwhelmingly leading global provider of humanitarian assistance in terms of sheer monetary amounts, and in fact between 2003 and 2013 gave one third of all contributions (Development Initiatives, 2013). Yet during the August 2005 disaster, it ultimately found itself in the position of issuing appeals for external assistance, as will be further examined in this study's next section. In 2010, DAC member New Zealand had been ranked third worldwide in humanitarian donor best practices according to *The Humanitarian Response Index* (DARA, 2010), but by February of the following year the government required outside support to address the damage caused by the Christchurch earthquake. And while Japan began 2011 as the world's fifth largest humanitarian aid donor, it became the top international aid beneficiary following its March earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster (Watts and Borger, 2011).

Wherever a country sits regarding world humanitarian rankings, the motives for providing aid in the wake of a disaster are as diverse as the givers themselves. A popular misconception is that international disaster relief operates in a neutral, apolitical space (Barnett, 2011). The reality though is far more complex. In one of the more exhaustive studies of its kind, Fink and Redaelli (2011) analysed aid sent by OECD members during 270 natural disasters occurring between 1992 and 2004. The authors found that donor countries made decisions based on numerous factors which substantially differed in each context depending on both the sending-receiving states involved as well as the nature of the event itself. Considerations ranged from the geographic proximity between potential benefactor and beneficiary to whether other major aid providers were also taking action. The authors label this latter pattern as 'bandwagoning' or 'herding': "On average, the likelihood to provide aid after a natural emergency increases by 15–33 percentage points when any other major donor participates in the aid process" (Fink and Redaelli, 2011, p.742).

Kelman (2012), in his extensive work on the subject of 'disaster diplomacy', has determined that countries with weak or non-existent diplomatic relationships will often engage in a complicated interplay related to humanitarian overtures. On the one hand, it may be one piece of a substantive larger effort to further improve relations between them. On the other, the government's assistance offer may be more simply motivated by a desire to score political points by embarrassing its adversary.

Legal commitments through mutual aid agreements also inform government responses to international disasters. These pacts work to reduce the inefficiencies of ad-hoc cross-border assistance by structuring key elements of the response in advance, and may have a multi-hazard focus or be tailored to a particular event type (wildfires, flooding, etc.). An agreement's scope might be applicable to the entire country or only shared geographic spaces such as mountain chains. Provisions typically cover communication channels for aid requests, types of support to be provided, command and control protocols, border crossing regulations and cost sharing arrangements. Most common are bilateral agreements between neighbouring states or ones in close proximity, and are significantly concentrated in the USA and Europe, but not exclusively so. There are also numerous regional and subregional arrangements worldwide (de Guttery, 2012).

The disaster affected government's decision to accept, reject or delay incoming assistance is no less influenced by a host of variables. One of the most dramatic contemporary examples of aid refusal, at least initially, was that by the Myanmar military regime following the 2008 Cyclone Nargis, which may have killed nearly 140,000 people (Belanger and Horsey, 2008). However aid rejections are in no way limited to closed, undemocratic states. Governments of every political profile seek to convey an image of being in charge; capable of handling their own internal affairs without outside help. And paradoxically, the worse the disaster, the more global media attention it might draw, and the more a government may become recalcitrant in accepting the help (Nelson, 2010). As Nelson writes:

“These are the bullhorn moments, such as those that occurred for President George W. Bush and Mayor Rudy Guilliani [sic] after the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, that can send a signal of competence and resolve to one's domestic population.” (Nelson, 2010, p.386)

States will often find it politically expedient to rebuff aid offers from antagonistic governments, yet customs, immigration and other domestic regulations may make it difficult – if not impossible – for a country to accept needed donations even from its closest allies. The International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent has documented scores of contemporary examples where aid was refused, delayed or undistributed – by countries spanning from Indonesia to the USA – even when that assistance was desired. Border obstacles include customs clearances, animal quarantines (for search and rescue dogs) and technical regulations pertaining to food, telecommunication equipment and transportation imports as well as international financial transfers. Given the multi-faceted nature of disaster relief, numerous domestic governmental bodies will correspondingly be involved, even regarding a single donation type. One entering food item, for instance, may require simultaneous approval from governmental entities responsible for foreign affairs, health, agriculture, consumer protection, trade and domestic emergency management. As the study's author, Fisher explains:

“While most states have disaster laws and/or plans of some sort, few have put sufficient advance thought into how to balance local control with the need for any international assistance that is required to be as speedy as possible. Instead, these dilemmas are commonly addressed for the first time in the charged and chaotic environment immediately following a disaster. This results in ad hoc rule-making, confusion and delay just when it can least be afforded.” (Fisher, 2007, p.14)

For the USA after Hurricane Katrina, its willingness and preparedness to accept external relief further hinged upon another dynamic unique to its own context. Put simply, it was commonly held that in only the most extreme, nearly unimaginable circumstance would the USA – one of the world's most powerful countries and consistently the top aid donor – ever become an international humanitarian aid *recipient*. One American official even held that “FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] managers anticipated using international aid only during a period of martial law in the United States” (Richard, 2006, p.11). Katrina would not only shatter US complacency in this regard, but conclusively tear down the wall between global aid ‘donors’ and ‘recipients’.

3 ‘We were not prepared’: the USA, Hurricane Katrina and international assistance

“Unlike many other countries, the US government has previously neither asked for nor accepted disaster assistance directly from foreign countries, choosing instead to direct offers of assistance to nongovernmental organizations such as the Red Cross” (United States Government Accountability Office, 2006). The phrasing employed in the US Government’s 2006 post-Katrina report – “neither asked for nor accepted” – is highly intentional. For it was not the first time that the international community proffered assistance to the USA following a natural disaster, with numerous examples dating back to the 1889 Johnstown Flood and the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake (Hannigan, 2012). However these external aid offers tended to be highly sporadic and limited in scale. Accordingly, when Katrina hit, the USA had few federal policies and procedures in place for addressing humanitarian assistance from abroad.

The prevailing legislative framework in place at the time of Katrina was, and continues to be, the 1988 Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, commonly known as the ‘Stafford Act’. Stafford outlines the procedures for a domestic disaster declaration and grants authority to the President or his delegate to accept and use donations. FEMA is delegated as the official governmental agency tasked with responding to disasters within the USA. Formerly an independent entity, it was absorbed into the newly created Department of Homeland Security (DHS) following the 11 September, 2001 terrorist attacks. The only explicit reference to cross-border assistance contained in the Stafford Act is that of mutual aid pacts with ‘neighbouring countries’ Canada and Mexico, with an emphasis on providing support to bordering US states (Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 2013).

In 2005, the controlling executive branch policy document outlining the responsibilities of various federal agencies in case of a declared emergency was the 2004 National Response Plan (NRP). On the subject of international aid donations specifically, the plan directed the US Department of State (DOS) to coordinate aid proffers from abroad, while FEMA was assigned the responsibility of accepting the assistance and managing its distribution. No provision in the NRP addressed how material donations in particular would actually enter the USA. Policy judgement calls as to which agency was responsible would rise to the level of the Homeland Security Council and the National Security Council (United States Government Accountability Office, 2006).

This was the system in place when Hurricane Katrina came ashore. Awestruck by what they were witnessing, governments abroad began making the first international overtures of assistance on the very day Katrina hit the Gulf Coast on August 29, arriving initially from Canada, France and Honduras (Richard, 2006). These early donations were the initial wave of what would become a historically unprecedented avalanche of humanitarian assistance ever offered to the USA. Donation overtures jumped from seven the day after Katrina made landfall to 122 by September 9 (State Department South, 2005). In total, 151 countries or international organisations would make financial or material offers to the USA in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane. Motives behind the proposed contributions ranged from the desire to give back to a country that had been a major aid benefactor to embarrassing the USA for propaganda value (Richard, 2006).

Confronted by this aid inundation, coordinating government agencies strained to develop procedures consistent with the 2004 NRP. While the State Department immediately volunteered to assist FEMA, “this quick action did not mean that State or

FEMA had any idea of what to do with the donations” (Richard, 2006, p.6). At the time of Katrina, no formal system existed to evaluate the suitability of unsolicited tenders from abroad. The principal US Government agency possessing experience in responding to international disasters, the Office of Foreign Developmental Assistance (OFDA) within the US Agency for International Development (USAID), had on no prior occasion utilised its vast expertise actually within the USA. Additionally, FEMA’s International Affairs Office, now tasked by the Agency to address incoming requests, had originally been mandated to assist *other* countries in developing response plans. It “was not itself set up to operate in an emergency” (Richard, 2006, p.11). Despite these drawbacks, an ad-hoc interagency group was quickly established comprising of the State and Defence departments along with FEMA’s International Affairs Office and OFDA. In the month following Katrina’s landfall, the US Government would accept offers from 108 countries and organisations (State Department South, 2005).

Assistance worked most efficiently when grounded in previous intergovernmental understandings, including military to military coordination. For example, Washington on 4 September initially requested food and then later the same day, medicine and logistical supplies, from NATO’s Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center. NATO provided a liaison to OFDA/FEMA to coordinate these efforts (State Department South, 2005). Altogether 39 countries would respond affirmatively to the US appeal for help under NATO auspices. An air transport operation was launched between Germany’s Ramstein Air Base and Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas, the latter having been designated as an international staging hub. Twelve NATO flights would ultimately bring almost 189 tons of donated materials to Little Rock during its 21 day mission (NATO, 2005).

Neighbouring Canada’s extensive support was also partially guided by arrangements in place beforehand. Under prior agreement, a liaison officer from Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (PSEPC) was already seconded to the US Department of Homeland Security at the time of Katrina. Consultation occurred rather quickly between PSEPC and FEMA and Ottawa soon launched ‘Operation Unison’. In addition to the delivery of cash and materials, Canada sent many specialised teams. These included a heavy USAR unit from Vancouver which rescued 119 people in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana before the first US teams arrived on the scene. Moreover, private companies such as Air Canada delivered planeloads of water and then helped evacuate New Orleanians from the city. The Canadians further dispatched three warships and a Coast Guard vessel; the latter which assumed designated US Coast Guard functions under prior agreement with Washington (Scanlon et al., 2012). The Canadian ships also transported supplies and hundreds of sailors, structural engineers, construction professionals, logistics personnel and dive teams to help in clearing debris from clogged regional waterways in and around New Orleans. The three warships eventually anchored off of Biloxi, Mississippi, where Canadian work parties joined their US and Mexican counterparts in the affected zones. As Scanlon et al. (2012, p.62) note, “it aptly demonstrated how two allies can work together ... and it was the first step toward US Northern Command and Canada Command working together”.

Fellow neighbour Mexico also played a significant role, although with less mutual assistance protocols in place. As US diplomat Kelly (2015), stationed in Mexico City later recalled, there was a “mad scramble to get Washington to say yes, to figure out how to admit more than 200 military personnel without passports or visas, and to recognise that the Mexican army, traditionally one of the most nationalistic and anti-American

elements in the Mexican government, was making an extraordinary gesture". These Mexican military units included engineers, doctors and nurses who tended to Katrina survivors in San Antonio, Texas. Others based on two Mexican naval vessels assisted elsewhere along the Gulf Coast, notably participating in cleanup operations in Biloxi. The Mexican Government also supplied tons of food, water and mobile surgical and kitchen equipment to the relief efforts (Kelly, 2015). Katrina in fact marked the first time that Washington had ever accepted help from Mexico during a disaster (Tiefenbacher and Hagelman, 2008).

The Bush Administration also declined scores of offers. The ad-hoc interagency group assessing international donations turned down numerous proposals for external military support, specialised assistance (such as USAR teams) and material items from friends including Greece, Finland and South Korea. As Solomon and Hsu (2007) report, Washington even "declined 54 of 77 recorded aid offers from three of its staunchest allies: Canada, Britain and Israel". Proposed donations by adversarial countries such as oil from Iran and Venezuela and doctors and medical supplies from Cuba were also rejected (van der Linde, 2008).

Given both the unprecedented nature of the Katrina disaster itself as well as the unaccustomed international proffers of assistance, the ad hoc group managed many things well under very trying circumstances. However, there were some missteps along the way. Among the more publicised shortcomings was the acceptance of food and medical supplies which were later deemed unsuitable for use in the USA. These subsequent decisions were made all the more diplomatically uncomfortable because they had been extended by close US allies such as the UK, Germany and Italy. In one case, some 200,000 British Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) had reached distribution points in the USA, only to be recalled at the last minute. US Department of Agriculture inspectors determined that they contained meat banned in the US due to concerns over Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) or 'Mad Cow Disease'. Similarly German MREs were denied entry into the USA because they were not certified BSE-free, despite the fact that US soldiers ate comparable meals during joint exercises with their German counterparts in Afghanistan. Medical supplies from Italy were not utilised because they lacked English labelling. In the meantime, the US Government incurred considerable storage costs before the unused goods were either passed on to non-US parties or eventually destroyed. Their ultimate disposal made the original decision to accept the products even more diplomatically difficult to justify. As the US Government Accounting Office Report (GAO) (2006, p.23) concluded, "there is an unquantifiable cost in the diplomatic impact of rejecting foreign donations after they have been received".

Other challenges included the lack of a tracking system confirming that sanctioned assistance actually reached intended destinations within the USA (United States Government Accountability Office, 2006). Indeed, some material items arrived on foreign military transport planes (mostly from NATO countries) without any FEMA, State or Defence oversight (United States Government Accountability Office, 2006). In the area of pledged cash or easily convertible commodities such as oil, some estimates suggest that over \$700 million in promised overseas assistance went initially uncollected by Washington (Solomon and Hsu, 2007). Many frustrated foreign governments later directed these donations to private organisations, Gulf Coast universities or NGOs such as the American Red Cross or the Bush/Clinton Katrina Fund. Even with the \$125 million in cash collected by the US Government, there were long delays in fund disbursement to hurricane survivors and organisations (Solomon and Hsu, 2007).

4 The USA as aid recipient: the international assistance system (IAS)

In the post-Katrina aftermath, the Bush administration did not grow complacent about the possibility that the USA might require future international aid. In the first (of many) major reviews of the Katrina response, a February 2006 report undertaken on President Bush's instructions stated:

“We were not prepared to make the best use of foreign support. Some foreign governments sought to contribute aid that the United States could not accept or did not require. In other cases, needed resources were tied up by bureaucratic red tape. But more broadly, we lacked the capability to prioritize and integrate such a large quantity of foreign assistance into the ongoing response. Absent an implementation plan for the prioritization and integration of foreign material assistance, valuable resources went unused, and many donor countries became frustrated. While we ultimately overcame these obstacles amidst the crisis, our experience underscores the need for pre-crisis planning.” (Office of the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security, 2006, p.62)

To that end, the DOS and DHS were jointly tasked with leading an interagency effort to provide additional operational direction to the NRP's International Coordination Support Annex.

The result was the creation of the international assistance system (IAS), which expanded upon the ad-hoc procedures initiated during Katrina. Managed by FEMA, in close cooperation with the State Department, the IAS framework charted the US course of action in both requesting particular types of international assistance and processing foreign donation offers following a Stafford Act declaration (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2013). The system applied only to interactions between the USA and fellow national governments and intergovernmental organisations. It did not address offers from private sector sources, NGOs or any action already covered by bilateral or military-to-military agreements. FEMA recommendations, appearing on various US departmental homepages, direct other countries to contribute cash directly to NGOs as “the most effective way” to help in the event of a US-based disaster (Slaten, nd). As the IAS's founding document (Department of Homeland Security, Department of State and USAID, 2010, p.8) further explains:

“Financial contributions give organizations the power to rapidly procure exactly what is needed for disaster victims. Moreover, unlike in-kind donations, cash donations entail no transportation cost. They also allow relief supplies to be purchased at locations as near to the disaster site as possible. This approach has the triple advantage of stimulating local economies (e.g., providing employment, generating cash flow), ensuring that supplies arrive as quickly as possible, and reducing transport and storage costs.”

The State Department and FEMA's International Affairs Division conducted extensive IAS briefings for the diplomatic corps in Washington as well as consular officials across the USA. IAS's purpose is to assess foreign offers and then to coordinate and distribute accepted materials to the impacted areas within the disaster zone. The State Department maintains a database, the International Assistance Tracker, which records both US needs and offers of international assistance. The IAS authorises State's Crisis Management Support Office to directly communicate with foreign governments as to whether the USA will require external aid, and if so, what kind (Department of Homeland Security, Department of State and USAID, 2010).

All donated items must “meet USG [US Government] regulatory requirements for entry and use” within the USA and cannot require the payment of additional transportation costs for the items prior to receipt. (Department of Homeland Security, Department of State and USAID, 2010, p.10) Additionally the IAS is utilised to procure any needed resources which are not domestically available. Procured material would also have to meet all US regulatory requirements. The IAS makes it clear that “it’s highly unlikely the USG will accept an offer of food” (Department of Homeland Security, Department of State and USAID, 2010, p.15). Lastly, in the case of foreign governments providing assistance directly to other US Government entities (such as offers of military-to-military aid conveyed to the Department of Defence), they too must be dispersed officially through the IAS (Department of Homeland Security, Department of State and USAID, 2010). Since specialised foreign personnel operating on US soil typically require preclearances (credentials, licenses, etc.), the IAS recommends that outside of existing bilateral or multilateral agreements, foreign personnel “only be requested as a last resort” (Department of Homeland Security, Department of State and USAID, 2010, p.14).

The predominant assumption behind the IAS framework is that the USA will typically still be able to provide for its own disaster response needs. The framework will only officially be activated under extraordinary circumstances during a catastrophic emergency or simultaneous disasters. However, it is envisioned that the IAS might be used as a ‘guide’ even for non-Stafford Act events. In these instances, DHS/FEMA would coordinate with the State Department regarding any foreign aid offers or any US requests for international assistance.

Principles enshrined within the IAS Concept of Operations (CONOPS) have guided US officials since 2007, with an official version of the framework published in 2010. In the subsequent eight years (and despite high-profile disasters such as the April 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico (Crowley, 2010; McNeill et al., 2011)),³ the IAS has yet to be formally invoked during a Stafford-declared emergency. FEMA officials confirm however that there have been a number of unofficial applications of its principles and procedures. For example, after Hurricane Gustav in September 2008, the People’s Republic of China (despite US attempts to redirect the gift elsewhere) provided US\$ 100,000 to assist the people affected along the Gulf Coast region. A FEMA official (Confidential interview, 15 November, 2014) described it as a ‘political decision’ to accept the funds from Beijing. The Chinese government, through its Red Cross Society, additionally donated US\$ 50,000 to the American Red Cross. China’s contributions were thought to be a reciprocal expression of gratitude for US assistance in the aftermath of the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake. The IAS was informally utilised again in May 2011 when Japan provided plastic sheeting and 8000 blankets following deadly tornadoes in Alabama. Tokyo said this gesture was in appreciation for US help during the earlier March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan (Jackson, 2011).

Yet perhaps the closest invocation of the IAS to date occurred during Superstorm Sandy in October 2012. Unlike Gustav and the Alabama tornadoes, Superstorm Sandy was a Stafford-declared emergency. However the IAS was still not officially activated. FEMA officials allude to a ‘soft launch’ of the IAS framework during this especially devastating emergency (Confidential interview with FEMA official, 15 November, 2014). As Andrew Slaten (Email exchange, 21 October, 2014), Deputy Director of FEMA’s International Affairs Division, explains:

“following Superstorm Sandy, FEMA activated the IAS in a modified form in response to an offer from the Russian Federation (RF). FEMA used its own logistical capabilities, working closely with the State Department, to receive over 15,000 blankets from EMERCOM⁴ of Russia, FEMA’s partner agency in the Federation. Flown to the U.S. at the expense of the RF, FEMA arranged for teams from AmeriCorps to unload the blankets, transport them to a voluntary agency distribution center, where they were distributed to the survivors of the storm. The gift from the Russian people to the American people was timely, as the weather had turned quite cold ...”

These two Russian cargo aircraft arrived two weeks after Sandy hit, during a time when many New York and New Jersey households were still without heat and electricity. All told, the Russian Government provided almost 50 tons of relief supplies to the USA (Voice of Russia Radio, 2012). “In using the IAS in a flexible manner” during Superstorm Sandy, Slaten (Email 21 October, 2014) contends that lessons learned during the US interaction with direct Russian government assistance “has been a keystone in the revision of the IAS CONOPS”.⁵

FEMA in fact launched a formal interagency review of the IAS CONOPS in November 2013. Almost a dozen departments or agencies ranging from the Homeland Security, Defence and State Departments to USAID’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance have participated in the revision of this key operational document. FEMA (2013) describes its goal as enhancing “the functionality, efficacy and operational potency” of the IAS. Findings were expected to be released in 2015, but as of this writing (September 2015) they had not yet been made publicly available.

5 ‘No shame in asking the world for help’:⁶ New Zealand, aid assistance and the Christchurch earthquake

As the USA struggled to respond to the devastation along its Gulf Coast, New Zealand’s emergency management personnel contemplated what a similar catastrophic disaster might mean for the remotely located, sparsely populated archipelago, situated on tectonic fault lines and within an active volcano zone. Although the country had not faced a large-scale natural disaster since the Hawke’s Bay/Napier earthquake of 1931, a national mindset regarding international assistance had developed very differently in New Zealand from that of the USA.

“What do we need to do differently?” Norton (2005), the country’s Director of the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management (MCDEM) asked in the days after Katrina. “For a national-level disaster”, Norton (2005) observed, “there are no resources waiting in the wings or warehouses. We need to coordinate what we have – and so connections within and across sectors, and between international, national, regional and local arrangements, are fundamental – on the day, ad-hoc arrangements won’t work”.

Wellington was in fact already preliminarily engaged in an extensive review of its emergency management policies and procedures. The CDEM Act of 2002 established, among other items, a timeline for a new National Plan which was to go into effect officially in July 2006 (MCDEM, 2005). Concurrently with the end stages of this review, Rick Barker was appointed Minister for CDEM. As he recalls about this period:

“It was my impression that [Civil Defence] had fallen into slumber land. Local authorities all had better priorities for their money and were generally of the view that as long as they gave emergency services a nod and a wink then central government would come to the rescue and provide all the resources. It was the Boxing Day [2004] Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina that woke people up. Natural disasters were suddenly very real which caused all to have a rethink of how prepared we were.” (E-mail Interview with Rick Barker, 5 November, 2014)

In short, Katrina’s “effect was in refocusing [Civil Defence] on preparing realistic plans” (Barker Interview). And in particular, Wellington drew lessons from the US experience related to ‘inter-operability’ issues among its foreign emergency management relationships. Under Barker, the MCDEM assumed a more activist approach to New Zealand’s overseas counterparts, initiating contacts and cooperation with FEMA (including Barker’s and CDEM Director John Hamilton’s 2006 visit to New Orleans) as well as dusting off and enhancing dormant agreements with Australia. In both instances, non-binding Memorandums of Understanding that the New Zealand Fire Service had regarding reciprocal rural fire response were utilised as a ‘logical step’ to expand broader emergency management cooperation with Australia and the USA (Barker Interview).

Later, “In order to make sure that New Zealand finds itself in a better position” than the USA at the time of Katrina, Barker (2008a) articulated an International Engagement Strategy in December 2007. This strategy contained three main tenets:

- “*We want to be helped* – to ensure that New Zealand’s response capability is supported by access to international assistance following a large emergency event.
- *We want to help others* – to fulfil New Zealand’s international obligation to be a good ‘global citizen’ through response operations, capability development and the provision of international assistance.
- *We want to learn* – to increase New Zealand’s domestic resilience and CDEM capability through increased CDEM knowledge” (Barker, 2008b).

Part of this international strategy was to advance a Pacific-regional database of resources by identifying their availability for country partners and providing for a single point of access to them during a disaster. Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Australia initially expressed interest in joining New Zealand in this venture. However domestic politics intervened, and with a governmental turnover in Wellington, the regional database idea did not proceed.⁷ On a more micro-level, New Zealand did establish a centralised register of its growing bilateral emergency management agreements. Additionally, under the 2009 National Plan review, all government agencies were charged with notifying MCDEM of any changes (or potential changes) in regards to its country-to-country arrangements (MCDEM, 2009).

In terms of major bilateral agreements, Wellington formalised civil defence arrangements with both Australia and the USA in May 2009 and December 2010 respectively.⁸ These agreements provided for 24/7 contact between the relevant emergency management divisions and a regular exchange of information, best practices and expertise. At the time of the US-NZ signing, CDEM Director Hamilton perceptively noted, “Few, if any, countries in the world can respond on their own to a national disaster... Having the relationships, knowing how to immediately contact each other and understanding how to work together are crucial to a speedy, well-directed response.

The bigger the disaster, the more important the prior-arrangements and planning become” (MCDEM, 2010). These plans would be tested two months later when a catastrophic earthquake hit the country’s second largest city, Christchurch, and Hamilton himself became the National Controller overseeing the response and initial recovery phases.

6 International assistance and the 2011 Christchurch earthquake

The 6.3 magnitude earthquake devastated wide areas of Christchurch, still suffering from the impact of a September 2010 trembler which had struck the Canterbury region. The February quake destroyed much of the Central Business District (CBD); severely damaged 65,000 homes; displaced thousands and resulted in the deaths of 185 people (Johnson and Mamula-Seadon, 2014). Many of these fatalities were foreign nationals at an English-language school killed when the six-story Canterbury (CTV) Building collapsed. For the first time in New Zealand’s history, a “National Emergency” was declared. In making the declaration, Civil Defence Minister John Carter (Carter, 2011) told Parliament that it would “ensure the maximum possible co-ordination and co-operation between central and local resources, and international assistance”. He later recalled that the formal pronouncement also “cleared up any doubt” and ‘gave certainty’ to the ultimate authority granted to National Controller Hamilton to make decisions (Phone interview with Minister Carter, 21 December, 2014). In tandem with the National Emergency Declaration, Wellington issued a call for practical international assistance. As Hamilton explains,

“Our procedures for requesting and accepting international assistance through the International Assistance Cell (IAC) in the National Crisis Management Centre were important for matching needs with offers and co-ordinating the whole process. Not surprisingly there were challenges encountered in managing the politics and the expectation that a speedy reply was possible ... The National Controller was expected to agree to the offers to be accepted. How the acceptance was relayed to the provider varied depending on the nature of the offer. [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade] and Ministers could be used to convey acceptance and gratitude.” (E-mail Interview with John Hamilton, 30 March, 2015)

Given the scope of the devastation within the Christchurch CBD – in which 4000 buildings needed to be cleared and that many foreign nationals were thought to be trapped in the collapsed CTV building – some of the first assistance offers by individual countries as well as by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA, 2013) were search and rescue teams (Glasse, 2013; Carter, 2011). Many of these units were offered as part of pre-arranged bilateral agreements or by virtue of New Zealand’s membership in the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), an international roster of professionally classified search and rescue teams organised under the auspices of the United Nations (McLean et al., 2012).

A USAR team from New South Wales, Australia arrived overnight and was soon joined by a second Australian team from Queensland along with units from China, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, the UK and the USA.⁹ In total some 450 international USAR professionals would join three New Zealand teams comprised of nearly 150 local personnel (Glasse, 2013). As Hamilton notes, Wellington “deliberately chose to accept only those USAR teams that were UN accredited to give us the assurance that they were

capable, trained to a common and known standard and willing to operate under the UN guidelines and therefore ‘under the control’ of the New Zealand USAR commander” (Hamilton interview). However, several private search and rescue units came anyway. At one point, an unauthorised Israeli unit was escorted out of the cordoned (red) zone by New Zealand military forces (Watkins and Small, 2011). New Zealand authorities also grappled with how to manage international USAR teams whose governments did not diplomatically recognise each other (McLean et al., 2012). The presence of the Taiwanese team challenged authorities in this regard vis-à-vis China. In the end, while most rescues occurred before the bulk of the international USAR teams (save the Australian units) arrived, they “did play a significant and very useful role in search and recovery after the rescue phase was complete” (McLean et al., 2012, p.82).

In other avenues of international specialised assistance, contingents of medical professionals, disaster victim identification (DVI) specialists from multiple countries and a Singaporean military unit – already in New Zealand for joint exercises – also headed to the Christchurch region. Equally important was the deployment of almost 325 police officers drawn from every Australian state, territory as well as the Federal Police force. These officers had full sworn policing powers and were partnered with their New Zealand counterparts in patrolling the city and its environs.¹⁰

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade also coordinated material contributions ranging from plastic sheeting and blankets to generators and sanitation resources (McCully, 2011). Certain items were specifically requested by Wellington, while others were not. A few international offers were politely declined outright, but according to some on the ground, these materials might have had “real value had the offer been accepted” (McLean et al., 2012, p.61). In this regard, New Zealand officials faced some of the same challenges experienced by the USA in 2005. As the subsequent, independent review (McLean et al., 2012, p. 64) concluded: “The value of unsolicited assistance to the response varied considerably. Some was vital to the effort, and some was of limited benefit... Yet it is difficult for a nation to decline generous aid offered by friends”. Upon reflection, Hamilton (Interview) underscores that the “IAC process worked well but it could now be improved further. Key stakeholders at all levels should be aware that there is a proven process in place and encouraged to have the discipline to use it. Working around the IAC process risks confusion, misalignment and a lack of co-ordination”.

In terms of cash contributions, Wellington initially encouraged other countries to donate to New Zealand NGOs. Days after the earthquake however, Prime Minister John Key launched “The Christchurch Earthquake Appeal Trust” to act as a global fundraiser for the Canterbury regional recovery efforts. This was “unfamiliar” territory for the country, the *New Zealand Herald* editorialised: “We are not accustomed to asking for help or to receiving it. But we should do so gracefully” (No shame in asking the world for help, 2011). All told, the Christchurch Earthquake Appeal Trust raised and distributed nearly NZ\$ 100 million before dispersing its final grants in April 2014. Forty percent of these funds came from international sources (Christchurch Earthquake Appeal Trust Secretariat, 2014).

In assessing the New Zealand Government’s handling of international aid and support during the response phases, the Review (McLean et al., 2012, p.11) determined, “Assistance from overseas was of great value and was well managed. The major issue requiring improvement is the cross matching of offers and needs”. Additionally, the high-value nature of Australia’s assistance in the area of professional services (USAR, DVI, police officers and medical personnel) was repeatedly underscored in the report.

It recommended closer cross-Tasman emergency management links which would benefit both countries, including:

“training courses, inviting Australian emergency managers to New Zealand emergency management exercises and supporting Australian emergency management during fires, floods and cyclone emergencies. Such arrangements also assist in building New Zealand capability. Had provision of trained incident managers from Australia been arranged they could have supplemented trained New Zealand staff. This could have avoided installing staff into incident management roles where they had little experience and little or no training. Increased use of the reciprocal provision for trained New Zealand emergency managers to Australia, in terms of the agreement signed in 2009 with Emergency Management Australia, would have the benefit of giving invaluable experience in managing under the pressure of real emergencies.” (McLean et al., 2012, p.65)

In summing his appraisal of the overall emergency management response, CDEM Minister Carter emphasised that “the strength was the legislation” (Carter Interview). The institutions and processes envisioned by the 2002 Act were put in place and more importantly functioned in the way anticipated. As for the international assistance, Carter states that it was a “big part of the confidence” exhibited during the response. In a country traumatised by a natural disaster unlike any other in its living memory, the outpouring of global generosity showed New Zealanders that the world was standing with New Zealand in its time of need (Carter Interview).

7 Conclusion

Following Hurricane Katrina, an US media commentator criticised the Japanese Government’s more modest offer of government assistance to the USA, deeming it “insulting”. The Japanese Deputy Press Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tomohiko Taniguchi, issued a strongly worded rejoinder: “Well, that is just insulting to us. Because if you think about it, in a similar situation, would the Carnegies have sent a check to the Rockefellers?” (Quoted in Richard (2006), p.40).

This response perfectly captures the mid-2000s global mindset related to the international aid landscape. The fact that this statement was issued by a Japanese official however is particularly noteworthy, both with respect to Japan’s past experience by that point and what would lie in its future. For before the USA and Katrina, it was Japan that was among the first major humanitarian aid donors to find itself on the international relief end of the equation, following the 1995 Kobe earthquake. Tokyo experienced the same predicament as Washington would exactly 10 years later, nearly paralysed regarding how to accept a wealth of aid offers coming from abroad. As Nishimoto explains:

“Although this reluctance was said to have stemmed from factors such as a strong sense of self-sufficiency, bureaucratic gridlock, and unwillingness of officials to relax domestic rules, the largest reason seems to be simply that the central and local authorities in charge of disaster response had not anticipated accepting international assistance. Due to this lack of preparation, accepting international assistance was perceived to be more burdensome than beneficial.” (Nishimoto, 2014, p.305)

The Japanese government, like its US counterpart a decade later, would actually utilise the Kobe disaster as a catalyst to pursue significant legislative and policy reform

regarding incoming humanitarian assistance (Nishimoto, 2014). As a result, Tokyo was in a much stronger position to manage cross-border aid following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.¹¹

Yet at the time that the Foreign Ministry official made his comment, perhaps it was still inconceivable that in the near future major humanitarian aid donors would more regularly become international disaster relief recipients. And as Japan, the USA and New Zealand have all painfully learned first-hand, policy preparedness – including pre-established mutual aid arrangements – can greatly minimise human suffering and diplomatic damage in the wake of a disaster. It is, in fact, a lesson from which all countries can learn.

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Notes

¹Interview on US television network ABC program This Week With George Stephanopoulos, 29 April, 2007, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/apr/83960.htm> (Accessed 15 December, 2014).

²E-mail Interview with Rick Barker, 5 November 2014.

³The US Government's response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill reminded many of the mismanaged offers of international assistance associated with Hurricane Katrina (See McNeill et al., 2011). Between April and June 2010, three dozen countries or international organisations extended varying offers and the USA seemed similarly paralysed in how to respond to them. One major difference between the 2010 and 2005 events, however, was the prominent involvement (and legal responsibility) of the well's owner, British Petroleum, in the cleanup efforts along with

that of the US Government. Another difference was that many of the offers in 2010 were from private international companies and not government-to-government interactions and importantly, the IAS does not cover industry-to-industry aid. But the most striking dissimilarity between Deepwater and Katrina was explained by State Department Spokesman P.J. Crowley (Crowley, 2010), “With few exceptions, these international offers of assistance are made on a reimbursable basis, which means that the assistance is provided only if paid for by the recipient”. In other words, the offers were not outright gifts with few (if any) strings attached as was the case in 2005. With this noted, Deepwater continued to highlight “that the United States lacks the capability and infrastructure to prioritise and integrate a large quantity of offers of international assistance into an ongoing response” (On the Scene Coordinator Report, 2011, pp.114–116).

⁴EMERCOM is the Russian Ministry for Emergency Situations. FEMA and EMERCOM have had a long-standing cooperative relationship enshrined in a 1996 Memorandum of Understanding on Emergency Management signed between Washington and Moscow.

⁵It should be noted that during Superstorm Sandy other governments donated funds directly to NGOs – as directed by IAS guidelines. Taiwan, for example, divided a \$1.3 million contribution between United Way and Habitat for Humanity. See Congressman Albio Sires’ (D-NJ) homepage: <http://sires.house.gov/recognition-taiwan%E2%80%99s-support-hurricane-sandy-victims> (Accessed 11 December, 2014).

⁶A *New Zealand Herald* headline on 1 March 2011 following the Christchurch Earthquake.

⁷Barker notes that there was “resistance from two quarters. There was sensitivity about the possible location of such a centre and the foreseen possibility, which I believed had no substance, that national agencies would be pressured into building and holding a particular capability that they didn’t want to. Aligned with that was the possibility that one country could be responsible for maintaining a capability that was used more often than others and would therefore be carrying a disproportionate financial load” (Interview).

⁸The USA and Australia also signed a bilateral emergency management agreement in April 2010.

⁹Before their return to the USA, the Los Angeles USAR team donated their specialised equipment (valued at over US\$ 1 million) to their NZ counterparts (McLean et al, 2012, p.83).

¹⁰This was the largest number of Australian police officers ever sent to assist their New Zealand colleagues and the first time ever that officers from all parts of Australia worked together in a single operation. See New Zealand Police News Release ‘Historical moment for Australian Police’ 14 March 2011 <http://www.police.govt.nz/news/release/27459> (Accessed 11 December, 2014).

¹¹The hesitance to accept international expertise related to the third element of the March 2011 catastrophe, the nuclear disaster at Fukushima, was another matter. However that aspect encompasses a whole host of other distinctive issues that require greater policy attention not only for Japan but other nuclear energy states as well.