

# Chapter One



*The Role of the Department of Defense in  
Responding to Catastrophe*



# Foreword

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On September 15, 2005, as we were just beginning to assimilate hard lessons surrounding our nation's response to the hurricane, President Bush declared in immediate hindsight that within the federal government only the Department of Defense (DoD) could effectively bring to bear the forces, resources and logistical expertise to respond to an event like Katrina. The hurricane had surpassed our traditional notions of "disaster" and entered into a whole new level of destruction that we were beginning to characterize as "catastrophic." As though paying testimony to the President's assertion, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (through the Federal Emergency Management Agency) had turned to DoD on September 1, 2005, and requested that they assume responsibility for logistics distribution functions, by conservative estimates amounting to a "billion dollar mission." Laid along side other support functions—from search and rescue, to support to law enforcement and beyond—an easy case could be developed for the commander of the U.S. Northern Command's assertion to law makers that active duty forces should be given complete authority for responding to catastrophic disasters.

Quickly following Admiral Keating's assertion, however, was one from another member of our uniformed leadership, Major General Timothy Lowenberg, the Adjutant General for the state of Washington. In a missive to his colleagues, General Lowenberg suggested that the Admiral's position amounted to a "policy of domestic regime change."

The purpose of this panel is to step away from immediate assertions and immediate responses to promote an understanding of a more

fundamental question: Should there ever be an occasion in which the DoD is the lead federal agency in responding to a catastrophic event?

Of course, before we can examine that notion, we must first come to grips with what we mean by “catastrophe.” The Catastrophic Incident Annex of the National Response Plan (NRP) attempts to help us by defining a “catastrophic incident:”

*Any natural or manmade incident, including terrorism, that results in extraordinary levels of mass casualties, damage, or disruption severely affecting the population, infrastructure, environment, economy, national morale, and/or government functions.*

A catastrophic event could result in sustained national impacts over a prolonged period of time; almost immediately exceeds resources normally available to state, local, tribal, and private-sector authorities in the impacted area; and significantly interrupts governmental operations and emergency services to such an extent that national security could be threatened.

The delineation between ‘disaster’ and ‘catastrophe’ is obviously designed to alert responding officials at all levels to another set of criteria, signaling another tier of destruction that may well call for procedures beyond the norm. And while the above definition is helpful, it is less than satisfying, because it doesn’t do much for us in identifying “trip wires” that will key a response or, in particular, an extraordinary response.

This, at least, begins our discussion on common ground, because no one on either side of the question would ever suggest that DoD would be considered as the lead federal agency in responding to a catastrophic event under anything other than extraordinary circumstances. Conventional wisdom holds that the NRP sufficiently meets response and recovery requirements following a major natural disaster in the vast majority of cases. The ‘tiered response’ envisioned in the NRP, envisioning a progressive introduction of local, state, and federal capabilities as each preceding tier is overwhelmed, has served the nation well on the average of 40-60 times a year following Presidential Disaster Declarations. In recent years through the course of that progression, DHS has been envisioned as the lead federal agency, not necessarily

“taking over” response and recovery operations from state control, but certainly leading the federal effort in support of that response.

Fairly or unfairly, Hurricane Katrina caused a number of observers to question that paradigm. Described by some officials as representative of “the low end of catastrophe,” Katrina nevertheless led first to questions of whether the federal government should take charge of response and recovery operations, and then whether there might be catastrophes at the “high end” that would outstrip DHS’ efforts to coordinate the federal response. The most frequently cited alternative, of course, postulated DoD assuming that lead.

The intent of this panel was to examine that alternative in terms of necessity, feasibility, and advisability. The three panelists undertaking that examination were imminently qualified to address it.

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Dr. Paul Stockton is a Senior Research Scholar at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation. Prior to joining Stanford, Stockton served as Associate Provost of the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, and was the founder and Director of its Center for Homeland Defense and Security. Dr. Stockton's research has appeared in *Political Science Quarterly*, *International Security and Strategic Survey*. He is Co-Editor of *Reconstituting America's Defense: America's New National Security Strategy* (1992). Mr. Stockton has also published an Adelphi Paper and has contributed chapters to a number of books, including James Lindsay and Randall Ripley, Eds., *U.S. Foreign Policy After the Cold War* (1997). Mr. Stockton received a B.A. *summa cum laude* from Dartmouth College in 1976 and a Ph.D. in Government from Harvard University in 1986 after which time he served as a Legislative Assistant to US Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Dr. Stockton was awarded a Postdoctoral Fellowship for 1989-1990 by the Center for International Security and Arms Control at Stanford University. In August 1990, Dr. Stockton joined the faculty of the Naval Postgraduate School where he served first as Director of the Center for Civil-Military Relations, and then as the Acting Dean of the School of International Graduate Studies. He was appointed Associate Provost in 2001.

Colonel Richard M. Chavez, United States Air Force, is currently assigned as Director, Civil Support in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense. He leads a staff of senior military and civilian subject matter experts that develop and coordinate DoD strategic policy regarding civil support response operations with 32 Federal agencies, the Joint Staff, National Guard Bureau, Service component staffs, and DoD Agencies. Domestic support operations under Colonel Chavez' oversight include: Protection of the President, Military Assistance for Civil Disturbances, disaster mitigation, mission assurance, National Special Security Events/Special Events, Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High Yield Explosive event response, and critical infrastructure protection. Colonel Chavez also executes oversight of DoD's policy for manning, equipping, training, and employment of DoD assets to include the National Guard's Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Teams and the Services' Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officers. He is responsible for co-

ordinating requests for DoD assets from other federal departments and agencies for Secretary of Defense approval. Colonel Chavez' operational experience in the Air Force includes over 35 overseas deployments in support of operations around the world and three Squadron Commands on as many continents. He is a graduate of East Carolina University and holds Masters degrees from Golden Gate University (Public Administration) and the United States Air Force Air War College (National Security Strategy). Prior to assuming his current position, Colonel Chavez was Director, Department of Defense, Emergency Preparedness Course and Chief, Homeland Security Readiness Branch at United States Army Forces Command at Fort McPherson, Georgia.

