

## **UK Military Hurricane Relief in the Caribbean**

### **Context**

The Caribbean consists of hundreds of mostly low-lying islands which, due to their position in the tropical North Atlantic, are especially vulnerable to hurricanes and other natural disasters.

The UK has a particular interest in the Caribbean as it is the ultimate guarantor of security and stability for the British Overseas Territories, six of which are in the Caribbean and North Atlantic region.

As part of a wider cross-government response, The UK military provides Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief in the immediate aftermath of a hurricane in the region, in order to save lives, limit damage, and help set the conditions for recovery and follow-on support.

### **How does the UK military prepare?**

The UK prepares first and foremost through our military posture:

- Ships of the Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary pre-positioned in the Caribbean carrying a specialist military Disaster Response troop and helicopters, as well as hurricane-related aid from the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office.
- Further forces are held at readiness to deploy from the UK should they be required.

In the months leading up to the hurricane season, UK military assets in the region conduct a series of familiarisation visits to key Caribbean nations and territories, taking part in joint exercises to ensure all elements of our hurricane response are ready. Additional COVID-19 challenges have made this particularly important this year.

### **What other countries and civilian organisations do we engage with?**

Multilateral coordination is at the forefront of UK planning. Key allied actors include Canada, France, the Netherlands and the US, who all have territories or national interests in the Caribbean.

The primary civilian coordinating body is the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), who are a regional inter-governmental agency for disaster management in the Caribbean Community. The UK's Foreign Office works closely with them to provide assistance when required, and the UK military liaise with CDEMA and other allies through the Multi-National Caribbean Coordination Cell (MNCCC) in Barbados.

The MNCCC's purpose is the sharing of information and optimising the use of ships and aircraft to deliver emergency aid to islands affected by natural disasters. It was initially

set up in Curaçao in 2017 to facilitate military coordination between France, the Netherlands and the UK. It was then augmented in Barbados in 2018 to include the US and Canada, and to facilitate civilian-military coordination with CDEMA who are co-located there.

### **The way ahead**

All nations and coordinating agencies seek to learn lessons from each hurricane season, in order to improve the quality and timeliness of an international response. Through this process, a good variety of multilateral coordinating bodies have been created in the Caribbean, like the MNCCC. These can be activated to coordinate a response to any crisis facing the region, and they are agile enough to adapt to any niche scenarios as there is no ‘one-size fits all’ approach.

In short, the current system has converged over the years on an effective and flexible set up, with multilateral cooperation at the forefront of its design. That said, the region would undoubtedly welcome any wider international contributions to a future disaster response, which could link in with coordination cells already established there, such as CDEMA or the MNCCC.

## Said Iziki and Marouane Gziri

*Royal Armed Forces of Morocco*

It is a great pleasure to participate in this meeting organized by the Atlantic Centre to discuss subjects which concern us all and which concern the space we share together.

I would like to thank our Portuguese friends for inviting our country to take part in this event which will not only be an opportunity for all of us to exchange our knowledge, to draw lessons, but also an opportunity to further strengthen our friendships and sharing of knowledge and experience.

My intervention will deal with two main axes:

- The challenges we face in our region.
- The tools to face these challenges.

Regarding the first part, we all know that the sea is a free space and constitutes a bridge between many nations. It is therefore a space of trafficking and all kinds of threats that countries are trying to thwart. To name only illegal immigration, illicit traffic, marine pollution, incidents at sea...

It is a space that we have not been able to tame due to the changing weather conditions. Although we are improving our maritime resources, the risks of a series of seas can cause us a great deal of material and human damage.

Finally, and to be limited to these points, the sea is full of wealth, which is sometimes badly overexploited or anarchically exploited, making the marine environment a space to be protected against abuse.

Faced with these challenges, and the limitations presented by conventional means, such as ships or aircraft, one of the most promising solutions for monitoring marine space is the use of special technology.

So, we can use satellites to extend our means of communication and use the images provided by satellites as sources of information to find out what is happening in this immense and sometimes dark environment. By continuously monitoring weather conditions, we can, after analysis, anticipate our actions in time and space. For example, through appropriate computer processing we can locate pollution slicks, follow suspicious traffic, learn about maritime traffic or have precise weather forecasts that would help us plan the deployment of our units.

To conclude my intervention, I would point out that this technology is not within everyone's reach, especially for countries which are in the process of developing. Mechanisms should therefore be found to optimize the use of these means and make them available to countries, which do not have the means to obtain them directly, in a spirit of cooperation and exchange of knowledge. Because in the end, the marine space brings everyone together, a problem near a country can easily be transmitted to the neighboring country, like an oil slick, which at sea evolves with the wind and can reach that country or another.