

U.S. POLICY ROADMAP FOR MEETING THE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE/DISASTER RELIEF (HA/DR) CHALLENGE DURING GREAT POWER COMPETITION

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Introduction

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) has set a national strategy for the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” by 2049. In pursuit of its objective, the PRC is becoming more powerful and globally engaged, consequently precipitating a “great power competition” with the United States. The nature of this competition and the challenge the PRC represents are hotly debated. Are we entering an environment where competition is a net-positive for the two nations and the world – or, are we at risk of another perilous Cold War? In the U.S., there is growing bipartisan consensus, as well as within the Biden Administration, that leans towards the latter view. In a recent May 2022 speech focusing on the China challenge, U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken stated:

“China is the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it. Beijing’s vision would move us away from the universal values that have sustained so much of the world’s progress over the past 75 years.”¹

The humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) sphere is an element of the “universal values” that Secretary Blinken and many others now believe to be at risk. Our recent project, *“China and the Future of HA/DR Operations in Great Power Competition,”²* highlighted this underappreciated aspect of the emerging competition. We found that the PRC is expanding its global interests, significantly growing its HA/DR resources and experience, and demonstrating increasing interest in projecting influence through humanitarian operations. As a result, some view the PRC’s emergence as an opportunity to *advance* the global HA/DR cause. However, in this report, we also found the PRC demonstrating a troubling trend of disregarding international humanitarian norms and principles that imply challenges in the future (e.g., PRC actions taken following the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines³, the takeover of South China Seas’ Mischief Reef starting in 1995⁴, the COVID disinformation campaign in 2020/21)⁵.

A January 2022 tweet from a PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman (shown nearby)⁶ further hints at the challenges ahead. In the midst of an international disaster relief operation in Tonga, the PRC thought it was appropriate to not only imply that the U.S. was not contributing to the relief effort (not true), but ignore the contributions of others as well. In an area of keen geopolitical interest, the PRC appeared to be exploiting the Tongan disaster to advance its broader strategic objectives. We see no evidence that the U.S. publicly countered the PRC’s clear disinformation effort in this case.



As with the Tongan example above, HA/DR operations frequently sit at the competitive seam between the PRC and the U.S. HA/DR operations often involve overlapping geopolitical interests in contentious and/or sensitive areas. Military forces flowing into such an environment further elevates the risk that such operations could become a flashpoint if not thoughtfully managed. The obvious question our previous research raised was ... what do you do about it? Are there policy measures that could steer this aspect of the strategic competition to a positive outcome in the relatively narrow HA/DR sphere? This paper aims to answer the question by proposing a policy roadmap (given a future funding profile) that meets the emerging HA/DR challenge to the U.S. Specifically, policies that would:

- Preserve the existing, generally accepted humanitarian principles of *humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence*,⁷ and
- Encourage the PRC to constructively employ their growing HA/DR resources and expertise in accordance with accepted international standards and principles.

Informed by our previous work, our policy prescriptions assume that:

- U.S. leadership recognizes the HA/DR challenge and desires a policy response.
- Competition between the PRC and the U.S. will be contentious and global.
- The PRC will continue to build economic and military power.
- The PRC views the competitive stakes as ultimately zero-sum.
- The PRC engages in HA/DR to advance its strategic geopolitical interests, at times at the expense of humanitarian needs.

We built the paper's findings from a review of HA/DR literature and interviews with 13 subject matter experts. The interviewees represented a broad perspective on the issues surrounding China and HA/DR, including prominent experts from the diplomatic, military, intelligence, humanitarian/relief, policymaking, and academic communities (interview methodology is described in the Annex). Over the course of the interviews, various strategies, policy structures, and competitive concepts were discussed that informed a policy framework for addressing the challenge. The discussions also helped identify key policy tenets that would be necessary to underpin a successful approach. In later interviews, we had the opportunity to elicit feedback and improve on our emerging policy thoughts. Our final policy recommendations are derived from our interpretation and distillation of these inputs.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows:

Analysis. This section describes the future HA/DR policy environment, the superpowers' strengths and weaknesses, and identifies potential policy-related leverage and investment areas.

Outlining Policy Options. This section describes the policy options that meet the PRC challenge, underpinned by foundational policy tenets and future U.S. federal funding profiles.

Summary. This section summarizes our study process and results.

Annex, Interview Methodology. This annex describes the interview methods used to support this paper's research.

Analysis

The PRC has made extensive investments across the diplomatic, information, military, and economic (DIME) spectrum, amassing significant power and influence to achieve great power status. The emergence of China as a global superpower will upend many areas of the global landscape - including HA/DR. This section describes our view of the future policy environment within the HA/DR sphere and the key HA/DR-related strengths and weaknesses in play between the superpowers. It derives potential policy-related leverage and investment areas that could serve as the building blocks for a viable U.S. policy response.

Outlook. Based on our previous work⁸, we believe the superpower competition will alter the HA/DR operating environment in the following key ways:

- China's global interests and infrastructure will expand over time. Driven primarily by its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China will build out an expanding network of land, sea, and digital lines of communications (LOCs) in support of its global economic objectives. These growing interests and infrastructure (e.g., ports, airports, etc.) will also increase the PRC's interest and ability to participate in HA/DR operations far from its periphery.
- Superpower competition will continue to bleed into the HA/DR sphere. As the PRC moves to increase its influence and protect its growing global interests, HA/DR will become an increasingly important aspect of the strategic competition. A key facet of the competition will be a more aggressive PRC information/disinformation campaign to advantage its broader strategic objectives.
- China will attempt to supplant the West's leadership role in HA/DR. As China's ability to project power grows, the PRC will attempt to supplant the West's leadership role (particularly the U.S.) in HA/DR operations - first along its periphery, then expanding outward along the developing LOCs. As a result, cooperation with the PRC in HA/DR operations will become more difficult and complex politically. As their power grows, we also expect the PRC to resolve their "uneasy" view of the international/NGO humanitarian system⁹ by attempting to rewrite relief standards and processes to better conform with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interests.
- China will become increasingly assertive. When the PRC feels it has dominant power and key interests are in play, it will likely exclude Western-aligned HA/DR resources (particularly foreign military) that, from its perspective, compromise their interests.

Process for Deriving Policy Investment Areas. Given the competitive outlook described above, the remainder of this section is devoted to deriving candidate investment areas that will serve as the building blocks for our HA/DR policy options. Figure 1 below depicts the process we developed for the study. First, the U.S. and PRC's strengths and weaknesses were compared to identify key areas where U.S. policymakers may have the leverage to further the HA/DR-related policy objectives. Conversely, we also derived key areas where the PRC may have leverage against the U.S. From a policymaking perspective, these leverage points guided us to candidate proactive and defensive investment areas that seek to help the U.S. achieve its policy objectives.

To constrain our study, we limited our work to those policy items and topics with a clear nexus to the HA/DR sphere. At the end of this process, a table summarizes the info our analysis developed.

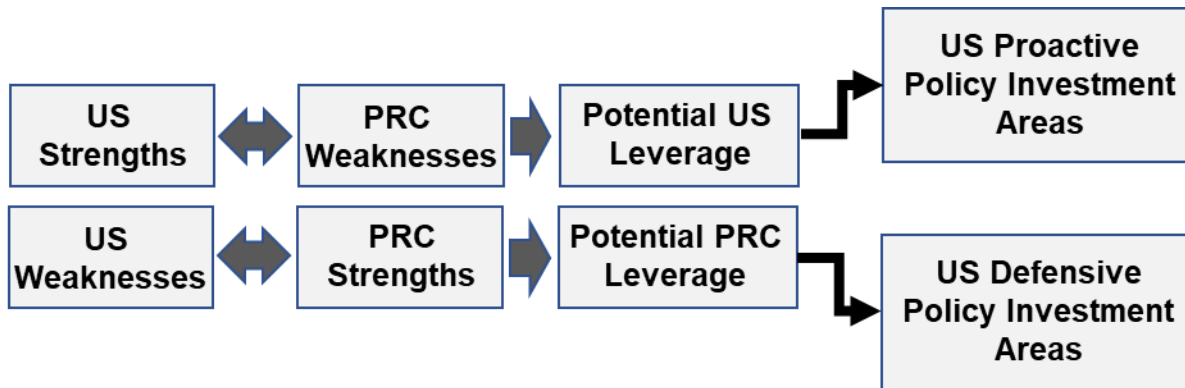


Figure 1. Process for Deriving Leverage Points and Candidate Policy Investment Areas

Competitive Strengths versus Weaknesses. From a competitive HA/DR policymaking perspective, a summary list of the U.S. and PRC strengths and weaknesses is below.

U.S. Strengths

Most capable, experienced HA/DR capabilities. The U.S. possesses the most advanced and experienced capabilities for conducting HA/DR operations.

Global Reach. The U.S. has an unsurpassed logistics infrastructure, resources, and operational experience, enabling a rapid global HA/DR response capability.

Extensive Partner Nation Network. The U.S. has an extensive network of trusted partners for leveraging assets, local knowledge, and operational access to support HA/DR.

Cooperative Within International Structures. The U.S. supports and comfortably integrates/coordinates within international HA/DR humanitarian organizations.

Charitable Culture. The U.S. possesses a vibrant charitable culture towards individuals, reflected in the long-standing public and private funding of philanthropic organizations and humanitarian operations.

Respect for Sovereignty. The international community recognizes the U.S.’s long record of respecting the sovereignty of nations during HA/DR operations.

Adherence to humanitarian principles. The international community recognizes the U.S.’s long record of adhering to humanitarian principles during HA/DR operations.

Extensive Government Funding. Annually, the U.S. Government expends large sums on overseas projects, humanitarian aid, and investment programs.

Extensive Non-Government Wealth/Available Capital. Annually, private U.S. firms and individuals invest large sums for overseas capital investments and HA.

Partner Wealth. Many of the U.S.’s foreign partners in HA/DR are geopolitically aligned and wealthy (e.g., UK, Japan, Germany).

U.S. Weaknesses

Poor strategic messaging. The U.S. does not prioritize strategically messaging the nation's global investments and efforts in the HA/DR sphere.

Modesty. When the U.S. does message about the nation's HA/DR efforts, the characterization and branding are overly modest.

Failure to Lead and Educate. U.S. Leadership has failed to educate the U.S. public on the comprehensive nature of the superpower challenge and the stakes and risks in play - including in the HA/DR sphere.

Piecemeal/uncoordinated USG response. The U.S. primarily responds to discrete events with discreet actions, failing to integrate humanitarian efforts into a broader strategic approach to assisting nations.

Lacks national consensus for effort. The U.S. Government has not made the case nor sought national consensus from the U.S. public on the need to embark on a potentially expensive response to the PRC challenge (where rethinking HA/DR would be an element of the response).

Slow, bureaucratic response. Once decisions are made, the U.S. ability to execute programs and missions (with the exception of initial disaster relief operations) is slowed by bureaucratic impediments – particularly with respect to funding.

U.S. funding leadership is obscured. The U.S. fails to sufficiently message its contributions to HA/DR-related efforts (the U.S. is the single greatest contributor of funds – both government and private), in part because much of the funds are pooled with other nations into international organizations (e.g., UNOCHA, WFP). This creates an exploitable weakness within a competitive superpower environment.

PRC Strengths

Well thought out strategic plan. The PRC leadership has laid out a strategic plan for achieving superiority over the West, with HA/DR explicitly stated as an element of their comprehensive plan.

Whole of government approach. When the PRC decides to conduct a foreign HA/DR operation, the effort will be broadly supported across the DIME and nested within its overall competitive strategy.

Messaging integrated into strategy. PRC prioritizes ensuring its messaging objectives are integrated into every element of its strategy and the messages are tailored to the specific targeted audience (both domestically and internationally).

Growing military and economic resources. PRC is building significant military and economic power, enabling greater and more responsive HA/DR resources.

Growing operational expertise. The PRC is rapidly improving operational HA/DR expertise through domestic and international operations and events.

Growing global reach. The global network of land, sea, and digital LOCs built in support of BRI significantly improves the PRC's ability to project commercial and military resources in support of HA/DR operations.

Growing diaspora network. Globally-dispersed Chinese nationals serve the PRC as an on-the-ground, forward network supporting HA/DR operations.

Dominant Trade Position. China is the top trading partner of over 120 countries (for the U.S., China is #3). It has leveraged this economic power to exert pressure in economic and non-economic areas to further its national objectives.

PRC Weaknesses

Disdain for the current international humanitarian structures/protocols. By not fully participating in the existing international humanitarian structures and protocols, the PRC has less ability to leverage international resources or shape and influence the HA/DR sphere.

Development aid is China-centric. PRC development aid prioritizes its domestic sources over the affected nation's local area vendors (labor, materials, design), diminishing the positive impact of the aid on the local economy.

Transactional approach. PRC's transactional mindset/approach often sub-optimizes the individual in need in favor of the PRC's broader interests, leading to conflicts with humanitarian principles.

Less capable, less experienced HA/DR capabilities. Although significantly improving over time, the PRC still trails the U.S. and several other nations' abilities to conduct complex HA/DR operations.

Weak charitable culture. PRC lacks a vibrant non-government philanthropic community, depriving the nation of potential partners and alternative perspectives in humanitarian problem-solving.

Mercantilist Worldview. The PRC is pursuing a mercantilist strategy that degrades economic benefits to their international partners and taints their efforts in the HA/DR sphere.

Lack of Respect for Sovereignty. In areas of keen self-interest, the PRC's worldview often leads to actions contrary to established international sovereignty norms.

Leverage Points. From our study and review of the relative strengths and weaknesses between the U.S. and the PRC, we identified key points of leverage that have the potential to advantage each nation's objectives.

For the U.S., potential leverage exists because of its:

- Unsurpassed ability to lead and conduct HA/DR operations
- Unsurpassed national wealth and resources
- Unsurpassed global reach
- Superior trust from partners within the global humanitarian network
- Vibrant philanthropic culture
- Reputation for respecting the sovereignty of others

- Ability to build long-term, mutually beneficial economic opportunities with foreign partners

For the PRC, potential leverage exists because of its:

- Focused, funded, and comprehensive strategic plan
- Perceived positive, strategic momentum in the superpower competition against the U.S. (i.e., the PRC is the future)
- Powerful and integrated strategic communications apparatus
- Rapidly improving competency in HA/DR operations
- Dominating economic position vis-à-vis likely recipient nations
- Dominating geopolitical position vis-à-vis likely recipient nations
- Ethically unconstrained in its willingness to advance its geopolitical objectives

Candidate Proactive and Defensive Policy Investment Areas. Based on the U.S./PRC leverage points, we developed candidate investment areas to exploit U.S. advantages (proactive) and guard against PRC advantages (defensive). In addition, the candidate investment areas served as a menu of policy options for achieving our stated study objectives (preserve existing humanitarian principles; encourage PRC to employ its resources in accordance with accepted HA/DR international standards).

Candidate proactive investment areas (to exploit/extend U.S. advantages) include:

- *Strategic Communications.* The U.S. possesses a wealth of advantages in the HA/DR sphere. However, the U.S. has declined to ensure that the world is aware of the exceptional capabilities, investments (both public and private), and positive works being conducted. A concerted effort to improve communications in this area is needed.
- *Strengthen Partnerships.* Although the U.S. already possesses an unsurpassed HA/DR partner network, the emerging PRC challenge should precipitate a redoubling of U.S. effort to extend its trust and expertise. This can be accomplished through increased effort in areas such as outreach and exercises and strengthening international standards/protocols. Particular attention should be made to strengthen trust and partnering with domestic and international NGOs.
- *Sovereignty Offensive.* The U.S. should emphasize the importance of respecting sovereignty in HA/DR operations through actions and deeds. The U.S. enters a HA/DR event seeking equal, long-term, and respectful partnerships. The objective is to raise the cost of disrespecting sovereignty in the eyes of the world and future host nations.
- *Expand Trade Opportunities/Incentives.* The PRC's mercantilist worldview (where recipient nations are customers and clients) presents an opportunity for the U.S. to highlight the greater benefits that can come to recipient nations through expanded trade.
- *Accelerate/Simplify Funding Mechanisms.* Our research highlighted a common theme of slow and bureaucratic U.S. funding mechanisms. Accelerating the approval process would significantly improve U.S. agility/appeal of aid offers.
- *Improve Operational Performance.* As the U.S. force structure declines and the PRC's grows, the PRC will challenge the U.S.'s superior HA/DR capabilities and global

responsiveness. As a result, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and State Department will need to develop strategies to sustain and possibly extend the U.S.'s operational advantages in an austere resource environment.


- *Bolster Geopolitical Funding.* Due to largely cultural and historical reasons, the U.S. has a clear competitive advantage in working on humanitarian issues focused on individuals' welfare. At key competitive points, the U.S. should exploit this advantage and invest in making countries more resilient to humanitarian distress, focusing on preparedness, the welfare of individuals, and economic opportunity.

Candidate defensive investment areas (to counter PRC advantages) include:

- *Strategic Communications.* The PRC employs aggressive messaging for its efforts in the HA/DR sphere. However, the PRC also at times is dismissive or denigrates the efforts of others (e.g., the earlier Tongan tweet example). The U.S. (and its partners) need to aggressively counter the PRC's information/disinformation messaging and ensure host nations and the world are aware of the extensive humanitarian works being performed by the U.S. and its partners.
- *Invest in Vulnerable Nations.* At points where the PRC is investing in nations (often vulnerable nations) for geopolitical gain, the U.S. needs to focus additional resources to counter the efforts in coordination with like-minded partners (to include NGOs). Although this effort would need to be broader than simply the HA/DR realm, HA/DR-related actions could include such efforts as building resilience in communities and disaster relief training and exercises.
- *Strengthen National Defenses.* The shrinking U.S. military force structure negatively impacts the broader strategic competition with the PRC. This includes within the HA/DR sphere, where a declining force structure will compromise U.S. ability to respond rapidly and professionally - presenting the PRC with a competitive opportunity that it will likely exploit. Therefore, the U.S. must maintain a force structure sufficient for the competition.

Table 1 summarizes the key elements of our analysis process. To assist in identifying the most impactful policy investment areas, elements of each category in the table are listed in our rough view of their importance to the competition (we say rough because some elements will vary in importance due to such factors as timeframe and location). For example, under "U.S. Strengths" we consider having the *Most capable, experienced HA/DR capabilities* to be the U.S.'s most important strength. For "U.S. Weaknesses" we consider *Poor strategic messaging* to be the most important. For the PRC, elements are listed in how the U.S. may view their importance, not the PRC's perspective. For example, we list *Disdain for current international/humanitarian structures/protocols* as the PRC's most important weakness.

Table 1. Derivation of HA/DR Leverage and Investment Areas

U.S. Strengths	PRC Weaknesses	U.S. Leverage Points		HA/DR-Related Candidate Policy Investment Areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most capable, experienced HA/DR capabilities • Adheres to humanitarian principles • Respect sovereignty • Partner network • Cooperative within international structures • Global reach • Extensive government funding • Charitable culture • Extensive non-government wealth/ available capital • Partner wealth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disdain for current international humanitarian structures/ protocols • Less capable, less experienced HA/DR capabilities • Development aid is China-centric • Lack of respect for sovereignty • Mercantilist worldview • Transactional approach • Weak charitable culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsurpassed ability to lead/ conduct HA/DR operations • Unsurpassed wealth/ resources • Unsurpassed global reach • Superior trust within global humanitarian network • Vibrant philanthropic culture • Reputation for respecting sovereignty of others • Ability to build long-term, mutually beneficial economic opportunities 		<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; text-orientation: mixed; font-weight: bold; font-size: 2em; margin-right: 10px;">P R O A C T I V E</div> <div style="flex-grow: 1;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic communications • Strengthen partnerships • Sovereignty offensive • Expand trade opportunities/incentives • Accelerate/simplify funding mechanisms • Improve operational performance • Bolster geopolitical funding </div> </div>
U.S. Weaknesses	PRC Strengths		PRC Leverage Points	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor strategic messaging • Lacking national consensus • Failure to lead/educate public • Slow, bureaucratic response • Piecemeal/uncoordinated USG response • Modesty • U.S. funding obscured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possess strategic plan • Whole of government approach • Growing military/economic resources • Messaging integrated into plan • Dominant trade position • Growing operational expertise • Growing global reach • Growing diaspora network 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused/funded strategic plan • Perceived strategic momentum (e.g., PRC is the future) • Powerful strategic communications • Rapidly improving operational competency • Dominating economic/trade relationships vis-à-vis recipient nations • Dominating geopolitical position vis-à-vis recipient nations • Ethically unconstrained 	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; text-orientation: mixed; font-weight: bold; font-size: 2em; margin-right: 10px;">D E F E N S E</div> <div style="flex-grow: 1;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic communications • Invest in vulnerable nations • Strengthen national defenses </div> </div>

Outlining Policy Options

In U.S. Secretary of State Blinken’s May 2022 speech on China, he stated that

“... we cannot rely on Beijing to change its trajectory. So we will shape the strategic environment around Beijing to advance our vision for an open, inclusive international system.”

To accomplish this, Secretary Blinken summarized his strategy as simply to “invest, align, compete.” In this section we outline our proposed policy options for the HA/DR sphere that are aligned with Secretary Blinken’s “invest, align, compete” strategy. By starting with a proposed set of proactive and defensive investment areas (see the previous section), we produced policy options based on assumed U.S. Federal future funding profiles (flat, modest increase, significant increase). Irrespective of the funding level, we also established a set of policy tenets that would be key to any successful policy approach. Figure 2 depicts the process used.

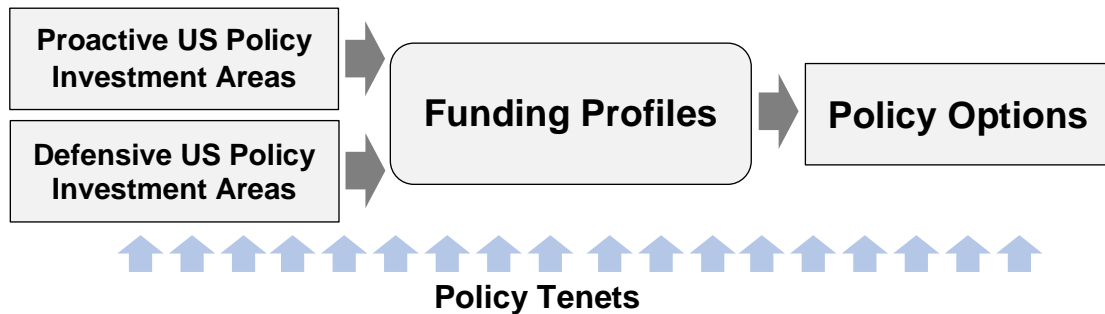


Figure 2. Process for Outlining Policy Options

Policy Tenets. During our research and interviews, several underlying tenets emerged that we thought needed to be reflected in any successful policy response. These tenets are integrated into each policy option and include:

- **Nonconfrontational.** To ensure broad international acceptance, U.S. policy must not target China – instead, U.S. policy is targeting positive measures to benefit individuals in need during a HA/DR crisis.
- **Effectively Communicate.** The humanitarian principles, protocols, requirements and accomplishments of the international HA/DR community must be clearly and broadly communicated and actively defended.
- **Generate momentum.** U.S. policy measures should instill confidence in the U.S.’s continued leadership role and generate momentum amongst the international HA/DR community to defend and advance established humanitarian principles.
- **Principles-based.** U.S. policy must defend and strengthen internationally-accepted institutions and organizations that advocate and defend accepted humanitarian principles.
- **Collaborative capacity building.** U.S. policy must work with the international HA/DR community and partner nations to increase operational capacity/effectiveness.

Policy Options. With the PRC challenge now broadly recognized across the U.S. political spectrum, the amount of federal funding the U.S. is willing to allocate in response is a logical way to discriminate between policy options. We used three rough geopolitical/military U.S. funding profiles (flat, modest increase, significant increase) that characterizes the overall funding environment. For each funding profile, key focus areas within the HA/DR sphere are highlighted for investment. To simplify the discussion, we describe only the additional policy features we recommend as funding resources increase.

Policy Option #1 (Flat Funding Profile). In the near future, U.S. Federal geopolitical funding will likely be flat in real dollars. Although not ideal, significant measures could still be taken in a constrained fiscal environment to begin addressing the emerging challenge to HA/DR. Key focus areas would include:

Strategic Communication Engagement. Simply communicating the U.S.'s extensive actions and investments in the humanitarian arena would be impactful. With limited funding, the U.S. should be capable of proactively telling its positive story and countering any misinformation/disinformation that is becoming more prevalent as the superpower competition becomes more heated. Messaging also needs to convey the significant role private U.S. organizations and industry play in the humanitarian sphere. U.S. messaging should be weaved throughout the plans and actions being taken and ensure recipient nations are targeted for receipt. Targeted communications should also account for nations that do not adhere to the humanitarian principles (humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence).

Strengthen and Energize Partnership. One of the key competitive advantages that the U.S. possesses (and the PRC lacks) is an extensive network of like-minded partners (both nations and NGOs) who share the same humanitarian principles and HA/DR protocols. With limited funds, the U.S. should be capable of energizing the HA/DR standards community to strengthen the humanitarian guardrails of acceptable HA/DR-related operations and behavior – with the objective of raising the geopolitical costs for the PRC (or any other nation) to ignore humanitarian principles.

Accelerate/Simplify Funding Mechanisms. A high payoff initiative possible in a frugal funding environment is streamlining the approval process for the disbursement of federal aid/assistance funds. This action will make the initiatives of the U.S. more attractive, increasing the likelihood that recipient nations will accept programs aligned with existing humanitarian standards. The U.S. needs to match the PRC's agility in this area.

Sovereignty Offensive. The U.S. should lead a movement that, through all HA/DR actions and deeds, the host nation's sovereignty is respected, highlighted, and always paramount. Central to this effort would be proactively demonstrating respect for sovereignty in actual operations, exercises, and guideline and standards conferences. Consideration should also be given to updating the "Oslo Guidelines" (Guidelines on The Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief).¹⁰ Given the authoritarian nature of the PRC, the U.S. should advocate for an assessment of the adequacy of the current guidelines and potentially lead the development and international acceptance of an updated version – ideally with the PRC participating – that protects the existing humanitarian principles in the new era.

Policy Option #2 (Modest Funding Increase). With additional funds, significant effort could also be devoted to the following key focus areas:

Expand Trade Opportunities/Incentives. The U.S. and its partner networks are also often robust economic powers. The U.S. should seek to lead a movement within this network that complements the short-term humanitarian relief with a broader, longer-term effort that encourages economic resiliency and opportunity. Central to this effort would be lowering barriers to two-way trade and incentives for resourcing from within the impacted nation. This focus area would make partnering with the U.S. (and like-minded partners) more attractive, improving the likelihood of achieving our policy objectives in the near and long term.

Improve Operational Performance. To continue to be viewed as the most impactful HA/DR resource, the U.S. needs to protect, and possibly extend, its preeminence in this area. As more funding becomes available, the U.S. should improve the integration of HA/DR training and exercises into its regular operational tempo. Particular emphasis should be placed on tapping its extensive partner network and agreeable NGOs to improve interoperability and responsiveness. The objective is to be viewed as the trusted and preferred partner by recipient nations in the event of a disaster.

Invest in Vulnerable Nations. Within a modest funding profile, the U.S. should be capable of strengthening humanitarian standards by investing in nations that are being pulled into the geopolitical competition (a recent example is the Solomon Islands). U.S. should coordinate with like-minded partners to invest in embassies and consulates to better understand the needs of vulnerable nations and the natural and geopolitical tensions. It will also help to identify partnership opportunities (e.g., agriculture, health, technology) and improve aid effectiveness and outreach. Special thought should also be given to better frame aid within the context of improving communities' organic resilience to natural disasters.

Policy Option #3 (Significant Funding Increase). If significant funding increases become available, all the previously discussed investment areas would be enhanced and broadened. In addition, two additional focus areas become possible.

Bolster Geopolitical Funding. As significant resources become available, the U.S. would be in a position to broadly address engagement areas that have been allowed to atrophy since the end of the Cold War. Across the spectrum, aid and engagement efforts would be enhanced, such as targeted, high payoff infrastructure projects, financial, medical, and technical assistance, and the development of markets. In contrast with the PRC, these initiatives would be designed to be mutually beneficial, encourage community resiliency, and pay meticulous respect for each nation's sovereignty. Again, this focus area seeks to elevate the desirability of the U.S. as a relief partner in the eyes of recipient nations experiencing a disaster.

Strengthen National Defenses. If the U.S. decides to make significant investments to bolster national defense to deter a hot war, and deterrence succeeds, many aspects of HA/DR will indirectly benefit. An increased force structure would enhance global presence, agility, and capability during disasters. As an element of influence and competition, the U.S. military could invest with an eye toward improved exercises, innovation in relief technologies, and command and control. Improved global presence would also complement efforts to protect sovereignty, strengthening partnerships, and help to diminish weaker nations' vulnerabilities.

Summary

As the PRC builds wealth and influence, its activism and authoritarian views on governance, sovereignty, human rights, and economics underscore Secretary Blinken's concern for "universal values" and advancing the U.S. vision for an "open, inclusive international system." Of note, the current Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), William Burns, has been blunter about the challenge facing the U.S., describing China in a recent speech as "increasingly adversarial" and that China ...

*"... is intent upon building the capabilities to bully its neighbors ... and chip away with other authoritarians at the rules-based international order that we and our allies have worked so hard to sustain."*¹¹

If Secretary Blinken and Director Burns are correct about PRC intent, the potential for upheaval in the post-World War II order will be extensive and would not spare the HA/DR sphere. Yet, despite this, the U.S., as the indispensable global HA/DR operator and thought leader, has not broadly reflected on this emerging challenge. This paper begins to address this deficiency by constructing a roadmap that guides decision-makers to an effective policy response based on funding conditions.

Figure 3 summarizes our policy roadmap findings. As Federal geopolitical funding increases (from flat to significant increase), additional key **Focus Areas** become available for implementation. These Focus Areas were derived from studying the U.S./PRC strengths and weaknesses, which helped identify points of leverage that were considered for investment. The **Policy Tenets** underpin all measures taken while pursuing our **Policy Objectives**. As the number of funded Focus Areas increases, the likelihood of achieving the Policy Objectives increases (although in theory, Policy Option #1 alone might be capable of achieving one or both of the Policy Objectives).

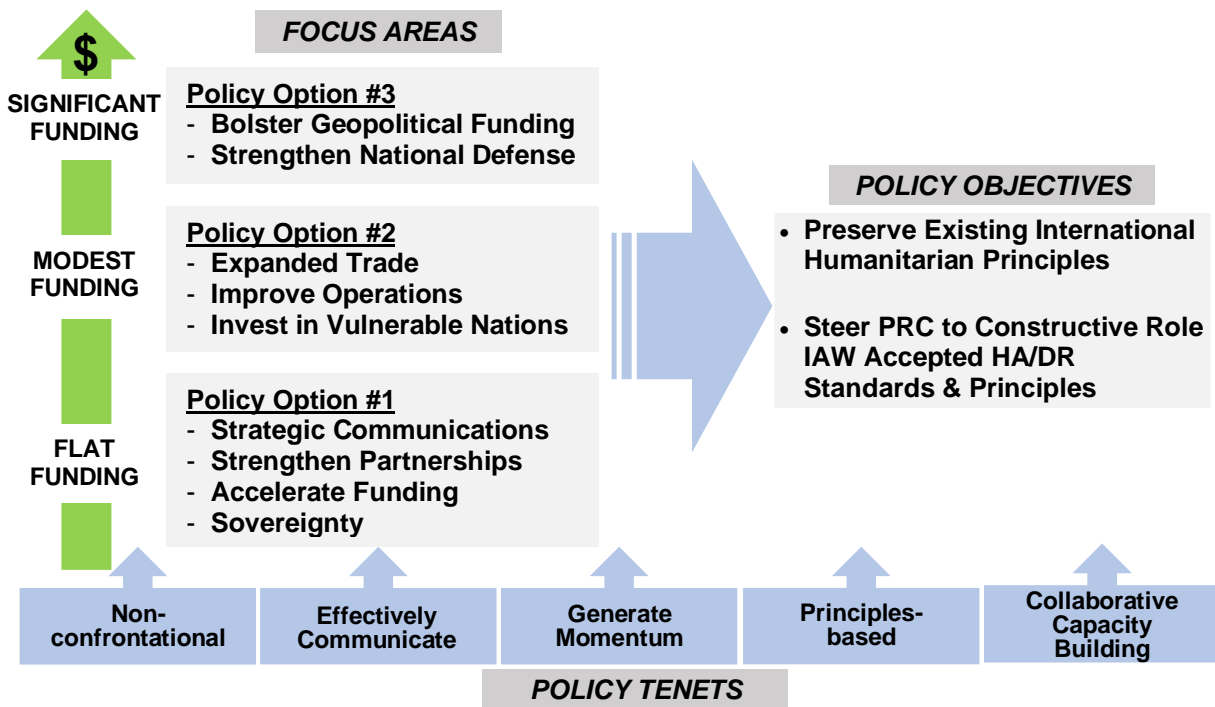


Figure 3. Policy Roadmap Overview

Final Policy Points. This study revealed several overarching points that appear critical for achieving our policy objectives and warrant highlighting. To some extent, each point is related to many focus areas described earlier.

- First, and most importantly, if the U.S. does nothing else, communicating effectively is critical. From either a proactive or defensive perspective, a strong voice is needed to defend humanitarian principles.
- Second, the U.S. must reassert its leadership in the HA/DR area. Without conspicuous and assertive action to defend humanitarian principles, the PRC will fill the void – to the detriment of the world’s ability to “*alleviate suffering of people.*”¹²
- Third, U.S. leadership must directly communicate with its citizens on the stakes in play and explain why this issue is worthy of investment.
- Finally, whatever path the U.S. may take, achieving the HA/DR policy objectives will require nesting the approach within a coherent, broader geopolitical strategy.

Next Steps. This paper proposes a roadmap to U.S. policy makers for addressing the PRC challenge within the HA/DR sphere. Recent events in Taiwan highlight the potential risks inherent in HA/DR operations and should instill a sense of urgency to take action. With this in mind, we recommend the following near-term steps be taken:

- Brief the issue and the proposed policy roadmap to key stakeholders (e.g., State Department, DoD, USAID).
- Initiate studies to refine and deconstruct each focus area. Stakeholders should be tasked to develop the details, tasks, and costs associated with a particular focus area.
- Wargame competitive scenarios. Wargaming will allow sponsors and players to better understand the issues associated with HA/DR operations in competitive environments and gain insight into crafting effective policies derived from the proposed roadmap.
- Identify and transparently enlist NGO/Academic/International players to partner in a movement to defend the humanitarian principles.
- Given the insights gained, develop a funded implementation plan with the support of the nation and our partners.

Annex Interview Methodology

Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted to inform this research paper. Interviewees were humanitarian practitioners (including actors associated with multinational and US governmental agencies); military and intelligence specialists (in particular, interviewees with PRC expertise); and career international policy-making specialists (all with PRC expertise). Interviewees discussed their experiences and views with respect to effective policymaking, HA/DR operations and relations in various contexts, and the future outlook for the U.S./PRC relationship. The interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom. The interviews were conducted under a protocol where at the interviewee's discretion, their contributions (including their organizational affiliation) could be either anonymous or made public (in the course of the project, the authors decided to keep all interviewees anonymous). A key limitation in the interviewee pool was that the interviewees were Western-centric.

The below questions shaped the structure of the interviews conducted for this paper. The interviews were semi-structured and conversational, so the questions actually asked and discussed varied with each interviewee.

- From your perspective, what is the nature of China?
- As the PRC continues to mature its military capabilities, do you anticipate their HA/DR calculus will change (e.g., humanitarian benefit over national self-interest)?
- For well over a decade, the US military invited the PRC to participate in training and exercises to elevate HA/DR readiness. Should the US continue to do this in the future?
- PRC is building a HA/DR track record of bilaterally-focused operations. What does this mean for the future of PRC HA/DR? What could this mean for US and other governmental HA/DR practitioners?
- If present trends continue, what risk does US-PRC coexistence within the HA/DR sphere present that could affect civilians? How might these risks be mitigated in the future?
- What is your view of China's influence at the WHO and how do you think it impacted the world's ability to respond to COVID-19?
- *If the response to above is that it had a significantly negative impact, the follow-up question is: To armchair the COVID-19 scenario, 5 years before the pandemic ... what could the US and its partners have done to prevent the ineffectiveness of the World's response?*
- In the international HA/DR arena, what are the US's strengths? Weaknesses?
- If international HA/DR community members were asked the same question about the US, would they agree with the above?
- How do you think the PRC views the US's strengths and weaknesses?
- As the PRC becomes more powerful, do you expect them to adhere to the existing international HA/DR principles? Or do you expect them to attempt to steer the international community in a different direction? If so, what changes do you expect?
- At the US national level, what measures should the US take to defend the existing international HA/DR principles?
- Given the potential for the PRC challenging the HA/DR principles, what actions should USAID and DoD take to bolster the existing framework?
- Is there a way to wargame a policy response that might be insightful?
- Could the 1975 Helsinki Accords serve as a model for how to strategically protect international humanitarian principles?

- Given the goal of our project, is there someone you could recommend to us for an interview?

Endnotes

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