Challenges Facing the Controlling Stage of the Disaster Response Management Resulting from War Operations and Terrorism in Iraq

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Abstract

The effects of war in Iraq are coupled with the susceptibility to natural hazards, which has exposed the people of Iraq to multiple man-made disasters. Despite the fact that terrorists did not have a hold on any part of Iraq before the US invasion, it is generally believed that Iraq contains many terrorists and terrorist organisations. As a result, violence in Iraq has become normalised, ranging from the Iraqi and US military assaults and sectarian militias, threat of suicide bombings, to violent street crime. Because response activities must operate in a constantly changing environment during a disaster, the response operation is complex and need more controlling efforts. Therefore, it is widely agreed that controlling the response to disaster stemming from war operations and terrorism is often considered a difficult stage within the four disaster response management stages: planning, organising, directing, and controlling.

This paper is based on an ongoing PhD study. It aims to determine the challenges facing the controlling stage of disaster response management in Iraq with particular reference to war operations and terrorism. This paper adopts a single holistic case study approach, where disaster response management is the unit of analysis. In order to develop a rich and robust data set, a mixed methods approach is utilised based on semi-structured interviews, questionnaire surveys and document analysis. A conceptual content analysis is used to articulate the primary data and this is then analysed in the context of the secondary data. The findings show that disaster response controlling stage faced different challenges such as lack of modern technology and equipment, multiple sources for the decision at the scene, lack of public education, and failure in imposing a proper security cordon.

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1. Introduction

Disasters are often large intractable problems that test the ability of communities and nations to effectively protect their populations and infrastructure, to reduce both human and property loss, and to rapidly recover [1]. Even in the 1990s, it was recognised that disasters, especially man-made ones, were an ever-present threat and were happening at an increasing rate worldwide [2]. Over the course of the past century, according to Coppola [3], man-made disasters grew at a rate much greater than natural disasters. Thus, Desforges & Waeckerle (1991), at that time, argued that natural and man-made disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, plane crashes, high-rise building collapses, or major nuclear facility malfunctions, posed increasing challenges to disaster response management. To conduct proper disaster management, the sequence of activities that are logical, integrated and progressive should be acted as a cycle called Disaster Management Cycle [4]. There are different phases of this cycle, such as response, reconstruction, mitigation, and preparedness [5]. The response phase is considered as one of the critical phases of the Disaster Management life cycle [6, 7]. The complexity of the disaster response mission, in some cases, will be increased due to the high volume of potential casualties as well as the urgency of a fast response [8]. To manage response activities, four major managerial functions, namely, Planning, Organising, Directing, and Controlling should be performed [9].

The focus of this paper is about the challenges during the controlling stage of disaster response management.

Although extensive research has been carried out on disaster management, no single study exists which adequately covers the problem of disaster response management in Iraq particularly the controlling stage which is one of the four stages of the disaster response management. There has been some discussion among researchers regarding the behavioural response to the disaster as applicable to large-scale destruction and acts of terrorism [10-13]. Yet the extensive reorganisation of the disaster management system following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, reinforced the traditional model of command and control [14]. It is widely believed that the world changed forever after the events of 11 September 2001. It became a more dangerous and uncertain place, where no-one is safe or immune from the threat of terror. Terrorism is the most salient hazard due to a remarkable upsurge in terrorist acts in the recent past [3, 10-12]. With regard to Iraq, Iraq was ranked number 1, out of the top 10 countries most at risk of terrorism [15]. It is generally believed that Iraq contains many terrorists and terrorist organisations [12]. Not only that, the continuing effects of conflict, displacement and severe poverty have exacerbated the exposure of the Iraqi people to these disasters. Many essential services needed to manage hazards, reduce risks and respond to disasters have been crippled by war and post-war conflicts [16].

It is widely acknowledged that poor policy and institutional capacities regarding disaster management makes people and communities more prone to the effects of natural and man-made disasters. As humanitarian disasters become more complex, different countries such as Middle Eastern countries including Iraq try to overcome such disasters by enhancing disaster management in this area with research. Therefore, this paper aims to critically review the challenges facing the controlling stage of disaster response management in Iraq immediately aftermath of the disaster incidents. This paper is part of an ongoing PhD study being undertaken on the four stages of the disaster response stage, namely, Planning, Organising, Directing, and Controlling in order to manage response activities and conduct overall evaluation for disaster response management in Iraq.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, the controlling stage is discussed in general, its definitions and steps by reviewing the related literature with particular reference to disasters response management. Section 3 presents the research methodology. Section 4 introduces the research findings and discusses the findings that emerged from both primary and secondary data in order to bridge the gap between theory and empirics. The final section concludes the paper.

2. Controlling Stage of Disaster Response Management

The main intention of management is to establish the essence of proactive performance in our chaotic world as well as to assist an organisation to make the best use of its resources to achieve its objectives. To accomplish these goals, four major managerial functions, namely, Planning, Organising, Directing, and Controlling should be performed [9].
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