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Concept of Operations Considerations For  
Working With Socially Engaged Buddhists in  
Southeast Asia For United States Navy and  
Marine Corps Humanitarian Assistance and  
Disaster Relief Missions

Coates, Gregory, R.

Monterey California. Naval Postgraduate School

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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> My paper concentrated on a global development within Buddhism called Socially Engaged Buddhism (SEB), with a particular emphasis on groups in SE Asia. I have chosen to do this for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, "SEB" is a relatively new religious-political phenomenon that had its birth in the 1950s in Vietnam and continues today throughout SE Asia. Second, I focused on the three-core ethics of SEB: loving-kindness (metta), compassion (karuna), and generous giving (dana). Understanding both the historical religious-political context and religious practice of Socially Engaged Buddhists will not only better equip the US Navy/Marine Corps Team to respect and serve alongside the people of SE Asia with the highest ideal of professionalism but will allow us to be more effective in the execution of a Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Mission. I argued the way forward in SE Asia Concept of Operations for Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Missions will be to partner with local SEB Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International SEB Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). The main body of my thesis looked at the religious, cultural, and organizational structure of a few NGOs and INGOs that may serve as religious and cultural liaisons with US Navy and Marine Corps personnel to any Host Nation's population. In addition, I presented an apparent contradiction within some corners of SEB—religiously sanctioned violence. While religiously sanctioned violence does exist in rare cases among groups that might consider themselves "socially engaged," this should not diminish the importance of a collaborative partnership with NGOs and INGOs committed to non-violence.					
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SOUTHEAST ASIA  
FOR  
UNITED STATES NAVY AND MARINE CORPS  
HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND  
DISASTER RELIEF MISSIONS

By

Gregory Russell Coates  
LCDR, CHC, USN

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views  
and are not necessarily endorsed by Candler School of Theology or  
the Department of the Navy.

April 24, 2019

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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The U.S. private sector is under attack in cyberspace. An increasingly mainstream national security argument calls for amending U.S. law to permit private sector actors, either by themselves or under government supervision, to take so-called "active defense" measures—technical measures that fall in the grey zone between passive network defenses and aggressive offense. This essay identifies and surveys the relevant laws of twenty countries with large and technologically innovative private sectors. As the U.S. government considers how best to protect U.S. private industry, this "map" informs the options on the table for a holistic review and response to the problem.					
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“The United States Pacific Command Area of Responsibility (USPACOM AOR) covers half the earth’s surface and more than 50 percent of the world’s population, or 3.6 billion people. It also suffers 80 percent of the world’s disasters. The Asia-Pacific region is 25 times more likely to have a major disaster than Europe.”<sup>1</sup>

“Overcome the angry by non-anger; overcome the wicked by goodness; overcome the miser with generosity; overcome the liar with truth.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Introduction**

As a Chaplain in the United States Navy, I have been sent to Emory University and Candler School of Theology to study how religion and culture could affect Concept of Operations for a United States Navy/Marine Corps Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Mission. As a result of this study I will present here my findings and conclusions during the conceptual stages of any Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Mission in Southeast Asia (SE Asia): Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Sri Lanka. In addition, it is my goal to have my research, conclusions, and advisements formatted in a brief to be provided to all Religious Ministry Teams headed to United States Pacific Command Area of Responsibility.

I have chosen to write about Theravada Buddhism in SE Asia for two primary reasons. First, during President Obama’s administration, the United States Navy started refocusing its attention away from the Middle East and back towards our historical area of expertise: the United States Pacific Command Area of Operation. Second, SE Asia is more likely than most areas of the world to be affected by natural

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance, USPACOM Area of Responsibility, <https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Training/DMHA101/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility>, accessed October 04, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> BuddhaNet, *The Dhammapada: The Buddha’s Path to Wisdom* (verse 223), <https://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/dp17.htm>; accessed April 24, 2019.

disasters. Because Theravada Buddhism is the predominant religion in this area, I will be able to advise Commanding Officers and their Religious Ministry Teams on how this religion and associated culture could impact their Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Mission in the SE Asia area of operation.

While every mission will be unique with respect to the size and scope of any natural disaster, our missions might include but are not limited to Foreign Disaster Relief, Dislocated Civilian Support, Security, Technical Assistance and Support Functions. Related operations may include Peace Operations, Stability Operations, Nation Assistance, and Noncombatant Evacuation Operations.<sup>3</sup>

As the US Navy/Marine Corps Team begins to conceptualize the parameters of any mission, I as a Christian Chaplain who now has some background in Buddhism have a vital role to play in the design of the mission. I would be assigned the advisement role on “the impact of religion . . . as well as the potential impact of military operations on the religious and humanitarian issues in the OA (Operational Area).”<sup>4</sup> In addition to the general impact, military doctrine specifically identifies one core fundamental expectation for United States Chaplains. JG 1-05 states,

Chaplains may advise the commander and staff members on various religious dynamics within the OA. Chaplains may be tasked to accomplish certain liaison functions that relate to religious or humanitarian purposes approved by the commander, particularly with indigenous religious leaders and faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the OA.<sup>5</sup> . . .Coordinates with senior military chaplains, government officials, officials of NGOs and international organizations, local and national religious leaders, and others, as directed by the CCDR.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> USJCS (US Joint Chiefs of Staff), *Joint Publication 3-29: Foreign Humanitarian Assistance* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 03 January 2014), I-7- I-10.

<sup>4</sup> USJCS (US Joint Chiefs of Staff), *Joint Guide 1-05: Religious Affairs in Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1 February 2018), ix.

<sup>5</sup> USJCS, *Joint Guide 1-05: Religious Affairs in Joint Operations*, II-2.

<sup>6</sup> USJCS, *Joint Guide 1-05: Religious Affairs in Joint Operations*, II-5.

In order to fulfill the mission laid out in JG 1-05, my paper will concentrate on a relatively new global development within Buddhism called Socially Engaged Buddhism (SEB), with a particular emphasis on groups in SE Asia. I have chosen to do this for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, “SEB” is a relatively new religious-political phenomenon that had its birth in the 1950s in Vietnam and continues today throughout SE Asia. The phrase ‘Engaged Buddhism’ originated with Thich Nhat Hanh, a prominent Vietnamese monk who worked for peace during the Viet Nam War. According to Sallie B. King, “Thich Nhat Hanh coined the term ‘Engaged Buddhism,’ using it to refer to the kind of Buddhism that he wanted to see develop: one that would translate the wisdom and compassion that Buddhists strive to develop into concrete action on behalf of all sentient beings.”<sup>7</sup> While there is ongoing disagreement among monks about being involved in “worldly” affairs outside of the monastery, Hanh responded, “Buddhism as always been engaged. All of Buddhism is engaged because all of it addresses human suffering.”<sup>8</sup>

Second, I will also focus on the three-core ethics of SEB: loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), and generous giving (*dana*). Understanding both the historical religious-political context and religious practice of Socially Engaged Buddhists will not only better equip the US Navy/Marine Corps Team to respect and serve alongside the people of SE Asia with the highest ideal of professionalism but will allow us to be more effective in the execution of a Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Mission.

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<sup>7</sup> Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 8.

Finally, I will argue the way forward in SE Asia Concept of Operations and Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Missions will be to partner with local SEB Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International SEB Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). The main body of my thesis will be looking at the religious, cultural, and organizational structure of a few NGOs and INGOs that may serve as religious and cultural liaisons with US Navy and Marine Corps personnel to any Host Nation's population. In addition, I will present an apparent contradiction within some corners of SEB—religiously sanctioned violence. While religiously sanctioned violence does exist in rare cases among groups that might consider themselves “socially engaged,” this should not diminish the importance of a collaborative partnership with NGOs and INGOs committed to non-violence. Still, this distinction should be taken into consideration for any missional planning.

### **Socially Engaged Buddhism**

In order to understand SEB in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, I must begin with the foundational core beliefs of Buddhism in SE Asia. I will focus on three (two of which also entail ritual practices): the Three Refuges, the Four Noble Truths, and the Five Lay Precepts. Following these core philosophical and religious beliefs, I will present the various types of SEB found in SE Asia. Finally, I will look at the unique relationship between the HN's government, the Sangha (monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen), and the local Buddhist population.

While Buddhism is fluid and “always changing,”<sup>9</sup> there is an orthodox core of Buddhism known as “the three refuges.” The three refuges define who is a Buddhist and is foundational to their belief. Noted Buddhist scholar Kate Crosby writes,

The simplest definition of a Buddhist is one who “takes refuge” in the “three refuges.” The first refuge is the Buddha, who found the path to salvation in relation to which Buddhism as a religion developed. The second refuge is the Dhamma, the truth or teaching realized and promulgated by the Buddha. The third refuge is the Sangha, the communities of monks and nuns who have pursued and preserved the Dhamma, and provided religious and other support to the communities that materially supported them.<sup>10</sup>

The three refuges—also known as the Triple Gem<sup>11</sup>— provide the foundational structure and relationships which help sustain cohesion of Buddhism not only in SE Asia but around the world.

Concerning the three refuges, I will focus on the second refuge—the Dharma. As mentioned above, the Dharma represents the truth or teaching that is believed to come from Siddhartha Gautama, the “historical” Buddha, over 2,500 years ago. Buddha taught what is now referred to as the Four Noble Truths. To understand the Four Noble Truths is to understand the grand narrative of moving from suffering to liberation or enlightenment for the Buddhist, i.e., *nirvana*.<sup>12</sup> With respect to this spiritual journey, Donald Mitchell writes, “These Holy Truths are about the dissatisfactory human condition, its cause, its possible end, and the path that leads to this release.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Tara Doyle, conversation with author, 10 December 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Kate Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity, and Identity* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 1. While the author uses the Pali word Dhamma, I will use the Sanskrit word Dharma.

<sup>11</sup> Asanga Tilakaratne, *Theravada Buddhism: The View of the Elders* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 20.

<sup>12</sup> While I try to use Pali for most of my Buddhist terms, I occasionally use Sanskrit for the familiarity of a word.

<sup>13</sup> Donald W. Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 46.

The Four Noble Truths the Buddha taught are: (1) there is suffering (*dukkha*); (2) the cause of suffering is craving and ignorance (*tanha* and *avidya*); (3) it is possible for suffering to cease for all in the state of nirvana (*nibbana*); and (4) the way to end suffering is the Noble Eight-Fold Path (*magga*), consisting of ethical discipline, mental discipline and wisdom.<sup>14</sup>

While volumes have been written on the Four Noble Truths, I will briefly describe the general understanding within the Buddhist context. The First Noble Truth, suffering (*dukkha*) is at the core of all the evils in the world and is the opposite of one's true, enlightened attitude of happiness. Since suffering is at the center of all problems, Buddha says that the cause of suffering, the Second Noble Truth, is one's craving or thirst (*tanha*) for material things because unenlightened humans lack wisdom in understanding the impermanence of all things including one's self. Peter Harvey writes about the centrality of suffering. "The aim of overcoming *dukkha* (suffering), both in oneself and others, is the central preoccupation of Buddhism, and one towards which ethical action contributes."<sup>15</sup> As a result, the Third Noble Truth declares that it is possible for suffering to cease for oneself, others, and all created sentient beings. Finally, the Fourth Noble truth reveals the pathway to ending suffering, which comprises ethical precepts, right views, and meditative practices. This is known as the Noble Eight-Fold Path.

One would rightly argue that the traditional application of the Four Noble Truths is for one to detach him/herself from the world by entering a monastery and seeking the

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<sup>14</sup> Tara Doyle, "What the Buddha (Might Have) Taught" (Socially Engaged Buddhism Class lecture, Emory University, Atlanta, GA, September 4, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 33.

path of enlightenment as a monk or nun. However, I believe that through such examples like Thich Nhat Hahn, the engaged Buddhist, monk or nun chooses not to detach from the world literally but rather is dedicated to showing compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness (*metta*) by addressing and relieving the suffering of those who are around them through acts of generous giving back to the community (*dana*).

It is significant to understand that for followers of SEB, the Four Noble Truths teach transformation of not only the individual but society as a whole through their compassion (*karuna*), loving-kindness (*metta*), and generous actions (*dana*). Sallie B. King, one of the major scholars of SEB, reinforces this understanding. She writes, “Sometimes it may seem as if Engaged Buddhists are only concerned about curing mundane suffering, but that is not the case. They want to cure both mundane suffering and the human condition, *dukkha* in its larger sense. These two are held together, both valid.”<sup>16</sup>

The Noble Eight-Fold Path speaks to both aspects of transforming oneself and society. Since the entire Noble Eight-Fold Path lies outside the scope of this paper, I am only going to focus on steps three through five, i.e., Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood because these impact the ethical behavior of Buddhists. According to Matthew Walton, cultivating the “morality” aspects of right speech, right action, and right livelihood is the most common focus in monks’ sermons in Myanmar.<sup>17</sup> I would imagine that this is equally true throughout the Theravadin world.

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<sup>16</sup> Sallie B. King, *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 18.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew J. Walton, *Buddhism, Politics and Political Thought in Myanmar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 45.

The major way to live a life of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, or what I call the Moral Perfection of the Noble Eight-fold Path, is to follow the Five Precepts, which are central to any Buddhist layperson in SE Asia. These are: (1) No killing, (2) No stealing, (3) No sexual misconduct, (4) No lying, and (5) No intoxicants. A great example of contemporary interpretations of the Five Precepts is Thich Nhat Hanh's *Mindfulness Trainings*<sup>18</sup>. In the first training titled 'Reverence for Life,' he vows to not kill nor let others kill people, animals, plants, or minerals. The second training, titled 'Generosity,' vows not to exploit, cause social injustice, steal, or oppress any person, animal, plant, or minerals. In the third training, titled 'Sexual Responsibility,' one is determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. The fourth training, titled 'Deep Listening and Loving Speech,' one speaks in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. The fifth training, titled 'Mindful Consumption,' includes not only intoxicants but also a lifestyle that cultivates healthy eating, physical and mental health. One can see how these trainings expand traditional morality into more socially engaged ethics.

Another important thinker in the SEB movement is Ken Jones, who is a lifelong activist and Zen practitioner for over thirty years. He is also a founding member of the UK Network of Engaged Buddhists.<sup>19</sup> Like Thich Nhat Hanh, Jones also reinterprets the ethical aspects of the 8-fold path along SEB lines. In his book, *The New Social Face of Buddhism*, he provides two general types or categories of SEB. They are: social helping — comprising service and welfare; and radical activism.<sup>20</sup> For Jones, the

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<sup>18</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Creating True Peace: Ending Violence in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community, and the World* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 73-74.

<sup>19</sup> Ken Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism: A Call to Action* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), back cover.

<sup>20</sup> Jones, 174.

“social helping” category focuses on personal engagement<sup>21</sup> through compassion (*karuna*) and generosity (*dana*). Jones’s personal engagement is about the transformation of the individual. Radical activism, on the other hand, focuses on social engagement whereby one attempts to change systems, not just individuals<sup>22</sup>. Social engagement for Jones includes “a lifestyle that is conscious and well informed—ecologically, politically, economically, and culturally. This he notes is about, for example, “right livelihood”. . .”<sup>23</sup> Social engagement is about transforming the world in “the creation of a global society free of war, poverty, curable disease, and the many forms of oppression and exploitation, through the evolution of a compassionate and cooperative commonwealth.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Ethics of Socially Engaged Buddhism.**

There are three ethical principles that not only hold all Dharma teachings together, but also provide meaning and purpose to all actions which will one day produce either enlightenment (*nirvana*) or a better reincarnation (*samsara*) for Buddhist followers. These three are compassion (*karuna*), loving-kindness (*metta*), and generosity (*dana*). Although I have touched on these already, I will focus on them more deeply in this section.

Donald Swearer articulates an insightful summary of how I understand these three ethics as foundational to SEB spiritual formation and application in SE Asia. He writes, “Doctrinally, ideal action in Theravada Buddhism can be described as

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<sup>21</sup> Jones, 175.

<sup>22</sup> Jones, 175.

<sup>23</sup> Jones, 175.

<sup>24</sup> Jones, 176.

meritorious action (*punna-kamma*) or action that does not accrue demerit . . . Terms used to characterize ideal behavior and attitudes are generosity (*dana*), loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*).”<sup>25</sup> Understanding the vitality of compassion, loving-kindness, and generosity, is to not only grasp the possible two goals of all Theravada Buddhists—producing good karma in order to achieve either a better rebirth (*samsara*) in the next life (lay people) or enlightenment in this life (monks and nuns), like the Buddha.

The first core ethical principle is compassion.<sup>26</sup> One could argue compassion (*karuna*) permeates every thought and action of Buddhism because compassion was the energy enabling Siddhartha Gautama to become Buddha. Asanga Tilakaratne echoes this understanding when he wrote, “The Buddhists know the Buddha as one who is endowed with great compassion. In fact, it is held that the very driving force behind his act of becoming the Buddha was the great compassion he felt toward all beings who suffer in the *samsara*.”<sup>27</sup> However, other Buddhist scholars like Tara Doyle would argue that wisdom not compassion enabled him to become a Buddha. She argues that compassion was in many ways the result of wisdom and not the primary cause.<sup>28</sup> Regardless, one can appreciate and understand how fundamental compassion is to Buddhism generally, including SEB.

As a result, all Buddhists (monks, nuns, laity) constantly strive to develop compassion (*karuna*) towards the suffering (*dukkha*) of all sentient beings. Compassion

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<sup>25</sup> Donald K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that while I focus on Theravada Buddhism in this paper, followers of SEB belong to both the Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist traditions.

<sup>27</sup> Asanga Tilakaratne, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Personal conversation with Dr. Tara Doyle.

is the opposite of cruelty or harm.<sup>29</sup> Compassion is non-harm or non-violence. We will see compassion in action in people like SEB NGOs and INGOs.

Flowing out of compassion (*karuna*), comes the second core ethical principle which is loving-kindness (*metta*). At its Buddhist core, loving-kindness (*metta*) means universal benevolence or friendliness.<sup>30</sup> The key emphasis for loving-kindness is the universal application towards all people and all of creation. Inherent in loving-kindness is an understanding of non-judgement. The goal, as with compassion, is to serve not only others in order to reduce their suffering (*duhkha*) but the sources (anger, greed, and delusion) which produce suffering as well.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a perfect example of compassion in action based on loving-kindness. During the Vietnam War, he refused to take political sides even though he is Vietnamese. With his understanding of *karuna*, he tirelessly served those who were suffering greatly because of the war. In addition, after the war was over, he tirelessly ministered to both the United States and Vietnamese veterans, a demonstration of his commitment to not just *karuna*, but to “not taking sides.”

One might ask, how important is compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness (*metta*) for a Buddhist? I would argue it is the foundation of wisdom located in the first two steps of the Noble Eight-Fold Path—right understanding and right thought. To emphasize the importance of compassion and loving-kindness, the *Karaniyametta Sutta* teaches, “May all be well and secure, may all beings be happy! . . . for all beings be

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Harvey, 104.

<sup>30</sup> Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 23.

yours. Cultivate an all-embracing mind of love, For all throughout the universe, In all its height, depth and breadth-- Love that is untroubled, and beyond hatred or enmity.<sup>31</sup>

The third core ethical principle, according to Sallie B. King, is giving or generosity (*dana*).<sup>32</sup> In Buddhism, compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness (*metta*) is made real and tangible through giving generously (*dana*). Generosity is the core dynamic within the Buddhist Four-Fold Sangha (monks/Bhikkhu, nuns/Bhikkhuni, laymen/Upasaka, and laywomen/ Upasikaa).

Generous giving (*dana*) can traditionally best be seen in the relationship between the monks, nuns, and the laity. As the monks and nuns have taken vows of detachment of “worldly affairs” to focus on moral perfection by meditation and teaching the Dharma to the laity, the laity in turn give generously (*dana*) to the monks and nuns. Dana includes but is not limited to providing food, robes, house-hold items for the monastery, and even the maintenance or physical additions to a monastery.

How important is *dana* to a Buddhist in SE Asia? According to Sallie King, “the laypeople have by no means seen this relationship as a burden; on the contrary, they see the monastics as “fields of merit,” a boon in the form of an opportunity to earn merit.<sup>33</sup> To earn merit is to produce good karma. Producing good karma has two direct benefits for Buddhists. First, they can transfer their merits onto their deceased relatives in order to assist them in their next lives; and second, merits or good karma will result in true happiness in this life and a better reincarnated life in the future.

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<sup>31</sup> Kate Cosby, 144-45.

<sup>32</sup> Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 23.

These ethical principles are so critical to those whom we will be assisting, that I would contend that our primary role should simply be to provide land, sea, and air logistics to Buddhist NGOs and INGOs, so that they can engage in compassion (*karuna*), loving-kindness (*metta*), and generous giving (*dana*) to those who have been affected in a Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief environment. In addition, by allowing Buddhist NGOs and INGOs to be the liaison between US Military and Host Nation's people, we limit any unintentional religious and/or cultural misunderstandings as we execute our mission.

Finally, by encouraging Buddhist NGOs and INGOs to be our liaisons, we recognize not only that they were on location prior to the disaster, but also that they will continue to be there long after we have successfully concluded our mission, in cooperation with them. Therefore, we should focus on helping them logistically become more efficient by providing heavy-lift capabilities to move as much materials and personnel where they are most needed during the duration of our mission. In order to fully appreciate SEB NGOs and INGOs presence in the theater, I will now present four organizations and their activity in SE Asia.

### **Humanitarian Assistance in Southeast Asia**

In this section, my research focuses on four organizations and their following characteristics: (1) a general overview of the organization, (2) its structure, and (3) any Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Missions in the past. I will conclude each organization with my advisement for possible partnerships in future missions. The organizations are: Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka; the global

organization Tzu-Chi of Taiwan; Shanti Volunteer Association of Japan working in Cambodia; and Sitagu Association of Myanmar.

### Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, Sri Lanka

The first organization to be discussed is the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (Sarvodaya) of Sri Lanka. Founded in 1958 by Dr. Ahangamage Tudor Ariyaratne, Sarvodaya began as an educational program in one village to help villagers develop self-help initiatives. 50 years later, they are active in more than 15,000 villages offering services like early childhood development, rural technical services, woodwork and exports, community health, and the institute of higher learning.<sup>34</sup>

On Dec 26, 2004 a 9.3 earthquake generated a tsunami in the Indian Ocean resulting in a regional death toll estimated between 200,000 and 300,000.<sup>35</sup> According to Elizabeth Harris, the destruction of the tsunami in Sri Lanka was devastating. She estimated that 30,000 Sri Lankans lost their lives, 800,000 were homeless, and 70 percent of Sri Lanka's coastline was devastated.<sup>36</sup> According to Eric Shaw, The United States Navy and Marine Corps assets first arrived and set up a Forward Command Element in Thailand on 28 Dec 2004. 30 Dec 2004 Joint Task Force Disaster Relief Assessment Teams arrived in Sri Lanka and concluded missions on 29 Jan 2005.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Sarvodaya Shamadana Movement Sri Lanka, <https://www.sarvodaya.org/history>, accessed April 24, 2019.

<sup>35</sup> B. Poisson, M. Garcin, and R. Pedreros, "The 2004 December 26 Indian Ocean tsunami impact on Sri Lanka: cascade modelling from ocean to city scales," in *Geophysical Journal International* 177, no 3 (1 June 2009): 1080, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-246X.2009.04106.x>, accessed January 18, 2019

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth J. Harris, *Buddhism and International Aid: A case Study from Post-tsunami Sri Lanka in Buddhism, International Relief Work, and Civil Society*, edited by Hiroko Kawanami and Geoffrey Samuel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Shaw, *Operation Unified Assistance: 2004 Sumatran Earthquake and Tsunami Humanitarian Relief*, Newport, RI: United States Naval War College (May 2013), vii, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264153352\\_Operation\\_Unified\\_Assistance\\_2004\\_Sumatran\\_Earthquake\\_and\\_Tsunami\\_Humanitarian\\_Relief](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264153352_Operation_Unified_Assistance_2004_Sumatran_Earthquake_and_Tsunami_Humanitarian_Relief), accessed January 18, 2019.

In my opinion, partnering with a SEB organization such as Sarvodaya would have made these missions far more effective, especially in the logistical dispersion of supplies. I say this for the following reasons. To maximize a Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Mission, with the Sri Lankan Buddhist religion and culture in mind, a contemporary-dynamic relationship with a religious NGO like Sarvodaya would be advantageous for both sides especially for the logistical movement of all supplies for the following reasons. First, according to Sri Lankan monk and Harvard PhD graduate, Mahinda Deegalle, since 1958 Sarvodaya has operated welfare programs in 11,600 villages. Through Sarvodaya's programs, "more and more monks have realized their social responsibility and try to do whatever they can to elevate the standard of living in the communities in which they live."<sup>38</sup> According to SSM's website, they now operate in over 15,000 villages.<sup>39</sup> After all, Sarvodaya Shramadana means "the awaking of all by donating one's labor for the welfare of others."<sup>40</sup>

One of Sarvodaya's main goals is their Disaster Management Unit (DMU).

Sarvodaya's DMU's operational structure consists of a 5R Strategy. They write,

5R Strategy: Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Reawakening. Support from this unit is provided in the event of disasters such as tsunamis, floods, landslides and disease outbreaks. Resources include emergency equipment and relief items such as food parcels, communal cooking, dry rations, water supply, and mobile medical camps.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Mahinda Deegalle, *Contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhist Traditions in The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*, edited by Michael Jerryson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 26-27.

<sup>39</sup> Sarvodaya Shamadana Movement Sri Lanka, <https://www.sarvodaya.org/sarvodaya-shramadana-societies>, accessed March 12, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Mahinda Deegalle, 26-27. One interesting observation of SSM's website (<https://www.sarvodaya.org/organizational-structure>) when it comes to organizational structure is its spiritual foundation of each village known as a Shamadana society.

<sup>41</sup> Sarvodaya Shamadana Movement Sri Lanka, <https://www.sarvodaya.org/disaster-management-unit>, accessed March 12, 2019.

According to the same website, one can see the 5R strategy at work as recently as the Sri Lankan floods of May 2016. Food, water bottles, sanitary packs, dry ration packs, 5 medical boats mobilized, 1 medical camp conducted, distribution of clothes, and kitchen utensil packs were distributed. They also write that the “reawakening of all” – through loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), joy of living derived by making other people happy (*mudhitha*); and equanimity (*upeksha*)<sup>42</sup>— might be manifested through both the giving (*dana*) and receiving of supplies.

As one can see, to have such a religious philosophy operating in over 15,000 villages provides an already existing and extremely large footprint for equitable distribution of supplies and services. Moreover, this Buddhist NGO has an intimate religious relationship with people directly affected by any natural or man-made disaster requiring our assistance. Logistically speaking, by getting supplies into the organizational hands of religious NGOs like Sarvodaya, the U.S would be partnering with a religious, indigenous NGO in helping those greatest affected by a disaster while helping those in the NGO to strive towards compassion (*karuna*), loving-kindness (*metta*), and generous giving (*dana*).<sup>43</sup>

### Tzu-Chi, Taiwan

The next two organizations I will present are not Theravada Buddhist organizations from SE Asia, although they have worked extensively in that region. This reinforces how transnational and fluid Buddhism is in SE Asia. However, as we will see,

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<sup>42</sup> Sarvodaya Shamadana Movement Sri Lanka, <https://www.sarvodaya.org/philosophy-and-approach>, accessed April 1, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> It is important to note that Sarvodaya also help non-Buddhists (Muslims and Hindus) on the island, although they have been accused of being Buddhist-centric.

their footprint is not only significant in SE Asia but also throughout the world. The first organization I would like to present is the Chinese Tzu-Chi Foundation of Taiwan. While countries of SE Asia are predominately Theravada Buddhist, there are non-Theravada Buddhist SEB organizations providing humanitarian relief in the area of operation. Tzu-Chi is Mahayana Buddhist and is arguably the largest SEB INGO in the world.<sup>44</sup>

Jung-chang Wang captures the humble beginnings and the current size of Tzu Chi today. He writes in 2013, “Founded in 1966 in eastern Taiwan, by a Buddhist nun Cheng Yen and a small group of women, today it has grown to include 1 million volunteers in Taiwan who dedicate their time and efforts for no financial reward, and nearly 10 million members and donors operating in more than 55 countries.”<sup>45</sup> According to Tzu Chi’s website, they now operate in 69 countries including offices in Cambodia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand while also working on the ground in Laos.<sup>46</sup>

Tzu Chi is not only impressive with respect to the size of their organization, but they also have some very unique characteristics which set them apart from other SEB NGOs and INGOs in SE Asia. First, as previously mentioned, Tzu Chi was started by a nun and a small group of women. Second, while they are a lay Buddhist movement with some monastic leadership, Tzu Chi still has prominent leadership roles filled by

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<sup>44</sup> Sallie B. King will stress later that although Tzu Chi’s is thoroughly committed to service work, their ultimate goal is enlightenment. Service works plus enlightenment is what distinguishes SEB.

<sup>45</sup> Jung-Chang Wang, *International Relief Work and Spirit Cultivation for Tzu Chi Members in Buddhism, International Relief Work, and Civil Society*, edited by Hiroko Kawanami and Geoffrey Samuel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 123.

<sup>46</sup> Tzu Chi website, [http://tw/tzuchi.org/en/index.php?option=com\\_&view=article&id=293&Itemid=283&lang=en](http://tw/tzuchi.org/en/index.php?option=com_&view=article&id=293&Itemid=283&lang=en), accessed Jan 18, 2019.

Buddhist nuns, which makes their organization unique.<sup>47</sup> According to Brooke Schedneck, “A main focus of their work is aid support organized around need and location . . . contributing time and money to volunteer efforts focused on education, medical care, international disaster relief, and bone-marrow drives.”<sup>48</sup>

With such a large, active organization, one question which needs to be raised and answered is what does their organization look like on the ground especially within the context of a Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief environment. Jung-Chang Wang provides an observation into Tzu Chi’s operating procedures. He writes,

Their work concentrates on distributing emergency cash, food, clothes, and medicines to those in affected areas. They also send generators, tents, sleeping bags, and other essential relief goods . . . [The] 6 Goals are: prompt relief and safety, psychological and spiritual support, permanent housing, preservation of children’s education, peaceful livelihood, and the protection of the environment . . . For Buddhists, Tzu Chi also conducts funerals and associated rituals to appease the deceased spirits and give consolation to the victims.<sup>49</sup>

Although Tzu Chi does not openly talk about their religious tradition, their goals and actions are firmly rooted in the Dharma and expressed through their compassion (*karuna*), loving-kindness (*metta*) and giving (*dana*) towards anyone suffering from a humanitarian/disaster relief environment. Sallie B. King summarizes the Buddhist goal of Tzu Chi, and notice the emphasis on the spiritual growth of the volunteers. She writes,

The personal transformation Cheng Yen seeks for her followers is not only an increase in generosity, but also the kind of transformation brought about by the inevitable frustrations of working together with other people .

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<sup>47</sup> Brooke Schedneck, “Buddhist International Organizations,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*, edited by Michael Jerryson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 411-13.

<sup>48</sup> Brooke Schedneck, 401.

<sup>49</sup> Jung-Chang Wang, 133.

. . Even though Tzu Chi is so thoroughly oriented toward service work, the ultimate goal is still enlightenment or Buddhahood.<sup>50</sup>

Based upon my research on Tzu Chi, I would recommend the following: First, begin (or continue) a dialogue with Tzu Chi to familiarize ourselves with their ongoing charities within the countries of SE Asia both directly and in cooperation with USAID (if applicable); Second, during these conversations, Concept of Operations should generate an internal contingency operational plan as to how we could provide the logistical movement of Tzu Chi volunteers and/or humanitarian supplies into areas where Tzu Chi is already on the ground. The end-state of such a relationship is to efficiently provide the materials and accessibility for Tzu Chi volunteers to continue religiously impacting the lives of Host Nation's people affected by a Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief situation long after we are gone.

#### Soto Zen Buddhist Shanti Volunteer Association, Japan

Another example of a transnational SEB INGO is the Soto Zen Buddhist Shanti Volunteer Association (Shanti) based in Japan. Out of all the SEB organizations I have presented so far, Shanti is an atypical organization which allows me as a Chaplain to help Concept of Operations think outside the box when it comes to viable, potential partnerships in a Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Mission. Shanti is atypical because in 1980 they were initially founded to provide emergency relief supplies for Cambodian refugees. In 1984 their first development project was not launched in Japan but rather Surin Providence, Thailand.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Sallie B. King, *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism*, 39-40

<sup>51</sup> Shanti Volunteer Association, *History*, <http://sva.or.jp/english/about/history.html>, accessed April 24, 2019.

Today, Shanti operates throughout Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar (including multiple refugee camps on the Thailand border), Nepal, and Afghanistan,<sup>52</sup> the Shanti Volunteer Association conducts education, culture, and disaster relief programs which respect traditional cultural practices.<sup>53</sup>

While Shanti's website focuses heavily on education in the form of reading programs for children, Jonathan Watts provides insight into how wide and diverse Shanti has been in working to alleviate suffering and enhancing people's lives. Watts writes,

The word "Shanti" means peace and tranquility in Sanskrit. Its core focus is supporting educational and cultural activities in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. In Thailand, it manages nursery schools and student dormitories in depressed inner cities and agricultural regions. In Laos, it constructs schools, and prepares and distributes teaching resources and materials. In Cambodia, SVA has been engaged in providing libraries . . . It constructs schools and manages vocational training.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, while the website does not presently give much information about humanitarian relief efforts, Shanti has been active in the past. According to Ranjana Mukhopadhyaya,

SVA carries out emergency relief aid at the time of natural calamities and has offered support for earthquake victims in India (2000), Iran (2003), Sumatra (2009), tsunami victims in Thailand (2005), in Bangladesh (2007), and Myanmar (2008), Koke earthquake (2005), Niigata Earthquake (2007), and the devastating earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011 in Tohokku region, to name a few.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Shanti Volunteer Association, *Shanti Volunteer Association Annual Report 2017*, 8-14, <http://sva.or.jp/english/pdf/report2017.pdf>, accessed January 22, 2019.

<sup>53</sup> Georgetown University Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, *Shanti Volunteer Association*, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/organizations/shanti-volunteer-association>, accessed January 22, 2019.

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan S. Watts, "A Brief Overview of Buddhist NGOs in Japan," In *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 31, no. 2, [https://www-jstor-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/stable/30233767?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/stable/30233767?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents), accessed January 23, 2019, 424.

<sup>55</sup> Ranjana Mukhopadhyaya, "Transnational Networks of Dharma and Development: International Aid by Japanese Buddhist and the Revival of Buddhism in Post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia." In *International Relief Work, and Civil Society*, edited by Hiroko Kawanami and Geoffrey Samuel (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013), 84.

Once again, Concept of Operations should take into consideration how Shanti like other Buddhist NGOs and INGOs mentioned above are well connected, established, and integrated within the daily rhythm of people's lives of SE Asia and thus makes them a viable, potential partner in any Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Mission. Although they are Japanese, their 38-year presence in this region has allowed them to become very knowledgeable with each country's traditions, customs, culture, and religion.

One possible concern is Shanti's Non-Profit Organizational (NPO) status as of 1999.<sup>56</sup> Watts argues that Shanti sought NPO status

in part to clearly separate it from any religious or sectarian ties that would interfere with gaining either government financial aid or other secular financial support. This secularizing trend presents the opportunity for increased integration of Buddhist NGOs into the general civil society movement without the constraints of some of the more conservative influences of traditional Buddhist denominations.<sup>57</sup>

I raise the NPO status for a couple of reasons. First, would an NPO status negate or hinder the US Navy Chaplain Corps from engaging Shanti as a religious organization for a Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Mission? Second, since NPO status is beyond the scope of this paper, future research would be warranted to see if Buddhist NGOs and INGOs are trending towards NPO status. These are questions needing to be answered by the Judge Advocate Corps.

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<sup>56</sup> Shanti's NPO status is very unique and atypical for a Buddhist NGO or INGO.

<sup>57</sup> Watts, 418-19.

## Sitagu Association, Myanmar

The final Buddhist organization is the Sitagu Association (Sitagu) of Myanmar. Sitagu is placed last because out of all the NGOs and INGOs presented in this paper, Sitagu is, at least for me, the most complex and contradictory expression of SEB in SE Asia. I say this because, on one hand, they say they are driven by classic compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness (*metta*) motivations or paradigms. But, on the other hand, many of its members are involved in Buddhist nationalism and violence against the Rohingya (Muslims in Myanmar's Kayin State). This latter factor would produce a complex and militarily challenging situation for Concept of Operations in a Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Mission in Myanmar.

Matthew Walton's interview of a monk in July 2014 reveals how integrated the religious and political environments are in Myanmar. Walton writes, "One monk from a teaching monastery outside Yangon opined that . . . if monks were to fulfill their traditional role as both educators and moral guides, they needed to study and understand politics themselves, in order to be able to advise the laity in this area."<sup>58</sup>

Just from this interview, I can appreciate the religious-political complexity of Myanmar's Buddhist culture. At the beginning of this paper the controversy focused on whether or not a monk should leave the monastery and get involved in "worldly affairs." By 2014, there are monks in Myanmar who not only study and understand politics, but who are fully engaged with the political establishment of Myanmar. Sitagu's founder and leader Sayadaw U Nyanissara is probably the most famous, charismatic one of them all.

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<sup>58</sup> Matthew J Walton, 149.

Since the foundation of Sitagu in 1980, Sayadaw U Nyanissara has brought much relief to the physical suffering in Myanmar. According to Carine Jaquet, an independent analyst and associate researcher affiliated with the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia, “Sayadaw U Nyanissara has supported the creation of 21 hospitals all over the country to provide access to health services regardless of the faith of the patient.”<sup>59</sup> In addition, he “controls a vast network of social service organizations, including hospitals, schools, universities, monasteries, and meditation centers. In recent years he has acquired prominent donors from both the military government and the democratic opposition.”<sup>60</sup>

As impressive as these accomplishments are, I would like to focus on one humanitarian aid mission Sitagu successfully executed after Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in May 2008. With respect to this, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies website writes, “According to official figures, 84,500 people were killed and 53,800 went missing. A total of 37 townships were significantly affected by the cyclone. The UN estimates that as many as 2.4 million people were affected.”<sup>61</sup> According to Jaquet and Walton,

Within 9 days of Nargis, they had distributed 1,000 tons of rice and 370 trucks containing clothing, food, medicine, and other vital necessities . . . directly reaching 1,500 villages and 2,264 monasteries . . . Sitagu’s role in relief work lasted eight months in total. Sitagu would continue to work another two years during the recovery phase of Nargis . . . Sitagu also

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<sup>59</sup> Carine Jaquet and Matthew J. Walton, “Buddhism and Relief in Myanmar: Reflections on Relief as a Practice of Dana.” In *International Relief Work, and Civil Society*, edited by Hiroko Kawanami and Geoffrey Samuel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 56. Matthew J. Walton is Aung San Suu Kyi Senior Research Fellow in Modern Burmese Studies at St. Antony’s College, Oxford University.

<sup>60</sup> Matthew J Walton, 142.

<sup>61</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Myanmar: Cyclone Nargis 2008 Facts and Figures* (03 May 2011), <http://www.ifrc.org/en/news-and-media/news-stories/asia-pacific/myanmar/myanmar-cyclone-nargis-2008-facts-and-figures/>, accessed January 23, 2019.

collected funds from international donors of various countries . . . the donations totaled over US \$5.14 million.<sup>62</sup>

The ability to logistically move around by land or sea and deliver these supplies speaks to how integrated an indigenous Buddhist NGO can be on both a national and local level. Even though I myself was sitting off the coast of Myanmar in 2008 with the 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit waiting for the invitation to assist (which never came), whenever an invitation does come, I would recommend organizations like Sitagu provide the personal interaction and distribution of humanitarian aid and supplies. The US Navy/Marine Corps Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief team can provide the heavy lift capability and fill the gaps of any services where they are most needed.

### **Religiously Sanctioned Violence**

I have demonstrated so far that SEB is built on compassion (*karuna*), loving-kindness (*metta*), and generous giving (*dana*). However, religiously sanctioned violence has also been a part of some socially engaged Buddhist groups, including the one I just detailed: Sitagu. While tracing the history of this contradiction of actions are beyond the scope of this paper, indeed there has been an entire book devoted to a “Just-War” theory in Buddhism,<sup>63</sup> my purpose here is to simply observe these phenomena along with how I see potential risks to any Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Mission in these potential areas of operations. To do this, I will look at Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar.

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<sup>62</sup> Carine Jaquet and Matthew J. Walton, 57.

<sup>63</sup> Tessa J. Bartholomeusz, *In Defense of Dharma: Just-war ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

In Sri Lanka, the civil war between ethnically Indian Hindus and Sinhala Buddhists erupted in 1983 mostly along the north and east coast. During this recent conflict, the Buddhist monks have played a passive role in the religiously sanctioned violence against the Indian Hindus. According to Tessa Bartholomeusz, there is a religious doctrine titled “Dharma Yuddhaya” meaning “religious or righteous war.”<sup>64</sup> In a seeming contradiction in terms, she continues, “It is the sangha, the monastic community, that keeps alive the polysemic reading of dharma yuddhaya . . . Here, the sangha, an institution that phrases its identity in terms of separation from the physical world of violence, calls for violence to achieve its ends.”<sup>65</sup>

In a more recent turn of events, the Sri Lankan nationalistic Buddhist group called the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) or Buddhist Power Force, has targeted Muslims. This group is led by a Buddhist monk named Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara.<sup>66</sup> According to the BBS spokesman Dilantha Withange, “BBS is not a terror organization. BBS is not promoting violence against anyone . . . but we are against certain things.”<sup>67</sup> He cites threats by The Islamic State to declare the whole of Asia a Muslim Realm.<sup>68</sup> According to a March 13, 2018 article “Sri Lanka’s Anti-Muslim Violence in *The Diplomat*, Sudha Ramachandran writes, “Since 2012, anti-Muslim rhetoric has surged in Sri Lanka. It has drawn on global Islamophobia but also on long-standing stereotypes of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. Outfits like the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) have carried out a

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<sup>64</sup> Tessa J. Bartholomeusz, 68.

<sup>65</sup> Tessa J. Bartholomeusz, 68-69.

<sup>66</sup> Charles Haviland, “The darker side of Buddhism,” British Broadcasting Company, May 30, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32929855>, accessed January 25, 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Haviland, “The darker side of Buddhism,” accessed January 25, 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Charles Haviland, “The darker side of Buddhism,” accessed January 25, 2019.

sustained hate campaign against Muslims and unleashed violence on them.”<sup>69</sup> In addition to the struggles against the Tamil Tigers (who are primarily Hindu), islamophobia is a recurring religious-political narrative not only in Sri Lanka, but as we will soon see in Thailand and Myanmar as well.

As we now look at Thailand, one will continue to notice similar religious-political dynamics in the intimate relationship between Buddhism, nationalism, government military forces, and their aggression towards the indigenous Muslims who make up very small minorities. I use the term indigenous because the ethnic Muslims in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar have lived in these countries for hundreds of years and are not recent immigrants.

When it comes to religiously sanctioned violence in Thailand, the form of violence from some monks is both direct and physical. According to Michael Jerryson,

Since January 2004, the three southernmost provinces of Thailand have been under martial law. The region was once part of a Buddhist kingdom called Langkasuka. However, it later became the Islamic kingdom of Patani. While Thailand is over 90% Buddhist, the three southernmost provinces are over 85 percent Malay Muslim.<sup>70</sup>

Marte Nilsen provides more graphic statistics about the conflict between the monks, Thailand’s government military, and the Muslim community. He writes, “By January 2010, more than 4,000 people had been killed and over 6,500 had been injured in the deep south since 4<sup>th</sup> January 2004, the date most commonly set to mark the outbreak of the resurgence. The large majority of these casualties are believed to be victims of

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<sup>69</sup> Suda Ramachandran, “Sri Lanka’s Anti-Muslim Violence,” *The Diplomat*, March 13, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/sri-lankas-anti-muslim-violence/>, accessed January 25, 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Jerryson, “Buddhism, Conflict, and Peace Building,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*, edited by Michael Jerryson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 553.

insurgent separatist violence.”<sup>71</sup>

Amidst all the violence which has occurred in the three southernmost regions in Thailand, the most unique and contradictory development, that both Jerryson and Nilsen write concerns the “Soldier Monks.” Jerryson sums this phenomenon up best,

Buddhist military monks (*tahanphra*) are soldiers who are selected during training to covertly operate as both monks and soldiers. After they undergo a full ordination ceremony, military monks perform the typical duties of a monk, but are armed and receive a monthly salary from the military. For the military monk, his role is necessary to protect Buddhism in southern Thailand. Here, Buddhism means religion (in Thai, *sasana*). In the view of many Buddhists in the region, if Muslims drive the Buddhists out of southern Thailand, order and morality will leave as well.<sup>72</sup>

Here is the microcosm of what I am referring to as religiously sanctioned violence in Buddhist majority areas. While this practice is highly debated, and often severely criticized, within the sangha, the sangha carries the perceived weight of protecting Buddhism and Buddhist culture, especially in the Theravada Buddhist tradition of SE Asia. With this perceived weight of protecting Buddhism and Buddhist culture, there are some questions I would like the sangha to address. These questions might include, Can the “soldier monk” be understood in defense of Buddhist culture as compassionate (*karuna*), loving-kindness (*metta*)? Can the act of violence itself be understood as generous giving (*dana*) in defense of Buddhism and Buddhist culture? While these questions remain to be answered, the reality in Thailand (and Myanmar) is there are

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<sup>71</sup> Marte Nilson, “Military Temples and Saffron-Robed Soldiers: Legitimacy and the Securing of Buddhism,” In *Southern Thailand in Buddhism and Violence: Militarism and Buddhism in Modern Asia*, edited by Vladimir Tikhonov and Torkel Brekke (New York: Routledge, 2013), 39. The author’s statistics come from Srisompob Jitpiomsri and D. McCargo, “The Southern Thai Conflict Six Years On: Insurgency, Not Just Crime” in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 156-183, (ISEAS, 2010) 157; and Mark Askew, “The Killing Fields of the Deep South: A Deadly Mix,” Bangkok Post August 9, 2009.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Jerryson, 554.

monks who are armed and engaged in religiously sanctioned violence against the Thai (and Burmese) Muslims.

Not only are armed monks needed to be considered during Concept of Operations as an operational risk for a Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Missions but so should the monasteries. Thailand, for instance, has been reported to “enforce brutal counterinsurgent directives and interrogation techniques, often on Buddhist temple grounds (Amnesty International 2009, 11).”<sup>73</sup> If and when we should execute missions in this region, the Commanding Officer must be aware that a temple/monastery might be used for such techniques.

I am presenting Myanmar last for a couple of reasons. First, the scale of inter-religious violence has garnered more international press over the past eight years than either Sri Lanka or Thailand combined. Second, according to my research, Myanmar’s ultra-nationalist monk U Wirathou is either directly or indirectly influencing the anti-Muslim hate-speech (and possible violence) throughout not just Myanmar, but Sri Lanka and SE Asia.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 727,000 Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar’s northeastern state of Rakhine have fled the violence into Bangladesh.<sup>74</sup> The two main Buddhist organizations with anti-Muslim agendas are 969, of which Monk Wirathu is the president, and MaBaTha (also known as The Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion). I predict that

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<sup>73</sup> Michael Jerryson, 554.

<sup>74</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Rohingya Refugee Crisis, <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>, accessed January 25, 2019.

this persecution of Muslims throughout SE Asia will continue to grow over the coming years.

For example, On October 14, 2018, Wirathu gave a fiery speech at a religiously sanctioned pro-military rally. During his speech, he addressed the possibility of the International Criminal Court investigating Burmese generals for crimes against humanity. Wirathu said, “The day when the ICC comes here . . . is the day that Wirathu holds a gun.”<sup>75</sup> At the end of his speech, he reminds the audience of the main reason for his position against the Muslims—the fear of Islamization of Myanmar and the destruction of Buddhist culture.”<sup>76</sup>

As one can see, there is a current growing trend of hostilities—both verbal and bodily—against indigenous Muslims in Myanmar (led by organizations like 969 and MaBaTha), and Sri Lanka (by SBS members), as well as other smaller organizations in Thailand and Cambodia. While I have drawn sharp attention to what is sometimes referred to as “enraged-Buddhism,” playing off the term “engaged Buddhism,” Charles Keys reminds all to keep the larger picture of Buddhism in mind when looking at monks like Wirathu. Keys writes,

Although anti-Muslim Buddhist monks have figured prominently in stories in recent years about Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand, *they are not representative of most monks* [emphasis mine] in their countries. There are some outstanding examples of Buddhist leaders denouncing anti-Muslim individuals and groups. At the forefront of these are those affiliated with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), an organization based in Thailand. In marked contrast with the “enraged”

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<sup>75</sup> Agence France-Presse, Yangon, “Rohingya crisis: Myanmar monk hits back at international community,” in The Daily Star, last modified on October 15, 2018, at 10:37 AM, 3, <https://www.thedailystar.net/rohingya-crisis/news/myanmar-monk-wirathu-hits-back-international-community-army-generals-genocide-1647187>, accessed November 29, 2018.

<sup>76</sup> Agence France-Presse, Yangon, “Rohingya crisis: Myanmar monk hits back at international community,” in The Daily Star, last modified on October 15, 2018, at 10:37 AM, accessed November 29, 2018.

Buddhists who would purge their societies of all Muslims, engaged  
Buddhists seek to pursue dialogues with them.<sup>77</sup>

While I agree with Keys conclusions about “enraged” Buddhists being the minority among the national Sanghas as a whole, these few monks are not only endorsing, but leading the efforts towards instigating religiously sanctioned national (military and paramilitary) violence against mainly ethnic-minority Muslims. This unfortunate fact needs to be kept in mind when doing humanitarian work in this region.

As a result of my research on “enraged Buddhists,” I argue that any current and future Concept of Operations of any Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Mission located in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos cannot assume that all Buddhist monks are peaceful. Therefore, while every Concept of Operations and Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Mission will be unique, caution and security must be a priority when it comes to executing Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Missions in partnership with monks and monasteries in Sri Lanka and SE Asia, especially in adjacent regions and regions where ethnic-minority Muslims live.

## **Conclusion**

While one cannot predict when future Humanitarian Assistance or Disaster Relief Missions will occur, one can and should continue to prepare for the next mission. Here are some religious datapoints to consider as Concept of Operations gather to plan for upcoming Humanitarian Assistant/Disaster Relief Mission(s).

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<sup>77</sup> Charles Keys, “Theravada Buddhism and Buddhist Nationalism: Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand,” In *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 14, no. 4, 49-50. DOI: 10.1080/15570274.2016.1248497, accessed November 26, 2018.

First, according to the Central Intelligence Agency's *World Factbook*, as of July 2018, there are approximately 149 million Buddhists living in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos.<sup>78</sup> Most of these Buddhists are Theravadin and are the focus of this paper. Second, according to Moe Thuzar, "Southeast Asia has historically been at the core of frequent natural disasters that beset the countries in the region. In recent years, these disasters have increased in frequency and intensity, causing immeasurable damage to life and property. At times, the natural disasters are exacerbated by human interference or inaction."<sup>79</sup>

Whether natural or man-made, the United States Navy and Marine Corps will be called to assist a Host Nation with a Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Mission, and the question I have tried to answer is, "How might I best advise the commander and staff members on various religious dynamics within the Operations Area?"<sup>80</sup>

The best advisement, based on my research, begins and ends with Socially Engaged Buddhism (SEB). By assisting Buddhist NGOs and INGOs, we would manifest the highest ideal of professionalism which would best represent the United States of America.

I recommend that the United States Military's primary role, when it comes to religion and culture, is providing logistical supports (air, land, and sea) for the Buddhist NGOs and INGOs operating in the Host Nation. A secondary role would be the

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<sup>78</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ce.html>, accessed March 13, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Moe Thuzar, "Disaster Management and Humanitarian action in Southeast Asia: Opportunities for an ASEAN-Japan Coordinated Approach." In *Beyond 2015: ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership for Democracy, Peace, and Prosperity in Southeast Asia*, edited by R. Sukma and Y. Soeya (2013), 298, [http://www.jcie.org/japan/j/pdf/pub/publst/1451/17\\_thuzar.pdf](http://www.jcie.org/japan/j/pdf/pub/publst/1451/17_thuzar.pdf), accessed March 13, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Cf USJCS, *Joint Guide 1-05: Religious Affairs in Joint Operations*, II-5.

preservation of monasteries that have not been affected by the disaster. As I have noted, in humanitarian contexts the monasteries become 'centers of gravity' for the surrounding population. Everything else including the equitable distribution of supplies, care for those who are still living or dead, the performance of rituals and ceremonies should be the responsibility of the local monasteries and the NGOs and INGOs.

Time and cultural sensitivity is of the essence when it comes to Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Missions. On one hand, we can respond quickly by providing all supplies anywhere within the Host Nation. On the other hand, Buddhist NGOs and INGOs can best work with the local monasteries and sanghas to distribute the supplies with the cultural sensitives needed because their pre-existing network of relationships is already established.

Having argued for the partnering of Buddhist NGOs and INGOs, I do have two concerns that need to be given attention when it comes to the concept of any operation. One concern is political (past or present tension with and within the Host Nation's Government) and the other deals with security (potentially armed monks in Myanmar and Thailand). The political concern is specifically Myanmar's government's tension with SEB including the monks. When it comes to the tension between SEB and Host Nation's Governments, I recommend that we thoroughly have a sound understanding of all past and present tensions between the two groups. We do not want to inadvertently get caught between the two sides. In addition, we need to avoid offending the Host Nation's government by mistakenly partnering with an NGO or INGO that the government doesn't like. While this issue might solely be with Myanmar, it is a criterion to be taken into consideration when planning a mission.

The second concern deals with security. As my research has shown, the potential for armed monks in both Myanmar and Thailand are possible, especially around regions where religious minorities live. My advice, should we find ourselves conducting missions in an area where Muslims are present, is to be situationally aware of possible armed conflict between local government forces, “militant” SEB and the Muslim populations. While such a conflict would be rare, the possibility is there.

Overall, I believe the role of SEB in SE Asia to potentially impact Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Missions will continue for decades to come. The indigenous monasteries as well as Buddhist NGOs and INGOs should play a vital role in Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Missions because of their daily impact on the lives of the Host Nation’s people. Finally, I believe mission success, from a religious and cultural perspective, can be achieved by logistically moving Buddhist NGO and INGO people and supplies to wherever the Host Nation directs us.

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