

The Evolution of the System of Cooperation Among the American Air Forces' (SICOFAA) Operational Approach on Humanitarian Aid and its Impact on its Organization and Doctrine

COLONEL JORGE ERICK REÁTEGUI BARTRA, Assistant Secretary General, Permanent Secretariat of SICOFAA

"There is no higher religion than humanitarian aid. Working for the common good is the greatest creed",
Albert Schweitzer, Nobel Peace Prize, 1952.

A Bit of History

On 16 April each year the system of cooperation among the American air forces (SICOFAA) celebrates the day of its creation, in commemoration of the first Conference of Chiefs of air forces of America (CONJEFAMER), 57 years ago, held from 16 to 25 April 1961 at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. Its purpose was to **promote greater understanding and cooperation between the air forces of the Americas with a view towards hemispheric security**, as enshrined in the first worksheet of the workbook of SICOFA Permanent Secretariat's register.



Source. SPS: Picture of the commanders of the participating air forces of CONJEFAMER I.

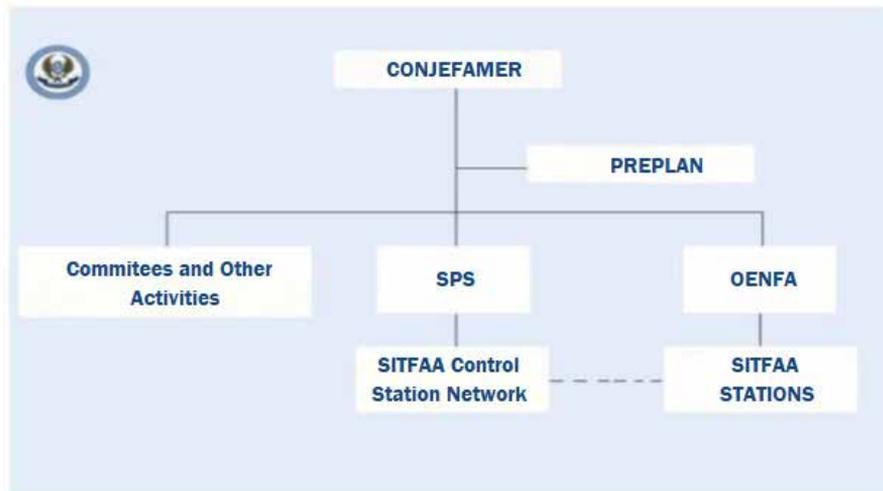
14 air forces of the Americas, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay Venezuela and U.S. as host participated in the Conference sponsored by the Chief of staff of the USAF, General Thomas D. White USAF,

Since its creation, the SICOFAA has always sought that spirit of cooperation that's been consolidated in its 57 years of existence, an operational approach focused on humanitarian aid, which is realized through Exercise Cooperation. The SICOFAA now has 20 active members, 5 observers, and 2 Special guests.

Organizational Structure

It is important to understand that the SICOFAA has no air resources or units to respond to a disaster in any country in our hemisphere. Instead, it's an organization that harmonizes and coordinates aircraft and related equipment that can go to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance between its member air forces, as set out in its Strategic Plan 2017-2022 (PLANESTRA), from an aeronautical point of view. The SICOFAA is an important mechanism of articulation of operational resources in these circumstances, and above all. It is a proactive organization with a view to optimize the performance of the air forces and their equivalents.

To perform this task the SICOFAA is structured, according to article 17 of the Charter, in the following manner:



Source. Charter of the SICOFAA

In the organizational structure of the SICOFAA, all of its parts have important functions for the implementation of the emanated resolutions of the CONJEFAMER, as the maximum authority of the system. However, this organization has a unique feature, a **Permanent Secretariat**, which according to article 23 of the Charter, “**aims to centralize and ensure the continuity and permanence of the activities of the SICOFAA**”, with operations for humanitarian aid clearly established as one of the two main strategic areas of PLANESTRA 2012-2027. This continuity allows

the system to be able to plan activities and make appropriate follow-up of the same, as Exercise Cooperation, in order to improve and get a better response and better implementation of the common doctrine before the occurrence of a disaster.

Other important elements within the Organization of the SICOFAA are the Control Station for the network of Information Technology and Telecommunications of the American Air Forces system (SITFAA for its acronym in Spanish) and its SITFAA stations. This allows reliable communications among its members, not only in everyday communication, but when a disaster occurs, so it will be treated in an own chapter.

New approach

Humanitarian relief operations are not new in the SICOFAA, since the first time it was addressed was during the CONJEFAMER XII in May, 1972, coincidentally where the first CONJEFAMER I took place, at Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, U.S. At that time, the presentation of the topic “Organization of the command of transport air in cases of disasters” by Lieutenant General of the Air Force of Peru (FAP) Rolando Gilardi R., was recorded as the final act of the CONJEFAMER. This event framed the beginning of interest in this type of operations that years later would become the way ahead for SICOFAA.

However, it was not until July 2006 when the new operational approach of SICOFAA to perform operations of humanitarian aid was put in place with the resolution given in the CONJEFAMER XLVI, in Brasilia and Natal. There the SPS proposed a goal to achieve a multilateral exercise to be held in a tentative period of five years with the specific objective to provide humanitarian support and rescue for natural disasters. So was born Exercise Cooperation I, which was planned for almost 4 years, with the Final Planning Conference (FPC) in May 2010 in Puerto Montt, Chile, since the exercise was to be carried out by the Air Force of Chile (FACH) in October of that same year.

This new approach for the SICOFAA consolidated **humanitarian aid operations** as one of the two main strategic thrusts of the 2012-2027 PLANESTRA. It forced the system to review, modify, and create new processes to give viability to this new approach: Continue with the development of the exercises; the formulation of combined air operations for humanitarian aid Manual; the signing of the Memorandum of understanding between the air forces that comprise the SICOFAA for cooperation and assistance in matters of disasters; the strengthening of the SITFAA to provide better and fluid communications during disasters; the creation of the Virtual room of coordination (SAVICO) for disasters; the development of a tool using Microsoft Access program, which has been called “goals and lessons learned (wave)”, to display if the objectives of the combined air operations for Humanitarian aid were achieved and lessons learned from it; the adoption of Unified Software Air Logistics Module (Mule) of the Argentinian Air Force (FAA) as the tool to be used in actual events and Exercise Cooperation; as well as the large air combined IV (CEMAC IV) course aimed at humanitarian aid developed by the FAA.

To reach this new approach the SICOFAA took almost 50 years of creating and strengthening bonds of friendship and trust among its members, as manifested in the justification established for the development of the PLANESTRA 2012-2027: “Since its inception in 1961, the SICOFAA has been developed as a body committed to the promotion of friendship, sharing media, experiences, knowledge and the spirit of solidarity among the air forces of the continent and their equivalents. Over fifty years of institutional life has achieved these objectives”.

As an organization, the SICOFAA felt prepared to carry out this new approach, taking into consideration the characteristics of aviation, as manifested in the formulation of its PLANESTRA 2012-2027, “The incidence of natural disasters or other emergency situations which exceed national capacities, demand the availability of extraordinary resources that can be committed to

the care of the population in risk areas; but mainly of levels of organization that will facilitate a timely response”.

To be able to develop their activities, keeping the new approach in mind, currently the SICOFAA carries out its cycles according to the agreement reached in the LIII CONJEFAMER, held in Santiago de Chile in June of 2013, where the SPS as part of the presentation of the Master Plan for 2012-2017 of the SICOFAA, proposes “exercise cooperation with each two-year interval being the other real and virtual one”, considering the third year for subjects of common interest to its members (thematic cycle).



Source. Peru *INFORMA.com*: Hercules of the Argentina air force in humanitarian aid operations in Chiclayo, Peru, by the floods of March 2017.

Communications network

The SICOFAA SITFAA network is composed of a station control network strategically located in the SPS and its SITFAA stations located in each member country of the SICOFAA. “What we know as the SITFAA, in its early days it was called SITFA (inter-American system for telecommunications of the air forces), which was proposed and approved at the CONJEFAMER V, held in Washington D.C. in May 1965, whose purpose was to “Promote coordination and rapprochement between the air forces of Latin America with the aim of achieving greater solidarity and capacity for Hemispheric Defense”.

The SITFAA underwent several changes since it came into operation, from his doctrine to its equipment, talking by HF radios for many years as primary media, however, at first the advent of technology and in a second time the new approach of the SICOFAA, they brought with them the changes in the areas mentioned above, as it reads in the prologue of the Manual the SITFAA, “the advent of the internet has diminished significantly the use of HF as primary means of communications administrative system. With this prevailing reality, it is imperative that the SITFAA search, adapt, and exploit new technologies for the benefit of the same and its users”.

Until 2014 the doctrine of the SITFAA was established in three documents, rules of the SITFAA, Communications Operations Manual with its annexes and the Handbook of computer

operations. However, the development of the various activities of the SICOFAA and humanitarian aid operations, forced the system to rethink the need to align the doctrine of the SITFAA with the new approach, determining that the exercise cooperation III, carried out by the air force of the Peru would be the occasion to do so, as established in the final report of the 12th Committee held in Lima, Peru in February of 2014, **action committal for the official bond of Air Force of the United States, (OENFA-USAF)** to send a SITFAGRAMA through the AFA01 station to member countries in order to invite them to participate in the SITFAA workshop that will be held in the Peru, to integrate the three (03) regulations regarding SITFAA stations into one for better development and execution”.

Exercise cooperation III developed the SITFAA workshop which is summarized in the introduction of the SITFAA Manual, “in April 2014, another group formed by operators and stations SITFAA officers representatives from seven forces (air)” Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, USA, Paraguay, Peru and Dominican Republic), as well as personnel of International Affairs, met in Lima, Peru, during the execution of the exercise cooperation III, to integrate, standardize and modernize these three documents”. Product of this working document that currently governs the actions of the SITFAA is the Manual of the SITFAA, having as first priority during their employment, “Support in the event of natural disasters and humanitarian assistance”, as stated in article 4.

Another date which is of importance where the new approach of the SICOFAA directly affects the SITFAA was the unfortunate earthquake in Ecuador in April 2016. During the mentioned event the network control SITFAA handled an enormous amount of information of the time, which made difficult their timely dissemination system, basically that information would be handled point to point, reason which arises the need to implement a tool capable of providing information in a centralized way and in real time for all the members of the SICOFAA.



Source. SPS: The Network Control Station and SPS staff conducting a communications exercise, using the SAVICO.

The SAVICO was in response to this need, since it allows better coordination to handle different media such as chat, important documents for humanitarian operations, audiovisual media among others, in a single window, providing a strategic vision of the event to the commanders of the air or equivalent forces comprising the SICOFAA. The use of the SAVICO was approved at the CONJEFAMER LVII held in Natal, Brazil, in June of 2017.

During 2017 various catastrophic events occurred such as fires in Chile, flooding in Peru, Mexico earthquake, and hurricanes in the Caribbean, which also originated the revision and amendment of chapters I “**General Concepts**” and “**Immediate action disaster or humanitarian aid operations**”, and the “Manual combined air operations for humanitarian aid of the SICOFAA”, in order to expedite requests for humanitarian aid, and improve the planning of air forces and/or equivalent participants. These chapters were presented at the XXVII Committee, held at Lima, Peru in November of 2017 and should be approved at the CONJEFAMER LVIII, in Panama City, in June 2018.

It is necessary to determine that the development of communications and all the activities of SICOFAA during actual events of humanitarian aid occur within a framework of respect for rules and laws of each participating country, as mentioned in the air operations Manual Combined for humanitarian aid of the SICOFAA: “this manual has the purpose of establishing a procedure in the event of an emergency, disaster or need for humanitarian aid, act in a way that is agile, coordinated and safe once you have made diplomatic formalities between the respective Governments, both at the behest of the country that has the emergency, as to those air forces that are providing assistance, with the information required to develop a Air combined operation safe and effective for the human and material resources involved.

Exercise cooperation

Exercise cooperation from the SICOFAA is the main generator of the doctrine of humanitarian aid of the system, since a multinational exercise that involves the use of equipment and personnel have to make use of a common language operation where to sustain all your development, as set out in the final report of the exercise cooperation I, General objective, “develop, verify and assess the planning and execution of the exercise, with the purpose of standardizing procedures and define a methodology for joint action“, so the American aerial forces, operable with efficiency and promptness, support emergencies such as those generated in this exercise.”

The cooperation I exercise as we already saw above, was carried out by the FACH in Puerto Montt, Chile in October 2010, with the participation of 12 members of the SICOFAA air forces. Following the course of action of the SICOFAA regarding the new approach to a virtual exercise and other real/exercise cooperation II takes place in its virtual form executed by the Argentina Air Force (FAA) in Mendoza, Argentina, in April 2013, exercise cooperation III (real exercise) executed by the FAP, between the cities of Lima and Pisco, in April of 2014, with the participation of 12 air forces of SICOFAA, exercise cooperation IV (Virtual) conducted by the FAA in Mendoza in April 2016.

The exercise cooperation V (actual exercise) scheduled to be held in Puerto Montt, Chile between September and October of 2017 was cancelled by the earthquake in Mexico in September of the same year, however, all the planning of the initial phase was developed Planning Conference (IPC), Middle Planning Conference (MPC) and Final Planning Conference (FPC).

All these exercises had objectives to be reached and left many lessons learned; responsible for centralizing and disseminating such information between the air and/or equivalent forces the SICOFAA is the SPS as described in the Operations Manual Air combined for humanitarian aid of the SICOFAA “the Permanent Secretariat of the system (SPS), compile the lessons learned in a document that recorded the modifications carried out in the present Manual and the reasons that originated it. In addition, the manual may be modified based on lessons learned from different operational activities of humanitarian aid that can be carried out in the field of the SICOFAA, “conception the present Manual may be” modified within the SICOFAA scope within their cycles, after exercise or actual operation and based on experiences or lessons learned and/or proposal of one or more of the members of the system”.

The latest revision of the Handbook of combined air operations for humanitarian aid of the SICOFAA was held in November 2014, however, from an academic point of view the Inter-American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA), conducted a review of the mentioned Manual, recommending 11 changes to it in a letter sent to the SPS in May 2017. This proposal is being addressed in each Committee, with the first point of order being the creation of the annex for operational assessments, which was worked by the SPS and presented at the XXVIII Committee, Florianopolis, Brazil in February 2017.

Product analysis for the creation of an annex for operational evaluations that would allow continuous improvement of humanitarian aid operations was the “Assessment of goals and lessons learned” annex, whose purpose is to “Perform the evaluation of the Combined air operations for humanitarian aid in order to determine compliance with the proposed objectives and lessons learned for their subsequent dissemination». In order to achieve this purpose this annex includes a tool that uses the Microsoft Access program named goals and lessons learned (OLA).

As set out in the Master Plan 2017-2022, the SICOFAA and cycles approved by the CONJEFAMER LVII, in Natal, Brazil in June of 2017, exercise cooperation will be developed in the following way: exercise cooperation (virtual) VI, Argentina, in April of 2019, the (real) exercise cooperation VII, Rio Negro, Colombia, in August of 2020.



Source. MINDEF Peru: Exercise cooperation III running Pisco, Peru, carried out by the air force of Peru.

Conclusions

1. The new approach of humanitarian aid of the SICOFAA increased channels of coordination and communication among its members in order to secure and reliable combined air operations.
2. The new approach generated the creation of a common doctrine for combined air operations of humanitarian aid and these operations generated at the same time the continuous review and renewal of this doctrine.

3. The new approach strengthened the image of the SICOFAA in the region as an organization capable of carrying out air operations combined for the benefit of the peoples of America before the occurrence of a disaster.
4. The cooperation exercises allow to strengthen the capacities of members of the SICOFAA aerial or equivalent forces to carry out air operations combined disaster.
5. Network SITFAA of SICOFAA, during the occurrence of a disaster in the region, offers all the media at your fingertips to spread all possible information among its members, in order to generate the following:
 - a. A strategic vision of the commanders of what happens in the SICOFAA regarding this event.
 - b. A proper planning that allows to optimize the use of aerial means in amount and opportunity for and after the event.
 - c. Encourage voluntary participation to carry out air operations of humanitarian aid of its members after the occurrence of the event.
6. Currently the SICOFAA according to its Charter aims to “promote and strengthen the bonds of friendship, cooperation and mutual support among its members”, nothing better than for this purpose is oriented for something so sublime, humanitarian aid. □

Bibliography

- Final report of the I CONJEFAMER, Randolph AFB, San Antonio, USA, in April 1961.
Register of activities within.
Strategic plan 2012-2022 within.
Letter constituting the within.
Final report of the XII CONJEFAMER, Randolph AFB, San Antonio, USA, in May 1972.
Final report of the XLVI CONJEFAMER, Brasilia/Natal, Brazil, in July 2006.
Final report of the exercise cooperation I, Santiago de Chile/Puerto Montt, Chile, in October 2010.
Final report of the LIII CONJEFAMER, Santiago de Chile, held in June 2013.
Master plan 2012-2017 within.
Final report of the V CONJEFAMER, Washington, D.C., in May 1965.
SITFAA manual.
Final report of the Committee XII, Lima, Peru in February, 2014.
Final report of the exercise cooperation III, Lima/Pisco, made in April 2014.
Final report of the LVII CONJEFAMER, Natal, Brazil, in June of 2017.
Final report of the Committee XXVII, Lima, Peru, in November of 2017.
Manual of combined air operations to aid humanitarian from within.
Final report of the exercise cooperation II, Mendoza, Argentina, in April of 2013.
Final report of the co-operation IV exercise, Mendoza, Argentina, in April 2016.
Letter of the IAAFA at the SPS on May 20, 2017.
Final report of the XXVIII Committee, Florianopolis, Brazil, in February 2017.



Colonel FAP Jorge Erick Reátegui Bartra is Assistant Secretary General, Permanent Secretariat of SICOFAA, Davis-Monthan AFB; he has an MBA in Advanced Management Development with a minor in Process Management from Fluminense Federal University in Niterói, Brazil; He was pilot Instructor of the MI 17 helicopter and later he was pilot instructor of the Combat Helicopter MI 35P; Commander of the Air Squadron No. 332 of the Air Group No. 3 located in Lima, Peru. He was Second Commander of Air Group No. 2 located in Arequipa; Commander of the Air Component of the Special Command of the Valleys of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers (VRAEM) and held the position of Head of the Training Department of the Air Force Officers' School of Officers of Peru.