

Gobi Wolf 2017 strengthens ties between Mongolia, international partners

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His colleagues call him the Spider-Man. Bayartogtokh Jamsran, a first responder with the Mongolian National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) Special Rescue Unit, donned a mask and an orange suit before he rushed into a wrecked building.

Though only a rescue simulation as part of Exercise Gobi Wolf 2017, Bayartogtokh was no less heroic as he secured a boy—role-playing a trapped victim of a fire caused by an earthquake—and snapped the both of them into a rope dangling from a window. ~~before and~~ dashed ~~ing~~ two stories down to safety.

He pulled off the maneuver with an ease and grace that earned him the moniker of the acrobatic web-slinging superhero. But he wasn't bitten by a radioactive spider; he had to earn and hone his skills.

Bayartogtokh learned his craft abroad in Kazakhstan before validating what he learned in the Republic of Korea and other Asian nations. His professional upbringing is a testament to the international nature of perfecting the art and science of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and is indicative of the Mongolian and international ~~expertise experts~~ who gathered in Dalanzadgad, Mongolia, for GW 17.

The exercise was hosted by the Mongolian National Emergency Management Agency and ~~the~~ Mongolian Armed Forces May 1 to 5, 2017, as part of the United States Army Pacific's humanitarian assistance and disaster relief "Pacific Resilience" series.

Pacific Resilience tests host nation defense support to civil authorities during disaster situations, the integration of foreign humanitarian assistance, and the strategic communication required to implement emergency-management plans.

"We do this to facilitate cooperation and coordination, [and] build relationships between host nations and other regional responding agencies—not just military but also governmental," said U.S. Army Maj. Edwin Morton, GW 17 exercise director and lead U.S. planner. "There are international components of this that we're exercising. We're not just building relationships. We're also working out the cooperation and coordination mechanisms that we need to effectively respond to a disaster where there's been a request for international assistance."

The exercise unfolded in four phases including a subject-matter expert exchange, a table-top exercise, a field-training exercise, and an after-action review.

During the subject-matter expert exchange, participants from Mongolia, the United States, ~~and~~ non-governmental agencies, ~~as well as~~ delegates from Bangladesh, Canada, Hungary, Japan, Nepal, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea, got to know each other and gain a common understanding of the Mongolian National Disaster Protection Law that provided the framework for the exercise.

Participants divided into their functional areas during the table-top exercise and focused on implementing the processes and procedures that would see them through the scenario.

And a tough scenario it was, presenting not just one but three hazards that would challenge Mongolians and international partners alike. A simulated 7.5 magnitude earthquake notionally devastated the southern province of Ömnögovi, located in the Gobi Desert on the border with China.

The earthquake affected goat herds throughout the region, introducing sheep pox and threatening the livelihood of thousands of goat herders.

U.S. Army Capt. Sarah Watkins, a veterinarian with the 97th Civil Affairs Battalion, placed the impact of a pox outbreak in context.

"In the U.S. we call it livestock," she said. "For other societies it is their ~~livestock—it's—it's~~ their very livelihood."

The third hazard introduced during the table-top exercise was a simulated dust storm, a common phenomenon in the dry expanses of the Gobi Desert.

During the field-training exercise, the simulated dust storm became an all-too-real one. Gusting winds, 30-degree temperatures, and clouds of dust that seemed to infiltrate every crease and crevice of clothing made training in the field a challenge.

Watkins' group huddled in a ger, a portable round tent that is remarkably stable in hurricane-force winds.

The inputs dispensed by exercise control threw curve and knuckle balls at the veterinary group. The Mongolian and U.S. groups came up with separate assessments and solutions to news of earthquake aftershocks and mixing herds, comparing answers when they were done. Watkins nodded her approval when she saw many of the Mongolians' assumptions and solutions were borne out in the scenario.

The second day of the field-training exercise offered a break in the weather. The sun peeked through gaps in the galloping clouds, cutting the wind down to manageable levels and making it feel like the month of May.

Participants gathered at an emergency-response training site that featured a cement hulk of a building filled with simulated casualties stemming from the earthquake aftershocks.

In quick succession a veritable brigade of police, firefighters and medics swarmed the building, extracting victims by crane, a litter zip-lined down a rope, rappel, and even having a victim jump onto a huge inflatable rescue mat.

The after-action review allowed participants the opportunity to reflect on what they learned and to implement best practices for the future.

David Kang, deputy director for the Federal Emergency Management Planning [Agency \(FEMA\)](#) and Exercise Division, said this is the sixth Gobi Wolf he has attended, both as an Alaska Army National Guard officer and as a FEMA employee. He said he is impressed with how NEMA integrates lessons learned during exercises and real-world responses.

“[NEMA is] a learning organization,” Kang said. “They've got great attitude, they're very motivated, and they're extremely sharp and an intelligent organization. They're very good at change management, so they're willing to adapt best practices. So, for me, that is a validation of what I have seen from Gobi Wolf 1 all the way to Gobi Wolf 2017.”

Morton said despite speaking different languages and coming from different professional cultures, Mongolians and their partners always manage to come together to tackle a crisis.

“Everyone has different systems,” he said of the various agencies involved. “They use different acronyms, and they have different cultures in a lot of ways. Developing and enhancing interoperability between these stakeholders is really the key takeaway.”

[It was a takeaway not lost on -Bayartogtokh during GW 17. Throughout the exercise, the NEMA rescuer leveraged every bit of his international training to showcase his capabilities of responding to victims of a natural disaster. He has learned to integrate seamlessly with local police, firefighter and medical colleagues. The Spider-Man can add impressive U.S. and international partners to his list of achievements.](#)