

# THE ALASKA NATIONAL GUARD TYPHOON HALONG RESPONSE IN WESTERN ALASKA

Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies

North American Arctic Security Dialogue Webinar | 20 February 2026 | Executive Summary

## SPEAKERS

- **Mr. Ben Bartos**, National Weather Service Alaska Region
- **Major Zach Miller**, Alaska National Guard Deputy J5
- **Captain Jeff Shoup**, NOAA Liaison to NORAD & USNORTHCOM

*“In Alaska, the tyranny of distance amplifies every response. What looks small elsewhere can become a major state enterprise here.”* ~ Major Zach Miller

In early October 2025, Typhoon Halong intensified into a Category 4 system before transitioning into a powerful ex-typhoon that tracked across the Bering Sea and struck western Alaska. The storm drove a surge approximately six feet above normal high tide, causing catastrophic flooding that destroyed homes, displaced more than 1,500 residents, and triggered the largest civilian airlift in Alaska history. Search and rescue forces executed 51 combined joint saves in a single day, followed by the evacuation of more than 1,100 residents via multi-stage airlift.

Arctic distance, limited infrastructure, and the transition from fall to winter weather fundamentally shaped the response. Operations across the roadless Yukon–Kuskokwim Delta, roughly 400 miles from Anchorage, were constrained by gravel airstrips, limited staging capacity, and rapidly degrading conditions. As power, sanitation, and water systems failed, the mission rapidly shifted from lifesaving SAR to deliberate evacuation, sheltering and sustained recovery. Once evacuation pathways became known, civilian self-evacuation surged, complicating accountability and shelter planning. Bethel ultimately served as the logistics hub for all surrounding communities impacted, where AKNG processed more than 165,000 pounds of supplies through local warehouses, delivered approximately 354,000 pounds of cargo by air, and flew more than 363 fixed- and rotary-wing flight hours under austere Arctic conditions.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR ARCTIC DISASTER RESPONSE

### FORWARD PRESENCE IMPROVES DECISIONS

For large events, leverage **Unified Coordination Groups at the response “center of gravity,”** not at a distant hub. Direct local coordination expedites assistance & prevents response efforts from being late to need.

### A SHARED OPERATING PICTURE IS A FORCE MULTIPLIER

Reduce parallel planning and better align priorities by using **interoperable information systems.**

### ACCOUNTABILITY IS LAYERED

**Track evacuees at multiple points** and plan for self-evacuation patterns.

### PREPAREDNESS MUST BE EXERCISED, NOT ASSUMED

Tabletop discussions help, but prioritize **full-scale interagency exercises that move people and resources to reveal real friction points** and improve organizations.

### PLAN FOR THE HUMAN DIMENSION

**Consider fatigue management, tribal and cultural considerations, and sensitive missions** to shape operational tempo and resourcing.

