

U.S. Ambassador coordinates with military during multinational humanitarian effort following earthquake



U.S. Navy (Eric S. Powell)

U.S. Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief Keys to Success in Pakistan

By KENNETH J. BRAITHWAITE

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On the morning of October 8, 2005, an earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale struck the North West Frontier Province/Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) region of Pakistan 63 miles north of Islamabad, creating a multifaceted humanitarian emergency necessitating an immediate worldwide response. The earthquake left nearly 74,000 dead, 70,000 injured, and 2.8 million displaced or homeless. Since the buildings were primarily constructed of brick and cinder block, the quake literally shook them to pieces. Some 80 percent of structures collapsed in Muzaffarabad, the capital of AJK province. Due to the hour, most people were indoors and were crushed or trapped under the rubble. The inaccessible terrain, the near-destruction of all medical facilities and roads to the area, the approach of winter, and the demographics characterized by subsistence-level agriculture presented intense challenges to relief operations.

The U.S. response to its ally was instantaneous. Rear Admiral Michael LeFever, USN, Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group 1, was immediately appointed by General John Abizaid, USA, Commander, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), to head Joint Task Force Disaster Assistance Center Pakistan (DAC PAK). The admiral and an initial assessment team of medical, engineering, and logistic personnel were in Islamabad within 48 hours. For the next 6 months, a coalition force with a peak strength of over 1,200 personnel conducted the largest and longest relief effort in U.S. military history.

During the course of relief efforts, helicopters (primarily CH-47 Chinooks) flew more than 5,200 sorties, carrying almost 17,000 passengers, 3,751 of whom were casualties. They delivered more than 14,000 tons of humanitarian aid supplies, up to 200 tons per day. Two field hospitals, the 212th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) from Germany and Combined Medical Relief Team 3 deployed from Okinawa, Japan, treated over 35,000 patients and administered 20,000 vaccinations. Navy SEABEES brought the engineering capability to clear 50,000 cubic yards of rubble from roads so trucks could deliver supplies. Many members of the first SEABEE unit to respond, Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 74 out of Gulfport, Mississippi, had recently lost homes due to Hurricane Katrina. Because of that experience,

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they brought useful insight to the relief/reconstruction effort.

Following the natural disasters of the tsunami that struck Southeast Asia in December 2004 and Hurricane Katrina the month before the earthquake, the U.S. military once again found itself centrally engaged in a familiar if rather new role conducting hurricane assistance/disaster relief operations.

Admiral LeFever discovered early on that the ability to respond quickly, adapt regionally, and coordinate and communicate between disparate agencies was vital. In assessing a full range of lessons learned, several major elements contributed to success:

- the military's capacity for speed and effectiveness
- adaptive procedures including on-scene, empowered command and control
- the ability to coordinate the response to a dynamic and evolving situation among vastly different military, civilian, and government entities in addition to international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)
- creating a "semi-permissive" environment
- the prominence of strategic public affairs/public diplomacy and the way they enhanced U.S. goals in the USCENCOM area of responsibility (AOR).

Speed and Effectiveness

Of foremost importance to initial relief operations was the capacity to deploy rapidly and effectively. The military, a "9/11 force," was able not only to respond quickly but to stabilize the situation so the governments of Pakistan and other nations, along with the NGOs, could conduct long-term relief and reconstruction programs. The military simply possessed unique assets designed for crisis situations and rapid movements, such as field hospitals, engineering/construction crews, and security capabilities.

The portability and capacity of these military assets were vital to the timeliness of the response. Admiral LeFever and the assessment team, along with a 23-person Contingency Response Group, established a base of operations at Chaklala Air Base outside Islamabad. Within 72 hours, helicopters

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Pakistanis unload supplies from Chinook helicopter during multinational disaster relief effort

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Mike Boytas)

from Afghanistan began conducting relief flights to the affected area. By late October, the 212th MASH was on the ground in Muzaffarabad and fully capable in an area where all other medical facilities were destroyed. The rapidity of this initial response significantly mitigated the "secondary disaster" of disease caused by the destruction of sanitary and medical infrastructure.

A major factor in mission success was the relationship with the host nation military. The Pakistani army had considerable expertise in military management and doctrine surrounding complex humanitarian emergencies, and the U.S./coalition forces were able to integrate with them and serve as an enabling agent. The Office of the Defense Representative Pakistan, the Department of Defense liaison to the Pakistani military, had established relationships that allowed it and DAC PAK to immediately integrate into the Pakistani army's procedures, assisting where necessary. This enabled resources to be allocated effectively and efficiently.

A less quantifiable effect of a rapid initial military response was the sense of order it brought to affected areas. The Pakistani army quickly penetrated the devastated area to establish command and control, maintain order, interdict crime, secure landing zones, establish a communication and logistic network, and reassure people that help was on the way.

Furthermore, in conjunction with U.S. forces, the host military provided the capability and expertise to control and coordinate efforts during a developing situation. The element of adaptability, especially in command and control, was vital.

Dynamic Command and Control

U.S. Central Command Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A) allowed DAC PAK flexibility and authority on the ground; Admiral LeFever had command and control of all U.S. forces flowing into the theater to support the disaster. In a complex humanitarian disaster like the South Asia earthquake, an empowered on-scene commander directing the evolving situation was critical.

Unlike the tsunami or Hurricane Katrina, where the nature and extent of the destruction were immediately apparent, the remote terrain of Kashmir and the North West Frontier Province hid the magnitude of the disaster for days. As late as October 11, the figure of 18,000 dead was believed too high, but the final number would total almost 74,000. In such an inaccessible, opaque situation, it is vital to have the decisionmaker on the ground.

DAC PAK brought command and control ideas and concepts to the disaster response and established procedures for air operations. In the initial effort, over 80 aircraft operated with no air traffic control, altitude separation, or—before the Pakistani military established control on the ground—regulation of landing zones. Crowds swarmed toward the helicopters, which then had to hover and push out supplies.

Also, Pakistan's Chaklala Air Force Base—joined to Islamabad International and the only airfield that could service the disaster area—quickly became overwhelmed. Aid/relief workers were arriving from all over the world and assembling, creating a hub of activity with no command infrastructure. The U.S. Air Force 24th Air Expeditionary

U.S. Airmen, Pakistani soldiers, and Ukrainian aid workers unload Russian plane bringing relief supplies



U.S. Air Force (Jeromy K. Cross)

Group, staging U.S. military logistic/support out of Chaklala, acted quickly to organize the overall effort and move the mountains of relief supplies.

In retrospect, it was critical to have an on-scene commander for two reasons: the evolving nature of the emergency (especially ignorance of the extent of damages), and the complexity required to coordinate numerous and variegated entities. A disaster of such scale required someone with boots in the field who could get a sense of the requirements—how many heavy lift helicopters to bring, best locations for hospitals, and where engineering capabilities could be most effective—and also the authority to start bringing resources in immediately.

Coordinating Militaries, Agencies, and Governments

A third element that contributed to DAC PAK's effectiveness was coordination and deconfliction in the fog and friction of an incredibly complex and dynamic situation. During crisis and stress, relationships that already exist are a critical platform for moving the contingency forward.

From the outset, DAC PAK developed procedures specific to the relief effort. The U.S. Embassy, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), U.S./coalition and other militaries, and NGOs achieved intensive cooperation. Fortunately, the American

Embassy in Islamabad was already familiar with joint and coalition operations.

"This Embassy is unusual in that only 20 percent of the people . . . are State Department," said Ambassador Ryan Crocker. "The relief effort built on this disposition and created close interagency cooperation."

The amount of supplies overwhelmed the capability of air and ground transportation assets. The immensity of the relief effort demanded intricate coordination to obviate logistic jams. The Air Force Contingency Response

Group (CRG) was integral to establishing a mechanism to affect materiel handling. DAC PAK built an air control order and air tasking orders to handle the huge loads of cargo arranged for reception, as well as staging and onward movement of all people and supplies.

DAC PAK was critical in forming a common approach to helicopter-borne relief operations. The CRG set up Chaklala Air Base as the airport of departure, a single point of entry and departure for supplies. Admiral LeFever pulled together helicopter assets from the United Nations, the Pakistani army, and other countries, developed a common operating picture, and then began delivering aid. In the initial stage, Task Force Griffin's 12 aircraft (predominantly CH-47 Chinooks) operated from sunrise to sunset. The airfield that had been teeming with cargo for 3 weeks was emptied by October 31.

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DAC PAK enjoyed a consistently positive relationship with Pakistan's government, military, and NGOs on a tactical, operational, and strategic level. It supported the military by offering help in capacity and logistics, for example, loading and unloading helicopters and setting up pallet yards. "We set a new world standard for how the military works with everyone else to respond to a complex humanitarian emergency," said Ambassador Crocker.

The initial emergency relief operation set the stage for a transition to long-term reconstruction and for USAID and NGO projects such as cash-for-work, the rebuilding of permanent structures, and delivering seeds and fertilizer so the agrarian population could sow crops in the spring. The USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) operated seamlessly with the military assets.

The success of the relief effort was due in part to the ability to quickly and efficaciously build a team among nations, agencies, and branches of the military (Expeditionary Strike Group 1, U.S. Joint Forces Command, Task Forces Griffin and Eagle, and individual augmentees). The experience and competency of personnel were the keys to this monumental team building. It was critical to have experienced people with the wisdom and maturity to crystallize into an effective group under pressure in a short time. "It's people who make systems work," said Admiral LeFever.

Humanitarian Operations in an Unsettled Region

Unique to this relief effort were challenges germane to the AOR. The relief effort managed risk to personnel in a semi-permissive environment. DAC PAK ensured the right size and combination of people and allowed no excess, due to security concerns in the earthquake-affected region. The North West Frontier Province is an uncertain zone in a volatile part of the world. Conflicts from Afghanistan and between tribes have bled through the Khyber Pass, and enemies of the United States have been able to achieve sanctuary in contentious, ungoverned areas that are only nominally part of the state of Pakistan.

DAC PAK balanced force protection concerns with the humanitarian nature of the mission by having security provided by Pakistani military assets, primarily the army rangers, who worked with U.S. personnel in

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areas such as Muzaffarabad and Shinkiyari. This served to protect the forces without misrepresenting the humanitarian assistance mission.

Communication Strategy

Prior to the October earthquake, and largely because of the ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, most Pakistanis viewed the United States with uneasiness. A State Department poll in the spring of 2005 indicated that nearly half of the country had either a “poor or very poor opinion” of the United States. As a result, immediately implementing and

was the U.S. CH-47 Chinook helicopter. In the first 4 months, with American flags clearly visible on their sides, Chinooks delivered over 70 percent of all relief supplies, and around 60 percent up to late February. By March 7, 28 million pounds of supplies had been flown in, and the Chinooks had become a recognized symbol of hope.

Soldiers and Marines at U.S. field hospitals in Muzaffarabad and Shinkiyari assisted hundreds of Pakistanis every day, not only treating earthquake victims, but also delivering routine medical care. Preventive medicine teams vaccinated some 20,000 people, many of them children. Such public health outreach

U.S. Embassy to ensure that the entire public, not just those in the earthquake affected areas, understood America’s commitment to assisting them. Pakistani reporters and photographers routinely flew in U.S. helicopters delivering aid, as did other international and U.S. media representatives. And Ambassador Crocker, Admiral LeFever, and Bill Berger, head of the U.S. DART team for USAID, conducted regular press conferences to further articulate the U.S. Government’s involvement.

In November, the larger strategic implications of the operation began to become evident when the A.C. Neilson group released the results of a poll showing the number of Pakistanis who had a “favorable opinion of the United States” had grown from 23 percent to 46 percent. By the spring, a State Department poll conducted from late January to early February showed that number rising to 55 percent. In a region that has become the focal point for the global war on terrorism and fight against radical Islamic extremism, these numbers were significant. But they were never the central focus of the operation.

“You don’t go into something like this thinking about what impact it will have on your image,” said Admiral LeFever. “You go into it focusing on doing the right thing to help people.”

The earthquake relief effort in Pakistan created a remarkable construct: a relationship between states and peoples significantly improved at every level of society. Flexibility and the ability to quickly build a team from vastly different organizations were the characteristics that enabled mission success. The “soft infrastructure” composed of interpersonal relationships and in-country connections was invaluable. The humanitarian assistance to the people of northern Pakistan set the example for interagency and international cooperation in the face of a complex humanitarian disaster and furthered U.S. goals in the area of operations by facilitating favorable interactions between U.S. personnel and the inhabitants of the region. **JFQ**



General Abizaid visits Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, during multinational earthquake relief mission

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Mike Byrtas)

maintaining an aggressive, well-coordinated communications strategy was essential to the relief operation.

Two public affairs teams from U.S. Joint Forces Command’s newly established Joint Public Affairs Support Element deployed to Islamabad and led a communications effort that included not only the element’s military public affairs officers, but public diplomacy and public affairs professionals from the U.S. Embassy, USAID, and various NGOs. Throughout the 6-month operation, the communication strategy centered on one primary theme: the U.S. commitment to helping the people of Pakistan.

True to that principle, U.S. and coalition Soldiers, Sailors, Airman, and Marines constantly delivered an image of relief and friendship. The most visible symbol of this effort

served a region that had never benefited from this type of sophisticated medical care. A last MASH still stands in Muzaffarabad, a gift to Pakistan worth \$4.5 million. And after removing 2,300 truck loads of rubble and constructing dozens of shelters for schools and families, the SEABEEs did the same, giving their Pakistani military counterparts equipment worth \$2.5 million.

These and other concrete examples of U.S. support and friendship were communicated daily to Pakistani newspapers and television stations by the U.S. Disaster Assistance Center and

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