

## **Cooperation in Natural Disaster Management and Prevention Coordination between States and between Military and Civilian Actors**

### **Case Study: NATO’s Involvement in Pakistan Earthquake Relief in 2005**

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##### **Introduction**

I will start my intervention by outlining the political framework for NATO’s Involvement in humanitarian operations.

Then use an example, NATO’s role in the Kashmir earthquake in 2005, to draw some conclusions with regard to coordination between various actors.

Let me say right up-front that NATO is not a major humanitarian actor and has no aspirations to become one.

Nevertheless, NATO’s involvement in disaster response and humanitarian operations has a history dating back almost 60 years when in 1953 the Alliance assisted Belgium and the Netherlands that were hit by storm floods. However, the collective use of military capabilities under NATO command in a humanitarian operation has happened only a few times since then.

Examples in recent history are the assistance provided to the United States in 2005 in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, the disaster relief provided to Pakistan after the devastating Kashmir earthquake in 2005, this being probably the largest ever NATO involvement in a humanitarian operation, and the assistance provided to Pakistan in 2010 during the monsoon flooding.

##### **The Policy**

NATO’s policy document that was adopted in summer 2008 list three clear principles:

Firstly, the policy stresses that the use of military assets in response to humanitarian situations should, as appropriate, be in line with the relevant UN guidelines, namely the Guidelines on the use of MCDA in Complex Emergencies and the “Oslo Guidelines”, in particular to safeguard compliance with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality.

Secondly, the responsibility for disaster response rests with the stricken country. However, when the magnitude of a disaster exceeds the national response capability, there may be a need for international assistance, including, if requested, assistance by or through NATO. This approach has already been recognised in the 1998 policy of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council with the title “Enhanced Practical Cooperation in the Field of International Disaster Relief”. This policy also recognizes

the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as the prime focal point for the coordination of international disaster relief operations.

Thirdly and finally, the policy highlights that NATO's role and added value is likely to be in respect of short term disaster relief. NATO's support, at the request of a stricken nation should be aiming at improving the conditions for recovery, a task to be implemented by other more appropriate actors.

NATO can be involved in humanitarian operations through the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (the EADRCC), and / or through the use of military assets and capabilities available in the Alliance's Command and Force Structures. The two options are not mutually exclusive.

As far as the EADRCC is concerned, the Centre may act in response to a request from a stricken nation or in response to a request from the United Nations. The Centre's role is to act as a clearinghouse mechanism between requests and offers for assistance. The provision of assets and capabilities by individual donors would occur on a bilateral basis.

The use of military assets and capabilities available in the Alliance's Command and Force Structures will only be provided on request by the stricken nation or by an appropriate international organization and upon decision of the North Atlantic Council. So much about the policy.

### **The example: NATO's Disaster relief Operation in Kashmir**

Two days after the Kashmir earthquake of 8 October 2005 that left more than 73 000 people dead, 70 000 injured and some four million homeless, Pakistan requested NATO assistance for the humanitarian relief operation it was mounting. The North Atlantic Council agreed to help and approved a two-stage Alliance response.

The first stage focused on an air-bridge. On 13 October 2005, the NATO was requested from the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to airlift 10 000 tents, blankets and stoves from Turkey to Pakistan. Several other requests from UN agencies followed. The first NATO relief flight to Pakistan arrived on 14 October. At the request of the Pakistani authorities, priority was given to moving tents and blankets, with the majority of the relief items being provided by the UNHCR. Eventually, some 160 flights delivered about 3500 tons of relief goods.

Forty-two NATO Allied and Partner countries provided assistance to Pakistan; the NATO air-bridge was used by 21 of them.

The second stage of the operation added elements drawn from the NATO Response Force, including a deployed headquarters command and control structure, engineering units, helicopters and military field hospitals, altogether about 1000 soldiers. NATO forces worked closely with both the government of Pakistan and the United Nations on a daily basis and were plugged into the UN cluster system. NATO's contribution to the overall relief operation was to maintain the air-bridge, support intra-theatre air-lift, restore critical road infrastructure and provide makeshift shelter and

medical support. The aim of these relief activities was to help earthquake survivors make it through the winter.

By early December 2005 most elements were in place and contributed effectively to the relief efforts in the Bagh region, which the Pakistani authorities had identified as the area for the NATO relief operation on the ground.

NATO helicopters lifted relief goods from Islamabad to forward supply dumps and from there directly to the point of need. They also moved sick, injured and displaced people from the immediate earthquake zone. The NATO helicopter refueling site supplied fuel to the international helicopter force. The NATO field hospital accepted thousands of patients and provided treatment with mobile medical teams. NATO engineers built shelters at high altitude, provided fresh water supplies and cleared and repaired roads.

By 1 February 2006, all NATO units had left Kashmir for a staging area, from where they then traveled back to their home countries.

## **Discussion**

Although NATO has been involved in disaster relief since the 1950s, so high-profile a role outside the Euro-Atlantic area was unusual. Moreover, questions arose whether this is an appropriate activity for the Alliance.

NATO's contribution to the Pakistan relief effort was substantial. Indeed, if the many bilateral contributions of NATO Allies, and especially that of the US military, are added to the NATO operation, the overall Allied effort was critical to the wider relief operation and helped save many lives. Two Allies brought their military disaster response teams that had been deployed under bilateral arrangements under NATO command when the NATO relief operation started.

Although the NATO operation in Pakistan clearly made a great difference to the overall relief effort, it also raised a number of questions. Why, for example, should military capabilities be deployed in international disaster-relief operations? Why should NATO be involved? What added value can NATO bring to relief efforts? And who should lead operations dealing with the consequences of disasters?

Some commentators clearly believe that disaster-relief work can be done better and more economically by civilian actors, whether they are national authorities, international organizations, or non-governmental organizations. While this may be the case for most disasters, there are unfortunately occasions when the scale of the disaster is so great that national authorities and first responders are simply overwhelmed. It is in these instances that the military can and should become involved. In fact, helping national authorities responding to natural or industrial disasters is a fundamental mission of the armed forces in most countries.

If one recognizes that military capabilities may usefully be deployed in disaster-response operations the next issue to address is that of NATO's added value. Clearly, military contributions do not have to come via NATO and may be made on a bilateral

basis. Moreover, decision-making in response to disasters needs to be rapid and the Alliance's multilateral approach is in theory slower than that of individual countries.

NATO's primary contribution is the coordinating, liaising and facilitating functions that the EADRCC and the Alliance's military structures provide. These enable smaller Allies to contribute capabilities, such as a military hospital or water purification unit, that they would not be able to contribute on their own. In addition, this coordination role that characterizes NATO-led operations has proven useful both to the authorities of the receiving country and to the United Nations, who were thereby able to deal with a single actor rather than many.

In requesting and accepting assistance, Pakistan was not concerned about whether the foreign assets provided were civilian or military. More important was that they met real needs and arrived in a timely manner.

Some foreign military assets were specifically requested by Pakistan, but many came through unsolicited offers. Offers were made for a variety of reasons, some of them political, rather than in response to an identified need. This supply-driven approach caused some coordination problems.

Coordination problems were also created when some military contingents were not prepared to undertake specific key tasks assigned to them by Pakistan authorities, such as digging field latrines, even though these tasks fell within their competency and normal range of work.

No clear distinction was made between relief and rehabilitation work in the earthquake response. Foreign military assets committed to relief found that their enthusiasm, capacity and capability could lead them into undertaking rehabilitation and even development work. Because NATO was following EU standards for power distribution, water and sanitation, among others, there was a danger that the work it was doing would be unsustainable when other actors would take over. The standards of foreign medical and health care were also higher during the relief period than they had been before the earthquake. Consequently, many survivors were reluctant to revert to lower health care standards in the rehabilitation process.

## **Conclusions**

Finally I would like to draw some conclusions:

In its decision the North Atlantic Council made clear that its involvement in the disaster response was purely to save lives and livelihoods and speed up recovery. The decision to set up an air-bridge to Pakistan, for example, could be taken quickly, above all, because there was already a precedent, namely the airlift to the United States in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The decision to send medical personnel and engineers to Pakistan, by contrast, took longer as there was no precedent at the time for sending military personnel to a non-NATO country for a disaster-relief operation.

Accordingly, the Council established that:

- The duration of NATO's mission would be limited to three months.

- NATO's mission would only encompass emergency relief and recovery, not reconstruction.
- NATO would work with and for the Government of Pakistan.
- This deployment would not set a precedent for future humanitarian deployments.

Coordination is critical to the success or failure of a disaster relief operation. The need for civil-military coordination arises because the humanitarian and military actors have different cultures and priorities and operate under different procedures and codes of conduct, with large numbers of civilian and military actors on the ground adding to the coordination difficulties.

Sharing of information in a timely and accurate way is both the key to successful coordination and at the same time one of the bottlenecks with many actors and their differing mandates. However, civil military coordination seems to be generally good in the functional area of logistics, the transport of relief personnel and relief goods to the affected population.

Generally, it was perceived that the Pakistani Government's plan was clear and that it adhered to its priorities. The government's strong leadership and flexibility in adapting to the situation encouraged NATO and the bilateral providers of foreign military assets to coordinate their efforts.

Under the leadership of UN OCHA nine humanitarian clusters were established based on the model commissioned in August 2005. This cluster approach had not yet been internationally approved and had never been used before in disaster response. NATO, which became one of the main contributors of military assets, was readily able to use the new humanitarian cluster system.

Mindful of the fact that the UN cluster system was a new concept and not completely understood by all actors and that NATO deployed elements of the NATO Response Force in a humanitarian operation for the first time in its history we can conclude that civil and military cooperation and coordination was not perfect but produced many positive results.