

U.S. Air Force (Mike Buytas)



Soldier offers water to Pakistani girl affected by earthquake, October 2005

Pakistan Earthquake Relief Operations Leveraging Humanitarian Missions for Strategic Success

BY WILLIAM J. BOWERS

On Christmas morning 2005, at Saint Patrick's Catholic Church in Auckland, New Zealand, a priest stepped up to the pulpit to deliver his sermon. "Christmas is a time of giving. And this morning," he said, while holding aloft a thick, off-white wool blanket, "several hundred children suffering from the aftereffects of the earthquake in northern Pakistan will wake up and

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receive one of these.” The priest then explained that several local farmers came to him wanting to do something special for Christmas. Through the church’s coordination with relief agencies in Pakistan, the farmers learned that bedding was desperately needed and made hundreds of wool blankets from the fleece of their sheep. The church shipped these blankets to Pakistan, where they were distributed by helicopters to villages and into the hands of cold children.

Ten weeks earlier, I had participated in the III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) planning effort on Okinawa, Japan, to deploy a task-organized detachment of approximately 250 Sailors and Marines to Pakistan to provide humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR). Listening to the priest’s Christmas sermon, I began to understand the multiplicative positive effects that can spring from a well-planned and well-executed HA/DR campaign.

In the early years of the Cold War, the Berlin Airlift showed how a humanitarian assistance campaign could engender lasting political success in an ideological struggle. After Marshall Plan aid had flowed into Western Europe for 1 year, the Soviet Union blockaded West Berlin in July 1948 in an effort to force the Americans out of the city. For the next 15 months, American and British aircraft delivered 2.3 million tons of humanitarian assistance supplies to the more than 2 million people living in Berlin.¹ Although few of President Harry Truman’s national security advisors believed it could be done, the American people stood solidly behind the President and the humanitarian effort. By April 1949, the cooperative strategy of the Western European powers had led to creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).² In May 1949, the Soviet Union decided to lift the blockade, and by September, the airlift had officially ended.

This is instructive because it shows how a humanitarian mission can contribute to a major political success.

Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief remain a powerful strategic way to achieve political ends. In an ideological struggle, HA/DR campaigns project the best of American values abroad. While the American military has made considerable progress in its ability to conduct counterinsurgency operations, protracted land campaigns are politically and economically difficult to sustain. However, the HA/DR campaign in Pakistan, Operation *Lifeline*, provides a useful model of how humanitarian missions can contribute to political success. *Lifeline* included military partners along with government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working together to save thousands of lives. In the future, the American military will participate in more HA/DR campaigns such as *Lifeline* and should leverage the interagency process and military partnerships to achieve enduring strategic and political success.

The Qayamat

On Saturday, October 8, 2005, a 7.6-magnitude earthquake struck northern Pakistan, killing approximately 73,000 people and destroying more than 400,000 homes. Because Saturday is a school day in Pakistan, many children were among the dead and injured.³ The largest earthquake in Pakistan’s history displaced an estimated 3 million people and primarily affected two provinces: Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir (see map).⁴ These areas are among the most difficult places in the world to reach, with mountainous terrain, limited roadways, and elevations that range from 4,000 to 14,000 feet. Weather was severe, and the likelihood of snowfall by November increased the

Area of Pakistan Earthquake



risk of an even greater humanitarian crisis if displaced people became stranded in the mountains without aid. The earthquake severely damaged roads, bridges, and the airfield at Muzaffarabad, making provision of immediate relief difficult. The security situation in these provinces was not conducive for military relief operations, especially from the United States, due to the presence of radical Islamic groups. According to author Greg Mortenson, director of the Central Asia Institute, Pakistanis called October 8, 2005, *Qayamat*—“the apocalypse.”⁵

Pakistan’s government did not have an organization akin to the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to deal with disasters of this scope. Its provinces did have Provincial Relief Commissions, but nothing substantial existed at the national level.⁶ While people expected a quick response from Pakistan’s government and military, the Pakistani army had lost hundreds of its own troops in Kashmir and could not provide immediate assistance. Moreover, because damage to the roads and bridges was so severe, relief support would have to be provided by air, and the Pakistani military lacked heavy cargo helicopters. Pakistan needed external support if it was to avoid a second major humanitarian crisis.

India, which controls its own portion of Kashmir, also suffered approximately 1,300 dead and 150,000 displaced. It offered to send relief supplies to Pakistan, but since travel through the line of control from Indian-controlled Kashmir into Pakistan was contentious even under

normal circumstances, Pakistan judged this to be only an offer of token aid.⁷ Pakistan did not instantly accept India's offer of helicopters either, "apparently for fear of the symbolism that Indian army uniforms on Pakistani soil would represent."⁸ Iran and Turkey landed C-130s at Rawalpindi with relief supplies, but did not deploy the lift capabilities necessary to deliver these supplies to the areas most in need.⁹ The United States was thus Pakistan's brightest prospect for immediate assistance.

Pakistan's military leaders feared that either a terrorist attack upon American troops or an escalation-of-force incident that killed innocent Pakistanis could jeopardize the entire relief effort

The Americans had conducted a massive HA/DR campaign called Operation *Unified Assistance* after the East Asian tsunami in late 2004, but that crisis occurred in areas accessible from the sea and within the purview of the U.S. Navy. The environment in northern Pakistan was much more forbidding. The American military was also under strain from sourcing two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Any military support for Pakistan was likely to come at the expense of other priorities, especially if it came from the 19,000 American troops then in Afghanistan or the Naval Expeditionary Strike Group-1 (ESG-1), which consisted of five ships and was then in Egypt conducting Exercise Bright Star.¹⁰ Still, the night after the earthquake, President George W. Bush announced, "Thousands have died, thousands have been wounded, and the United States of America wants to help."¹¹

Seizing a Strategic Moment

The American Ambassador to Pakistan, Ryan Crocker, immediately saw how bad the situation was and knew that America's response was "crucial to our future relationship."¹² Crocker had a long and distinguished career as a Foreign Service Officer that included tours in Lebanon, Iran, Syria, Kuwait, Egypt, and the reopened American Embassy in Kabul after coalition forces had deposed the Taliban.¹³ He understood the strategic importance of Pakistan to South Asia and the Middle East and "called in every chip he had to get more resources, military and civilian, to help with the relief effort."¹⁴

Crocker saw a "strategic moment," and called General John Abizaid, the U.S. Central Command commander, to get support.¹⁵ Abizaid did two things for Crocker: first, he arranged for the Ambassador to coordinate with the American commander in Afghanistan, Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, to get immediate military support; second, he identified the ESG-1 commander, Admiral Michael LeFever, to command the military's portion of the relief effort.¹⁶ Crocker, who earlier had immediately ordered 10 State Department counter-narcotics Huey II helicopters flown by Pakistani army officers to transport rescue teams to affected areas and to begin evacuation of the injured, had thus set the tone for the American response.¹⁷

Bill Berger led the regional Disaster Assessment Response Team (DART) from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). His DART deployed to Pakistan from Nepal to determine requirements on the ground and provide technical expertise.¹⁸ Berger possessed extensive disaster relief experience and had played a major role in coordinating the American response for *Unified Assistance*.¹⁹ With Berger on the ground,



U.S. Air Force (Mike Buytas)

Army helicopter delivering supplies provides aerial view of devastation in town of Oghi

USAID called forward stockpiles of emergency relief supplies that included plastic sheeting, water buckets, blankets, and food. USAID also had about 50 employees in Pakistan who had established relationships with the prime minister's office and senior officers within the Pakistani military. As American officials started to arrive, these USAID officials facilitated contacts between them and their Pakistani counterparts.²⁰

A day after the first American C-17 landed in Islamabad with 90,000 pounds of relief supplies on October 9, Admiral LeFever and a small staff from ESG-1 arrived to create Combined Disaster Assistance Center-Pakistan (CDAC-PAK).²¹ LeFever realized the importance of forging close military partnerships. As the Combined Maritime Forces commander during Bright Star, LeFever had led forces from 47 nations in the world's largest coalition exercise.²² LeFever's CDAC-PAK would be a task-organized expeditionary organization that would call forward capabilities from around the world that would then deploy into Pakistan by sea and air. The CDAC-PAK partnership with the Pakistani military would be crucial. With Crocker, Berger, and LeFever on the ground, the Americans had the right leadership team in place to partner with the Pakistanis to help save thousands of lives. But it would require a great deal of trust-building from both sides.

The Pakistani army took the lead in the international relief effort and committed more than 150,000 troops to it.²³ But Pakistan's military leaders recognized right away that they required assistance from the U.S. military to fill critical gaps to avoid a greater humanitarian catastrophe. They understood that the American military's expeditionary field hospitals and rotary-wing aviation assets could save many lives and that its heavy engineering assets could supplement their own to open critical roads into northern Pakistan. But at the same time, they realized that a cluster of American troops at a base could be a lucrative target for potential violence in regions known to contain extremist groups.

Pakistan's military leaders also understood that escalation-of-force incidents, in which American troops at security checkpoints fired their weapons at approaching vehicles, had become an unfortunate reality of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁴ They thus feared that either a terrorist attack upon American troops or an escalation-of-force incident that killed innocent Pakistanis could jeopardize the entire relief effort. After careful deliberation, they decided that the Pakistani military should provide security for all American military bases, personnel, NGOs, and government organizations during *Lifeline*.²⁵

While involved in planning for deployment of an expeditionary field hospital to Pakistan, the III MEF staff discussed this arrangement with the officers from CDAC-PAK. We were concerned about the prospect of Sailors and Marines deploying into northern Pakistan without their own security. But CDAC-PAK assured us that the Pakistani army had decided to provide this security and was taking this mission with the utmost seriousness.

Pakistan's military leaders also appreciated the danger of rotary-wing aviation operations

in the high altitudes and mountainous terrain of the affected provinces. They understood that if American military helicopters carrying relief supplies started to fall out of the sky, that too would jeopardize the relief effort. After announcing that eight helicopters were being transferred from Afghanistan to Pakistan, General Abizaid acknowledged the risks: "Operating in this part of the world . . . is dangerous. The mountains are high; the weather is bad; the conditions are difficult. But we've been doing it in Afghanistan. There's no better trained group of people to do it than the people that are there now."²⁶

While acknowledging the superb training of the U.S. pilots, Pakistan's military leaders still formulated a plan to have their own "safety pilots" accompany American pilots into the cockpits as an extra set of eyes. They also planned to have Pakistani army crews retrieve the externally loaded slings that would carry relief supplies into the zones that were too dangerous to land in.²⁷

The American and Pakistani militaries had decided to take calculated risks in their military partnership to help save thousands of lives. Crocker, Berger, and LeFever planned to integrate their operations with each other and the Pakistanis at an unprecedented level; the challenge would come in execution. Crocker would later write that "building confidence is a long process, but sometimes you can take great strides in a short time."²⁸

Building Trust

After the American team solidified its security arrangements with the Pakistani military, CDAC-PAK called forward niche capabilities to support *Lifeline*. For example, the 212th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) deployed by air from Angola and became fully

operational in Muzaffarabad by October 25.²⁹ The III MEF Combined Medical Relief Team-3 (CMRT-3) deployed from Okinawa, Japan, and became fully operational in Shinkiyari by November 17. CDAC-PAK eventually consisted of approximately 1,200 personnel and included the staffs of two surgical field hospitals, 25 helicopters to include 21 Chinooks,³⁰ a company of 125 Navy Seabees who arrived by sea at Karachi, and a small detachment of “Pararescuemen” from the U.S. Air Force.³¹ Australia also contributed a detachment of 140 soldiers and four Blackhawk helicopters, organized as Task Force 632.³²

The Pakistani army’s provision of security for the field hospitals at Muzaffarabad and Shinkiyari highlighted the positive effects that emanate and multiply from close military partnerships. The field hospital at Muzaffarabad, in particular, posed a significant security risk for CDAC-PAK because, according to USAID’s Julie Koenen-Grant, it was “surrounded by mountains and visible from all sides . . . like in the middle of a large cereal bowl.”³³ But the hospital’s apparent vulnerability also increased its accessibility and visibility to Pakistanis who might have needed help, which is an important tradeoff in any HA/DR mission.

As the Pakistani army provided for 212th MASH security, Koenen-Grant noted the effect was that “the local Pakistanis all saw and noticed [that] the [hospital] lights were on early and well into the night, and commented favorably on the work ethic of the Americans and the respect for which they were treated.”³⁴ CMRT-3’s field hospital at Shinkiyari experienced a similar dynamic. In the same manner that the German people grew to respect Americans by watching their planes fly at all hours of the day and night into Tempelhof airfield during the Berlin Airlift, the Pakistani

people grew to respect those Americans who were working tirelessly at the Muzaffarabad and Shinkiyari field hospitals.

U.S. integration of diplomacy with military operations helped to create an asymmetric advantage over political and religious extremists who opposed their participation in the relief effort

CDAC-PAK’s two field hospitals attracted doctors from throughout Pakistan and became key nodes for military doctors, Pakistani doctors, doctors of Pakistani origin from other countries, and physicians from international organizations such as the World Health Organization. Even extremist groups such as Jammāt-ud-Dawa welcomed the support of these expeditionary American medical capabilities. One Jammāt-ud-Dawa chief, Mohammad Khalid, stated, “I would invite the American doctors and medical staff to come and join us.”³⁵ The two field hospitals became symbols of the American-Pakistani military partnership and an asymmetric advantage for the United States as American doctors treated many who had never been seen by a medical professional.³⁶ And most importantly, the hospitals were not attacked. A Pakistani army brigadier general told me 4 years later, with obvious pride, that “during nearly six months of relief operations [from October 2005 to March 2006], there was not one terrorist attack upon a U.S. base, troop, or NGO worker.”³⁷

CDAC-PAK’s close partnership with the Pakistani military also had an enormous impact on the safety of rotary-wing aviation operations. CDAC-PAK and the Pakistani military executed their safety pilot concept by placing

Pakistani pilots into the cockpits of Chinooks. Pakistani army crews retrieved the externally loaded slings after cargo had been delivered into zones too dangerous to land in. The potential for a midair collision on these flights was high due to poor visibility, treacherous terrain, and the narrow flight corridors in which the Chinooks had to fly.³⁸ Moreover, high winds significantly increased the danger of carrying externally loaded slings. The Pakistani safety pilots provided a valuable extra set of eyes for the Chinook crews while Pakistani army crews quickly recovered the slings and brought them back to Rawalpindi, enabling uninterrupted rotary-wing relief operations.

U.S. integration of diplomacy with military operations helped to create an asymmetric advantage over political and religious extremists who opposed their participation in the relief effort. For example, Crocker wrote how his coordination with the Chinook crews created a positive strategic effect:

*Early on, some of us thought it would be a good idea to put big American flag decals on the Chinook helicopters that had been ordered out of Afghanistan into Pakistan to deliver aid. "Are you completely crazy?" said the commander of the helicopter contingent. He'd just come out of a war zone, after all. "Why don't we just save time and paint a big bull's-eye on them?" "No, no. Trust us on this," I said. "It'll work." And it did.*³⁹

Soon thereafter, one imam who criticized the Americans was "booed and heckled by worshippers."⁴⁰ Another Pakistani businessman told a reporter that "Pakistan is not a nation of ingrates. . . . We know where the help is coming from."⁴¹ The Chinooks filled a critical void that helped to save lives by delivering the right

aid—to include food, water, winterized tents, plastic sheeting, and medical supplies—to the right place at the right time. Before long, Pakistani children were seen playing with toy Chinooks as the large helicopters became the most visible symbol of the relief effort.⁴²

Major General Javed Aslam, the commander of Pakistan's army aviation, stated that Pakistanis called the Chinooks "angels of mercy" for their delivery of relief supplies. An army brigadier general added that "Chinooks flying in Pakistani airspace came to resemble more than the U.S.-Pakistani [military-to-military] contacts, but actually the larger U.S.-Pakistani partnership in an unprecedented humanitarian effort."⁴³ Crocker best summed it up, writing that the Chinooks operating in Pakistan "became an emblem of the whole international relief effort."⁴⁴ The leadership team of Crocker, Berger, and LeFever took an approach that built upon the Pakistanis' efforts and "got the tone just right."⁴⁵ CDAC-PAK's diplomacy and partnership with the Pakistani military enabled nearly 6 months of aviation operations in which American helicopters flew more than 5,900 missions through some of the toughest terrain in the world—often loaded with external slings that weighed thousands of pounds—without one mishap, crash, or shoot-down.

The Americans' interagency integration also made great strides in a short time. When CDAC-PAK moved its headquarters to Muzaffarabad and placed another forward operating base in Mansehra, Crocker sent his people forward to be his "eyes and ears" on the ground. "He bent every rule in the book to get our people up where they needed to be to liaise with the U.S. and Pakistani militaries, NGOs, and the UN [United Nations] Community on a 24/7 basis," said Lisa Johnson, former director



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

Commander of U.S. Disaster Assistance Center–Pakistan gets aerial view of relief efforts in Muzaffarabad

of the State Department’s Narcotics Affairs Section in Pakistan.⁴⁶ Johnson added that these forward operating bases were not “secure,” and that Crocker had to keep Washington closely informed of where he deployed all of his people throughout the operation.⁴⁷

About 30 Pakistani USAID employees traveled to the devastated areas immediately after the earthquake while there was still the risk of an aftershock. Their purpose was to make initial contact with the victims and send information back to Islamabad. These people knew the language, the regional dynamics, and which assets could be marshaled quickly. As NGOs and United Nations personnel flowed into Pakistan, these USAID workers became the crucial node of coordination among CDAC–PAK, the American Embassy, and many NGOs to deconflict projects, establish priorities based on constant consultation with the prime minister’s office, prevent duplication of effort, and commit the fiscal resources to actually get the work done. These NGOs became USAID’s “troops on the ground” as OFDA committed “more than \$69.4 million to earthquake-affected populations.”⁴⁸

Small Successes, Large Return

The American-Pakistani military partnership and the brilliant interagency integration of America’s leaders were only part of the reason for the success of *Lifeline*. Three anecdotes illustrate the active, upfront, and concerned leadership that characterized the American effort throughout the operation. First, Crocker accompanied one of *Lifeline*’s early flights to an outlying village and learned that there were several seriously injured people on the ground. He directed his crew to “place every seriously wounded person you can on this helicopter when it leaves; I want every inch of this

floor space covered.”⁴⁹ The helicopter crew filled the aircraft to its maximum capacity and transported the Pakistanis back to Mansehra, where they went on to appropriate medical facilities, and many lives were thus saved.

Second, on November 10, 2005, after 1 month of nonstop relief operations, Crocker encouraged his exhausted staff to attend the Marine Corps Birthday Ball at the American Embassy in Islamabad. During the evening’s ceremony, a staffer approached Crocker with an urgent crisis: a 5-year-old girl was

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then at 212th MASH in Muzaffarabad and needed immediate lifesaving surgery that required evacuation to Rawalpindi. Because of the treacherous terrain and danger to pilots, relief missions had not previously been flown at night. But a little girl’s life was at stake, so Crocker authorized one of the State Department’s helicopters with an American-trained, night-vision-capable Pakistani crew to fly the dangerous night mission, and the girl was successfully evacuated to Rawalpindi.⁵⁰

Third, Lance Corporal Stephanie Mendez exemplified how young Servicemembers deployed to Pakistan stepped up to fill positions normally held by more senior officers to help treat Pakistanis. Mendez was an electrician with CMRT-3 who was tasked with maintaining 100-percent generator reliability at the surgical hospital at Shinkiari. Faced with adverse weather conditions, a complex power grid,

and an influx of hundreds of disaster-stricken people, she helped to develop and execute a plan to wire 45 tents and a 60-bed hospital that subsequently provided care to more than 14,000 Pakistanis.⁵¹ Her commander specifically remembered her “in freezing rain at 0100 [in the morning] up to her knees in mud making sure the generators were working” properly so that Pakistanis could continue to receive medical treatment.⁵² The truth is that throughout *Lifeline*, hundreds of similar stories could be told about everyone who participated with their Pakistani partners to help mitigate suffering from the earthquake, from the Ambassador down to the most junior Servicemember.

At a press conference announcing the transfer of 212th MASH to Pakistan in February 2006, LeFever said that his assignment as CDAC-PAK’s commander was “the most professionally and personally rewarding tour of my military service.”⁵³ At a ceremony for the departure of CDAC-PAK on March 31, 2006, Crocker called *Lifeline* “the longest disaster assistance effort in U.S. military history” and “the largest humanitarian assistance mission since the [1948] Berlin Airlift.”⁵⁴ At the same ceremony, Major General Javed Aslam told departing American and Australian troops: “You came in to do good. And in doing so, you have brought enormous honor on yourselves, your services, and your country. You have saved the lives of thousands and given tens of thousands the opportunity to put their lives back together.”⁵⁵

Stephanie Mendez went on to earn meritorious promotion, recognition as the III MEF “Marine of the Year,” and assignment as a Drill Instructor who is currently training recruits at Parris Island, South Carolina. Still, in an email to me 4 years later, she wrote, “That operation was the best thing I have ever participated in.”⁵⁶

Looking Beyond the Tactical

When asked about the lasting impact of the American-Pakistani partnership developed during *Lifeline*, one senior Pakistani diplomat told me, “We are looking beyond the tactical to think in bigger picture terms.”⁵⁷ The United States, too, should view *Lifeline* through a wider lens to glean important lessons and future implications. First, HA/DR campaigns are an effective way to project American values abroad to make progress toward political ends. In the future, the United States should seek opportunities to translate operational success in HA/DR campaigns into enduring strategic partnerships and/or political alliances. These alliances are not likely to look like the NATO that emerged from the Berlin Airlift, and should be carefully tailored to counter current threats. But as with the Berlin Airlift, a HA/DR campaign such as *Lifeline* can catalyze larger political forces that can then cohere into an enduring political alliance if the opportunity is seized.

Second, the American military should continue to field general purpose forces capable of full spectrum operations. CDAC-PAK’s deployment of forces and relief supplies by sea and air showed how flexible maneuver from those domains can enhance military partnerships, provide leaders on the ground with operational space to better determine requirements, and minimize impact on the local people by not placing a large military footprint on the ground. The *2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (QDR) emphasis on acquiring more enablers such as rotary-wing aircraft, foreign language expertise, tactical communications, and combat service support equipment are steps in the right direction. CDAC-PAK was fortunate to have Chinooks next door in Afghanistan to call forward; next time, these capabilities might have to come from the sea.

Lifeline, *Unified Assistance*, and recent HA/DR operations in Haiti attest to the enduring value of expeditionary, forward-deployed forces augmented by strategic lift by both sea and air, and the U.S. military should ensure that it retains these capabilities.

Third, the United States should not wait for natural disasters to occur to expand its military partnerships with countries in South Asia and the Middle East. We know that the northward movement of the tectonic plates in South Asia is causing the Himalayas to rise by about 1 inch per year, which indicates that there are likely to be more natural disasters in the region that contains Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Iran. The American military could sponsor HA/DR conferences, tabletop exercises, and interagency and interoperability working groups that prepare these vulnerable countries for catastrophic events. Exercises in the Pacific with countries such as Thailand for Cobra Gold and the Philippines for Balikatan might provide a useful model. Crocker stated, “Commanders globally should be incorporating HA/DR operations into their exercise schedules to develop and refine skills, practice interagency operations, and build their relationships with partner militaries.”⁵⁸ The American military should also embrace being a “supporting” command to our partners when that is what the situation calls for. The Pakistani army had the lead during *Lifeline*, and its ability to integrate with CDAC-PAK showed that America can advance its national interests without always being the “supported” command.

Fourth, the interagency process is not broken and actually works quite well when the right people are involved. The team of Ambassador Crocker, Admiral LeFever, Bill Berger, and the numerous NGOs that participated in *Lifeline* integrated operations to produce truly stellar

results. Those public servants who demonstrate the flexibility and adaptability to excel in an interagency environment, especially during a real-world contingency, should be rewarded with promotion, awards, and having their stories broadly told across their organizations. Like a winning college football program, success will breed future interagency success if excellent performance is recognized and capitalized upon.

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Fifth, we need to do a better job at getting our stories told. Human beings are naturally conditioned to receive a powerful narrative, but too often our best stories do not get told because we rely on the media or public affairs personnel to tell them, and these people are not always present. The ancient Greek historian Plutarch understood that an interesting anecdote could often provide a truer and more compelling account of an operation than the mass movement of armies, but we sometimes have difficulty getting our best stories out into the public domain. During the Berlin Airlift, for example, publication of the newsletter *Task Force Times* told readers about the exploits of American flyers, spurred competition between units, and even countered Soviet propaganda.⁵⁹ One of the other innovations of *Lifeline* was the brilliantly coordinated public information campaign.⁶⁰ The inherent goodness of the American people serving in the military, government, and

NGOs is an asymmetric advantage that has no effective countermeasure, and we cannot lose sight of the larger strategic narrative that these people write before our eyes. Communicating our stories is essential and will enable the creation of powerful narratives that equal the deeds and character of our people.

Conclusion

On September 22, 2006, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf presented Admiral LeFever with the *Sitara-I-Eisar* (Star of Sacrifice) medal for his outstanding leadership of CDAC-PAK.⁶¹ The U.S. combined interagency efforts during *Lifeline* provided 370,000 people with relief supplies, treated 35,000 people for injuries, and inoculated 20,000 more. American military forces delivered more than 1,000 tons of relief supplies and 107 pieces of engineering equipment, while safely flying more than 5,900 relief missions.⁶² More important than all of these tangible statistics, the Americans and Pakistanis learned to trust each other in the process of saving lives. *Lifeline* made an enormous impact on Pakistan's population and highlighted the good engendered when America's values and interests are aligned and executed on the ground. Public opinion polls taken in May 2005 before the earthquake and in November 2005 during *Lifeline* showed that "favorable opinion of the U.S." rose from 23 percent to 46 percent while "confidence in Bin Laden" plummeted from 51 percent to 33 percent.⁶³

Lifeline showed how interagency integration, cooperation with partner militaries, and careful organization of an expeditionary force that filled critical needs can make a strategic impact. From CDAC-PAK's close partnership with the Pakistani military, to Ambassador Crocker's decision to launch a dangerous night mission to save the life of a 5-year-old girl, to Lance Corporal Mendez's operation of the

generators at all hours of the day and night to treat Pakistanis, the Americans “got it right” in Pakistan. As strategists continue to grapple with how best to leverage the interagency process and get the most out of our military partnerships, the lessons from *Lifeline* are a good place to start. **PRISM**

Notes

¹ Richard Reeves, *Daring Young Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 274.

² *Ibid.*, 238–239.

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⁴ Author interview with Brigadier General Amir Bajwa, Pakistani army, November 13, 2009.

⁵ Greg Mortenson, *Stones into Schools* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 157.

⁶ Joint Center for Operational Analysis, “International Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Operations,” PowerPoint brief, January 23, 2007; Bajwa interview.

⁷ “A Double Tragedy,” *The Economist*, October 15, 2005, 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Michael Hirsch, Zahid Hussain, and Ron Moreau, “One Crisis Too Many?” *Newsweek*, October 31, 2005, 34–35.

¹⁰ Joseph Giordano, “Military Arrives in Pakistan to Assist in Earthquake Recovery,” *Stars and Stripes*, October 12, 2005.

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¹² Author interview with Ambassador Ryan Crocker, March 17, 2010.

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¹⁴ Koenen-Grant interview.

¹⁵ Crocker interview.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Author interview with Lisa Johnson, director, Narcotics Affairs Section, Department of State, November 17, 2009; Embassy of the United States press release, “Ambassador Crocker Press Conference,” October 20, 2005.

¹⁸ Koenen-Grant interview.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Joint Center for Operational Analysis, “International Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Operations.”

²² U.S. Navy Biography of Vice Admiral Michael A. LeFever, available at <www.navy.mil/navydata/bios/navybio.asp?bioID=173>.

²³ Bajwa interview.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Kathleen T. Rhem, “U.S. Military Assistance Moving toward Pakistan,” October 11, 2005, available at <<http://defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=18099>>.

²⁷ Koenen-Grant interview.

²⁸ Ryan Crocker, “Eight Years On,” *Newsweek*, November 8, 2009.

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- ³¹ Joint Center for Operational Analysis Brief, “Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief in Pakistan,” October 31, 2006.
- ³² Kashif Aziz, “U.S. and Australia Wind Up Quake Operation,” *Daily Times*, March 31, 2006.
- ³³ Koenen-Grant interview.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ As quoted in Steve Coll, “Fault Lines,” *The New Yorker*, November 21, 2005, 48–53.
- ³⁶ Johnson interview.
- ³⁷ Bajwa interview.
- ³⁸ Koenen-Grant interview.
- ³⁹ Crocker, “Eight Years On.”
- ⁴⁰ Stephens.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Crocker, “Eight Years On.”
- ⁴³ Aziz; Bajwa interview.
- ⁴⁴ Crocker, “Eight Years On.”
- ⁴⁵ Crocker interview.
- ⁴⁶ Johnson interview.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Koenen-Grant interview; USAID, *Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2006*, “Pakistan–Earthquake,” 63–64.
- ⁴⁹ Johnson interview.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Email from James M. Gannon, February 5, 2010.
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- ⁵⁵ Anita Powell, “Pakistan Mission Has Written History,” *Stars and Stripes*, March 31, 2006, available at <www.military.com/features/0,15240,92897.html>.
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- ⁵⁷ Author interview with senior Pakistani diplomat, February 25, 2010.
- ⁵⁸ Crocker interview.
- ⁵⁹ Reeves, 105, 108–109.
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