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Perceptions of the Pakistan Earthquake Response

Humanitarian Agenda 2015 Pakistan Country Study

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Executive Summary

The devastating earthquake that struck northern Pakistan and the disputed territory of Kashmir on October 8, 2005, killed approximately 75,000 people, injured 70,000 more, left an estimated 3.5 million people homeless, and devastated the basic infrastructure of a region the size of Belgium. Despite a daunting array of obstacles – inaccessible mountainous terrain, the onset of winter, the challenges of coordinating an unprecedented diversity of providers of humanitarian assistance, and the sheer numbers of people in humanitarian need – a wide range of local, national and international actors rose to the humanitarian challenge. Unlike the aftermath of many other natural disasters there were no significant numbers of subsequent deaths from injury, cold, food shortages, or disease. The earthquake response, which was led from the earliest stages of rescue and relief to the ongoing reconstruction phase by the Pakistan Army, is judged by many to have been the most effective response ever to a natural disaster of this magnitude.

The objective of this study was not to conduct an evaluation of the earthquake response, but to learn from the perceptions of a wide range of aid recipients and providers in order to better understand and more effectively address some of the key challenges currently facing humanitarian action. This case study is part of a multi-country study being conducted by the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University entitled, “The Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Principles, Politics and Perceptions” (HA2015). Each case study has focused on understanding perceptions regarding four interrelated issues that are likely to influence the humanitarian agenda during the coming decade:

- The **universality** of humanitarianism – is there anything truly universal about what we call humanitarian action or are the principles and apparatus of humanitarian action perceived to be primarily Western and Northern?
- The implications of **terrorism and counter-terrorism** for humanitarian action – to what extent is the humanitarian enterprise perceived to be part of the security agenda of the US and its allies, and if so what are the implications for humanitarian action?
- The search for greater **coherence** and integration between humanitarian and political/security agendas – does the cost of more integrated approaches exceed the benefits?
- The **security** of humanitarian personnel and the beneficiaries of humanitarian action.

The field research for this study was conducted in March 2007, 18 months after the disaster. Most of the report’s findings are based on focus group discussions with men and women in the most earthquake-devastated areas of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Pakistan-administered Kashmir (PaK), as well as key informant interviews with Pakistani military and civilian officials, and the staff of donor agencies, UN agencies, and local and international NGOs. While the focus of the research was on the initial six months of rescue and relief efforts, respondents also communicated their perceptions – generally much more negative – of the subsequent reconstruction phase.

The Universality of Humanitarianism

In contrast to most of the other HA2015 case studies, the humanitarian principles and apparatus of the initial earthquake rescue and relief efforts were not perceived by those interviewed to be particularly Western and Northern. In large part this was due to the fact that Pakistanis played such a major role in the response. Not only was the relief operation led throughout by the Pakistan Army, but Pakistani citizens and organizations were the first to respond to the earthquake, which sparked the largest philanthropic response by Pakistanis that the country has ever experienced. The universality of the humanitarian imperative to save lives and alleviate suffering was vividly demonstrated by the wide range of local, national and international actors – including erstwhile enemies – who rushed to earthquake-affected communities and worked side-by-side to rescue and aid the survivors.

The international organizations that participated in the rescue and relief efforts, including US and NATO military forces, were very positively perceived by focus group participants. There was a near unanimous sentiment by local respondents that these organizations responded for humanitarian reasons rather than to promote hidden political, cultural or religious agendas. There was also a strong perception that international aid workers were generally culturally sensitive, and at least during the relief phase there appeared to be a fairly forgiving attitude towards those that were not.

Respondents' views regarding the perceived cultural sensitivity or insensitivity of aid workers called into question the common assumption that cultural insensitivity is primarily an expatriate staff issue. While international aid workers were more likely to blame internationals for being culturally insensitive, most Pakistani respondents blamed non-local national staff for the majority of problems caused due to cultural insensitivity. While local communities seemed to be willing to view the behavior of foreigners as simply being "foreign," all Pakistani staff – especially female staff – were expected to behave as "locals." This issue of "locals within locals" highlights the need in culturally diverse contexts to be aware of the potential pitfalls of making overly simplistic distinctions between "national and internationals," "locals and foreigners" or "insiders and outsiders."

The area where the universality of humanitarian principles was most in doubt was over issues of human rights in general, and women's rights in particular. Human rights were perceived by many Pakistanis to be a tool to promote western political and cultural agendas, which led some humanitarian organizations to stop talking about human rights and to instead adopt "less loaded" terminology like "protection" or the "Law of Armed Conflict." The vastly differing perceptions between most aid agencies and local communities regarding the rights and roles of women, especially in the most conservative areas of NWFP, created difficult dilemmas of how to uphold "universal principles" in areas where they were not universally accepted. Differing perceptions about human rights and protection contributed to these areas being perceived by many aid workers to be the "weakest links" in the earthquake response.

The general consensus around humanitarian principles and action seemed to erode the further the earthquake response moved away from immediate life-saving rescue and relief efforts. The universality of the humanitarian imperative to save lives and alleviate suffering appeared to transcend most differences within and between aid givers and aid receivers in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. As the relief phase transitioned into the reconstruction phase, however, these differences became more noticeable and

pronounced. Along with the growing differences came a noticeable increase in anti-aid agency sentiment and an accompanying increase in security incidents targeting aid agencies and their staff.

Impact of War on Terror (WoT)

The perception of most respondents in the Pakistan earthquake study, whether aid providers or recipients, was that the impact of the WoT on the humanitarian response was minimal. Even the deployment of US and NATO military forces was generally perceived to have been motivated by humanitarian considerations, whereas under normal circumstances in Pakistan this would have been highly sensitive and generated numerous conspiracy theories. However, despite these overall perceptions, Pakistan's geostrategic position as a front-line state in the WoT, and the presence of numerous militant Islamic groups – including some on US and UN lists of terrorist organizations – inevitably resulted in the WoT having some impact on the earthquake response.

The most visible impact noted by several aid officials was that while the earthquake response was motivated by humanitarian considerations, the scale of the response by several western donors was motivated by WoT considerations. There is little question that the twin objectives of rewarding a “strategic ally” and “winning hearts and minds” in the WoT clearly influenced the scale of the earthquake response, especially for the US. The instrumentalization of humanitarian action to achieve counter-terrorism objectives by rewarding strategic allies and “winning hearts and minds” raises serious questions about the future of principled humanitarian assistance. Pakistani earthquake survivors benefited from their country's front-line status in the WoT, but there are profoundly negative implications for those affected by crisis and conflict in countries or regions not perceived to be of strategic importance.

A second impact of the WoT was the important but controversial role played in the earthquake response by Islamist militant groups, especially during the initial rescue and relief phase. Several interviewees expressed concern that the mutual suspicion between many international and national aid organizations on the one hand, and the Islamic organizations on the other – in part due to the WoT and the labeling of some organizations as “terrorists” – had contributed to the overall poor coordination between Islamic and non-Islamic organizations in the earthquake response. These groups included *bona fide* religious charities and organizations, as well as militant *jihadi* organizations that were on US and UN lists of terrorist organizations and therefore banned from receiving funding or in-kind contributions. Nevertheless, several UN organizations and other aid agencies did provide the militant groups with aid supplies. Although opposed by the US, most people interviewed for this study felt that it was appropriate to let these Islamist militant groups operate in the initial rescue and relief phase in light of the imperative to save lives and alleviate suffering. Some interviewees noted that the US adopted a constructive low key “don't ask, don't tell” approach to the presence of banned Islamist groups. Even after formally raising its objections to the presence of these groups with the GoP the US did not actively pursue the matter when the government refused to close them down.

Coherence and the Role of the Pakistan Army

The coherence and integration issues that arose in the Pakistan earthquake response differed considerably from the other HA2015 case studies which were conducted primarily in armed conflict settings. The two most notable differences were that humanitarian objectives remained preeminent in the response to the devastating earthquake in Pakistan, whereas political objectives often trumped humanitarian objectives in the case studies conducted in conflict settings. The other notable difference was that the efforts to promote

greater coherence and integration in most of the other case studies related to the establishment of integrated or semi-integrated UN missions, whereas in the earthquake response the focus was on the Pakistan Army's role in leading one of the largest and most integrated civil-military humanitarian operations ever conducted.

The central role played by the Pakistan Army was one of the most interesting and notable aspects of the Pakistan earthquake response. While the prominent military role in the rescue and relief operation generated some unease in humanitarian circles, for the most part these concerns were overcome through effective communication and coordination. The army was strongly criticized for its perceived slow response during the first days following the earthquake when it appears to have prioritized its own organizational imperatives of saving the lives of its own soldiers and rebuilding its forces on the disputed Line of Control with India rather than rescuing civilian earthquake victims. This initial criticism turned to praise, however, for the army's effective leadership of the subsequent relief phase, where its decision-making skills, logistical capacity, coordination skills, and willingness to listen and learn contributed to one of the most effective humanitarian responses ever to a large-scale natural disaster.

The praise for the role of the Pakistan Army in the relief phase stands in contrast to its increasingly unpopular role in the subsequent reconstruction phase. As in national politics more generally, the army found it much easier to take over control than to hand power back to civilian authorities. Because the army was still seen to be running the show behind the civilian façade of the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA), it became the focal point for much of the widespread public frustration with reconstruction efforts that were falling short of public expectations. The transition from a military to a civilian-led reconstruction program became all the more urgent given the growing anti-army sentiment in Pakistan, and in particular the escalating conflict between the army and Islamist militant groups elsewhere in Pakistan. During the first two years following the earthquake the affected areas were not perceived to be a conflict zone, and the Pakistan Army was not viewed as a belligerent force. As the conflict in the NWFP with Islamic militant groups escalated, however, and the army increasingly became a party to a conflict that spilled over into the earthquake zone, the military's central role in the earthquake response became more problematic. The highly integrated civil-military response to the earthquake that was perceived to be so central to the success of the relief phase was increasingly perceived to be a potential liability.

Security

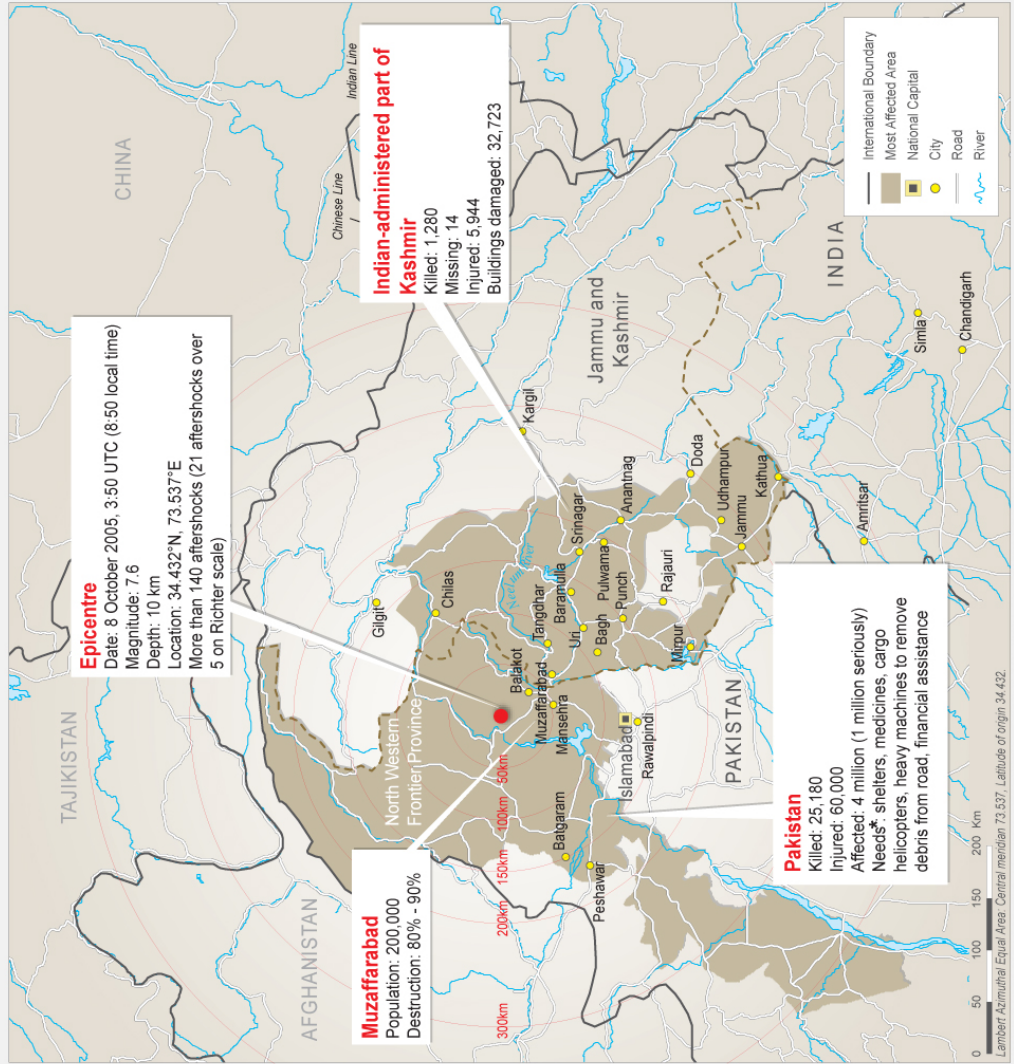
In the earthquake-affected areas of northern Pakistan and Kashmir international aid agencies perceived the security situation to be much more dangerous and insecure than local communities. The presence of many Islamic militant groups in this front-line state in the WoT led many international agencies to identify terrorist attacks as the major security threat in the earthquake-affected areas, and to consequently apply strict security measures. However, during the first 1.5 years following the earthquake there were no serious security incidents targeting aid workers, and for the first two years no attacks that seemed likely to have been perpetrated by militant Islamic groups. The large-scale presence of Pakistan Army troops and intelligence personnel was widely credited by both aid providers and recipients to have played an important role in maintaining security in the earthquake zone. The relatively benign operating environment led several aid workers to question the appropriateness of what they perceived to be overly strict and inflexible security policies of many aid organizations. Some field staff in particular expressed concern that humanitarian imperatives were being trumped by staff security considerations that were based on poor security analysis resulting in inappropriate and unnecessarily rigid security policies.

In the spring and summer of 2007, nearly two years after the earthquake, there was a significant increase in the number of security threats and incidents targeting aid agencies and their staff. While the main threat analysis of most international agencies continued to focus on external factors such as terrorist attacks, nearly all of the actual security threats and incidents proved to be related to internal factors having to do with perceptions of aid agency actions or inaction. These included growing frustration with the perceived slow pace of reconstruction and inadequate reconstruction assistance relative to expectations, as well as some charges of cultural insensitivity especially relating to national female staff. More important, however, were factors related to the political economy of aid such as aid projects bypassing and undermining the authority of traditional landed elites and local religious and political leaders. The most important factor generating security threats and incidents seemed to be employment politics and the insufficient attention given by many aid agencies to who were, or were not, being given jobs in aid programs.

Preliminary OCHA map of earthquake-affected area

South Asia (Pakistan and India): Earthquake

OCHA Situation Report No. 8
 Issued 13 October 2005
 GLIDE: EQ-2005-000174-PAK



- *Needs (indicated by Gov. of Pakistan):**
- Helicopters
 - 50,000 winterised family tents (only some 5,000 have been distributed to date);
 - 1,000,000 blankets;
 - Medicine: typhoid drugs and antibiotics (in syrup form for infants);
 - Disinfectants (for bodies);
 - Water purification kits and tablets;
 - Food (cooked and tinned, high energy biscuits).

Up to now, recorded commitments of 100,000 blankets and 37,000 tents

Map data source: UN Cartographic Section, DevInfo, Acworld, USGS, Inclinav.com.
 Code: OCHA/GVA - 2005/0169

Created by the ReliefWeb Map Centre
 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
 United Nations - 13 October 2005

1. Introduction

Background

At 8:50 a.m. on October 8, 2005, a devastating earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale struck northern Pakistan and the disputed territory of Kashmir, which is divided into Pakistan-Administered Kashmir (PaK)¹ and Indian-Administered Kashmir (IaK).² The earthquake killed approximately 75,000 people, injured another 70,000, and left an estimated 3.5 million people homeless. A massive humanitarian rescue and relief operation followed that was led by the Pakistan Army. The response included thousands of private citizens who were in most cases the first to respond, Islamic militant groups based in the region, search and rescue teams from several countries, US and NATO military forces, UN agencies, and more than one hundred national and international NGOs.

The response created some compelling images of the universality of humanitarian action, with erstwhile enemies – including militant *jihadi* groups, US and NATO military forces, and 2,500 Cuban doctors and nurses – working alongside each other to save lives and respond to the needs of earthquake survivors. Despite daunting challenges, including the difficult mountainous terrain and the race against time to provide basic shelter to the homeless prior to the arrival of the Himalayan winter, the humanitarian response to the earthquake was perceived by many to be “one of the largest and most effective responses to a natural disaster to date.”³

The purpose of this case study was not to conduct an evaluation of the earthquake response. The objective was to learn from the perceptions of those affected by the Pakistan earthquake, as well as those involved in relief and reconstruction efforts, to better understand some of the key challenges facing humanitarian action and humanitarian assistance organizations. This study is part of a broader study undertaken by the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University entitled, “The Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Principles, Politics and Perceptions” (HA2015), which aims to help equip the humanitarian enterprise to better address emerging challenges during the coming decade. In particular, the study is looking at four interrelated issues that are likely to shape the humanitarian agenda:⁴

¹ This paper describes the territory of Kashmir controlled by Pakistan as “Pakistan-administered Kashmir” (PaK). However, within Pakistan it is more common to hear it referred to by its officially recognized name of “Azad [free] Jammu and Kashmir” (AJK).

² This case study does not include an analysis of the earthquake response in Indian-Administered Kashmir (IaK), where approximately 1,300 people were killed. India turned down offers of international assistance and indicated that it was capable of handling the response in IaK.

³ US Embassy Islamabad, Unclassified Cable, “Pakistan - Earthquake: Closeout of the USAID/DART,” April 5, 2006.

⁴ More details on the HA2015 project, including a complete list of HA2015 publications, are available at: <http://fic.tufts.edu/?pid=32>. See in particular the preliminary HA2015 report, “Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Principles, Power, and Perceptions,” Medford, MA: Tufts University, Feinstein International Center,

(continues . . .)

- The **universality** of humanitarianism – is there anything truly universal about what we call humanitarian action or are the principles and apparatus of humanitarian action perceived to be primarily Western and Northern?
- The implications of **terrorism and counter-terrorism** for humanitarian action – to what extent is the humanitarian enterprise perceived to be part of the security agenda of the US and its allies, and if so what are the implications for humanitarian action?
- The search for greater **coherence** and integration between humanitarian and political/security agendas – does the cost of more integrated approaches exceed the benefits?
- The **security** of humanitarian personnel and the beneficiaries of humanitarian action.

Case studies examining these four issues have been conducted in 12 countries where humanitarian action is being undertaken.⁵ The Pakistan case study differs from the others in several important respects. First, it is the only one where local conflict was not an important dimension to the humanitarian response. Second, the Pakistan case study is the only one looking exclusively at the humanitarian response to a rapid onset natural disaster, in contrast to the other case studies examining humanitarian action in situations of armed conflict. Finally, a notable difference in the case of the Pakistan earthquake response was the central role played by the Pakistan Army in leading relief and reconstruction efforts.

Methodology

The field research for this case study was conducted in March 2007, 1.5 years after the earthquake struck northern Pakistan and Kashmir. While the focus of the research was on perceptions of the humanitarian response during the initial six months of rescue and relief efforts, respondents inevitably also communicated their perceptions – usually much more negative – of the subsequent reconstruction phase since April 2006. The study therefore includes analysis of the contrasting perceptions of the relief and reconstruction phases.

The field research was conducted over a three-week period in Islamabad, and in the three districts most badly affected by the earthquake – Mansehra and Battagram districts in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), and Muzaffarabad district in Pakistan-administered Kashmir (PaK). As the main objective of the study is to better understand perceptions of the earthquake response, the report findings are based primarily on the following sources of information:

- 55 key informant interviews with government officials, staff from NGO, UN, Red Cross/Crescent, and donor agencies, and with politicians, religious leaders, journalists and academics (see Appendix A for a list of interviewees).

September 2006 (<http://fic.tufts.edu/downloads/HA2015PreliminaryReport.pdf>), and the synthesis report issued in February 2008.

⁵ During the first phase of HA2015 research ending in August 2006, case studies were conducted in Afghanistan, Burundi, Colombia, Liberia, northern Uganda, and the Sudan. During the second phase, case studies have been conducted in DRC, Iraq, Nepal, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

- 30 focus group discussions using a semi-structured interview format with 262 community members affected by the earthquake, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), local politicians, professionals, and one with NGO national staff. These included 19 male focus group discussions with 162 participants, seven female focus group discussions with 54 participants, and four mixed focus group discussions with 46 male and female participants. The author conducted seven focus group discussions, and the rest were conducted by three Pakistani researchers (see Appendix B for a list of focus groups).
- Eight detailed questionnaires completed by international aid workers working for NGO, UN and donor agencies.

The study has also benefited from a variety of secondary sources, including aid agency reports, government documents, academic articles, and press accounts.

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the help of Shaheen Khan, assisted by Riffat Rizvi and Asif Shahzad, who organized the field research in NWFP and PaK, and helped conduct and write up many of the focus group discussions. The research in PaK benefited a great deal from the hospitality, organizational assistance, contacts, and in-depth knowledge of Raja Baber. I would also like to thank Anna Pont for sharing her insights regarding the earthquake response and for patiently answering many follow-up email questions. A final word of thanks is due to Antonio Donini, Larry Minear, Anna Pont, and Colin Rasmussen for reviewing and commenting on a draft version of this paper, and to Tim Morris for editorial assistance.



Destroyed house on ridge

2. Overview of Earthquake Response

In the space of a minute on the morning of October 8, 2005, the powerful earthquake that struck northern Pakistan and the disputed territory of Kashmir leveled towns and villages, killed or injured 145,000 people, and destroyed or seriously damaged 600,000 homes and most of the area's education, health, and transportation infrastructure. The map below identifies the areas affected by the earthquake – a 30,000 square kilometer area approximately the size of Belgium. Table 1 summarizes some of the key earthquake statistics indicating the scale of the disaster and the daunting challenges facing the many Pakistani and international civilians and military personnel involved in the subsequent rescue, relief, and reconstruction efforts.

The earthquake measured 7.6 on the Richter scale, considerably less than the 9.2 magnitude Indian Ocean earthquake that resulted in the December 2004 tsunami that killed 225,000 people. However, several interviewees for this study emphasized that in many ways the Pakistan earthquake rescue, relief, and reconstruction challenges were much greater. One UN official noted that the greater number of dead in the tsunami “is a false measure because dead people don't need help. In the earthquake there were 3.5 million

homeless compared to 1.5 million displaced by the tsunami, and more injured than in the tsunami.” Geographical and climatic differences were also highlighted, including the often remote and inaccessible mountainous terrain in northern Pakistan and Kashmir and the bitterly cold Himalayan winters. As one aid official noted, “People can live one month without food, one week without water, but only one night without shelter under these climatic conditions.” Finally, while the burden of responding to the tsunami was spread among several countries, the burden of responding to the earthquake fell primarily on Pakistan.

Table 1: Key Earthquake Statistics	
Killed	73,338 (including an estimated 18,000 children killed when schools collapsed) (plus 1,309 in India)
Injured	69,412 (plus 6,622 in India)
Population Affected	3.5 million
Affected Area	30,000 square kilometers
Houses severely damaged/destroyed	600,000 (76% of the entire housing stock)
Health facilities severely damaged/destroyed	796 (80% of primary level facilities severely damaged/destroyed)
Education facilities severely damaged/destroyed	6,298 destroyed or severely damaged, and education work force reduced by 60-70% through death, injury or migration
Roads damaged	6,440 kilometers
International Humanitarian & Reconstruction Aid	US\$ 1.4 billion in humanitarian aid, US\$ 6.2 billion pledged in grants and loans at November 2005 Donor Conference

Sources: ERRA, “Annual Review,” 2005 to 2006, and ERRA and IASC, “ERRA-UN Early Recovery Plan,” May 2006.

Rescue and Relief Phase

By all accounts the first on the scene to aid in rescue efforts and to provide relief goods were individual Pakistani citizens. In an unprecedented outpouring of public sympathy, private citizens throughout the country donated relief supplies and thousands of volunteers flocked to the earthquake-affected areas to assist in rescue and relief operations. As one government official exclaimed: “The Pakistani nation responded – children sent their pocket money from Karachi to the Khyber.” While the public response was generous and enthusiastic, it was not well-organized. Soon there were traffic jams of well-intentioned volunteers transporting relief supplies for earthquake victims, often blocking the only roads leading into the earthquake zone. Much of what was donated was extremely useful but lots was not, and within a few days of the earthquake there were reports of piles of inappropriate second-hand clothes littering the streets or being burned as fuel. Despite these problems, the work of these individual volunteers played a critically important role in the rescue and relief operations during the first few days following the earthquake.

Individual volunteers were soon joined by workers from a wide range of national and international organizations. The first organizations to respond were reportedly the Islamic militant or “*jihadi*” groups already based in the area at camps used to train anti-Indian Kashmiri militant groups (their role is discussed in greater detail in the ‘Impact of the War on Terror’ section of this paper). Within the first day or two the staff of national and international NGO and UN agencies that were already working in Pakistan, and in some cases already working in the earthquake areas, were actively involved in rescue and relief efforts. Less than 24 hours after the earthquake the first international search and rescue team deployed by the

Turkish Red Crescent Society arrived in Islamabad. It was soon followed by many other search and rescue teams, over 100 national and international NGOs, several private sector organizations, and international military forces.



Within 24 hours of the earthquake the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team flew into Islamabad and worked with the Government of Pakistan (GoP), donors, UN agencies, and NGOs to establish coordination structures. Within three days it had prepared and issued a Flash Appeal for \$312 million to support a six-month emergency response, which two weeks later was increased to \$550 million. During these initial days an important decision was also made to adopt and pilot the “Cluster Approach”, the framework for humanitarian coordination devised by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).⁶ Based on this decision, different UN agencies were appointed to lead different sectoral and thematic coordination clusters that operated in Islamabad as well as in the four “humanitarian hubs” – in the towns of Mansehra, Battagram, Muzaffarabad, and Bagh – within the earthquake zone.

The Pakistan government was ill-prepared for a disaster of this magnitude, despite the knowledge that this region of northern Pakistan and Kashmir is highly earthquake prone as it is the meeting place of two tectonic plates that have created the Himalayan Mountain range. No disaster response organization existed to respond to major natural disasters, and it was therefore not surprising that the country’s most powerful, best organized and best resourced institution, the army, took charge of relief operations. On the day after

the earthquake President Musharraf appointed a serving military officer, Major General Farooq Ahmad, to establish and lead a Federal Relief Commission (FRC). The FRC was intended to be a “one-window operation” to coordinate and integrate all relief efforts including the work of both civilian and military actors.

Perceptions of the central role played by the army in leading the earthquake response (discussed in more detail later in the paper) have been mixed. It was initially severely criticized in the press for doing little to rescue civilians during the first few days following the earthquake, and for instead focusing on rescuing only military personnel and re-supplying and deploying new troops to man the Line of Control (LoC) separating Pakistan- and Indian-administered Kashmir. It has also been criticized for prolonging its central role into the reconstruction phase where it has been blamed for many of the perceived problems with reconstruction programs. However, nearly all the interviewees for this study were full of praise for the effective leadership the army provided during the six month relief phase following the earthquake. One report quoted a USAID official with 20 years of experience responding to Asian disasters as saying: “In terms of a host government, this was the best response – the most competent I have ever seen.”⁶

One of the noteworthy features of the Pakistan earthquake response was the important role of international military forces in the earthquake rescue and relief phase. As discussed in more detail later, factors contributing to the significant involvement of US and NATO forces in the response included Pakistan’s geostrategic importance in the US-led “War on Terror” (WoT), and the proximity of US and other NATO forces and equipment in neighboring Afghanistan. Within 48 hours of the earthquake the first of 24 US helicopters arrived in Islamabad from Afghanistan. Soon approximately 1,200 US military personnel had arrived in Pakistan to assist with relief efforts, which included a medical team to run a US Army Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) in Muzaffarabad, and a 125-person Naval Mobile Construction Battalion to clear roads and debris, assist in setting up IDP camps, and rebuild infrastructure.⁷ In addition to US military forces, the NATO Response Force also deployed approximately 1,200 specialist personnel including engineers and medical staff from 17 NATO countries to participate in NATO’s first purely humanitarian mission. NATO forces also operated two “air-bridges” to fly relief supplies to Pakistan from bases in Germany and Turkey.⁸

One of the major successes of the earthquake response, and one of the best examples ever of effective civil-military collaboration in a humanitarian relief operation, was the helicopter operation that ended up being the largest helicopter airlift of aid in history. In much of the remote and mountainous terrain of the earthquake zone – where the few roads that had existed prior to the earthquake were blocked by landslides and destroyed bridges or had simply slipped down the mountainside – helicopters were the only effective way to rapidly transport relief supplies. Although there were reports of considerable confusion during the critical first two weeks after the earthquake, the subsequent operation was described by one interviewee as “seamless.” The Pakistan Army, US Navy, and the UN Humanitarian Air Service managed a highly effective

⁶ U.S. Agency for International Development, “Pakistan Quake Relief,” May 2006, p. 6.

⁷ USINFO, “NATO Continues to Expand Earthquake Relief Effort in Pakistan,” November 14, 2005, <http://usinfo.state.gov/sa/Archive/2005/Nov/14-590949.html>.

⁸ Daniel Kronenfeld and Rhoda Margesson, “The Earthquake in South Asia: Humanitarian Assistance and Relief Operations,” CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service, December 12, 2005, (<http://digital.library.unt.edu/govdocs/crs/permalink/meta-crs-8257:1>) p. 19.

Air Operations Cell (AOC) that at its peak coordinated over 100 helicopters that delivered 100 tons of food to the earthquake zone, transported injured to medical facilities outside the earthquake zone, and transported aid workers to and from the earthquake zone. According to one report, “Never before had a home military, foreign allied support, and the United Nations worked so well in the delivery of air support.”⁹

Most aid workers interviewed for this study believed that despite numerous shortcomings and frustrations, the earthquake relief effort was a tremendous success. Many pointed to the fact that after the earthquake very few people died in the “second wave of deaths” which often follows disasters due to lack of shelter or capacity to treat injuries. There was also not a “third wave of deaths” caused by outbreaks of disease. According to a WHO official, fewer Pakistanis died in the earthquake zone after the earthquake than die in an average winter season in that region.¹⁰

An important reason that was given for the low mortality rates was the success of “Operation Winter Race,” which was literally a race to provide adequate shelter to the estimated 3.5 million homeless prior to the onset of the normally harsh Himalayan winter. More than 500,000 tents, five million corrugated galvanized iron (CGI) sheets, six million blankets and 2.2 million tarpaulins and plastic sheeting were distributed.¹¹ Nevertheless, there was still a major shortage of winterized tents that would keep those living at higher altitudes warm enough throughout the winter. To address this critical problem a strategy was adopted of constructing “one warm room” using the rubble from destroyed homes and corrugated iron roofing sheets, which played an important role in contributing to the success of Operation Winter Race.¹² Nature was also kind – perhaps the most important contributing factor to the success of Winter Race was the fact that the 2005-2006 winter was uncharacteristically mild.

Transition from Relief to Reconstruction

In April 2006, six months after the earthquake, the relief phase transitioned into the reconstruction phase. This was symbolized by the FRC being phased out as an independent entity and its responsibilities taken over by the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA).¹³ Like the FRC, ERRA was technically a civilian institution, but it was still very much run by military officers. ERRA and the IASC jointly developed an Early Recovery Plan (ERP) that outlined a set of programs designed “to minimize the gap between relief and reconstruction.” The goal of the ERP was to avoid a loss of momentum and a gap, and “to support the longer-term road to reconstruction by bridging the end of the relief phase and the start of full-scale reconstruction.”¹⁴ The focus of the reconstruction phase shifted from saving lives to rebuilding the lives and livelihoods of the affected populations using the slogan “Build Back Better.”

⁹ Nadeem Ahmed and Andrew MacLeod, “The 2005 Pakistan Earthquake,” Chapter 7 in Kevin M. Cahill, ed., *The Pulse of Humanitarian Assistance* (New York: Fordham University Press and The Center for International Humanitarian Cooperation, 2007), p. 170.

¹⁰ USAID, “Pakistan Quake Relief,” May 2006, p. 4.

¹¹ ERRA and IASC Country Team, “ERRA-UN Early Recovery Plan,” May 2006, p. 5.

¹² For a more detailed account of Operation Winter Race, see Nadeem Ahmed and Andrew MacLeod, op. cit., pp. 170-172.

¹³ www.erra.gov.pk

¹⁴ ERRA and IASC Country Team, “ERRA-UN Early Recovery Plan,” May 2006, p. vi.

It is common in transitions from short-term relief operations to longer-term reconstruction and development programs for a gap to develop and widen between public expectations of what reconstruction work should be done and the reality of what governments and aid agencies are capable of doing. The Pakistan earthquake response was no exception, and soon the positive perceptions of the relief operation changed into more negative perceptions about reconstruction efforts. One contributing factor was that there was a much clearer sense of the purpose and objectives during the rescue and relief phase. According to one UN official:

'Build Back Better' is a nice slogan but should we interpret this as build back a better society, or build back better infrastructure? We haven't been able to define this. We lost a common goal at some point – I'm not sure when. In the rescue/relief phase we had a common goal. In the reconstruction phase we're very far apart without a common vision. The Early Recovery Plan is a tool that provides a common framework but it doesn't provide a common vision. We should have invested more time in having Pakistani policy-makers and the humanitarian community agree on a common vision.

Two other explanations given in interviews and focus group discussions for the growing public discontent in the earthquake areas included the public's frustration with the perceived slow pace of reconstruction, and the resentment of local politicians and civilian administrators who felt bypassed by the army and NGO-led relief and reconstruction programs. The most common cause cited for the discontent, however, was the ERRA housing policy. Respondents complained that its financial assistance packages were inadequate and that technical standards were slow to be developed, poorly communicated, and initially too inflexible.

Much of the growing public discontent with reconstruction efforts was directed at the Pakistan Army which was still perceived to be running the show, albeit from behind the thin civilian façade of ERRA. While the army's role was understood and welcomed during the rescue and relief phase, there was a lot less acceptance of the army's continued leadership role during the earthquake reconstruction phase. As with national politics in general, there were growing demands for the military to put in place an exit strategy to turn responsibility for earthquake reconstruction back to civilian administrators and local government officials.

Humanitarian Coordination – Perceptions of the “Cluster Approach”

One of the important decisions made shortly after the earthquake was to use the UN-led “Cluster Approach” for coordination despite the fact that, although endorsed by the heads of the IASC member agencies, it had not been approved for implementation until 2006. The Cluster Approach was based on a recommendation made in the 2005 Humanitarian Response Review (HRR)¹⁵ commissioned by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator to assign global “cluster leads” to address assistance gaps in humanitarian relief operations. In September 2005 the IASC endorsed a proposal to assign different UN agencies to lead (an initial nine)

¹⁵ http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/_tools/download.asp?docID=1173&type=

sectoral or thematic clusters¹⁶ that would be responsible for identifying and filling assistance gaps in humanitarian response operations, as well as for being the “provider of last resort.”¹⁷

On October 9th – the day after the earthquake – the UNDAC team in Islamabad issued its first situation report (sitrep) using a format based on the HRR-proposed clusters. This was followed a few days later by a Flash Appeal for funding that was also organized into the HRR clusters. According to one first-hand account, these initial *ad hoc* decisions had major ramifications on the subsequent earthquake response:

*Firstly, a new and experimental approach would be used for what was quickly becoming a larger and more complex humanitarian response.... Lead agencies had neither trained their cluster coordinators nor budgeted for the positions. Agencies had little institutional knowledge of the structures, and basic tools, such as terms of reference and guidelines, simply did not exist. Clusters created first for the sitrep and then for the Flash Appeal now made a permanent mark on the relief operation. The clusters were formalized, leaders appointed, and coordination structures and mechanisms were put in place.*¹⁸

Shortly after the adoption of the Cluster Approach in Islamabad, clusters were established in the four “humanitarian hubs”. These field-based clusters soon became the center for operational coordination in the earthquake-affected areas.

While there were a number of criticisms of how the Cluster Approach functioned that are discussed below, it is important to note that overall it was generally perceived to have worked better than previous humanitarian emergency coordination mechanisms. Most of the criticisms of the Cluster Approach that were mentioned in interviews for this study were also noted in the IASC real-time evaluation of the Cluster Approach conducted in February 2006, and an ActionAid assessment of the Cluster Approach conducted in February and March 2006.¹⁹ Perceptions of the major shortcomings of the Cluster Approach identified in these two assessments, as well as in the interviews for this study, are outlined below.

¹⁶ The nine clusters were: Health, Food and Nutrition, Water and Sanitation, Logistics, Camp Management, Emergency Shelter, Emergency Telecommunications, Protection of Vulnerable Groups, and Early Recovery. In the Pakistan earthquake response a tenth cluster, Education, was added.

¹⁷ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), “Real-Time Evaluation, Cluster Approach, Pakistan Earthquake,” Islamabad, February 2006, p. 5.

(<http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docid=1005901>)

¹⁸ Nadeem Ahmed and Andrew MacLeod, “The 2005 Pakistan Earthquake,” Chapter 7 in Kevin M. Cahill ed., op. cit., p. 164.

¹⁹ The IASC and ActionAid reports provide a more detailed assessment of the Cluster Approach in the earthquake response, and are quoted from in this section’s analysis of the cluster shortcomings: Inter-Agency Standing Committee, “Real-Time Evaluation, Cluster Approach, Pakistan Earthquake,” Islamabad, February 2006 (<http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docid=1005901>); and ActionAid International, “The Evolving UN Cluster Approach in the Aftermath of the Pakistan Earthquake: an NGO perspective,” 2006 (www.actionaid.org/docs/evolving%20un%20cluster.pdf)

Confusion and Lack of Clarity About the Cluster Approach - Given that the Cluster Approach was not intended to be implemented until 2006, and that it was pilot tested in an extremely complex and large-scale humanitarian response to a devastating natural disaster, it is not surprising that it generated considerable confusion and raised many questions. No terms of reference existed initially so there was a lack of clarity about the role of the clusters and the responsibilities of the cluster leads. The IASC evaluation noted that “few people were able to differentiate between the Cluster Approach and the traditional sector approach,” and was described by some as simply “old wine in new bottles.” The IASC evaluation also noted that the “raison d’être” of the Cluster Approach to fill gaps was not well understood, and that as a result “some clusters were established where no gap existed” and that other gaps – notably assisting IDPs in spontaneous camps – remained unfilled.

Failure to Prioritize Cross-Cutting Issues – A finding of the cluster evaluations that was reiterated by interviewees for this study was that cross-cutting issues of gender, environment and human rights had “fallen between the cracks.” According to the IASC evaluation, “Within clusters there was no accountability for these issues and there was no cross-cluster mechanism to address them. These issues tended to get sidelined and overshadowed by the pressing demands for immediate delivery of supplies and services.” Related to the failure to prioritize human rights issues were frequent criticisms of the weak leadership and ineffectiveness of the UNICEF-led protection cluster. The perception that the protection cluster was the “weakest link” and “didn’t deliver at all” are discussed in more detail in this paper’s section on ‘The Universality of Humanitarian Action.’

Weak Information Management and “Gap Analysis” – The weakness of information management and “gap analysis” has been a common finding of most assessments of the earthquake response. According to the IASC evaluation, “Overall the information management in this crisis response received low marks. The apparent disconnect between the field-hubs and Islamabad was exemplified by a lack of standardized, interoperable and verifiable data.” The quote in Box 1 from a USAID “lessons learned” document based on the earthquake response highlights that this weakness was not limited to the clusters alone, but was a much broader problem involving the UN’s Humanitarian Information Center (HIC) as well as the GoP’s military and civilian institutions.

Box 1: Weak Information Management and “Gap Analysis”

Without good information management in a disaster one cannot develop what the military refers to as a ‘Common Operating Picture.’ To produce this, a basic needs assessment measured against supplies being provided to produce a “gap analysis” upon which one can prioritize assets is necessary. Neither the GOP nor the U.N. was able to produce any analysis of this sort during the several months of the response effort...

There were many causes for this problem.... The GOP did not have a “single window” for information to be provided by the donor and response community. Although the U.N. had the Humanitarian Information Center (HIC) and the U.N. clusters, for many reasons... these systems never productively connected....

As was the case with the issue of assessments, the lack of a reliable system spawned a proliferation of

ad hoc and duplicative systems that wasted time and resources. The most notable was the HIC “twin” set up by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This system, finally combined with the HIC, was aptly named the Strategic Information Cell (SIC) and soon died a natural death.

The GOP military, which was present everywhere in the field, was best placed to produce reliable information, but somehow, whether from a culture of not sharing information or the inability to develop standard formats for reporting information, the GOP military was never able to provide or publish precise data.

Source: “USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) briefing book for Senior Management in Asian Embassies and Missions (based on Pakistan Earthquake), p. 2.

Weak Inter-Cluster Communication and Coordination – There was reportedly little communication or coordination between the different sectoral and thematic clusters, which as a result tended to work in “silos.” This limited the chances of cross-cluster fertilization, including the ability to identify cross-cutting issues and the opportunity to learn lessons from the experiences of the other clusters. There was also poor communication and coordination, and in some cases much tension between the field-based hub clusters and the Islamabad-based clusters.

Weak NGO Participation – There was a widespread perception that NGO participation in the clusters was weak. A number of reasons were cited for this including a lack of knowledge and understanding by NGOs of the Cluster Approach, as well as skepticism about the value added of committing valuable staff time to attend the large number of cluster meetings. According to the director of one international non-governmental organization (INGO), one of the only reasons to attend cluster meetings was that “if you didn’t go to meetings or provide information you weren’t on the radar screen.” There was also reluctance on the part of some NGOs to participate in what was a UN-led – and perceived by some to be “UN-centric” – coordination mechanism. Many local NGOs reportedly did not participate because they were either not aware of the meetings, often not invited, or because they could not understand or speak English sufficiently well to participate in or benefit from the discussions. As discussed in the ‘War on Terror’ section of this paper, the fact that there were few efforts to invite Islamic organizations to cluster meetings as well as to involve them in other coordination efforts was viewed by some interviewees as a “missed opportunity.” Many were big stakeholders, but as one interviewee noted, “there was a reluctance to invite them.”

Weak Donor Participation and Support – Donor participation in the clusters was reported to be weak. The IASC evaluation also noted “the lack of clarity on how the clusters linked to donor groups like “G7” and International Financial Institutions.” The weak participation by many donors could simply have been a function of having insufficient staff to cover the large number of sectoral and thematic cluster meetings. In the case of some of the largest donors, however, some interviewees felt that that the reason for their lack of involvement and support was more fundamental. According to a senior UN official:

USAID wanted to kill [the Cluster Approach] as they don’t want the UN to have a role. DFID also didn’t like it. In general donor coordination was secretive, not representative, Western, and unaccountable to the clusters. The donors don’t want “good humanitarian donorship” to work – they don’t want to lose sovereignty.

Another UN official felt that “the USG formally endorses the cluster approach but informally it is anti-cluster.” A US official believed that the negative attitude of many colleagues was because “US groups have an immediate prejudice against the UN. OFDA’s attitude is that the UN is inefficient, but it’s no more inefficient than the US. Their perception is influenced by the US’s anti-UN policy and the media and not necessarily based on experience.”²⁰

Good for Information Sharing and Networking but Ineffective for Decision-Making – One of the most common observations made about the clusters was that they were useful as venues for information sharing and networking, but that they were ineffective mechanisms for shaping policies and making decisions. A UN official observed that in practice “smaller meetings of key decision-makers were held when key decisions needed to be made.” The clusters were perceived by some to be too large and unwieldy, with rapid turnover in their membership, and little in the way of membership criteria to help ensure that participants could contribute substantively to cluster discussions. Another problem was that in many cluster meetings there were only a minority of participants who were sufficiently senior to take decisions. The IASC evaluation noted that this problem extended to the cluster leads themselves as “most cluster-leads (coordinators) were not Heads of Agencies and did not have the delegated authority to make decisions.”

Another Layer of Bureaucracy – Several respondents, especially from NGOs, were concerned that the Cluster Approach had created a thick layer of additional bureaucracy whose benefits were often not clear. In particular, they complained, about the large number of cluster meetings which were often poorly chaired and had few tangible outputs. An INGO director referred to the large number of cluster meetings as “coordination run rampant,” while the IASC report quoted a respondent’s concern that, unchecked, the Cluster Approach risked becoming a “cluster monster.”

Weak Cluster Leadership – Concerns were raised about the capability and capacity of some agencies as well as individuals to lead clusters. One donor emphasized the need to ensure flexibility in assigning cluster lead agencies based on the relative strengths and capacities of agencies in each specific context: “The main issue was who should run the clusters. They could have made some better decisions. For example, IOM was not the right agency to run the shelter cluster.” Even more questions were raised about the capacity and coordination skills of some of the cluster leads, with several respondents emphasizing the need for stricter selection criteria for cluster leads, and more specific training in areas such as how to coordinate, facilitate, and manage meetings.

Cluster Lead Confusion Between Agency Role and Cluster Role – Several of the UN cluster leads reportedly had trouble “stepping out of their institutional hats.” In some cases this was because cluster leads had the difficult and confusing task of simultaneously fulfilling both agency responsibilities as well as their cluster responsibilities. According to one INGO director, “UN lead agencies couldn’t distinguish between their agency role and their head of cluster role. This led to confusion both internally and externally. Cluster leadership needs to be neutral and not promoting agency agendas.” A UN official described how “UNICEF was the lead [of the protection cluster] but for the first three months was only interested in child protection so many NGOs quit in frustration.” The IASC evaluation reported that some cluster leads “felt

²⁰ The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) is a unit of USAID.

that clusters were driven as much by agency priorities as by cluster responsibilities... . Many informants recommended the complete segregation of operational responsibilities from coordination responsibilities in the role of the cluster leaders.”

High Turnover of Cluster Leads and Members – Many respondents, especially government officials, cited the high turnover of cluster members in general, and cluster leads in particular, as an important factor undermining the effectiveness of the clusters. Several interviewees commented on the importance for effective coordination of forging strong personal relationships – and at times friendships – as well as the importance of key individuals. The rapid turnover of cluster leads and members made developing these relationships extremely difficult. According to the ActionAid study published only five months after the earthquake: “In Manshehra there were 4 changes to OCHA cluster heads, 8 to the head of the Security cluster and 5 to the UNICEF cluster lead.”²¹

Problematic Transition from UN-led Cluster Approach to GoP-led Coordination – A problem with the Cluster Approach identified in several interviews was the inadequate preparation for developing a sectoral/thematic coordination system to replace the clusters when they were phased out between April to June 2006. In February 2006 the IASC evaluation referred to “a lack of clarity of how the cluster system should evolve.” While there was a general understanding that the UN-led clusters during the relief phase would be replaced by GoP/ERRA-led coordination mechanisms during the reconstruction phase, the transition was reportedly not a smooth one. According to one senior UN official:

The cluster system was dissolved without being replaced with anything else. This was a disaster. This is when lots of the ERRA policies started popping up unchecked and un-discussed. In May-July we saw lots of nonsense, in part because there was no cluster system to vet policies and no mechanism to say “no” to ERRA.

Some identified the problem as inadequate ERRA capacity to lead sectoral/thematic coordination following the phasing out of the clusters. However, a more fundamental problem identified by one UN official as to why ERRA could not effectively replace the UN-led clusters was “due to lack of trust between the GoP/Army and civil society in Pakistan – a political reality/complication mostly overlooked by the international humanitarian community.”

Box 2: A Cluster Critique

The cluster system was imposed on us by a UN reform agenda. We were constantly getting dragged into meetings. For us it was painful. It only left us with half a day to implement. We could have used our time much better. Overall it was a net loss.

I thought the cluster system was quite sloppy. The UN cluster evaluation team had already decided that it was the way to go, although many of us thought it didn't work well. There were too many people

²¹ ActionAid, op. cit., p. 24

involved and it slowed us down. There was too much information, and too many people who had to say clever things around the table. What we needed were a few people who were more committed. Instead, people came to represent their organizations and felt they had to say something. There was a hodgepodge of too many interests, and at times it became a forum for UN agencies to fight their petty turf wars.

The clusters were not effective as decision-making bodies – they were too democratic for their own good. There was no selectivity in terms of membership. We need to distinguish between information sharing and coordination and planning. We should have one information-sharing meeting and a smaller group of operational people for planning and implementation. We need to divide planners from information sharers, and to separate those who have to act from those who want to be visible in meetings. The coordination meetings that worked the best were often due to the heavy-handed military approach. This was often the only way to reach a decision.

For me the most important thing to make coordination work was getting to know people as human beings. Having informal meetings over beer – or a “strong tea” – was the best way to build trust and confidence in a congenial manner. You also can’t underestimate the importance of key personalities like General Nadeem.

Source: Interview with UN official

Despite the cluster shortcomings identified above, very few aid workers expressed the view that coordination of the earthquake response would have worked better without the Cluster Approach. There seemed to be a general consensus that, in the words of one INGO director, “They worked reasonably well considering this was the first time they were piloted.” Several people noted that while the clusters were often not very effective in terms of strategic coordination and decision-making, they were a useful forum for information sharing and networking. The Cluster Approach also played an important role in providing a relatively clear coordination framework that was understood and supported by Pakistani military and civilian authorities. In an article jointly authored by a Pakistani Army Lt. General and a senior UN official who both played central roles in leading the relief effort, they summed up their assessment of the Cluster Approach as follows:

After the relief operation was over most commentators, from the NGOs, the United Nations, and the government of Pakistan, could point to some systematic errors and room for improvement based on the cluster choice. All agreed, however, that it was a better response than normal, at least as far as humanitarian coordination was concerned.”²²

²² Nadeem Ahmed and Andrew MacLeod, op. cit. in Kevin M. Cahill, ed. op. cit., p. 165.

3. The Universality of Humanitarianism



The perceived universality of humanitarian principles and action was greater in the Pakistan earthquake response than in most of the other HA2015 case studies where the humanitarian enterprise was perceived to be “fundamentally northern in values, appearance, and behavior.”²³ In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake Pakistani citizens were the first to respond, with thousands of volunteers rushing to rescue and assist survivors in the earthquake affected areas of NWFP and PaK, as well as from a collapsed high-rise apartment building in Islamabad. Truck load after truck load of relief supplies donated by Pakistanis throughout the country soon started arriving in the areas devastated by the earthquake. The earthquake,

²³ Antonio Donini et al., “Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Afghanistan Country Study,” Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, June 2006 (<http://fic.tufts.edu/downloads/HA2015AfghanistanCountryStudy.pdf>), p. 13.

and the in-depth coverage provided by Pakistan's young but rapidly growing commercial TV channels, mobilized and unified Pakistanis throughout the country and abroad, and resulted in the largest philanthropic response Pakistan has ever witnessed.

The first organizations to respond in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake were also mostly national and not international, further strengthening the perception that the humanitarian response to the earthquake was not a Western or Northern led enterprise. These included Islamist organizations (including some militant *jihadi* groups on UN and US State Department and Treasury lists of banned terrorist organizations), local community-based organizations and NGOs, and the Pakistan Army, who were joined by the few international NGOs already working in the area at the time of the earthquake. Even following the arrival of numerous international civilian and military rescue and relief teams and international aid agencies, the nearly unanimous perception communicated in focus groups was that these civilian and military organizations were there to assist in rescue and relief efforts rather than to promote hidden agendas. This is another indication that the humanitarian response was perceived to be based on universal principles rather than northern principles and agendas. The image of thousands of Pakistani citizens volunteering alongside organizations as diverse as the US military, Cuban medical teams, and Islamic organizations branded by the UN and US as "terrorist," was a powerful symbol of the universality of humanitarian action.

This is not to say that there was complete consensus among the different relief actors and local communities around all humanitarian principles. While there was a universal acceptance of the imperative to save lives and provide assistance to earthquake survivors, the motivations and the ways of doing it often differed considerably. As one senior international aid official noted:

The principle of relief is universal but motivations differ from the militantly religious to the militantly secular... In a place like Kohistan [district of NWFP] the people don't distinguish between a Christian organization perceived to be pushing a religious agenda and a secular organization pushing a women's rights agenda. A radical Islamic group's agenda would be more accepted in Kohistan than a secular agenda.

Several interviewees also pointed out that the more the earthquake response shifted from the immediate life-saving rescue and relief efforts to the medium- to longer-term reconstruction programs the more the consensus around the universality of humanitarian action broke down.²⁴ An aid official described this process as follows:

²⁴ This evolution is consistent with other major crises studied by Tufts researchers. In the former Yugoslavia, for example, the broad consensus that existed during the "all hands on deck" emergency period gave way to greater differences among groups as reconstruction needs loomed larger and issues of institutional division of labor, sequence of activities, and funding became more contentious. See Larry Minear et al., "Humanitarian Action in the Former Yugoslavia: The U.N.'s Role 1991-1993", Occasional Paper #18, Providence, Rhode Island: Watson Institute, 1994

(http://hwproject.tufts.edu/publications/electronic/e_op18.pdf)

Issues and differences get highlighted more as time goes on. In the immediacy of the earthquake people took help from anyone... The humanitarian impulse came first, but then other factors including political ones played a role.

Perceptions of Humanitarian Action and Actors

A very striking characteristic of the focus group discussions with earthquake survivors was the extent to which they perceived the international aid agencies during the initial rescue and relief phase to be there for humanitarian reasons rather than to promote political, religious or other hidden agendas. A focus group member in the devastated town of Balakot said, “Foreign agencies remained completely neutral and impartial. They just came to aid humanity. They didn’t engage in religion, politics or ethnicity.” This perception was true not only of INGOs and UN agencies, but also of US and NATO military forces. According to one resident of the earthquake-devastated city of Muzaffarabad, “The international military response was perceived as humanitarian. People said farewell to the US Army with flowers. They had no political agenda.” Box 3 contains a quote from a Muslim cleric in Mansehra district ridiculing the suggestion that there were any foreign religious agendas, and supporting the perception that foreign aid agencies were involved in the earthquake response solely for humanitarian reasons.

Box 3: A Positive Perception of International Aid Efforts

I got the reputation for being the “NGO’s maulvi” [Muslim cleric]. In my Friday sermons I say that the allegations that NGOs are trying to change your religion is a stupid issue. I tell them, “Are the wildlife NGOs trying to change the religions of the birds and the monkeys? Is our Islam so weak that someone can easily change our religion?” We’ve seen billions of rupees of aid distributed but we’ve not met anyone who’s changed their religion.

We believe foreigners came to help, although people are disappointed with some NGOs that they did not do more. But only five percent of the most ignorant think there is a foreign agenda. People saw with their own eyes helicopters distributing supplies. The people were very happy when the US Army built a hospital. They did a very good job. When they left people were very appreciative and gave them a big farewell. People thought they came to help.

The reputation of foreigners in this area is much better after the earthquake. Foreign agencies... were not at all involved in promoting political or religious agendas. Nearly everyone thinks that whatever NGOs did, whether lots or little, was done for humanitarian reasons. No foreigners were involved in other activities. Of the 30,000 people here you won’t find one who tried to convert. People will criticize how the distribution was done – that some got more than others – but they don’t criticize that they had agendas.

Source: Interview with local religious leader

Several Pakistani NGO workers believed that the earthquake response would play an important role in helping to remove the anti-NGO sentiment that existed prior to the earthquake, especially in the most conservative areas of NWFP (see Box 4). According to one, “Our experience is that there is a lot more acceptance after the earthquake, especially in conservative areas like Allai and Battagram. Before the

earthquake some people accepted us but not everyone.” Others noted that the impact of the positive perception of the role of NGOs during the earthquake response extended beyond the earthquake areas. According to one INGO manager, “Relations between the government and NGOs have improved dramatically after the earthquake. There is now a much better understanding of NGOs. This has led to a general change of attitude that is not just earthquake specific.”

Box 4: Pre- and Post-Earthquake Perceptions of NGOs

Before the earthquake there was lots of opposition to NGOs from religious groups. Maulvis have turned into politicians – they run the government in NWFP and Balochistan. They see NGOs as their strongest opposition so they oppose them. In their Friday sermons mullahs encouraged communities to oppose NGOs. NGOs needed effective community activists to overcome this opposition.

After the earthquake, when people saw on the one side the corruption and favoritism of the Pakistan Government and army, and on the other many international volunteers as the main ones giving support and rescuing people from Margalla Towers [a highrise apartment building in Islamabad that collapsed in the earthquake], this reversed the negative impression of the international community and aid workers. Poor people without TVs went to shops and neighbors’ homes to watch 24 hour coverage of the earthquake response. Through cable TV they saw people in other countries raising money. In Balakot jihadi groups and French volunteers were working in the same place. People saw the jihadis stop work to pray while the French workers carried on working and saved a little child while the jihadis were praying. Lots of stories like this were narrated. The world is now a global village – news spreads quickly – people are now loving the international community. As a result, religious groups are now trying to again bring to the fore that they drink and dance, etc....

The improved reputation of the international community and INGOs has also helped improve the reputation of local NGOs... and created more acceptance of NGOs. The situation is getting better because they see us providing tangible assistance. We’re a changed community – change has taken place. The disaster and its response have provided a great opportunity for those of us working in communities for years to come.

Source: Interview with Pakistani NGO worker

The positive perception that national and international aid agencies were motivated by humanitarian objectives rather than hidden agendas does not mean that there were no criticisms of these agencies. Many focus group members criticized the relief money being wasted on expensive four-wheel drive vehicles, high rents, and high staff salaries, and that “they are making lots of money off of us.” Many others complained about not being adequately consulted, which they believed resulted in inappropriate policies and priorities, and poor targeting of relief aid. Several politicians and civil administrators complained about how aid agencies bypassed them and only worked with the military or directly with local communities. According to one:

Foreign NGOs have weakened civil society by talking much more to the military than civil society. They should have interacted more with civilian government and civil society instead of just dealing with the military. Apart from that NGOs did a fantastic job.

Several interviewees also questioned how long the positive perception of NGOs would last, especially as the earthquake response transitioned from relief work to reconstruction and development. According to one INGO director:

We're hearing more about people getting upset over NGOs in the reconstruction phase. We're seeing it in the increase in security incidents.... As NGOs move from relief distributions to the softer side of development, their reputation will fade and problems will increase.

A Pakistani NGO worker expressed a similar concern about the preferences for relief over development assistance, and the risk that INGOs will be associated with the former and Pakistani NGOs with the latter:

Most INGOs had a good reputation because they did relief. Now they're gone and we're left to do development, so people are less happy with us. People start their conversations with "what will you give us?" People still want relief.

These concerns about the sustainability of the positive perception of aid agencies and of a potential backlash of anti-aid agency sentiment have proven to be well-founded. As discussed in greater detail in the sections on security and on the role of the Pakistan Army, following the transition from rescue and relief efforts to longer-term reconstruction efforts there was a very noticeable increase in anti-aid agency and anti-army sentiment, and an increase in security incidents targeting aid agencies. If negative perceptions of reconstruction efforts continue to replace the positive perceptions of aid agencies created during the rescue/relief phase, it is likely that the significant improvement in the reputation of aid agencies in the earthquake area will prove to have been relatively short-lived.

Cultural Sensitivity

Closely related to the issue of the perception of aid agencies is the perception of the cultural sensitivity of aid workers. With a few notable exceptions, international aid workers were given high marks for cultural sensitivity in focus group discussions in earthquake-affected communities. According to one religious leader in a conservative area of the NWFP:

Most foreigners tried to adapt to our local culture. Many of the international women dress more modestly than the Pakistani girls.... The world is a global village and everyone watches television. The dress of foreigners is now less of an issue – it no longer looks so shocking.

A Pakistani NGO worker commented:

I visited an INGO in June – three expat women were wrapped in scarf, dupatta [head covering] and shawl despite it being very hot. They were being more local than the locals.

Not surprisingly, in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake the cultural sensitivity or insensitivity of foreigners was pretty low on most people's list of concerns. According to a Pakistani NGO worker, "During

the first six months people didn't care who was coming, what they were wearing or their religion." This sentiment was echoed by a *mullah* who stated, "People were so in need they weren't worrying about what people were wearing but what was in their hands."

A good indication that cultural insensitivity of foreign aid workers during the relief phase was not perceived to be a major issue was the positive impression that most local communities had of the 2,500 Cuban medical workers. The Cubans were often highlighted as the exception to the general rule that international staff were relatively culturally sensitive. According to one interviewee, "they had no idea where they were and asked us where to find rum. They were unprepared in terms of clothing, had no warm clothes, often walked around in inappropriate clothes, and would go to the river to wash in public." In one case local religious leaders did complain about inappropriate clothing like shorts and t-shirts, and the fact that Cuban male and female staff were sharing tents. According to a senior government official this issue was raised with the Cuban Ambassador and "corrective action" was taken. The cultural gap and perceptions of insensitivity were compounded by serious communication problems as few of the Cubans could speak English, let alone local languages. Despite the perception of cultural insensitivity, however, the Cubans along with the Turks were some of the most highly praised in interviews and focus group discussions, and were given a warm sendoff when they left. According to an Islamic organization official:

All NGOs were very sensitive to local culture except the Cubans. The Cubans were very carefree but people didn't pay any attention to what they were wearing. They played badminton but no one said a word. When the Cubans closed their camps a large percentage of Muzaffarabad came to say goodbye.

Interestingly, in the interviews and focus group discussions for this study most of the concerns raised about the cultural insensitivity of international staff came from international staff themselves. Although there were some reports of religious leaders complaining in Friday prayers about the "vulgarity and obscenity being spread by foreigners," and a few complaints about the dress sense of the Cubans, most Pakistani respondents in the affected communities were largely forgiving of perceived areas of cultural insensitivity, and attributed them to ignorance of the local culture. Several remarked that the Pakistanis who were raising the cultural insensitivity of foreigners as an issue had ulterior political agendas, or were writing sensationalistic stories "to sell papers."

As the rescue/relief phase transitioned into the reconstruction phase, however, concerns about cultural insensitivity became more pronounced. These ranged from complaints about female expatriate staff smoking in public, to a few cases where emergency food items being distributed were not *halal*, to one case where two international staff of an organization were caught distributing Christian literature. However, the most serious and frequently raised issues were the employment and behavior of female staff, the interaction of male and female aid agency staff, and the use and abuse of alcohol. The behavior of female staff, particularly national female staff, was a particularly sensitive issue. A UN official described a meeting held with local religious leaders in a very conservative area of the NWFP to discuss security concerns related to the publication of cartoons in a Danish newspaper that were perceived by many Muslims to be blasphemous.

We arranged meetings with local mullahs in Battagram – they never raised the cartoon issue. They only raised issues regarding the behavior of women – women should cover their heads, shouldn't walk alone, shouldn't play sports with men, etc...

Aid agencies addressed the cultural sensitivity issue in very different ways, with some adopting and enforcing organizational policies and others leaving it primarily up to the discretion and judgment of individual staff members. According to an INGO director, “We are doing more cultural awareness training for all staff. We used to focus on security training but now we’re adding cultural training.” Cultural sensitivity issues required agencies to grapple with the difficult issue of how to weigh the personal freedoms and rights of individual staff members with organizational interests, including organizational reputation, program effectiveness, and staff security. According to a UN official, “the UN took a strong stance and said that UN staff are never off duty.” An INGO manager described the difficulty of determining “at what point does it become an organizational issue” when dealing with adults who are used to making their own decisions on issues of behavior perceived by many to be personal. Another INGO manager described the challenge of formulating policies that balanced individual and organizational rights and interests:

We had several problems with interactions between male and female staff. It’s hard for us to come up with a policy that males and females on our compound can’t interact.

On the issue of alcohol consumption, one of the strictest organizations was the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which initially had a policy of “zero tolerance.” For Christmas and New Years some drinks were sent but the empty bottles were then sent back to Islamabad to be disposed of. Other agencies were not so careful, and several people described attending INGO and UN parties in the field where national and international staff were drinking and dancing (see Box 5). One international aid worker explained, “It was such an intense environment people needed an outlet. Everyone assumes we’re corrupt anyway, so why not just do it.” An INGO director, however, felt these parties “gave ammunition to those who don’t like us.”

Box 5: Party Politics

An engagement party was held at the [INGO] office for one of their local staff. Some of the staff were dancing and reportedly drinking. The son of a local politician was not invited and was turned away at the door, causing a big argument. The rumor mill then went berserk... Rumors were created of wine, foreign women, cultures and values being attacked, etc.... The next day a warning was sent out to fire all female national staff within 48 hours or else mullahs wouldn’t offer funeral services for their parents and wouldn’t conduct marriage ceremonies. The issue was taken up opportunistically by local politicians and local journalists. The real target was the local administration as well as a frustration over jobs. The Ministry of Interior’s response was to “just hire the local mullah’s son as a driver.”

Source: Interview with Pakistani aid worker

“Insiders” and “Outsiders” & “Locals within Locals”

One of the interesting findings to emerge from the interviews and focus group discussions conducted for this study was the extent to which Pakistani respondents in particular, but also many international respondents, believed that the major cultural sensitivity issues resulted from the behavior of national staff rather than international staff. Many comments were made like the following:

Pakistanis were much less sensitive about cultural awareness than expats. (Pakistani NGO manager)

Most of our problems with cultural sensitivity were non-local national staff who hadn't experienced living in a foreign culture. They think they are Pakistanis and can do whatever they want in Pakistan. (INGO manager)

National staff often ignored very basic issues of cultural sensitivity like gender seating in cars. (Pakistani NGO manager)

Cultural sensitivity is not just an expat issue. This was the first time many national staff had lived away from home. In [IDP camp] there were lots of young female social mobilizers (one was only 17). They were from other areas like Abbottabad, and some were flirtatious and highly culturally insensitive – they played badminton outside, listened to loud music, etc.... We had to impose a 10 pm curfew – I felt like a boarding school houseparent. (INGO IDP camp manager)

Local staff of Pakistani NGOs and INGOs caused most of the problems. (Kashmiri politician)

An important contributing factor to this perception is that different standards of behavior were being applied to different categories of aid workers. In general, national staff seemed to be judged by a stricter standard of behavior than international staff, and national female staff by a much stricter standard than national male staff. As one Pakistani aid worker noted, "If you and I go out and eat during Ramzan [the Muslim month of fasting] no one will blame you because you're a foreigner, but they'll blame me." Similarly, while Cuban male and female aid workers were only mildly criticized for sharing tents, Pakistani male and female staff were heavily criticized for sitting together in a car. According to an INGO manager working in the conservative NWFP district of Battagram:

Mullahs have fewer problems with expat women. They are much more worried about Pakistani women not dressing properly and interacting with local women and showing how liberal they are.

In addition to the differing standards was the strong belief of many of the Pakistani aid workers that as Pakistanis they had the right in Pakistan to behave according to their own cultural norms. An INGO manager cited the following example:

We hired some Pakistani nurses who in the evenings were dancing in [their living quarters in] the IDP camp – we had to terminate them. It was difficult for us to tell them to cover their heads – they resisted. They felt that they were Pakistanis in Pakistan and could do what they wanted.

How to manage the issue of different standards of behavior being applied to different employees, and the extent to which Pakistani staff should have to adapt within Pakistan, created difficult organizational issues. One Pakistani director described the problem he faced when he requested his national staff, especially the women, to be more culturally sensitive in the conservative earthquake areas where they were working:

We cracked down on our Mansehra office but our strong female leadership was opposed. They said we were reinforcing conservatism, and that their behavior was not about promoting a western agenda – it is about Pakistani rights.

The cultural sensitivity question highlighted that Pakistani culture is not monolithic. As in most countries there are major cultural differences between urban and rural areas, and along lines such as ethnicity, class, ideology, and sectarian affiliation. This diversity highlights the imprecision of terms used by aid agencies like “national” and “international” staff, or “locals” and “foreigners.”²⁵ One INGO manager described his problem of having to manage “locals within locals:”

Ninety-eight percent of our staff are from other areas of Pakistan. Our national staff are not viewed by locals as “local staff,” and the national staff distinguish themselves from what they refer to as the “local staff.” Most national staff don’t speak Pashto – it’s a case of having locals within locals.

The question of who is a foreigner and who is not was most pronounced in the disputed territory of Kashmir. Most Pakistanis view Kashmir as part of Pakistan, and Kashmiris as Pakistanis. This was also how many national and international agencies perceived their Kashmir operations, with PaK essentially treated as being another province of Pakistan. Many Kashmiris, however, viewed themselves as Kashmiris and not as Pakistanis. Several Pakistanis reported being quite surprised and shocked at the realization that after all their childhood education and indoctrination that Kashmir was part of Pakistan, that the Kashmiris they were interacting with did not perceive themselves to be Pakistanis. According to one Pakistani aid agency official, “I was very surprised to discover that Kashmiris view themselves as Kashmiris, and the rest of us, including Pakistanis, as foreigners.” According to another NGO manager:

Pakistani staff assume and say that we are all the same, whereas Kashmiris view themselves as different. Many Pakistani staff were not aware of these tensions and sentiments. We need to educate both national staff and not just expats about these issues.

Several interviewees raised concerns regarding the impact on Kashmiri culture of the large influx of aid agency staff into PaK, primarily from the much more conservative province of NWFP. According to one NGO worker:

Staff from NWFP cause a lot of problems in AJK. They bring in their conservatism. Two of our female staff wore veils which made local female staff think they had to wear veils. Kashmiri culture is very different from NWFP culture. NGOs have failed to adequately recognize this.

The issue of aid agencies hiring “locals” versus “foreigners” has generated considerable tension in PaK. As discussed later in the security section of this paper, many interviewees attributed the significant increase in security incidents in PaK to the strong perception of many Kashmiris that most aid agency jobs are being given to “foreigners” from Pakistan. According to one INGO director:

We’re using Punjabis and Pathans and treat them as locals in AJK – but they’re not. AJK staff view themselves as different than Pakistani staff – they’re not all the same. Already in AJK there has been a huge influx of outsiders when you could hire Kashmiri staff.

²⁵ For a discussion of the “insiders” and “outsiders” issues found in the first phase of the HA2015 case studies, see Donini, et. al., op. cit.

The question of the cultural sensitivity or insensitivity of aid workers has highlighted the diversity of cultures in Pakistan and PaK, and that organizational distinctions between “national” and “international” staff are not always useful in addressing issues of cultural sensitivity. Despite the growing recognition that many of the problems related to perceived cultural insensitivity resulted from the behavior of “national staff,” who in most cases were not “local staff,” most international aid agencies still treated the problem of cultural sensitivity primarily as an expatriate staff issue.

Differing Perceptions of Human Rights – Especially Women’s Rights

As life-saving rescue and relief efforts transitioned into the reconstruction phase the area where a lack of consensus over humanitarian principles was most apparent, and the perception that foreign agendas were at work was greatest, were in discussions over issues of human rights, particularly women’s rights. Several interviewees noted that the concept of human rights is a very sensitive topic in Pakistan, and is perceived by many to be a tool to promote western political and cultural agendas. A UN official explained that as a result:

We don’t use the “human rights” term but instead call it “protection.” As long as we get the job done it doesn’t matter what we call it.... If by being too principled we can’t do anything I’ll compromise to be able to do a lot.

A director of a humanitarian organization said that the term “human rights” is perceived to be linked to attacking Islam, so instead “we talk about the ‘Law of Armed Conflict’ because it is a less loaded term and more acceptable.” This perception is widely held and not just confined to military officials or conservative clerics. A UN official described participating in a workshop on human rights-based approaches where many national staff “who had been in the UN for 10 years had never read the Declaration on Human Rights, and said they don’t apply to our society. Even UN staff don’t agree with the principles let alone everyone else.”

The issue of respecting women’s rights was a particularly challenging one confronting relief agencies responding to the earthquake, especially with regard to the employment of national female staff. Aid agencies that were strongly committed to the right of women to work, and who recognized the importance of women’s participation in relief and reconstruction activities, often faced stiff opposition from local religious leaders who perceived aid agencies to be promoting liberal western values and culture. According to a Pakistani female NGO worker, “People sometimes think we promote foreign values regarding women’s issues.... Recruitment of more female staff was sometimes perceived as promoting western values. We have to be careful not to push sensitive issues too quickly.”

Several interviewees attributed the objections to women working to factors other than deeply conservative cultural and religious views. According to one aid worker, in some areas “mullahs got carried away about women’s issues, but this was nearly all politics.... In some other areas like AJK it was partly due to too few jobs and a feeling that women shouldn’t get jobs while men are still unemployed.” Jealousy rather than cultural or religious beliefs was cited by several interviewees as the real reason why some people objected to the employment of female staff. According to a female focus group participant in Mansehra district of NWFP:

When a girl or boy of a family work in an aid agency and earn good money for the family, the neighbors feel jealous and start talking about the girls. Everyone knows that it is not because the girl is working in

an aid agency that bothers them, but the fact that the girl is earning a good salary for the family which makes the others jealous.

Sensitivities regarding the employment of female staff were largely related to national female staff. In the deeply conservative region of Kohistan, however, international relief agencies were initially told not to bring in international female staff. Only after lengthy negotiations with local elders was an agreement reached that western women could work in the area if they covered their heads. This issue generated debates not only between aid agencies and conservative local community leaders, but also between aid workers. In some areas, for example, international female staff as a matter of principle refused to cover their heads. Others argued that:

The discourse is powerful around the veil issue but often it is misunderstood. Covering your head doesn't mean you are a submissive dependent woman. They're picking the wrong battle – covering your head isn't the big issue. Mullahs use this issue to their advantage.

The large gap between the perceptions of most aid agencies and local communities on issues such as women's and children's rights, and the vastly differing cultural attitudes and practices, created challenging organizational dilemmas for humanitarian agencies. An INGO worker working in an IDP camp gave the following example:

We tried to employ people from the camp. We hired one kitchen helper in his mid-20s whose father was a security guard. He had been married but was divorced and wanted to get married again. He got engaged to a nine-year-old, but they weren't going to get married for a couple of years. Due to our child protection policy we had internal debates about whether he could be kept on. Eventually we decided to let his contract run out and not renew it. But this was a difficult decision as this is how they've always been – his father got married at 13 or 14 to a 12-year-old.

There were sharp differences of opinions among aid workers on how to deal with situations where local cultural attitudes and practices violate international human rights norms and laws. Some argued:

We often hear the excuse, 'You don't understand our culture.' But using culture as an excuse for bad behavior isn't acceptable – that violates the rights of people.

A director of a humanitarian aid agency, however, was critical of aid agencies in a humanitarian relief context pushing other agendas:

We go in for earthquake response and then start pushing women's issues. If you come in to do earthquake response then do earthquake response – don't start pushing women's empowerment programs. We need community acceptance. Women working in the health sector are accepted, but not in all other sectors. We shouldn't impose our views on them. Our principles will be defeated by being imposed.

Protection of IDPs "The Weakest Link"

Closely related to the differing perceptions of human rights were the differing perceptions between government authorities and many international organizations over protection issues. The government was credited by several interviewees for quickly adopting measures to protect unaccompanied women and

children in hospitals and to prohibit the adoption of quake orphans, which reduced the risks of human trafficking of earthquake victims. There were some concerns raised by a few organizations as well as in the media that the government paid insufficient attention to reports that Islamic militant organizations were sending orphaned children to their religious schools or *madrassahs*.²⁶ However, the area where the differing perceptions over protection issues were most apparent – and most contentious – related to the protection needs of IDPs, which several interviewees referred to as “the weakest link” in the humanitarian response to the earthquake.

The earthquake destroyed or damaged an estimated 600,000 homes and resulted in hundreds of thousands of people being displaced. Approximately 250,000 to 300,000 of these ended up in 48 officially-recognized IDP camps of 50 or more tents that were supported by the GoP and UNHCR – the UN refugee agency designated as lead agency for the Camp Management Cluster.²⁷ A much larger number ended up in an estimated 1,000 “spontaneous” or self-settled camps of fewer than 50 tents. These spontaneous camps were populated by different groups including genuine IDPs, villagers camping near their destroyed homes but not technically displaced, and in some cases by relatively unaffected groups as an opportunistic way to get assistance from aid agencies.²⁸

Spontaneous camps were never officially recognized due to a relatively arbitrary decision based primarily on capacity constraints to make 50 tents or more the minimum requirement for official recognition as an IDP camp. According to one analysis:

*[T]he multitude of different kinds of camps in various locations led to much confusion. This confusion was more than a problem of semantics – it led to poor analysis of the humanitarian situation, and poor analysis of how it should be addressed.*²⁹

Several interviewees for this study acknowledged that the decision to make a “pragmatic compromise to distinguish between formal and informal camps” was one of the “key problems” in adequately addressing the protection needs of those affected by the earthquake. International agencies reportedly became “preoccupied” with the protection needs of those living in or returning from official camps, but overlooked the needs of the many other displaced not living in official camps.” An Oxfam briefing note in January

²⁶ See Kate Clark, transcript of “File on 4 – ‘Pakistan’,” British Broadcasting Corporation, October 3, 2006 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/17_10_06_pakistan.pdf)

²⁷ In September-December 2006 UNHCR phased out of its role in IDP camp management, and handed over its mandate as focal point to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). NRC’s role was advisory, with the management of the IDP camps the responsibility of the government’s Camp Management Officer (CMO) in PaK, and the District Coordination Officer (DCO) in NWFP.

²⁸ Damian Lilly, “When is a camp not a camp? When it’s a ‘tent village’”, *Humanitarian Exchange*, Number 34 (London: Overseas Development Institute, June 2006), p. 17. (<http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=2814>)

²⁹ *ibid.* pp. 16-18.

2006³⁰ noted that many of the unofficial camps had not received assistance and that few met Sphere Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.³¹

Many of the spontaneous camps did eventually receive some support from NGOs or political and religious groups, but conditions were often considerably worse than in official camps. Furthermore, many IDPs in the spontaneous camps were often not provided with the same incentives in the form of “return packages” as the IDPs living in officially-recognized camps. The inequitable provision of humanitarian assistance was raised by Oxfam in a briefing note under the heading, “Same fate suffered, different support received”:

Humanitarian assistance should be impartial and provided according to need.... After the earthquake, however, distinctions were made between the types of camps, which led to differing standards of services and support to people who had suffered the same catastrophe.... Many of those involved in the emergency response now believe that this distinction between camps was regrettable.³²

As highlighted in the previous section of this paper, many GoP officials were uncomfortable with the language of human rights, and were reportedly reluctant to recognize the protection rights of IDPs. Some argued that as the IDPs were not refugees, and as Pakistan was not a conflict or post-conflict situation with collapsed state institutions, there was no need for the international community to concern itself with the protection rights of Pakistani citizens in the earthquake area. A senior UN official described the “differing perceptions of rights” as follows:

We focused on developing a structure to deal with protection issues but there was not a lot of interest. This was the real challenge in the post-emergency transitional phase. It was difficult with authoritarian military institutions like ERRA to get our interests across. We have differing perceptions on rights. We have trouble explaining that all Pakistanis are citizens.... The government doesn't recognize that there's a problem. They're always saying, "these people are tough, they are used to it, etc...." We tried to get protection viewed as non-threatening as it was viewed as a threat. We tried to get consensus by calling it "working on citizens' issues." One CBR official in Muzaffarabad said, "now we understand what you mean by protection. Before we thought it was just a human rights thing."³³

³⁰ Oxfam International, “Starting on the Road to Recovery: Saving Lives and Rebuilding Livelihoods after the Pakistan Earthquake,” Oxfam Briefing Note, January 29, 2006, p. 2. [http://oxfam.intelli-](http://oxfam.intelli-direct.com/e/d.dll?m=235&url=http://www.oxfam.org/en/files/bn060129_road_to_recovery_pakistan/download)

[direct.com/e/d.dll?m=235&url=http://www.oxfam.org/en/files/bn060129_road_to_recovery_pakistan/download](http://www.sphereproject.org)
³¹ www.sphereproject.org

³² Oxfam International, “Keeping Recovery on Course: challenges facing the Pakistan earthquake response one year on,” Oxfam Briefing Note, October 2006, (<http://www.oxfam.ca/news-and-publications/publications-and-reports/oxfam-briefing-note-keeping-recovery-on-course/file>) pp. 7-8.

³³ The same official gave another example of how the language of human rights, or in this case its incorrect use by international aid agencies, complicated negotiations with government officials:

The talk about “land rights” confused issues of landlessness with land being a right – we didn't sufficiently distinguish between the two. Shelter is a right – land isn't a right. We were saying that land has to be given to these “landless,” but we weren't right. It was easier to sell once we changed the language.

A few interviewees thought that the government's lack of interest in protection was reflected in the officials it appointed to deal with protection issues. According to one UN official:

ERRA's weakest link is the social protection group which has disastrous leadership. This is a serious problem as we try to assist the remaining case load. Although the ERRA leadership is supportive, I don't think the social protection staff themselves understand or care.... There is no government interest so I don't see things getting better.

Pakistan's experience with hosting millions of refugees who fled the conflict in neighboring Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s helped shape the perception of many government officials regarding IDPs and how to deal with them. They were very anxious to avoid another situation where nearly three decades after the Afghan refugee camps were first established more than one million still live in what are now referred to as "refugee villages." Senior FRC and ERRA officials also talked about the need to avoid creating a "dependency syndrome" that they often associated with African countries, and the need for "tough love" or "hard love." Their main IDP policy objective was to encourage IDPs to return to their villages to rebuild their lives and livelihoods rather than to become dependent on aid handouts living in IDP camps that risked evolving into semi-permanent or permanent settlements. According to one aid worker:

The official position is that "This isn't Africa. Pakistanis are industrious and we don't want to create a dependency syndrome like many African camps. What we need is 'hard love' – they will struggle at first but will then get back on their feet."

The GoP's strong desire to avoid the creation of aid dependency in long-term IDP camps resulted in a policy to close the camps as quickly as possible. A major IDP return program was launched in the spring of 2006 after most of the winter snow had melted. IDPs in official camps were offered incentives to return such as free transportation, one month's supply of food rations, employment opportunities on cash for work projects, and financial assistance packages based on house damage assessments. Several international aid agencies expressed concerns that this hastily organized IDP return program, especially in the NWFP, violated the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.³⁴ An Oxfam briefing note observed that "In NWFP, the authorities scheduled a faster return. The international community played a limited role here, and this led to concerns that the process was in many cases not safe, dignified, informed, or voluntary." A DFID Situation Report noted:

Relief agencies remain concerned at what UNHCR officials describe as the "unseemly rate" of return in NWFP, with "considerable evidence of undue psychological pressure being used", such as withholding compensation or free travel if return is not made on a fixed day.³⁵

By June 2006 approximately 85 percent of the IDPs were estimated to have left the official camps as part of the returns program, leaving approximately 30-40,000 remaining in the camps. In addition, IOM estimated

³⁴ www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/principles.htm

³⁵ DFID Emergency Operations Team, "DFID Situation Report No. 44, South Asia Earthquake," 7 April 2006 (<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/News/files/emergencies/pakistan/pakistan-earthquake-sitrep43.pdf>), p. 2.

that approximately 100,000 IDPs remained in spontaneous camps in the urban and peri-urban areas of Mansehra and Muzaffarabad.³⁶ A much higher percentage of the urban IDP population remained in the camps than the rural IDPs due to the much more complex nature of reconstruction issues in urban settings. These complexities included issues of population density, rubble removal, more complex and expensive urban building design and reconstruction requirements, and the designation of all of the town of Balakot in NWFP and 30 percent of Muzaffarabad in PaK as seismically unsafe “red zones” in which no building reconstruction could take place.³⁷

The majority of the rural IDPs who remained in the camps did so due to land tenure issues, and in some cases the loss of land due to landslides or the threat of landslides. For urban IDPs, land tenure issues as well as destroyed or badly damaged and unsafe houses were the main factors. Another category of IDPs were an estimated 5,000-10,000 from the old caseload of IDPs and refugees who during the 1990s fled to camps near Muzaffarabad to escape from fighting along both sides of the disputed Line of Control separating Indian- and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. A third category for which criteria were established in May 2006 was Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVIs), including widows, orphans, elderly, and the seriously disabled.

The government’s strong desire to limit the number of IDPs and close the camps as soon as possible created significant IDP protection issues. One concern was that it seriously delayed preparation for winterizing shelters in the IDP camps for the winter of 2006-2007. ERRA was very concerned that after the initial return of IDPs in the spring of 2006 the IDP camps for those remaining should not be “too nice” lest they encourage some who had left to return, or discourage those who remained from leaving. Nevertheless, it was clear that, like it or not, some IDPs would have to remain in the camps during the next winter. Aid agencies therefore became increasingly frustrated with the unwillingness of government officials, especially in the NWFP, to let them prepare for that inevitability until very late in the year. According to one UN official closely involved in the negotiations, “We started discussions in June [2006] with ERRA, but they said no one would be in tents by winter. It took us to November to convince them to start winterizing.”

In the spring of 2007 the government renewed its effort to pressure IDPs to leave the camps so that they could be closed. This again generated concerns about the potentially negative impacts that the implementation of this policy could have on IDPs. One concern raised by several aid workers was the government’s effort to narrow the agreed upon definition of those who could be classified as EVIs. According to one, this was “a very cynical exercise by ERRA to redefine vulnerability more narrowly to increase the numbers eligible to return – it’s a paper reclassification.” A UN official described it as “a numbers game. They want to define vulnerability as narrowly as possible to show success.... We have tried to ensure that vulnerables aren’t pushed out of camps.”

Another concern was that the government’s policy to close the IDP camps as quickly as possible was resulting in restrictions being placed officially and unofficially on protection monitoring. According to one

³⁶ US Embassy Unclassified Cable, “Pakistan Earthquake: Update on Transition and Reconstruction,” June 20, 2006.

³⁷ *ibid.*

international aid worker, “The government didn’t want interference so there was little tracking of vulnerables within the NWFP. What little protection monitoring that did take place was only done in official camps.” The government reportedly started “refusing access to IDP camps” and in at least one case an international legal advisor for an aid agency was “blacklisted” for raising protection issues.

The government was also reluctant to conduct a proper IDP registration exercise, or to conduct or permit an intentions survey to provide a deeper understanding of why IDPs remained in the camps and the constraints to their returning home. According to a frustrated international aid worker:

There is a strong desire to get people out of camps – this is the sentiment driving policy which is why they don’t want an intentions survey – they don’t want to slow things down. The problem is that we urgently need a registration and intentions survey.... I can’t even visit a camp without an NOC [No Objection Certificate from the government]. Returns start in a few days but we don’t have a clear sense of intentions.

As with the IDP return process in the spring of 2006, the government’s policy of pressuring IDPs to return in the spring of 2007 was criticized by some aid officials for “not observing the humanitarian principles of return.” One common complaint was that what little information that was provided to IDPs as well as aid agencies was poorly communicated and provided at very late notice. On the day that one aid official was interviewed for this study he complained that “The Camp Management Officer just received information today about the move of IDPs out of his camp which is to take place in three days.” The director of an international humanitarian organization complained that “The rights of IDPs to a dignified and informed return were not respected. People were given little notice before being boarded on trucks.” An international UN official expressed the following concern about the end result of what he believed was a flawed policy:

The total IDP caseload is 5,700 families of which 1,100 are the old case load of Kashmiri refugees and 1,000 are “vulnerables.” Of the 3,600 remaining, only 400-600 are from rural areas. The rest are from the city and don’t have anywhere to return to. The argument of sending people back doesn’t make sense as most are locals. This isn’t “tough love” – this is a flawed policy. “Tough love” will result in slums or unassisted camps.

While many of the criticisms of IDP protection policies and practices were directed at government organizations and officials, some also addressed the shortcomings of international aid agencies. One failure that was highlighted was the UNHCR-led Camp Management Cluster’s inability to effectively address the needs of the majority of the earthquake-affected population living in spontaneous camps. The IASC real-time evaluation identified this failure as an indication that the Cluster Approach was not yet capable of fulfilling its “raison d’être of... identifying and filling gaps...”:

This group makes up the overwhelming majority of the earthquake affected population.... The realization of this significant gap in the overall response indicates that the Cluster Approach has not yet fully

*managed to remedy what it was conceived to do, i.e. to identify and address “gaps” in humanitarian assistance during emergencies.*³⁸

UNICEF was criticized by some for its weak leadership of the Protection Cluster. An Oxfam briefing note stated that the cluster coordination system “struggled to deliver important UN responsibilities. Social protection monitoring, for example, was too weak to ensure that the return of displaced people from camps in NWFP to their home areas was guided by international standards and principles.”³⁹ The protection cluster was also criticized for doing little to address the protection needs of non-IDP vulnerable groups in the earthquake zone. According to an INGO director, “In general the government did a good job clamping down on adoption and protecting women and unaccompanied children in hospitals, but the Protection Cluster didn’t play a role.”

Several NGO officials criticized UN agencies for not taking a stronger stand on protection issues, which they felt undermined the ability of NGOs to advocate more effectively for them. According to one NGO worker, “UNHCR and UNICEF did lots of bargaining with the government. We have been less flexible... but now if you don’t compromise you lose access.” A few interviewees believed that UNHCR did not want to antagonize Pakistani officials over IDP camp management issues because its main organizational interest remained its Afghan refugee program. A director of an international NGO had a more general complaint about the lack of support by some senior UN officials for international humanitarian principles:

The UN was very aware that some IDPs were here for the long haul and not just for the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. There should have been much more advocacy on principles. The UN made a distinction between international principles and local principles, and argued that we should respect local principles. As an international institution, however, the UN should have upheld international principles.

An overall criticism of the IDP response was the preoccupation with the return of IDPs rather than the protection needs of IDPs. According to an NGO worker:

The humanitarian community has not handled the IDP issue well. The Returns Taskforce has focused on facilitating return but doesn’t address the needs of those who can’t return. We didn’t look broadly at this issue because we set up a “Return Taskforce” that by definition only focuses on return. Everything is made to look like a returnee – it’s like the saying, “If you have a hammer everything looks like a nail.”

Box 6: Protection the “Weakest Link”

Human rights are universal. The IDP Returns Taskforce tried to apply international protection guidelines and principles, but the Government of Pakistan argued that these are not refugees so we don’t need to talk about “protection.” The UN also gave mixed messages and spoke with different

³⁸ IASC, op. cit. p. 11.

³⁹ Oxfam International, “Keeping Recovery on Course: challenges facing the Pakistan earthquake response one year on,” Oxfam Briefing Note, October 2006, p. 8.

voices regarding the extent to which protection principles were useful. Some UN staff argued that “This is a sovereign government – not Sudan or Afghanistan where people are displaced by conflict.” [A UN official] in a speech in front of government officials in AJK, said “GoP law trumps international law”....

Another problem was that cluster leads had trouble stepping out of their institutional hats. Tensions developed between UNHCR and UNICEF over protection issues. Because these were IDPs and not refugees UNHCR focused on camp management only. UNICEF was the cluster lead on protection and was meant to lead in the other areas of protection but they said we only do child protection. Some of the UNICEF field staff put in good protection monitoring systems but they were consistently undermined (consciously or unconsciously) by their head office, and told “This isn’t what we do.” Some UNICEF staff in the field thought they might lose their jobs if they implemented principles. UNICEF consistently dropped the ball....

OCHA and UNHCR also didn’t push on protection. UNHCR didn’t want to hurt their Afghan program, which was more important for them than the earthquake program. OCHA was focusing on finalizing the Early Recovery Plan – the transition strategy. This was an important fund-raising document and they didn’t want to jeopardize negotiations with the FRC and ERRA by raising protection issues.

Source: Interview with INGO worker

This section has examined perceptions regarding the universality of humanitarianism and shown that during the initial earthquake rescue and relief efforts humanitarian principles and mechanisms were not perceived as Western or Northern. The relief operation was led by the Pakistan Army and Pakistani citizens and organizations were the first to respond. The universality of the humanitarian imperative to save lives and alleviate suffering was demonstrated by the wide range of local, national and international actors – including erstwhile enemies – who worked side-by-side. Their efforts – including those of US and NATO military forces – were very positively perceived. There was near unanimity that responses were driven by genuine humanitarian reasons, not by covert political, cultural or religious agendas. There was a strong perception that international aid workers were culturally sensitive, and in cases where this was not the case a willingness, at least initially, to forgive. Local community attitudes towards perceived cultural sensitivity of aid workers call into question the common assumption that insensitivity is primarily an expatriate staff issue. While international staff tended to blame each other for cultural insensitivity, locals overwhelmingly blamed non-local fellow Pakistanis. They were particularly upset at the alleged inappropriate behaviour of Pakistani females and their perceived failure to conform to local values. This issue of “locals within locals” highlights the need to eschew simplistic distinctions between “national and internationals,” “locals and foreigners” or “insiders and outsiders.”

The area where the universality of humanitarian principles was most in doubt was over issues of human rights, particularly women’s rights and the protection rights of IDPs. Many Pakistanis judged human rights discourse to be a tool to promote western political and cultural agendas, leading some humanitarian organizations to adopt more innocuous terminology. The chasm between most aid agencies and local communities regarding gender issues – especially in the most conservative areas of NWFP – raises the dilemma of how to uphold “universal principles” in areas where they are not universally accepted. Many aid workers saw human rights in general, and women’s rights and IDP protection issues in particular, as one of

the weakest links in the earthquake response. These and other differences became more pronounced as the initial consensus around humanitarian principles gave way to increasing anti-army and aid agency sentiment and a resultant increase in security threats and incidents targeting the aid community.

4. Impact of War on Terror

The HA2015 country studies have sought to understand how terrorism and counter-terrorism efforts in the post-9/11 world have influenced the concept and conduct of humanitarian action. The earlier studies have focused for the most part on conflict situations, especially Iraq and Afghanistan, where the impact of the 'War on Terror' (WoT) on humanitarian action has been particularly strong. The Pakistan earthquake response provides an interesting opportunity to look at an issue that has received a lot less attention – the impact of the WoT on humanitarian action in the context of a natural disaster.

A Perceived Minimal Impact

Aid workers interviewed for this study felt that globally and at the national level in Pakistan the WoT had a negative impact on humanitarian action, but that the impact on the earthquake response was minimal. At the global level a US official felt that the Bush Administration's WoT language of "being with us or against us" had "created a wall [between the US and most others], even for those of us who don't want it to be there." In Pakistan a UN official felt that one of the very negative humanitarian impacts of the WoT was "the license given to intelligence agencies which is horrifically misused against political activists, journalists, and others – many of whom have disappeared." Several interviewees felt that the WoT had created a lot more suspicion in Pakistan about the work of aid agencies in general, and US agencies in particular. A US INGO worker, who had just returned from a field visit, recounted the following anecdote to illustrate his concern about the impact of the WoT on how western aid agencies are now perceived in Pakistan:

We were wandering through a neighborhood when a laborer we passed said... "I'm not a terrorist." He thought we were there to catch terrorists. We're increasingly living in a bubble, and fail to realize that top of their mind is recent news and a perception that we're there to look for terrorists.

Humanitarian rescue and relief operations following sudden onset natural disasters are less likely to be as highly politicized or heavily influenced by external political or security agendas as humanitarian action in situations of protracted conflict.⁴⁰ One American aid worker observed how much he was enjoying working on the earthquake response precisely because he felt it was less politicized and less influenced by US political agendas like the WoT:

My experience with USAID in Pakistan is directly related to 9/11. Before that they weren't here. All US assistance here is very political and linked to the WoT. ESRA [a USAID-funded education program] was directly talked about as "stemming the madrassah phenomenon, and stopping the production of Taliban." As a public health official I want to do public health for the sake of public health. I'm very glad I'm now involved in the earthquake response – it's much less politicized.

⁴⁰ A similar point is made in the synthesis report of the first round of HA2015 case studies, which identified the need to differentiate between "hot war situations" and "less problematic" post-conflict settings. See Donini, et. al., op. cit. p. 27.

The overwhelming majority of focus group participants in the earthquake zone also perceived the response of the US and other international donors, including the deployment of US and NATO military forces, as being driven by humanitarian rather than political considerations. However, Pakistan's geostrategic location as a "front-line" state in the US's global WoT, for which it has been richly rewarded with billions of dollars of US foreign aid since 2001, has ensured that WoT considerations still played a role in the earthquake response. Furthermore, the earthquake epicenter was right near another front-line – the Line of Control (LoC) that divides Pakistan-administered Kashmir (PaK) from Indian-administered Kashmir (IaK). This front-line added an additional WoT dimension to the response, as Islamic militant groups have been fighting a "jihad" against India forces since 1989 in IaK. Many of these groups have been supported by Pakistan and trained in training camps in PaK and NWFP.⁴¹ Some of them, notably Lashkar-i-Tayyeba (associated with the Islamic organization Jamaat ud-Dawa) and Jaish-i-Mohammad (associated with the Islamic organization Al-Rashid Trust), which were very active in earthquake relief efforts, have been classified as "Foreign Terrorist Organizations" by the US State Department and are included on the UN's "Consolidated List" of individuals and organizations affiliated with the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Immediately following the arrival of US military and NATO forces to assist in the disaster response, some of the Urdu press carried reports of hidden agendas, including the pursuit of WoT objectives (not to mention a few wild rumors that the US had caused the earthquake as an excuse to take control of this strategic region between Pakistan, India and China). Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who at the time of the earthquake was the Secretary General of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), a coalition of six Islamist parties, as well as the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly, was one of the only prominent Pakistani politicians to oppose the deployment of US and NATO forces.⁴² In earthquake-affected areas, however, few people were giving much attention to conspiracy theories or objecting to the presence of foreign military forces. As one national NGO worker in Muzaffarabad noted:

People in the earthquake areas didn't care who gave aid – they were happy with anyone. Elsewhere there were perceptions and conspiracy theories but not in the earthquake area.

A government minister from PaK described the local perception of international military forces as follows:

There were some rumors that they have hidden agendas, and that the US created the earthquake to take over, but after a couple of weeks the majority were completely satisfied. When they left everyone was sad that they were leaving.

Even some of the militant groups involved in the earthquake response were reported in the press as welcoming US military forces. The director of Jamaat ul-Dawa's relief efforts in Kashmir, Javed ul-Hassan, played down the notion of a conflict between his relief group and western aid agencies:

⁴¹ For a more detailed analysis of Pakistan's support for militant groups in Kashmir, see Jessica Stern, "Pakistan's Jihad Culture," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2000

(<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20001101faessay940/jessica-stern/pakistan-s-jihad-culture.html>)

⁴² Raja Asghar, "MMA Opposed Nato, US Forces for Quake Relief," *Dawn*, October 29, 2005.

*We are facing a national tragedy, and the government is asking all organizations to help. We must welcome the American soldiers just like the others who are coming. We must shake their hands and thank them.*⁴³

While most government officials and UN and NGO aid workers felt that the US's initial response was primarily driven by humanitarian considerations, a few interviewees and some secondary sources did identify two important ways in which the earthquake response was affected by the WoT: 1) a much more generous US response as part of a conscious effort to use the earthquake response to "win hearts and minds"; and 2) controversy over the role of Islamist organizations and militant 'jihadist' groups in the response.

"Winning Hearts and Minds"

Probably the greatest impact of the WoT on the US's earthquake response was the very conscious effort on the part of US policy-makers to reward a strategic WoT ally, and to use it as an opportunity to "win hearts and minds"⁴⁴ and boost the US's sagging popularity in this front-line state. A *Wall Street Journal* editorial called the earthquake response "...one of America's most significant hearts-and-minds successes so far in the Muslim world."⁴⁵ Only two days after the earthquake an Associated Press article, entitled "U.S. hopes to win hearts and minds in Pakistan," quoted US Ambassador Ryan Crocker as saying that the US government's swift grant of \$50 million in emergency aid reflected its "long-term strategic relationship" with Pakistan. "That means when crisis hits an ally, we step forward to help," raising questions about the neutrality and impartiality of the US's humanitarian assistance, and what would have happened if the earthquake had struck a country that was not strategic or an ally. The article went on to suggest that there was also a US "hearts and minds" agenda motivating the response:

*Crocker hinted that the American aid could help improve perceptions of the United States in this Islamic nation of 150 million. "Certainly that was true with the tsunami relief effort," Crocker said.... In Kabul, a U.S. military spokeswoman, put it more bluntly. "The terrorists make us out as the infidels, but this is not true, and we hope this mission will show that...."*⁴⁶

Less than a week after the earthquake, the *Washington Post* had an article entitled, "Earthquake Aid for Pakistan Might Help U.S. Image," in which it stated:

⁴³ James Rupert, "Militant groups aid quake victims," *Newsday*, December 28, 2005.

⁴⁴ In this paper the phrase "winning hearts and minds" is used to describe the efforts to win public support, usually in counter-terrorism or counter-insurgency contexts, by means of aid projects and public diplomacy efforts.

⁴⁵ Bret Stephens, "Chinook Diplomacy: The U.S. military wins hearts and minds in Pakistan," *Opinion Journal*, *The Wall Street Journal Online*, December 22, 2005, <http://www.opinionjournal.com/editorial/feature.html?id=110007711>

⁴⁶ "U.S. hopes to win hearts and minds in Pakistan," Associated Press, Oct. 10, 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9651378/>

U.S. officials are quick to say that the rapid reaction to the earthquake... is largely due to humanitarian considerations – as well as to a desire to reward the Pakistani president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, for his support of U.S. interests... “Musharraf is a friend and hero in our eyes,” said one senior U.S. official... “There is a clear and unmistakable signal being sent that we help our friends...” As another U.S. official put it: “If this helps to show that Abu Ghraib is not reflective of the American character, that would be good.”⁴⁷

A US Congressional Research Service Report written two months after the earthquake was very explicit about the potential benefit of US earthquake assistance to the WoT:

The degree to which the United States receives positive press for its contribution to the earthquake relief effort may make it easier for Musharraf to support anti-terror activity in the region.”⁴⁸

The same report noted the opportunity for a “public relations dividend,” an opportunity that was not missed by Karen Hughes, the Under-Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, who visited the earthquake-affected areas in northern Pakistan in November 2005. The public relations benefits of the US earthquake response were also highlighted in the trip report of a Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff member who visited Pakistan six weeks after the earthquake:

Even our harshest critics admit that the U.S. has come through for Pakistan at a critical moment and that this generous humanitarian gesture is improving the average Pakistanis’ image of America. This is no small feat, given that polling data from last summer showed that only 23 percent of the Pakistani population held a favorable view of the U.S., while 51 percent of Pakistanis had a great deal of confidence in Usama Bin Laden.⁴⁹

While the humanitarian need in the earthquake-affected areas was tremendous, and most US assistance was clearly addressing real needs, there were cases where the public relations objective of winning hearts and minds clearly trumped considerations of humanitarian need. The most blatant example was the US Ambassador’s insistence on bringing the most visible symbol of the US earthquake response, Chinook helicopters, back from Afghanistan at considerable expense for the one-year anniversary of the earthquake. According to one US official:

Sending helis on the one-year anniversary was “very dumb” – a big waste of money that was based only on “hearts and minds” considerations.

⁴⁷ Glenn Kessler and Robin Wright, “Earthquake Aid for Pakistan Might Help U.S. Image,” Washington Post, October 13, 2005, p. A18. The same article noted: “Polling has indicated that the U.S. tsunami effort... has paid dividends to the United States’ image in Indonesia.... A survey of 1,200 Indonesians one month after the tsunami... found that, for the first time, more Indonesians (40 percent) supported the U.S. terrorism fight than opposed it (36 percent).”

⁴⁸ Daniel Kronenfeld and Rhoda Margesson, op. cit. p. 20.

⁴⁹ Lisa Curtis, “Pakistan Earthquake: International Response and Impact on U.S. Foreign Policies and Programs,” Staff Trip Report, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, December 2005, p. 3.

Several interviewees raised concerns that “humanitarianism is becoming more and more about winning hearts and minds,” especially for the US, rather than delivering humanitarian aid in a neutral, impartial, and independent manner. The perceived counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency benefits of hearts and minds programming is resulting in increasing percentages of US development assistance being programmed on the basis of assumed WoT benefits rather than on the basis of poverty or need. While this is most visible in the large-scale reconstruction and development programs in Iraq and Afghanistan,⁵⁰ the earthquake response illustrates that the assumed WoT benefits of hearts and minds programs is also influencing how US humanitarian assistance is programmed. For example, some aid workers noted that Pakistan’s strategic importance as a front-line state in the WoT probably resulted in the international community, and the US in particular, responding more quickly and more generously than if the earthquake had occurred in a less strategically important country. According to one INGO director, “the \$6.4 billion pledged for reconstruction is a remarkable amount, if delivered, and is probably due to Pakistan’s strategic importance.” A director of another INGO believed that, “the scale of the response, although not the response itself, is related to ‘hearts and minds’ considerations.”

Some NGOs clearly assume that WoT considerations influence humanitarian funding as they used the strategic importance in the WoT argument “to sell” their proposals to OFDA and USAID. One aid worker described efforts to get a proposal funded for work in a particularly conservative earthquake-affected area: “We sold it to the US as being a very strategic place for the US, a place where many Taliban were recruited, a great way to do things differently.”

In the case of a country like Pakistan, viewed as “strategic” and an “ally,” it seems likely that the WoT agenda had the positive result of increasing the speed and the scale of the US response. The obvious implication, however, is that in regions or countries that are not strategic allies in the WoT there is danger that the US response will be less generous.⁵¹ This raises significant questions regarding the extent to which humanitarian funding, particularly from the US, will increasingly prioritize WoT and counter-insurgency considerations over principles of neutrality and impartiality in the provision of humanitarian assistance.

The Controversial Role of “*Jihadi*” Groups

Interviews for this study confirmed observations made by others that in many cases the first to arrive on the scene to assist in rescue and relief efforts following the earthquake were members of Islamist groups, including militant *jihadi* organizations. Respondents were generally very positive about the speedy assistance provided by these groups, who they often referred to in interviews as “our Muslim brothers.” According to one national NGO worker:

⁵⁰ In Afghanistan, for example, more than 50 percent of USAID assistance is going to four (out of 34) southern provinces most affected by the Taliban insurgency. Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), “Enhancing Aid Effectiveness,” Afghan Development Forum, April 2007.

⁵¹ Some interviewees expressed concerns that even within Pakistan the humanitarian needs of less strategic areas and groups were being overlooked. These included victims of 2006 flooding in Sindh province, as well as IDPs in Balochistan displaced due to fighting between Baloch separatist groups and the government.

Jihadi groups were very effective. They were the first to respond. They were much more organized than civil society groups... They had horses and carried supplies on their backs. They were the first to deliver food. We had hundreds of volunteers on our door dressed in jeans and t-shirts, but we didn't know how to use them. The jihadi organizations were much better organized.

Pakistan's main Islamic political parties like Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) and the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) were active in rescue and relief efforts, along with their respective welfare wings, the Al-Khidmat Foundation⁵² and the Al-Khair Trust⁵³, and their affiliated militant organizations, the Hizbul Mujahidin and Jamiat-al-Ansar (formerly Harkatul Mujahidin). Two of the most prominent groups involved in rescue and relief efforts were Jamaat ud-Dawa⁵⁴, closely linked to the US designated "Foreign Terrorist Organization" Lashkar-e Tayyeba, and the Al-Rashid Trust, which has been designated by the US and the UN as being a financial facilitator of terrorism.⁵⁵ According to one report, "Officials have identified as many as seventeen groups that have either been banned by the Musharraf government or placed on its terrorism watch-list but are still involved in relief activities."⁵⁶

Given their religious credentials volunteers from these Islamist organizations played an important role in burying the dead,⁵⁷ in addition to rescuing survivors, delivering food to remote areas using horses and mules, setting up state of the art medical and surgical facilities, and running orphanages and religious schools. The members of *jihadi* groups, many of whom had been trained at camps for Kashmiri militant groups in the earthquake-affected areas of NWFP and PaK, had the tremendous advantage of knowing the terrain and the people, and having close ties with and support from the Pakistan Army. They also benefited from being independently funded, well-organized, used to enduring hardship, and having a large cadre of professional volunteers including doctors, nurses, and engineers. Jamaat ud-Dawa alone, despite reportedly losing 70 of its own militants in the earthquake, claimed to have mobilized 2,500 volunteers to assist in earthquake relief efforts in NWFP and Kashmir.⁵⁸ The ICG report noted in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake Jamaat ud-Dawa, in spite of its own losses, deployed 350 workers in Muzaffarabad. According to a Jamaat ud-Dawa activist quoted in the ICG report:

⁵² <http://al-khidmatfoundation.org>

⁵³ <http://al-khairtrust.org>

⁵⁴ www.jamatdawah.org

⁵⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the different Islamist organizations involved in earthquake relief efforts, see International Crisis Group, "Political Impact of the Earthquake," Asia Briefing No. 46, March 2006 (www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4023&l=1) pp. 8-13. ICG distinguishes three types of Islamist groups – "missionary groups that have no political agenda, organizations with a political agenda that eschew violence, and jihadi outfits that advance their political agenda through violent means" – and notes that in Pakistan it is often difficult to distinguish between the closely linked political and *jihadi* organizations.

⁵⁶ "Banned outfits active in relief," *The Nation*, 23 October 2005, quoted in International Crisis Group, *ibid.* p. 10.

⁵⁷ ICRC organized a workshop for Islamist organizations on handling and burying dead bodies.

⁵⁸ "Militant groups launch 'jihad' for earthquake relief," Daily Times, October 14, 2005, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2005%5C10%5C14%5Cstory_14-10-2005_pg7_41.

Our workers were connected to one another through wireless systems, we had sixteen ambulances and motorboats, as well as mobile X-ray machines and operation theatres to treat our injured jihadis” and enough food “to feed 3,000 people daily during the first week....”⁵⁹

In general, international and national aid agencies tended to keep their distance from the Islamist organizations, and vice versa. However, most aid agency staff interviewed for this study were generally supportive of the fact that no groups, including *jihadi* organizations, were prevented from responding to the humanitarian imperative to save lives following the earthquake. According to a US official, “*Jihadi* groups worked very hard and did what everyone else did – everyone worked together to save lives.” A senior UN official observed: “This was the first time NATO and al-Qaeda worked together, and western Christian NGOs worked side-by-side with Islamic militant groups – it was great.”

During the first several months following the earthquake several UN agencies, ICRC and NGOs collaborated with and delivered assistance through some of the *jihadi* organizations. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake this was a logistical necessity. According to one UN official: “In natural disasters emergency capacity trumps ideology. When need exceeds supply you use what capacity exists.” One former WFP employee reported that WFP relied quite heavily on *jihadi* groups to use their mules to transport food to higher altitudes when helicopters were not available. In addition to WFP food, banned *jihadi* groups reportedly received tents from UNHCR to be used for IDP camps, shelter supplies and non-food items from IOM, medical supplies from WHO, and school supplies from UNICEF.⁶⁰ A major European donor said: “We wouldn’t want our partners to support Al-Rashid for political reasons, but it’s not a problem if they provided them with some supplies.”

The US government’s response to the relatively high profile role of Islamist militant groups in the earthquake response, including some designated as “Foreign Terrorist Organizations,” was remarkably low-key. There were significant concerns that funds raised for the earthquake response by these organizations could be diverted to support terrorist activities, and that the positive impressions resulting from their relief efforts could assist in generating greater public support and potentially recruitment opportunities for their extremist causes. This concern was expressed in the trip report of a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff member who visited the affected areas six weeks after the earthquake:

A major issue to monitor over the next several months is whether extremist groups, such as the Jamat ul-Dawa (JuD – formerly the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a State Department-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization), are using their increased influence with the population in Pakistani Kashmir to recruit for the Kashmir militancy.⁶¹

⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, op. cit. p. 11.

⁶⁰ See Kate Clark, op. cit. and Jawad Hussain Qureshi, “Earthquake Jihad: The Role of Jihadis and Islamist Groups after the October 2005 Earthquake,” *Humanitarian Exchange*, Number 34, June 2006, Overseas Development Institute, Humanitarian Practice Network (www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=2815).

⁶¹ Lisa Curtis, op. cit. p. 12.

There were also concerns about the impact on charitable donations in Western countries, and the US in particular, if there were lots of media accounts of foreign aid going to support militant Islamist organizations. However, there was also a recognition that during the initial rescue and relief phase it would also not look good if the US took a high-profile role in actively trying to stop the work of some of the more effective providers of humanitarian assistance.

The response of the US Embassy in Islamabad during the first few weeks following the earthquake was described by one senior UN official as “don’t ask, don’t tell.” According to one journalist, both the *jihadi* groups and the US decided to “postpone their agendas” for the sake of relief efforts. Two months after the earthquake, however, the US Embassy in Islamabad did formally raise its concerns about the role of militant groups in the earthquake response with the GoP. In December 2005 the US Ambassador told Pakistani journalists that the government should stop militant groups from doing relief work as it gave them an opportunity to promote their militant ideas. Vice President Dick Cheney reportedly repeated this message during his 20 December meeting in Islamabad with President Musharraf.⁶²

The GoP responded by refusing the US request to close down the programs of the banned Islamist organizations. President Musharraf was quoted in the *Financial Times* as saying:

*We have warned them [militant groups] that if we see any single activity of their involvement in anything other than welfare, we are not only going to ban them but we are going to get them out of that place... But now since they are there, certainly we would not like them to stop, why should we not allow our own people who are going there and assisting those people, whether they are 'jihadis' or anybody.*⁶³

General Farooq Khan, the former head of the Federal Relief Commission, gave a similar response in an interview for this study: “If you hear of any jihadi militant activities let me know. But if there are no problems then let them work.” The US did not seem to push the government too hard on this issue. In an interview with General Nadeem Ahmed, the Deputy Chairman of ERRA, he said: “The US raised its concerns in a diplomatic note. The GoP responded that they’re doing a good job and that their effort is required. The US showed accommodation and understanding.”

UN agencies were asked to make sure that their earthquake assistance was not channeled through banned Islamist organizations, although compliance with this request was reportedly not closely monitored or strictly enforced. According to a WFP official:

It didn't dawn on us to check the list [of banned organizations] in the beginning. Anyone who could deliver was used... In the first few days we just threw aid out of helis. It was about three weeks before we were

⁶² James Rupert, “Militant groups aid quake victims, *Newsday*, December 28, 2005 (www.newsday.com/news/nationworld/world/ny-wojiha284567280dec28,0,1720131.story?coll=ny-worldnews-toputility)

⁶³ Jo Johnson and Farhan Bokhari, “FT interview with President Pervez Musharraf,” *Financial Times*, October 26, 2005.

told to check the list. We investigated potential partners and weeded out some who might be in it for the wrong reasons.

Several UN employees reported that they “never received any clear guidance from the UN” on this issue. A BBC *File on 4* program reported that it had seen paperwork confirming aid flows from UN agencies to groups like Jamaat ud-Dawa and Al-Rashid Trust four to five months after the earthquake.⁶⁴

One impact of the WoT on US NGOs is the requirement to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Patriot Act, especially the Treasury Department’s Anti-Terrorist Financing Guidelines.⁶⁵ These require NGOs to ensure that employees or consultants they hire, or merchants or contractors used to procure services, supplies or equipment, are not on the “Specially Designated Nationals” list of the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). According to a US NGO Director:

We were aware early on that groups like Al-Rashid Trust were on the US black list. We had to follow normal procurement procedures and had to check out companies, but no one was breathing down our necks and it didn’t slow us down. It was, however, hard to run all our recruitment through the OFAC terrorist lists. We were hiring dozens of people and had to send all their names to HQ to run checks. It worked relatively efficiently because our HQ had systems to do this.

Although interviewees did not report any major negative humanitarian impacts of anti-terrorist legislation,⁶⁶ examples were given of how the blacklisting of organizations as a result of the WoT could undermine humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality in the provision of assistance. One INGO worker based in an IDP camp reported:

Food was not distributed to Al-Rashid Trust. They would come to coordination meetings but we didn’t interact too much. Al-Rashid had their own little bit of the camp that was cordoned off and they did their own thing. At the end we interacted with them a lot to develop an incentive system for IDPs to return home... We couldn’t give USG funded supplies to Al-Rashid Trust – we were very conscious of this – although I didn’t really care as everyone needed help. Al-Rashid Trust knew what was going on and I was embarrassed and felt guilty. The Al-Rashid Trust staff were being pressured by their camp dwellers and asked why they weren’t getting the full package that others were getting. But it wasn’t too bad as they had their own funding systems and resources. In the end we gave a food package to all the families leaving the camp including Al-Rashid families because it was not USG funded.

⁶⁴ Kate Clark, op. cit.

⁶⁵ <http://treas.gov/press/releases/reports/0929%20finalrevised.pdf>

⁶⁶ The Pakistan earthquake experience differs notably from the one documented in the HA2015 Palestine case study where WoT legislation severely compromised the ability of US aid organizations to adhere to humanitarian principles in the delivery of assistance for fear of violating provisions of the Patriot Act in their interactions with groups that might be linked to blacklisted organizations.

Box 7: Awkward Moments

The diverse range of aid actors in the earthquake response created some awkward moments. An aid worker based in an IDP camp described a request he received prior to a visit to the camp by US Senator John Kerry:

USAID wanted the Cuban flag taken down and wanted al-Rashid Trust banners taken down. We refused to get involved in this issue. In the end the army got Al-Rashid to take down their banner but the Cuban flag remained. USAID made sure to take pictures from angles that didn't show the Cuban flag.

Source: Interview with aid worker

While some earthquake assistance was channeled by the UN through militant organizations, and there was some on-the-ground collaboration between these organizations and some NGOs, several interviewees felt that the earthquake response was a “missed opportunity” to coordinate more closely with the Islamist groups. According to one national NGO worker, “Maybe we avoided them too much. There was very little interaction. We could have created better coordination, and we should have invited them to cluster meetings.” ICRC was reportedly the only organizations that saw the earthquake response as an opportunity to strengthen its relations with these groups.

The failure to actively encourage Islamist organizations to participate in the cluster coordination meetings, and at times the active discouragement of their participation, was perceived by several interviewees as one of the important coordination failures. The failure to involve or invite militant organizations that were banned by the UN Security Council to UN-led cluster meetings was understandable, but other Islamist organizations providing humanitarian assistance were in many cases also not invited. According to one NGO worker in Muzaffarabad:

Cluster meetings hardly saw any Islamic organizations participating.... There was a reluctance to invite them. I asked why we weren't inviting them. All Islamic organizations aren't jihadis, but it's hard for many people to differentiate.

On one occasion when they were invited a UN official involved in organizing the meeting reported that he was reprimanded:

We got in trouble for inviting Al-Rashid Trust to a shelter cluster meeting. They were big stakeholders. They were blacklisted by the US but not the UN at the time. We never got any clear guidance on jihadi issue from the UN.

Of course, as most of these Islamist organizations had their own resources, and probably their own suspicions of UN-led coordination mechanisms, some may have deliberately chosen not to participate. According to a former WFP national staff member:

When I was working at WFP we contacted on a personal basis some jihadis running camps, but when reports went up to our boss we were told not to provide assistance to anyone who doesn't attend cluster meetings. When I asked them to come to the cluster meeting at 9pm they refused to come and said, “we don't need your help. The food is for the people – why should we report to you.”

The strongest critique of the prominent role militant Islamist organizations were allowed to play in the earthquake response was given in an International Crisis Group (ICG) policy briefing note published six months after the earthquake. The ICG report was particularly critical of the Pakistan Army's patronage of the Islamist and *jihadi* organizations:

*Above all, jihadi groups have benefited from military patronage. Having served Pakistan's strategic interests in Kashmir and Afghanistan for more than two decades, they see themselves as extensions of the army.*⁶⁷

It was also critical of the international community's relatively unquestioning engagement with these groups. In a somewhat controversial recommendation for humanitarian organizations committed to principles of neutrality, the report states:

*International humanitarian organizations should substitute their engagement with Islamist organizations, especially the jihadi variant, for partnerships with national secular and non-sectarian national organizations which have a proven capacity for working with local communities.*⁶⁸

The ICG report raised several concerns regarding the impact of Islamist and *jihadi* organizations in the earthquake response. It believed that an "upsurge of sectarianism is inevitable" as a result of the large-scale reconstruction of mosques and *madrassahs* by the different militant groups, whose sectarian affiliations were often different than the local communities where they were operating. An even greater concern was that the religious *madrassahs* built by these organizations would replace schools, thereby increasing the influence of militant ideologies among youth.⁶⁹ The report noted that Pakistan's largest union of *madrassahs* had established an earthquake relief fund to rebuild 1,500 mosques and 300 *madrassahs* in PaK and NWFP.⁷⁰ The director of a Pakistani NGO interviewed for this study raised concerns about the potentially negative impact of the cultural conservatism of Islamist groups on Kashmiri culture and society, which is known for its rich musical and artistic cultural heritage, and for more liberal social values regarding the role of women in society.

The ICG and several media reports also raised concerns about the efforts of militant Islamist organizations to send children orphaned by the earthquake to their *madrassahs*. Following early reports of child

⁶⁷ International Crisis Group, op. cit. p. 11.

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p. 8.

⁶⁹ A BBC *File on 4* report recounted visiting an IDP camp school run by Jamaat ud-Dawa where textbooks were found aimed at children around the age of ten that promoted the idea of *jihad*. Children were also heard singing a song celebrating violent *jihad* – "Those who deny our faith, invite them to convert. Then if they refuse, destroy them utterly." The same broadcast reported a father complaining to the BBC about his 13-year old son being radicalized at a Jamaat ud-Dawa *madrassah*, and sent for military training. Kate Clark, op. cit.

⁷⁰ International Crisis Group, op. cit. p. 12.

trafficking after the earthquake the government moved quickly to ban the adoption of quake orphans, insisting that either the extended families or the state would look after all quake orphans. However, one-year after the earthquake there were still reports that militant Islamist groups were sending quake orphans away to their *madrassahs*. According to a BBC interview with a district leader of Jamaat ud-Dawa in an earthquake-affected area of NWFP:

We have only done a survey of children without fathers or without both parents. Until now we have registered two thousand pupils from Battagram, Kohistan, and Allai districts. So far we have managed to place four hundred children aged four to nine and have sent them to various... Jamaat ud-Dawa madrassahs and mosques and we are now making arrangements to open a big centre in Mansehra for the rest, the other sixteen hundred children....⁷¹

One of the greatest concerns of the ICG, many western commentators, and many Pakistanis with a more liberal outlook, was that the militant Islamist groups would use the goodwill and resources generated by their earthquake assistance to create a political base in this strategic region, much like Hamas and Hezbollah had done in Palestine and Lebanon. According to the director of a Pakistani NGO:

The earthquake provided an opportunity for jihadi groups to put on a softer face by providing services. This is helping them to become a political force by getting a popular support base, but they still have a militant outlook.

A US official interviewed for this study noted the similarities between the motivations of the militant Islamic groups and the US, who both perceived the earthquake response as “our chance to convince people we’re good – to win hearts and minds and change how we’re perceived.” Some of the Islamist groups clearly perceived there to be an ongoing battle for hearts and minds in the earthquake-affected areas. The ICG report noted:

Both the Islamist political parties and their jihadi allies are understandably concerned about changed public perceptions of the West due to the relief work of NATO and Western NGOs... “We need to offset the impact that foreign NGOs are having on the minds of the people”, said an Al-Rasheed Trust camp manager in Mansehra. “We welcome the whole world to carry out relief activities. But we cannot tolerate propagation of Western values and culture under the cover of relief work.”⁷²

The perceived potential to win hearts and minds is likely to have also influenced Ayman al-Zawahri, al Qaeda’s reported second in command, to release a video shortly after the earthquake calling on Muslims to help earthquake victims despite the Pakistani government being an “agent” of the United States: “I call on all Muslims and Islamic charity organizations in particular to go to Pakistan and give a helping hand to the victims there.”⁷³

⁷¹ Kate Clark, op. cit.

⁷² International Crisis Group, op. cit. p. 13.

⁷³ Yara Bayoumy, “Al Qaeda’s Zawahri Urges Muslim Aid to Quake Victims,” Reuters, Oct. 23, 2005 (www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L11328193.htm).

As highlighted in Box 8, several interviewees for this study were skeptical that short-term gratitude for relief assistance would translate into longer term hearts and minds benefits – either for militant Islamist groups or the US. Some pointed out that in their desperate state earthquake victims were grateful for whoever provided assistance – whether *jihadi* groups, the US military, or aid agencies – but that this did not necessarily make them sympathetic to any particular causes. An Islamic NGO worker asked rhetorically, “Did Islamic groups use aid for their own political and ideological objectives? Affectees were not at all interested in *jihad* – they were focusing on survival.”

Box 8: Skepticism Regarding Political Benefits of Earthquake Aid

The notion that this was a golden opportunity for jihadi groups to win support doesn't hold true – appreciation for their work doesn't translate into political support. Jamaat Islami from day one was the most effective and efficient social welfare organization, but this hasn't led to an increase in its popular support. People don't vote on that account – it doesn't translate into popular support. The same for the US – their role won't “win hearts and minds.” In South Asia charity and charitable work has little to do with political work. The best known social workers don't win elections. Edhi [one of Pakistan's leading philanthropists] stood twice and couldn't win more than five percent of the vote. Imran Khan with all his charitable hospital work struggled to win. People don't want to waste their vote.”

Source: Interview with Zaffar Abbas, Islamabad Resident Editor of Dawn Newspaper

The HA2015 case studies have tried to assess the implications for humanitarian action of terrorism and counter-terrorism, including the extent to which the humanitarian enterprise is perceived to be part of the US-led WoT. Most respondents in this case study felt that the impact of the WoT was minimal, and that the earthquake response – including the deployment of US and NATO military forces – was motivated by humanitarian considerations. However, a few respondents noted that the WoT had had the effect of raising sensitivities and questions regarding the role in the earthquake response of Islamic militant groups, and had contributed to poor coordination with most Islamic organizations. Despite the objections of the US, most aid workers interviewed for this study felt that in light of the humanitarian imperative to save lives and alleviate suffering it was appropriate for the GoP to have allowed militant groups to play an important role in the earthquake response. For some aid officials, the most significant impact of the WoT was that Pakistan's status as a strategic ally and “frontline” state in the WoT had resulted in more generous aid contributions of western donors in general and the US in particular. This raised concerns that the WoT was resulting in humanitarian funding being allocated “strategically” as part of a conscious strategy to “win hearts and minds in the WoT,” rather than in an independent, neutral and impartial manner. While “frontline” status proved fortunate for earthquake survivors in Pakistan, there are obvious negative implications for those in need of humanitarian assistance who do not happen to live in a country or region perceived to be of strategic importance.

5. Coherence and the Role of the Pakistan Army

The Coherence Agenda

An important objective of the HA2015 study has been to critically examine the impact of attempts to promote greater coherence and integration in conflict and post-conflict environments between humanitarian efforts and political, military and/or peace-building efforts. The main finding of the first round of HA2015 case studies regarding the push for greater coherence and integration was that the political-humanitarian relationship in integrated missions “is far from a collaboration among equals,” and that there is “a recurrent danger that humanitarian and human rights priorities will be made subservient to political objectives.”⁷⁴

The HA2015 preliminary report also highlighted the need to differentiate between coherence and integration issues in “hot war situations (in which greater insulation or independence for humanitarian and human rights action is required) and post-conflict settings (...where the integration of humanitarian and human rights activities is less problematic).”⁷⁵ One of the notable differences between this case study and the other HA2015 case studies is that the earthquake response did not take place in a conflict or post-conflict environment, and the international community did not have any explicitly prioritized political or peace-building objectives alongside its humanitarian objectives.⁷⁶ There is therefore a need to differentiate not only between the coherence and integration issues in conflict and post-conflict settings, but also between these two contexts and the generally less politicized context of a humanitarian response to a natural disaster.

Although less politicized than most conflict or post-conflict contexts, this is not to say that there were no political agendas being pursued by Pakistani and international actors involved in the earthquake response. The concerted efforts discussed earlier in this paper’s WoT section of both the US government and Islamic militant groups to use their humanitarian response to “win hearts and minds” were examples of a clear desire to achieve policy coherence between humanitarian and political objectives. Some have argued that President Musharraf has been able to use the international community’s support for the central role of the army in the earthquake response to help legitimize and entrench military rule in Pakistan.⁷⁷ Shortly after the earthquake some analysts were recommending that relief and reconstruction assistance in the disputed territory of Kashmir be “used as a means of peace building” between India and Pakistan.⁷⁸ Some of Pakistan’s political parties also clearly saw the earthquake response as an opportunity to raise funds and

⁷⁴ Antonio Donini, et. al., op. cit. pp. 3-4, 23.

⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 27.

⁷⁶ Although Kashmir has been a disputed territory since 1947 and generated considerable conflict, including two Indo-Pakistani wars and a long-running Pakistan-backed insurgency movement, trying to resolve the Kashmir dispute was never a significant factor motivating the international community’s response to the earthquake.

⁷⁷ Tom Bamforth, “Humanitarian intervention in a sovereign state: the political fault-lines of the Pakistan Earthquake,” *Humanitarian Exchange*, Number 34, June 2006, (www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=2807) p. 6.

⁷⁸ Alpaslan Ozerdem, “The Mountain Tsunami: afterthoughts on the Kashmir earthquake,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2006, p. 416. www.id21.org/zinter/id21zinter.exe?a=0&i=s10bao1g1&u=47aae726

their political profile through relief activities.⁷⁹ However, while political objectives were undoubtedly being pursued by some, the primary objective motivating rescue and relief efforts was to provide humanitarian assistance to earthquake survivors. Indeed, the International Crisis Group (ICG) was critical of the way in which the international community did not use its earthquake aid contributions to promote specific political objectives, and advised:

*The international community would be wise to use its massive reconstruction pledges also to counter jihadi influence, support Pakistan's democratic transition and promote regional peace.*⁸⁰

The absence of an explicit political objective makes the coherence issues examined in this study significantly different than the other HA2015 case studies. Another important difference is that, unlike most of the other case studies, the integration issues in this study are not related to the advantages and disadvantages of an integrated or semi-integrated mission led by the UN. Instead, this section will examine perceptions regarding the impact on humanitarian action of the central role of the Pakistan Army in leading a large and closely integrated civil-military humanitarian response to the earthquake.

The Pakistan earthquake rescue and relief effort is considered to have been one of the largest and most integrated civilian and military humanitarian operations ever. According to a Pakistani Lt. General and senior UN official who both played central roles in the response:

*The humanitarian operations and military operations were so interlinked that at the strategic level there could no longer be any meaningful division between the military operation and the humanitarian operation. It was one.*⁸¹

The earthquake response is also perceived by most donors and aid agencies to have been one of the most effective large-scale humanitarian responses – much more so than other recent responses to natural disasters, including the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. One of the interesting findings of this perceptions study was the extent to which key informants directly involved in earthquake relief efforts attributed this success to the central role in relief efforts of national and international military forces in general, and the Pakistan Army in particular.

In the days following the earthquake the Federal Relief Commission (FRC) was established headed by a serving army general to coordinate the overall earthquake response, and 60,000 troops were deployed to assist in relief efforts. While the army was strongly criticized for responding slowly in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, and heavily criticized for its role in the longer-term reconstruction phase, the vast majority of aid workers as well as aid recipients who were interviewed were full of praise for the army's role in leading the relief phase. The following section will discuss in more detail some of the concerns raised

⁷⁹ Rishad Mahmood, "Scoring Points: The MQM and JI workers face-off during relief work," *The Herald*, December 2005, pp. 86-87.

⁸⁰ International Crisis Group, op. cit. p. 1.

⁸¹ Nadeem Ahmed and Andrew MacLeod, op. cit. p. 174.

regarding the role of the Pakistan military in the earthquake response, as well as some of their perceived strengths and weaknesses.

Humanitarian Skeptics vs. Pragmatists

The positive perception of the role of the Pakistan Army in the relief phase is particularly noteworthy given the anti-military sentiments of many humanitarian aid workers, and the antagonistic relationship that often exists between aid agencies and military forces.⁸² According to the UN Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator, Jamie McGoldrick: “We were all slightly wary of the military, coy even, when we started; in-fact humanitarians have a deep-seated fear of being linked to militaries.” He highlighted the positive experience working with the military in the earthquake response and suggested, “Maybe it worked well because from the beginning everybody subsumed themselves under the Pakistani military.”⁸³

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a few European humanitarian organizations like Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) did make a conscious effort to maintain a clear distinction between their relief efforts and those of the military, although nearly all adopted a relatively pragmatic and flexible approach to this issue. The ICRC, which is most famous for its strict adherence to the principles of neutrality and independence, acknowledged that “Kashmir is a sensitive issue but it was a natural disaster so we could be more flexible.” They were therefore willing to coordinate closely with the army, use relief supplies off-loaded from military helicopters, participate in common assessments with the army, and use Chinook helicopters that did not have any logo. However, they refused the military’s request to put military pilots in their helicopters, or any other measures that could damage their image of independence and neutrality. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) also worked closely with the military and in the initial days following the earthquake used military vehicles to transport supplies.

UN officials expressed very little concern that working closely with the army during the rescue and relief phase may have been compromising humanitarian principles. Most stressed, often at great length, the critically important role played by the army as well as their own positive experiences working with military personnel. One exclaimed: “Working with a benevolent dictatorship in an emergency response was just fantastic!” A senior UN official noted that while some of the staff were initially concerned about working with the army, these concerns soon disappeared:

⁸² Civil-military tensions are often greatest in conflict zones such as Afghanistan where international military forces are tasked with both fighting duties as well as providing reconstruction assistance. This perceived “blurring of lines” has been widely criticized by many humanitarian agencies, especially in relation to the operations of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan. See, for example, Save the Children, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Humanitarian-Military Relations in Afghanistan,” London, 2004, <http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=4604&flag=report>; and DACAAR, “DACAAR’s position on relations to PRTs in Afghanistan,” Kabul and Copenhagen, June 2005, <http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=4604&flag=report>.

⁸³ IRIN, “When Disaster Strikes: The Response to the South Asian Earthquake. A humanitarian dilemma: Civil-Military adventures,” www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=6&ReportId=59215.

There were lots of young people involved in the earthquake response who were anti-military and thought there were clandestine objectives. By the end of the second week there was lots more confidence in each other. We relied on the military. They became our closest buddies and intervened whenever we had trouble. We were closer to the military and worked better with them than ever before. They augmented our heli capacity. We put food on their helis which is usually a “no-no” but in this situation was life saving.

Most INGOs, particularly those based in the US, were also very willing to work closely with the Pakistan Army, although some European NGOs did make an effort to keep their distance. The director of a European NGO described the difficulty of upholding principles like neutrality in an environment where most national aid workers and organizations were not aware of humanitarian principles or the sensitivities of working with military forces, and most UN agencies and INGOs had “put aside” rules of engagement between the international aid community and the military (see Box 9). Another director of an international humanitarian relief organization highlighted the difficulty and questioned the impact of trying to appear neutral in the prevailing environment:

When 90 percent of aid agencies are working with the Pakistan military, if 10 percent say ‘no’, what is the impact? We can’t distinguish ourselves in an environment with so many NGOs.

One of the only international humanitarian organizations working in PaK when the earthquake struck, MSF-Holland (Artsen zonder Grenzen) acknowledged that “It was almost impossible to work without the military.” A very tangible example of this was the need for MSF to use a Pakistani Army helicopter to evacuate one of their international staff members injured in the earthquake. MSF-Holland also considered using military helicopters to transport relief supplies but a decision was taken to bring in their own (one of which unfortunately crashed).

One of the factors that made it easier for humanitarian organizations to adopt relatively flexible approaches to working with the Pakistan military was the fact that the military officers heading the FRC and ERRA quickly learned about their sensitivities and, in most cases, worked hard to accommodate them. For example, while the military personnel working on earthquake relief efforts wore their uniforms they were not armed. According to an advisor to the military leadership of the FRC and ERRA:

General Nadeem started by saying things like “we’re going to tell MSF to do this.” We told him to be more diplomat than soldier or the NGOs will leave. Show the NGOs the needs and then let them decide what to do, and we’ll backfill the gaps.

Another factor was that as humanitarian aid workers and military officers worked intensively together in field operations and coordination activities mutual respect, trust, and in some cases, personal friendships, developed which helped remove some of the suspicions that may have existed. Several international aid workers mentioned how impressed they were by the caliber and dedication of the Pakistani officers with whom they interacted. Some noted that the biggest problems they faced arose when dealing with civilian rather than military officials:

The perception of the military in Islamabad is very positive. Most frustrations are with the civilians in ERRA. Military officers are very impressive. The majors I deal with really believe in human rights, but I’m

disgusted with the civilians. In April-May when camps switched from military to civilian control people were concerned about the impact of the loss of military leadership.

Finally, conscious efforts were made to downplay how closely integrated the humanitarian and military operations were to make it easier for both international humanitarian agencies and the Pakistan military to feel more at ease. An example of this was the deliberate effort to hide or downplay the existence of the Strategic Oversight Group (SOG).⁸⁴ The SOG was a relatively informal group within the FRC consisting of the senior Pakistani, UN and major donor representatives, which met regularly to discuss strategic issues related to the earthquake response. In an interviewee for this study one member of the SOG explained why its existence was “kept secret”: “It was kept secret for two reasons: 1) NGOs would be upset at the extent to which the military ran the show; and 2) to hide the level of international military engagement.”

Box 9: Working with the Military – Humanitarian Principles vs. Pragmatism

Director of a European NGO

Very few national institutions and civil society organizations had an understanding of impartiality and neutrality. A good local partner of ours was using military trucks to deliver supplies. I made them off-load. They argued that the supplies weren’t going to the military and that they were more efficient, less corrupt, etc... I said that we could only use military trucks if there was no alternative. We understood the role of the military in Pakistan and that engaging with them beyond most essential meant strengthening their power base.

We were very concerned about the role of the military, except for the very first few days when the military would have played a role in any country. But the rules of engagement with military were put aside by UN and INGOs. National NGOs may not have been aware of these rules or subscribe to them but we do. I raised two concerns with ... OCHA: 1) Shouldn’t we have some rules of engagement for the international community with the military; and 2) a sense of how long they should be involved.... How do we ensure that they don’t take political advantage of our assistance? This has not been consciously debated.

American NGO Worker

I had a bit of an anti-military bias coming out of a development background. Plus I was pretty ignorant about the military – I didn’t even know what a colonel was. I think it’s really important for aid workers to learn more about the structure of the military and how it works. It was very difficult working with the army in the beginning. You need to learn how to take hits, and how to make good ideas their ideas. European NGOs took longer to recognize the necessity of working with the military than the US NGOs. US NGOs were perceived to have “sold out” as we’d back the military a lot – but that helped us and gave us much more freedom. Some of the French NGO purists shot themselves in the foot by refusing to

⁸⁴ According to two members of the SOG, “It was thought that many players, both military and civilian, would have been uncomfortable if it were known how closely the strategies were linked.” Nadeem Ahmed and Andrew MacLeod, op. cit. p. 174.

work with the military. The sooner agencies recognized that they had to the better. Many individuals had strong humanitarian principles about working with the military, but once personal relationships developed relations improved.

Source: Interview with aid workers

While many aid workers and aid recipients interviewed for this study questioned the appropriateness of the army's role in the longer-term reconstruction phase, especially given the central role of the military in Pakistani politics, very few argued that the army should not have played a central role in the rescue and relief phases. Several emphasized that it is hard to imagine any country in the world not using its military forces to respond to a natural disaster of this scale, especially if the military is as large, well-trained, and well-resourced as Pakistan's. Other aid officials noted that the natural disaster context in the earthquake zone differed from conflict zones, and that the role of the army was therefore less problematic as it was not a belligerent force.⁸⁵ There seemed to be a general consensus that in a disaster of this magnitude the humanitarian imperative to save lives should take priority over political concerns that this might help legitimize either military rule or militant Islamic groups.

It is important to note that the Pakistan Army does not have a constitutional mandate to respond to natural disasters. Prior to 2001 this was the responsibility of provincial civil administrations, and after the Local Government Ordinance of 2001 it became the responsibility of local governments at the district level. They can choose to involve the military if required, but in the case of the earthquake this process was not followed. The FRC and ERRA were established by Presidential Ordinances and were never authorized by parliament, despite requests by parliamentarians for this to be done. While nominally the FRC and ERRA were established as civilian institutions and housed in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, according to most informed sources this is "more form than substance, in as much as the army retains firm control over policy and management functions."⁸⁶ During the relief phase, and more problematically during the reconstruction phase, the civil administration in general and local government in particular has largely been bypassed.

Several donor and aid agency officials emphasized that while in principle it would have been better to have a civilian-led response to the earthquake, in reality there was really no alternative to the army leading relief efforts. As the largest, most powerful, best-resourced and best-trained institution in Pakistan, the army alone had the capacity to lead an effective response. As one Pakistani official noted:

⁸⁵ If the conflict between the Pakistan Army and Islamic militant groups continues to spread out of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region into earthquake-affected regions of NWFP, there could well be serious implications for aid organizations working closely with an army that is increasingly perceived by some to be a belligerent force in a conflict zone.

⁸⁶ Shaheen Rafi Khan, Ali Shahrukh Pracha, and Mohammad Reza Abbasy, "Bridging the Gap? The Role of the Military in Humanitarian Assistance," Sustainable Development Policy Institute, February 2006, pp. 9-10. See also Muddassir Rizvi, "Pakistan Army's Role in the Quake Relief Under Flak," IDS Daily Journal (European Edition), December 9, 2005, <http://www.ipsterraviva.net/Europe/article.aspx?id=2713>.

In principle the army should withdraw, but if they did who would step in? INGOs aren't here for the long-term. Local NGOs don't have the capacity. The civilian government doesn't have the capacity.

Furthermore, the civil administration that existed in the earthquake zone had been devastated, with offices destroyed and many officials killed, injured, traumatized and/or looking after the survival needs of their families. Even if the local civilian administration had survived intact, its widespread reputation for being very weak (and often corrupt) meant that it would not have had the capacity to lead a response. As a senior USAID official noted, "The only organization that can handle a disaster of this magnitude is the army." Of course, the fact that Pakistan has no other strong institutions that could have led the response is to a considerable extent the result of a long history of deliberate actions taken by the Pakistan military to weaken all other potential rivals for power. As one Pakistani researcher noted, "The army has to do it because no other institutions exist – the army has destroyed them all."⁸⁷

A Highly Criticized Rescue Effort

The Pakistan government, and in particular the army, were heavily criticized for the slow initial response to the earthquake, especially in the local media. One of Pakistan's leading journalists who was attempting to reach Muzaffarabad the day of the earthquake observed, "I could not help but notice the absence of government and army rescue teams. Instead, the void was filled by members of the 'religious' parties."⁸⁸ Some of those involved in the response have challenged the criticism of a slow start and argued that the response compared very favorably with other disaster responses, especially given the scale of the disaster, the enormous logistical challenges of accessing the remote and mountainous earthquake areas due to the destruction of roads, and the severe disruption of the army's chain of command in the earthquake zone.⁸⁹

While there may have been good reasons for the army's delayed response, there was, nevertheless, a strong public perception that the army responded slowly during the rescue phase. Several explanations have been given for this slow initial response. The first, as explained in an interview with Lt. General Nadeem Ahmed of ERRA, was simply that "Pakistan was not prepared for this level of disaster." At the time of the earthquake Pakistan had no disaster response organizations other than a small Emergency Relief Cell in the Cabinet Division which maintains a few relief supplies for small-scale emergencies, and a Crisis Management Group in the Ministry of Interior to respond to contingencies like hijackings. While the Pakistan military has responded to many previous natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes, other than the 1970 cyclone in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) that killed an estimated 300,000 people, none were even close to the scale of the 2005 earthquake.

⁸⁷ Several current and former civil servants noted that President Musharraf's policy of devolution of power to local government, which replaced the civil servants who ran the districts (known as the District Management Group) with elected local officials, destroyed one of the only civilian institutions that could have played a significant role in the earthquake response.

⁸⁸ Zaffar Abbas, "Off Centre," *The Herald* (Karachi), November 2005, p. 17.

⁸⁹ For the perspective of two individuals heavily involved in leading the response, see Nadeem Ahmed and Andrew MacLeod, *op. cit.*

Another factor that delayed the army's response was that it clearly prioritized institutional and strategic considerations over adherence to humanitarian principles of impartiality. As a result, the army's top priority during the first few days following the earthquake was to rescue the large number of military personnel who were injured in the earthquake, and to restore its defenses along the disputed Line of Control separating Indian- and Pakistan-administered Kashmir.⁹⁰ Although officially the army reported only 456 servicemen dead and 700 injured, most observers believed the actual figures to be much higher.⁹¹ Press accounts and key informants interviewed for this study gave estimates ranging from 3,000 to 6,000 servicemen killed when their barracks and fortified bunkers along the LoC collapsed or were swept away in landslides.

According to the director of an INGO working in PaK at the time of the earthquake, "Initially the Pakistani military were more interested in rescuing their own military men so we were able to focus on the civilian side." Journalists noted that during the first two days after the earthquake army helicopters focused on carrying reinforcements to forward positions and bringing back the dead and wounded. According to one report, "It was only after the forward positions had been restored and adequately manned that the military turned to general rescue and relief work." The explanation given by a retired brigadier in the article was as follows:

*The quake exposed the military to an unprecedented predicament as the country's forward positions at several places were rendered unmanned. This caused panic and a rush to move in reinforcements because India could have easily occupied strategically important peaks that had been left undefended."*⁹²

This assessment was supported by the following account given by a Pakistani aid worker whose NGO was working in PaK:

On October 11th lots of soldiers were sitting around doing nothing. They had their weapons so it didn't look like they were there for rescuing – they were being deployed to the front line. The army's first response was to replace their dead and injured.... Once they had replaced their forces then they did a good job in relief – we need to give the devil his due.

Other factors also contributed to the perception that the army was slow to respond during the rescue operation. The army's chain of command was badly damaged in the earthquake zone as a result of the death of many of its officers and the destruction of communications networks. This reportedly left many troops awaiting orders before taking action. Another factor mentioned in some press reports was that the army decided to prioritize using its heavy machinery in the area to clear roads rather than to use them to assist in rescue efforts by lifting debris from collapsed buildings. This was reportedly done for military reasons

⁹⁰ Government officials interviewed for this study gave a figure of 80,000 troops deployed along the LoC at the time of the earthquake, although other interviewees speculated that the number was considerably higher.

⁹¹ In an interview for this study, Major General Farooq Ahmad Khan, the first head of the FRC, gave figures of 550 dead and 700 injured.

⁹² Syed Shoaib Hasan and Intikhab Amir, "The New Fault Line," *The Herald*, November 2005, p. 58.

because “Landslides had blocked roads and disrupted the supply lines of forward positions.”⁹³ Presumably, however, this decision was also taken based on the urgent need to reopen the major transportation arteries to facilitate the transport of relief workers and supplies to the earthquake zone, and to evacuate the injured to hospitals outside of the earthquake zone.

Finally, the role of the media, especially Pakistan’s young but rapidly evolving electronic media, played a major role in shaping the public’s early perceptions of the earthquake response. While the media in Pakistan is certainly not unique in prioritizing reporting of failures and bad news, according to one analysis “many believed that private channels, currently steeped in cut-throat competition, had resorted to ‘shock value’ techniques to generate a buzz and, consequently, profits.”⁹⁴ While there were certainly many noteworthy failures of the government and the army worth highlighting, some channels seemed to cross the line from reporting into advocacy by deliberately choosing not to highlight any successes. The Islamabad Bureau Chief of the private Aaj Television was reported as saying:

*We did not want to show any good things that happened at the early stages. We only wanted to show that things were not being done. It was our way of telling the people that the crisis was not over.*⁹⁵

A senior Pakistani journalist interviewed for this study noted that “the press was very critical and very confrontational” in the initial weeks following the earthquake. He acknowledged that in retrospect, “we were all criticizing but they did a good job.... Without the army, the relief operation couldn’t have succeeded.”

A Highly Praised Role in Relief Phase

In sharp contrast to the negative perceptions of the military role during the first week following the earthquake was the very positive perception of the army’s central role in coordinating the relief phase. Positive responses from aid workers and aid recipients to questions regarding the role of the military in the earthquake response included:

The Pakistani Army were open, listened, learned and then came up with better solutions. They kept in control. This is what’s made it work. I’ve stayed on because they’re a pleasure to work with.
(international aid agency official)

The military is an excellent tool – structured, used to difficult working conditions – they can deliver and have delivered. We would have been headless chickens without them. (international aid agency official)
We think the Pakistan Army did really well. They sacrificed their soldiers and helped us in our time of need. (male focus group member from the NWFP)

The Pakistan Army provided all the assistance in our area. Nobody else came to our area to help us.
(female earthquake IDP from PaK)

⁹³ *ibid.* p. 58.

⁹⁴ Huma Yusuf, “Blurred Vision,” *The Herald*, December 2005, p. 100.

⁹⁵ *ibid.* p. 100.

Interviewees listed a number of the positive actions taken by the military following the earthquake. The 'Security' section of this paper discusses the important role of the army in restoring law and order, ending looting, and ensuring security for aid workers. Other responses praising the role of the army ranged from being first on the scene in some remote areas, to individual acts of kindness. According to a Pakistani aid worker not normally inclined to be positive about the Pakistan Army:

The army didn't behave like the army. I saw a Major pack some food in the middle of the night and carry it to a family that was too embarrassed to receive aid during the day.

Aid workers and aid recipients cited several factors that they believed contributed to the effective military leadership of the large-scale national and international earthquake relief operation. One was a very practical reason that many Pakistani military officers are quite familiar with UN operations because they have participated in UN peace-keeping operations. According to General Farooq, the former FRC Commissioner,

The Pakistan military has had lots of interaction with the international community through peacekeeping operations, international training courses, field maneuvers abroad and in Pakistan. Pakistani peace-keeping operations are often the biggest.

Another factor is the perception that military personnel tend to be better-trained, more effective, and less corrupt than civilian officials. However, the most important factors that interviewees gave for the Pakistan Army's effective leadership of the relief phase were its strengths in logistics, decision-making, coordination, and listening and learning.

Logistical Capacity

One of the major advantages that many military's have in responding to disasters is their logistical capacity. General Nadeem, the former head of the FRC and now the Deputy Chairman of ERRRA, described this advantage as follows:

The military has unique advantages over international humanitarian actors, especially surplus assets during peace time – medical, engineering, aircraft, tents, personnel, vehicles, a command structure. It can reach inaccessible areas. We even did traffic control management, air bridges, and reception centers for foreign aid.

The helicopters of the Pakistan military and international military played a critically important role in rescue and relief efforts. In the mountainous and remote earthquake zone, where most roads had been badly damaged and blocked, helicopters were initially the only way into and out of many of the affected areas other than walking or traveling by horse or mule. Within 25 minutes of the earthquake, the first military helicopters reportedly took off from Rawalpindi to assess the damage, and on the first day 12 helicopters flew a total of 48 hours transporting injured out of the earthquake zone.⁹⁶ The army's

⁹⁶ "There is no bar on the activities of militant outfits as long as they serve a humanitarian purpose", interview with Major General Shaukat Sultan, Director General, Inter-Services Public Relations, *The Herald*, November 2005, p. 58a.

helicopters and logistical capacity meant that in many remote and high altitude areas like the Allai valley, military personnel were the first on the scene providing assistance. The Pakistan Army Air Wing, the US Navy and the UN Humanitarian Air Service formed an Air Operations Cell which proved to be a great success, and the first time national and international military forces and the UN had “worked so well in the delivery of air support.”⁹⁷ According to Lt. General Nadeem of ERRA, at its peak, “the Joint Aviation Operations Centers were coordinating the operations of 150 helicopters operated by 10 different nationalities, flying 300-400 sorties a day.”

In addition to the helicopters, the Army Corps of Engineers played a critical role in clearing landslides, reopening blocked roads and building bridges. According to a joint donor assessment, 4,429 kilometers of road were damaged or blocked in the earthquake zone which it estimated would take Rs. 29.8 billion (c. US\$500 million) to restore.⁹⁸ In a much shorter time than many had expected, the Army Corps of Engineers had reopened many of the most important transport arteries.⁹⁹

The army’s logistical skills were also evident in many other areas. Shortly after the earthquake the army established six “forward operating bases” in the earthquake zone that served as distribution hubs where relief supplies could be delivered to, stored, and distributed from. The military also played an important role in traffic management. One journalist described the traffic jam on the road to Balakot a few days after the earthquake caused by trucks and vehicles with relief supplies, aid agency staff and “disaster tourists”:

The queue on the road to Balakot was seven kilometres long and had it not been for army jawans [privates] who had been ordered to keep one lane clear of traffic, there would have been no space for the ambulance and rescue services.¹⁰⁰

Decision-Making Ability

One of the major strengths of the army in the earthquake response was its ability to make important decisions quickly and decisively in the midst of a crisis situation. This proved to be critically important, especially during the first few days following the earthquake. One of the most important decisions taken shortly after the earthquake was to appeal for international assistance based on the recognition that the needs generated by the disaster were beyond the government’s capacity to effectively address. For a relatively closed organization the Pakistan Army made remarkably quick decisions to waive visa requirements for foreign aid workers, expedite customs clearances for relief supplies, and open up the sensitive region of PaK to aid agencies and international military forces.¹⁰¹ In the words of one aid organization director, “The army opened doors we never thought could be opened.” Another important decision taken the day after the earthquake was to establish the Federal Relief Commission, which the first FRC Commissioner, Major General Farooq Ahmad Khan, described as a “one-window operation” to

⁹⁷ Nadeem Ahmed and Andrew MacLeod, op. cit., p. 170.

⁹⁸ Intikhab Amir, “Unsafe at Any Speed,” *The Herald*, December 2005, p. 81.

⁹⁹ Shaheen Rafi Khan, Ali Shahrukh Pracha, and Mohammad Reza Abbasy, op. cit, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Zaffar Abbas, op. cit. p. 17.

¹⁰¹ An exception to this openness was the case of arch-enemy India, whose offer of helicopters was rejected by Pakistan unless the Indian helicopters could be flown by Pakistani pilots (a condition India rejected).

coordinate the relief efforts of the government, donors, UN agencies, international military forces, and national and international aid agencies. According to General Farooq:

I was given a very strong mandate. I could get relief supplies cleared without going through customs. For example, IOM was bringing in 100 vehicles from Torkham that I was able to have cleared with one phone call... We also abolished visa requirements – they were issued on arrival for 3 months.

Several interviewees commented on the advantages in an emergency of having a powerful institution like the army with the authority to take decisions quickly, rather than always having to wait until consensus is achieved among all actors. As one UN official observed:

Once the military buy-in to something their attitude is ‘let’s do it’ in contrast to the international community which spends another two weeks deciding what kind of screw-driver is needed.

Another advantage the military had was a chain of command and communications system to quickly communicate decisions. “Once the military made a decision,” one international aid worker remarked, “48 hours later the colonel in a remote valley in the earthquake zone would communicate the decision at the evening coordination meeting.”

Effective Coordination

Many interviewees identified the army’s strengths and capacity to coordinate as being a major contributing factor to the strong earthquake response. In an emergency situation the fact that the military had authority and people had to listen to them gave them a major comparative advantage. According to one senior international aid official, “Meetings worked better due to the heavy-handed military approach – it was the only way to reach a decision.” A UN official described the advantages of the army’s approach to coordination over the UN’s:

The army had the competency and authority to coordinate. When a newcomer or new NGO arrived in [the earthquake zone] the army Colonel would say, ‘here’s your tent, here’s your cot, and come to the coordination meeting at 6 pm. It was great to have the army leading coordination. We would have wasted weeks for OCHA and the UN system to deliberate and reach consensus on creating a coordination structure.

Similarly, the head of an INGO noted that “the military had much greater coherence than the civilians.... If there had been a civilian-led response there would have been a lot more power struggles and indecisiveness.” In the Allai valley NGOs actually objected when OCHA did try to set up sub-offices to facilitate coordination because they preferred military-led coordination.

Several interviewees noted that another important advantage of the army in a coordinating role was that it had the capacity to follow-up on decisions that were taken, monitor activities and hold agencies to account. An INGO director observed:

The military are who they are – they have authority and can make things happen. They did a good job holding the international community to account. They would call us up to see if we had delivered on our

promises. There were no disconnects on the Pak military side. Their hierarchical chain of command meant that every night General Farooq would have his reports.

Another aspect of the army's approach to earthquake coordination was to be firm on the bigger picture policy issues, but not to micro-manage the day-to-day field operations of NGOs. In an interview for this study (see Box 10) General Nadeem of ERRA described this approach as "non-interfering coordination" based on the recognition that "humanitarians are allergic to being told what to do." According to one of his advisors: "Oxfam complained 'we get no direction from Islamabad.' No, they didn't, but this was deliberate. If we had told them what to do they wouldn't have done it." The INGO Director quoted in Box 10 expressing concerns about working with the army, acknowledged that the term "non-interfering coordination" was not just rhetoric:

Despite our concerns, the military played an incredibly positive role. They never told us where to go, who to target, etc... They only told us to go to remote areas where others couldn't help. When the military took charge of IDP camps – we said we couldn't help unless they met Sphere standards. The army told us to teach them Sphere standards.... Overall the military role has been positive with strong leadership that has held the international community accountable.

This policy of "non-interfering coordination" proved especially effective in keeping humanitarian organizations on board and coordinating closely with the army. According to an advisor, the FRC Chairman General Farooq proudly proclaimed: "We knew our coordination was good when even ICRC worked with us."

A final point regarding the effectiveness of the military-led coordination of the relief phase that several interviewees emphasized was that, "you can't underestimate the importance of key personalities." According to a major donor official: "The Pakistan Army did very well. They were led by incredible people like General Nadeem and General Farooq. This shows the importance of key individuals." Related to this was the importance of several of the key individuals involved in the earthquake response – military and civilian – getting along well. Several interviewees mentioned that some of the humanitarian vs. military tensions that existed in the beginning were resolved as personal friendships developed between humanitarian aid workers and military officers through coordination mechanisms like the sectoral cluster meetings. According to a senior UN official: "It all came down to key people getting on well. But the UN hates that – they don't want to acknowledge the role of key personalities."

Willing to Listen and Learn

One of the interesting and surprising perceptions that international aid officials repeatedly highlighted in responding to questions about the role of the Pakistan Army in the earthquake response was the extent to which military officers were willing to acknowledge what they did not know, and to listen, learn and adapt in order to respond more effectively. In an article written by General Nadeem and Andrew MacLeod, they described a "critical meeting" at the start of the second week following the earthquake that was held between key generals and UN representatives:

There was a frank and open discussion in which both sides shared their fears for the size and scale of the disaster, and the concerns that it would be beyond the scope of all to deal with. Surprisingly, honestly, and strongly, the Pakistani military shared with the United Nations their belief that they did not know what to do. This was a critical moment.

...A series of meetings between key actors on both sides allowed the military to learn the history, ethos, and mores of the aid community, the meaning of “earmarked funding,” the fundamental principles of the Red Cross movement, why MSF broke from ICRC, and why the UN agencies are often each other’s largest competitors.¹⁰²

Several interviewees noted how quickly the army officers learned aid jargon, although it was not always clear the extent to which the principles had been internalized. According to one INGO worker who worked closely with Pakistan Army officers:

The military quickly learned “development speak” and learned how to disguise their prejudices. They have a superiority complex and initially talked about the need to tell ignorant locals what to do, while NGOs were talking about “empowering” the people. However, soon they started saying, “the people want this” or “the people want that.”

The director of a humanitarian organization noted that “the military was very cooperative and learned all our principles at HQ and field levels. We insisted on there being no armed guards as escorts. We never saw guns.”

The Sphere standards, for which the army specifically requested and received training, seemed to be a particular favorite of the officers. A UN official commented on how the “the colonels started stealing our lingo and quoting IASC policies and Sphere standards.” According to another UN official:

The military like standards, guidelines, accountability – they like to be able to say ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ That is why they liked the Sphere guidelines. They understand Sphere as practical guidelines and standards, and not as humanitarian principles. We provided Sphere training to all brigadiers on up. Soon all were carrying their orange books under their arms and calling up agencies to hold them to account because their latrines were not up to standard.

Several interviewees expressed concern that “The military is learning about humanitarianism but humanitarians are not learning enough about the military.” In an operation where both national and international military forces were so heavily involved, some aid workers acknowledged that their ignorance about how militaries operate was a liability. Some observed that “Aid agency staff with military backgrounds were the most effective” in the earthquake response as they knew how to interact with and gain the respect of national and international military officers.

¹⁰² Nadeem Ahmed and Andrew MacLeod, op. cit., p. 169.

Box 10: Lessons from the Earthquake

Interview with Lt. General Nadeem Ahmed, Deputy Chairman, ERRA

Four important lessons we learned from the earthquake response are:

1. **A willingness to learn** – On day one we acknowledged we didn't have knowledge and capacity, and we were more than willing to learn from humanitarian organizations.
2. **Opening up** to the international humanitarian world, which was remarkable for such a closed institution. We became a good facilitator for humanitarian organizations. There was an initial reluctance but then they preferred to operate with the military and found it easier to interact with us than civilian officials.
3. **Developing Coordination Mechanisms** – We provided a platform for all humanitarian organizations – at Federal, State and district levels.... Every evening a coordination meeting was convened and participated in by all sectors which provided an overarching view while the UN Cluster system provided sectoral views. We minimized duplication through “non-interfering coordination” because we realized humanitarians are allergic to being told what to do. We allowed agencies to do what they wanted where they wanted and we backfilled. NGOs generally like to work in high visibility and accessible areas so we worked in remoter areas.... When the military sat with humanitarian actors we both learned from each other.
4. **Personal relationships are critical** – Once we got to know and trust each other we could talk frankly among friends. This spirit would then trickle down. We used strong leadership to push teamwork down the system.

A Controversial Role in the Reconstruction Phase

The perception of the army's role in the earthquake response, which went from very negative during the rescue phase to very positive during much of the relief phase, again became increasingly controversial and unpopular during the reconstruction phase. Some of the responses from aid workers and aid recipients to questions regarding the role of the military included:

The army played a key role in the rescue phase which we appreciate. We saw military forces at midnight carrying food and tents up the hill to earthquake victims. However, in the relief phase we're not happy with the army. They didn't listen to us and there are lots of irregularities. (Focus group member in NWFP)

The army played a very constructive role in the relief phase, but we felt that at the reconstruction phase coordination and leadership should go back to civilian pre-earthquake structures. (INGO representative)
Yes, the military did a good job and now it's time for them to leave. We need to work more through local government – this is the only sustainable option. Ultimately elected governments have to handle the response. (Pakistani researcher)

As the quotes above illustrate, there was a widespread perception that while the army played a necessary and effective relief role the responsibility for reconstruction should have been transferred back to the civil administration. As noted earlier, superficially this was done by declaring ERRA to be a civilian institution

headed by a civilian chairman. As is often the case in Pakistan, however, behind the civilian façade the army retained real power and authority. The perception (and reality) that the military was running the show meant that the military was subsequently blamed for many of the perceived failures during the reconstruction phase.

During the relief phase there was a general recognition that the military was the only institution strong enough to lead the response, especially given that local civilian government institutions had been devastated by the earthquake. However, as discussed in the security section of this paper, local political and religious leaders and the local civil administration became increasingly angry with the army, ERRA and in some cases aid agencies, because they felt the entire earthquake response effort was passing them by and that they were not “getting a piece of the action.” They feared becoming politically marginalized as they had little influence over the political economy of aid and could not use the potential patronage benefits of distributing relief supplies and providing jobs to their supporters to enhance their own power bases. They also resented what they perceived to be the paternalistic treatment they received from army officers. Members of a focus group with Union Council¹⁰³ members in Mansehra District complained, “The army sometimes summoned us to attend meetings but they made all the decisions.”

Box 11: Army Sidelines Local Administration

Following heavy rains in the spring of 2007, major landslides in Kashmir killed several people and displaced many more. A UN official involved in relief efforts gave the following example of the army consciously side-lining the local administration:

The District Commissioner chaired a coordination meeting on the recent landslides attended by the UN, ICRC, and the local administration, but the army refused to participate. The civil administration led the planning of the relief response but the next morning the army arrived and completely hijacked the entire operation. They loaded helis with journalists and didn't take any UN staff or members of the civilian administration. This sparked a heated debate among the local administration officials left behind about what is the role of the army. We thought of them as a taxi service [to provide the helicopters], but they wanted the PR. We [the UN] refused to let the military take our aid. We instead called up USAID and got their heli. We could do this as the UN but the civilian administration couldn't take on the military.

Source: Interview with UN official

At the same time that local leaders were becoming frustrated at being marginalized, the public were becoming increasingly angry about what they perceived was the slow-pace and inadequate scope of reconstruction efforts. Much of the public's frustration was due to the common problem in large-scale relief operations of assistance efforts failing to meet expectations that are often unrealistically high. Those whose lives had been devastated by the earthquake often saw a major discrepancy between the billions of dollars they heard had been donated for earthquake relief and reconstruction, and what they saw being provided.

¹⁰³ A Union Council is a sub-district level of local government and civil administration in Pakistan.

In addition, the transition from many free handouts during the relief phase to aid agencies introducing more “sustainable programs” requiring greater “community participation” may also have helped generate frustration.

By far the largest source of frustration was generated by problems relating to the implementation of ERRA’s housing policy. The enormous challenge of rebuilding an estimated 600,000 damaged or destroyed homes was inevitably going to be complex and time-consuming, especially considering the need to use earthquake-resistant construction techniques. For a task of this scale and complexity it is not surprising that there were a wide range of perceptions regarding the successes and failures of the housing program. Some major donors perceived the housing program, especially in rural areas, to have been very successful, with a World Bank review mission giving it its highest ranking of “highly satisfactory.”¹⁰⁴ According to one UN official, compared to other major housing reconstruction projects following natural disasters, including the tsunami response and Hurricane Katrina, “the policy approach implemented for housing in Pakistan has been the most successful recovery and reconstruction... in terms of speed and quality of construction in the world so far.”¹⁰⁵ The “owner-driven” policy of providing approximately US\$3,000 of financial assistance in several installments directly to owners to rebuild their homes rather than to pay contractors or NGOs to build them was acknowledged by many aid workers to have been a very successful policy.¹⁰⁶

Despite these positive perceptions regarding the housing policy, however, the length of time it took to develop the policies and building standards, the complexity of those standards, the poor communication of the policies and standards, the method and amount of financial assistance packages, perceptions of corruption in the processes, and implementation delays all combined to generate widespread anger and frustration in the earthquake-affected areas. Housing issues generated the most complaints in focus group discussions in the earthquake zone. Because army personnel comprised the majority of Progress-Monitoring Teams (PMTs) and Assessment and Inspection Teams (AITs) that supervised and monitored the housing program, and provided the certification necessary to receive financial assistance packages, the army was the target of much of the anger over the housing issue. According to members of a focus group in Shinkiyari district of the NWFP:

¹⁰⁴ IRIN, “Pakistan: World Bank lauds housing reconstruction in quake-hit north,” January 20, 2008, (www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76306)

¹⁰⁵ A similar opinion was expressed by the Pakistan Country Representative of UN HABITAT: “With a disaster of this magnitude, dealing with the type of mountainous terrain and extreme weather conditions, we feel that much more has been achieved than in any other response to recent natural disasters worldwide.” IRIN, “Pakistan: Owner-driven housing making headway in quake-zone,” October 8, 2007, (www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=74695).

¹⁰⁶ For an interesting comparison of recent post-disaster housing reconstruction programs, which highlights the relative successes of the Pakistan earthquake response, see Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority, *MATRIX: Global Post-Disaster Housing Reconstruction Comparative Analysis*, October 2007

(www.erra.gov.pk/Reports/Rural%20Housing/MATRIX%20Global%20Disaster%20Reconstruction%20Comparison.pdf).

Because of ERRA's failed policies, housing is still our biggest problem. People waited one year for ERRA designs. Some people were confused and went ahead and rebuilt their homes, but now they don't meet ERRA standards.... The [housing] compensation issue is making many people unhappy. Day-by-day people are getting disillusioned and the army is losing its support.

While the UN agencies and major donors were generally very supportive of the military-dominated ERRA, some international aid agency officials questioned the wisdom of their relatively unquestioning support. One donor representative was very critical of how “donors have swallowed the army’s role uncritically – especially in the reconstruction phase.” Several expressed concern that this strong international support for the military’s role in the longer-term reconstruction phase undermined provincial and district governments and could help strengthen authoritarian rule in Pakistan. Others felt that while the military culture was effective in leading the emergency relief phase, it was not well-suited to a longer-term reconstruction phase requiring community involvement and building consensus.

One of the concerns raised most frequently about the role of the military in the reconstruction phase, especially with regards to the establishment of ERRA, was the negative impact that this parallel bureaucracy would have on provincial and district governments. A director of an INGO expressed the following concern:

I don't agree with putting the military in charge of ERRA following the transition from FRC. There is lots of bad blood between the civilian bureaucracy line departments and ERRA. Everyone likes General Nadeem – he's nice to work with, listens and is responsive. But ERRA is a completely parallel body that confuses things. The international community is providing lots of support to ERRA, but what are we doing to strengthen the civilian line departments?

The Need for an Exit Strategy

A final and related concern raised by several interviewees was the lack of an exit strategy for ERRA and the military. According to a UN official, “There is a disconnect as the government has no strategy to empower line ministries to take over ERRA’s role after two-three years.” A Pakistani journalist noted that as a military institution, “ERRA doesn’t trust anyone. They must recognize that at some point they will have to exit and turn things over to local leaders. There is no planning for an exit.” A UN official, however, highlighted a serious dilemma:

There is no real exit strategy because everything is military in this country. As civilian institutions don't function it is in our interests to keep the military involved. Civilian structures are dysfunctional in contrast to military structures that function and can deliver. However, they will lose their credibility doing things they're not good at.

Since the Pakistan Army first seized power in a military coup in 1958, it has worked hard to ensure that it is the most powerful institution in the country, and deliberately weakened all other institutions that could potentially challenge its authority. The more the military has undermined other institutions, however, and the more power and responsibilities it has then taken on directly, the more Pakistanis hold it directly responsible for all real and perceived failings – despite the army’s frequent attempts to maintain a façade of civilian rule.

The military's controversial role in national politics was mirrored on a smaller scale in its increasingly controversial role in earthquake reconstruction. Despite its effective and highly praised leadership of the relief phase, the army's reputation became increasingly tarnished as a result of growing frustrations with reconstruction efforts. These frustrations were a consequence of a number of factors, including some poorly conceived, communicated and/or implemented policies and programs, the frustration of local leaders who felt that they were being marginalized, and by the nearly inevitable gap that often develops between levels of resources and levels of expectation in large scale relief and reconstruction operations (especially in the housing sector). These frustrations would likely exist no matter who was leading reconstruction efforts. However, the army bore the brunt of the criticism because, as in national politics, it had proven to be much more effective at taking over authority than letting it go, and was therefore still perceived to be in charge of reconstruction efforts.

6. Security

The following section examines the security situation in the earthquake-affected areas of Pakistan as perceived by local communities as well as aid agencies. It then looks at how the security situation deteriorated during the reconstruction phase, and examines differing perceptions of the causes of insecurity. The section concludes by examining perceptions of the effectiveness of security policies and procedures in the earthquake response, including the security role played by the Pakistan Army.

Local versus International Perceptions of Security

The research for this study revealed strong differences in how the security situation in earthquake-affected areas was perceived, with international aid agencies viewing the situation to be much more insecure than local communities.¹⁰⁷ There was a strong perception among international agencies that the earthquake areas in NWFP and Kashmir were dangerous due to the presence of militant Islamist groups, and that there was a serious threat of terrorist attacks against western aid personnel.

For most international agencies the most serious security concerns during the first six months after the earthquake were caused by the Danish cartoon controversy in February 2006. Following the publication in a Danish newspaper of cartoons perceived by many Muslims to be blasphemous, violent demonstrations were held throughout Pakistan and many other Islamic countries. As a precautionary measure many agencies withdrew international staff from the earthquake-affected areas, although unlike many other parts of the country the demonstrations in these areas remained relatively peaceful. The January 2006 missile attack in a tribal agency of the NWFP, which reportedly killed 80 students (including children) at an Islamic *madrasah* that was allegedly training militants, also generated considerable anti-American sentiment and fears of retaliatory attacks against aid workers.¹⁰⁸ However, despite militant *jihadi* groups working in close proximity to US and NATO military forces, and despite the presence of numerous soft western aid agency targets, during the six-month rescue and relief phase and the first year of reconstruction efforts there were no reported security incidents where organizations designated as “terrorist” are suspected of having been involved.

The focus group discussions with earthquake affectees in NWFP and PaK indicated that the security situation was generally good before the earthquake. Following the earthquake, especially during the first week, there were incidents where relief convoys and some shops were looted, although the looting ended once the military arrived. A Union Council member in the NWFP town of Shinkhari described the situation as follows:

¹⁰⁷ The differing local and international perceptions of security in the earthquake zone were the opposite of what was found in the other HA2015 case studies (available at <http://fic.tufts.edu/?pid=32>), where local communities consistently had much stronger perceptions of insecurity than international staff.

¹⁰⁸ While the Pakistan Army claimed responsibility for the attack in Bajaur Agency many Pakistanis believed that the attack was conducted, or at least assisted, by the US.

In the very beginning there were some crowd control problems. People saw aid going to everyone else and out of desperation some people fought to get shelter. They raided trucks with tents but would let trucks with food and blankets go.

In one area the distribution of relief supplies reportedly led to fighting between rival groups in the village, but no one was killed. In several areas there was a perception that following the earthquake there had been an increase in robberies. This was attributed in part to many people living outdoors in tents and temporary shelters, but primarily to an influx of earthquake IDPs. As one focus group respondent noted: “There were robberies in the area after the earthquake because many people migrated from the hilly areas to our land.” A few respondents blamed the increase in house and car thefts on Afghan refugees living in the area.

Despite the reported increase in thefts in some areas, the general perception of focus group participants was that security was generally still quite good, and was not a major cause for concern. This was true not only in terms of their own security, but also the security of aid agencies working in the area. There was a clear recognition in focus group discussions that security incidents affecting aid agencies in their areas “will obviously affect the work of aid agencies. If there is misconduct or a bad attitude of people towards the aid agencies, they will not be able to function properly.” Possibly due to this reason, the few security incidents involving aid agencies were largely dismissed as being due to internal agency politics, disgruntled personnel, or actions to cover up wrong-doings by aid agency staff. A few cases where aid agency tents were burned down were explained as deliberate arson attacks by the affected agency’s employees “so that people wouldn’t be able to find out what was stolen.”

Many international aid workers arriving in Pakistan for the first time after the earthquake perceived it to be dangerous. The country’s international reputation for being on the front-line of the WoT, and home to a plethora of Islamic extremist groups including al Qaeda, the Taliban and Kashmiri militant organizations, led many agencies to initially adopt more restrictive security policies than several respondents thought was required. According to an INGO director with extensive Pakistan experience:

Many aid workers came to a country they perceived to have master-minded 9/11 – a country full of terrorists. They thought everyone in Pakistan would have a turban and a Kalashnikov.... Some agencies were treating every road accident as a security incident. The paranoia was very irritating – it kept aid workers away from a large percentage of the population.

A former member of an OFDA Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) recounted how their security briefings warned them to look out for specific *jihadi* group flags who are “the bad people you need to stay away from.” Some team members were reportedly terrified of bumping into “bad people” until they eventually realized that “*jihadi* flags won’t hurt you.”

Once in the field the welcoming and hospitable response of local communities helped alleviate the security concerns of many of the aid workers. During times of heightened tension community leaders in many areas helped assuage aid agency concerns by promising to guarantee the security of their staff. According to one US NGO worker, “on several occasions leaders came to tell us that they would look after us – they didn’t want us to leave.” Given the warm welcome they received in host communities, and the lack of security incidents, many aid workers expressed frustration that aid agency security policies remained inappropriately strict.

From Relief to Reconstruction: Changing Security Perceptions

Despite the perception of many organizations that the earthquake zone was a highly insecure area, there were no serious security incidents targeting aid agencies during the relief phase. During the reconstruction phase that followed, however, there was a noticeable increase in security threats and incidents, although still fortunately no incidents resulting in the death of aid agency staff. These included a number of incidents in the spring of 2007, including an amateur explosive device thrown into an INGO compound in Battagram which slightly injured one national staff member; a few cases where NGO tents were burned down under suspicious circumstances; anonymous threatening letters including some containing death threats against specific employees; beatings of some national staff of aid agencies, and threatening rumors and press articles including a newspaper report that 50 suicide bombers had entered the town of Mansehra to attack NGOs.¹⁰⁹

Bagh district of PaK was one of the areas of significant tension during the reconstruction phase. During the spring of 2007 several government officials, local politicians and religious leaders made anti-NGO and UN statements. Most of their criticisms were based on the employment policies of aid agencies, especially the hiring of female staff and the alleged inappropriate behavior of male and female staff. In March two aid workers received letters containing death threats. In April and May there were several attacks against aid agency staff, including the torching of a house belonging to a UN national staff member and several incidents where aid agency drivers were beaten up. In another incident two national female staff were arrested and two Pakistani male colleagues beaten up “for having a picnic in a public area while being unmarried.”¹¹⁰ Anti-NGO demonstrations were held in Bagh and a coalition of religious parties threatened to attack NGO and UN offices and residences as well as any vehicles carrying female passengers. As a result, most international NGOs and subsequently UN agencies suspended their activities and closed their offices in Bagh for a two-week period. Following discussions between senior government officials and local political, religious and civil society organizations, and the expression of support for the work of the aid agencies by community leaders, their work resumed.

The most serious security incidents in the earthquake zone started taking place in the summer of 2007 and continued into the fall, especially in Mansehra and Battagram districts of the NWFP. In early October armed men opened fire on a Pakistani NGO vehicle in Mansehra district that was transporting female staff, seriously injuring the driver. According to press reports, the attack followed a call by a local religious leader to attack female NGO workers.¹¹¹ Signs also reportedly appeared on some roads in Battagram district calling on all NGOs to leave. Later in October an explosive device exploded outside the Battagram office and residence of a Pakistani NGO injuring eight staff, two of them critically. On the same day the compound of

¹⁰⁹ In Battagram tensions mounted following rumors that shoes being distributed by UNICEF had Quranic verses inscribed on the soles. A potentially explosive situation was averted when religious leaders were taken to the warehouse and asked to randomly open boxes and examine the shoes to prove that the rumors were false.

¹¹⁰ IRIN (Islamabad), *Pakistan: Islamic extremists attack aid workers*, May 9, 2007.

www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=72048

¹¹¹ Nisar Ahmed Khan, “Driver hurt in attack on NGO women,” *Dawn* (the Internet Edition), October 11, 2007 (www.dawn.com/2007/10/11/top17.htm).

CARE International was riddled with automatic gunfire but no injuries were reported. More significantly, on the same day there were also reports of a separate rocket attack on an army camp in the same area suggesting that distinctions were not being made between humanitarian and military targets. As a result of the attacks nearly all aid agencies suspended their operations and evacuated their staff out of Battagram.¹¹²

Perceived Causes of Insecurity

In the interviews and focus group discussions that were conducted for this study in the spring of 2007, several different factors were cited for the increase in threats and security incidents during the reconstruction phase. Nearly all pointed to internal factors relating to perceptions of aid agency actions (or inaction), rather than terrorism and other external factors that had been the focus of most security concerns and analyses. If the field research for this study had been conducted after the October 2007 attacks on NGOs and army facilities in the NWFP it is likely that respondents would have cited more external factors, especially the escalation and spillover into the NWFP of the conflict between the Pakistan Army and Islamic militant groups in the tribal regions of western Pakistan.

The main factors cited for the increases in anti-aid agency sentiments as well as security incidents included growing local frustration with the perceived slow pace of reconstruction efforts, charges of cultural insensitivity (especially regarding employment and behavior of national female staff), bypassing and disempowering of major landlords and local religious and political leaders, and – most importantly – paying insufficient attention to the employment politics of who were or were not being given jobs by aid agencies.

Growing Frustration with Reconstruction Efforts

An early indication that the security situation might deteriorate was a shift from the widespread gratitude and praise of the aid effort by local communities during the relief phase, to the first expressions of anti-aid sentiment by local leaders and local newspapers during the reconstruction phase. While most of the criticism was directed at the Pakistan Army, which was leading relief and reconstruction efforts, complaints were also increasingly made about the work and behavior of NGOs and UN agencies and their staff.

The interviews for this study revealed sharp differences between the very positive assessment by earthquake affectees of rescue and relief efforts and their much more negative assessments of reconstruction efforts. The growing disenchantment with aid efforts over time is certainly not unique to the Pakistan earthquake response and reflects a trend visible in many humanitarian situations.¹¹³ A major contributing factor is the near inevitable gap that exists between the perceptions of aid recipients of their assistance needs and the resources and capacity of governments and aid agencies to address them. An important factor often fueling the problem of unrealistic expectations are the public relations machines of donors and aid agencies that focus on placing self-serving stories in the media about all the money they are donating and all the good

¹¹² IRIN (Islamabad), “NGOs suspend operations in quake-hit Battagram,” October 31, 2007.

www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/ff8cf3d6a59ad71f07a8ac02a739c998.htm

¹¹³ The HA2015 Afghanistan case study (available at <http://fic.tufts.edu/?pid=32>), for example, showed how the perceived absence of a peace dividend contributed to hostility directed against the aid community growing to dangerous levels.

work they are doing. The gap between what people hear is being given and done for them, and what they receive often fuels cynicism and frustration with the aid system.

In the earthquake-affected areas the majority of complaints regarding reconstruction efforts were related to the financial assistance packages for houses that were damaged or destroyed during the earthquake. The large gap between the expectations of earthquake survivors to have approximately 600,000 homes quickly paid for and rebuilt, and the resources and capacity of the government and aid agencies to do this, was inevitably going to generate frustration and tensions. However, the problem was exacerbated due to delays in developing a seismically sound housing policy, and the complexity and poor communication of the policy once it was developed. The resulting confusion and anger was compounded further by allegations of corruption in the compensation process.

Most of the anger over the housing issue was directed at the army, which was leading the process of assessing and awarding financial assistance packages for damaged or destroyed houses. However, demonstrations were also held against some of the NGO implementing partners of the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF),¹¹⁴ a GoP and World Bank-funded poverty-reduction organization that was responsible in some areas for assessing the levels of damage, compliance with the newly established building standards, and the resulting levels of financial assistance. One aid official attributed some of the tensions in Bagh district of PaK to the housing issue: “The Bagh situation is partly to maintain pressure for compensation. The compensation issue is making people much more critical of NGOs.”

Cultural Insensitivity

Several international aid workers attributed the increase in threats and security incidents to the cultural insensitivity of aid agencies and workers that caused offense in conservative local communities. An INGO director commented on the laxity of the international aid scene:

I was amazed at how liberal the environment was – parties with national staff of both sexes with alcohol flowing freely.... If we had been more sensitive before we'd be having fewer problems now.

The two most commonly reported complaints were the interaction of male and female staff, particularly national staff, and the reported use and abuse of alcohol on aid agency compounds. While many agencies quickly instituted policies requiring alcohol-free field offices, and culturally appropriate gender-segregated accommodation, others did not. There were some reports of parties where alcohol and drugs were liberally consumed. Local Urdu tabloids were often quick to carry colorful reports of young Pakistani women being drugged for sex, aid agency staff being caught “in a compromising position” in local hotels, agencies that were trafficking in women, and the general spread of “corrupt Western values.”

While there were elements of truth to some of these reports, many were clearly sensationalist, designed to stir up trouble and, as one focus group member noted, “to sell papers.” In one case a UN agency hired some female staff in PaK and made some culturally appropriate arrangements for them to live with a local family. A local paper then reported that the agency was housing male and female staff together in a hotel. When the

¹¹⁴ www.ppaf.org.pk

UN agency manager called the father of one of the women to apologize for this report, which damaged the reputation of his daughter and his family, the father said that the newspaper article was probably generated by a member of his extended family who was jealous that his daughter had been given a good job.

As noted earlier in this report, the cultural insensitivity of foreign aid workers was raised much more as an issue by foreign aid workers and a few government officials than by community members. No community member interviewed for this study cited the cultural insensitivity of foreign aid workers as a significant factor contributing to insecurity of aid workers. Several stated that those who did raise objections to the behavior of foreigners did so due to ulterior political agendas. However, several community members did raise the perceived cultural insensitivity and inappropriate behavior of national staff as an issue generating tensions and contributing to anti-aid agency sentiments.¹¹⁵

Local Politics

Most Pakistani interviewees believed that it was political factors rather than the cultural insensitivity of aid workers that was the underlying cause of most security threats and incidents. Several interviewees observed that international aid agencies “don’t understand local government structures and politics.” They argued that tensions were mounting because local political and religious elites were “being bypassed and not getting a piece of the action” and that the local “power structure is beginning to feel threatened and is fighting back.”

The ERRA bureaucracy as well as aid agencies both bypassed local political and civil administrations, and delivered aid directly to local communities. According to a fieldworker of a Pakistani NGO, “We all bypassed local government which further damaged the reputation of local government officials.” Another INGO manager with a long history of working in Pakistan referred to a “battle between the civilian bureaucracy and the army” as a result of “ERRA establishing a parallel administration that is recentralizing power and undermining devolution in NWFP.” Some interviewees highlighted that this is particularly important in the context of electoral politics: “I suspect we will see more security problems as we are undermining the authority of *mullahs* and *nazims*¹¹⁶ in an election year.” One interviewee also blamed elections for some of the problems in Bagh district of PaK where there were some of the most serious anti-aid agency sentiment: “The problems have been politically motivated by those who lost elections. They’ve used issues like Western values, women shouldn’t work, etc..., to put pressure on the government.”

In interviews for this study local District and Union Council officials were very angry about being bypassed. One member of a focus group discussion with Union Council officials in Mansehra district complained: “There is no role for local government and provincial government. ERRA makes policies without talking to local people. They should involve the local representatives of the people.” Another Union Council member

¹¹⁵ As noted earlier in this report, this was largely due to national staff members, and females in particular, being expected to act in accordance with “local” cultural norms and practices, whereas international staff were judged by a different standard and were more readily forgiven for acting according to “foreign” cultural norms.

¹¹⁶ *Nazims* are the heads of local government councils that are elected at the district and sub-district levels in Pakistan.

complained about being politically undermined by being bypassed: “People come to us to solve their problems, but the government and NGOs don’t provide us with any assistance to address the people’s problems.” Another group complained: “No one has talked to us about our needs. We only hear through the newspapers. Policies are made behind closed doors in Islamabad.”

It is important to note, however, that most focus group participants as well as government and aid agency officials strongly supported bypassing local officials. There was a widespread perception that many local officials were corrupt, and that if earthquake assistance was channeled through them their primary consideration would be to assist themselves, their families or their voters. One NGO worker cautioned, “*Nazims* are very difficult to work with. They always say, ‘start with my house.’” Another complained, “*Nazims* support their own supporters. One Union Council *Nazim* stopped a distribution and wanted his supporters added to the list.”

In addition to the local politicians and civil administration, several interviewees pointed out that religious elites were also being bypassed, and were feeling threatened by the growing popularity of NGOs who they had previously criticized vociferously. One government official in PaK noted that in Bagh some *mullahs* had been creating some of the problems simply “to have their presence felt.” A Pakistani aid worker noted: “You need to give the *mullahs* their share, a stake, simple recognition. Recognition and respect are very important – sixty percent of the problem is gone by addressing this issue.”

Another political explanation that some interviewees gave for the increase in security incidents, especially in PaK, was that Pakistani security agencies were behind them. Due to the dispute with India over Kashmir, PaK has always been a sensitive region and access to it by foreigners very restricted. Following the earthquake many observers were surprised by the Pakistani military’s willingness to quickly open it up to foreigners. Some interviewees speculated that with the relief phase over some of the intelligence agencies in particular would like to increase travel restrictions, and see a reduction in the number of foreigners working in PaK.¹¹⁷ According to one UN official:

There is still unfinished business in AJK and NWFP. The GoP has generously allowed the international community to come in and help provide relief to save people, but not to do long-term development. Now that the relief phase is over unfinished business will rise to the top of the agenda.

The Politics of Jobs

Probably the single most important political issue generating anti-aid agency sentiments was employment politics. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake aid agencies already operational in Pakistan redeployed staff from programs elsewhere to earthquake-affected areas. New and old agencies alike rapidly hired large numbers of Pakistani staff to deploy to the earthquake areas. English skills and prior experience

¹¹⁷ Some interpreted the reintroduction in March 2007 of the requirement for “No Objection Certificates” (NOCs) by foreigners traveling to PaK as one example of a desire of the military and intelligence agencies to start restricting the access of foreigners in PaK. According to one UN official, “The NOC issue shows that security is more important than tourism. You can’t have tourism with the NOC policy. It’s an issue of cause and effect – the priorities are clear.”

in a relief or development organization were often the main selection criteria, rather than local knowledge. In the earthquake-affected areas few individuals, especially women, possessed these skills as few aid agencies were operating in these areas prior to the earthquake. Furthermore, many of the potential recruits from these areas were coping with the trauma and survival needs of their families in the aftermath of the earthquake, rather than looking for job opportunities. The end result was that most aid agencies were staffed with large numbers of outsiders – both national and international – and had few local staff.

This was not a major problem during the rescue and relief phases when everyone was focusing on immediate survival needs. Once the attention shifted to reconstruction and rebuilding livelihoods, however, the high percentages of non-local staff in aid agencies, and the perceived lack of job opportunities for locals, became an increasingly potent cause of resentment and political unrest. This was especially true in PaK, where there was considerable resentment at the number of Pakistanis, particularly Pashtun from the NWFP, who were brought in to work in aid agencies. The World Food Programme (WFP), for example, was nicknamed “NWFP” as so many of their staff were Pashtuns from the Northwest Frontier Province. One Minister in the PaK government noted that “unemployment is the single biggest issue – number one.... Jobs are critical for the people of AJK. Most able-bodied men in AJK fell out of the labor force to rescue family. Sixty percent of working men are now out of a job....” In the meeting between senior government officials and NGOs to discuss the deteriorating security situation in Bagh district, one of the main points identified in the meeting highlights was the recommendation to NGOs “to recruit/prefer local people as employees.”¹¹⁸

Resentment over who was or was not hired was undoubtedly an important contributing factor to the increase in anti-aid agency sentiment, security threats, and security incidents during the reconstruction phase. According to an official from an agency where employees had received death threats, “threat letters have always come at times of recruitment.” According to another report, all the aid agency drivers beaten up in Bagh district of PaK, for example, have been Pashtuns. It may also not be coincidental that some of the other security incidents came at a time when agencies were sharply downsizing staff numbers during the transition from large-scale relief programs to smaller reconstruction program. According to one NGO field manager who was interviewed regarding a security incident that injured one of his staff: “We recruited a lot of staff in the beginning – about 400. We have had to then do lots of cutting which was very painful.”

While aid agencies did discuss personnel issues such as poaching of staff and salary harmonization, most were slow to recognize the political importance of jobs, and the local-versus-outsider tensions that were being generated by their employment practices. As one journalist pointed out, “It’s all about jobs. NGOs never thought about this. They brought in their own workforce. This was not a problem in the first few weeks, but then it turned into a big issue.” After the initial rescue and relief phase it is likely that many aid agencies were valued more in terms of the jobs they provided than for the reconstruction work they were doing. As one INGO manager observed, “People think the major benefit of your presence is the jobs you provide.” The importance of the employment issue, and its perceived political and security ramifications, is

¹¹⁸ “Recent Bagh Situation,” Email circulated by National Humanitarian Affairs Officer, UN Office of the Resident Coordinator, Islamabad, May 12, 2007.

illustrated by one UN official's remark that "intelligence agencies often visit us to ask how many local staff we have versus outsiders."

An IOM advertisement in a local paper for some qualified engineers provides a good example of the political sensitivities of the employment issue, and the political uses and abuses of these sensitivities. At the same time that IOM had advertised for engineers, they also hired three female staff with minimal academic qualifications to be social mobilizers. Shortly thereafter IOM was wrongly accused of hiring unqualified young women as engineers, and the following report appeared in a local newspaper under the headline, "NGOs recruiting against merit, Intelligence agencies have started investigation:"

*NGOs are recruiting against merit and in this regard Intelligence agencies have started investigations against IOM and UN-HABITAT. Our correspondent reported that these two agencies have bulldozed the merit and have recruited under metric [grade 10 school certificate] females as engineers while ignoring male MSc engineers. Upon severe protests by the youth; intelligence agencies have started collecting details of the personnel involved in the hiring process. Protestors demanded from the government to ensure that NGOs follow the principles for transparent hiring or else their offices would be surrounded.*¹¹⁹

Even when aid agencies did recognize the political importance of jobs they still faced tricky organizational and political dilemmas of whether to prioritize hiring according to merit, or hiring locals. According to one UN official:

UN-HABITAT and IOM are both being criticized for not hiring according to merit, but we're also being criticized for hiring outsiders. In Kashmir you can't win. If we hire from the area that creates problems, and if we don't it creates problems.

Hiring locally creates its own set of problems as many areas are divided into feuding factions riven by sectarian, ethnic, clan, and political divisions. Hiring a local affiliated with one factional group invariably generates tension with rivals. As one experienced Pakistani aid worker observed: "You need to give everyone a share in employment. If you hire someone related to the *Nazim* [local political leader], then hire someone related to the *Khateeb* [local religious leader]." Another organizational dilemma faced by many aid agencies was that while they were being advised by the government to hire more locals, they also had to contend with frequent demands by government officials, including senior officials in ERRA's Islamabad office, to hire their friends and relatives.

Effectiveness of Security Policies

Perceptions varied considerably amongst aid agency staff regarding the appropriateness and effectiveness of their respective security policies and procedures in the earthquake response. Some senior managers sitting in Islamabad felt that the security regime was "spot on" and that "the proof is in what happened – very little – it worked." Given the perception of relatively high threat levels, and the increasing emphasis and investments by most international aid agencies in strengthening security policies and procedures, they felt

¹¹⁹ Daily Khabrain (Muzaffarabad Edition), March 23, 2007.

that an appropriate balance was maintained between prioritizing staff security and maintaining sufficient flexibility to respond effectively to the large-scale humanitarian disaster.

Several other interviewees, especially program staff based in the field, were less positive in their assessments. They expressed particular frustration at the disconnect that they believed existed between perceptions of security in the field, and aid agency security officers and senior managers based in Islamabad and international headquarters. Many complained about what they believed were inappropriately strict security policies based on the initial assessment that Pakistan was very dangerous due to the presence of Islamic militant groups and terrorist organizations. One international aid agency worker felt that security officers were fixated on the threat of terrorist attacks when “landslides are a much bigger threat than al-Qaeda.”

Concerns were also expressed that the security policies, procedures and personnel that most international aid agencies have invested heavily in during the past few years have primarily been in response to conflict situations. There was a perception that these were often not appropriate or adapted sufficiently for a natural disaster response like the Pakistan earthquake, and a few individuals expressed concern that their inappropriateness and inflexibility could be costing lives. An INGO fieldworker complained about “too restrictive” security policies such as not being able to drive after dark, which in her opinion had more of a negative impact on efficiency and effectiveness than a positive impact on improved security. An INGO director described the tensions between security personnel and policies and program staff:

He [the security officer] wanted convoys to have lead vehicles and follow vehicles, no night driving, follow the book, etc.... I didn't feel it was appropriate – there was too much momentum to slow things down with security policies. We did take risks – not all consciously – especially from a safety perspective. It's very hard to institute basic safety measures in this context. We had big fights over night driving. Security people have a trump card even for senior management. I overruled some of it but at the field level program people couldn't overrule security people. This created major tensions.

Field staff of operational UN agencies expressed the most frustration with security policies, in particular what they felt were unnecessarily restrictive UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) guidelines. According to one UN official, “UN security protocols are not designed for emergency response – we always violate them.” Others complained that “the top priority of security people is to cover their backsides,” and to “always err on the side of caution” when some humanitarian contexts warrant greater risk-taking to save lives.

The research findings of this study suggest that perhaps the most serious problem undermining the effectiveness of security policies and procedures, especially during the reconstruction phase, was the limited understanding of many aid agencies of local politics and power dynamics, especially the political economy of aid. Given that the root causes of most of the security threats in the earthquake areas seemed to be political in nature, there was surprisingly little investment in political analysis by aid agencies. Several aid workers complained that rather than understanding and mitigating the causes of insecurity there was a tendency, especially among security officers, to treat security as a technical issue by focusing on compliance with the UN's Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS).

These concerns are clearly articulated in Box 12, which provides an analysis by an international aid worker with extensive experience in Pakistan of the complex set of factors that contributed to the growing number of security incidents in PaK. It highlights the limited capacity of most aid agencies to understand and engage with local political dynamics, to actively maintain channels of communication with all key communities and political actors, and the security implications of this lack of understanding and engagement. While there were remarkably few serious security incidents during the rescue and relief phases of the earthquake response, the increasing number of incidents directed at aid agencies during the reconstruction phase suggests that aid agencies need to prioritize investing more in understanding and mitigating their underlying political causes.

Box 12: Causes of Insecurity in Kashmir

[M]uch of it [the increase in security incidents] has to do with hiring. Different clans in Kashmir trying to get the monopoly of the job market, get their people in, get the benefits of projects to target only their area. In addition to that there are genuine conservatives in Kashmir who do not like women working and have objections to outsiders misbehaving.... On top of that you have various political agendas: elections, people wanting jobs and political power, Kashmir for Kashmiris, ethnic tensions between Pashtuns (lots of migrant labour and drivers)[and Kashmiris], mullah's being influenced by the general wave of anti-western sentiment. In all the incidents of drivers getting beaten up the drivers were Pashtun.

For me what is really worrying is not the sentiments that the locals and mullahs express from time to time in Bagh but the reaction of the international community. There seems to be particularly in the UN an utter lack of will and understanding that there needs to be dialogue between the international community/NGOs and mullahs and community. I look back at working in Afghanistan pre-9/11 during the Taliban government and the constant efforts that were made to keep the channels of communication open with the Taliban to allow for space to operate effectively without causing offense and problems.

UNDSS among others seems to have forgotten that security is largely about relationships not gadgets, higher walls, and bunkers. There is no negotiation taking place or explaining why we as the humanitarian community are doing what we are doing or even informing people that we are there to serve all factions/clans and not just a few. I find that very few individuals (this goes for UN and NGOs) are at all aware and interested in the politics of what is going on and who is who.... In places like this it would be far more useful to have political officers employed then police men and ex-army. Or at least a combination!

Source: Personal email communication with aid worker, May 11, 2007.

Security Role of the Pakistan Army

There was a widespread perception among interviewees for this study that the Pakistan Army played the central role in effectively providing security following the earthquake. The army's positive role in creating a secure environment for aid workers and aid beneficiaries was noticeable in the immediate aftermath of the

earthquake when looting of aid convoys began to take place in some areas. An INGO director described the situation as follows:

We faced security issues from day two. In Mansehra we wanted to divide our convoy of relief supplies – 50 percent to Balakot and 50 percent to Mansehra. On the Battagram road people were stoning vehicles and not letting them through, and there were reports of looting. Security became a big issue in the early distributions. We quickly decided not to distribute unless the military was present... The military maintained order.

Several focus group members described how looting stopped as soon as the army appeared on the scene, and contrasted the effective role of the military with the ineffective role of the police. In the words of a Shinkiari Union Council member: “One soldier could stop a crowd of 1000 looters, but 1000 police couldn’t stop even one person.” The army also played an important role in securing helipads and ensuring crowd control when helicopters were landing and unloading relief supplies.¹²⁰ The presence of troops, combined with the extensive network of intelligence agencies reporting on and dealing with potential security problems, undoubtedly played an important role in helping to create a secure environment in which aid agencies could operate.

Following the earthquake the Pakistan government quickly determined that it needed as much international assistance as possible to respond effectively. It realized that any serious security incidents would have had a very negative impact on the capacity of the international community to deliver humanitarian assistance, not to mention further damaging Pakistan’s international image. According to one senior aid official, “The Pakistan government was very keen that nothing happens to foreigners – they were very concerned about their image.” They reportedly “read the riot act to Islamic groups,” especially the Kashmiri militant groups with whom they had close ties.

The army was also proactive in advising aid agencies how to behave to avoid security incidents. According to one INGO director, the military general heading the FRC told them that “the army could provide security if aid agencies had liquor free offices and residences, and respected female dress codes.” On a few occasions when anti-aid agency sentiments were expressed, senior government officials, including General Nadeem of ERRA, came in person to talk to communities to make clear that local communities had to support and protect the aid agencies as the government alone did not have the resources to provide relief and reconstruction assistance if they left.

The main controversy regarding the army’s security role during the rescue/relief phase was its offer of armed escorts in the NWFP during the period of heightened tensions due to the Danish cartoon controversy. Many aid agencies accepted the offer, some because they did not want to confront the army, others because they were not familiar with humanitarian principles, and still others because they felt that being protected by a military force that was not in this case a belligerent in a conflict situation was not a violation of humanitarian principles. However, a few primarily European NGOs rejected the offer as being contrary to

¹²⁰ In one tragic incident a Pakistani NGO worker was killed by a helicopter rotor as a result of jostling by a crowd at a helipad.

humanitarian principles. According to the director of one of these agencies: “We should have had a stronger international position. The UN accepted and INGOs funded by USAID also accepted, which weakened the position of others.” For those who rejected military escorts a compromise was reportedly agreed upon with the army. According to General Farooq, who at that time was heading the FRC, “I offered escorts but five NGOs said we’ll quit. I told them that if something happened to them it will give us a bad name. Do you mind if the escorts are at a distance not visible to you?”

While the Pakistan Army clearly played an important role in enhancing the security of earthquake victims and aid workers during the rescue and relief phase, there were concerns that the army’s role could contribute to increasing insecurity during the reconstruction phase. One concern was that anti-military sentiment would be fueled in the earthquake zone by frustrations with unpopular housing policies for which the army was perceived to be responsible. More importantly, however, was the concern that the escalating conflict between the Pakistan Army and Islamic militant groups, which has resulted in a growing number of suicide attacks against military targets in Pakistan, could spread into the earthquake zone. If the army is increasingly perceived to be a belligerent in a conflict with militant groups, their central role in earthquake reconstruction efforts and close working relationship with aid agencies could end up endangering both.¹²¹

¹²¹ This is one of the most disturbing aspects of the October 2007 simultaneous attacks against both NGO and army targets in the Battagram district of NWFP.

7. Conclusion

This case study has examined the perceptions of a wide range of aid recipients and providers regarding the humanitarian response to the devastating earthquake that struck northern Pakistan and the disputed territory of Kashmir in October 2005. The objective of the study has been to learn from these perceptions in order to better understand, and more effectively address, some of the key challenges currently facing humanitarian action.

The Pakistan earthquake response illustrates both permanence and significant change in the functioning of the humanitarian enterprise. On the positive side, the evidence points to the continuing relevance and acceptance of some fundamental humanitarian principles. Universality is alive and well, especially when it comes to immediate life-saving activities. The relationship between “outsiders” and “insiders” was also positive, though perceptions of aid agencies and the cultural sensitivity of aid workers, as in all the HA2015 case studies, became more problematic after the immediate relief phase was over. When assessing “insider-outsider” relationships or issues of cultural sensitivity simplistic assumptions need to be avoided – at times Pakistani organizations and national staff from outside the affected area were perceived to be more “foreign” and culturally insensitive than international agencies and their staff. On the negative side, the earthquake response provided a stark reminder, particularly over issues of human rights, that “universal principles” are not all universally accepted. An unfortunate consequence was that women’s rights and protection issues were perceived by many to be the “weakest link” in the earthquake response.

Few aid providers or recipients perceived the humanitarian response to the earthquake to have been motivated by WoT considerations. Nevertheless, this case study supports the finding of other HA2015 studies that strategic WoT considerations are contributing to greater instrumentalization of humanitarian aid – although in this case it worked to the benefit of those in need of humanitarian assistance. Pakistan’s status as a strategic ally and front-line state in the WoT clearly contributed to the scale of the international response to the earthquake. The US, in particular, made a very conscious effort to use the earthquake response to “win hearts and minds” and reward an important ally. While in this case Pakistani earthquake survivors (and many aid agencies) were beneficiaries of the instrumentalization of aid, it could well prove fatal for victims of humanitarian crises in countries that are not perceived to be of similar strategic importance.

Ironically, the US’s desire not to alienate a WoT ally or to be seen to be impeding relief efforts is likely to have contributed to its relatively permissive “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy regarding the relief operations of Islamist militant groups on the US list of terrorist organizations (who presumably were also using the earthquake response as an opportunity to “win hearts and minds”). Oddly enough, strategic WoT considerations may therefore have helped preserve neutral humanitarian space for US military forces to work alongside militants belonging to banned terrorist organizations in the earthquake response.

Most of the HA2015 case studies, including this one, have shown that humanitarians are not always adept at navigating political shoals, despite political and strategic interests – whether international, national or local – never being far below the surface. In the earthquake context this poor political analysis was apparent in a number of areas, including the limited understanding by many international staff of the role of the army in Pakistani society, the structure and role of local government which was largely bypassed, the

political economy of aid, and the politics of Kashmir. Among other things, this limited understanding of the political context contributed to a fundamental misreading by many agencies of the nature of security threats. While many agencies have invested considerable resources to enhance the security of their staff and assets, there is still a need for more and better analysis of local contexts and of the place that humanitarians, wittingly or not, occupy in the political landscape.

Finally, perhaps more than anything else the Pakistan earthquake relief effort vividly demonstrated the growing importance of military forces in disaster responses. This is a trend that is likely to be accelerated, in part due to the very positive perception of the role of the Pakistan Army and international military forces in the earthquake response. (Already the UN has reportedly recommended that the Pakistan military form a standby team to respond in other disasters). The central role of the Pakistan Army in leading the very successful relief effort illustrates the potential benefits of a coherent and closely integrated civil-military response in a natural disaster context. This finding differs from the other HA2015 case studies, which highlighted the tendency of integrated approaches in contexts of armed conflict to consistently allow humanitarian concerns to be trumped by political and military concerns. An obvious lesson to be drawn is that integrated approaches are most likely to be effective from a humanitarian standpoint when, as is more likely in a natural disaster context, humanitarian objectives remain primary and political and security objectives secondary.

Another important lesson from the Pakistan study (as well as the Afghanistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka studies) was that the benefits of coherence seem to obey a law of diminishing returns. As the less contentious life-saving humanitarian phase transitions into a more politicized reconstruction and recovery phase, the role of military forces is likely to become more politicized and disputed. It is therefore important for military actors to not only develop their capacity to respond to disasters, but also to develop their capacity to exit from disaster responses and hand over responsibility to civilian authorities – a notable weakness of the Pakistan Army. While it seems inevitable that the role of military forces in humanitarian action will grow, and despite their very positively perceived role in the earthquake response, it is nevertheless important to remember that the deployment of military forces in the relief effort – whether Pakistani, US or NATO forces – were all heavily influenced by strategic considerations. If this type of involvement is a harbinger of things to come, humanitarian actors may be facing a steep learning curve in terms of dealing with, and sometimes insulating themselves from, militarized relief in the years to come.

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Appendix A: Acronyms

AJK	Azad Jammu and Kashmir
DART	Disaster Assistance Response Team
DFID	UK Department for International Development
ERRA	Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority
ERP	Earthquake Recovery Plan
FRC	Federal Relief Commission
GoP	Government of Pakistan
HIC	Humanitarian Information Center
HRR	Humanitarian Response Review
IaK	Indian-administered Kashmir
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDP	Internally displaced person
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LoC	Line of Control
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
OFAC	Office of Foreign Assets Control
OFDA	Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance
PaK	Pakistan-Administered Kashmir
SOG	Strategic Oversight Group
UNDAC	UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
WoT	War on Terror

Appendix B: List of Interviews

Zaffar Abbas, Resident Editor, Dawn Group of Newspapers

Adan Adar, Program Director, Save the Children (US)

Jonathan Addleton, USAID Mission Director

Lt. Gen. Nadeem Ahmed, Deputy Chairman, ERRA

Kamran Akbar, Team Leader, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) Rehabilitation & Reconstruction Unit

Jawad Ali, Livelihoods Program Manager, Mercy Corps

Shamim Ali (Shama Malik), AJK Minister for Social Welfare & Women's Development.

Sardar Nusrat Aziz, Administrator, District Council Muzaffarabad

Raja Baber, Civil Society Activist, Muzaffarabad

Leith Baker, Return & Reintegration Advisor, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

Mustafa Elkanzi, Country Director, International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Muhammad Farid, Program Manager, District Reconstruction Unit, Battagram

Yassine Gaba, Head of Office, European Commission Humanitarian Aid (ECHO)

Syed Nazir-ul-Hassan Gilani, AJK Secretary, Religious Affairs, Auqaf, Zakat & Ushar, Hajj, Social Welfare, TQT Trust, Council of Islamic Ideology and Women Development.

Prof. Taqdees Gillani, English Department, AJK University and Chairperson, HOPE

Earl James Goodyear, Senior Recovery Programme Advisor, UNDP

Maulana Abdul Hayee, Mufti, Kuza Banda, Battagram

Faiza Janmohamed, Country Director, Mercy Corps

Manzoor Hussain, Infrastructure and WatSan Program Manager, Mercy Corps

Michael Jones, Representative, World Food Programme (WFP)

Marilee Kane, Deputy Director, Earthquake Reconstruction Program, USAID

Brian Kelly, Head of Earthquake Programs and Operations, International Organization for Migration

Abdul Majid Khan, Member, AJK Legislative Assembly, Muzaffarabad

Major General Farooq Ahmed Khan, Chairman NDMA & PMIC

Raja Mohammad Farooq Haidar Khan, Member of Legislative Assembly, AJK, Senior VP of Ruling Party

Jehansher, Mansehra Coordinator for Community Mobilization, IRC

Lt. Col. Raja Mohammad, AJK Minister, Works, Development

Nasim Khan, Authorities, Reconstruction & Rehabilitation

Samina Khan, Chief Executive, Sungi Development Foundation

Shaheen Rafi Khan, Research Fellow, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)

Kilian Kleinschmidt, Assistant Representative, UNHCR

Andrew MacLeod, UN/ERRA, Relief to Recovery Transition Advisor

Bob MacLeod, Director, Earthquake Reconstruction Program, USAID

Sohail Mahboob, Area Manager AJK, Islamic Relief

Sardar Arshad Mahmood, Administrator, Municipal Corporation Muzaffarabad

Pascal Mauchle, Head of Delegation, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Ghulam Nabi, Mansehra Programme Manager, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)

Farrukh Marvin Parvez, Regional Representative, Church World Service (CWS)

Anna Pont, Programme Coordinator, UN HABITAT

Ali Shahrukh Pracha, Consultant, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)

Colin Rasmussen, Reconstruction Program Specialist, USAID

Tom Roth, Country Manager, Médecins Sans Frontières / Xxx Zonder Grensen (MSF) Netherlands

Momina Sanam, PPAF Regional Coordinator, NWFP

John Sampson, Head of Office, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Muzaffarabad

Suzanne Smith Saulniers, Program Director, Recovery and Rehabilitation, IRC

Shamshad, Committee Chairperson, Camp Management Office, Turi IDP Camp, Muzaffarabad

James Shepherd-Barron, Senior Returns Taskforce Advisor, IOM

Kate Simpson, Advocacy, Media & Communications Team Leader, Oxfam

Farhana Faruqi Stocker, Country Representative, Oxfam

Malick Shahbaz Ahmad Tahir, Specialist Research and Documentation, Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO)

Azmat Ulla, Head of Delegation, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

Cynthia Veliko, UN Human Rights Advisor

Wajahat, Islamic Relief, Muzaffarabad

Qazi Wasi-ur-Rehman, Khateeb Markezi Jamia Masjid, Shinkhari, Mansehra District

Ann Wilkens, Ambassador of Sweden

Zafar Zeeshan, Head of Programmes, Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO)

Appendix C: Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussions, Mansehra District, NWFP				
FG Participants	#	Gender	Location	Date
Afghan refugees	6	Male	Union Council #4, Basyal Banda	3/19/07
Community members	7	Male	Karkalla	3/19/07
Members of extended family	5	Female	Sadiqabad	3/19/07
Educated professionals	6	Male	Shinkiari	3/20/07
Community members	11	Female	Shinkiari	3/20/07
Community members	6	Female	Shinkiari	3/20/07
IDPs from Naran	5	Male	Shinkiari	3/20/07
Nazim/Union Council members	6	Male	Shinkiari	3/21/07
Local villagers & IDPs	10	Male	Nara Deri, Balakot	3/21/07
Local villagers & IDPs	4	Female	Nara Deri, Balakot	3/21/07
IDP camp elders	5	Male	Jabba IDP Camp	3/21/07
Community members	19	Male	Dharial Fateh Mung	3/25/07
IDPs	9	Female	Sirran IDP Camp, Dharial, Shinkiari	3/25/07
Focus Group Discussions, Battagram District, NWFP				
FG Participants	#	Gender	Location	Date
Community members	7	Male	Battagram	3/23/07
Community members	5	Male	Qilla	3/23/07
Community members	4	Male	Battamori	3/23/08
Community	23	Male	Allai	3/24/07

members				
Community members	10	Male	Pamyal Sharif	3/24/07
Community members	13	Male	Daood Village, Alerpori	3/24/07
Community members	9	Male	Jasool Village	3/25/07
Focus Group Discussions, Muzaffarabad District, PaK				
FG Participants	#	Gender	Location	Date
Community members	6	Male	Nayee Moppi	3/26/07
IDPs	10	Female	Turi Camp, Muzaffarabad	3/27/07
Community members	9	Female	Khatta Chakdan	3/27/07
IDPs	12	M&F	Old University IDP Camp	3/27/07
Community members	11	M&F	Phatika, Mirpura, Neelum Valley	3/27/07
Community members	5	Male	Khondi Peran	3/28/07
Landless IDPs	6	Male	Garhi Dopatta	3/28/07
Pakistani NGO staff	15	M&F	Muzaffarabad City	3/28/07
IDPs	8	M&F	Malikpura IDP Camp	3/29/07
Community members	10	Male	Chinyati, Tehsil Deerkot	3/30/07
TOTAL = 30 FGs	262			