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## **Indian Military Diplomacy: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief**

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### **Introduction**

Humanitarian assistance and Disaster relief have emerged as important missions for major militaries around the world after the Cold War. The missions that were once largely left to such organisations as the International Red Cross have now become an important part of the security agenda of nations with significant military capabilities. The absence of great power rivalry and conflict after the collapse of the Soviet Union compelled a reevaluation of the objectives of military force after the Cold War. Following a brief moment of relative

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tranquillity, the focus of the US and Western armed forces turned towards fighting two land wars in the Middle East and South Asia. The war in Iraq was triggered by concerns about Baghdad's clandestine programme to build weapons of mass destruction. The foray into Afghanistan was compelled by the attacks on Washington and New York on September 11, 2001 by Al-Qaeda from its sanctuary in the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. While the Iraq war was framed in terms of countering the spread of weapons of mass destruction, the Afghan occupation was defined as the Great War on Terror.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism were identified in the post-Cold War world as high national security priorities which would require military responses from nation-states. Besides these two objectives, a range of non-traditional security threats emerged as new priorities for the great powers. These included climate change, trans-national crime, civil wars and humanitarian crises within the developing world, many parts of which were witnessing the collapse of governing structures. Weak and failing states and intra-state conflicts were seen as the international security threats more pressing than traditional inter-state wars. Nation-building and democracy promotion were among the new objectives that gained traction across the political divide within the West. The record of major-power and international military responses and their effectiveness in dealing with non-traditional security threats is under some critical scrutiny across the world.<sup>2</sup>

After the uneven results from US military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, there are questions about the wisdom and efficacy of externally driven 'nation-building' in the developing world. Popular support in the West for such interventions, humanitarian or otherwise, has significantly declined in the second decade of the twenty-first century. If unilateral use of force is seen as ineffective in the wake of American occupation of Iraq, collective multilateral interventions in pursuit of humanitarian objectives have not all turned out to be successful. If there is considerable disenchantment among the supporters of such humanitarian interventions, the political criticism of these operations has become more strident. Meanwhile amidst renewed great power rivalries — between the West and Russia in Eurasia and the United States and China and Japan and China in East Asia — there is renewed reflection of the prospects for military conflict among major powers.

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<sup>2</sup> For a broad sense of the discussion, see Jolyon Howorth, "Humanitarian intervention and post-conflict reconstruction in the post-Cold War era: a provisional balance sheet", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2013, pp. 288-309; Jan Selby, "The Myth of Liberal Peace-building", *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2013, pp. 57-86.

Two categories of major military missions that have emerged in the post-Cold War world, however, are likely to endure even amidst a renewed great power confrontation—one is humanitarian assistance and the other is disaster relief. Although there is growing ennui in the West for expensive nation-building operations, there is strong support for the idea of humanitarian assistance to people in need around the world. Unlike operations aimed at ending civil wars and propping up nation-states, military operations in responses to humanitarian emergencies are likely to be of relatively short duration. Natural and man-made disasters evoke huge sentiments of solidarity and support for military operations within capable states. Collaboration on HA/DR operations is widely seen as a useful tool in promoting confidence-building among rival powers and in strengthening existing military alliances. They are also seen as valuable instruments to build regional and multilateral cooperation. The major military powers are likely to build on their expansive experience over the last two decades in providing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief in the coming years.

The interest in HA/DR operations are no longer limited to the advanced nations. Militaries in emerging powers like China and India are paying growing attention to HA/DR operations. Beijing and Delhi are eager to improve their national capabilities to respond to emergency situations at home and are ready to contribute to regional and multilateral efforts on HA/DR. In India, HA/DR has slowly gained traction as a potential military activity beyond the national borders. This paper begins with a brief review of India's changing structure of disaster management at home. It then moves on to analyse the evolution of Indian attitude towards humanitarian operations abroad. The paper then focuses on India's approach to collaboration on HA/DR with major powers and within various regional initiatives. The concluding sections of the paper review some of the domestic constraints on and imperatives for developing an effective HA/DR policy beyond India's borders.

## **Disaster Management at Home**

After a series of severe natural calamities over the last decade and a half, India has sought to strengthen its disaster management structures at home. The Disaster Management Act was approved by the Indian Parliament in December 2005. It was followed by the Disaster

Management Policy outlined by the central government in 2009.<sup>3</sup> Together they marked a shift from the past emphasis on relief and rehabilitation to a “holistic, multi-dimensional, and multi-disciplinary approach. It involves the full range of disaster management activities: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, relief, and rehabilitation”. Given the complex political structure of a large country, the institutional structure set up consists of a National Disaster Management Authority at the Centre chaired by the Prime Minister, State Disaster Management Authorities at the provincial level, and District Disaster Management Authorities at the local level. The consolidation of this structure, however, has been uneven. Not all states have moved towards establishing effective mechanisms at the provincial and local levels.

The underlying philosophy of the new disaster management policy has been that the civilian authorities must be the main responders. With this in view, a National Disaster Response Force is being raised under the Ministry of Home Affairs. This has left open some ambiguities about the role of the armed forces.<sup>4</sup> They have not been given the responsibility for disaster management. Yet in practice, the armed forces have been called in at the very beginning of a crisis and are usually the last ones to leave. The armed forces are very much part of the apex structure of national disaster management. The chief of the Integrated Defence Staff, a three-star general and the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (the senior most four-star general) are part of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the NDMA. The forces are also expected to play role in training the civilian personnel in disaster management as well deploying the existing resources of the services at relatively short notice. Some in the armed forces are concerned that continued reliance on the armed forces will reduce the prospects for the development of civilian capabilities at the national and local levels and reduce the core competence of the armed forces—war fighting. The counter-view is that the armed forces must adopt HA/DR as one of their important missions, integrate it into their planning, review and consolidate their experience in what until now have been ad hoc responses, and leverage the experience and capabilities in the international arena.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive study of disaster management in India before the new act of 2005, see Prakash Singh, William W. Mendel and Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., *Disaster Response in India* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2000); for a full account of the current structures and policy, see Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, *Disaster Management in India* (New Delhi, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion, see Col. O.S. Dagur, “Armed Forces in Disaster Management”, *Maneckshaw Papers*, No. 4 (New Delhi: Centre for Land Warfare Studies, 2008)

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion, see Shivananda H. and P.K. Gautam, “Reassessing India’s Disaster Management Preparedness and the Role of Armed Forces”, *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January 2012, pp. 108-109.

## Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Abroad

Although humanitarian operations have only recently acquired international salience, India is not unfamiliar with the issues involved. In fact the Partition of the Subcontinent, which coincided with independence, saw a massive movement of people across the new borders in the Punjab and Bengal. Managing these flows was among the first challenges that confronted independent India. Later, in 1959, Chinese communist crushing of the Tibetan rebellion saw the flow of Tibetan refugees led by their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. More than half a century later, nearly 150,000 Tibetans stay in India. In 1970-71, as the Pakistan army cracked down on popular protests in East Bengal, India had to host nearly 10 million refugees.

Ad hoc responses to humanitarian crises now appear to slowly yield place to a more organised Indian policy. Humanitarian assistance is defined as support "designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies". It is different from other kinds of assistance that nation-states provide and is "intended to be governed by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence". It is of short-term duration and covers a range of activities, from the delivery of goods and services of immediate need, and participation in relief coordination, to rehabilitation and reconstruction. Delhi's growing interest in contributions towards humanitarian assistance over the last decade is traced by analysts to India's enduring spiritual values that "espouse solidarity with suffering and giving without expectations in return". "India conceives humanitarian assistance as 'extending sympathy' to the disaster-affected or as 'a goodwill gesture. Because of India's deep cultural tradition of giving, the population generally endorses relief efforts by the government".<sup>6</sup>

The tradition of giving has revived in part by the significant expansion of the Indian economy, the availability of greater financial resources and a sense of growing regional and international responsibilities. These sensibilities saw India respond to humanitarian crises across the world, including Hurricane Katrina in the United States (2005) and the Fukushima disaster in Japan (2011). Although the assistance offered by India was insignificant, it underlined a strong sense of international citizenship. India has also begun to support international organisations engaged in humanitarian relief. The World Food Programme which was a net provider of food assistance to India until the early 2000s acknowledged India

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<sup>6</sup> Claudia Meier and C.S.R. Murthy, "India's Growing Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance", GPPI Research Paper, No. 13 (Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute, 2011), p. 7.

as its 15th largest donor in 2006.<sup>7</sup> As India became one of the world's largest economies, it now has the means to contribute to international assistance more systematically and significantly. India's expanding humanitarian assistance is part of a broader trend. India, over the last decade, has emerged as one of the leading non-Western donor of international assistance. Even as India continues to receive foreign aid, it set aside in 2013-14 nearly US\$ 1.3 billion for foreign assistance. This marked a four-fold increase from 2003-04.<sup>8</sup> Since the early years of its independence, India did give aid to its smaller neighbours in the Subcontinent. Today the scale and geographic scope of its aid have steadily increased.<sup>9</sup> India's total humanitarian assistance during 2001-10 has been estimated at around US\$ 315 million. The bulk of this, US\$ 240 million, has gone to India's neighbours in South Asia. India has shown a strong preference to share its expertise in disaster management with other developing countries, for example with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Guyana.<sup>10</sup>

India's approach to HA/DR is driven by a set of principles derived from the core values of its foreign policy. One of these is the emphasis on the centrality of territorial sovereignty and principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states. India insists that HA/DR assistance must be provided only with the consent of the country affected and in principle on the basis of a formal request from the state authorities. It is wary of non-governmental organisations gaining access to the affected zones and provides assistance directly to the governments. India underlines the importance of the principle that HA/DR assistance must be "demand driven". The western governments argue that the international community must respond to the "demands" of the people in the affected zone. India has often viewed with some concern that the Western approaches are often dictated by strategic considerations, for example during Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar during 2008. India is also extremely cautious about injecting itself into conflict zones with its humanitarian assistance.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Analysis by Respondanet, available at <<http://www.respondanet.com/Asia/indias-foreign-aid-program-catches-up-with-its-global-ambitions.html#sthash.HXq4HgoB.dpuf>>

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion, see Andreas Fuchs, "The Needy Donor: An Empirical Analysis of India's Aid Motives", *World Development*, April 2013, pp. 110-28; Sachin Chaturvedi, "India's Development Partnership: key policy shifts and institutional evolution", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2012, pp. 557-577; Vivan Sharan, Ivan Campbell and Daniel Rubin, "India's Development Cooperation: Charting New Approaches in a Changing World", *ORF Special Report No.2* (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, July 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Meier and Murthy, n. 6, pp. 17-19.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the divergence between Indian and Western views, see Sarabjeet Singh Parmar, "Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) in India's National Strategy", *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January 2012, pp. 95-99.

## Role of Armed Forces

India's armed forces currently play an important role in providing humanitarian assistance abroad. India is careful not to deploy combat troops and focuses on sending doctors, engineers who can contribute to relief activities. Indian naval and air assets are of course used for sea and air lift of Indian assistance. Could HA/DR operations become a major mission abroad for the Indian armed forces in the coming years? India's traditional emphasis has been on the use of armed forces for territorial defence and internal security duties. Its armed forces have occasionally have been deployed beyond borders, usually within the Subcontinent for specific national security purposes. India has also been the leading contributor to international peacekeeping operations under the UN auspices. The last few years, however, have seen the deployment of Indian armed forces for other contingencies. Two recent operations come readily to mind.

One is *Operation Sukoon* in Lebanon that was aimed at evacuating Indian citizens trapped in a civil war during July 2006. Four Indian Naval ships, *INS Mumbai*, *INS Brahmaputra*, *INS Betwa*, and *INS Shakti* returning from a goodwill visit in the Mediterranean were asked to turn around and proceed to the coast of Lebanon. The naval squadron evacuated a total of 2,280 people (1,764 Indians, 112 Sri Lankans, 64 Nepalese and seven Lebanese with Indian spouses) to Cyprus from where they were flown to the Subcontinent by Air India.<sup>12</sup> *Operation Sukoon* was touted as the largest post-independence civilian evacuation by the Navy. But not for long, as the Navy embarked on a larger mission, *Operation Blossom*, to evacuate Indian citizens from the Libyan civil war in early 2011. India dispatched the large LPD ship, *INS Jalashwa* and a destroyer *INS Mysore* to the Libyan coast at the end of February. Assisted by two contract ferries, Air India and the Indian Air Force, the Navy evacuated around 15,000 Indian citizens from Libya.<sup>13</sup>

These two operations were however driven by the need to secure India's own national interests. A few other operations were directly related to humanitarian objectives in India's neighbourhood. One was the participation of the Indian armed forces in the tsunami relief efforts at the end of 2004 which affected parts of India as well as Maldives, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. For this massive domestic and international relief effort, the Indian armed forces

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<sup>12</sup> Commander Neil Gadihoke, "Evacuating Nationals by Sea", Naval Forces, April-May 2011, available at <<http://www.spsnavalforces.com/story.asp?mid=18&id=4>>

<sup>13</sup> Rohan Joshi, "Bringing our Citizens Home", *Pragati*, April 2011, available at <<http://pragati.nationalinterest.in/2011/04/bringing-our-citizens-home/>>

deployed 20,000 troops, 40 ships, and 32 aircraft, including helicopters. For the international effort alone, the Air Force lifted 500 tonnes of relief material, 1,750 personnel by air and the Navy delivered 735 tonnes and conducted 1,063 sorties by sea. Together the Indian armed forces delivered medical relief to nearly 15,000 people. The Indian Ministry of Defence summed up the effort by saying that “The Indian armed forces were able to demonstrate speed, man-power intensive tasks, specialized skills and a humanitarian approach in responding to the crisis”.<sup>14</sup> If the Tsunami effort helped put external HA/DR on India’s policy map, Delhi soon began to take a more active part in disaster management in its neighbourhood.

The Indian armed forces contributed to relief effort in Bangladesh when it was hit by Cyclone Sidr in 2007.<sup>15</sup> In the wake the Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, the Indian armed forces were among the first external agencies to participate in the relief effort.<sup>16</sup> While Myanmar, locked in a political confrontation with the West, was unwilling to accept Western aid, it was open to assistance from India and its ASEAN neighbours.<sup>17</sup> While relief operations abroad have now become common, there is no denying the fact that the Tsunami relief operations were a decisive moment for India’s military diplomacy. The capacity and credibility of the Indian armed forces was demonstrated to the international community as never before. Since then both the United States and India’s neighbours in the east began to see Delhi as a major force capable of becoming a genuine partner in military matters. The image of India was transformed amidst the recognition of its military capabilities and political will to undertake ventures beyond its borders. “Recognising the key role that India can play in the region”, the Foreign Office said, India “was invited to be a part of the Tsunami Core Group put together by the United States in order to facilitate a coordinated effort to deal with the disaster. When it was announced, there was the United States, Japan, India and Australia. Later on, it was expanded to include the United Nations, Canada as well as the European Union”.<sup>18</sup> At the operational level, the Tsunami relief effort resulted in policy guidance on disaster relief abroad, issued by the Defence Crisis Management Group. It tasked the Integrated Defence

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<sup>14</sup> See Ministry of Defence, *Annual Report 2004-05*, New Delhi, p. 202.

<sup>15</sup> Press Information Bureau, “Indian Air Force IL-76 Carries Aid to Dhaka”, New Delhi, November 22, 2007; available at < <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=33025>>

<sup>16</sup> Press Information Bureau, “Indian Armed Forces Launch Operation Sahayata: IAF, Navy Rush Relief to Myanmar”, New Delhi, May 7, 2008; available at < <http://www.pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=38604>>

<sup>17</sup> P.S. Suryanarayana, “Myanmar’s Cyclone Crisis and India’s Aid”, *The Hindu*, May 30, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, *Bridging the Ocean*, New Delhi, February 2005.



Staff to coordinate the relief effort with the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of External Affairs and other relevant departments and agencies.<sup>19</sup>

## **HADR in Military Diplomacy**

India's impressive participation in the Tsunami relief efforts came amidst a rare moment of warmth in India-US relations. The advent of George W Bush as US President in 2001 saw Washington signal a new commitment to build a strategic partnership with India and significant expansion of bilateral defence engagement. In the second term of President Bush, this cooperation was elevated to a higher level. In June 2005, the Defence Ministers, Pranab Mukherjee and Donald Rumsfeld, signed a ten-year defence framework agreement that laid out the broad themes of bilateral cooperation, including their joint participation in peacekeeping and other coalition operations.<sup>20</sup> This was the first such agreement that India had signed with any power since independence. Within a few weeks, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was in Washington and his talks with Bush produced the historic and controversial civil nuclear initiative. The meeting also produced a less-noted "Disaster Relief Initiative" that put specific flesh and bones on the new framework for defence cooperation by focusing on one particular dimension.<sup>21</sup>

Under the Disaster Relief Initiative, Delhi and Washington agreed "to establish a dialogue and identify additional military training needs, skills-development requirements, and other challenges to a speedy and effective disaster response." The two sides also emphasised the importance of increasing "their ability to respond to disasters in an integrated fashion". It was also agreed that "the U.S. and India will continue to work together with the regional community on the development and implementation of early warning system programs". They also decided to cooperate in building disaster response capabilities in other countries, and "share best practices and experiences with a view to strengthening a regional response to natural disasters". Since then, cooperation in disaster relief has remained an important theme

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<sup>19</sup> Vice Admiral Raman Puri, "Tsunami Relief Operations by the Indian Armed Forces, 2004-05", *USI Journal*, Vol. CXXXV, No. 560, April-June 2005, pp. 200-214. Admiral Puri was personally involved with the IDS at that point of time.

<sup>20</sup> "New Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship," Washington DC, June 28, 2005, at <[http://www.indianembassy.org/press\\_release/2005/June/31.htm](http://www.indianembassy.org/press_release/2005/June/31.htm)>

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Department of State, Fact Sheet, Washington DC, July 18, 2005; <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/fs/2005/49730.htm>

in bilateral discussion on strategic issues and endured in the dialogue with the Obama Administration.<sup>22</sup>

India's new interest in collaborative HADR was also reflected in India's expanding defence engagement with Japan. The 2009 Joint Action Plan for Security Cooperation signed with Japan provides a comprehensive framework for bilateral cooperation on disaster management. This included sharing of information, intensive exchanges between multiple stake-holders in countries, capacity building, and cooperation with third countries in disaster management.<sup>23</sup> If HA/DR cooperation has figured in the expanding defence partnerships with the US and Japan, it has also emerged as a potential area of military confidence-building with China. Delhi has sought to resist the framing of the defence relationship with China in terms of rivalry and has over the years sought to develop a track of defence engagement with Beijing that included high level exchanges and joint exercises. While the traditional emphasis has been maintaining peace and military stability on the land border, maritime issues have begun to figure in the dialogue. At the sixth round of the annual defence dialogue in 2014, senior defence officials agreed on strengthening maritime security cooperation between their navies and intensify exchanges in the areas of peace-keeping, counter terrorism, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.<sup>24</sup>

India's military diplomacy is not limited to its relations with major powers. It has increasingly become an important element of its security multilateralism. At the multilateral level, India has taken the lead in promoting regional cooperation in disaster management in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). In the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami which affected Maldives, Sri Lanka and parts of India, the SAARC environment ministers met in a special session in mid-2005 and called for a comprehensive framework for regional cooperation on disaster management and the establishment of a mechanism to execute it. By the end of 2006, the SAARC had set up a regional disaster management centre that is located at the National Disaster Management Centre in Delhi, India. The 2007 SAARC summit in Delhi had approved the broader framework for

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<sup>22</sup> See for example the Joint Statement issued at the end of the third round of the strategic dialogue in Washington, June 2012. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/06/192267.htm>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/pmv0912/action.html>

<sup>24</sup> Press Information Bureau, "6<sup>th</sup> India-China Defence and Security Dialogue Held", New Delhi, February 24, 2014; available at < <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=104189>>

cooperation in the region.<sup>25</sup> The SAARC is now considering the idea of a rapid response mechanism in the region for disasters.

Disaster management has also been at the top of India's recent engagement with the ASEAN and the various institutions and forums led by it. At the annual summit with India at the end of 2013 in Brunei, the ASEAN "identified disaster management as a common priority for both ASEAN and India. ASEAN region and India are well known as natural disaster prone areas. In this regard, the ASEAN Leaders encouraged India to support the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme and to Collaborate with the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre)."<sup>26</sup> India has been participating in the Disaster Relief Exercises (DiRex) under the ARF auspices since 2011. India also joined the multilateral exercises focused on humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and military medicine in Brunei, June 2013. The exercise practised a coordinated international response to a hypothetical typhoon striking a Southeast Asian nation and setting off secondary disasters such as floods and mud-rock flows.<sup>27</sup>

The focus on HA/DR has also become central to India's own regional initiatives. The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, that India helped launch in 2008, has made HA/DR a major theme for regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean. The IONS brings together on a biennial basis the chiefs of navies from the countries of the littoral. India is proposing HA/DR, maritime domain awareness and anti-piracy as priority themes for the IONS work. India has also offered itself as the lead coordinator for HA/DR cooperation in the IONS.<sup>28</sup> Disaster risk reduction has also been identified as a priority area in the work of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).<sup>29</sup> India hopes to contribute to greater collaboration on this in the region and promote capacity building in the littoral.

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<sup>25</sup> Available at < <http://saarc-sdmc.nic.in/pdf/framework.pdf>>

<sup>26</sup> See Ministry of External Affairs, "Chairman's Statement at the 11<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-India Summit", Bandar Seri Begawan, available at <<http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/22311/Chairmans+Statement+of+the+11th+IndiaASEAN+Summit+Bandar+Seri+Begawan>>

<sup>27</sup> See Martin Sieff, "ASEAN defence ministers host disaster relief, military medicine exercise", Asia Pacific Defense Forum, June 28, 2013, available at <[http://apdforum.com/en\\_GB/article/rmiap/articles/online/features/2013/06/28/asean-disaster-relief](http://apdforum.com/en_GB/article/rmiap/articles/online/features/2013/06/28/asean-disaster-relief)>

<sup>28</sup> See official notes from the chiefs' conclave in South Africa, April 2012. Available at <[http://ions.gov.in/sites/default/files/Confirmatory\\_Notes\\_of\\_Conclave\\_of\\_Chiefs.pdf](http://ions.gov.in/sites/default/files/Confirmatory_Notes_of_Conclave_of_Chiefs.pdf)>

<sup>29</sup> Earlier known as the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC). See the Gurgaon Communique issued by the Council of Ministers in November 2012; available at <<http://www.mea.gov.in/in-focus->

The Indian Navy, which has shown a great interest in HA/DR operations has made the theme a focus area in the biennial *Milan* exercises that it organises in the Bay of Bengal. Started in 1995 as a confidence building exercise between India and its maritime neighbours, Milan has become a much broader forum covering both Eastern and Western Indian Ocean regions. The exercises held in February 2014 saw the participation of seventeen countries ranging from Mauritius and Seychelles in the West to the Philippines and the New Zealand in the East.<sup>30</sup> Addressing the seminar organised in conjunction with the *Milan* exercises, the chief of the Indian Navy underlined the importance of developing regional consensus on the methodologies for HA/DR engagement in the region and standard operating procedures for such operations.<sup>31</sup>

## Structural Constraints

On the face of it, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief appear to have been clearly identified as important military diplomatic objectives for India. Yet it is quite clear that Delhi is a long way from effectively pursuing it in the region either unilaterally, in collaboration with major powers or through regional multilateral organisations. Part of the problem lies in the inertia among the political class. There is considerable reluctance within the political class to see a substantive military role for India beyond its borders. While the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government seemed to be more open to new ideas on military role, the Congress party seemed more ambivalent. The second term of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government saw the emergence of a paradox. While the government expanded formal commitments to military diplomacy in general and for external collaboration on HA/DR in particular, it has been hesitant in translating them into practical policies. Even as India was reluctant to embark on joint disaster relief operations with the US, it has also been wary of unilateral American HA/DR activity in the Subcontinent. Delhi has

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<sup>30</sup> Press Information Bureau, "Milan 2014 an Unequivocal Success", New Delhi, February 9, 2014; available at <<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=103278>>

<sup>31</sup> "Navy Chief says nations must join hands in disaster prone Indo-Pacific", *Hindu*, February 5, 2014; available at <<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/navy-chief-says-nations-must-join-hands-in-disasterprone-indopacific/article5656991.ece>>

been suspicious of Washington's attempts to expand military cooperation with Maldives and Bangladesh in the name of HA/DR contingencies.<sup>32</sup>

The civilian bureaucracy too appears divided on the Indian military role abroad. India's Foreign Office has begun to attach great value to Indian military engagement beyond borders as an important element in the nation's diplomatic tool box. The Ministry of Defence, however, has been unable or unwilling to provide much-needed leadership and initiative amidst growing external interest in defence cooperation with India. It also appears that the three armed services do not have the same appreciation of the overall utility of HA/DR operations for the Indian military strategy. As in other spheres of military diplomacy, the navy has shown far greater interest than the other two services in external engagement. This is but natural, given the outward orientation of the navy. The Indian Air Force has in recent years begun to catch up with the Navy. The army, preoccupied as it is with onerous responsibilities for internal security and territorial defence, has not devoted significant attention to operations beyond borders except the international peacekeeping role and joint exercises with a few partner countries. The army, however, has the most extensive experience in disaster relief at home and will have to play a critical role in any significant HA/DR operations in the future.

The armed forces, in general, appear some distance away from developing a comprehensive approach to HA/DR operations either at home or abroad. As a critical review noted, "The Indian armed forces handle disasters without any database of the resources, skills and services essential for effective response at short notice. Emergency preparedness, drills, and forecasting of possible disasters that can be anticipated over time and space are absent. The forces do not have any training establishment" dedicated to this mission, except the College of Military Engineering which focuses only on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear disasters."<sup>33</sup> The review makes the case for establishing a centre for excellence in disaster

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<sup>32</sup> Sandeep Dikshit, "In Indian Ocean, the threat is from the U.S. not China, says Gayoom", *Hindu*, June 7, 2013 available at < <http://www.thehindu.com/news/in-indian-ocean-threat-is-from-us-not-china-says-gayoom/article4788579.ece> >; AFP, "Maldives rejects military pact with U.S.", *Defense News*, January 22, 2014, available at < <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140122/DEFREG03/301220025/Maldives-Rejects-Military-Pact-US> >; U.S. Pacific Command, "USARPAC, Bangladesh Army Kick off Disaster Relief Exercise and Exchange", August 19, 2013 available at < <http://www.pacom.mil/media/news/2013/08/19-usarpac-bangladesh-army-kickoff-DRE-exercise.shtml>>; for a discussion of expanding military ties between Dhaka and Washington, see Ataur Rehman, "Bangladesh-United States Relations: Security in the Bay of Bengal", *Peace and Security Review*, Vol. 6, No. 11, 2014, pp.17-20.

<sup>33</sup> Shivananda H. and P.K. Gautam, "Reassessing India's Disaster Management Preparedness and the Role of Armed Forces", *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January 2012, p. 111.

management under the Headquarters of the Integrated Defence Staff and a solid assessment of earlier activity.

## **Long-term Interests and Imperatives**

As India comes to terms with the changing nature of its security interests, the current ambivalence in Delhi towards military diplomacy in general and HA/DR operations in particular is unsustainable. The structural changes in the Indian economy — nearly 60 per cent of the India's GDP is linked to the external sector — suggest that India's security interests are no longer limited to the Subcontinent. In fact, India's current Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his predecessor Atal Behari Vajpayee have repeatedly declared that India's security perimeter extends from the Suez to the South China Sea. Future governments have to translate this general political affirmation into a credible policy towards military engagement beyond borders.

Meanwhile, amidst the perception of India's rise on the regional and global stage, there will be greater demands on India to contribute to public goods in Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral. With its own self-image as a responsible power, India will have to combine political will with its real existing capabilities for HA/DR operations in the region. This is natural given India's geographic location, national capabilities and the vast experience of its armed forces in dealing with natural calamities at home. There is growing recognition within India itself that HA/DR capability is critical for the promotion of India's regional and global interests, and its soft and hard power.

Beyond the broader political goals of India as a rising power, there is an emerging economic dimension to the imperatives facing Delhi on HA/DR operations. According to a study by the Asian Development Bank, of the ten disasters with the highest death tolls across the world since 1980, seven occurred in Asia. In 2011, 80% of global disaster-related economic losses occurred in Asia and the Pacific region. The losses caused by the disasters were immense, not only in terms of human lives, but also in terms of property destroyed. A conservative estimate of the average annual direct economic damage due to disasters in countries of Asia and the Pacific in the period 2001-2011 was US\$ 60 billion".<sup>34</sup> Preparing to limit the risks of these

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<sup>34</sup> *Disaster Risk Management in Asia and the Pacific: Issues Paper* (Tokyo: Asian Development Bank and the ADB Institute, April 2013), p. 2.

recurring losses is an important economic imperative for India in developing a robust disaster relief capability that can be put to use at home and abroad.

No country in the region, including the United States, is capable of addressing the challenges of HA/DR on its own. Cooperative efforts, then, are critical. Although India is committed to collaborative action with the major powers, there is considerable residual political self-doubt and hesitation that has limited cooperation with other powers. While differences with the United States and the West over some of the political principles relating to HA/DR are real, India could set the terms for the joint ventures in which it is willing to participate. Such operations can help modernise the capacity of the Indian armed forces and civilian personnel to respond to emergencies at home and abroad. Collaborative HA/DR operations beyond its own territory strengthen India's ability to conduct expeditionary operations in Asia and the Indo-Pacific littoral. Many of the skills involved in HA/DR operations — management of complex logistics, civilian evacuation from the disaster zone, emergency medical treatment, communication, intelligence and surveillance — are also critical for coping with conflict situations. HA/DR operations thus provide invaluable real-life training in dealing with conflict situations.

With its expansive capabilities and experience, India will stand to gain much by developing an active policy for HA/DR operations beyond its borders. India's recent contributions to disaster relief in the immediate neighbourhood have helped lift India's image in the region, long coloured by perception of hegemony.<sup>35</sup> But there is room for much more active engagement of the Indian armed forces in regional disaster management. Meanwhile, as China's regional profile rises, India is likely to find Beijing playing a larger role in collective security functions in the Subcontinent and the Indian Ocean. Much like India, China has been reluctant to use its military beyond its borders. Unlike India, China until recently did not even participate in UN peace-keeping operations. Over the last decade, a rising China has become an active participant in UN peacekeeping. It has also begun to expand its humanitarian assistance and is seeking to raise its voice on global humanitarian agenda.<sup>36</sup> In 2004 when the Tsunami struck eastern Indian Ocean, the responses of India and China were widely

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<sup>35</sup> For a discussion see, D. Suba Chandran, N. Manoharan, Vibhanshu Shekhar, Jabin T. Jacob, Raghav Sharma, and Sandeep Bharadwaj, "India's Disaster Relief Diplomacy", *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2, April-June 2009, pp. 63-80.

<sup>36</sup> Andrea Binder and Bjorn Conrad, "China's Potential Role in Humanitarian Assistance", *Humanitarian Policy Paper Series*, Global Public Policy Institute, February 2009.

compared. The Indian Navy was the first to reach affected regions, even as Delhi coped with the effects on its own soil and in Sri Lanka and Maldives. Chinese armed forces were mute spectators, as Beijing stepped in eventually to provide a large package of economic assistance. A decade later, India's ambivalence on HA/DR operations is in stark contrast to China's vigorous regional military diplomacy.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Roy Kamphausen, David Lai and Travis Tanner, eds., *Learning by Doing: PLA Trains at Home and Abroad* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2012).