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**INTENT AND RESOLVE:
Strategic Communications in Support of USPACOM
Foreign Humanitarian Assistance Operations**

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Marketing is too important to be left to the marketing department.

- David Packard, co-founder of Hewlett-Packard

Introduction

In today's volatile global security environment, the old adage that "the only constant is change" is particularly applicable. With ongoing conflicts in Southwest Asia, the Middle East, Africa and other regions of the world, and new flare-ups occurring in Eastern Europe and Latin America, there is no dearth of competition for the attention and potential employment of the U.S. military. Amidst these events, our nation continues to execute a rebalancing of strategic priorities toward the Asia-Pacific region. In U.S. Pacific Command's (PACOM) implementation of this policy, foreign humanitarian assistance (FHA) operations are a major component of the strategic approach for the region.¹ Conflicting, ineffective, or incomplete strategic messaging dilutes the benefits of our participation in these activities. In a resource-constrained environment, our military force must extract maximum value and effect from its actions through complementary messaging. PACOM must achieve a greater return on its foreign humanitarian assistance investment through more effective use of accompanying strategic communications. Strategic communication operations must constitute a conscious and deliberate line of effort, integral in both steady state and crisis response activities. Doing so will benefit PACOM's theater campaign by strengthening regional cooperation and mitigating the perception of U.S. presence as a challenge to regional influence.

Priorities in the Pacific

The policy of rebalancing to the Pacific entails an overall increased emphasis on the region, implemented through a wide range of security, economic, and diplomatic initiatives. The concept was developed under the Obama administration and formally introduced by the President in a speech delivered to the Australian Parliament in November 2011. In this speech, the President announced his intent to commit the United States to a larger, long-term role in shaping the Pacific region and its future. At about the same time, the President directed his national security team to make America's "presence and mission

¹ Locklear, Samuel J. USPACOM Strategy 2013, available at: <http://www.pacom.mil/about-uspacom/2013-uspacom-strategy.shtml>

in the Asia-Pacific a top priority.”² The Secretary of Defense codified military aspects of this policy soon thereafter in the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance. In this document, he states “while the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region.”³ Secretary of Defense Panetta expanded on the policy shift in his remarks at the Shangri-La Conference in Singapore in June 2012, emphasizing the diplomatic and economic aspects of the strategy and softening any perceived adversarial tone toward China. More recently, the Department of Defense (DoD) reinforced its commitment to the Pacific rebalance in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review, stating “U.S. interests remain inextricably linked to the peace and security of the Asia-Pacific region.”⁴ The document further explains America’s “enduring commitment to peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region requires a sustained ability to deter aggression, operate effectively across all domains, and respond decisively to emerging crises and contingencies.”⁵ While this statement broadly refers to capability across the range of military operations, recent history suggests the preponderance of those crises and contingencies in the region will fall squarely in the FHA realm.⁶ Therefore, it is in our nation’s interests to ensure we gain maximum benefit from our efforts, to include the value gained from comprehensive and synchronized strategic communications.

The need for humanitarian assistance and crisis response capabilities is already substantial in the PACOM area of responsibility and is likely to grow in the future. The Pacific, and in particular the island nations of Southeast Asia, provides fertile ground for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance needs. As noted in the 2014 PACOM posture statement, 80% of all natural disasters worldwide occur within its area of responsibility.⁷ The region is susceptible to a range of geological phenomena such as earthquakes, volcanic activity, and tsunamis and also to climate related events such as typhoons, cyclones, monsoon flooding, extreme temperatures, and drought. The effects of these events are exacerbated by the concentration of population and infrastructure along low-lying coastal areas. Furthermore, some areas are at risk for outbreaks of diseases such as dengue fever, malaria, and pandemic influenza. Finally, there is always the possibility of unique, non-environmental occurrences or “technical disasters” such as the damaged Fukushima nuclear reactor and recent disappearance of Malaysian Airlines Flight 370. In many of these scenarios, the likely needs of the crisis will grossly exceed the capacity of any single nation to mount a timely and effective response.

The risk associated with these environmental conditions is tangible, ultimately being measured in both lives and dollars. In March 2011, the Sendai earthquake and resulting tsunami in Japan caused over 21,000 casualties and damages in excess of \$120 billion.⁸ More recently, Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines in November 2013. The super storm, bearing sustained winds between 145-195 mph, caused over 6,000 deaths with estimates of another 30,000 people injured or missing. Total damages to infrastructure, social systems, and economic productivity were estimated at over \$2 billion.⁹ The magnitude of these isolated events is enormous, and the cumulative toll on the region is similarly

² Obama, Barack H. “Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament.” Presented in Canberra, 17 November 11. Accessible at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>

³ Panetta, Leon E. “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense.” Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2012.

⁴ Hagel, Charles T. “Quadrennial Defense Review.” Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, March 2014.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Asian Disaster Reduction Center. “Natural Disasters Data Book 2012: An Analytical Overview,” available at: http://www.adrc.asia/publications/databook/DB2012_e.html

⁷ Locklear, Samuel J. “U.S. Pacific Command Posture Statement.” Washington, DC: Presented to the House Armed Services Committee, March 25, 2014.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council. “NDRRMC Updates re Effects of TY YOLANDA (HAIYAN).” Disaster Reports. April 17, 2014, available at <http://www.ndrrmc.gov.ph/attachments/article/1177>.

staggering. The table below from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction provides a regional summary of natural disasters in Asia over a recent 28-year period.¹⁰

<i>Natural Disasters in Asia (1980 – 2008)</i>	
No of events:	3,341
No of people killed:	1,144,006
Average killed per year:	39,448
Economic Damage (US\$):	\$673.5 B
Economic Damage per year (US\$):	\$23.2 B

Source: PreventionWeb.net (Regional Summary)

These figures alone provide significant justification for continued investment in our ability to execute military FHA operations. Increasing and exercising our FHA-related capacity, capability, and cooperation contribute directly to our success in the security, economic, and diplomatic arenas of our rebalancing effort. As Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel stated in a recent editorial piece, “[these] non-traditional security challenges...cannot be resolved through military efforts alone. They require strong partnerships across military and civilian agencies, and with the private sector and non-governmental organizations.”¹¹ While military operations are not the sole solution, they form the backbone of a timely and effective response, bringing unique capabilities to bear and enabling critical cooperation between other agencies.

Current PACOM Strategy

As outlined in its strategy statement, PACOM’s strategic approach singles out three focus areas: building strong relationships, assured presence, and effective communication.¹² Each of these efforts supports, and is supported by, the command’s FHA developmental and operational activities. First, the formation and nurturing of strong bilateral and multilateral relationships is critical to developing effective crisis response capabilities. In turn, the multinational cooperation fostered by planning and training for FHA is a powerful conduit for establishing and developing these partnerships. PACOM’s interaction with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its individual states on disaster response provides an excellent example of this principle in action. Second, PACOM seeks to provide assurance of a continued presence as a signal of the nation’s enduring interest and engagement in the region. This is accomplished through our posture and forward stationing of forces, which enable the training and engagement with our regional partners resulting in improved readiness. Again, FHA operations are an important component of this construct, both benefiting from progress in this area while contributing materially to perceptions of U.S. commitment and interest. Last, strategic communications are intended to convey the command’s resolve to protect the interests of the United States and its allies and promote stability throughout the region. FHA operations innately reinforce this message by demonstrating America’s commitment and vested interest in regional stability. However, PACOM’s current use of strategic communications to complement its significant FHA efforts is incomplete, presenting opportunities for improvement.

¹⁰ “Asia - Disaster Statistics.” PreventionWeb, available at:

http://www.preventionweb.net/english/countries/statistics/index_region.php?rid=4

¹¹ Hagel, Charles T. "Realizing the Asia-Pacific Rebalance." Defense One. April 1, 2014, available at <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2014/04/realizing-asia-pacific-rebalance/81730/>.

¹² Locklear, USPACOM Strategy 2013, available at: <http://www.pacom.mil/about-uspacom/2013-uspacom-strategy.shtml>

The question the military, as well as the whole of the U.S. government, must ask itself is, “What can we do or do better around the world, and specifically in the Pacific as we rebalance our forces in that region, to ensure we achieve our national security ends within the means available to do the job?” Fortunately, a partial answer is provided in the framework of the PACOM theater strategy. Strategic communication appears in the list of “guiding principles” and is an area that offers a disproportionate return on investment. The strategic approach further directs all activities undertaken in the region will be “... amplified by clear and consistent communication of PACOM intent and resolve.”¹³ These activities include both real-world response missions and training exercises in support of FHA operations.

While strategic communication is an established pillar of Pacific strategy, it is a pillar not given the necessary level of effort or attention. As ADM Mullen said in a 2009 *Joint Forces Quarterly* article, good strategic communication is about credibility. He continues by defining credibility as a measure of the gap between what we say and what we do.¹⁴ It is fair to say in some cases it is even a measure of the gap between what we say at one time and what we say later. Accepting ADM Mullen’s assertion that strategic communication is about credibility, and credibility is simply matching words with actions, there are minimal additional resources required to implement or improve a strategic communications lines of operation. The investment is simply in the planning effort and ensuring messages are targeted in the same way as any other precision weapon. The messages are not what we say about a particular action, but rather what a particular action says about us. A kinetic weapon that misses its target will cause unintended damage, and the same is true with strategic messages. Consequently, every effort must be made to ensure not only the proper target is selected, but also the proper message is sent to service the target.

To demonstrate the concept of tailoring a message to reach a particular audience, it is helpful to think of any successful political campaign. Campaign managers do painstaking research, usually down to the district level, to fully understand the human terrain, geography, politics, social structure, and key issues.¹⁵ They can then craft messages to appeal to the voters in that dynamic. This results in candidates giving a speech to blue-collar workers on a factory floor instead of an auditorium, or speaking to farmers wearing blue jeans instead of a business suit. This is the essence of strategic communications, where the message is not so much spoken but is present in the matching of deeds to words, bringing credibility to the messenger.

Establishing and maintaining credibility assists the United States in achieving its national objectives more easily through diplomacy. Equally important, U.S. credibility reduces exploitable opportunities by eliminating contradictions, which adversaries can target for counter-messaging. The United States can benefit greatly from well-executed strategic communications in association with FHA operations in the Pacific, but can suffer greatly when adversaries find the gaps created in our credibility by poor strategic communications.

An example of gap exploitation includes recent, pervasive accusations of “disaster militarism,” suggesting the U.S. military uses FHA as a tool of political and military coercion. For instance, the authors of a *Foreign Policy in Focus* article point out the United States was “touting relief efforts as justification for the need for a new long-term agreement for greater bilateral military cooperation and an increased U.S. military presence in the Philippines” after responding with assistance following Typhoon Haiyan.¹⁶ A credibility gap was created when the stated purpose of the relief effort known as Operation

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mullen, ADM Michael G., “From the Chairman Good Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics”, *JFQ*, Issue 55, 4th Quarter 2009: 2-4.

¹⁵ In his SAMS monograph, “New Military Strategic Communications System”, MAJ Robert F. Baldwin laid out a useful framework to treat strategic communications in a similar fashion to a political campaign.

¹⁶ Fukushima, Annie Isabel, et al, “Disaster Militarism: Rethinking US Relief in the Asia-Pacific, available at <http://fpif.org/disaster-militarism-rethinking-u-s-relief-asia-pacific/>

Damayan was to “restore normalcy to people’s lives.”¹⁷ It is exactly this kind of gap, brought about by saying one thing (restore normalcy) and doing another (seeking increased presence) which adversaries seek to exploit.

Examining Recent FHA Operations

Recent events in the Asia-Pacific region provide ample opportunity for analysis and insight on the efficacy of our messaging efforts in support of crisis response. The following vignettes describe three distinct crises, the U.S. response and military support rendered, and highlight ways more effective strategic communications may have benefited the outcome of the crisis response efforts.

Monsoon Flooding in Pakistan. In some instances, opportunities for strategic communication are made more difficult by a ‘non-permissive’ messaging environment. Despite this challenge, difficult does not mean impossible nor should it mean unworthy of effort. In July 2010, Pakistan received an abnormally large amount of rain during monsoon season, resulting in massive flooding. The flooding eventually killed nearly 2,000 people, injured 3,000, and negatively affected 20 million in other ways – making it the worst natural disaster in the country’s history.¹⁸ The international response was significant, with the United States being the single largest contributor of support.¹⁹ Of the 5,689 short tons of aid delivered by non-Pakistani military airlift, 4,041 short tons (71%) were delivered by the U.S. military. In total, the DoD disbursed and estimated \$107.4 million in aid to Pakistan, including 450,000 packaged food rations compliant with Islamic-dietary law.²⁰ Despite these contributions, the Government of Pakistan (GoP) was highly concerned about allowing foreign militaries, and the U.S. military in particular, from operating inside its borders. According to a Rand report, U.S. officials stated the Pakistani Army General Headquarters ended U.S. military participation two to four weeks before both the Pakistani National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and the United Nations considered doing so necessary.²¹ Why? Pakistani political concerns necessitated the United States not receive too much credit for its role in the relief operations. As a result, Pakistani media agencies actively suppressed local coverage of U.S. efforts.²²

The Pakistani floods, while not specifically a PACOM event, provide valuable insight into challenges the U.S. may face in conducting strategic communications. In the broader context, there was hope that U.S.-Pakistani relations would strengthen as a result of U.S. assistance.²³ At the time of the floods, the relationship was strained but showed signs of improving. Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State at the time, had just concluded a strategic engagement in Islamabad, where the United States pledged financial aid toward infrastructure development and trade incentives. Some of the money devoted to that aid was redirected towards flood relief, potentially lessening the impacts of the capital intended for strategic relationship building.²⁴ A more concerted strategic communications initiative could have made

¹⁷ “Recovery Effort Takes on Great Energy, Task Force Commander Says,” available at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121177>

¹⁸ United Nations, “Pakistan, Floods Relief and Early Recovery Response Plan, Revision,” November 2010, p. 10.

¹⁹ K. Alan Kronstadt, Pervaze A. Sheikh, and Bruce Vaughn, “Flooding in Pakistan: Overview and Issues for Congress,” Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, November 18, 2010.

²⁰ USAID, “Pakistan – Floods, Fact Sheet #9,” January 21, 2011a. See also USAID Office of Inspector General, “Audit of USAID/Pakistan’s Flood Relief Efforts as Administered by Local Nongovernmental Organizations,” Audit Report No. G-391-11-003-P, January 24, 2011, p. 1.

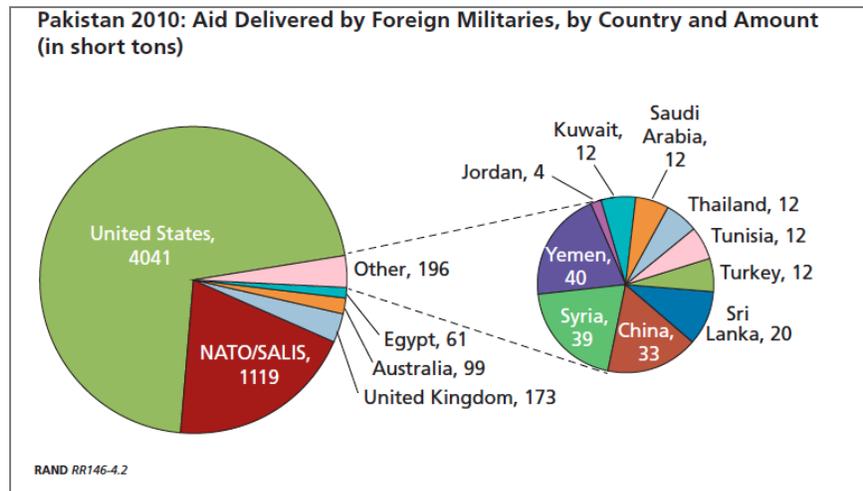
²¹ Moroney, Pezard, Miller, Engstrom, and Dollreport, “Lessons from Department of Defense Disaster Relief Efforts in the Asia-Pacific Region,” Rand, 2013, p. 73

²² Moroney, Pezard, Miller, Engstrom, and Dollreport, “Lessons from Department of Defense Disaster Relief Efforts in the Asia-Pacific Region,” Rand, 2013, p. 81

²³ “U.S. sees opportunity in Pakistan floods,” available at <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/08/03/us.pakistan.flood/>

²⁴ “U.S. Strategy in Pakistan is Upended by Floods,” available at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/19/world/asia/19diplo.html?_r=0

those redirected funds just as useful, if not more so, at bolstering the fragile but developing U.S.-Pakistani relationship. The communications would have to, at least in part, target the GoP and the Pakistani populace. Unfortunately, this did not happen as robustly as it should have. In fact, although one of the United States' desired goals from flood relief was a strengthening of U.S.-Pakistani relations, very little was done to advertise our efforts to the populace. Undoubtedly, such messaging would have had to be informed and sensitive to GoP insecurity regarding foreign assistance, and specifically that rendered by the United States. However, that insecurity need not dissuade the United States from accurately portraying its efforts.

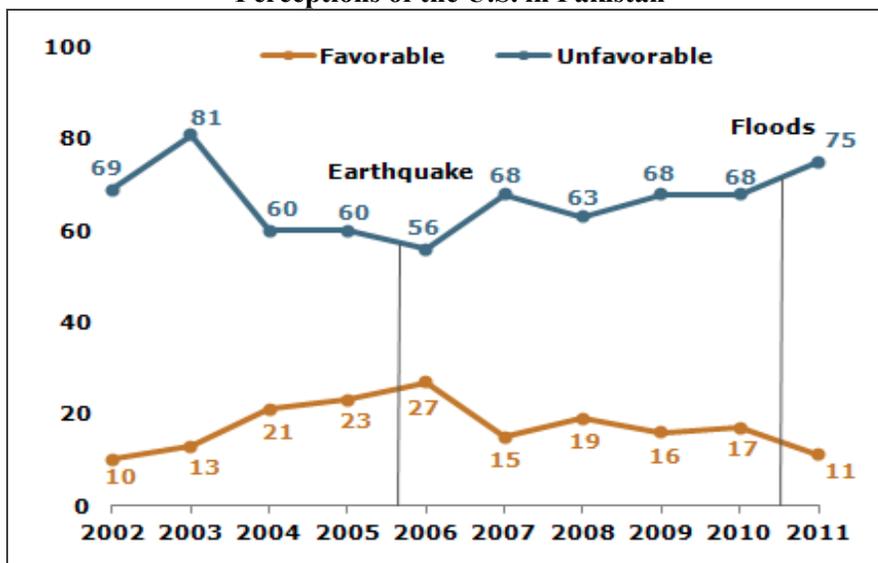


History shows public awareness of U.S. foreign humanitarian assistance improves the perception of the United States, which consequently has the potential to strengthen strategic partnerships. In 2005, the United States spent nearly \$500 million in response to a devastating Pakistani earthquake. According to Pew Research and a 2006 Global Attitudes survey, views of the United States improved modestly as a result, with 27% of Pakistanis giving the U.S. a positive rating (up from 23% the previous year) while negative views decreased from 60% to 56%. Notably, there was no Pakistani effort to minimize reporting of U.S. aid for the earthquake relief effort. This contrasts sharply with the results from 2010 and 2011, when the Government of Pakistan actively suppressed reporting on U.S. assistance efforts. Despite the United States' flood relief contributions, favorable public opinion declined from 17% to 11% while unfavorable opinion rose from 68% to 75%. Of note, the 2010 poll was taken before the floods and the 2011 poll was taken before the controversial raid that killed Osama bin Laden.²⁵ While it is unwise to attribute these attitude changes solely to strategic communications (or lack thereof), it is equally unwise to discount their effect on the polling results.

Had the knowledge of U.S. assistance been more pervasive among the Pakistani populace, it is likely the perception of the United States would have been improved. Favorable perceptions facilitate stronger relations and increase cooperation between countries, offering a key strategic advantage of conducting FHA operations. While the GoP's reluctance to advertise U.S. involvement would have required a more creative and culturally sensitive implementation of strategic messaging, that alone does not mean such efforts would have been unachievable or without significant strategic value.

²⁵ "Does humanitarian aid improve America's image?" available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/03/06/does-humanitarian-aid-improve-americas-image/>

Perceptions of the U.S. in Pakistan



Cyclone Relief in Burma. Conflicting messaging from various levels of government can also undermine attempts at strategic communications. On May 2, 2008 Cyclone Nargis struck the Irrawaddy Division in southwest Burma before moving over Rangoon the following day. The storm’s significant power, with sustained 132 mph winds and high tidal waves, devastated the Irrawaddy Delta, most of which is at or barely above sea level.²⁶ According to local newspapers, an estimated one in four buildings remained in the hardest hit areas.²⁷ Estimates set the death toll at 130,000, with another 2.4 million affected by the storm.²⁸

The military junta government of Burma did not have a favorable standing with the international community and was hesitant to accept outside assistance. Initially, no foreign organizations were allowed in the country, a fact lamented by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA).²⁹ Despite a history of poor relations accompanied by 18 years of sanctions against Burma, the United States (and the DoD in particular) saw the disaster as an opportunity to engage the reclusive country.³⁰ However, gaining access proved difficult due to extreme Burmese skepticism of U.S. intentions. This sentiment was so strong the government used state media outlets and distributed leaflets to broadcast warning of a potential invasion by the United States to gain access to the country’s oil deposits. It required personal engagement and visits by ADM Timothy J. Keating, the PACOM commander, and Henrietta Fore, Director of Foreign Assistance and USAID Administrator, for the United States to be allowed to provide assistance.³¹

To respond to the event, the United States established a Joint Task Force (JTF) focused on logistical support and the delivery of non-food relief. The JTF was created from the military units

²⁶ Ian McKinnon, “How Geography and Politics Made a Cyclone So Destructive,” *The Guardian*, May 6, 2008.

²⁷ Moroney, Pezard, Miller, Engstrom, and Dollreport, “Lessons from Department of Defense Disaster Relief Efforts in the Asia-Pacific Region,” Rand, 2013, p. 16

²⁸ “‘To Be Busy Helps Them Forget’: Burma’s Storm Survivors Cobble Together a Meager Future,” *The Washington Post*, July 6, 2008.

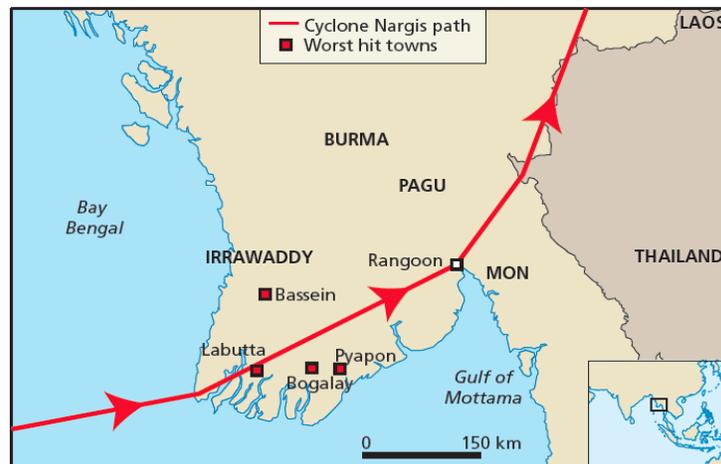
²⁹ OCHA, “Myanmar Cyclone Nargis, OCHA Situation Report No. 26,” June 2, 2008b.

³⁰ Michael F. Martin, *U.S. Sanctions on Burma*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, February 7, 2012.

³¹ Rand, p. 20

participating in PACOM’s annual Exercise Cobra Gold, which was underway nearby when the cyclone hit. Despite the significant challenges involved in gaining access to the country both before and during the operation, the DoD effort eventually transported over four million pounds of relief aid on 186 C-130 sorties supporting 32 international relief agencies.³² Initially, the aid had to be turned over to Burmese officials for distribution once it arrived in country; the Burmese did not trust the Americans enough to allow onward movement. After some time and confidence building, the Burmese eventually allowed the aid to be distributed by NGOs.³³ The U.S. also offered to provide a dozen CH-53 heavy-lift helicopters and about the same number of CH-46 medium-lift helicopters from the *USS Essex*, which was positioned near the western coast of Burma. The United States hoped the Burmese would allow these helicopters to distribute aid to otherwise inaccessible areas. To assuage concerns regarding their use, the United States attempted various confidence-building measures, from allowing Burmese personnel to ride on the relief helicopters to inviting officials to Thailand to observe what was being loaded on them. Still, the Burmese leadership eventually rejected the U.S. offer.³⁴

Map of Cyclone Nargis’s Path



RAND RR146-2.1

In total, the United States provided \$84.6 million in disaster relief, \$12.9 million of which came from the DoD.³⁵ This figure is far short of what it could have been in a more permissive environment than that set by the Burmese government. The United States could have attained greater access had U.S. strategic messaging been better coordinated and more consistent. Two days after the cyclone made landfall, First Lady Laura Bush condemned the junta for not giving people adequate warning of the coming storm.³⁶ The White House also issued statements criticizing Burma for not allowing greater foreign and U.S. aid to reach its people. Such messaging worked directly against DoD efforts to assure the Burmese people the United States was there to help, and not infiltrate or invade their country. The DoD considered the number of flights allowed into Burma as a positive indicator of growing Burmese confidence. It found the rhetoric from Washington worked to erode that confidence, rather than build it.

³² Wai Moe, “Burma Drops New Operating Guidelines,” *Irrawaddy*, June 24, 2008; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2011, p. 18

³³ Moroney, Pezard, Miller, Engstrom, and Dollreport, “Lessons from Department of Defense Disaster Relief Efforts in the Asia-Pacific Region,” *Rand*, 2013, p. 20

³⁴ Moroney, Pezard, Miller, Engstrom, and Dollreport, “Lessons from Department of Defense Disaster Relief Efforts in the Asia-Pacific Region,” *Rand*, 2013, p. 21

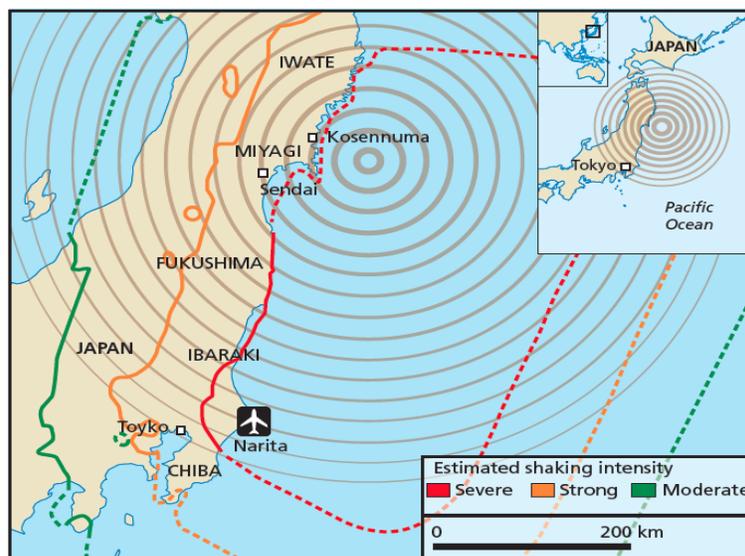
³⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2011, p. 11.

³⁶ Dan Eggen, “First Lady Condemns Junta’s Response to Storm,” *Washington Post*, May 6, 2008.

In fact, Admiral Keating, PACOM commander, made 15 separate attempts to extend the aid and enhance distribution provided by the DoD before the air bridge, and consequently DoD support, was ceased on June 22, 2008.³⁷ Had a cohesive U.S. messaging campaign focusing on confidence building rather than condemnation been undertaken, the United States, and DoD in particular, may have provided even more aid with better distribution than what actually transpired.

Operation TOMODACHI. In contrast to the previous examples, disaster relief operations in Japan demonstrate the positive effect of advantageous strategic communications. On March 11, 2011 a magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck off the eastern coast of Honshu Island, Japan. The resultant tsunami, measuring up to 40 meters high, inundated 561 kilometers of shoreline and destroyed 129,500 homes.³⁸ The Government of Japan (GoJ) estimated casualties at 16,000 people dead, with another 5,000 injured and 500,000 displaced.³⁹ In addition, the destructive force of the tsunami waves caused the reactor cooling systems at several units of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power complex to fail. As a result, multiple explosions occurred over the next few days, complicating the relief effort significantly as the GoJ was forced to evacuate areas within 30 kilometers of the plant.⁴⁰

Map of Areas Affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami



SOURCE: U.S. Geographical Survey (USGS), found in "Japan Earthquake: Tsunami Hits North-East," *BBC News*, March 11, 2011.
RAND RR146-5.1

International response to the disaster was swift and substantial. Within three days, 91 countries and nine intergovernmental organizations offered assistance. Due to its own well-developed response capabilities and a desire to simplify the operation, the GoJ initially only accepted help from the United

³⁷ Moroney, Pezard, Miller, Engstrom, and Dollreport, "Lessons from Department of Defense Disaster Relief Efforts in the Asia-Pacific Region," Rand, 2013, p. 22.

³⁸ Japanese Red Cross Society, "Japan: Earthquake and Tsunami, 11 March 2011–26 April 2012," 12 Month Report, EQ-2011-000028-JPN, April 27, 2012.

³⁹ U.S. Air Force, "Team Kadena & Operation Tomodachi (Friend): 11 March–13 April, 2011," 18th Wing History Office, undated.

⁴⁰ Charles Miller, et al., "Recommendations for Enhancing Reactor Safety in the 21st Century," United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission, July 12, 2011, pp. 10–14; OCHA, "Damaged Fukushima Nuclear Plant Cause for Concern," March 20, 2011d.

States and three other countries: New Zealand, Australia, and South Korea.⁴¹ The U.S. military deployed close to 24,000 personnel, 189 aircraft, and 24 Navy vessels in support of the disaster response.⁴² By April 2011, the United States had provided \$95 million in humanitarian assistance, \$88 million of which was spent by the DoD.⁴³ In total, the United States contributed more money to disaster relief than any other country.⁴⁴

U.S. strategic messaging was accomplished in a decentralized manner throughout the operation. Multiple organizations at different echelons communicated targeted messages to specific audiences. This approach allowed for each organization to tailor its message for a specific purpose at a specific point in time, which contributed to the broader story of U.S. assistance. As such, the event provides a useful example of the benefits of communications reaching a target audience; the GoJ and Japanese people were keenly aware and appreciative of U.S. efforts. According to a Pew research poll, favorable attitudes towards the United States by the Japanese rose from 66% to 85% following the disaster. In addition, the Japanese Cabinet Office found that Japanese “friendly feelings” towards the U.S. were at 82% following the earthquake, the highest since the poll began in 1978.⁴⁵

The goodwill created from U.S. aid is a key enabler of advancing U.S. interests during bilateral and multilateral engagements on a wide range of issues, from economic matters to security cooperation. For example, just three weeks after the Fukushima disaster the GoJ agreed to increase host nation support from three to five years and to provide 188 million yen annually to defray the costs of stationing U.S. troops in Japan.⁴⁶ The agreement is especially significant in light of two significant pressures on the GoJ and then Prime Minister Naoto Kan to reduce, rather than increase, support to U.S. presence. First, in June 2010 the former Prime Minister, Yukio Hatoyama, resigned over the mishandling of a planned relocation of Futenma airbase to a less populated part of Okinawa, which was followed by mass protests to remove the base entirely.⁴⁷ Second, Japan’s ailing fiscal health made reducing Japan’s contribution to U.S. basing an attractive cost cutting measure.⁴⁸ Despite these pressures, the GoJ was politically enabled to bolster the longstanding U.S.-Japanese security arrangement, due in large part to the goodwill fostered by U.S. assistance in the wake of the disaster.

The Way Ahead

The United States is fully invested in promoting stability in the Pacific region. In particular, PACOM’s history of support to FHA operations is strong evidence of that commitment. Continued engagement with Asian partners – both individual nations and regional institutions – on FHA planning, training and execution that takes into account regional, national and cultural subtleties will greatly assist USPACOM in establishing the credibility so vital for furthering U.S. national interests. Cohesive and coordinated strategic communications is one area where there is still significant opportunity for progress. Though not conclusive, the vignettes discussed provide evidence suggesting the value of strategic communication and the long-term effects it can impart on bilateral and multilateral negotiations and agreements. Direct causal relationships related to strategic communications are difficult to establish, as there are simply too many factors affecting outcomes at the strategic level. However, there is a

⁴¹ Stephanie Nebehay, “Japan Requests Foreign Rescue Teams, UN Says,” Reuters, March 11, 2011.

⁴² Andrew Feickert and Emma Chanlett-Avery, Japan 2011 Earthquake: U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Response, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, June 2, 2011, p. 1.

⁴³ U.S. Agency for International Development, “Japan – Earthquake and Tsunami, Fact Sheet #17,” April 22, 2011c.

⁴⁴ “FACTBOX-Aid and rescue offers for Japan quake”. *Reuters*. 16 March 2011.

⁴⁵ Richard Wike, “Does Humanitarian Aid Improve America’s Image?” Pew Global Attitudes Project, March 6, 2012.

⁴⁶ “Disaster Militarism: Rethinking U.S. aid in the Asia-Pacific,” available at <http://fpif.org/disaster-militarism-rethinking-u-s-relief-asia-pacific/>

⁴⁷ “Japan PM apologizes for U.S. bases in Okinawa,” available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/10388407>

⁴⁸ Chanlett-Avery, Manyin, Cooper and Rinehart, “Japan-U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service, 2013, p. 18.

compelling and pervasive theme in all these examples: a lack of strategic communications generally leads to poorer relations while positive messaging efforts facilitate a strategic environment advantageous to U.S. national interests. Relationships matter, whether at the personal, organizational, or country level. When strategic messaging works in concert with U.S. FHA efforts, relationships strengthen and partnerships are enhanced.

Though the United States has executed many successful FHA operations over the past decade, we have missed key opportunities to capitalize on those successes at the strategic level. Mounting an effective strategic communications campaign can be complicated by host nation sensitivities, but complexity is not a reason for inaction. Such conditions merely pose additional challenges which must be taken into consideration when developing the plan. These challenges are often country dependent, necessitating detailed knowledge of those countries most likely to be effected by these significant events. Enhancing the strategic communication program requires a relatively small investment, mostly at the combatant commander's staff level, concentrating on effective synchronization with other government agencies and bodies. As such, it is a cost effective way for the United States, and specifically USPACOM, to capitalize on these opportunities in the future.

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