

## *Chapter 21*

# **Response to the 2004 Tsunami: An International Perspective**

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It is virtually axiomatic to begin a conversation regarding lessons learned and best practices by discussing the usually expected failure in applying the former, and making an assumption that the latter concept has substantial validity; in other words, that best practices can be determined and applied across the board. In taking a backwards look at the tsunami of December 2004, and the nature of the response on an international and local scale, it must be acknowledged that lessons “learned” more often translate into lessons “observed” and that best practices may only be understood and promulgated on a disaggregated basis. Arguably, this is not a conclusion applicable only to the tsunami because of the scale of the regional impact with the complications inherent in a disaster of that magnitude. A regional perspective can begin and end at the water’s edge or at a national boundary. In the case of early warning systems, however, there was a regional consensus that establishing such systems was an urgent priority.

It is important to note, however that a retrospective examination such as this necessarily includes a carefully chosen degree of obfuscation. For example, this analysis is presented in global terms as if institutions and collectives in general operate as monolithic entities. This is useful for purposes of presentation but certainly overlooks the realities of individual actions and initiatives redounding to the benefit of organizations but with little relation to them as such. An impediment to understanding the area of humanitarian assistance, simply put, may well be its ad-hoc nature and the tendency to examine its operation taking this aspect as an immutable fact.

### **The Indian Ocean Tsunami**

The earthquake triggering the tsunami, with a magnitude of 9.0, struck off the west coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. The tsunami affected 12 countries in south and southeast Asia and the northeastern coast of Africa. This aftermath of the earthquake affected Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand, to differing degrees, but with an overall massive loss of life exceeding two hundred thousand persons. It created, in addition to the immediate consequences of the disaster, long-term issues of resettlement and reconstruction. Further, in the case of Aceh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, the response was affected by ongoing conflict. This is noteworthy, as the conflict issues affected the response in relation to the roles of international actors.

As with most events of significant magnitude, the tsunami captured worldwide attention. Its aftermath remains newsworthy but to a significantly smaller audience, assuming one is out the region where it occurred. We have a two-part but related scenario to review. There is the event with its effect on the lives of those in immediate danger, and a worldwide and often stunned

public, including those with particular anxieties over the fate of friends and relatives. Then there is what follows and slowly unfolds as attendant political and social issues are worked out.

The magnitude and extent of the impact of the tsunami led to an immediate outpouring of direct assistance, with credible offers of more to come. The United States initially pledged \$350 million accompanied by a pledge of military support. This was almost immediately followed by an additional request for \$600 million. The initial contribution of \$40.5 million by the European Union was quickly increased. Private contributions were of similar magnitude. In some cases, such as that of the non-governmental organization (NGO) *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF), the level of contributions exceeded their program requirements as well as the ability to utilize the funding. MSF then announced this quite publically, requesting the suspension of contributions to them for tsunami relief. This unusual declaration highlighted the level of support emanating from the public and governments as well as international groups from all communities.

It must be acknowledged that a critical aspect of this disaster was the fact that the area was a worldwide tourist Mecca. There were few countries whose citizens were not visiting in one of the affected areas, with anxious relatives abroad whose attention immediately focused on their television screens, radios, the internet, or newspapers. In that respect, this was a transnational occurrence which, at least temporarily, transcended usual regional concerns and disputes.

Further, in the case of Indonesia, the outpouring of apparently apolitical aid was seen by some as ameliorating the presumed growing polarization between the west and Muslim nations. This certainly seemed to be an outcome; perhaps in the short term and on the basis of perceptions not shared.

The importance of the issue of coordination of international relief efforts was immediately recognized by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). An emergency meeting was held in Jakarta within two weeks of the event. The agenda focused on increasing contributions and coordinating relief efforts.

## **The Actors and Their Roles**

It would be difficult to identify a group not involved in the response. In addition to the national governments and their militaries, civil society organizations, foreign militaries, private enterprise, and international NGOs also played key roles.

The resources and logistical expertise available to and utilized by national militaries was critical in the early days, particularly in the areas of security, communications, and movement of relief supplies. However, there were limiting factors affecting their response. The Indonesian military, for example, had few helicopters in the region. However, the U.S. aircraft carrier was in the region and its 25 helicopters began flying missions within days of the disaster. Even with added capacity, insufficient transportation assets were a major element, as well as the critical factor that the military and their families were among the victims.

The contribution of civil society organizations, including NGOs, church groups, and other community organizations, notably, the national Red Cross/Red Crescent societies, was extraor-

dinary and many would argue that these local groups represent a little understood or appreciated component of the overall response. Interestingly, these organizations were not routinely included in national disaster management planning. This exclusion also extended to private corporations, local and international, whose contributions were cited as unprecedented.

It is worth making an observation on the importance of staffing. Another way of looking at the connection between individual actions and initiatives referred to above is to consider how, at all levels and across all organizations, the impact of excessive staff rotation plays a major role. This factor introduces an element of built-in vulnerability to any structure or set of objectives

We are now looking at transnational issues. Given that today's world features global enterprises in virtually all areas, the dimension of the private sector clearly needs to be measured and included in both the preparation and response.

### **Coordination and Other Issues**

There is no question but that the large number of diverse organizations with a range of mandates, operational assumptions, levels of resources, not to mention experience, created acute coordination challenges, especially during the early days of the response.

Local civil society groups, in the absence of their inclusion in the national plan, found themselves dealing with the lack of clear reporting lines and were often the objects of interference from various government bodies.

In addition, many NGOs with little experience in humanitarian relief but with often abundant resources, were unwilling or just unaware of the need to cooperate with other groups. In fact, some of the groups with considerable independent resources operated without consultation with other partners or even the government.

Preparation for disaster has been a high-level concern of countries in the region to varying degrees. India, for instance, was thought to have developed a good response system in coordination with USAID's provision of support for training over some period. Its response to the tsunami, however was deemed to be "chaotic" with accusations directed at relief workers who allegedly hijacked relief supplies. In addition, interference by national authorities with the work of the trained local relief works was widely reported.

### **Foreign Military Assistance**

It is beyond question that the amount of assistance provided through foreign militaries was considerable. There was, however, little direction from regional governments on how this assistance was to be implemented in the case of logistical support or distributed in the case of food or other direct assistance. However, an underlying reality of military involvement was the haphazard nature of the arrival of military assets and the lack of clear terms of reference governing their actions. This was partly compensated for by the fact that regional militaries had previously worked with host nation forces.

The U.S. Pacific Command led a Combined Support Force (CSF) based in U-Tapao, Thailand. A command center housing liaison officers from Australia, Britain, Japan, Singapore, and Thailand was set up along with a civilian-military coordination cell which served as a base for UNOCHA and USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team representatives. Here again we see the modalities required to implement an effective response served as the basis for regional and international cooperation.

The question of constraints on the movements of foreign militaries into areas of previous or potential conflict was, on occasion, an issue. The military role was, as suggested above, at times complicated by ongoing insurgencies in regions such as Aceh in Indonesia. This impacted on the willingness of the Indonesian government to grant foreign military assistance to some regions. Initially the Indonesian military (TNI) refused to allow international relief flights landing permission in Banda Aceh. This restriction was waived, but additional constraints were placed on the movements of foreign militaries in general, and NGO workers required permission from TNI for movements outside of town.

In this connection, a limitation on the effectiveness of foreign military was the absence, in some cases, of status of forces agreements (SOFA).

In contrast to the situation in Indonesia, Thailand became the logistics hub for a significant portion of the U.S. and international relief effort. Longstanding relationships between the Thai and U.S. militaries undoubtedly contributed to the success of the partnership.

In addition, international Guidelines such as the Oslo Guidelines for the Use of Military Assets in Humanitarian Operations were not generally known. As a result, implementing them was not integrated into national planning.

On the other hand, an essential element, namely recognizing the authority of the national government over the distribution of relief supplies, remains a standing concern. While independence of action can often seem appropriate as the dominant imperative, acknowledging host-nation sovereignty is fundamental. It is frequently apparent that control by the local authority has been so weakened by the event that there is no realistic way in which their leading, at least in the short term, is possible. However, this is not a standing state of affairs and what has been described as “the principle of the subsidiary of international assistance” must be acknowledged.

This understanding should apply not only to international organizations and NGOs, but donor governments as well.

Another aspect of the relationship to foreign military assistance, beyond the broad-based overall Guidelines referenced above, is the relative unfamiliarity of the respective communities, military and civilian, with each other’s procedures and assumptions. Some would argue that in the best of all possible worlds, given that the military will be present during these large-scale disasters, that consideration be given to joint training exercises and, at the very least, shared briefings and perhaps short-term secondments of personnel.

## National Issues

The advertising slogan “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” unfortunately seems apt in looking at the relation between national and regional planning. At the national level, the tsunami experience underlined very clearly the fundamental importance of organizing response capacity at the local level, where the role of the first responder is paramount. The tsunami experience again underscored the question of access to resources in the event of breakdown in normal delivery channels or services. Resource availability and other capacities accompanied with disaster management strategies must be established as a standing role at the local level. This, in turn, needs to be linked to planning and resource management at the national level.

## Regional Issues

The United Nations plays a critical role in supporting and setting a framework for regional cooperation. A central feature of this role is the capacity of UNOCHA to organize and share information. Information sharing during the response to the tsunami and now in the period following reinforces a critical dimension of transnational engagement.

Admittedly in the tsunami affected region, possibilities for joint action are somewhat complicated by the existence of different regional groupings as commented on above: ASEAN and SAARC. This is a function of political realities, but as the tsunami made clear, there are overlaps of interest in the area of response to a natural disaster as well. The experience has been the basis for the development of initiatives which may be replicated. Within a month after the tsunami of 2004, Sri Lanka established, with the support of UNDP, a Disaster Management Center (DMC) which in 2007 proved instrumental in warning of the need to evacuate coastal regions in the face of an impending tsunami.

Further, it is obvious that a regional early warning system is not only a necessary tool, but its development can serve as focal point in furthering regional cooperation. Development of a regional contingency plan is a logical next step. Such a plan would include distribution of information on resource availability and logistical capabilities.

An important, yet easily overlooked, aspect of regional interaction is joint training and reaching agreement on operational terms of reference. Gaming exercisers are a proven method of imparting shared training.

The business community, already joined on a regional basis by commercial interests reinforced by the activities of Chambers of Commerce, should be encouraged to take an active role in planning and evaluation of resource capability.

*The Burma Exception:* Little needs being said about regional relations with Burma. While information on the effects of the tsunami is sketchy, it is clear that this country has self-selected itself out of sharing in the regional consensus.

## **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**

An important aspect of taking a global perspective on disaster response too frequently overlooked or given a low priority in budgeting and planning is risk reduction. The concept of preparing communities to respond has only recently become part of the thinking of decision makers. The clearly defined image of an expected effective early response has to date dominated the behavior of responding organizations and funders, including the public. The willingness to commit funds to this aspect of the disaster cycle lags behind the need. The tsunami demonstrated how important it is that response preparation be seen as part of the educational and training routines for both civilian and local police and military personnel.

Disaster risk reduction, if it is to be effective requires a clear legal framework and the acceptance of defined and supported institutional responsibilities well in advance of an event. Further, it should be noted that risk awareness is very much a part of the disaster profile. In the tsunami, risk awareness, generally speaking because of the absence of recent experience, was very low. The lack of this awareness was, therefore, a major factor in the high death toll.

A positive result of the tsunami experience has been the demonstration of a willingness in all of the affected countries to recognize and develop measures to attack this weakness.

## **The Next Phase Recovery**

Recovery, from the strictly national point of view, is not a transnational issue. The decisions and actions of donors may attempt to be as broad-based as possible, but finally decision making and execution of plans devolves to those in each country responsible for national stability or to those in a position to manage outcomes. As discussed earlier, early warning systems are a notable exception. A report in IRIN of December 2007 cites Transparency International, Sri Lanka as claiming that there is a \$500 million gap in the accounting for the funds received for tsunami relief. Donors might feel reluctant to contribute so generously in the event of another disaster, but will the public allow them to take what might appear as a position devoid of moral standing?

## **A Look at Civil-Military Relations: A Transnational View**

Humanitarian and military objectives are likely to differ significantly when operating in the same environment. This is hardly unexpected, given their sharply distinct missions, mandates, and terms of reference. However, some objectives may in fact actually overlap even though institutional assumptions may inhibit recognition of this. It is those areas of apparent differences, which acquire frequently unintended significance when they serve as the basis for antagonistic behavior, that may affect the allocation and use of resources. All sides are losers when this occurs, most especially the communities affected by the discord when civil and military interests seemingly collide.

## **The Military Image**

The word military carries with it a variety of images, depending on which of the world's militaries you are describing. The images presented, for example, by the U.K. or the U.S. military are quite different than those offered by the military of a state where the government has chosen to use its armed forces as a tool of repression. Then there is the image of the military when seen responding to natural disasters, as distinct from that of the military engaged in combat or described as consuming a huge part of the national budget.

During the response to a natural disaster, the reaction to military involvement is generally favorable. The military's special advantage in logistics is often heavily relied on to assist in the rapid delivery of aid over long distances and into otherwise inaccessible areas. In this case, humanitarian organizations have fewer concerns about the role of the military in providing immediate relief. Natural disasters play no favorites and non-governmental organizations, local structures, and the military often function as a team. The Asian tsunami and the Pakistan earthquake present striking illustrations of the value of the cooperation and the level of public acceptance of the military's role.

In short, there is no clearly defined image of the military that fits all encounters expected or ongoing. The perception that there is or needs to be an unambiguous consensual view of the military in relation to transnational issues seems rooted in the assumptions that it must always be seen as an arm of state policy and that military training automatically contravenes the principles of impartial humanitarian assistance.

## **Assumptions and the Approach of this Chapter**

This chapter proceeds from the assumption that while there are and needs to be critical differences between the approach of the military and civil society to humanitarian work, these differences are not absolute or so rigid in nature as to preclude combined action when and where appropriate. This assumption is presented in the context of relations among cooperating militaries from different states; in other words, a transnational military.

Today, the nature of the relationship between the military and civil society is increasingly under scrutiny. It is important that this relationship be based, to the extent possible, on shared understandings. This applies equally to the relationships among different militaries.

Our initial focus is on the civilian-to-military relationship. It is not only the civilians or military on the ground whose understanding of the others' assumptions may be deficient. This may extend to higher levels of decision-making as well. We will then examine the role of gaming scenarios in laying the groundwork for enhanced military to military cooperation.

## **Improving the Chances for Cooperation**

The comparisons used in what follows are intended to assist in clarifying some of the expectations and assumptions that get in the way of effective communication between the military and civilian organizations on both the national and international scenes. They represent an attempt to capture the concerns and interests of the respective communities and place them in a broader

context. The challenge is to find, to the extent possible, areas of common concerns as an aid in establishing a framework for cooperative action. A first step is clarifying how the parties use language as an aid in avoiding fundamental misunderstandings. The goal is to facilitate the development of strategies for military and civilian actors operating in a transnational environment that do not compromise their views on roles, mandates, and recognized national interests.

## **Language and Behavior**

On a very basic level, the more action-oriented nature of military discourse often strikes civilians as unnecessarily strident or even reflecting a naive approach to what is or is not possible. In other words, the very tone of an exchange between the communities may militate against a meaningful exchange taking place.

### ***Information and Intelligence***

*Humanitarian Organization Views and Behavior:* Humanitarian organizations see information as a tool for improving program implementation and planning. In this sense, it is clearly distinct from intelligence, with its intent of gaining an advantage over an adversary. Information management in the humanitarian community is designed to support a range of objectives, including program evaluation, assessment, and ever-present funding requirements. Finally, the use of information is also required to be consistent with the tenets of the various codes of conduct governing the provision of humanitarian assistance.

*Military Views and Behavior:* For the military, information and intelligence are seen as virtually synonymous. Both terms are applied to the tools for tactical and strategic decision-making and action. Information, therefore, is deemed essential to providing an advantage over an opposing group. This leads the military to often see humanitarians working in their area of operations as automatically connected with their objectives, and therefore valuable as a source of first-hand information.

### ***Security in the Field: Responsibilities and Concerns***

*Humanitarian Organization Views and Behavior:* The concept of security is closely tied to staff protection, protection of beneficiaries, and the concept of “humanitarian space.” This last is defined in different ways, but a fundamental statement turns upon the need to have a safe and secure environment in which to do humanitarian work. Further, the word “protection” has more than one understanding. It applies to physical protection in the sense described above, and also to legal protection defined by humanitarian norms and international law.

*Military Views and Behavior:* Here again, the military view includes a focus on the means by which security is established and control of the requirements for maintaining security. Humanitarian organizations rarely establish security procedures beyond maintaining the tools of self-protection, such as warden networks, secure housing, staff training, and issues of safe access. The military does not take this more indirect approach to security. For the military, operational plans assume the imposition of security as part of mission objectives.

### ***Leadership during Conflict or Civil Strife***

*Humanitarian Organization Views and Behavior:* From the humanitarian organization perspective, leadership, to the extent it is seen as required or desirable by the community on the ground, may reflect the lead agency approach and not a command-and-control relationship. This approach is increasingly taken by the United Nations. It may be a function of individual initiative, simply being first on the ground, or having and sharing resources. In some circumstances, the determination of which humanitarian organization takes a leading role (usually implicit as opposed to stated) may be connected to variables such as experience in the area, staffing levels, and relations with the local community.

*Military Views and Behavior:* Who is in charge is a fundamental concern for the military. Overall responsibility is determined by institutional imperatives, training, and a defined mission statement. Effectiveness is very much related to a chain of command, which is imbued in military culture but can also be personality-driven. However, clear delineations of roles, responsibilities, and unity of command are viewed as necessary in order to ensure mission success. In those cases where the military objective is either planned to or results in a need to include humanitarian assistance, decision-making need not necessarily take into account considerations of civilian expertise or previous arrangements with the local community. This, of course, does not resonate well within the humanitarian community.

### ***As Things Stand: Some Observations***

*The Public's View of the Humanitarian Organization Community:* Speaking in general terms, public and donor expectations of the humanitarian organization community takes more than one form and are closely related to the source of their funding. In the eyes of the public, the role of relief organizations is pretty straightforward. They exist to save lives, assist the needy, and demonstrate the humanitarian values of the communities from which they come. Individuals tend to see humanitarian agencies as an extension of a strongly felt need to ameliorate the suffering of others. This support takes many forms, from cash donations to direct provision of material aid.

Humanitarian organizations, however, may require the support of a variety of donors. The larger the crisis, the more dependent they may become on a broad base of donor support. Donors will follow different approaches. Ideally, humanitarian organizations would prefer funds that have no strings attached in order to make decisions based solely on their own professional judgments. While humanitarian organization actions are based on mission statements and program activities reflecting those statements, a humanitarian organization may act differently depending on the expectations of the donor.

Donors routinely place tight controls on expenditures. For a time, this was seen as primarily related to issues of accountability. Increasingly, however, there is a realization that donors have responsibilities to beneficiaries not dissimilar to those of the organizations they support. The Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative is one example of this trend.

*The Public's View of the Military:* Again, speaking generally, the military has a constituency which does not usually see it as primarily concerned with providing humanitarian assistance.

This view may change in the absence of ongoing conflict, if the humanitarian community is seen as lacking the capability to deal with a humanitarian task. Nor does the military see itself in this role as a normal operational assumption. A recent Department of Defense Directive, DOD 3000.05, has somewhat altered this perception. This Directive requires that the armed services include stability operations, which can include peacekeeping, as a core mission. That having been said, the mantra that the military exists primarily to “fight and win our nation’s wars” still permeates the mindset of many officers as well as that of the public. On the other hand, in times of large-scale disasters, there is frequently an expectation that the array of resources available to the military will and should be tasked to respond.

A clear difficulty lies in how much preparation the military can realistically undertake to meet the expectations of the Directive and today’s realities. An important factor will be the amount and nature of training resources directed to the issue. Military training objectives are necessarily different from those of humanitarian agencies. The degree of concentration on the specific skills essential to realizing military objectives remains a primary challenge.

### ***Guidelines for Establishing Rules of Engagement Between Civilians and the Military***

Recent progress made in expanding the level of communication between the humanitarian and military communities is very encouraging. Examples are the work in the United States of the NGO umbrella organization Interaction, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, in developing and launching guidelines for relations between civilians and the military during conflict. These guidelines are essentially consistent with those developed by the international community as represented by the UNOCHA Civil/Military Guidelines and the Oslo Guidelines governing the use of military assets. The reframing of these guidelines in Afghanistan by the non-governmental umbrella structure, ACBAR, is an example of the international scope of the tenets underlying all these documents.

These initiatives mark a significant step forward in clarifying what has often been a relationship productive of misunderstanding and subject to strongly held and frequently unexamined convictions on both sides.

### ***An Instrument For Improving Transnational Cooperation Among Militaries***

One approach to developing an integrated approach to doctrine and training is the use of scenarios posing situations mimicking a complex stability operation. It is an underlying assumption, for an exercise designed to strengthen international cooperation among national militaries, that structural change is not the central objective. That is the responsibility of a nation’s leadership. On the other hand, developing joint doctrine and approaches to training that translate into greater cooperation is paramount.

There are critical elements to accomplishing changes in attitudes and behavior. This is as true for the military environment as it is for any institutional or social change. Any exercise intended to assist in facilitating change must clearly concentrate on those aspects of organiza-

tional behavior impeding such change. A gaming scenario designed to replicate these areas can be an effective instrument.

*Viking '08*, involving both NATO and EU forces and executed in November 2008, was such an exercise. The exercise was based on events occurring in countries sliding into crisis. It is the premier training exercise for the Swedish armed forces and also serves as a fundamental occasion for the framing of doctrine and training within NATO. An important aspect was a focus is on increasing partner interoperability through the use of technology. Civilians were integrated into the exercise through the participation of government officials and humanitarian organizations.

An estimated 25 nationalities participated, with approximately 1800 military and police officers engaged in the exercise. Twelve nations throughout Europe and NATO were engaged in this cooperative training environment aimed at laying the foundation for unity of effort for joint action in implementing UN resolutions. A cadre of civilians was assembled to replicate the non-military side of this complex exercise.

This was a cross border exercise requiring cooperation between NATO and EU forces. The operational elements for decision-making included:

- The spillover effect of crisis to neighboring countries
- Ethnic, religious, and culture-related violence
- Huge humanitarian need
- International security implications
- A breakdown of law and order
- Area-wide economic collapse

A central aspect of the exercise featured the provision of information on the doctrine and training principles of the participating countries. This speaks to the necessity of understanding the operative assumptions of the cooperating actors.

Information exchange was assisted through a variety of IT approaches, including online web applications and e-mail. In addition, conventional telephone systems, video telephone conferences, and real-time simulation were employed.

## **Into the Future**

Establishing and maintaining effective relationships among organizational structures, military and humanitarian, from different countries, with differing institutional and national histories is clearly a challenge. Successfully meeting this challenge turns in significant measure upon creating opportunities for joint training through exercises such as *Viking '08*. The military does not, however, function in a vacuum. A starting point, therefore, is recognition of the importance of the military and civilian worlds accepting the need to move towards greater understanding of each others' frame of reference.

