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India and Humanitarian Assistance in Post Conflict Peace Building



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The United Nations has developed a range of instruments for controlling and resolving conflicts between and within states. It includes use of the security forces in its either traditional role (both peacekeeping and peace enforcement), preventive deployment and peace building. Peace building aims at transforming the conflicts to create a sustainable peace environment that is characterised by absence of physical violence and commencement of activities to rebuild a broken state. The field of peace building is much more complex and wider than most people realize. This term is now increasingly used to describe entire range of activities including peacekeeping, economic development, diplomacy, transitional justice, democratization efforts etc. It entails much more than either rebuilding or forming a state. Some of the important activities, which form part of the peace building activities are: creating a safe and secure environment; humanitarian assistance; rehabilitation and economic reconstruction; resettlement of refugees; monitoring and improving

Key Points

1. In post conflict peace building, the term *Humanitarian Assistance* covers all activities, which are of urgent need to save human lives.
2. Indian Government considers only those activities that assuage human suffering caused by only natural disasters fall under *Humanitarian Assistance*, which is guided by 1994 Oslo Guidance. But according the Western concept, *Humanitarian Assistance* should include suffering of civilian population in armed conflict.
3. Based on past experience, India has great potentials when it comes to mitigating human sufferings. NDMA's role in response to earthquake in April 2015 is a pointer in this direction.
4. India's concept or philosophy of *Humanitarian Assistance* can and should change its trajectory depending on its national objective and foreign policy.

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an autonomous think-tank dealing with national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional and sub-conventional conflict and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy-oriented in approach.

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human rights situations; establishment of interim administration; mediation and confidence building measures; and finally transition of authority. In all these activities, the UN peace operation plays a crucial role in bringing sustainable peace with a big scope for the non-uniformed personnel i.e. the civilians' participation in reducing violence and creating a safe environment for peace-making and peace-building activities to take place and moving forward the political process. These unarmed civilians could be UN employees (Blue Helmets) and members of governmental and non-governmental agencies. All with the common aim to save human lives and help restoring normalcy in the conflict zone. Based on the past experience of the international community specially those who worked in field, the most critical areas in the conflict zone which necessitate immediate attention and where civilian can make much better contribution are: reintegration of the demobilised combatants and their families; medical assistance; provision of food and shelter; provision of basic amenity like water, sanitation, electricity; infrastructure development such as construction of roads to provide internal connectivity, construction of hospitals, educational facilities, administrative building etc. skill development (including war wounded casualties), humanitarian de-mining, security sector reform, establishment of rule of law and judiciary, and conduct of election. A number of these activities (except those related to security, judiciary, rule of law, administration and election), which are of urgent need to save human lives, can be grouped under Humanitarian Assistance. Such assistance can come to the conflict zone in various forms. It could be UN provided, under either regional or bilateral arrangement or even voluntary contributions by the NGOs. The primary aim of such initiative is to save innocent human lives. At the same time, in the context of bi-lateral government-to-government assistance, to a

great extent, the level and quantum of assistance depends on the strategic interest of the donor country and its relation with the recipient country. To some degree, understanding and interpretation of the very concept of *Humanitarian Assistance* also influence the nation's (including India) philosophy for humanitarian assistance.

According to Global Humanitarian Assistance - a Development Initiative, Humanitarian assistance generally mean the aid and action designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations (Source: Good Humanitarian Donorship).¹ According to Claudia Meier and C.S.R. Murthy, "The Indian government uses the terms 'humanitarian assistance' or 'disaster relief' for activities that assuage human suffering caused by natural disasters like cyclones, droughts, earthquakes or floods."² But Western donors believe that humanitarian assistance must be provided to the civilian population affected by armed conflict. Western concept is aligned with the UN. As per the UN, whenever there is a disaster or a humanitarian catastrophe, the UN is on the ground providing relief, support and assistance. According the UN secretary general:³

"Today, we recognize the millions of people who count on us for their very survival. The one billion people afflicted by hunger. The tens of millions forced to flee their homes because of disaster and conflict.

The children who die from diseases we know how to cure. The women and girls who are brutalised by sexual violence. And the humanitarian community will be on the scene rushing bravely towards danger, determined to help people in mind."

The narrow definition of India's concept does not mean that India is averse to providing assistance to the civilian population affected by armed conflict. For, India has rendered aid in post-conflict scenarios in two instances—Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. This is in keeping with the neo-liberal approach adopted post-1991. India's rationale in providing such relief is perhaps guided by the necessity of extending sympathy and good will to its neighbors within broad parameters of its national security and foreign policy. Therefore, it is immaterial for what India stands for. India's idea/philosophy of humanitarian assistance is grounded in age-old traditions and human values. A country, which is almost every year affected by natural calamity, has to set priority in its decision to provide humanitarian assistance. But where India essentially differs from many Western nations is the strict adherence to the principles of humanitarian assistance:

- humanity – saving human lives and alleviating suffering wherever it is found
- impartiality – acting solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations
- neutrality – acting without favouring any side in an armed conflict or other dispute where such action is carried out
- independence – the autonomy of humanitarian objectives from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

India's reservation stems from its conviction and respect to the 1994 Oslo Guidelines and believes that while extending humanitarian assistance,

State sovereignty must be respected. Whereas, Western nations feel that very nature of complex humanitarian emergencies, the principles of independence does not hold good. In this regard, most of the Western nations want to invoke the principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) to strengthen their argument. On the contrary, most of Asian nations outrightly reject these so called Western values – importance of democracy, human rights and rule of law as an excuse for intervention in others' sovereignty. India considers the donors as the partners and not recipient of an Indian walking aid to come out of the disaster. This is precisely the reason that it believes in providing aids bilaterally after consultation with donors. India also believes in concept of community ownership.

In the recent years, the subject of Humanitarian Assistance And Disaster Relief (HADR) has become of center of focus of the global community. Even within the Indian policy makers, determining the conceptual framework to provide assistance has started getting greater importance than before. Given the size of the sub-continent, geography, its harsh climatic conditions, and its vulnerability to disasters, India has been able to acquire vast experience in this field. Although India has specific disaster relief units specially trained and equipped to get deployed at a very short notice, Indian armed forces still form the core of such relief operations. While India's policy is domestic centric, it never hesitated in partnering the global community when it came to humanitarian assistance. In the last ten years, post disasters such as Tsunami, Cyclone, Earthquake, India has rendered humanitarian assistance and sent relief material to Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Philippines, Japan and US (Katrina). India has also steered and participated in various international HADR Seminars and Exercises. Describing India's contribution in disaster assistance, Sarabjeet Singh

stated: “As India moves to occupy an important position in the global community, it is in the process of bolstering its capabilities to match the rising expectations. That India would play an important role is only to be expected keeping in view its values, its interest in the stability in the region, its economic and development needs and its geographical location”.⁴

Accordingly, on December 23, 2005, the Government of India enacted the Disaster Management Act, which envisaged the creation of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), headed by the Prime Minister, and State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) headed by the respective Chief Ministers, to spearhead and implement a holistic and integrated approach to disaster management in India.⁵ From the time of its raising, there has been a paradigm shift in the concept of NDMA. The Vision of NDMA states –

“To build a safer and disaster resilient India by a holistic, pro-active, technology driven and sustainable development strategy that involves all stakeholders and fosters a culture of prevention, preparedness and mitigation.”

Thus the focus of NDMA now is “disaster risk reduction and mitigation”. It is because, in any disaster, the first responder will always be the one who suffers the most. Therefore, while relief should flow in, it is also important that the first responder is able to quickly respond to the disaster without having to wait for outside relief. Towards this, NDMA has developed programs to bring about awareness and preparing community and other stakeholders through Mock Exercises to respond to any calamity. As a second responder, NDMA now is well poised with ten of its well-trained and well-equipped National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) battalions (two additional battalions are

under raising) to intervene as early as possible. When the 7.5-magnitude earthquake struck the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal on 25 April 2015, NDRF Teams were ready to be airborne within two hours of receiving the executive orders. This amazing speed was possible because NDMA is constantly looking out for any warning, reviewing and updating its operational strategy / Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). As a result it was possible to deliver more than 10,000 Metric Tons of relief material and equipment at the disaster affected areas of Nepal within a very short time. It is not that it was only India who did everything. There were Teams of 34 countries, which took part in rescue operation. According to available information, there were number of casualties. But only 14 lives could be saved. Out of these, 11 lives were saved by the Indian NDRF Teams. It was the biggest Indian Armed Forces Rescue and Relief Operations abroad so far. In the just concluded ‘Operation Maitri’, the Indian Air Force and the Army flew 2223 sorties, rescued/evacuated about 11,200 people (including 780 casualties) to safer places and transported and dropped about 1700 tonnes of relief materials. The Indian armed forces Rapid Action Medical Teams extended medical assistance to 4762 injured, including 300 surgeries, 216 hospital admissions and 4174 OPD cases.⁶

Reflecting on India’s assistance to Nepal, Brigadier Ravi Pandalai attributed the success of the massive operation to India’s preparation to meet the challenge of natural disasters in the last 15 years or so.⁷ India’s experience in handling devastating Orissa Super Cyclone (1999) and the Gujarat Earthquake (2001), the Asian Tsunami (2004), earthquakes (Andamans 2009; Sikkim 2011), floods (Uttarakhand 2013; Jammu & Kashmir 2014) or the evacuation of citizens from Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, has helped India to carry out the task at hand with professionalism and in

an organised manner. The latest demonstration of India's capabilities in this regard came in the wake of the earthquake that struck Nepal. While NDMA had always accredited well in past when it came to responding to national calamity, response to disaster in Nepal was possibly the litmus test for the organisation. The massive rescue and relief operation however would not have been possible without the contribution of Indian Armed Forces and a number of governmental and NGOs. According to Lt General Naresh Marwah, one of the members of NDMA, numerous NGOs and Corporates had approached NDMA with substantial contribution.⁸ NDMA the nodal organisation of the country for disaster management was overwhelmed with the nation's vast potential in providing humanitarian assistance. The manner, in which operation was coordinated and executed in most efficient but quiet manner, indicates the nation's potential, the level of preparedness and commitment of the national authority for disaster management. It is not important if India's NDMA has been raised only for natural disaster relief. Since the victims of disaster whether man made, natural calamity or result of conflict are the innocent population, to be able to effectively respond to such disasters, each nation must have a national organisation like NDMA. Additionally, because of familiarity with geography, climatic conditions and knowledge of the potential of the respond mechanism of the neighbours, a regional arrangement will deliver better dividends than any other system. In the South Asian Region, in order to establish and strengthen the regional disaster management system to reduce risks and to improve response and recovery management at all levels, SAARC Disaster Management Center has been established in the year 2005. The Framework of SAARC Disaster Management provides a platform for South Asian countries to:⁹

- Establish and strengthen the regional disaster management system to reduce risks and to improve response and recovery management at all levels
- Identify and elaborate country and regional priorities for action
- Share best practices and lessons learnt from disaster risk reduction efforts at national levels
- Establish a regional system to develop and implement regional programmes and projects for early warning
- Establish a regional system of exchanging information on prevention, preparedness and management of natural disasters
- Create a regional response mechanism dedicated to disaster preparedness, emergency relief and rehabilitation to ensure immediate response
- Create a regional mechanism to facilitate monitoring and evaluation of achievements towards goals and strategies.

Even after four years of its raising, SAARC failed to respond to the disaster in Nepal. It is because the present mechanism of SAARC is quite weak and present effort of the Centre has been purely academic in nature. It reflects on the absence of collective response mechanism to mitigate common threats of this nature.¹⁰ In the wake of Nepal Earthquake, our PM has proposed conduct of Joint Exercise by SAARC Members to prepare for Regional Response to such calamities. Likewise, one Team of NDRF battalion of India has recently participated in one such joint exercise under the aegis of ASEAN in Malaysia. As for India's concept or philosophy of humanitarian assistance, it is an abstract matter,

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which can easily change its trajectory depending on its national objective and foreign policy. However, what should remain at the core of humanitarian assistance philosophy is the importance of enabling the recipient nation to cope with disaster and helping

to preserve its self-esteem. To put it in another words, the recipient nation should never be left with a feeling that it cannot walk without a crutch from the donor nations when it comes to reducing and mitigating impact of disasters.

Notes

1. <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/data-guides/defining-humanitarian-aid>
2. Claudia Meier and C.S.R. Murthy, "India's Growing Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance", GPPi Research Paper No, 13, March 2011, pp 6.
3. Remarks of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon during the launch of first World Humanitarian Day at UN Headquarters on 19 August 2009.
4. Parmar, Sarabjeet Singh, *Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) in India's National Strategy*, Journal of the Defense Studies, Volume 6, Number 1, January 2012 (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group: New Delhi)
5. <http://www.ndma.gov.in/en/about-ndma/evolution-of-ndma.htm>
6. Press Information Bureau of India report of 5 June 2015. From the net: <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx>
7. Pandalai, Ravi, *IDSA COMMENT on India's Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Effort in Nepal*. From net: <http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/IndiasHumanitarianAssistanceandDisasterRelief> (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group: New Delhi)
8. Lt General NC Marwah is a retired Indian Army officer with tremendous experience with UN Peacekeeping and disaster management
9. <http://saarc-sdmc.nic.in/framework.asp>
10. Nayak, Nihar R, *IDSA COMMENT on The Nepal Earthquake: Could SAARC have been Effective?* From net: <http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments> (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group: New Delhi)

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