

Chapter 2

Indian Ocean Tsunami and International Cooperation

An earthquake occurred off the coast of Sumatra at the end of 2004 and the subsequent tsunami it triggered in the Indian Ocean (“the Indian Ocean tsunami”) wrought devastating economic damage to Asian countries bordering on the Indian Ocean and claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. In response, international organizations, governments and militaries, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and individuals extended aid to the affected countries on a global scale. Of note was the emergency aid provided by the militaries of various countries, particularly during the initial stage of the disaster relief.

The support provided by major countries seems to have had an impact on international relations in the region. In addition to its direct aid to disaster victims, the United States’ role in coordinating the relief activities of the different militaries was highly appreciated across the region. Australia was also commended for playing a similar role. On the other hand, China, which has been seeking to strengthen its influence in the region, failed to make a tangible contribution to the relief efforts.

The relief activities carried out in the disaster-stricken areas by the different militaries, international organizations, NGOs, and others raised several issues: (a) the problem of coordinating the relief activities of militaries from various countries, (b) constraints deriving from the governments of disaster-stricken countries and problems concerning the smoothness and efficiency of relief activities, (c) the slow pace of rehabilitation activities, and (d) the approach taken by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to deal with unconventional security risks, including disaster relief. It is hoped that the lessons learned from the tsunami relief activities will be applied during large-scale relief efforts in future.

1. Earthquake and Tsunami Damage, and Emergency Relief Activities

(1) Damage Caused by the Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami

The earthquake, which occurred in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Sumatra at 00:58 hours Universal Time on December 26, 2004, registered 9.0 on the Richter scale. Large aftershocks continued in an area stretching about 1,000 kilometers north to south from the Andaman Islands and the Nicobar Islands (India) to just off Sumatra, causing heavy damage to the northern part of Sumatra.

The shift in the ocean floor displaced an enormous volume of seawater and created a huge tsunami that spread across the Indian Ocean and reached as far as the East African coast. Unlike the countries in the Pacific region, those bordering the Indian Ocean have had little experience with tsunami and did not possess adequate regional or national early warning and evacuation systems. Due in part to the lack of such systems, the coastal areas of many countries of the region suffered huge loss of life and devastating economic damage.

Approximately 300,000 people were killed or listed as missing in 12 countries—Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and the Seychelles. The greatest loss of life occurred in Indonesia, where the tsunami left more than 230,000 dead and missing in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province (Aceh Province) in the northern part of Sumatra. Sri Lanka recorded about 35,000 deaths, India about 16,000, and Thailand about 8,000. In addition, about 1.5 million people were displaced, and the number of victims who needed aid amounted to about 5 million. The total damage caused by the tsunami is estimated at more than \$7.9 billion.

Even after the tsunami, Indonesia continued to experience earthquakes. On March 29, 2005, an earthquake registering 8.7 on the Richter scale struck Nias Island, near the epicenter of the December 2004 quake. A large number of buildings collapsed and more than 900 lives were lost.



The coastal areas of Sumatra, Indonesia, devastated by the tsunami (US Navy photo by Seaman Patrick M. Bonafede)

(2) Worldwide Emergency Relief Activities

News of the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami rapidly spread across the world. Newsreel footage of huge tsunami waves overrunning the coastal areas of many countries bordering the Indian Ocean, wreaking havoc on internationally renowned tourist destinations and foreign vacationers, shocked people across the world, prompting them to extend a helping hand. A Special ASEAN Leaders' Meeting on Aftermath of Earthquake and Tsunami was held on January 6, 2005. The 26 countries and international organizations that participated in the summit meeting held in Jakarta, Indonesia, pledged cooperation with the international community and the regional countries in providing emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance, as well as the prevention and mitigation of human suffering. The United Nations issued a *Flash Appeal for Indian Ocean Earthquake-Tsunami 2005* (the Flash Appeal), which stated that during the first six months following the tsunami, \$977 million would be needed to provide emergency aid to the tsunami-stricken areas, and the participating countries and organizations expressed their willingness to cooperate.

As of December 2005, humanitarian assistance/aid committed or contributed by governments, international organizations, private organizations, and individuals from 100 countries exceeded \$6.1 billion. (In addition, the amount of uncommitted pledges as of the same month stood at \$600 million.) A third of that amount was accounted for by personal donations, and the humanitarian assistance contributed by the Japanese government came to more than \$500 million, the largest among the donor countries. More than 200 international organizations, foreign governments, and NGOs were engaged in humanitarian assistance activities, and 35 countries sent more than 30,000 military personnel to carry out such activities.

Emergency relief activities in the affected areas were conducted by international organizations, foreign governments and their militaries, and NGOs, all in cooperation with the local governments. The roads and bridges in most of the coastal villages, particularly in Banda Aceh, the capital of Aceh Province, were washed away by the tsunami. Most of the local government officials and law enforcement officers who could have played a critical role in the aftermath of the tsunami were killed or injured (2,000 of the municipal government officials of Banda Ache, or 80 percent, were killed or reported missing, paralyzing the local government). President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono declared the incident a National Catastrophe and carried out a humanitarian aid campaign by dispatching

Table 2.1. Humanitarian assistance to victims of the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami (as of December 8, 2005)

(in US\$)

Donors	Commitments/ Contributions	Ratio of commitments to total (%)	Uncommitted pledges
Japan	502,579,970	8.2	0
Britain	136,128,698	2.2	13,364,408
United States	134,107,148	2.2	217,776,074
Germany	129,651,389	2.1	0
Canada	116,487,566	1.9	0
European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO)	98,842,102	1.6	68,992,664
Norway	81,468,409	1.3	1,832,061
China	62,248,729	1.0	1,600,000
France	60,359,661	1.0	27,890,183
Italy	57,864,154	0.9	1,206,273
Denmark	44,119,185	0.7	0
Netherlands	41,666,548	0.7	0
UAE	41,430,427	0.7	270,000
Sweden	41,370,476	0.7	6,466,126
Australia	36,398,508	0.6	8,046,409
Finland	32,726,978	0.5	482,509
Greece	31,009,201	0.5	0
Allocations of unearmarked funds by UN	30,464,876	0.5	0
New Zealand	27,079,695	0.4	1,183,118
Switzerland	26,361,383	0.4	0
Qatar	25,000,000	0.4	0
India	23,000,000	0.4	0
Ireland	22,357,836	0.4	8,767,866
Spain	21,971,308	0.4	0
Others	196,613,478	3.2	207,728,714
Private (individuals & organizations)	4,127,818,551	67.1	53,250,000
Total	6,149,126,276	100	618,856,405

Source: Data from the Financial Tracking Service by OCHA.

Note: "Commitments/Contributions" includes commitments made by donor countries in response to the Flash Appeal of the United Nations, and bilateral assistance and assistance to international organizations reported to the United Nations.

units of the National Armed Forces of Indonesia (TNI) to rescue victims, build housing units, transport and distribute relief goods, provide medical services, recover bodies, and clean up the areas. Contingents from the military of Australia, Brunei, France, Germany, India, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New

Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, the United States, and Britain cooperated in relief and rehabilitation efforts—airlift, sea transport, amphibious landings, medical services, and civil engineering for the reconstruction of roads and bridges. Those who were engaged in relief activities in Indonesian territory included 6,178 troops from Indonesia and 5,666 troops from other countries. In addition, about 5,000 men and women from international organizations and NGOs have participated in aid activities.

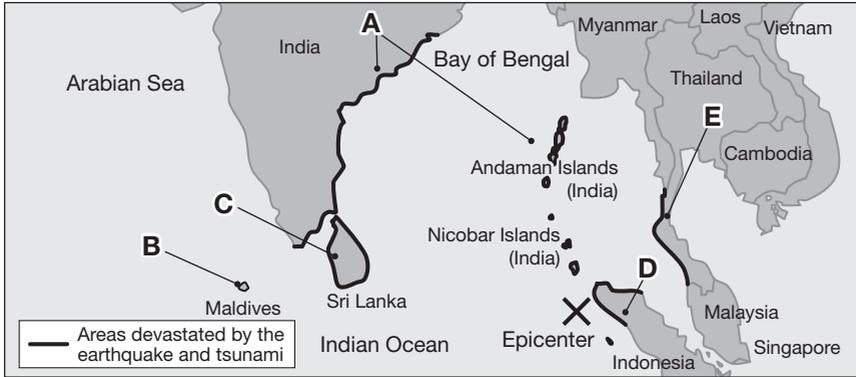
The United States dispatched to Indonesia a total of 15,000 troops including those from the USS *Abraham Lincoln* Carrier Strike Group and operated the hospital ship USNS *Mercy* off the coast of Aceh. Pursuant to the Disaster Relief Team Law, Japan dispatched three naval vessels—the landing ship *Kunisaki*, the supply ship *Tokiwa*, and the destroyer *Kurama*—two air-cushioned landing craft (LCAC) loaded aboard the *Kunisaki*, one Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) SH-60J helicopter loaded aboard the *Kurama*, five Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) helicopters (three CH-47JAs and two UH-60JAs), one Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) C-130H transport aircraft, and a total of about 1,000 troops. This represented the largest overseas relief operation undertaken by the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and the first-ever overseas joint operation of all three SDF services.

The Indonesian government set the emergency relief period at three months. The TNI ceased its humanitarian assistance operations in March 2005 and took up the role of giving support indirectly to the newly established Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency for Aceh and Nias. In line with this decision, the foreign militaries were asked to complete their relief activities, and all of them withdrew by the end of March 2005.

A number of nations provided help to other affected countries as well—the United States, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Canada, India, South Korea, Pakistan, Russia, and Britain sent contingents to Sri Lanka, and Australia, Canada, France, and the United States did likewise to Thailand.

Until March 2005, 68 international organizations and NGOs were engaged in relief activities in Indonesia, 84 in Sri Lanka, 35 in Thailand, and 17 in the Maldives. A number of UN agencies—the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Organization for Migration, and World Food Programme (WFP)—have carried

Figure 2.1. Relief activities by the militaries in areas affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami



A. India

Dispatching country (including affected countries)	Naval vessels	Helicopters	Fixed-wing aircraft	Others
India	47	41	34	
Total	47	41	34	

B. Maldives

Dispatching country (including affected countries)	Naval vessels	Helicopters	Fixed-wing aircraft	Others
Australia				Medical team
France	1	1		
India	5	5	3	Medical team
Pakistan	2		2	Engineering team
Britain				Engineering team
Total	8	6	5	

C. Sri Lanka

Dispatching country (including affected countries)	Naval vessels	Helicopters	Fixed-wing aircraft	Others
Sri Lanka	12	13	5	
Australia				Medical team
Austria			1	Medical team, water system
Bangladesh	2	3	2	Medical and engineering teams
Canada				Disaster assistance response team, medical and engineering teams, water system
India	9	15	6	Medical team
South Korea	1		2	
Pakistan	2		1	
Russia		1	2	Medical team
Britain	3	2		
Total	29	34	19	

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D. Indonesia

Dispatching country (including affected countries)	Naval vessels	Helicopters	Fixed-wing aircraft	Others
Indonesia	28	2	15	
Australia and New Zealand	1	6	10	Field hospital, engineering team, air traffic control
Brunei		2	1	Field hospital
France and Switzerland	2	16	2	Medical team
Germany	1*	2		Field hospital
India	2*	1		
Japan	3	6	1	Medical team
South Korea	1			
Malaysia	1	2	2	Medical and engineering teams
Mexico	3			
Netherlands			1	Field hospital and air traffic control
Norway			2	
Pakistan				Field hospital and engineering team
Russia			4	Field hospital
Singapore	2	8	5	Medical team, engineering team, air traffic control
Spain	1		3	
Britain	1	2	3	
Total	46	47	49	

Note: * Includes one hospital ship.

E. Thailand

Dispatching country (including affected countries)	Naval vessels	Helicopters	Fixed-wing aircraft	Others
Thailand	7			
Australia				Forensic team
Canada				Forensic team
France			1	Military police team
Japan			1	Stationed in Utapao
Total	7	0	2	

Total

Dispatching country (including affected countries)	Naval vessels	Helicopters	Fixed-wing aircraft
Total from participating countries	137	128	109
US total	25	57	45
Grand total	162	185	154

Sources: Data from the websites of the US Pacific Command, the defense ministries of various countries, and WFP.

Note: The number of naval vessels does not include landing craft carried on board. The number of helicopters includes those aboard vessels in some cases. The country tables do not include the US deployment figures.

out relief activities. India refused to accept foreign assistance other than from international organizations. Thailand also declined foreign financial assistance stating that it could fend for itself financially.

Assistance from foreign governments and international organizations to disaster-stricken countries was given upon their request. On the other hand, NGOs carried out aid activities on their own. In order to effectively conduct such large-scale international relief activities, coordination between aid-giving countries and international organizations is essential. Initially, however, there were problems in coordinating the scale and substance of aid before relief teams were dispatched. But after arriving at their respective destinations, they coordinated their activities as needed. The US Pacific Command and the OCHA played a leading role in coordinating the relief activities of units of the various militaries. Immediately after the tsunami struck, the US forces organized, for the purpose of disaster victim relief, Joint Task Force 536 (JTF-536) with III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) based in Okinawa at its core and including the USS *Abraham Lincoln* Carrier Strike Group. Japan, Australia, and India joined JTF-536 as members of the core group and a coordination framework was thus established. Meanwhile, the OCHA, which took charge of civil-military coordination in UN humanitarian relief activities, took the role of matching the aid offered by donor countries with the needs of the affected countries.

On December 28, 2004, JTF-536 formed the multinational Combined Support Force 536 (CSF-536) from aid units of participating militaries. Lt. Gen. Robert R. Blackman, Jr., commanding general of III MEF, was named CSF-536 commander, and its headquarters was established at Utapao Royal Thai Naval Air Base. Its mission, named Operation Unified Assistance (OUA), was to provide humanitarian assistance/disaster relief support to the governments of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, and other afflicted countries to minimize the loss of life and mitigate human suffering. In addition to the US forces, contingents from the militaries of Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Maldives, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, Switzerland, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Britain, the United Nations, international organizations, and NGOs participated in CSF-536, and their aid activities were coordinated at the Combined Coordination Center (CCC) that was established concurrently with the CSF-536. Acting as field offices for CSF-536, Combined Support Groups (CSG) were established in turn in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. The OCHA

opened a forward office of its Military and Civil Defense Unit in Bangkok and dispatched UN Civil Military Coordination Officers to: Utapao in Thailand; Jakarta, Banda Aceh, Meulaboh, and Medan in Indonesia; and Colombo in Sri Lanka. When the demands for assistance were not met at the local level, the CSG operating in each country would coordinate



A briefing held at CSF-536 headquarters (Photo by Ms. Kaoruko Seki)

with its counterparts to satisfy such demands and, if that failed, the CCC would try to find a country capable of providing the required assistance. Countries that participated in the CSF-536 were not under US command and could provide assistance on their own. Moreover, there were countries that provided humanitarian assistance alone at the request of an affected country and the United Nations.

At the end of January 2005, the OCHA announced that, with the efforts of the affected countries and international support, the emergency relief phase was almost over. Ascertaining that units of the militaries of different countries and international organizations had adequate means of transportation to meet their requirements and were capable of carrying on assistance activities on their own, CSF-536 completed its mission by February 12, 2005, and US forces withdrew from the affected areas. Both the United Nations and the US forces acknowledged that the coordination provided by the CCC had worked well and effectively.

2. Impact on International Relations in the Asia-Pacific Region

(1) Growing Appreciation of the United States

The involvement of major powers in the relief efforts for the victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami has had some impact on international relations in the region. It is fair to say that the country that most demonstrated a high-profile presence was the United States.

In addition to the direct assistance it provided, the substantive role it played in coordinating the relief activities of the different militaries helped the United States earn the warm appreciation of the affected countries. In January 2005, the Bush administration pledged \$350 million in humanitarian aid, and in May the US

Congress raised the Tsunami Recovery and Reconstruction Fund to \$631 million. The US presence was felt particularly strongly in Indonesia thanks to the large units, including an aircraft carrier, Washington dispatched, the \$400 million grant-in-aid it gave, and the technical assistance it extended for repairing a road between Banda Aceh and Meulaboh.

Such assistance helped improve greatly the relations between the United States and Indonesia. The United States is keenly aware of the strategic importance of Southeast Asia, a region that it has considered as “the second front” in the war on terrorism since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. It attaches great importance to the stability of Indonesia, the largest country in Southeast Asia, which is in the process of shifting its political system from authoritarianism to democracy and has the world’s fourth-largest population and the largest Muslim community. However, with the war it is waging in Afghanistan and Iraq, the pro-Israeli position it takes on the Palestine issue, and the unilateralist diplomacy it is pursuing, the United States is regarded critically by some people in a number of Southeast Asian countries had taken. The United States probably hoped to improve its relations with countries with large Muslim populations and its image among them by preventing the human suffering caused by the tsunami from further worsening law and order in these countries and getting actively involved in emergency aid and reconstruction efforts. Indonesians who witnessed at first hand US troops pursuing disaster relief activities and learned of funds donated by many US citizens have reportedly improved their perception of the United States. A recent poll of attitudes in Indonesia found that 65 percent of the respondents viewed the United States in a more favorable light. President Bush said, “I’m heartened that the good folks of Indonesia see a different America now when they think about our country.” Actual relations between the two countries have also improved. During his visit to the United States in May 2005, President Yudhoyono agreed to resume talks with President Bush on energy, trade, and investment. As regards military cooperation with Indonesia, the US State Department announced in February 2005 that the department had decided to accept Indonesia’s full participation in the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program sponsored by the United States. Furthermore, the State Department announced during President Yudhoyono’s visit to the United States that it had lifted the ban on the export of nonlethal defense articles and services to Indonesia. Following a congressional resolution, the ban on the export of lethal weapons to

Indonesia had also been lifted in November 2005. Relations between the United States and Indonesia, which had remained cool since the 1990s, have thus begun to improve significantly.

The United States was able to provide significant assistance to the affected countries in the region thanks in part to the availability of deployable assets, including the Okinawa-based III MEF, close to the affected area, but that was not the only reason. The US forces had already built up readiness for, and experience in, cooperating and coordinating with the militaries of different countries over military operations other than war (MOOTW) including disaster relief through Cobra Gold exercises and the Multinational Planning Augmentation Team (MPAT) Program. The Cobra Gold exercises started between the United States and Thailand in 1982, Singapore joined in 2000, and joint military exercises have since been held annually in the presence of observers from neighboring countries. More recently, the focus of these exercises has shifted to nonmilitary missions such as peace enforcement, the noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO), and disaster relief. Japan's SDF also formally participated in the exercise in 2005. MPAT, which started in 2000 on the basis of lessons learned from experiences in the East Timor crisis in 1999, is a framework designed to rapidly set up and augment a multinational force (MNF) headquarters and has been holding regular workshops and drawing up standard operating procedures (SOP) for the purpose of improving the speed of multinational crisis response and force interoperability, increasing the MNF's mission effectiveness, and improving the unity of efforts. A total of 33 countries, the United Nations, international organizations, and NGOs have participated in it. The MNF envisioned for MPAT do not always operate under US command, but the coordination of disaster relief activities in this case was conducted within a US-led framework. The United States has demonstrated its initiative in forging cooperation for the security of the region.

(2) Evaluation of Relief Activities of Other Supporting Countries

Next to those of the United States, Australia's relief activities were very much appreciated by the tsunami-hit countries. Due to a chain of recent events—the Australian Defense Force playing a high-profile role among the multinational forces in East Timor in 1999, and Prime Minister John Howard advocating the necessity of preemptive antiterrorist strikes in other countries in response to the killing of a large number of its citizens in a terrorist bombing in Bali in 2002—

Australia's relations with Indonesia had cooled. Immediately after the Indian Ocean tsunami hit the coastal areas of Indonesia, Prime Minister Howard contacted President Yudhoyono to offer assistance. In January 2005, Australia announced that it would give Indonesia AU\$500 million in grants-in-aid (subsequently, it increased the amount to AU\$1 billion by offering AU\$500 million in noninterest loans) and dispatched naval vessels, transport aircraft, and helicopters to Indonesia. For Australia, stability in Indonesia, its nearest neighbor, is a critical issue that has a direct impact on its own security. The assistance offered by Australia to the affected areas of Indonesia has significantly improved relations between the two countries. When President Yudhoyono visited Australia in April 2005, he expressed gratitude to the government and people of Australia and supported Australia's participation in the East Asian Summit that was scheduled for December 2005. Subsequently, Australia's participation in the East Asian Summit was formally approved by the countries of ASEAN+3 (Japan, China, and South Korea), representing a significant diplomatic achievement for Australia.

Japan gave large sums of grant-aid to afflicted countries and dispatched SDF contingents to carry out relief activities in Thailand and Indonesia. Japan's assistance was highly appreciated by the affected countries of the region. Aid activities conducted by SDF units (the rapid transport of aid goods by helicopters and LCACs, medical services, and epidemic disease control) were particularly commended by the government and disaster victims in Indonesia. In addition to the accomplishments of the SDF in UN peacekeeping operations (PKO) in Cambodia and East Timor, the performance the SDF delivered in the tsunami relief activities in concert with the troops of Indonesia and other countries has increased awareness of the SDF and demonstrated that Japan could also contribute to improving international security in the region. At the same time, the SDF's participation in the tsunami relief activities offered it a good experience to draw on—the importance of intelligence-gathering and joint coordination—in carrying out similar activities in the future. On the other hand, some took the view that the large-scale assistance given by Japan was provided with an eye to attaining its long-standing diplomatic goal, namely a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Although some countries supported Japan's bid, Japan in the end failed to win the unambiguous support of Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries because of their opposition to the G4 proposal. However, Japan's persistent efforts

to make a contribution to the disaster relief activities will eventually form the foundation for it to play a political role in the region.

Immediately after the Indian Ocean tsunami, China announced that it would extend \$60 million in relief funds, shipped aid goods, and dispatched medical, rescue, and DNA identification teams. The assistance given by China paled in comparison with that extended by other major countries. That China did not dispatch units of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to the affected area may be interpreted as a sign of the Hu Jintao administration's wariness of getting the PLA involved in regional security cooperation, or as evidence of the lack of capacity and experience of its navy and air force to carry out relief activities in an area outside the country. Although China intends to enhance its regional influence in South and Southeast Asia, it failed to make a visible contribution, at least in response to demands for the relief of tsunami-affected countries, and has thus fallen behind the United States and Australia in this respect.

However, some take the view that as China attaches importance to a cooperation program for building a region-wide tsunami early warning system, exchanging tsunami-related information, pursuing recovery and reconstruction (including the promotion of tourism) in the affected countries, China's reputation has not necessarily weakened. China places a high priority on giving tsunami relief to Thailand and has reportedly become the largest aid-giving country to Myanmar. Thus, China seems to direct its assistance to countries it deems strategically important. In April 2004, China declared a strategic partnership with Indonesia and came up with a plan to offer \$800 million in loans to help Indonesia finance the recovery and reconstruction of its damaged infrastructure. Besides, China agreed to exchange military technology with Indonesia that included joint missile development. Indeed, China is trying to strengthen its relations with Southeast Asian countries.

Meanwhile, the approach taken by India contrasted sharply with that of China. Although India itself had suffered great damage, it declined foreign aid offers and itself extended considerable assistance—16 naval vessels, 21 helicopters, and a total of 1,800 troops to Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Indonesia. India also joined the international military assistance core group led by the United States. India seems to have intended to impress on the international community its desire to get involved in the affairs of East Asia as a major player through demonstrating its pride as a

major power and its willingness to bear responsibility for the stability of the region. Indeed, India actually demonstrated its potential to become a major power.

Among other Southeast Asian countries, Singapore pledged \$100 million for rehabilitation assistance and dispatched contingents of Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) including aircraft, helicopters, and naval vessels. The relief activities they carried out in Meulaboh on the western coast of Sumatra, the city closest to the earthquake's epicenter, were especially appreciated. The armed forces of Singapore and Indonesia have long enjoyed close relations. Personal ties among officers of the two militaries cultivated through regular exchanges and joint exercises, as well as consultations through diplomatic channels, contributed greatly to the SAF's rapid deployment and its operations in terms of information-gathering and on-site coordination. Moreover, Singapore's military cooperated to help their counterparts from other countries fulfill their missions safely by facilitating the passage of foreign troops through Singapore and by furnishing information about the coastlines transformed by the tsunami. Until now, the modernization of the SAF, which had raced far ahead of other regional militaries, had raised concern in neighboring countries. Some now take the view that the relief activities carried out by the SAF in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami have turned the suspicions of neighboring countries into a friendly attitude toward Singapore.

As the damage sustained by Malaysia from the Indian Ocean tsunami was relatively minor, it attached importance to giving assistance to Aceh Province, an area with which it has close geographical and cultural ties. Malaysia initially proposed to Indonesia that it would station its troops in Aceh for more than three months and cooperate in drawing up a master plan for Aceh's reconstruction. The enthusiasm of Malaysia for assisting Indonesia was thus quite keen. However, Malaysian military units pulled out of Aceh, as did their counterparts from other countries, and the operation of the Disaster Relief Centre they had been building was turned over to a Malaysian NGO. As troops from Singapore and Malaysia speak Malay, which is similar to Indonesian, they had little difficulty in communicating with each other. As aid workers from other Southeast Asian countries and Japan understood and respected local cultures and customs better than some of their Western counterparts, the local authorities appreciated their efforts.

Southeast Asian countries conducted relief activities on their own initiative, and except for an appeal issued by the Special Leaders' Meeting on January 6, 2005, ASEAN has taken no coherent action in connection with tsunami disaster

relief. Although there was no open criticism of ASEAN's inaction, some expressed disappointment at ASEAN's failure to take any effective action in the way it did at the time of the Asian currency crisis of 1997 and the turmoil in East Timor. On the other hand, others point out that under its present mandate, ASEAN was not conceived as a body responsible for taking immediate action at times of crisis. However, the damage wrought in its region by the recent Indian Ocean tsunami was arguably serious enough to remind ASEAN of the necessity to take some kind of joint action in the future.

3. Challenges Facing International Disaster Relief Cooperation

(1) Disaster Relief Activities of Militaries and Their Coordination

Generally, the attributes of the military are summed up in terms of their self-supporting capabilities, mobility, clearly defined chain of command, and the rapid mobilization of troops. These attributes are very effective not only in time of war but also in dealing with a disaster. The military fulfills a role by supporting affected local public bodies or civilian organizations during the initial emergency stage in such areas as: search and rescue of disaster victims; the transport of personnel, disaster victims, and relief goods; medical services; the prevention of epidemics; and the reconstruction of damaged infrastructures. It is generally accepted that when the initial emergency relief phase ends, the leading role in rehabilitation and reconstruction work passes to civilian authorities or civilian organizations, and the military is relieved of its duties. Also, in the case of international relief activities, foreign militaries perform a complementary role to the activities of the local military and civilian authorities at the request of the affected countries. However, unlike in the case of a domestic disaster, the activities of the militaries of various supporting countries do not necessarily come under a clear-cut command structure. Therefore, the coordination of activities among the militaries and international organizations is critically important.

The Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defense Assets in Disaster Relief (the Oslo Guidelines) formulated by the then UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) in 1994 prescribes the basic principles for the expeditious and effective use of military and civil defense assets (MCDA) in carrying out international disaster relief activities. According to the basic principles, support activities using MCDA may be carried out on a bilateral basis

or within the framework of the OCHA (then known as the DHA). In either case, a request from or the consent of the recipient country is required. The support activities should complement the relief activities of the recipient country, which is wholly responsible for the safety of aid workers dispatched by a foreign country, who are, in principle, not supposed to carry arms about their person. Furthermore, the *MCDA Reference Manual on the Use of Military and Civil Defense Assets* (the Manual), adopted in 1995, insists that in the case of a country needing disaster relief extended by the military of another country, a Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) should be established and its commander must direct operations. On the other hand, countries that dispatch their troops to the CJTF hold the authority to command and control their troops and to provide administrative and logistical support to their own troops.

The organization that performed the CJTF role as prescribed in the Manual during the relief activities in tsunami-hit areas was CSF-536, which coordinated the activities of troops dispatched from different countries. CSF-536, however, did not exactly have a unified command over the troops. Generally, it takes time to create a CJTF and establish a UN-led command and coordination mechanism in accordance with the Manual, and this leads to difficulties in providing an immediate response during the initial relief stage. Furthermore, surrendering the command of troops to another country carries with it the risk of undermining sovereignty. As happened during the tsunami relief activities, countries gave priority to the initial relief by first sending their relief teams and then seeking the local cooperation and coordination of relief activities from the different militaries, and this proved to be an effective approach in providing an immediate response.

As a result, cooperation and coordination between the United Nations, international organizations, and relief units of foreign militaries went smoothly during the tsunami relief operations and no friction of any consequence has been reported. However, the question as to who should lead and coordinate international relief activities was discussed soon after the tsunami. President Bush came up with an idea that four countries—the United States, Japan, Australia, and India (Canada and the Netherlands joined later)—form a core group to lead the relief activities, but European countries opposed the idea by insisting that the United Nations should provide leadership. In the end, before the Special Leaders' Meeting on January 6, 2005, they decided to carry out relief activities under the leadership of the United Nations. Although the idea of forming a core group was shelved as a

result, the United States in effect offered CSF-536 as a coordination forum in tandem with the OCHA. Some point out that the UN organizations failed to take an effective coordinating initiative at the initial stage because there is no organization capable of providing unified and effective leadership for dealing with disaster relief, in the way that the UNHCR effectively handles refugee problems.

At a meeting of the Tokyo Defense Forum held in June 2005 under the auspices of the Japan Defense Agency with representatives of 23 countries and organizations of the Asia-Pacific region present, the participants exchanged views about the disaster relief activities conducted by the militaries and lessons to be drawn from the experience. The topics on which there were diverging views concerned who should play a leading role in multinational operations and coordination, the necessity of pre-deployment coordination, and the necessity of a unified command and control structure. Although the participants agreed on the importance of the role played by militaries in the initial stages of relief operations, some favored the idea that the military should play a central role in relief operations and others took the view that the military should complement civilian-led relief activities, arguing that UN agencies such as UNICEF and the WHO are rapidly acquiring emergency deployment capabilities of their own and will not necessarily have to rely entirely on military assets.

On the necessity of pre-deployment coordination, some argued that the militaries should improve the effectiveness of their cooperation by coordinating the size of the units and military assets to be offered prior to their deployment. Others maintained that, given the vital importance of speed in disaster relief, countries and international organizations that are capable of providing assistance should carry out relief activities on their own even without pre-coordination with other countries or organizations. They accepted that inefficiency caused by an overlapping of relief activities or areas is unavoidable, and that effective post-deployment coordination is more vital. On the question as to whether a certain country or organization should be in sole command, some favored the idea on the grounds that such an arrangement would readily tap into the attributes of the military, while others dismissed the idea as impracticable because it would take time to hammer out such an agreement.

In the absence of a NATO-like multilateral alliance or a common security and defense policy such as that of the European Union, it seems unrealistic to create a joint disaster response group under a single command in the Asia-Pacific region.

Rather, it is more practical to utilize a mechanism adopted for tsunami relief in which supporting countries coordinated their activities of their own volition. In this connection, the role played by the US Pacific Command as a coordinator of relief activities was crucial.

However, whether the United States could always play such a role is open to question. For instance, when a disaster occurs in an area where the US has little national interest, when the scale of the disaster exceeds the deployment capability of the US forces, or when they are already involved in other military or humanitarian operations, it is uncertain whether it will provide the military assets necessary for relief. In such cases, another country needs to assume the leadership role in coordinating relief activities in affected areas in lieu of the United States. When a disaster occurs on a South Pacific island, as an example, Australia is ideally positioned to play a leading role in the relief.

The function of the United Nations, another coordinator candidate, should be strengthened. Among other things, the role the UN could play includes a project designed to help various countries familiarize themselves with the coordination process of the OCHA by participating in a civil and military coordination training program and by increasing military and civil defense assets registered with the OCHA Central Register. During the tsunami disaster relief operations, the Swiss armed forces made available to the United Nations helicopters it had registered with the OCHA Central Register.

Reflecting on the tsunami disaster relief operations, some pointed out that the military relief teams from various countries operated independently of each other and that there was no effective coordination among them on the ground. Coordination at a higher level such as the CCC was effective, but in order to make the relief operations smoother and more effective, it would be beneficial to take steps to improve the effectiveness of communication among aid workers in governments, international organizations, militaries, and NGOs that will actually carry out relief activities by exchanging views and conducting joint training exercises.

(2) Restraints in Affected Countries and Relief Activities

It is generally accepted that the responsibility for providing disaster relief rests primarily with the government of the affected country, and that assistance from foreign countries (including international organizations and NGOs) is predicated on the consent of the affected country. However, when the government of an

affected country is not functioning effectively as a result of damage sustained from a disaster, when it inherently lacks the capability of coping with a disaster, or when it is in the midst of a conflict, the relief activities of foreign countries are constrained for a variety of reasons.

Although a disaster-stricken country incapable of providing disaster relief rapidly enough agrees to accept foreign

A GSDF helicopter engages in international emergency relief operations in Meulaboh, Aceh Province, Indonesia. (Kyodo Photo)

relief teams or materiel, the arrival of such relief is often delayed due to the time-consuming procedures for issuing visas or clearing immigration and customs. In cases where relief teams have to pass through the territory and airspace of a third country, the clearance for safe passage through that country also becomes necessary. Therefore, a bilateral or a multilateral agreement simplifying these procedures would improve the smoothness and effectiveness of disaster relief activities.

Making the procedures even more complicated are the restraints imposed on relief activities by an affected country for political or security reasons. In fact, several areas hit by the tsunami are caught up in the operations of separatist movements, and the relief activities of foreign countries were restrained in part because of this.

In Indonesia's Aceh Province, where the conflict between the separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the TNI has lasted for 29 years, the Indonesian government had placed the area under civil emergency status when the tsunami occurred. The Indonesian government limited the period of relief activities of foreign troops and some UN agencies to three months and required foreign relief workers to be escorted by the TNI. As a reason for restricting the movement of foreign relief workers, the TNI cited the necessity of protecting them from unforeseen dangers such as an attack or intimidation by GAM elements. Some Indonesians feared that foreigners who stayed in Indonesia for any length of time might disrupt the local communities politically or culturally, while others thought that their presence was undesirable because they might gather military intelligence and thus pose a risk to national security.

In Sri Lanka, conflicts had raged sporadically between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed group of ethnic minority Tamils, and government

troops. Although a truce was called in February 2002, peace negotiations have been suspended since April 2003. The Indian Ocean tsunami severely damaged the northern and eastern areas of Sri Lanka that were in effect controlled by the LTTE. But as the Sri Lankan government controlling the distribution of aid from other countries was at loggerheads with the LTTE, relief activities were stalled. In addition, an inspection of LTTE-controlled areas planned by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was cancelled at the request of the Sri Lankan government.

India declined foreign assistance but, initially, the government's relief efforts reportedly failed to reach many affected areas, including the Andaman Islands and Nicobar Islands. When an earthquake struck Gujarat in western India in 2001, claiming 20,000 lives, India accepted large numbers of foreign aid workers who subsequently criticized the Indian government's ineffective response to the disaster. Some newspapers reported that the Indian government declined offers of foreign assistance because it did not want to draw similar criticism.

Initially, Myanmar's military government did not make public the extent of the damage caused by the tsunami and refused foreign assistance, fueling speculation that thousands of lives might have been lost. (According to UN survey estimates, the tsunami killed 60 to 80 people, and 5,000 to 7,000 were directly affected.) On the other hand, in countries affected by the tsunami where no functioning government existed to lead relief efforts and to protect foreign relief workers, such as Somalia, members of international organizations and NGOs had to brave rebel attacks to carry out relief activities.

When a foreign government delivers aid to an area where a rebel group is in conflict with the government or to an area controlled by insurgents, it is a critical issue to maintain neutrality in distributing such relief. The government of a disaster-affected country may consider foreign assistance as serving the interests of its enemy and restrict the foreign relief activities. Conversely, the antigovernment force may equate the aid-giving foreign troops with the military of the affected country and attack them. It is also conceivable that if any international organization or NGO uses military assets in carrying out relief activities, an antigovernment force may consider such an organization or NGO as a hostile group. Relief workers from an international organization operating in Aceh were indeed attacked by a rebel group, and a GSDF unit had to suspend helicopter operations for fear of an attack by a rebel group. In a 2004 Reference Paper entitled *Civil-Military Relationship in Complex Emergencies*, the OCHA says that the use of military

assets in support of humanitarian operations “should be exceptional and only on a last resort.” One American columnist, who observed the relief activities carried out by the US forces in the areas affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami, argued that they should have sought closer coordination with the NGOs working in these areas. But a senior staff member from Doctors Without Borders (MSF), an international humanitarian medical organization, opposed the idea by maintaining that although the MSF recognized the value of military logistics in some natural disasters, to seek or to accept the collaboration of the military “would undermine the neutrality and independence that allows us as a humanitarian aid organization to reach people in need.”

Furthermore, in cases where a disaster-afflicted country does not even seek foreign assistance despite its inability to provide adequate relief to disaster victims, the question as to what action, in terms of “humanitarian intervention,” the international community should take to save lives remains to be addressed.

(3) Delays in Rehabilitation and Reconstruction

Three to six months after the tsunami, the focus of relief activities shifted from emergency relief aimed at protecting the lives of disaster victims to long-term efforts for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the destroyed infrastructure and communities. Reconstruction activities undertaken in affected areas vary from one country to another depending on the extent of damage suffered. Typical instances are the construction of temporary housing, the provision of income-generating means (fishing boats and vocational training, etc.), the reopening of schools, and the repair or reconstruction of water services, hospitals, and port and harbor facilities. On Phuket Island, Thailand, and in some parts of the Maldives, the rehabilitation of damaged tourist facilities are well under way, and tourists have begun to trickle back to some of these areas, but rehabilitation work in many other areas has been delayed for a variety of reasons.

The first problem is the worrisome state of law and order in the affected areas. In June 2005, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and the LTTE agreed on the Post Tsunami Operational Management Structure (PTOMS), which would enable the government and LTTE to share rehabilitation funds. However, Buddhist groups and the People’s Liberation Front (JVP), a Sinhalese nationalist party, strongly opposed the agreement. The JVP left the ruling coalition and appealed to the courts, claiming the agreement was

unconstitutional. The Supreme Court suspended the implementation of PTOMS until the court ruled its legality. As the Sri Lankan government declared a state of emergency in August following the assassination of Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, the rehabilitation process slowed to a crawl. Since Mahinda Rajapakse, a hard-liner toward the LTTE, took office as president in November, many fear that the peace process itself may be scrapped and that the rehabilitation of affected areas may be further hindered.

In Aceh, Indonesia, behind-the-scenes peace negotiations had been in progress since the tsunami and a peace accord was subsequently signed in August 2005. It is hoped that this will at last provide the basis for rehabilitation work, but its success hinges on the restoration of law and order in local communities, by both the TNI and the GAM observing the truce, and by the disarmament of the GAM and the withdrawal of augmented government security forces from the area.

The second problem is rampant corruption and cronyism, as well as the bureaucratic red tape and inefficiencies of government agencies. Accordingly, aid did not reach needy victims and rehabilitation projects were often delayed.

In Indonesia, instances of misappropriation and embezzlement of government aid funds by local heads have been reported. Relief goods were often stolen or left gathering dust in port warehouses owing to the lack of coordination among government agencies, and the appropriation of foreign aid funds were delayed pending parliamentary approval. Director Kuntoro Mangkusubroto of the Aceh-Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency, a man of integrity who displayed considerable savvy in rebuilding Indonesian banks after the Asian financial crisis in 1997, took a firm stand against corruption, but on his own turf a number of cases of bribery in connection with rehabilitation projects have been reported. Additionally, supporting countries and international organizations had a distrust of the corruption-riddled recipient countries and demanded greater transparency in, and accountability for, the use of their aid funds—further delaying the progress of rehabilitation projects. In fact, the situation was so frustrating that some UN agencies (such as UNDP) withheld their cooperation with the Indonesian government until such time as the Rehabilitation Agency was formed. In a report submitted to the Sri Lankan Parliament, the auditor general revealed that there had been misappropriation of large sums of aid funds and that, due to the inefficiency of administrative agencies, only 13.5 percent of the foreign aid funds have been disbursed.

The third problem encountered during rehabilitation efforts has been the large disparities between geographic areas and the scope of aid required. In Aceh Province, for instance, rehabilitation resources have been concentrated in its capital, Banda Aceh, while rehabilitation work languished at the lowest level in other areas. Although the reconstruction of social infrastructure began to stir, the housing shortage is acute, and more than 60,000 people in Aceh Province are still living in tents as long as one year after the tsunami. In addition to the delay in building temporary housing, many disaster victims are not allowed to go back to their original places of residence because of the loss of documents proving their ownership or because some of them rented the land on which their homes stood, holding up their efforts to get their lives back to normal. Many long-term problems, such as caring for orphans and the mental states of the victims, remain to be addressed.

In terms of funds, the United Nations estimates that there will be a shortage of about \$5 billion in rehabilitation funds over the next four to five years. For the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the tsunami-hit areas, the international community needs to pay continuous attention, and extend support, to the affected people.

Delays in rehabilitation and reconstruction work are inviting a deterioration in law and order in these areas. In the Strait of Malacca, incidents of piracy, which had drastically decreased immediately after the tsunami, have begun to increase. It is speculated that fishermen in northern Sumatra whose means of livelihood were destroyed by the tsunami may have turned to piracy. Assisting affected fishermen make an early return to their former way of life through the acquisition of fishing boats and the restart of fishing activities would curb piracy and improve safety in these waters.

(4) A Regional Approach to Non-traditional Security Challenges: The Case of Southeast Asia

The absence of a tsunami early warning system, which has been in long-standing operation in the Pan-Pacific countries, caused the damage from the earthquake and tsunami to be even greater in the coastal countries of the Indian Ocean. With the support of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), an agency of the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), countries in the Pacific region have been cooperating in taking tsunami

countermeasures through the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Pacific Tsunami Warning System since 1968. In the Indian Ocean region, also, consultation is being made under the leadership of the IOC and, with the participation of countries in the region, the IOC is trying to build an Indian Ocean tsunami warning and mitigation system by July 2006.

As these tsunami countermeasures imply, the safety of the people and communities in affected areas cannot necessarily be delivered by a single country. During the past decade, the ASEAN members that have served as a core group for regional cooperation have come to share the realization that transnational issues—the fragility of the economic systems that came to light in the 1997 currency crisis, drug and human trafficking, illegal immigration, piracy, infectious diseases, and destruction of the environment—pose non-traditional security challenges that should be dealt with through bilateral or regional cooperation. The experience the countries of the region had during the tsunami disaster have made them keenly aware of the necessity for region-wide cooperation in dealing with disasters.

An ASEAN Ministerial Meeting held in July 2005 concluded an ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response. Among other things, the participating countries agreed to establish an ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management and to prepare SOPs for regional cooperation and national action. They also agreed to voluntarily report earmarked assets and capacities available for the regional standby arrangements for disaster relief and emergency response such as military and civilian assets and disaster relief items, and to utilize these assets at the request, and with the consent, of the affected party. In preparation for the agreement's implementation, a Regional Disaster Emergency Response Simulation Exercise, the first ever, was conducted in Malaysia in September 2005, with fire-fighting and disaster-prevention teams, as well as units of civil defense forces being sent to the exercise from Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.

At the Second ARF Security Policy Conference held in Vientiane, Laos, in May 2005, the participants agreed to build joint capacity in consequence management and to organize seminars to discuss organizations for command and control, the contribution of facilities/forces, and liaison between/transition to civilian relief. In November 2005, an ARF Intersessional Meeting on Disaster Relief was held for the first time since 2000, and the participants planned to submit a proposal concerning civil-military cooperation to an ARF Ministerial Meeting scheduled for 2006.

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In addition, signs of military cooperation among the member countries of ASEAN, a topic they had long shunned, began to emerge. At an ASEAN Chiefs of Army Multilateral Meeting held in Jakarta in September 2004, they stressed the necessity for cooperation among their respective armed forces in dealing with non-traditional threats such as terrorism and natural disasters. In August 2005, commanders of the military of the three littoral states of the Strait of Malacca (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) plus Thailand met to discuss measures to be taken for the security of the strait. An inaugural meeting of ASEAN defense ministers is scheduled for 2006. Cooperation in dealing with disaster relief, in which military exchanges have few conflicting interests, is expected to gather momentum as an area conducive to promoting military cooperation in coming years.

In addition to disaster relief, it will be necessary to organize a comprehensive and region-wide response to life-threatening diseases that pose a threat to human security, such as the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) that raged across the region in 2003, the avian influenza (“bird flu”) that is raising fears of human pandemic, and the haze that caused a fatal respiratory disease. Human security is an area that Japan has been tackling in earnest. Japan has vast experience in coping with frequent natural disasters and is expected to play a leading role in pushing regional cooperation in this field.

On October 8, 2005, an earthquake registering 7.6 on the Richter scale hit Pakistan and India, leaving 80,000 people dead or missing (see the commentary on p.62). It was expected that as many lives as possible would be saved by sharing the experiences of the tsunami relief and lead to solving the conflict between India and Pakistan through relief cooperation.

The earthquake in Pakistan

On October 8, 2005, a massive earthquake registering 7.6 on the Richter scale hit the northern part of Pakistan. As of November 22, about 73,000 people were killed in Pakistan, about 1,300 people were killed or listed as missing in India, and more than 3 million people were displaced. The areas hardest hit by the earthquake were Azad Jammu and Kashmir, in the northern part of Pakistan, and the Northwest Frontier Province.

The government and the military of Pakistan responded swiftly to the disaster, but the affected villages were located in mountainous terrain and the precious few access roads to them were rendered impassable in numerous places by the earthquake. Therefore, relief teams had to carry supplies on foot or by mule, and relief activities were severely hampered. The foreign assistance most needed in this case was the airlifting of relief goods and the sick and injured. For this purpose, more than 125 helicopters, domestic as well as foreign, were dispatched to the affected area. Road repairs and the distribution of relief goods were carried out by the Pakistan Army, and aid teams from foreign governments and militaries, and international organizations were engaged in delivering emergency relief goods, tents, and medical support.

Rescue and medical teams from the Japan Disaster Relief Team were actively involved in bringing relief to disaster victims immediately after the earthquake struck and provided transport support by sending six GSDF helicopters, one ASDF C-130 transport aircraft, and 150 relief personnel to operate them. Their activities ended on November 24, 2005. The US military sent 23 helicopters and 1,200 troops.

However, there were still areas relief goods had not reached. Because of their inaccessibility to motor vehicles, there were villages that had not received bare necessities one month after the earthquake. As snow began to fall in December, it was feared that more people would fall victim to the cold weather and to the delays in the delivery of relief goods.

At the donors conference held in Islamabad on November 19, 2005, supporting countries came up with an offer of \$5.8 billion in aid funds, \$600 million more than the cost initially estimated by the Pakistan government. However, only \$200 million have actually been contributed. As a large part of these commitments were loans, not grants-in-aid, some worry about the financial burden this may impose on the Pakistan government.

Meanwhile, signs of change in the confrontational relations between India and Pakistan have emerged after the earthquake. Since their independence from Britain, the two countries have claimed sovereignty—and have been in conflict—over Kashmir. Troops from the two countries confronted one another across the Line of Control (LOC) that was drawn when they agreed to a ceasefire in the First Indo-Pakistani War of 1949, and local inhabitants have since been separated. After the commencement of a bus service connecting the two countries across the LOC in April 2005, relations between the two countries have thawed. Since the November 2005 earthquake, the two countries have opened the LOC at five points to facilitate the exchange of relief goods and allowed affected kith and kin to visit one another. During the period, coordinated bombing attacks killed more than 60 people in New

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Delhi on October 29, 2005. Although the Indian government suspected the involvement of Islamic extremists based in Pakistan, the exchange of inhabitants from both sides of the LOC continued.

At a summit meeting held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on November 12, 2005, member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), a regional framework of South Asian countries, agreed to put in place a permanent regional response mechanism dedicated to disaster preparedness, emergency relief, and rehabilitation by drawing on the lessons learned from the Indian Ocean tsunami and the earthquake in Pakistan.

