

Submitted Testimony of
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The Earthquake/Tsunami Disaster:

As you know, this was a double-headed disaster. First was a massive earthquake that registered at 9.0 on the Richter scale, making it one of the 4 or 5 largest earthquakes of the past century. It lifted the ocean floor overlying the thrust fault between the Indian tectonic plate and the overlying Burma plate by up to 10 feet. The earthquake was followed almost immediately, in the case of the northwest shore of the island of Sumatra by a succession of tsunami waves. The region of destruction was extensive, ranging laterally 2000 miles from east to west, and from north to south nearly 500 miles, or 2/3 the width of the United States and nearly half the distance from the north of the U.S. to the south. The tsunami waves created great destruction and disruption in lives and property leaving over 160,000 dead and over 140,000 missing in its wake, over one million people displaced, and billions of dollars in reconstruction costs. To put a human face on this disaster, shortly before I went to the region to survey the damage and review our military relief effort, I met with an Acehnese who resides here in Washington. This one individual lost two hundred members of his immediate family in the tsunami. An aunt and an uncle who live here are his only surviving relatives in the world. The rest of his family was swept away in an instant.

I visited the region three weeks ago, just after the calamity. By that time, however, Thailand was already in the recovery stage. Sri Lanka was still conducting some emergency relief, but it was soon to turn the corner and the U.S. military effort was starting to shift elsewhere. In Indonesia they were still reeling from the enormity of this disaster. As terrible as it was throughout the region, the devastation in Indonesia was incomparably greater. Under any other circumstances the toll of over 8,000 dead or missing in Thailand alone would be devastating. Yet in Sri Lanka the losses of over 35,000 dead or missing is more than four times higher than for Thailand. But in Aceh, one small province in Indonesia, whose population at about 4.2 million is about a fifth of Sri Lanka's (20 million), the toll of over 114,000 dead and over 127,000 missing was seven times greater than in Sri Lanka (thirty-one times greater than Thailand).

The U.S. Response:

Despite the devastation, there was an encouraging amount of good news—the resilience of the people, the willingness of governments to cooperate to help their people and the readiness of the international community to offer assistance. One of the good news stories concerned the interagency coordination and cooperation within the U.S. government in Washington straight out to the ground level where the execution was occurring. The success in this cooperation and coordination was almost unprecedented, and it benefited directly from lessons learned in previous crises.

However, there is always room for improvement and we are looking closely at our response effort through an after action review. We have already identified, along with USAID/OFDA, the need to establish some common operating procedures and mechanisms to help smooth our coordinated response to future crises.

The ability of the Department of Defense to respond so quickly would not have been possible without the relationships developed over many years with the militaries of countries in the region, particularly with Thailand. An unexpected consequence of the relief operation was the opportunity to work closely and effectively with the Indian military, with whom we are expanding ties, as well as the Indonesian military (TNI), with whom we have had difficult relations in the past, but with whom we have worked well in this crisis.

Thanks to the Department of State, in cases where we required over flight clearances or status of forces agreements we were able to obtain them in a timely manner. This disaster, and our response to it, has demonstrated the importance of having standing agreements like these where possible, as well as bilateral Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreements (ACSAs) to enable us to cooperatively respond to humanitarian disasters. The restrictions that many people feared we might encounter from the Indonesian military and bureaucracy were overcome by the decisive leadership of newly-elected President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his Administration.

Our early relief efforts in Indonesia would have been somewhat more effective if we had more experience working with the Indonesian military (TNI) and if the TNI had better English language capabilities and more modern equipment, but the real point to emphasize is that the Indonesian government recognized immediately the need for help and welcomed all who came forward.

This disaster has no doubt focused the minds of other nations on creating some sort of disaster response capability. The countries in the regional core group

were selected to a large extent because they possessed the ability to respond quickly. It is in our interest to expand that capability and the number of our partners in the region who possess it. USPACOM has a program known as the Multinational Planning Augmentation Team (MPAT) to create not a standing response force, but a cadre of individuals who are accustomed to working together on a multinational basis to respond to crises. MPAT experience was put to good use in the response to the tsunami crisis.

The Department of Defense Response:

At the height of the Department of Defense (DOD) effort there were nearly 16,000 U.S. military personnel in the region, 26 ships (including one USCG cutter), 58 helicopters of all kinds, and 43 fixed wing aircraft (mostly transport). The capital investment that the American taxpayers have made in the equipment that made this effort possible reached nearly \$30B. With these state of the art resources our extraordinarily capable men and women delivered over ten million (10,124,059) pounds of food and supplies and provided over 400,000 (422,324) gallons of fresh water for the people whose lives were endangered by the specter of starvation and disease. As well, our military medical system provided care to over 2,500 patients, and the U.S. hospital ship MERCY remains off the coast of Sumatra rendering vital medical assistance.

But the real impact can best be measured in the lives saved and assistance provided to the host nations as they tried to come to grips with a disaster of such scope and extent. It can also be measured by the good will it has generated. Conservatively, the U.S. response to this natural disaster saved thousands, and probably tens of thousands of lives, particularly in Indonesia, and provided desperately needed hope to hundreds of thousands of others.

A little more than three weeks ago, as we flew above the northwest coast of Sumatra surveying the damage, the sheer scale of the devastation was overwhelming. The Indonesians were still finding as many as 3000 human remains a day in the rubble ... where there was rubble. At the airfield at Banda Aceh, in the heat and humidity, we saw a human chain of magnificent young American men and women loading the helicopters with supplies, food and water. All of them had volunteered to come ashore from the ABRAHAM LINCOLN Carrier Strike Group and make a difference however they could. In those lines were officers and sailors, Chiefs and fighter pilots, aid workers and Indonesian military (TNI) working side by side to get the food and water on those helicopters and out to the people of Aceh.

As a result of this effort, in Aceh the USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN and her helicopters have already passed into local legend as the *Grey Angels*. I had a

chance to visit with the crew of the LINCOLN during my visit and to share in their zeal for the relief effort. They were quite proud of what they were accomplishing. As one fighter pilot told me - - and I should say this is quite an admission coming from a fighter pilot - - “we are all helicopter pilots now.”

In Galle, Sri Lanka, we visited a school that had been undermined and rendered unsafe by the waves of the tsunami. In 100-degree heat, Marines and Navy Seabees, working alongside the Sri Lankan Army, operated heavy equipment and bent their backs into clearing the site for a new school. When we asked the teachers what they thought of the Marines and Seabees they burst into smiles and rapid-fire comments of approval.

On the runway at Utapao, Thailand, the young Air Force men and women of the airlift control elements were pressing themselves to the outer edge of their endurance controlling the flow of relief supplies to airfields from Utapao through to Indonesia and Sri Lanka. The efforts of our servicemen and women have not only saved lives but also generated unbelievable goodwill throughout the region.

As we pass the baton to the affected governments and international relief organizations, we have an interest in staying engaged. This crisis was humanitarian. It has been said that the Chinese character for crisis represents both danger and opportunity. Here then is a danger that failure to properly address the reconstruction needs, particularly in Indonesia, could harm the affected governments. But here too is also opportunity. If reconstruction is done the right way in Aceh, it could bolster the credentials of the Indonesian government. This is also an opportunity for the Indonesian government to show the people of Aceh the good things that Jakarta can do for them and to use the attention of the world to help achieve a political settlement to the longstanding separatist problem. Similarly, another country affected by this disaster, Sri Lanka, is facing a separatist problem. We hope that the opportunity that has been presented to the people of Sri Lanka can contribute to the long-term settlement of its divisions as well.

Any government would be challenged by this crisis and the burden of recovery. Indonesia in particular finds itself - - as an emerging democracy - - at the time of the tsunami not yet 100 days into the Administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. The 1997 economic crisis in Southeast Asia was referred to as an “economic tsunami” and it contributed to the down fall of the Suharto dictatorship. This real tsunami presents an enormous challenge to the still developing democratic government in Indonesia. However, by meeting the challenge successfully there is an opportunity to greatly strengthen democratic government and free institutions in the country that has the largest Muslim-majority population in the world.

We need to support the wave of democracy as it spreads across the Muslim world. The elections held in Indonesia last year, the second democratic elections in the country and the first direct election of a President, are as significant as the elections this year in Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq. While the new democracy in Indonesia is proving more capable than many thought possible, it must still be nurtured.

President Yudhoyono holds a great deal of promise in terms of increasing good governance, rooting out corruption, and continuing the already significant reforms of the TNI. President Yudhoyono is, by the way, a retired general and a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College through the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program.

We have a strong interest in helping this democracy succeed. One of the first ways we can do this is by ensuring that the job of bringing relief and reconstruction to the people of Aceh is accomplished.

We can also support democracy by strengthening the civilian government's capacity to manage defense and security matters and by supporting the process of reform in the Indonesian military (TNI).

We all recognize why the U.S. Congress and the Administration have put restrictions on military-to-military relations with the TNI. At the same time, I believe we must take a broad approach to relations with a country as important as Indonesia.

Legal restrictions on assistance we can provide to the TNI have contributed to some unfamiliarity and suspicions between our military forces. These restrictions did not overly limit our ability to respond to most of the tsunami-related requirements of the TNI. For example, we had the necessary authorities to provide spare parts for Indonesian C-130 aircraft.

Nevertheless, I believe that many of the restrictions on our defense relations with Indonesia have outlived their usefulness. We need to look forward. The Indonesia of today is simply a different country, and the TNI a significantly different military, from the one that perpetrated the depredations of East Timor.

During my visit to Jakarta, the new civilian Minister of Defense, Juwono Sudarsono, recognized the need for improved defense relations. He specifically asked for more assistance from the U.S. to assist his efforts to continue TNI reform. We should assist him in this effort.

Conclusion:

Through the hard work of the tsunami victims themselves, the affected nations, as well as the U.S. and the rest of the international community, the situation has evolved to the point at which current assistance needs can now be met by the military and civilian officials from the affected countries in coordination with the UN and relief organizations.

The redeployment of U.S. military assets does not signal the departure of U.S. assistance, but rather is a direct result of host nation, U.S. government agencies, international agencies, U.N. and other NGOs assessments that U.S. military assets and capabilities are no longer required. This is done in close coordination with the host governments and reflects the transition from direct support to recovery and reconstruction.

The lasting result of U.S. efforts should be that we did the right thing, for the right reasons - regardless of the nationality, race, or religion of those afflicted. That when needed, the U.S. was there to aid in this enormous humanitarian disaster relief effort and we remained only as long as we were needed and could be effective.

Although our military role is coming to an end this week, there is no conclusion to the suffering of the victims of this disaster in South and Southeast Asia. This is no time for short attention spans or donor fatigue. The entire international community has an interest in helping get the tools that they need to rebuild shattered lives. We thank the Congress, and this Committee, for your strong support for this effort.