



THE MACDONALD-LAURIER INSTITUTE



COMMENTARY

WHY AIDING PAKISTAN MATTERS

By Robert W. Murray

Each time a natural disaster occurs somewhere on the planet, there is typically a rush by national governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, aid groups and even celebrities to come to the rescue. Such reactions were seen after the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the 2005 Kashmir earthquake and more recently the earthquake in Haiti. In an era of supposed humanitarian responsibility and global consciousness, one is left to ponder why Pakistan is not receiving the same attention in the wake of its recent flooding.

Since the flooding began in July, it is reported that over 2,000 people have been killed, more than 722,000 homes have been lost and the United Nations estimates that well over 20 million people are suffering as a result. Structural damages are conservatively estimated at over US\$4 billion, wheat crop damages at over US\$500 million, and the World

As of August 15, approximately 20 per cent of that request had been received.

On August 17, the UN expressed major concern over the slow nature of the global response to the flooding and warned that further health, infrastructural and economic problems are likely to ensue. Since learning of the problem, there have been efforts made by states and non-governmental organizations, but these are lethargic at best. So why is it, then, that the world is not rushing to Pakistan's aid with the same passion and sense of humanitarianism than was seen in the wake of other recent disasters?

Two main problems

While there are a variety of factors that can be highlighted, including a relatively low death toll and an inept government response, two primary issues have impacted the way the world sees Pakistan at present – its response to India's offer for aid and ongoing accusations that its government is harboring, supporting or funding terrorists.

As of August 13, India had offered approximately US\$6.8 million in aid and pledged to send nearly 400 doctors to Pakistan. Much to the shock of the global community, Pakistan has thus far rejected India's offer of financial aid and has yet to provide visas to the doctors. Perhaps even more surprising is that India has gone so far as to offer to send its promised aid through UN agencies to overcome the historical political and military tensions be-

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Health Organization has noted that over 10 million people have been forced to drink unsafe water and the potential for the outbreak

of disease is high. After touring the affected areas, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon asked member states and global stakeholders for an immediate US\$460 million for emergency relief.

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tween the two countries, but this proposal has also not been accepted. If Pakistan is as desperate as it claims, and is willing to plead with the world for help, selective aid is simply not an option.

The second issue plaguing the global response to this disaster is continued charges leveled at the Pakistani government regarding its role in supporting terrorist activities. Pakistan itself cites recent comments by British Prime Minister David Cameron, openly claiming the government was responsible for promoting terrorism and hampering NATO efforts in Afghanistan, as a reason for the lack of aid. Sadly for the people suffering on the ground, this accusation against Pakistan's gov-



Pakistan's location makes it a vital interest for NATO countries.

ernment cannot simply be dismissed. It is assumed by most educated observers that Pakistan is where Osama Bin Laden is currently in hiding and that some members of the Taliban are using Pakistan as a base for its attacks on NATO forces.

Strategic factors

Despite its stubborn response to India and the allegations regarding terrorist activity, Pakistan must receive aid and attention, especially from members of NATO. This is by no means only a moral or ethical argument. Rather, it is based on solid strategic calculations. It is not surprising that the United States has been at the forefront of the relief effort thus far and that Canada had, as of August 14, pledged over \$30 million in aid. Regardless of the incompetent and corrupt nature of Pakistan's political leadership, its geographical location makes it crucial to the ongoing missions in Afghanistan for NATO and also in Iraq for the US and UK. Without aid, domestic radicalization and a possible Taliban insurgency are

both legitimate concerns, and the loss of Pakistan as a staging ground would be enormously costly for NATO and those nations operating in Iraq.

It is also important to note that sending this aid is not at all likely to alter the behavior of President Asif Ali Zardari. Allegations of corruption and the sponsorship of terrorism will certainly persist and continue to raise troubling questions about the sovereignty and legitimacy of the Pakistani government. Even so, the strategic importance of Pakistan cannot be overlooked by Canadians, or the citizens of any other NATO member state.

Clearly, the Government of Canada has recognized the geographical and political significance of Pakistan due to the recent announcement that it would match any private financial donations made in response to the flooding. Canadian citizens, who are surely and right-

fully skeptical about the internal problems of the Pakistani regime and question whether aid will actually reach those who most need it, have heard nothing from their government regarding placing conditions on aid or about the constant accusations made against President Zardari. This does not speak to the Canadian government's moral solidarity with its Pakistani counterpart, but instead, demonstrates Prime Minister Harper's recognition that an allegedly corrupt yet partially cooperative ally in Pakistan is better than no tactical partnership with that nation at all.

At its core, international politics is a self-interested game and regardless of humanitarian concerns, Pakistan is a vital strategic component in it. If the faces of millions of affected people do not motivate action, the long-term political and military consequences should.





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*Allan Gotlieb, former Deputy Minister of
External Affairs and Ambassador to Washington*

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*Hon. James S. Peterson, former Minister of International Trade and Member of
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