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Evaluating India's HADR Diplomacy

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Introduction to HADR Diplomacy

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) can refer to a range of activities and operations that are meant to provide short-term relief to crisis-affected populations and states. The United Nations Office for Coordinating Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) created the Oslo Guidelines on The Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets In Disaster Relief. According to the Oslo Guidelines, "humanitarian assistance is aid to an affected population that seeks, as its primary purpose, to save lives and alleviate suffering of a crisis-affected population."[1] There are three categories of humanitarian assistance:

1. Direct Assistance involves face-to-face distribution of goods and services.
2. Indirect Assistance is not face-to-face but rather involves activities such as transporting relief goods or relief personnel.
3. Infrastructure Support involves providing general services, such as road repair and power generation, that facilitate relief.

The Oslo Guidelines define international disaster relief assistance as the "material, personnel and services provided by the international community to an Affected State to meet the needs of those affected by a disaster."[2]

HADR operations are not only under the purview of international aid organisations, but also militaries, given their training, technical skills, and logistical capabilities. HADR has subsequently made its way into the security agendas of states with significant military abilities.[3]

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[1] United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2007. "Oslo Guidelines" https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/OSLO%20Guidelines%20Rev%201.1%20-%20Nov%2007_0.pdf

[2] Ibid.

[3] C Raja Mohan. "Indian Military Diplomacy: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief" *ISAS Working Paper No. 184.* (26 March, 2014) https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/178456/ISAS_Working_Paper__184_-_Indian_Military_Diplomacy__Humanitarian_Assistance_26032014162545.pdf

The provision of HADR may not only be altruistic and selfless, as states also use these operations as an instrument of diplomacy. HADR operations are used in a self-interested to advance foreign policy goals, and as a means for strategic competition.[4] HADR used to be seen as the domain of advanced Western nations like the United States but this is no longer the case.[5]

This paper examines India's Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HADR) diplomacy. It provides an overview of India's HADR principles, motivations, structure and capabilities. The paper also evaluates the existing and potential use of India's HADR operations in pursuing its foreign policy goals. This evaluation is based on three factors: 1) regional bilateral and multilateral ties, 2) transnational security cooperation and competition, and 3) military engagement with non-traditional security issues.

Overview of India's HADR operations and the use of HADR as a Diplomatic Instrument

Principles and Motivations

India's HADR operations are based on the principle of respecting the sovereignty of the affected state.[6] This emphasis on territorial sovereignty is coupled with a general stance of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states. Therefore, according to the Indian HADR principles, any humanitarian assistance will be extended only following the consent and formal request by the affected state to India for such assistance.[7] Without such consent, India - in principle - refrains from HADR operations outside its borders.

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[4] Canyon & Ryan. "Military and Private Sector HADR – Now a Sophisticated Tool for Strategic Competition" *Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies* (August 2021). https://apcss.org/nexus_articles/military-and-private-sector-hadr-now-a-sophisticated-tool-for-strategic-competition/

[5] C Raja Mohan. "Indian Military Diplomacy: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief"

[6] Chakradeo. "Neighbourhood First Responder: India's Humanitarian Assistance And Disaster Relief" *Brookings India* (August 2020). https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HADR-Policy-Brief.pdf

[7] C Raja Mohan. "Indian Military Diplomacy: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief"

India has defined its HADR ethos in contrast with the Western model of providing humanitarian assistance.[8] Due to its emphasis on sovereignty and consent, India's assistance is meant to be tailored to the needs of the affected state, as defined by its government. This is called 'demand-driven' aid or assistance. India is critical of Western countries and organisations following a 'supply-driven' model which may involve careless, unnecessary, and ultimately unhelpful intervention. Due to these features of its HADR operations, India "views itself as a 'partner' who wants to stand in solidarity with its sister developing countries in distress."[9] As a partner, India is interested in coupling short term HADR operations to long term development.

Aside from these principles and idealistic approach, India has used HADR operations as a tool to diplomatically strengthen bilateral relationships. Moreover, it views HADR operations as a way to project soft power and increase its international standing. Being an HADR "first responder" is thought to reflect India's "growing capability [to shape events outside its borders] and increasing willingness to assume the role of a leading power."[10] Thus India can be seen in a positive light as a powerful international actor who is aware and willing to act on its responsibilities. Through its HADR operation in the neighbourhood, India can subtly assert and consolidate its sphere of influence, and be seen as a 'net security provider.'

Structure and Capabilities

India's HADR operations involve both civilian and military agencies. However, apart from funding and initial coordination, the Indian government exclusively deploys the military for the provision of assistance and relief to other countries.[11] HADR operations are coordinated by the Development Partnership Administration - II (DPA-II) division of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).[12] When it receives a request for HADR assistance, the DPA-II division will coordinate

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[8] Meier & Murthy. "India's Growing Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance" *Global Public Policy Institute.* (March 2011) meier-murthy_2011_india-growing-involvement-humanitarian-assistance_gppi.pdf
[9] Ibid.
[10] MEA
[11] Meier & Murthy. "India's Growing Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance"
[12] Chakradeo. "Neighbourhood First Responder: India's Humanitarian Assistance And Disaster Relief"

with MEA, Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other ministries. Within the MoD, the Integrated Defence Staff Headquarters (IDS HQ) is in charge of foreign requests for assistance. As per the requirements of the HADR operations and resource availability, the Indian Army, Navy, Air Force,and/or Coast Guard assets are deployed in the crisis area.Although HADR is assigned to the DPA-II division, there is no set operating procedure or chain of command between this division and the other agencies.[13] As such the decision-making for HADR operations is largely ad-hoc and proceeds on a case-to-case basis.

India's military forces are arguably the only agency in the country equipped to carry out HADR operations abroad. They can carry out operations in inaccessible and vulnerable locations where civilian agencies have no reach. They have the personnel, training, and "a sizable number of transport aircraft, helicopters, and support vessels [that have] enabled them to carry out the quick provision of food, water, and medical supplies."[14] For instance, the INS Jalashwa transport dock acquired in 2007 and Shardul-class and Magar-class tank landing ships are used in the Indian Navy's disaster relief operations.[15] Another example of military capability is the Air Force's acquisition of C-17 aircrafts, the largest transport aircraft in the Indian Air Force, which will be useful for evacuation purposes.

Examples

The Indian government and armed forces have been at the forefront of a number of HADR operations, beginning with the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami relief efforts. These operations put HADR operations on the Indian policymakers' radar. Operations were also conducted in Bangladesh after cyclone Sidr in 2007. India stepped in to provide assistance and relief after Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar. This example is notable because Myanmar refused to accept Western aid, but was willing to ask India for assistance. Therefore, India's position as a 'security provider'

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Jaishankar, D. 2017 "India's Military Diplomacy." *German Marshall Fund.*
https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/Military_Layout_Final-1.20-26.pdf

[15] Ibid.

in its neighbourhood was bolstered, and the distinctiveness of its HADR ethos from the traditional Western approach was recognised.[16]

One of the largest and most comprehensive HADR operations India has conducted was *Operation Maitri* in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal earthquake. Multiple governmental, non-governmental, and military agencies were involved in the operation, with Indian government, state governments, and Indian NGOs spending a combined INR 400 Crore.[17]

A number of military assets were deployed for search and rescue operations and distributing relief material. India also sent technical experts to assist with post-disaster reconstruction and development, which is an example of its ethos of being a HADR partner and not a donor. India also conducted *Operation Insaniyat* to assist Bangladesh with the huge influx of refugees. In 2020, India deployed INS Airavat to send aid to Madagascar, following severe flooding there.

Evaluation of India's HADR Diplomacy

Bilateral and Multilateral Ties

So far, India's HADR operations have focused on its immediate neighbourhood. This is congruent with the "Neighbourhood First" policy adopted by the current government. Due to adhering to a demand-driven ethos and a principle of respecting sovereignty in terms of HADR operations, India has "mostly bilateral dealings with foreign governments and only rare engagements with regional international organisations."[18] Through mitigating the worst impacts of any humanitarian disasters in the region, India can maintain its regional network of strong bilateral ties. Moreover, in terms of self-interest, India's economic growth is tied to its neighbourhood, and enacting good disaster

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[16] Chakradeo. "Neighbourhood First Responder: India's Humanitarian Assistance And Disaster Relief"
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

management in the neighbourhood contributes to a relatively stable regional economic environment.[19]

India's preference for bilateral dealing during HADR operations is thus a 'diplomatic instrument' used to cultivate stronger bilateral relations. This is another reason why India prefers government-to-government channels in HADR operations. Meier & Murthy observe that in India's relations with Central American and West African countries, "a surge in humanitarian assistance activities parallel to generally intensifying diplomatic relations and rising investments."[20]

In India's relationships with the US and Japan, HADR operations and capabilities have played a role. For instance, the 2009 Joint Action Plan for Security Cooperation that India signed with Japan contains a framework for bilateral cooperation on disaster management.[21] India and the US have a Disaster Relief Initiative, whereby the two countries have sought to "establish a dialogue and identify additional military training needs, skills-development requirements, and other challenges to a speedy and effective disaster response."[22]

In terms of multilateral engagement, disaster management has played a significant role in India's engagement with ASEAN as well, as it is a common priority for both actors.[23] India is also the chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Organisation's Core Group on Disaster Risk Management which created official guidelines for HADR in the region.[24] With SAARC, India engaged with the SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters (SARRND) in 2011, although not much has come to fruition with this initiative. Beyond such committees, India participated in the

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[19] Meier & Murthy. ""India's Growing Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance"

[20] Ibid

[21] C Raja Mohan. "Indian Military Diplomacy: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief"

[22] Ibid

[23] Ibid

[24] Chakradeo. "Neighbourhood First Responder: India's Humanitarian Assistance And Disaster Relief"

PANEX-21 exercise with the BIMSTEC countries "to envisage contingencies for such operations in the backdrop of the pandemic."[25]

The scope for concrete multilateral engagement regarding HADR remains, especially in terms of joint exercises and collaborative training, as it has highlighted the neighbourhood as a priority for HADR operations. BIMSTEC is the most readily available multilateral grouping for exercises of this nature. ASEAN is also another option for the IOR since it already operates the Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre in Singapore[26] and Multinational Military Coordination Centers that Indian armed forces can collaborate with.[27] The revived Quad grouping also provides India with possibilities to cooperate on HADR capacity-building and deployment.[28]

Transnational Strategic Competition

HADR operations can be considered a part of transnational strategic competition. Although they display soft power, they are also a display of military performance, technical competence, and personnel capability. A proficient HADR deployment by the armed forces indicates their operational readiness.[29] Chong & Woo Lee () write that "increasingly, analysts and participants in HADR have drawn either operational comparisons or benchmarks from military performances in peacetime and wartime."[30] When multiple militaries are involved in simultaneous HADR operations, there is a "form of non-combat competition."[31] Moreover, if multiple services are being used in the operation, the way these services complement each other is another aspect of military

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[25] Patil, Sameer.." India's growing defence diplomacy footprint" *Observer Researcher Foundation.* (March 8, 2022.) https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-growing-defence-diplomacy-footprint/
See also Press Bureau of India. "PANEX-21 culminates with successful conduct of Table Top Exercise" (December 22, 2021) https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1784338

[26] Nanthini. "Defence diplomacy as a tool to cope with the climate crisis" *East Asia Forum.* (31 March 2022) https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2022/03/31/defence-diplomacy-as-a-tool-to-cope-with-the-climate-crisis/

[27] Canyon & Ryan. "Military and Private Sector HADR – Now a Sophisticated Tool for Strategic Competition"

[28] Chakradeo. "Neighbourhood First Responder: India's Humanitarian Assistance And Disaster Relief"

[29] Ibid.

[30] Chong & Woo Lee. 2017 "Asia's Security Competition by Proxy: Competitive HADR as a Respectable Arena?" in Chong, A. (eds) *International Security in the Asia-Pacific*. Palgrave Macmillan (pp 377-400). cd64b48e-6eb9-4a51-a615-1ce7167169b5.pdf (isanet.org)

[31] Ibid

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performance that HADR operations reveal. Given the range of HADR operations the Indian armed forces have deployed - especially in the neighbourhood - they have displayed incredible capability . However, there are some limitations that need to be addressed as well. One of the limitations is training regarding the specific humanitarian norms and doctrines required by HADR operations. Another limitation is coordination between ministries and the armed forces. Standard operating procedures, contingency planning, efficient communication channels, and pre-arranged diplomatic protocols should all be in place.[32]

When it comes to disaster relief and provision of humanitarian assistance, there is a notion of 'competition of compassion'[33] There is a level of international responsibility any state deploying HADR operations is eager to display. In the earlier sections, this paper has already discussed India's desires regarding to portray itself as a responsible actor. Therefore, HADR operations show that the military is not only a tool for hard power but soft power as well.

India has another avenue to develop this soft power aspect of HADR operations. Meier & Murthy note, "humanitarianism lies at the heart of Indian spiritual and cultural values." Indian diplomats and top military brass are in a position to portray HADR operations as being rooted in India's various spiritual traditions which espouse humanitarian impulses. This paper has already noted the duality of hard-power deployed as soft power inherent in HADR operations. Alloying sentiments regarding spiritual traditions with strategic concerns and hard power military deployment can be a powerful diplomatic instrument.

Military Engagement with Non-Traditional Security Issues

HADR operations are also a measure of military engagement with non-traditional security issues. For instance, climate change is likely to create an increase in the frequency of weather-related disasters, migration flows, as well as food and water insecurity.[34] Climate change is also

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[32] Jaishankar. "India's Military Diplomacy."

[33] Chong & Woo Lee. "Asia's Security Competition by Proxy: Competitive HADR as a Respectable Arena?"

[34] Nanthini. "Defence diplomacy as a tool to cope with the climate crisis"

increasingly discussed as a 'threat multiplier.'[35] The scope of non-traditional security threats will widen and the armed forces will be called on as first responders in such situations. Existing humanitarian networks may deteriorate even further in the future, so the role of the military - domestically and abroad - will grow larger.

While this aspect of HADR operations is forward-facing, it is still possible to be used diplomatically. For instance, India can be a leading power among emerging economies and its extended neighbourhood in terms of developing concrete operational procedures for climate-change related security crises. India's stance regarding HADR is distinct from the Western approach, and as such it offers emerging countries a helping hand as a 'partner' and not a 'donor.' Indian policymakers can further leverage this characteristic in terms of HADR operations and non-traditional security threats. Thus, there is scope for India adopting an advisory role, and even setting up and leading military exercises with partners. Defence diplomacy and military diplomacy via HADR can still proceed in this direction. However, this will require a lot of resources and coordination between different ministries and the armed forces. Moreover, it requires willpower amongst the different decision-making stakeholders to take concrete actions to prepare for such non-traditional threats.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see that India's HADR diplomacy has been proactive in establishing bilateral relations within its neighbourhood. However, the scope for multilateral engagement still remains quite high. Regional mechanisms like BIMSTEC and ASEAN are two avenues where India can further pursue HADR diplomacy. Investing in HADR capabilities in the Indian Ocean through groupings IORA and Quad is also likely to pay dividends in the future. Moreover, there are still avenues to HADR diplomacy that further strategic competition in soft power and also help prepare

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[35] Jayaram, D. "Climatizing' military strategy? A case study of the Indian armed forces". *Int Polit* 58, 619–639 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00247-3

against non-traditional security threats, especially pertaining to climate change. In these matters, India can capitalise on its distinctiveness from the Western HADR approach.

The armed forces play an outsized role in Indian HADR diplomacy, and for it to develop further in the future, the MoD and military leadership need to invest resources into it. As this paper has discussed, investing in HADR capabilities need not be altogether different from the more traditional, hard power, security concerns. After all, HADR operations are hard power deployments framed as soft power. Thus investing in creating more concrete operational procedures, training and education, and military exercises relating to HADR can strengthen India's standing within the international community. At the same time, it can effectively portray India as a 'net security provider' and a responsible power.