

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

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Introduction

Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sherman, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Department of Defense role in the U.S. response to the April 25 Nepal earthquake and aftershock of May 12. These earthquakes have caused a disaster of staggering proportions, requiring a significant humanitarian response from the entire international community. The United States is responding alongside our international partners in support of the Government of Nepal to bring lifesaving relief to the Nepalese people.

Before addressing the details of the Department of Defense efforts, I would like to express my deep sadness and offer my condolences to the families of our six Marines who perished when their helicopter went down in the mountains of Nepal last week, while providing aid to earthquake victims. I would also like to convey our sympathies to our Nepalese partners, in mourning for the loss of their two service members who were on board the helicopter. At the same time, I wish to express our gratitude to the Nepalese and Indian governments for their dedicated support in the search and recovery operations. This tragedy is a reminder of the vital role that U.S. service members play in delivering humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, but one that is not without risk. Our mission continues in Nepal and we remain committed to answering the call when disaster strikes, in the Asia-Pacific region and around the world.

The Department of Defense has a long history of military to military engagement in Nepal and across the region. This engagement has focused on four primary areas, to include supporting the professionalization and modernization of the Nepal military and the Ministry of Defense; enhancing Nepal's peacekeeping capabilities and contributions; building Nepal's

ground force capacity; and - most relevant to today's hearing - increasing Nepal's humanitarian assistance and disaster response capabilities.

In recent years, the Department of Defense, through the U.S. Pacific Command, has worked with the Nepalese government on initiatives designed specifically to mitigate the impact of an earthquake-related disaster. These efforts include the construction of Deep Tube Wells, the establishment of a central blood bank, repairs to critical airport infrastructure, the development of an airport disaster recovery plan, the establishment of emergency operations centers, and the construction of multiple disaster material warehouses throughout the country. The Department has also engaged in several Disaster Response Exercises and Engagements with Nepalese personnel; in September 2013 the Department of Defense held a Field Training Exercise focused on an earthquake impacting the Kathmandu Valley. Foreign humanitarian assistance, civil-military coordination, and interagency communication were the primary themes. More recently, Nepalese personnel participated in the Pacific Regional Disaster Reduction Exercise and Engagement in Bangladesh in August 2014, and another similar exchange is scheduled for later this year. Such efforts, along with other steady-state military humanitarian assistance projects, help to deepen our cooperation with our Nepalese partners, and appear to have mitigated some of the impacts of the earthquake and facilitated subsequent response efforts. For example, the Department of Defense funded Deep Tube Well project is currently being used to provide water and power to more than 5,500 internally displaced persons as well as local villagers and Nepalese police in the Kathmandu Valley.

The Department of Defense Role in U.S. Government Nepal Earthquake Response Efforts

Department of Defense personnel are deployed to Nepal in support of our USAID partners, providing unique military capabilities to the U.S. Government response effort. On April 25, just hours after the earthquake, Secretary Carter directed that the Department provide support to the Government of Nepal-led efforts, in direct response to USAID's request for assistance. U.S. Pacific Command ordered two Special Forces teams already in Nepal for training to assist the Embassy team with immediate lifesaving and medical support. Team members accompanied State Department consular personnel on chartered helicopters to rescue seven climbers stranded in Everest basecamps as well as repatriate the remains of a U.S. citizen killed in the avalanche. These teams remain engaged today, coordinating with Nepalese Army personnel on rescue operations in the Gorkha region.

The U.S. Transportation Command provided two C-17 transport aircraft to airlift the USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) as well as Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams from Fairfax County, Virginia and Los Angeles County, California. The teams arrived in Kathmandu on April 28. The rapid movement of the teams paid off when both were involved in the rescue of a 15-year-old boy from the rubble on April 30 after being buried for more than 120 hours. The USAR team's efforts were called upon repeatedly, as they provided vital medical care to many injured people, often working closely with U.S. military medics and personnel.

The U.S. Pacific Command deployed a 20-person Joint Humanitarian Assessment Support Team, which arrived in Nepal on April 29, to coordinate with the DART. This team, led by Marine Brigadier General Paul Kennedy, consisted of military experts in multiple specialties, focused on determining possible military staging locations as well as specific military support requirements. As the DART and Joint Humanitarian Assessment Support Team came to

understand the scale of the disaster, it became clear that more military support would be required, particularly rotary wing airlift and airfield management specialists to increase the throughput at the increasingly backlogged international airport in Kathmandu.

The U.S. military response effort, named Operation SAHAYOGI HAAT (Nepalese for “Helping Hand”) is under the control of Joint Task Force 505, commanded by Marine Lieutenant General John Wissler. The Joint Task Force comprises more than 900 total personnel in Nepal, Thailand, and Japan. More than 300 personnel are forward staged in Nepal with Brigadier General Kennedy, an additional 260 personnel are staged in Thailand, and the remaining 340 are based in Okinawa, Japan. Additionally, four C-17 transport aircraft, two KC-130J transport aircraft, four V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft, and three UH-1 helicopters were deployed to support the effort.

To date, Joint Task Force 505 has provided airlift, airfield services, search and rescue support, and other support to the USAID-led effort in eastern Nepal. As of May 18, the Joint Task Force has flown 290 sorties, and a total of 938 flight hours. The Joint Task Force has airlifted 1,488 passengers and more than 724 tons of material, including 109 tons of relief supplies.

Conclusion

The Department of Defense, in support of our USAID and Department of State partners, has responded swiftly to assist the Government of Nepal. The relief efforts to date highlight the unique capabilities the Department can bring to bear in the U.S. Government response to natural disasters and humanitarian crises.