

First air coordination cell established for Pakistan flood relief

By Staff Sgt. Kali Gradishar, U.S. AFCENT Combat Camera News Team / Published September 06, 2010

CHAKLALA AIR BASE, Pakistan -- A number of Pakistan, U.S. and international organizations, both military and civilian, gathered here Aug. 28 to form an air coordination cell aimed at streamlining air operations supporting Pakistan's flood relief efforts.

"There are a considerable amount of organizations [helping with flood relief in Pakistan]," said Travis Betz, a logistics officer on the U.S. Agency for International Development Disaster Assistance Response Team who assisted in bringing together the United Nations "logistics cluster and government of Pakistan and the U.S. military [to] have a coordinated air planning session."

The meeting was chaired by the commander of the Pakistan Army Aviation Command with representatives from U.N. Logistics Cluster, World Food Program, U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of the Defense Representative Pakistan and representatives from Air Force Central Command. Also present were representatives from the Pakistan army and air force and Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority.

"The biggest success we've had ... is the consolidation of the air coordination cell here," said U.S. Air Force Col. Greg Nelson, directory of mobility forces for humanitarian assistance.

After torrential rains pounded the country and a surge of water jetted through towns and villages, many were left without food, water, shelter and other basic necessities. The Pakistan Air Force's Central Flood Relief Cell stood up at Chaklala AFB to direct relief toward areas most in need, but there was still a communication gap between the many involved nations' militaries, governments and international organizations.

"Coordination up to the merging or forming of the air coordination cell has been fragmented," said Nelson, deployed from the 123rd Airlift Wing, Kentucky Air National Guard. "The lead civilian agency is the National Disaster Management Authority of Pakistan ... They have received support and commodities from all over the world, but it's just individual nations to them. Until we formed this coordination cell, the [various entities] weren't able to merge together and bring that requirements and commodities picture to an organized air flow capability."

The purpose of the air coordination cell meeting was to discuss available food and supplies, requirements in flooded areas throughout Pakistan and means for transporting the items throughout the country. It was also necessary within the meeting to facilitate communication between the countries and agencies involved and to better accommodate the many donations, air assets and collaborators.

"The main focus has been to find ... what the requirements are throughout the country during this flood disaster, and then we prioritize - find out what resources we have in terms of the commodities, whether it's food, medical supplies, shelter," said Air Force Lt. Col. Eliot Evans, Office of the Defense Representative Pakistan. "Then we have an air coordination planning meeting to coordinate what aircraft are available [and] what our capacity is to move the supplies that we need to."

"It's critically important for the flow of information so that all organizations ... are led by the Pakistan government, by the National Disaster Management Authority," added the colonel, deployed from the Virginia Air National Guard. "It's critical that this gives transparency to the flow if the humanitarian

assistance relief goods, and it also helps in the communication to make sure that we prioritize what areas are most in need - so that we can get those supplies distributed as soon as possible to the areas that are most affected."

Besides enhanced communication, the creation of the air coordination cell also provides the opportunity for a planning process that looks further into the future than the one-day-in-advance effort the relief cell had previously been putting forth.

Up until the establishment of the air coordination cell, the requirement for various commodities was passed on to the air cell to develop an "air flow plan immediately for the next 24 hours," said Nelson. "Now we're starting to look at a week out."

Getting lead representatives from each entity was not an easy task, but the change will likely be beneficial for relief operations now and in the near future.

"It took a while to get it together, but this will really increase the efficiency of air delivery of the needs across the country of Pakistan," Nelson stated. "But it's all in support of the government of Pakistan through the NDMA, and this cell puts the whole thing together."



U.S. Air Force Col. Greg Nelson, Director of Mobility Forces for Humanitarian Assistance to Pakistan(left) and a member of the World Food Program go over flight schedule for the next week on supplies being transported all over Pakistan in support of flood relief efforts on Aug. 28, 2010. An Air Coordination Cell was formed to discuss available food and supply requirements needed in flooded areas throughout Pakistan and means for transporting

items all over country. (U.S. photo taken by Staff Sgt. Andy M. Kin)



Pakistan Army Col. Khalil Dar (left) and John from the World Food Program talk rotary wing support in designated locations in support of flood relief efforts during an initial Air Coordination Cell meeting at Chaklala Air Field, Pakistan on Aug. 28, 2010. The ACC was formed to discuss available food and supply requirements needed in flooded areas throughout Pakistan and means for transporting items all over country. (U.S. photo taken by Staff Sgt. Andy M. Kin)



Pakistan Maj. Gen Arif, commander of the Army Aviation Command (center), heads an Air Coordination Cell meeting with many U.S., Pakistan, and international organizations aimed at flood relief efforts in Pakistan. The ACC was formed to discuss available food and supply requirements needed in flooded areas throughout Pakistan and means for transporting items throughout the country. (U.S. photo taken by Staff Sgt. Andy M. Kin)



Simon Hacker, senior UN Logistics Cluster coordinator (center), discusses numbers and locations with Pakistan Maj. Gen Arif, commander of the Army Aviation Command, during an Air Coordination Cell meeting with many U.S., Pakistan, and international organizations aimed at flood relief efforts in Pakistan. The ACC was formed to discuss available food and supply requirements needed in flooded areas throughout Pakistan and means for transporting items all throughout the country. (U.S. photo taken by Staff Sgt. Andy M. Kin)