

Forgotten America in Crisis

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The devastation Hurricane Helene has wrought on much of Appalachia—and Western North Carolina in particular—presents an unfortunate occasion to examine what the U.S. military is doing to secure the American way of life.

Unfortunately, the military's dismal response so far shows that they are unwilling to provide for the American people at a time of dire need.

Days after Hurricane Helene, the Biden-Harris Administration finally [activated up to 1,000 soldiers](#) to support the delivery of food, water, and medicine to isolated communities. But these efforts are too little, too late.

Compare this to the military's response after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when thousands of troops were mobilized within [seven hours](#) of receiving orders as the situation spiraled out of control.

Apparently, it is not worth a call to the soldiers of the 101st Air Assault Division who are seven hours away. The 2nd Marine Division, which is stationed only a few hours away from Ft. Liberty, is standing by. But the people of North Carolina only seem to be worth sending a small contingent of active duty troops, some phone calls from Delaware, and a few photo opportunities.

The parts of America long outside the consciousness of Pentagon strategists and Beltway elites have been destroyed. Entire towns are inaccessible by road. Hundreds of Americans are missing. Disaster relief is mostly falling to beleaguered response units, the National Guard, and heroic Americans like Tim Kennedy and Congressman Cory Mills.

It goes without saying that Ft. Liberty's [82nd Airborne Division](#), located just outside of Fayetteville, North Carolina, could send far more help. While there is no need to seize an airfield with airborne forces, the security environment is uncertain, with countless reports of looting and violence.

The 82nd Airborne serves as America's "Global Response Force." The 82nd was largely responsible for the evacuation of Hamid Karzai International Airport in Afghanistan—meaning that they are extraordinarily well-positioned to respond to Hurricane Helene relief efforts in their own state.

A brigade of paratroopers from the 82nd is always less than 24 hours away from massing combat power anywhere in the world.

It is not as if disaster relief is outside the purview of a combat-ready unit like the 82nd. Paratroopers from Ft. Liberty joined in [Hurricane Andrew](#) relief efforts in 2004. And they patrolled the streets of New Orleans in defense against looting in response to [Hurricane Katrina in 2005](#).

The Global War on Terror and international tension elsewhere did not stop the rapid deployment of critical U.S. military power to Haiti after a natural disaster. A mere 48 hours after Haiti experienced a devastating earthquake in [January 2010](#), the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 82nd Airborne landed in Port-au-Prince to provide security and humanitarian assistance. This came amidst a troop surge in Afghanistan and dormant but still existing military commitments in Iraq.

Perhaps more importantly, however, is the 82nd's [ability](#) to rapidly establish critical infrastructure in austere environments. American paratroopers could establish fuel depots, field hospitals, and dining facilities by the time a reader wakes up tomorrow morning. These activities would support other Americans in dire need—but such awesome power does not seem to be available to taxpayers in North Carolina.

Hurricane Helene comes amidst a dangerous international security environment. Iran launched hundreds of missiles at Israel on October 1, the Russia-Ukraine War grinds on, and the Pacific inches closer to conflict. Obviously the 82nd stands committed to respond to all of these threats at once.

But that does not tell the whole story.

Typically only one-third of the 82nd is on recall notice for “global” contingency operations. That means two infantry brigades, significant portions of battlefield support brigades, and tens of thousands of paratroopers are otherwise occupied with training or on leave. A total of 57,000 service members are stationed at Ft. Liberty, which is only a few hours from the worst natural disaster to strike Appalachia in American history.

The Army possesses unmatched crisis response capabilities. There is no reason Americans should not top the list of those who have access to this critical capability at a time when it is desperately needed.

One thousand troops, days after Helene hit, will be unable to effectively deal with the devastation. Helene is one of the [deadliest hurricanes](#) in the past half century; hundreds are missing, and thousands require immediate food, water, and medical supplies. The American people deserve better than this.