



# Collaboration or obstruction? Rebel group behavior during natural disaster relief in the Philippines

Colin Walch <sup>a, b, \*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Gamla Torget 3, 75120, Sweden

<sup>b</sup> Centre for Natural Disaster Science (CNDS), Villavägen 16, 752 36 Uppsala, Sweden



## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Available online 18 October 2014

### Keywords:

Natural disaster  
Armed conflict  
Climate change  
Rebel group  
Disaster management  
Resilience  
Philippines

## ABSTRACT

Under what conditions do rebel groups collaborate with the government in disaster relief operations? Despite the fact that many natural disasters occur in armed conflict contexts, little is known about the impact of conflict actors on natural disaster relief efforts. Affected by the same typhoon, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the New People's Army (NPA) behaved differently in the aftermath of the natural disaster. While the MILF collaborated with the government in relief efforts, the NPA did not. This article explains this variation by arguing that the level of hostility between the rebel group and the state in the pre-disaster period as well as the type of social contract that exists between the rebels and the local population shape collaboration during natural disaster relief efforts. The theoretical argument is explored through a comparative case study between these two rebel groups in the aftermath of a devastating typhoon in the Philippines in 2012.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

There is growing evidence that climate change is increasing the intensity and frequency of natural disasters, particularly hydrological and climatological ones, such as floods, cyclones, and droughts (SREX-IPCC, 2012). At the same time, armed conflicts continually affect communities and countries throughout the world. According to the 2011 World Development Report, more than 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by armed conflict (World Bank, 2011). Recently, several natural disasters have taken place in conflict situations, including in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Pakistan, Somalia, Colombia and the Philippines. However, we know very little about how armed conflicts impact natural disaster relief efforts. Natural disaster response and recovery policies have been mainly developed in secure contexts, where operational and institutional challenges resulting from armed conflict situations have not been properly taken into account. While scholars in the field have typically studied how natural disasters could increase the risk of armed conflicts, little has been written on the possible effects of armed conflict on natural disaster relief efforts.

One aspect of the effects of armed conflicts on natural disaster response has been particularly neglected: the influence of rebel

groups on natural disaster relief operations. This article defines rebel group as “an official military organization for the purposes of fighting the established military power of the state” (Raleigh & Kniveton, 2012:53) and which has the intention to govern. While rebel groups are not monolithic organizations – being frequently affected by internal differences and struggles (c.f. Pearlman & Cunningham, 2012) – they still remain important actors in the management of natural disasters. For example, rebel groups often define the security situation on the ground, control territory and determine access to civilians (Justino, Brück, & Verwimp, 2013). Their collaboration in disaster relief is often crucial for a smooth and effective response. Whereas some rebel groups are more willing to collaborate during natural disaster relief operations, others are not. To understand this variation in behavior, this article argues that the level of hostility between the rebel group and the state in the pre-disaster period influences whether or not collaboration will take place during disaster relief. In addition, collaboration is likely to be more active when the rebel group has established a strong social contract with the local population. Low hostility makes cooperation less costly and the quality of the social contract create obligations towards the civilians in terms of welfare provision from the rebel group. This argument is explored through a comparative case study between the behaviors of two different rebel groups following a major natural disaster in 2012 in the Philippines and explains why the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) collaborated with the government of the Philippines during disaster relief, while the New People's Army (NPA) did not. The

\* Corresponding author. Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Gamla Torget 3, 75120, Sweden. Tel.: +46 184716117; fax: +46 18695102.

E-mail address: [colin.walch@pcr.uu.se](mailto:colin.walch@pcr.uu.se).

findings, based on 11 weeks of field research in 2013, provide support to the theoretical propositions.

While governmental natural disaster relief efforts have been widely examined in the literature (c.f. Cohen & Werker, 2008; Fair, Kuhn, Malhotra, & Shapiro, 2013; Olson & Gawronski, 2010; Paik, 2011), rebel group interactions with the government in the aftermath of natural disasters have been largely ignored. By examining rebel group behavior right after natural disasters, this paper ties in with the growing literature on natural disasters and conflict, which hitherto has focused mainly on the effect of disaster on conflict and peace (c.f. Hyndman, 2011; Brancati, 2007; Nel & Righarts, 2008; Slettebak, 2012; Kreutz, 2012; Fjelde & von Uexkull, 2012). It also contributes to the literature on rebel group behavior (c.f. Weinstein, 2007; Beardsley & McQuinn, 2009; Mampilly, 2009) by providing fine-grained insights on relationships between states and rebel groups in the aftermath of natural disasters. Finally, the article contributes to the growing policy literature on the impact of armed conflicts on disaster response and recovery (Harris, Keen, & Mitchell, 2013; UNDP, 2011). A detailed study of the conditions under which rebel groups may collaborate with the government (and by extension the international community) has important implications for policymakers. It may provide them with a better understanding of the particular challenges and opportunities that rebel groups bring to disaster relief operations in conflict-stricken countries.

This paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews previous research on the effect of conflict on natural disaster response. It then develops theoretical arguments to explain rebel group behavior during natural disaster relief efforts. Following this section, the method adopted to explore the theoretical argument is discussed. This is followed by the analysis of the two cases in the Philippines. The final section discusses the findings and provides a conclusion.

## Previous research

There is agreement among scientists that, in strict terms, there is no such thing as a “natural disaster” (c.f. Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, & Davis, 2004; Birkmann, 2006; Hyndman, 2011). Indeed, natural disasters mark the interface between an extreme physical phenomenon and a vulnerable human population (O’Keefe, Westgate, & Wisner, 1976). Therefore, it is the combination of a natural hazard and a vulnerable human society that will result in a “natural disaster”. While natural disaster is used throughout the paper for a lack of a better term, the author is aware of the important human components of “natural” disaster.

There is little written on the impact of conflict on natural disaster response. The majority of researchers interested in this linkage have mostly examined how natural shocks can increase the risk of conflict (c.f. Drury & Olson, 1998; Homer-Dixon, 1999; Brancati, 2007; Nel & Righarts, 2008; Nelson, 2010; Slettebak, 2012; Fjelde & von Uexkull, 2012) or contribute to peace (cf. Kelman, 2011; Kreutz, 2012). Only a few authors have looked specifically at how armed conflicts affect the quality and effectiveness of natural disaster relief. According to Wisner, “there are many ways violent conflict complicates, confuses and obstructs the efforts of planners, engineers, and others to assist people in protecting themselves, their livelihoods, and their built environments from natural hazards” (Wisner, 2009:245). He argues that conflict decreases state capacity to respond to and prevent natural disasters. In addition, armed conflict can trigger displacement of large numbers of people and expose them to disease and unfamiliar hazards in new rural or urban environments, thus creating new pockets of vulnerability (Wisner et al., 2004). Conflicts can interfere with the provision of relief and recovery assistance, and

participatory methods meant to empower and engage socially vulnerable groups may be difficult or impossible during violent conflicts (Kelman, 2011; Wisner et al., 2004). They often destroy infrastructures, which may intensify natural hazards (e.g. irrigation systems, dams and levees) or compromise warnings and evacuation (e.g. land mines on roads) (Wisner et al., 2004). Violent conflicts diverts national and international financial and human resources that could be used for disaster reduction and response (Wisner et al., 2004) and obstruct relief operations (Menkhaus, 2012). Finally, previous research has also studied the conditions under which aid may have a negative effect on armed conflict when it is distributed blindly, without taking into account the political context (c.f. Anderson, 1999; Hyndman, 2011).

However, the behavior of armed actors in armed conflict and how these influence natural disaster relief has been under researched in the literature. Yet, we know that armed actors show different patterns in their relations with civilians (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2006), and the effects of armed conflicts on communities are multiple and contingent on how violence is employed and territory controlled (Kalyvas, 2006). While countries affected by civil conflict are fundamentally different from peaceful ones, they are not black boxes characterized by the collapse of order and governance (Justino, 2009; Menkhaus, 2007). Often, many actors substitute the state in the provision of public goods, justice and security (Justino et al., 2013; Mampilly, 2011; Menkaus, 2007; Weinstein, 2007). Local communities do not stay passive in the face of state failure, they try to find coping mechanisms to minimize risk and increase predictability (Menkhaus, 2007). This suggests that rebel groups have the potential to play an important role after natural disasters. In trying to understand the conditions under which rebel groups get involved and collaborate with the state during natural disaster relief, this article mostly resorts to the paradigm of micro-foundations of war (Justino et al., 2013; Kalyvas, 2006). The next section develops the theoretical argument.

## Level of hostility and collaboration during natural disaster relief

Natural disasters can prompt dramatic change in a conflict-affected country, altering attitudes towards the government and/or the rebel groups. Natural disasters can become tipping points – or critical junctures – for political and societal changes (Olson & Gawronski, 2003; Pelling & Dill, 2010). Post-disaster recovery is a special time characterized by extensive media coverage with high expectations on the government from both victims and the general public, which expect the government to respond properly (Olson & Gawronski, 2010). Both sides engaged in the conflict are aware of this particular context and will try to take full advantage of it.

On the one hand, it has been suggested that times following a natural disaster can be marked by an increase of violence (c.f. Brancati, 2007; Nel & Righarts, 2008) or even by terrorist activities (Berrebi & Ostwald, 2011). There are instances of rebel groups obstructing or even sabotaging governmental disaster response efforts, as a way to discredit a government’s efforts and legitimacy. Indeed, it is widely accepted that “each state has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory” (UN, 1991). Hence, rebels have an incentive to obstruct the relief efforts undertaken by the government as a way to indirectly strike the government and the civilians supporting it. Moreover, rebels can profit from discontent among the population toward the state and gain popular support (Raleigh & Hegre, 2009). It has been argued that natural disasters weaken state capacity and legitimacy and thus create opportunities for the disgruntled to engage in violent resistance

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7493338>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7493338>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)