Climate Change, Natural Disasters and the Military

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Summary

There is increasing recognition that climate change constitutes a growing threat to security. This is evident in debates in the UN Security Council, in national security strategy statements, and in an increasing volume of commentary and academic analysis emanating from think tanks and universities. When making this link, it has become common for analysts and policy practitioners alike to point to the ways in which the long-term implications of climate change can contribute to state fragility or resource contestation. Here, climate change becomes a potential 'threat multiplier'.[1]

While this approach to the climate change – security relationship tends towards positioning the threat posed by climate change as indirect, and the timeframe of effects as relatively long-term, both are challenged by the reality of natural disasters. Disasters are predicted to significantly increase in both frequency and severity as a result of climate change, are frequently immediate in timeframe, and can pose a direct threat to people.

The scale of devastation wrought by events such as cyclones/typhoons, droughts, floods, landslides and wildfires—often involving large-scale displacement and the destruction of homes and infrastructure—also frequently necessitates an extraordinary mobilisation of

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[1] See CNA (2014) *National Security and the Accelerating Risks of Climate Change*. May. Available at: https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/MAB_5-8-14.pdf; CNA (2007) *National security and the threat of climate change*. Available at: http://securityandclimate.cna.org/report/.

resources to address these effects. This often extends to the mobilisation of defence resources and personnel, both domestically and internationally. We have become accustomed to images of military personnel involved in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions throughout the world in response to natural disasters, whether floods in Pakistan, cyclones in Fiji, or fires in Australia, an example we will explore in more depth later. With climate change, and the associated growth in the number and severity of extreme weather events, demand for military disaster assistance is likely to grow.[2]

But given state militaries were established primarily to protect the nation-state from external military threat, and militaries themselves tend to see their role as defending against or prosecuting war, the role of militaries in responding to natural disasters is both vexed and controversial. We can also see—in different settings—very different perceptions of the military and its role generally, and specifically in the context of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions in times of national, regional or international crisis.

This policy brief explores the role of the military in responding to natural disasters. It first draws a linkage between disasters and security broadly, before then examining the ways in which military and defence resources might be mobilised in response to these disasters. We briefly look at the important role of perceptions of the military's role in responding to natural disasters—their own and those of others—and conclude with an assessment of how different countries have navigated this issue and carved out a specific role for the military in responding to natural disasters. Two case studies, the contested role of defence forces in responding to bushfires in Australia in 2019-20 and floods in Myanmar in 2015, are used to illustrate the challenges associated with recognising a role for the military in response to natural disasters.

Disasters and Security: The Linkage

Disasters are, by definition, detrimental to the security of individuals, groups and societies through death, loss of shelter, destruction of infrastructure, loss of income opportunities and other effects threatening life, health and livelihoods. Often, disasters have consequences for human security beyond their locality because of economic interactions with other regions, because victims become displaced or because domestic and international financial flows are redirected to disaster areas. Disasters generally also have long term effects on basic services, incomes and livelihoods of those affected, as it takes time to recover and rebuild.

Beyond their detrimental effects on human security, disasters can also affect security in more traditional senses. While disasters often strengthen cooperation both among affected individuals and groups, as well as with others willing to help, they can also lead to local turmoil, armed violence and even international tension. At the centre of such negative effects on physical security are often real or perceived differences among groups about the

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[2] IPCC. 2012. *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

extent of loss from a particular disaster as well as outside assistance provided to alleviate their consequences.

Parallel to creating or increasing grievances, disasters can also offer windows of opportunities for those willing to use violence to further their objectives. Disaster and the associated economic shock can, for instance, increase opportunities for recruitment of combatants due to fewer legitimate opportunities for generating income. This has been linked to the rise of the terrorist group Boko Haram in the Sahel, for example.[3] Conversely, governments can use the state of emergency that is often invoked during major disasters to tighten their grip on opponents. There is empirical evidence that disasters are connected to an increase in the level of domestic repression.[4] Historic examples, such as the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in the United States, also indicate the danger of the collapse of government services in general, and law enforcement in particular, for the maintenance of public order. More generally, disasters rarely leave balances of power, including the capability to use violence, unaffected.

Most recent research comes to the conclusion that disasters increase the likelihood of violent conflict, albeit only to a minor degree and under specific conditions. Prominent among them are the existence of ethnic or social conflict prior to disasters, economic marginalisation, and the absence of effective institutions for conflict resolution.[5] Disasters are less likely to lead to new armed conflicts than to increase the level of violence in ongoing ones. At the same time, the presence of an armed conflict amplifies the consequences of an extreme weather or geophysical event as health and other services deteriorate and those trying to bring disaster assistance are endangering themselves. In complex emergencies, such as in Somalia during much of the last three decades, the consequences of armed violence and disasters can reinforce each other in a vicious cycle.[6]

Large-scale disaster can also have consequences for international security. As is the case for local situations, disasters can also affect international relations both in the direction of more conflict and more cooperation. Relations between India and Bangladesh, for instance, are regularly strained when flooding in the coastal area of Bangladesh leads to large flows of displaced persons attempting to cross the border to India. By some accounts, the Indian government's 2800 km long border fence is precisely a response to these concerns.[7] However, there are also many examples of what has been called "disaster diplomacy": the explicit use of disasters to improve relations, primarily through the provision of disaster

[3] Crawford, A. 2015 *Climate Change and State Fragility in the Sahel*, FRIDE Policy Brief No. 205, June. Available at: https://www.iisd.org/sites/default/files/publications/climate-change-and-state-fragility-in-the-Sahel-fride.pdf

[4] Wood, R. M., Wright T.M. 2015, Responding to catastrophe. Repression dynamics following rapid-onset natural disasters. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60(8): 1446–72.

[5] Brzoska, M. 2018. 'Weather Extremes, Disasters, and Collective Violence: Conditions, Mechanisms, and Disaster-Related Policies in Recent Research'. *Current Climate Change Reports* 4(4): 320-329.

[6] Van Baalen S, Mobjörk M. Climate change and violent conflict in East Africa: integrating qualitative and quantitative research to probe the mechanisms. *International Studies Review* 20(4): 547–575.

[7] Banerjee, Bidisha (2010) 'The Great Wall of India', *Slate*, 20 December. Available at: https://slate.com/technology/2010/12/india-is-fencing-off-its-border-with-bangladesh-what-will-that-mean-for-millions-of-potential-climate-refugees.html.

assistance. Ilan Kelman, who has published widely on the subject, has come to the conclusion that there is no case of disasters leading to the resolution of international conflict, but numerous cases where they helped in furthering ongoing processes of reconciliation.[8]

Defence and Disasters

The scale and potential destruction of natural disasters suggests the need for states to develop and utilise significant resources and manpower to respond to the immediate needs of communities in the wake of these events. The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, for example, affected 15 countries, displaced at least 1.7 million people and resulted in the deaths of over 200,000. And by some estimates, in 2019 natural disasters—even before the onset of dangerous climate change—cost over $150 billion globally and saw the displacement of over 20 million people.[9]

A range of urgent measures is frequently necessary in response to natural disasters. In the case of floods or cyclones, for example, response imperatives extend from providing immediate protection to communities or infrastructure, removing large volumes of debris, clearing roads, establishing emergency health care facilities, moving displaced populations and even securing or maintaining law and order. In these contexts, militaries can play—and have played—a role in response to natural disasters. Indeed, these activities are the core components of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) missions, missions which have been increasing in size and scope in the context of climate change.

Of course, the activities outlined above could apply to deployments either within or beyond the state. In the case of some states, the military is not only the most well-resourced and capable body to cope with disasters, but also the only significant resource at the national government's disposal, a reality that necessitates their involvement in responding to natural disasters. This is the case in Pakistan, for example, with the military increasingly recognised as the body to be deployed in the face of natural disasters such as earthquakes and in particular floods. In other contexts, such as Germany, a role for the military in responding to domestic natural disasters necessitates an event reaching a particular threshold of seriousness, alongside a process of negotiation and consent from civilian authorities. While in Pakistan the military is often the first to provide assistance, in Germany it is thought of as the last resort in the case of major disasters.

In some ways, paradoxically perhaps, HA/DR missions undertaken by the military in other states that have been affected by natural disasters are often clearer and less controversial than has been the case with domestic deployments. In the case of international deployments, it is usually the case that the military forces in question have a clear and specific mandate, one agreed by the country inviting another state to assist with disaster management and post-disaster recovery. There is also a broad sense that a foreign deployment in this way is

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[8] Kelman, I. 2016. *Catastrophe and Conflict. Disaster Diplomacy and Its Foreign Policy Implications.* Brill, Leiden.
[9] Munich Re. *Tropical cyclones cause highest losses. Natural disasters of 2019 in figures*, Available at: https://www.munichre.com/topics-online/en/climate-change-and-natural-disasters/natural-disasters/natural-disasters-of-2019-in-figures-tropical-cyclones-cause-highest-losses.html.

demonstrative of a state's commitment to humanitarianism in its foreign policy. International military deployments to the nations of Southeast Asia in the wake of the Indian Ocean tsunami did not elicit significant criticism or arguably even trigger significant debate, for example.

Domestically, the same may not hold. While it is almost self-evident that military forces can and even should be deployed in the instance of requests from other states suffering the effects of natural disasters—given their deployment capabilities and resources—this does not necessarily apply at the domestic level. Here, a range of domestic actors and agencies, often with primary responsibility for the governance of that region or management of that issue area, might be (or crucially, appear to be) more suited to overseeing disaster relief measures. While some countries have clear criteria regarding when the armed forces might be deployed at the domestic level (as was the case with Germany, as noted), others are relatively ad hoc in terms of when, how and which branches of the military are called upon to mobilise in response to a domestic issue. This clearly invites a debate, potentially heated, about the appropriateness or otherwise of calling on the military in response to natural disasters, raising questions such as at which point we should do so, what their specific role should be, to whom they should be accountable, and which resources specifically should be deployed from which branch of the armed services or indeed reserve forces. Such a debate was evident in the context of Australia's response to the bushfires of 2019/20.

Case Study 1: Australia's 2019/2020 Bushfires and the Role of the Military

In late 2019 and early 2020, Australia experienced large-scale bushfires of unprecedented scope and severity. While almost all states in Australia were affected, the most devastating of these fires were in the southeast of the country, in the states of Victoria and New South Wales. As the fires reached their peak in these areas around the new year, they created hazardous air conditions in Australia's largest city, Sydney, and its capital, Canberra. More directly, they forced large-scale evacuations of communities, necessitated urgent operations to deliver goods and services to communities cut off by fire, and stretched local (often volunteer) fire services to their limits in fighting the blazes. By the time the worst of the fires had passed, over 30 people had died, dozens of homes had been destroyed and communities evacuated, over one billion animals had perished, and millions of hectares of forest had been burnt.

In these contexts, Prime Minister Scott Morrison's decision in early January to call up the Australian Defence Force (ADF) reserves to help with battling the blazes might be seen as relatively uncontroversial. This was a situation of unprecedented emergency in the face of natural disaster, and the ADF had experience in response to natural disasters both abroad (in Fiji in response to tropical cyclone Winston in 2016) and at home (in Queensland in response to 2011 floods). Yet the decision elicited significant domestic debate.

For many, of course, a role for the ADF in responding to natural disasters was logical and entirely appropriate in these emergency circumstances, with firefighting capacity

at breaking point.[10] Their ultimate role in deploying their significant resources to help monitor fires, execute evacuations of communities and assist with the delivery of necessary materials seemed appropriate to many. Some went further and noted that it made sense for the security institutions and military of Australia to be prepared for precisely this form of mission given the existential threat to people it represented, and given the likelihood of future demands for HA/DR missions.[11]

Others, though, were more circumspect—even concerned—about a role for the military in this context. One prominent suggestion here was that the defence forces should not be viewed in this way; as an institution designed to defend from invasion and participate in conflict, it was problematic to view ADF resources simply as a capacity to be drawn draw on for civilian purposes, even extreme ones.[12] Indeed this was implied in a Department of Defence submission to a Senate Inquiry into the National Security Implications of Climate Change in 2017, when broaching the issue of their role in response to natural disasters. While recognising that ADF were increasingly called upon in these instances, Defence reminded committee members that this was not principally what the military was for.[13]

Ultimately, the tendency for relatively ad hoc military deployments in the face of natural disasters, often with lingering uncertainty about who these forces answered to and what their specific role was, would seem to suggest the need for fundamental examination of, and planning for, a role for the military in these instances. Some countries have undertaken such planning, as will be noted, while Australia's approach to the security implications of climate change generally, and in response to natural disasters specifically, has been described as partial and piecemeal.[14]

In other instances, the possibility that the military is deployed as a last ditch or even desperate measure to cope with the scale of destruction, or re-establish law and order, invites concern about the militarisation of the management of a natural disaster. The example noted earlier of deployment of the United States National Guard to New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, for example, was intensely controversial. Perceptions, then,

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[10] Bergin, Anthony and Paul Barnes (2019) 'Bushfire crisis demands a rethink on defence's role in national disasters', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 December. Available at: https://www.smh.com.au/national/bushfire-crisis-demands-a-rethink-on-defence-s-role-in-national-disasters-20191221-p53m41.html.

[11] Burke, Anthony (2020) 'We spent $17B on one fleet, we won't spend $500m on the other', *New Matilda*, 16 January. Available at: https://newmatilda.com/2020/01/16/we-spent-17b-on-one-fleet-we-wont-spend-500m-on-the-other-which-do-you-think-is-more-urgent/; McDonald, Matt (2020) 'Climate change, security and the Australian bushfires', *Lowy Interpreter*, 12 February. Available at: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/climate-change-security-and-australian-bushfires.

[12] Blaxland, John (2020) 'Defending Australia from future catastrophe', *Asia and the Pacific Policy Society Forum*, 20 January. Available at: https://www.policyforum.net/defending-australia-from-future-catastrophe/.

[13] Department of Defence (2017) *Written submission to Senate Inquiry into the National Security Implications of Climate Change*, August. Available at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/Nationalsecurity/Submissions.

[14] Thomas, Michael (2015) 'Climate securitization in the Australian political-military establishment', *Global Change, Peace and Security*, 27(1): 97-118.

become crucial to the question of how the management of a response to natural disaster is assessed.

The Military in Disaster Management: Interests and Perceptions

Views on the utility and appropriateness of armed forces in disaster management differ widely both among various groups of actors involved in disaster relief, but often also within these groups. Military officers, humanitarian aid workers and politicians, generally the most important actors involved in disaster relief, have their personal perceptions about what armed forces can do and should do. In addition, there are institutional interests of militaries, humanitarian organisations and political decision makers beyond helping victims of disasters.[15] As can be seen from the case of Australia presented above as well as from many others, military involvement in disaster assistance is contentious. General principles are generally very abstract and vague. In practice, military disaster relief is primarily driven by the availability of alternatives and political expediency and thus differs from case to case.

1.   Armed Forces

Helping to alleviate the consequences of a disaster is a burden and opportunity for military forces. It is a burden, as it diverts resources to a function which is not generally perceived as being primary. Money available for procurement can only be spent once. If spent on transport planes which may be needed for disaster relief, it cannot be spent on fighter aircraft, and the other way around. Disaster assistance operations also cost money and bind personnel.

On the other hand, disaster assistance provides militaries with opportunities to improve their public profile, and potentially open public coffers for additional funding of military activities. German armed forces, for instance, greatly benefitted from providing large numbers of soldiers during various floods. Similarly, in the judgement of the US military, provision of disaster assistance overseas has improved its image in a number of countries.[16] Beyond this communicative aspect, disaster assistance can also yield very practical benefits. It can build trust, both with other local communities in disaster-affected areas, and with foreign militaries in international disaster assistance. It provides an opportunity for train-ing of personnel. Soldiers involved in the provision of disaster relief generally perceive this as a rewarding activity. Furthermore, operating in disaster areas can provide armed forces with intelligence they might not otherwise have gained, whether in domestic complex emergencies or in foreign countries. This can be particularly useful for militaries fighting insurgencies.

These opportunities also carry risks, however. One is that ineffective disaster assistance may reflect badly on the capabilities of armed forces. Instead of improving the image of the armed forces, badly organised disaster assistance may lead to questions about the military's

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[15] Canyon, D. V., B. J. Ryan and F. M. Burkle Jr. 2020. Rationale for military involvement in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. *Prehospital Disaster Medicine* 35(1):92-97.

[16] Beal, H. 2015. Military Foreign Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (FHA/FDR) Evolution: Lessons Learned for Civilian Emergency Management Response and Recovery Operations. *International journal of mass emergencies and disasters* 33: 274-309.

capabilities in general. This was the case in Myanmar after Typhoon Nargis, which hit the country in 2008. The military's poor performance in disaster relief undermined the legitimacy of the military government, which finally yielded power three years later. In some senses, the military in Myanmar appeared to have learned from its errors in its response to the 2015 floods.

Case Study 2: The Military Role in the 2015 Myanmar Floods

Myanmar has been hit by cyclones and flooding on numerous occasions. The most significant disaster occurred in May 2008, when tropical cyclone Nargis brought devastation to the country and more than 138,000 people were killed.

In July 2015 another cyclone, Komen, added to unusually high monsoon rains, leading to severe flooding. It affected up to one million people, predominantly in the west of the country.

Different from 2008, the death toll from Komen remained low, with 103 reported deaths. Disaster relief efforts, including by the Myanmar military, the Tatmadaw, were widely praised as effective in limiting disaster devastation and death.

Disaster management in Myanmar had begun to shift from military control to civilian oversight after the end of direct military rule of the country in 2011. Officially, a committee of ministers, led by the vice president, was in charge of planning and organising disaster management at the time of the 2015 floods. However, in practice, the military remained in the driving seat. It had a large personnel presence throughout the country and owned most of the relevant assets. Furthermore, between 2011 and 2016 the military's political role remained very strong, with the former prime minister and general Thein Sein continuing, after retirement, as civilian head of government.

Disaster relief was organised both locally and centrally. Different military organisations dominated in both arenas. Local military commands were generally the first to respond, through rescue missions and immediate assistance to disaster victims. Local units were also central for information gathering, coordination of various governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organisations and public communication. Central commands of the army, navy and air force organised the dislocation of assets such as helicopters and the supply of goods to affected areas. They also were running much of the information and communication with international humanitarian organisations who offered and were invited to support disaster relief.[17]

The military proved much more effective in delivering assistance than in the Nargis disaster of 2008, which had been substantially more devastating. Lessons from that

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[17] Zawa, T. N., Lima, S. 2017. The military's role in disaster management and response during the 2015 Myanmar floods: A social network approach. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 25 (1): 1-21.

failure had been learned, particularly with respect to greater flexibility of local units as well as cooperation with domestic civilian and international organisations.

The effectiveness of disaster assistance differed between regions, however.[18] Problems particularly emerged in two of the worst-hit regions, Chin State and Rakhine State. Minorities are populous in both states. A Chin rebel organisation had fought the government in the 1990s and 2000s but largely ceased activity after 2007. In Rakhine State, violent clashes between Muslim Rohingyas and Buddhists escalated in 2012. This led to mass flight of Rohingyas into secure areas. In the summer of 2015, more than a hundred thousand Rohingyas continued to live in makeshift camps.

Unlike the rest of the country, humanitarian assistance to disaster victims in Rakhine State was primarily supplied by civilian organisations. These had to operate under military control. The impression of the Tatmadaw's reluctance to provide assistance to the same degree as in predominantly Buddhist regions is confirmed by media reports, for instance of militaries turning Rohingyas away from temporary shelters. Similar reports also concern, albeit to a lesser extent, Chin State.

Among Rohingyas, management of the 2015 floods contributed to feelings of adversity towards the military. For the majority of Myanmar citizens, however, the military's actions were seen as proving their willingness to deal with the country's need. While the political importance of the military has decreased further, including for disaster management, the public image of the Tatmadaw among the majority of the population has improved, with the 2015 disaster management as one element.

The military, earlier involved in violent oppression of the democratic opposition, has largely evaded negative consequences of its past action. At the same time, the military's management of the 2015 floods further enlarged the rift between the Buddhist majority and Muslim Rohingya minority, which escalated into major violence in 2017.

Another risk for the military in responding to natural disasters is that political leaders may come to view disaster relief (rather than traditional military campaigns) as the military's core function. While some in the military may support such a transformation, many are likely to be opposed to becoming humanitarians rather than soldiers.

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[18] Desportes, I. 2019. Getting relief to marginalised minorities: the response to cyclone Komen in 2015 in Myanmar. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*_4 (7). Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s41018-019-0053-z.

2.   Civilian Humanitarians

From an organisational point of view, disaster relief by armed forces is unfair competition for civilian humanitarian organisations. They compete for allocations from government budgets, unless fully funded from private donations. But even if they are not directly depending on fungible budgets, there is competition over public perception of the importance of civilian versus military disaster relief. Another criticism voiced by humanitarian organisations is that armed forces tend to treat victims differently from what they deem proper. Trained in combat situations, soldiers may lack the respect for victims' needs and rights, contrary to the priorities of professional humanitarians.[19]

Humanitarians, however, realise that the military or military-style organisations such as the National Guard in the United States, are, currently and for the foreseeable future, an indispensable element of assistance in major disasters. The capacities of civilian organisations are too limited to meet needs in major disasters even in wealthy countries. Humanitarian organisations have a hard time justifying the procurement of major pieces of dual-use equipment such as transport aircraft and helicopters, which they will likely use only in disasters, while armed forces can claim to need them primarily for military purposes and only rarely for disaster relief. Furthermore, no civilian organisations command similar numbers of personnel to help in disaster relief.

As a result, the question for humanitarian organisations is not whether but when and how to cooperate with armed forces. Answers depend, to some degree, on the type of humanitarian organisation. Humanitarian organisations which are part of governmental structures, or highly dependent on government funding, generally are expected and willing to closely work with armed forces.

Independent civilian humanitarians, however, often have major difficulties with cooperation. While accepting that the military may come in as a last resort, they are often rightly afraid of being dominated by militaries. Armed forces are in principle exercising what can be called a "command post-style" approach to management of disaster relief. Militaries have a hard time shifting from a hierarchical approach to management which they are used to and which is engrained in procedure and training,[20] whether this is appropriate for disaster situations or not. Humanitarian organisations, on the other hand, generally prioritise flexibility in management with concern for victims as priority. Furthermore, typically a great number of diverse humanitarian organisations operate in concrete disaster situations. Often these have a hard time organising themselves as effectively as the military. This can lead to disdain towards civilian counterparts by militaries and a tendency to effectively take over control over joint relief operations.

Of course, by most accounts of governance in international society, militaries should be subordinate to civilian authorities. In the "Oslo Guidelines on The Use of Foreign Military and

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[19] See e.g. Hofmann C.-A. and L. Hudson. 2009. *Military responses to natural disasters: last resort or inevitable trend?* Humanitarian Practice Network, London, http://odihpn.org/magazine/military-responses-to-natural-disasters-last-resort-or-inevitabletrend/.

[20] Burke, R. P. 2018. Command and Control: Challenging Fallacies of the 'Military Model' in Research and Practice. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 36 (2): 149-178.

Civil Defence Assets In Disaster Relief" issued by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) a large number of humanitarian organisations and governments have endorsed the statement that: "Foreign military and civil defence assets should be requested only where there is no comparable civilian alternative and only the use of military or civil defence assets can meet a critical humanitarian need."[21] And in the Sphere Handbook, internationally regarded as the authoritative source for best practice in humanitarian action. it is stated:

> The military has particular expertise and resources, including those associated with security, logistics, transport and communication. However, any association with the military must be in the service of and *led by humanitarian agencies* and according to endorsed guidelines.[22](Emphasis added)

Joint operations of humanitarian organisations and militaries are particularly problematic in complex emergencies where disasters and civil wars coincide. Humanitarian organisations operate based on the principle of neutrality, which can hardly be expected from militaries which are involved in civil wars. They are one of the conflict parties. Some humanitarian organisations therefore reject all cooperation with militaries in such situations. Many humanitarian organisations have to realise, however, that sometimes they need to choose between cooperating with the military and not delivering assistance, for instance when the delivery of humanitarian assistance is only possible under military protection.

3.   Political Decision-Makers

For political decision-makers, the extended use of armed forces in disaster relief is a temptation, on various grounds. For one, it allows governments to reduce funding for disaster relief to a level substantially below what would be necessary to deal with large-scale disasters. If need arises, the armed forces will be called in to fill the gap. The military owns relevant assets, while personnel can be given orders what to do and is readily available. Sending armed forces to deliver assistance also can help justify levels of military expenditures for which there might otherwise by limited public support. Finally, dislocating armed forces to alleviate disasters in foreign countries can be a useful tool for improving relationships with their governments. This kind of reasoning breeds a tendency towards the 'militarisation' of disaster relief by ways of a strong reliance on military assets and a commanding role of armed forces in the planning and management of disaster relief. However, there are also important counterarguments to be considered by political decision-makers. Their weight differs from country to country.

Unless the military itself runs the government, control over the military by civilian authorities will be a major concern for those in power. An overly substantial role for militaries in

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[21] Available at: https://www.unocha.org/sites/uncha/files/OSLO%20Guidelines%20Rev%201.1%20-%20Nov%2007_0.pdf.
[22] The Handbook is published by the Sphere Project, supported by a large number of local, national and international NGOs, national authorities, the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and UN organisations with the primary objective to set international minimum standards in humanitarian response. Available at: https://spherestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/Sphere-Handbook-2018-EN.pdf.

a task that can also be performed by civilians runs counter to the concept of civilian dominance in society and politics. The broader public may find fault with politicians who rely on an all-purpose military rather than properly funding organisations professionally focusing on disaster relief. Politicians may also have similar concerns as militaries themselves about losing sight of—and resources for—national security tasks.

In the end, decisions on the size of dedicated organisational and operational capacities for disaster relief compared to likely disaster-related needs, and thus indirectly the likelihood of having to rely on armed forces as last resort, depend on a number of financial and political factors, including the public perceptions of the performance of civilian and military organisations in past disasters.

Comparative International Military Responses to Natural Disasters

The differing and diverse interests and perceptions of armed forces, humanitarian organisations, policy makers and others help understand why the military's role in disaster relief various from country to country. [23] Two telling extremes with respect to the role of the military in disaster assistance delivery are Israel and the United States.

In Israel, disaster assistance is under the military, or rather the Ministry of Defence. It runs the show, even if formally an interagency committee of government ministers is in charge. However, much of the planning and coordination is done by the military, which also commands important resources. In the United States, the role of the military for domestic uses is strictly limited by the 'Posse Comitatus Act' of 1878. This punishes those who, "except in cases and under circumstances expressly authorised by the Constitution or Act of Congress, willfully use [ ] any part of the Army or the Air Force as a posse comitatus or otherwise to execute the laws..."[24] The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act of 1988 clarifies that the military may only be authorised by the US President after request from a State government to do emergency work defined as "clearance and removal of debris and wreckage and temporary restoration of essential public facilities and services".[25] However, while the US military is strongly restricted with respect to domestic disaster assistance, it is very active in disaster relief in many other countries, seeing this as an important instrument to improve its image and to build strong relationships with foreign militaries. [26]

Many national systems for domestic disaster assistance exist between these two extremes. Particularly where disasters are perceived as only one type of emergency, with large-scale terrorist attacks or wars as other forms, the military tends to have an important role. Israel falls into this category, as did many European states during the Cold War. They saw civil

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[23] For information on emergency management structures in more than 30 countries see McEntire, D. A., ed. 2014. *Comparative Emergency Management: Understanding Disaster Policies, Organizations, and Initiatives from Around the World.* Emergency Management Institute, Emmitsburg, M. D. Available at https://training.fema.gov/hiedu/aemrc/booksdownload/compemmgmtbookproject/

[24] Section 1385 of Title 18, United States Code, available at https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/1385.

[25] 42 United States Code 5170b, available at https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/42/5170b.

[26] Homepage available at https://www.cfe-dmha.org/.

defence, shielding the general population from harm during warfare, and disaster assistance as overlapping in many ways, and thus best organised with major military input. Where the fear of militarisation is strong, for instance because the military has a record of taking over power, and the political weight of civil society organisations willing to support humanitarian assistance is strong, the role of armed forces in the provision of domestic disaster assistance tends to be of lesser importance. Correspondingly, and as noted, for democratic states the provision of disaster assistance outside their own country generally is more acceptable than for domestic disaster relief.

External disaster assistance is not only provided by richer countries with larger armed forces, even though they often are more capable of bringing in particularly high-value assets such as helicopters and large transport aircraft. For instance, to alleviate the destruction caused by tropical cyclone Idai and following flooding in Mozambique in March and April 2019, militaries from 15 countries delivered assistance, among them six African and six European countries as well as Brazil, India and the United States. Of a total of 113 aircraft, helicopters, large ships and other assets involved in relief efforts, 66 were owned by militaries, including eight by the Mozambiquan armed forces, according to UN OCHA. [27]

The deployment of military assets in foreign disasters often presents a double challenge. In addition to the need to cooperate with civilian agencies, foreign militaries also have to coordinate with local militaries and sometimes with militaries from other countries. This is facilitated through various international fora. The UN is engaged in trying to develop common understandings and best practices for the use of foreign military assets through activities such as dialogues, conferences, handbooks, training courses, workshops, simulation exercises, and specialist deployments in particular emergencies. UN OCHA, for instance, runs a Civil Military Coordination Service (CMCS) as the designated focal point in the UN system for humanitarian civil-military coordination (UN-CMCoord).[28] Particular fora also exist for particular regions. One is the "Regional Consultative Group (RCG) on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination for Asia and the Pacific". The RCG was formed in 2014 to improve disaster response preparedness in selected countries in the wider region such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines. As one of its activities, RCG has developed guidelines for civil-military coordination.[29] Another, focusing on information sharing in disaster situation. is the Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference (APICC). It brings together heads of military intelligence from some 28 partner nations across the region. The forum has produced the "APICC Multinational Guidelines: Information Support to Military Disaster Relief Operations".[30]

Discussing the role of militaries in disaster relief benefits from a broader perspective of the cooperation between armed forces and civilian entities. In many countries, armed forces have doctrines about "civil-military" (CIMIC) relations and even special CIMIC units, both

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[27] Data available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/tropical-cyclone-idai-international-deployed-assets-11-april-2019.

[28] Homepage available at: https://sites.google.com/dialoguing.org/home/about-cmcs.

[29] Homepage available at https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/asia/civil-military-coordination-working-group.

[30] Available at: https://community.apan.org/hadr/pacom-hadr/m/fha-files/181998.

for a variety of national and international activities.[31] Thinking on, planning for and implementing disaster relief by armed forces is generally influenced by such broader CIMIC doctrines, procedures and institutional arrangements. The civilian humanitarian side has attempted to provide a similarly thought-through and structured counterpart for their side of international humanitarian assistance, through a series of meetings, dialogues and documents, such as the mentioned Oslo guidelines, within the umbrella of the UN concept of CMCoord. [32] A detailed analysis of the commonalities and differences is beyond the scope of this brief. However, it should be emphasised again that general principles are often compromised in concrete emergencies driven by humanitarian needs on one side and the availably of assets and personnel on the other.

Conclusion

Militaries can play—and increasingly do play—a central role in response to natural disasters throughout the world. In some instances, these deployments are at home, in others abroad. What is clear in the context of climate change is that as natural disasters increase in frequency and intensity, we can expect more calls on militaries to deploy their significant resource capacity in the service of managing population movements, providing urgent goods, restoring services and function to communities, and assisting with the restoration of these communities more broadly post-disasters. The example of Australia noted earlier is telling here; its average annual HA/DR missions in response to natural disasters have more than doubled in the twenty years to 2017.

Yet while these calls for military involvement in response to natural disasters might become more frequent, and while the military is frequently the best-endowed institution in terms of personnel and resources to respond to a large-scale emergency, it does not follow that their role is uncontroversial. In simple terms, for many this is simply not what militaries are for. If there is more demand for disaster assistance, it is sometimes argued, more resources and money should be spent on dedicated organisations for disaster relief. For others, there are lingering concerns over the militarisation of responses to natural disasters, frequently borne of concerns about the veneration of militaries and an associated increase in use of military force and/or circumvention of democratic processes. These, and broader concerns about civil-military relations, are particularly prominent in instances where natural disasters hit areas that are already suffering through ethnic or social conflict. In countries without large and effective police forces, or where conflicts are linked to major violence, militaries are often involved, taking sides, or seen as taking sides by parts of the population. Military involvement in humanitarian assistance then risks reinforcing conflict patterns, particularly when military forces are using the situation to further their objectives. Climate change is likely to exacerbate this problem, with its double effect of increasing the likelihood of social conflict as well as the intensity of natural disasters.

These concerns notwithstanding, the scale of damage and harm that has been and can be wrought by natural disasters necessitates consideration of a role for whatever resources

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[31] Rietjens, S. J. H. and M. T. I. B. Bollen, 2008. *Managing civil-military cooperation: A 24/7 joint effort for stability*. Ashgate, Aldershot.
[32] Available at: http://ochaonline.un.org/webpage.asp?Page=665.

within a society (or even beyond) can be brought to bear to manage response and recovery to natural disasters. Climate change in this context poses fundamental questions about what defence resources are ultimately for, and more directly in the case of natural disasters what an appropriate role of the armed forces should look like in disaster relief. And as this policy brief has suggested, increasing calls on defence to engage in such operations will need to carefully manage the appropriate role—and perceptions—of the military, and the relationship to civilian agencies and oversight.

Policy Recommendations

1. Policy-makers should develop clear processes for the deployment of military resources in response to natural disasters, both at home and abroad. Military deployment should be less 'ad hoc' than current national and international practices suggest.

2. Policy-makers should also outline a clear division of labour and chain of command arrangements in response to natural disasters, particularly when looking to deploy military resources at home.

3. Policy-makers should consider expanding civilian capacities to respond to an increase in natural disasters and demands for disaster relief, ideally relying on militaries as an exceptional (rather than normal) contributor to disaster relief.

4. Militaries should develop training and resource capacity to manage the increasing call on them to perform humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions in the context of climate change.

5. Militaries should explicitly acknowledge humanitarian assistance and disaster relief as a legitimate and important role and ensure this understanding is reflected in training and resourcing.

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