

Final research paper

RECOVERING TO CONFLICT?

THE IMPACT OF TSUNAMI RECOVERY EFFORTS
ON CONFLICT IN ACEH AND SRI LANKA

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I. Introduction: peace in Aceh and war in Sri Lanka

Following the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, speculations arose in policy circles as to how this would influence the ongoing conflicts in Sri Lanka and Aceh. Both conflicts had seen decades of violent fighting between separatist rebel groups and government forces with thousands of casualties on all sides. In Aceh, the Free Aceh Movement had been fighting an ethnic-nationalist guerilla war for independence from Indonesia since 1976. Sri Lanka has been involved in a similar conflict since 1983, pitting the Tamil Tigers against the Sinhalese dominated government and army in a guerilla struggle for an independent Tamil state. Both conflicts harbored deep mistrust between government and rebel forces – yet both areas were also devastatingly impacted by the 2004 tsunami, leaving tens and hundreds of thousands dead, and many more displaced.

In its immediate aftermath, optimism soared that the disastrous impact could be a blessing in disguise, an opportunity for conflicting parties to unite and foster reconciliation (Stokke, 2005). Surprisingly, the two conflicts developed quite differently in the months following the tsunami. In Aceh, peace negotiations quickly initiated and, in August 2005, a peace deal was signed between the government and GAM, resulting in the withdrawal of security forces and disarmament and demobilization of rebel fighters (ICG, 2005a). In Sri Lanka, however, initial cooperation between government forces and Tamil Tigers after the tsunami soon gave way to a breakdown of the pre-existing ceasefire, and, at the time of the Aceh peace deal, the Sri Lankan conflict was resuming a level of hostilities not seen in three years (ICG, 2006).

This paper addresses the puzzle of why two seemingly similar conflicts affected by the same disaster evolved in two opposite directions. In doing so, it places itself within the more general literature on the political fallout of disasters. Two main arguments are generally presented in this literature. First, that disasters can foster political change (Birkland, 1998; Prater & Lindell, 2000) by creating a window of opportunity for peace (Kelman, 2003), or, less fortunately so, by aggravating existing political unrest (Drury & Olson, 1998). Second, that the political results from disaster largely reflect pre-disaster trends and contexts (Hoffman & Oliver-Smith, 2002; Lindell & Prater, 2003). In other words, post-disaster outcomes will tend to represent an acceleration or amplification of already existing dynamics.

The findings from the Aceh and Sri Lanka case studies included in this paper are consistent with the general literature. This paper argues that the two conflicts evolved differently post-tsunami due to two constellations of factors, and the paper progresses in accordance herewith:

- In section II, it argues that the *pre-tsunami conditions* in the two countries differed substantially and already favored two opposing outcomes. In Aceh, the presence of a mutually hurting stalemate, a unified government, and the absence of influential spoilers all pointed towards negotiations, which had in fact already tentatively begun. In Sri Lanka, however, a mutual arms race, a divided government, and the presence of important spoilers were all pulling in favor of a return to war.
- In section III, it further argues that the pre-tsunami conditions *moderated the effect* of the international attention and aid following the tsunami. Moreover, it did so in a manner that pushed the two countries even further along their already distinct trajectories towards war or peace. Under the conciliatory conditions already prevailing in Aceh, international attention in the wake of disaster led to improved diplomatic efforts, while aid money became a mutually enticing opportunity that provided further incentive for peace. In Sri Lanka, however, lack of reconciliatory intent and the influence of spoilers ensured that disaster diplomacy efforts were neutral at best, while aid money became a source of contention as government and rebels struggled over control, eventually triggering a return to hostilities.
- Section IV concludes by distilling policy recommendations from the case analyses.

II. Pre-tsunami conditions in Aceh and Sri Lanka

This section focuses on the pre-tsunami conditions in Aceh and Sri Lanka. It argues that the two countries were, even before the tsunami hit, already on separate trajectories towards peace in Aceh and war in Sri Lanka. It does so by asking two questions: 1) did parties have an incentive to pursue peace talks? – and 2) were the necessary conditions for peace talks in place?

1. Did parties have an incentive to pursue peace talks pre-tsunami?

Zartman (2001) proposes the concept of a *mutually hurting stalemate* as a necessary (although insufficient) condition for a negotiated settlement to conflict (see also Zartman & Faure, 2005). He argues that negotiated settlements come about when parties find themselves locked in a conflict from which they cannot escalate to victory and this deadlock is painful to both of them. Under such circumstances, parties begin to contemplate an alternative way out – thus opening a window of opportunity which may lead to negotiations. The theory is exemplified in Holbrooke's (1998) dissection of the successfully negotiated Dayton peace accords following the war in

Bosnia, in which a mutually hurting stalemate was brought about by a combination of NATO bombing of Serb positions and a successful Croatian counteroffensive.

Aceh: a mutually hurting stalemate encouraged negotiation

Employing Zartman's framework, Aceh provided a context in which a mutually hurting stalemate was encountered. War fatigue was present on both sides. Following the 1998 fall of president Suharto's 31-year long dictatorial regime, a period of political reform temporarily cooled the decade-long conflict and led to several rounds of peace negotiations. A ceasefire was brokered in 2000 and a cessation of hostilities agreement in 2002, but they failed to bring about lasting peace (ICG, 2005a). Fighting re-erupted and, in 2003, the military benefited from political instability to declare a state of military emergency in Aceh and initiate a major and heavy-handed counterinsurgency campaign designed to end the conflict once and for all (ICG, 2003). Fighting gradually increased between GAM and the Indonesian armed forces (TNI), leading to an all-time high in the scale of violence in the year leading up to the tsunami (Gaillard et al. 2008).

On the side of GAM, the TNI's counterinsurgency campaign was very costly. GAM suffered serious setbacks with the loss of large numbers of fighters, with a heavy crackdown on its civilian supporters, and with serious interruptions to its supply lines (ICG, 2005a). Although it had managed to build a very strong popular support in Aceh (Schulze, 2004), GAM now found itself pushed into the hills, often short on food, ammunition and medicine, and suffering from morale problems among fighters recruited during the previous, quieter years (ICG, 2005a). Along with a growing sense that the conflict had been abandoned and forgotten by the world community, the severe battlefield losses had prompted a new willingness among GAM leaders to consider alternatives to conflict as a political strategy (ICG, 2005a; Reid, 2006).

On the side of the government, the counterinsurgency strategy had proven successful in driving back GAM, but was draining the state budget and beginning to look unsustainable in the long run (Aspinall, 2005; McGibbon, 2006). Moreover, there was a growing sense that the heavy-handed methods of unwarranted arrests and forced displacement – reminiscent of the repressive methods of the Suharto regime – were in fact generating a consistent base of support and recruits for GAM and that, given the resilience proven by the rebels in the past, counterinsurgency might possibly be incapable of eradicating the movement altogether (Schulze, 2003; Aspinall, 2005). As the chief commander of the TNI later stated, "So long as the basic problems are not resolved, it

will be like one dies, another takes his place, two die, four take their place” (Media International, 2005, as cited in Aspinall, 2005).

Sri Lanka: escalation and arms build-up made negotiation less likely

While the Aceh context resembled a stalemate ripe for negotiation in Zartman’s (2001) framework, the Sri Lankan conflict was evolving in another direction. Similar to Aceh, the conflict between the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had originated in the 1970s and erupted into full-scale fighting since 1983 with only intermittent lapses. Contrary to Aceh, however, the Sri Lankan conflict had endured an unusually long lull in fighting in the years preceding the tsunami. A February 2002 ceasefire agreement constituted the longest period of peace between the warring parties since the 1980s (ICG, 2006). Since the ceasefire had been signed, however, the conflict was exhibiting signs of increasing tension and escalation on both sides, while attempts at peace talks had come to a complete halt with no progression on substantive issues (ICG, 2006).

As to LTTE, there were consistent speculations it had agreed to the ceasefire mostly to obtain a necessary respite from fighting. War fatigue and a lack of recruits had affected LTTE following major battles against the SLA in 2001, while its main fundraising source – the Tamil diaspora – had been seriously impacted by LTTE’s classification as a terrorist organization following 9/11 (Gunaratna, 2003). LTTE utilized the ceasefire agreement to rearm, recruit (from 6,000 to 16,000 fighters), consolidate its hold over controlled territories, and assassinate Tamil rivals (Ganguly 2004; ICG, 2006). The LTTE’s impressive military victories over the SLA in 2000 and 2001 (Economist, 2001a; 2001b) suggest that LTTE held confidence in its ability to constitute a credible threat on the battlefield. Further emboldening the rebels, LTTE held de facto control of the entire northeast of the country, running a practically independent state (ICG, 2006). Such self-confidence may explain its legendary leader, Prabhakaran’s, non-conciliatory speech in late 2004, in which he indicated readiness of a return to war (Gourevitch, 2005; ICG, 2006).

On the part of the government and the SLA, evidence suggests that they entered the ceasefire in part on the initiative of a pro-negotiation minded government that came to power in late 2001 (Gourevitch, 2005), and in part also for a temporary respite, following a faltering economy in 2001 and the need to increase security to rejuvenate trade and tourism (Ganguly 2004; ICG, 2006). Following its embarrassing military defeats to LTTE, the SLA used the respite to rearm and, owing to the post-9/11 focus on combating terrorist organizations, the SLA was able to secure

considerable support in terms of weapons and counterinsurgency training from Israel, India, and the US (Ganguly, 2004). As such, the Sri Lankan military was more confident, better armed, and better equipped as the ceasefire drew to an end.

In sum, the contrast between the pre-tsunami situation in Aceh and Sri Lanka was salient. Heavy fighting, war fatigue, and a growing skepticism towards military solutions dominated in Aceh, suggesting that the time may have been ripe here for negotiations. Sri Lanka, however, was headed in the opposite direction, with two years of relative peace and two well-armed and confident military groups both prepared for war.

2. Were necessary conditions for peace talks in place?

The escalation in Sri Lanka did not preclude a return to negotiations, but it seems likely that the incentive to look for alternative solutions was greater in Aceh and lesser in Sri Lanka. When considering the potential for a negotiated settlement, however, the conciliatory intent of conflicting parties is only one of several necessary preconditions. Another necessary condition, identified by Zartman (2001), is the presence of a *unified and recognized leadership* on each side, which may guarantee compliance with a negotiated agreement. Its importance is exemplified again in the Bosnian context, where Holbrooke (1998) coalesced the Serb and Bosnian Serb leaders into a unified negotiating unit by insisting on dealing solely with Milosevic. A third precondition, owing to Stedman (1997), is the absence of *influential spoilers* – parties who may perceive negotiations to threaten their power, worldview, or interests (also Stedman et al., 2002).

Aceh: unified leadership and limited spoilers facilitated negotiation

On the part of the Indonesian government, conditions had shifted already prior to the tsunami in favor of a unified, conciliatory approach. Elections in September 2004 had brought forth a president and vice-president who were both strongly committed to negotiation as a means of resolving the conflict (Aspinall, 2005). Their commitment to talks probably reflected growing skepticism of the military approach, coupled with an increased perception that GAM was representing the demands of the Aceh public. In 1999, between a half and one million people had gathered in protest for independence (Sulistiyanto, 2001). In late 2004, prior to the tsunami and acting on behalf of a unified presidential leadership, vice-president Kalla initiated underhand negotiations with the overall field commander of GAM. These initial negotiations led to a signed

statement of “nine points of agreement”, outlining what was later to become the basis for the final peace agreement (ICG, 2005a).

In GAM, leadership was initially more divided on peace talks. While military leadership rested with field commanders in Aceh, GAM’s political leaders had been in exile in Sweden since 1979 (Schulze, 2003). The Swedish leadership at first dismissed the nine points of agreement, and further attempts by Kalla to approach field commanders resulted in a display of strong loyalty towards the Swedish exiles as the sole negotiating representative of GAM (ICG 2005a). Consequently, Kalla shifted focus, and managed to set up meeting with the GAM’s political leadership in December 2004 (Aspinall, 2005) – thus setting the scene for negotiations already prior to the tsunami. Importantly, the government’s peace approaches to GAM included provisions to grant land to GAM leaders and fighters, whereby it sought to encourage buy-in of an agreement and avoid spoilers among potential, dissident rebels (ICG, 2005a). Equally important, the hardline founder of GAM, di Tiro, had recently abandoned leadership of the group due to poor health – commentators speculate that he might not have been similarly reconciliatory had he still been in control (Aspinall, 2005).

While leadership on both sides seemed unified with an absence of apparent spoiler factions, one possible impediment to the progress of peace talks remained the Indonesian military (TNI) and certain elements of the Indonesian political elite. The military still supported a hardline approach to GAM which, in part, may have had to do with its own vested interests in Aceh. TNI’s advances had largely disrupted GAM’s affiliation with the local economy, but it had simultaneously expanded the military’s own involvement in the war economy (Ross, 2005). According to one account, TNI soldiers were profiting up and down the chain of command through dealings in drugs, arms, logging, and more (McCulloch, 2003). Moreover, the military had obtained a considerable boost from the war in Aceh, which may possibly have led to deliberate attempts to subvert previous attempts at finding a peaceful solution to the conflict (Ross, 2005). This in turn may explain why it was the presidency pushing for peace talks in 2004, and why they were maintained confidential at first.

Sri Lanka: divided leadership and active spoilers hindered negotiations

In contrast to Indonesia, the Sri Lankan parliament was much more divided. Since 2001, the presidency and the prime minister post resided with candidates from the two opposing, dominant parties. Not only did the two have a strained personal relationship, they also held vastly different

views on how to resolve the conflict (Ganguly, 2004). Prime minister Wickremesinghe had signed a ceasefire with LTTE shortly after his inauguration, and then initiated negotiations on limited self-governance in the contested northeast. The negotiations only showed limited progress, however, as LTTE seemed unwilling to engage in any form of compromise (ICG, 2006). Consequently, in 2003, president Kumaratunga, who had not agreed to the ceasefire and feared the Tigers were using it to rearm, employed her presidential power to declare a state of emergency and suspend parliament. She subsequently allied herself with a small, xenophobic and militaristic party, JVP, to regain control of parliament and withdrew the former prime minister's offer to LTTE. Unsurprisingly, this led the Tigers to withdraw from negotiations, distrustful that the government could not restrain its hardliners (Ganguly, 2004). It also led the Tigers to adopt a more belligerent stance from this point on (ICG, 2006).

On the LTTE side, splinters in leadership were also developing. The LTTE traditionally invokes a fierce claim to being the sole representative of the Tamil community and has consistently employed a policy of assassinating dissenting political leaders, which has kept rival movements down (ICG, 2006). During the ceasefire, scores of Tamil opponents were murdered as LTTE used the lull in fighting to consolidate its power, but still the ceasefire was opening up room for internal division. In March 2004, LTTE's eastern commander, Colonel Karuna, formed a breakaway rebel faction, presumably following increasing tensions between the eastern and northern Tamils over economic issues (ICG, 2006). While Karuna was quickly defeated and forced to withdraw by the main LTTE army, the split undermined LTTE's hand at the negotiating table, as it could no longer claim to be sole representative of the Tamils (Ganguly, 2004).

From a spoiler perspective, the JVP was quite effective at disrupting the prime minister's negotiations with LTTE and has proven similarly effective in the past (Gourevitch, 2005). It represents a line of radically nationalist Sinhalese, rooted in a militaristic rebel movement, LTTE's Sinhalese counterpart, which fought the government and LTTE in the 1980s. Now transitioned into politics, the JVP has shown itself to be a small, but aggressively divisive party, which is very effective at raising public opinion against anyone pursuing rapprochement with LTTE (ICG, 2006).

Moreover, one can speculate whether the breakdown of negotiations was in part due to LTTE's leader, Prabhakaram. Some speculated that Karuna's rebellion may have prompted Prabhakaran to favor a return to war as a means of suppressing growing internal division (Gourevitch, 2005). Others believed that Prabhakaran would never agree to peace unless its under

his leadership and on his absolute terms (Ganguly, 2004). A former LTTE rebel, now turned government minister, said “Prabhakaran doesn’t want peace, he wants p-i-e-c-e—a piece of land to rule as a dictator” (Gourevitch, 2005). If Prabhakaram is not committed to peace, because the conflict sustains him in a position of power or allows LTTE to remain united, he might have been, and be, a highly influential spoiler.

3. Conclusion: Pre-tsunami conditions favored peace in Aceh, but war in Sri Lanka

The pre-tsunami conditions indicate that the two countries were, even before the tsunami hit, already on separate trajectories towards peace in Aceh and war in Sri Lanka. In Aceh, war fatigue and a mutually hurting stalemate had set the ground for negotiations, which were in fact already secretly ongoing prior to the tsunami. GAM’s strong support in the community made it appear as a valid negotiating partner, and the unified front which both the government and GAM could present pointed towards the viability of a negotiated settlement – although the willingness and ability of the Indonesian military to act as a spoiler to a peace process was still unknown.

Sri Lanka, on the other hand, had been characterized by a period of relative peace, which had allowed for mutual restocking of government and LTTE armies, both now primed for a possible resumption of hostilities. Attempts at negotiations had come to a standstill due to internal divisions in both the government and LTTE, and owing considerably to the spoiler influence of extremist nationalists like the JVP. Splits in the rebel group and growing evidence of discontent with the Tigers among parts of the Tamil community indicated that LTTE was not, as it claimed, the sole voice of the people. It also raised concern as to Prabhakaran’s sincere interest in a negotiated settlement, and worries that LTTE might now be pursuing war as a solution to consolidate its own control over the Tamil.

III. The impact of the tsunami on the two conflicts

While the previous section explored how the pre-tsunami conditions primed the two countries for peace and war, respectively, this section goes on to analyze how the 2004 tsunami and the international aid and attention it generated impacted the conflicts. It argues that the inflow of relief aid and the unique opportunity for diplomacy efforts that followed in the wake of the disaster influenced the conflicts in a number of ways. Importantly, it finds that the effects on conflict are *moderated* by the pre-tsunami conditions that have been explored in the previous section, implying that the outcome of the tsunami on the two countries was different because the

two countries differed. Overall, it finds that the tsunami strengthened the existing trajectories in each country – thus, in Aceh, the outcome of the tsunami was a consolidation of the peace process, whereas, in Sri Lanka, conflicting parties were driven further towards war.

1. Did the disaster increase diplomatic peace efforts?

When disaster hits a conflict-torn country, hopes are often raised that the cooperation and trust engendered by a common desire to address tragedy can foster reconciliation. Kelman (2003; 2006) presents a theory of *disaster diplomacy*, based on evidence from past disasters and the diplomacy engendered, to capture this potential. Empirical analysis indicates that disaster-related activities can *catalyze existing* cooperation – but cannot create it – consistent with realist perspectives that negotiations will not advance unless the necessary pre-conditions are in place. Kelman predicts that disaster-related activities, such as response and recovery, may lead to diplomatic activities by 1) calling international attention to the conflict, 2) creating a neutral environment for aid distribution, 3) creating new networks for conflict resolution, and 4) changing the public discourse. Importantly, he identifies *spoilers* as the major weakness of disaster diplomacy, as parties opposed to peace outcomes seek to ensure its failure.

Aceh: tsunami strengthened existing diplomatic efforts

Consistent with Kelman’s framework, the tsunami created an opportunity for already reconciliatory parties to further engage in peace talks. The tsunami was a blessing in disguise for GAM because of the massive international attention it brought to the conflict. A central part of the organization’s strategy had always been to bring world attention to the plight of the Aceh people (Schulze, 2004; Aspinall, 2005). With the sudden spotlight on Aceh, GAM was granted a unique window of opportunity, but was also painfully aware that international interest could quickly evaporate if negotiations broke down again (McGibbon, 2006). Faced with a seemingly new opportunity for peace building, the international community also put additional pressure on government and GAM to find a negotiated end to the war (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007).

Simultaneously, international pressure was being put to bear on creating a “neutral” environment to facilitate relief efforts. Fighting gradually de-intensified as international donors pushed for a ceasefire, as TNI directed its military efforts further towards relief provision, and as the inflow of journalists and relief workers on the ground meant that TNI had to give up its repressive, counterinsurgency controls of the region (McGibbon, 2006; Gaillard et al, 2008). Some

commentators speculate that international pressure may have been guided by own interests, e.g. the US and EU consolidating governance of a petroleum-rich country (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007). In any case, the international relief indirectly helped to create safe spaces on the ground which facilitated peace efforts.

In similar ways, the disaster was creating new networks on the ground that facilitated ground-level conflict resolution. By forcing the government to open the province, which had previously been sealed off to the outside world, the social and political environment was being transformed (McGibbon, 2006). Within weeks, more than 500 NGO's established missions in Aceh, and the influx of aid workers and organizations, coupled with a strict NGO adherence to providing assistance to all parties, irrespective of affiliation, opened up new opportunities for ground-level diplomacy and confirmed to the people of Aceh that local, national and international stakeholders were working in the same direction towards peace (Gaillard et al., 2008). From a micro-dynamic perspective on violence (e.g. Kalyvas, 2003), the humanitarian space may have been central in ensuring that conflict resolution at a local level could support the national level moves for peace that were occurring between GAM and government leaders.

Finally, the tsunami had impacted the national discourse on Aceh. Compassionate media interpretations of the disaster and stories of commiseration had altered the public discourse, converting Aceh from a region of threat and danger to one of national sorrow and solidarity. A vast majority of Indoneses switched to oppose a military solution to the conflict as Indoneses television was full of tears and prayers for Aceh (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007). The new public discourse found its way into national level politics, leading to a wide parliamentary support for peace talks, with only two members of parliament opposed (Gaillard et al, 2008).

Together, these influences likely strengthened the already initiated peace talks. GAM and government leaders met for first talks in Helsinki in January 2005, mediated by former president Martti Ahtisaari, who demonstrated great competence and commitment (McGibbon, 2006). The potential spoiler influence of the military turned out to be minimal, as military leaders proved to be skeptical but compliant with the government's new approach to GAM (Aspinall, 2005), and peace talks gradually progressed from there.

Sri Lanka: tsunami unable to revive failed diplomatic efforts

Equally consistent with Kelman's framework, the tsunami proved unsuccessful at generating effective diplomacy efforts in Sri Lanka, since there was little existing diplomacy to build on.

Although the conflict received international attention and aid similar to Aceh (TEC, 2006), this did not manage to create similar diplomatic effort. As one explanation, the Sri Lankan conflict did not muster the same level of international excitement at possible resolution. Where Aceh had presented a new opportunity, Sri Lanka was already three years into a peace process which was showing no substantial progress (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007). Moreover, in a post-9/11 environment, in which LTTE had obtained a reputation as one world's most ruthless suicide-bomber organizations, it did not muster the same international sympathy for its cause as GAM (Ganguly, 2004).

Initially, the Sri Lankan conflict witnessed considerable displays of solidarity and good will from leaders on both sides, and there were indications that the discourse was changing in favor of reconciliation (Uyangoda, 2005). In fact, both LTTE and Sri Lankan forces suspended hostilities and displayed sound cooperation on the ground in the first weeks (McGibbon, 2006). Hopes soared that it would forge reconciliation, as heartwarming stories emerged of military personnel risking their lives to save Tamil victims (UTHR, 2005). Soon, however, party politics and traditional nationalist agendas resumed dominance of public discourse (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007). Problems with the distribution of aid, as will be explored below, fermented hardliners on each side on the conflict, and mutual allegations of aid manipulation eventually devolved into a resumption of political violence (McGibbon, 2006).

Importantly, Sri Lanka did not see the establishment of a neutral or humanitarian space similar to the one in Aceh, which could facilitate ground-level conflict resolution. NGO's never made it into the (mainly LTTE-controlled) areas affected by the tsunami, primarily because LTTE insisted on channeling all relief aid through its own development organization, the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization – TRO (UTHR, 2005). This was in part to prevent an influx of international organizations and journalists from threatening LTTE's control (ICG, 2006). Moreover, because LTTE brutally suppresses local civil society and community initiatives it sees as a threat to its control, there were few community organizations on the ground to work with in ground-level conflict resolution (UTHR, 2005).

In sum, the factors that strengthened the budding peace process in Aceh were unable to get diplomacy off the ground in Sri Lanka. The initial responses to the tsunami were conciliatory on both sides, but because the fundamentals for negotiation were not in place, spoilers, party politics, and power struggles soon came to dominate the agenda and crowd out any potential gains from disaster diplomacy.

2. Did the inflow of humanitarian aid connect or divide conflicting parties?

The aid inflow, and the role it came to play in Aceh versus Sri Lanka, is of particular importance in understanding the impact on the peace/war scenarios. Aid – in the form of food, water, health services, and so on – is a resource flowing into the region and, as such, it is likely to influence the conflict. Several authors have studied how resources can become a goal and medium of conflicting parties (e.g. Reno, 1998; Collier & Sambanis, 2005), and how humanitarian aid, specifically, may become a source of contention between fighting parties (e.g. Macrae & Zwi, 1994; Prendergast, 1996; Anderson, 1999). These resource-competition approaches are useful in understanding both the Sri Lanka and Aceh scenarios.

Moreover, Zartman and Faure's (2005) concept of a *mutually enticing opportunity* is illustrative in understanding how aid impacted the conflict in Aceh, specifically. Similar to a mutually hurting stalemate, only with an emphasis on future gains rather than costs, this theory posits that, when faced with a mutually enticing opportunity which requires cooperation or reconciliation, conflicting parties may reconsider negotiation as an alternative to war. Thus, the introduction of a mutually enticing opportunity may bring parties to the negotiating table.

Aceh: aid became a mutually enticing opportunity that further connected parties

In Aceh, the promise of reconstruction that followed in the wake of the tsunami became an added incentive for peace. With the unprecedented media attention that the tsunami gave rise to, and the ensuing promise of massive international aid for reconstruction, the government and GAM found themselves under greater pressure and scrutiny to end the war (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007). Pledges of 9 billion dollars against an estimated 7 billion in needs (BRR and International Partners, 2005) inspired common hopes of “rebuilding a better Aceh” and improving local governance (World Bank, 2005). To conflicting parties, these promises became a mutually enticing opportunity which, consistent with Zartman and Faure (2005) and Anderson (1999), created a common incentive to pursue peace.

From the point of view of the government, it was consciously aware that tsunami relief offered a unique opportunity to rebuild Aceh, and that a peace deal would greatly facilitate the flow of international aid (Aspinall, 2005). From GAM's perspective, its grievances were based in large part on neglect of the people of Aceh, and GAM leaders recognized that the recovery operation provided a similarly unique opportunity to secure international aid and reform the basic structures that had sparked local discontent in the first place (McGibbon, 2006).

Pre-empting the possibility that aid distribution could become a source of contention, the government agreed to set up an *independent* Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007). This agency was not only able to secure foreign assistance more easily, it also insulated the government from criticisms of misallocation and misappropriation that could otherwise have become a divider between the conflicting parties (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007) – as happened in Sri Lanka.

Interestingly, reconstruction efforts also allowed some ability to tame the spoiler potential that arose out of elites' and military officers' often illicit involvement in the local economy (McCulloch, 2003). By devastating large parts of the local economy, the tsunami had to some extent broken down existing economic ties, thus reducing (but not ending) TNI's lucrative activities (Schulze, 2004; Reid, 2006). Conversely, by linking relief efforts with the peace process, the reconstruction process helped "induce" spoilers to comply with peace efforts. Local and some national elites were offered major business and political opportunities, which relied in part on peace being sustained (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007, p. 421).

In the end, for a combination of the reasons outlined above, GAM and the government were able to negotiate an agreement. Probably realizing that this was its best opportunity to strike a deal, GAM historically ceded its otherwise fierce claim to independence and accepted the more limited regional autonomy (McGibbon, 2006). The government countered by allowing GAM to run as a political party, something it had otherwise feared would lead to political demands for secession (Enia, 2006). The combination of these concessions allowed for the "resolution of incompatibilities" essential to ending a conflict (Wallensteen, 2002). A peace agreement was signed on August 15, 2005, and by mid-September, GAM rebels had begun turning in their arms (Enia, 2006), thus marking the end to the Aceh conflict.

Sri Lanka: aid became a source of contention that further divided parties

In Sri Lanka, reconstruction funds played a somewhat different role. The tsunami-affected areas were predominantly Tamil areas under LTTE control but also Sinhalese areas in the south. Donor pledges similar to those in Aceh were made, and as aid began to flow into the country, the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) set up a centralized relief system, charged with distributing to LTTE-controlled areas, and opposed anyone bypassing it (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007). This quickly led to allegations from LTTE leaders that the government was discriminating against the Tamils in the distribution of aid (Uyangoda, 2005), and LTTE insisted that international relief aid

earmarked for Tamil areas should be delivered through the LTTE controlled Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation – TRO (Enia, 2006).

Disputes over the distribution of aid quickly became a central point of contention. LTTE insisted on managing the distribution to Tiger-controlled areas, in part to prevent erosion of its control, but also because it was striving to build and prove its capacity to govern those areas and achieve political recognition as a valid government alternative (Enia, 2006; Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007). To be fair, the TRO's relief efforts stood in sharp contrast to the government's slow and poorly coordinated response and probably emboldened LTTE's demands for control (McGibbon, 2006).

GoSL, on the other hand, was very hesitant to allow funding to be channeled through TRO. It was concerned that resources would be siphoned off to support LTTE in rearming and restocking itself, as evidence indicates had happened in the past (UTHR, 2005; ICG, 2006). Moreover, GoSL did not want to give legitimacy to LTTE as a governing entity and simultaneously found it hard to justify to donors, since the Tamil Tigers were listed as a terrorist organization (Enia, 2006). Sinhalese nationalists, such as the JVP party, were particularly resistant to any moves that would indicate recognition of the LTTE (McGibbon, 2006).

As a compromise, president Kumaratunga worked to established a joint mechanism for channeling funds to the northeast. Donors promoted the establishment of a joint mechanism, recognizing that LTTE held de facto power over the northeast, to the frustration of Sinhalese nationalists (McGibbon, 2006). Six months after the tsunami, a joint mechanism known as P-TOMS (Post-tsunami operational management structure) was signed between GoSL and LTTE and set to distribute 2.5 billion dollars, (McGibbon, 2006).

Again, however, as with the negotiations prior to the tsunami, the agreement was blocked. Sinhalese nationalists feared P-TOMS would introduce interim administration and de facto self-governance structures through the backdoor (ICG, 2006). “Throughout the spring, whenever President Kumaratunga declared herself ready to negotiate such an accord, the JVP denounced her as a traitor; and when at last she succumbed to international pressure and agreed, in June, to an aid partnership with the Tigers, the JVP quit the ruling coalition and persuaded the Supreme Court to suspend the pact” (Gourevitch, 2005). As a result, the government fell, and P-TOMS never made it off the ground (Uyangoda, 2005).

From here on, the situation deteriorated rapidly. The collapse of the agreement, combined with long-held frustrations over the ceasefire, remove incentives for restraint and pushed Tigers

and government into new hostilities (McGibbon, 2006). In August 2005, the Sri Lankan foreign minister was assassinated, and tensions and killings gradually increased (Enia, 2006). In November, LTTE boycotted the elections following the collapse of government, which resulted in the election of a hardline president, who took a tougher stance on the Tigers (ICG, 2006). Violence gradually grew from here into a return to all-out war in April 2006.

3. Conclusion: Tsunami became a connector in Aceh, but a divider in Sri Lanka

The tsunami, and the international assistance and attention that followed in its wake, impacted the two conflicts quite differently. In Aceh, it became a connecting force. Increasing international pressure for ceasefire and disarmament opened up a neutral space on the ground and allowed an inflow of NGO's to the region. This facilitated ground-level conflict resolution in support of the ongoing national-level diplomacy efforts, which were further strengthened by a change in national discourse towards solidarity. The simultaneous promise of reconstruction and recovery presented a mutually enticing opportunity that strengthened the conflicting parties' incentive to pursue peace, while also laying a damper on possible spoilers.

In Sri Lanka, however, the tsunami and its aftermath became a dividing force. Disaster diplomacy proved largely ineffective, as there was no diplomacy to build on. Lack of agreement over how to distribute aid became a major divider, which prevented the evolution of a neutral or humanitarian space to facilitate ground-level conflict resolution, and also undermined the initial positive change in public discourse. Moreover, aid became a source of further strife, as government and rebels struggled over control of relief funds, eventually leading to a return to hostilities as spoilers prevented a joint mechanism for aid distribution.

Interestingly, the pre-tsunami conditions outlined in the previous section appear to have had a moderating effect on international attention and assistance. Specifically, whether the conflict was "ripe" for negotiation, and whether influential spoilers were present (the JVP in Sri Lanka), appear to have been central in determining whether disaster relief connected or divided parties, and whether disaster diplomacy was effective or neutral.

IV. Conclusion and policy recommendations

The two case studies included in this paper suggest that the pre-existing conditions of a conflict may be primary in understanding the direction in which the conflict will evolve subsequent to a disaster. It also suggests, however, that disasters may in fact have a real impact on

the evolution of the conflict and, furthermore, that the pre-existing conditions of the conflict may *moderate* whether conflict is bettered or worsened by the disaster. Specifically, this paper found that the 2004-tsunami strengthened the pre-existing trajectories of the conflicts in Aceh and Sri Lanka, propelling the former further towards peace and the latter further towards war.

In policy terms, we may ask what this means for our response to disasters in conflict areas. This paper offers tentative policy recommendations distilled from the above findings.

□ First, analyzing the context is vital when responding to disasters in conflict areas. If the fundamentals for negotiation – including a mutually hurting stalemate, a unified and conciliatory leadership, and limited spoiler presence – are not in place, the impact of disaster may be a worsening of the conflict. Conversely, when the fundamentals are in place, the aid and attention that follow in the wake of disaster may strengthen reconciliation efforts.

□ Second, diplomacy efforts in the wake of disaster are best guided towards conflicts that already show promise of reconciliation. In such areas, measures that can facilitate diplomacy and conflict resolution at different levels of the conflict may be supportive of peace. Creating neutral spaces on the ground, facilitating ground-level conflict resolution, advancing new discourses of compassion, increasing international attention to the conflict, and providing skilled mediators may all be helpful in facilitating successful negotiations.

□ Third, relief efforts, in particular, must be wary of the effect they may have on conflict. Where parties are not conciliatory, humanitarian aid may become part of a struggle for legitimacy and control and, inadvertently, further exacerbate tension and conflict. Conversely, where parties are already showing steps of reconciliation, aid may be used as an added incentive – the promise of a “peace dividend” – that may encourage parties towards peace. Additionally, aid may be targeted to restrain potential spoilers from disrupting a peace process. In either case, ensuring independent or joint mechanisms of distribution is also vital to avoid causing further division.

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