



INTER-REGIONAL COMPARISONS OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Event Report

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NTS Centre
HADR Programme

Event Report

INTER-REGIONAL COMPARISONS OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Report of the conference organised by

The Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Programme
Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre),
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS),
Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore

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Photo credits

Ms Janet Fung/RSIS (centre pages).

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Overview Session: Disasters in the Asia-Pacific	5
Northeast Asia Panel	8
Southeast Asia Panel	10
South Asia Panel	14
Order of Events	16
List of Participants*	18
Relaunching NTS-Asia	21
About NTS-Asia	21
About the HADR Programme	22
About the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre)	23
About the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS)	23
About the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies	23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Asia-Pacific was again the world's most disaster prone region in 2015 with a total of 160 disasters reported, accounting for 47% of the world's 344 disasters.¹ Disasters in 2015 continued to shape life across the region with the Nepal earthquake and extreme weather events in Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Vanuatu, and Micronesia affecting the lives of many people. Beyond natural hazards, the Asia-Pacific is also home to low-intensity and intractable conflicts. These conflicts often result in loss of life, persecution, and in some cases, mass forced migration. In 2015, the Asia-Pacific saw mass migration of Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants by sea out of the Bay of Bengal from Myanmar and Bangladesh. These migrants attempted to reach Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia only to face 'forced pushbacks,' which created a humanitarian crisis in the region. It is essential that in order to adequately provide for the needs of disaster-affected populations humanitarian principles are upheld.

In this region the consequences of natural hazards and conflict crises put pressure on local communities, governments, as well as regional and international organisations. As a result of the different actors involved, their diverse mandates and political will, there are significant challenges to humanitarian response and disaster management. It is therefore important to foster greater cooperation between the actors involved to build stronger disaster management capabilities as well as deliver aid effectively and efficiently to those most in need. Trust building takes time and requires cooperation amongst stakeholders prior to a crisis situation. In an effort to begin such collaboration amongst actors, the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Programme at the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) Nanyang Technological University (NTU), hosted and facilitated the conference on Inter-regional Comparisons of Humanitarian Action on February 22nd 2016 alongside the re-launch of the Consortium of Non-Traditional Security Studies in Asia (NTS-Asia Consortium) at the Grand Park City Hall Hotel, Singapore. This event brought together

key stakeholders including academics, practitioners, and military personnel from across Asia involved in humanitarian affairs. The conference covered Northeast Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the wider Asia-Pacific.

In Northeast Asia, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea are emerging international humanitarian actors. However, domestically humanitarian action is not new or non-traditional for their militaries, which are the first-responders during disasters. Humanitarian action is often seen as a means to maintain national security and generate popular legitimacy. Internationally, humanitarian action is dependent on domestic security conditions particularly for the Republic of Korea. In the Republic of Korea, humanitarian action is contingent upon the stability of the Korean Peninsula – a core national security concern. When peninsula relations are particularly unstable between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, there is little appetite for humanitarian action elsewhere. That said the amount of money allocated to humanitarian affairs in the Republic of Korea and Northeast Asia overall are increasing.

Over the past year in Southeast Asia, the region has experienced humanitarian disasters as a result of both conflict and natural hazards. In Myanmar the flight of Rohingya out of Rakhine State into neighbouring countries caused a humanitarian crisis that highlighted the precarious nature of the conflict there and its impact on the region. In Aceh, customary law ensured the Rohingya were openly welcomed to the province, which was at odds with the position of the central government in Jakarta. In Malaysia, most assistance to the Rohingya was through informal means via non-governmental organizations, corporations and individuals. In a similar light, adequate humanitarian responses to natural hazards depended on a whole-of-society approach. However, challenges remained across the region like inadequate access to villages, communication barriers, and low levels of disaster prevention and preparedness amongst the affected population. Likewise in South Asia, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal were susceptible to numerous

1 UNESCAP (2016) *Disasters in the Asia Pacific: 2015 Year in Review*. Available at: http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/2015_Year%20in%20Review_final_PDF_0.pdf. Accessed on: March 11, 2016.

natural hazards, such as flooding, tsunamis, earthquake, typhoons, and landslides. In both Bangladesh and Nepal, there remains a need to also invest in disaster preparedness and prevention mechanisms to increase capacity and minimize relief costs.



Associate Professor Mely Caballero-Anthony welcomes guests to the Conference. Credit: Janet Fung/RSIS

Throughout the conference it became clear that there are two emerging trends in humanitarian action across the Asia–Pacific. The first is the increasing activity of selected Asia-Pacific states engaged in international humanitarian action across the region. The second is the divergence between local conditions and national action. This divergence was identified as customary approaches to humanitarian action diverging from national policy to become an important promoter of international humanitarianism on the one hand, to the severe local capacity issues facing national disaster management to implement strategy on the other hand. The conference highlighted the importance of greater dialogue to share experiences, as well as forms of cooperation, coexistence and collaboration amongst actors across and between these different levels of governance in humanitarian affairs. It became clear that no single stakeholder can address the multitude of needs that emerge in humanitarian crises. It is therefore vital that stakeholders work together where possible in the preparation for and implementation of humanitarian action both as a result of conflicts and natural hazards.

OVERVIEW SESSION: DISASTERS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

The overview session set out the current humanitarian landscape in the region. It highlighted climate-related hazards and conflict hotspots. Country case studies from Cambodia and Brunei were presented. These studies identified the challenges these countries face in dealing with disasters in their respective nations.

Global humanitarian action has been confronting complex challenges brought on by disasters, climate-related events and conflicts. Humanitarian action can no longer be ad hoc. Proper preparation and collaboration amongst stakeholders, especially with national governments is central to meeting the needs of vulnerable communities.

Inasmuch as governments and stakeholders respond to crises situations, they must be guided by the four principles of humanitarianism: neutrality, impartiality, independence, and operational neutrality to engage accordingly with those affected. Upholding humanitarian principles will reduce discrepancies in response and ensure that those affected receive the attention they need.

By comparing national capabilities in humanitarian action, best practices and challenges of nations in the Asia-Pacific can be identified. It is imperative that nations in this region and especially within ASEAN share their experiences. Learning from others



Prof. Kim Sung-han moderated the panel. Photo credit: Janet Fung/RSIS

about different ways in which humanitarian action is delivered and challenges are overcome arguably allows for increased humanitarian effectiveness and efficiency in future efforts.

Climate related disasters in the Asia-Pacific

Last year was the hottest year on record since modern temperature record keeping began in 1880.² These new temperature highs induced weather dynamics that resulted into droughts in places across the Asia-Pacific like Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia and the Philippines. To date, climate-induced hazards such as typhoons, cyclones, and storm surge are the most likely causes of disasters in this region.

With this in mind, extreme weather events are likely to affect the Asia-Pacific in the future. Scientists predict that with the warming of the oceans in addition to climate change, more tropical storms are likely to occur. This will result in more destructive events and super typhoons similar in scale and gravity to that of Typhoon Haiyan that hit the Philippines in November 2013.

Nations in the Asia-Pacific region have an undoubtedly daunting future ahead, and by being party to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, countries have committed to reducing the number of affected people by disasters and the number of disaster losses. Committing to the goals outlined in the Sendai Framework will be a challenge for the region as the Asia-Pacific accounted for 50% of the 700,000 deaths associated with natural disasters during 2004-2015. To this end, while natural disasters are those that dominate humanitarian responses from stakeholders it is imperative not to over-respond and in turn suffer from humanitarian fatigue. Instead, humanitarian efforts should be comprehensive so that stakeholders can both respond to both natural disasters and conflict as well.

² Norton, Karen (2016). *NASA, NOAA Analyses Reveal Record-Shattering Global Warm Temperatures in 2015*. Available at: <http://www.nasa.gov/press-release/nasa-noaa-analyses-reveal-record-shattering-global-warm-temperatures-in-2015>. Accessed on: March 16, 2016.



Dr. Jonatan Lassa discussing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Credit: Janet Fung/RSIS

Conflicts and humanitarian principles

In light of preparing for future crises situations, it must be noted that the Asia-Pacific region is also home to low-intensity violent conflicts. In 2015, the most notable ones were in Rakhine State, Myanmar and Mindanao in the Philippines resulting in internal displacement. In situations such as these, where traditional, cultural and political sensitivities beleaguer conflict resolution, it is imperative that humanitarian efforts are sustained and delivered to those who need it the most. In order to ensure this, humanitarian actors need to be guided by the four humanitarian principles.

The first principle of a commitment to humanity denotes that all human suffering wherever in the world it may be, must be addressed. Given this, humanitarian aid workers must be concerned with the protection of life and health of the suffering, while ensuring respect is given to all. The second principle is impartiality. Humanitarian actors need to be impartial when providing assistance. This means that assistance must be given to those who need it, regardless of race, religion, social class, political opinion, or gender. There should be no discrimination when providing humanitarian assistance and everyone's needs should be prioritized as equally as possible. The third humanitarian principle is that of neutrality, which asserts that humanitarian assistance must not engage in political situations nor take sides during hostilities. As such, humanitarian actors must treat all those who are in need despite political affinity. What is more, humanitarian actors should not get themselves involved in controversy and refrain

from engaging in the conflict. Humanitarian actors must respect the views of those who they provide care and aid for. Fourth, humanitarian assistance must be operationally independent. Simply put, humanitarian assistance must only be concerned in delivering humanitarian assistance and be free from any political, economic or military agenda.

In addition to providing humanitarian assistance that is guided by humanitarian principles, actors must also operate under the principle of "do no harm". In other words, humanitarian assistance, while helping communities, must negate negative consequences espoused from giving such aid. More often than not, humanitarian assistance is a short-term solution to alleviate suffering of affected communities. In doing so, the surge of goods and other types of intervention have the ability to affect local economies and power balances if aid is not contextually sensitive to its surroundings. In effect, if delivery of aid is not well thought out or planned, cessation of aid or inundation of resources could severely damage the structure of any pre-existing local economy. In light of this, prior to delivering humanitarian aid anywhere in the world and throughout the Asia-Pacific, actors must be holistically cognizant of the operational environment in which they function.

Enhancing national capacities for Disaster Risk Reduction

At the crux of successful humanitarian action is the capacity of national governments to respond to the manmade or natural disasters that they face. As such, effectiveness and coordination in response arguably lies in the ability of national governments to absorb local and international humanitarian actors. In recent years most Asia-Pacific nations have created and implemented national disaster management plans and laws. These plans and laws lay out the national disaster management position to clarify how a local government intends to manage a disaster. Publically made disaster plans allow for the international humanitarian network to verse themselves on the protocols prior to a crisis. In doing so, this allows for the development of preparedness mechanisms and arrangements prior to a disaster event.

Establishing a disaster management law is the first step in committing to addressing disasters and it is also a first step towards achieving the goals outlined by the Sendai Framework. While disaster management laws are a symbol of acknowledgement of governments to disasters, the implementation of such laws indicates the level of commitment and

governance capabilities of leaders. In the previous 10 years, a significant number of countries around the Asia-Pacific have put in place disaster management laws and plans, yet implementation of these and mainstreaming disaster management still remains difficult. In part, imperfect implementation of disaster frameworks has been due to the limited human and fiscal surge capacity to manage successful disaster risk reduction. Simply put, governments in the region have not yet allocated enough money and human resources to implement and follow through on the high-level laws they have established. This has been the case in Cambodia. In which they have established a National Committee for Disaster Management since 1995 and a Natural Disaster Management law that was passed in 2015. However, mainstreaming and enforcement still remains a challenge.

At the lowest level, enhancing capabilities to address disasters begins at the community level. More often than not, it is communities themselves that act as first responders to disasters. Community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) is one of the national initiatives of the Kingdom of Brunei Darussalam. Through this initiative the Bruneian Government is able to develop community awareness on disasters that in turn results into capacity building. In addition to this, they have also engaged townships in weather watching, hazard mapping, first aid, and fire safety. As a result, better preparing local Bruneian communities to respond to disasters and enhancing disaster risk reduction from the bottom level of governance.

Discussion

Given the effects of climate change, the world is experiencing an unprecedented change in weather patterns. With this in mind, national governments need to create or innovate their climate change policies to adapt to a world faced with a global climate that is likely to see hotter, drier, and conversely colder and wetter periods that are likely to be prolonged. These can result in extreme droughts or cold spells. The consequences that come out of these extreme weather patterns are likely to challenge the capabilities of national



*Mdm. Ton Nu Thi Ninh asks a question in the discussion.
Photo credit: Janet Fung/RSIS*

governments. Therefore it is imperative that national governments carefully review the natural hazards and risks that affect their nations to better prepare for the potential disasters they may face in the future.

While it is challenging to develop policies to address the changing climate and disasters, design and implementation of such policies remains a significant hurdle. In order for national policies to holistically address the needs of their people they must be underpinned by humanitarian principles. Neutrality, impartiality, independence, and operational neutrality guide humanitarian assistance operations and ensures that the most vulnerable people regardless of race, social status or gender are treated with respect and dignity. By operating within humanitarian principles, governments can better ensure the human security of their citizens. Though they are not the only humanitarian actors during a crisis, effective development and implementation of climate and disaster policies lies primarily with national governments. If the political willingness is there to drive policy, national governments will undoubtedly be better equipped and capable to meet HADR crises ahead and to collaborate with other humanitarian actors.

NORTHEAST ASIA PANEL

The Northeast Asia panel focused on country case studies of Japan, China and South Korea, and the experience of these increasingly important players in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The panel highlighted the definitional differences within the sub-region and the ways in which HADR is prioritized in relation to maintaining national security.

Despite their proximity, Japan, China, and South Korea have different forms of governments, threats, and therefore myriad challenges to HADR. Japan is susceptible to earthquakes, tsunamis, and typhoons, to name a few due to its location on the Pacific Ring of Fire. In China, natural hazards have caused widespread crises such as heavy flooding and landslides. In South Korea, while the effects of natural hazards have not been extreme, the traditional security tension on the Korean peninsula arguably preoccupies and limits Korean humanitarian efforts.

Natural disasters are not only “natural”

From the Chinese perspective, natural disasters are not merely natural, but rather, they consist of a natural hazard striking an area or making landfall, and in turn affecting the human population of the aforementioned area. In the recent past, however, China has experienced large-scale complex emergencies, resulting in widespread devastation and extensive response efforts. Through these experiences, the Chinese have now defined compound disasters as events associated with or caused by natural disasters resulting in casualties, property loss, destruction of resources and social instability. However, they differ from natural disasters as they are distinguished by multiple causes and are multifaceted in scope.

The Yuyao Floods in Zhejiang, China is classified as such a compound disaster. In early October 2013, torrential rains from Typhoon Fitow inundated at least 70 percent of Yuyao city and caused over half a million of its 1.3 million residents to evacuate their homes. With the majority of the city submerged, Yuyao's water, power, telecommunication and transportation systems were all paralyzed. This widespread devastation posed significant challenges and highlighted a limited response capacity. By mid-October, due to allegations of slow HADR efforts, the people of Yuyao attacked police, threw rocks, and overturned government vehicles illustrating the descent into civil unrest. The Yuyao compound disaster was not only caused by the devastation brought on by Typhoon Fitow, but it was

further prolonged by manmade unrest as well. In the last 10 years other significant examples of compound disasters in Northeast Asia are the 2008 Szechuan earthquake and the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.



Professor Yu Xiaofeng talks about how natural disasters are not only “natural” Credit: Janet Fung/RSIS

Disasters and defense forces

As Japan is positioned on the Pacific Ring of Fire, the Japanese people are susceptible to earthquakes, typhoons, and tsunamis. With this ever-present positional vulnerability to natural hazards, over 80% percent of the Japanese population is in support of the Japanese self-defense forces carrying out disaster-related work, making them the most desired first-responder in the nation. This is in contrast to many other countries which utilize defense forces as a last resort in disaster situations. This panel demonstrated that this is not the case for Japan.

The Japanese self-defense forces responded to the Hyogo earthquake in 1995 and the Tohoku earthquake in 2011 with 26,000 personnel and 117,000 respectively. This was just over half of all Japanese forces, 207,000 personnel. With this in

mind, Japanese self-defense forces are increasingly engaging in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In times of calamity, the Japanese people look to their self-defense forces as a steady and reliable institution that evokes a sense of calmness and relief for affected populations in traumatic situations.

The case of Japan illustrates how some populations prefer self-defense forces or the military to take the lead in disaster response. Militaries often have the broadest capability, many resources and more personnel than any other civilian-led organization or NGO. With this in mind, the panel suggested that national perceptions of disasters and military involvement be studied. This would allow for a more contextualized understanding of the needs of people during crises. Moreover, such a study would indicate the people's preference in first responders. This would in turn allow for governments to develop a more tailored response and relief effort in the long run.

HADR stymied by traditional security concerns

Despite national prevailing attitudes of military involvement in HADR, the overall trend in Northeast Asia still reflects the dominance of traditional security at the top of their security agenda. For South Korea and China, this can be distinctly seen through national overseas development contributions.

In the case of South Korea their limitations to HADR efforts are first and foremost constrained by their 'developing country mentality' and a focus on domestic wealth redistribution versus international relief and development aid. As the South Korean budget grows, it is expected that overseas HADR contributions will grow as well. However, should the budget remain constant or decline, international HADR contributions will remain limited. An additional limitation to South Korean overseas HADR contributions is that the government chooses carefully what to spend on and it does not spend on issues that can be overshadowed by bigger international donors. As such, of the 2016 South Korean overseas development assistance, only 2% has been allocated to humanitarian assistance. Lastly, South Korean humanitarian assistance is limited by the preoccupation of the military with maintaining focus on the tensions within the Korean peninsula. This imminent security threat arguably consumes a significant amount of personnel and resources.

Similarly, China, in the era of its "going out" policy still

allocates a limited amount of overseas development aid (ODA) to humanitarian assistance. While China sees humanitarianism as an important factor in maintaining good relations with the international community, only 0.4% of its total ODA from 2010 to 2012 was spent on humanitarian projects. The brunt of China's ODA went to economic infrastructure projects that accounted for 44.8% of their total aid budget.



*Dr Lee Jaehyon presents *The Potential and Limitations to Korean Involvement in Regional HADR Efforts*. Photo credit: Janet Fung/RSIS*

Discussion

Despite Western perceptions that the use of the military must be a last resort in humanitarian action, the case of Japan deviates from the global norm and offers a single country perspective of a wider trend in Asia of military involvement in disasters. In light of this, the perception of the military is dependent on the context in which the military or armed forces are operating. When people see the military as a stabilizing force amidst the chaos of a devastating natural disaster as well as its capacity as an institution, then it is important to reevaluate the role militaries play in disaster response, particularly as a first responder.

HADR response should be needs-based and sensitive to the society and culture of the area of operation. What may work in and for the West needs to be rethought when it is applied in an Asia-Pacific context. In developing Asian countries, the national armed forces may well be the only institution capable of responding to a natural disaster and by default be the first and only responder to humanitarian crises.

SOUTHEAST ASIA PANEL

The Southeast Asia panel focused on national and humanitarian actor responses to the irregular migration out of the Bay of Bengal and the Myanmar floods in 2015. The irregular migration flow included people from both Bangladesh and Myanmar. The latter were mainly Rohingya and are often referred to as the world's most persecuted minority as they have been regarded as stateless since 1982 and suffer disproportionately in Rakhine State, Myanmar, especially since riots in 2012. Last year, thousands of Rohingya boarded flimsy boats to flee persecution and many headed south through the Gulf of Thailand into the Straits of Malacca. As a result, this became a transnational human security concern for ASEAN. The Myanmar Floods in 2015 were also indicative of the risks faced by many countries in the region from; exposure to Cyclone Komen to the effects of unusually heavy monsoon.

In Southeast Asia, the exposure of countries to natural disasters is well reported. However, this has not led to a significant shift in mindset over how to better manage, prepare and respond to both natural and man-made disasters. This panel sought to highlight some of the intricacies found in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in Southeast Asia. What became known as the Southeast Asian migrant crisis in 2015 challenged the resolve and responsiveness of ASEAN nations, and more broadly the international community. The panelists presented case studies of the Malaysian and Indonesian responses focusing on both state and non-state actors. Finally, a perspective on responding to the 2015 Myanmar Floods was shared in which it was highlighted that there were multiple challenges that faced the international response in the affected areas in Magway Division, Sagaing Division, Chin State and Rakhine State in the west of Myanmar.

Beyond the Migrant Crisis: Malaysian responses to irregular migrants

While international news reports of the migrant crisis in 2015 brought attention to the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar, many have fled to Malaysia over a much longer period of time. Rohingyas began resettling in Malaysia as early as the late 1970s, but significantly increased from 1982 when the Myanmar citizenship law of that year denied them a path to nationality and so a large influx of people went to Malaysia as irregular migrants. Some Rohingyas were resettled in Malaysia as they had preexisting familial or friendship ties with established Rohingya communities there, particularly around Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Kelantan, and Penang.

Despite long standing migration patterns of the Rohingya to Malaysia, the Malaysian government still considers the Rohingya as 'illegal immigrants' and a threat to national security and stability. Moreover, the Malaysian parliament has rejected giving Rohingya the official documentation that was given to Filipino refugees in Sabah. Malaysia remains a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention but the government does tolerate refugees. Indeed, since the Indochinese exodus in the 1970s, the UNHCR has operated an office in the country to determine refugee status, and remains in place today. The Malaysian government is currently offering Rohingya refugees temporary stay based on humanitarian grounds. However, in reality many Rohingya families in Malaysia have been in the country for more than 50 years.

With little support from the Malaysian Government, Rohingya refugees are reliant on about 18 to 20 community-based organizations (CBOs) after they are processed by the UNHCR in Kuala Lumpur. Mostly uneducated, the Rohingya have extreme difficulties integrating into Malaysian society. Through the CBOs, Rohingya are first helped to locate their friends and family. If any are found, Rohingya refugees are settled into that local community. For those who are alone, orphaned, or abandoned, CBOs struggle to support them, which can end up in some refugees resorting to begging. CBOs generate funds through private donations which allow for the support for the Rohingya to continue. Despite such funds, there remains an inadequate number of welfare centers to house or learning centers to teach the Rohingya. These support initiatives, particularly for Rohingya children, will assist them to break the cycle of poverty and marginalization that they were previously subject to in Myanmar and enable them to become part of the Malaysian labour force.

Humanitarian Responders in Aceh, Indonesia

In May 2015 Northern Aceh fishermen rescued Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants at a time when the Indonesian government was refusing to allow boats to disembark onto Indonesian land. Guided by their obligations under traditional customary laws of the sea, the *Hukôm Adat Laôt*, Acehese fisherman led 3 waves of rescue operations. On 10th, 12th and 15th May, 2015, over 400 fishermen led coordinated rescue missions saving over 1500 lives. In so doing, participating fishermen risked their personal safety, the revocation of their licenses and their economic livelihoods.

Despite such risks, Acehese fisherman acted upon their obligations to fulfill *Hukôm Adat Laôt*. This customary law has been in place for centuries and is based in part on humanitarian grounds but is also akin to human rights principles. Under the *Hukôm Adat Laôt*, the Acehese are prescribed not only to rescue the Rohingya but to treat them with dignity as well.

Unlike the lack of welcome that the Rohingya experience elsewhere, the Northern Acehese practice *Peumulia Jamee* where the guest is celebrated and honoured. Treating the Rohingya with dignity and respect, is viewed by the Northern Acehese as a way to fulfill their ancestral traditions.

The profound respect of the Acehese for the Rohingya has had wider implications for Indonesia. At a national level, the Indonesian government is revisiting a draft presidential regulation on asylum seekers and refugees. At the local level, *Hukôm Adat Laôt* has inspired standard operating procedures, guidelines, and a code of ethics for humanitarian assistance addressing asylum seeker and refugees. This is a first in Indonesia, and possibly in the ASEAN region that local government units are the ones driving refugee policy. As such, this is a case that warrants further investigation as an example of where the grassroots has the potential to influence national policy.

Floods in Southeast Asia – The case of the 2015 Myanmar Floods

In July 2015, unusually heavy monsoon rain fell on Myanmar, leading to widespread damage to an already weak infrastructure, particularly in low-lying areas. This flooding was compounded when Cyclone Komen made landfall in Bangladesh on 30th July and brought with it heavy rains and extreme

winds into Myanmar. This caused severe flooding and landslides. The next day, the Government of Myanmar declared 3 natural disaster zones in Chin state, Sagaing state, and the Rakhine state.

International responders faced multiple challenges including accessibility, communication, and poor disaster education and awareness of the affected population. Firstly, infrastructure throughout Myanmar remains weak, which led to flash floods that cut off road access and destroyed bridges. In addition to this, some areas were affected by landslides, which made passage difficult. Humanitarian responders needed heavy-duty 4 by 4 vehicles, used traditional methods of transport or walked to these remote areas while carrying emergency health equipment. Secondly, communication with local communities was also difficult for responders. Myanmar has 135 recognized ethnic groups, most of whom speak their own language or dialect. During the relief effort, humanitarian responders had to first engage local volunteers prior to the implementation of relief projects so that they could be sensitized to local conditions. Thirdly, many villages used traditional medicines and hygiene practices. This made it difficult for humanitarian responders to assist people as modern medical practices differ from local community traditions. As a result, local communities needed to learn simple disease reduction practices, such as hanging mosquito nets. Humanitarian responders also found that there was little awareness of communicable and infectious diseases such as malaria, cholera and typhoid, which are highly prevalent in the affected communities.

Discussion

In 2015, Southeast Asia experienced the overlap of both man-made and natural disasters highlighting the importance of taking a holistic and comprehensive approach to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Irregular migration out of the Bay of Bengal in 2015 and the Myanmar Floods in 2015 illustrated the multifaceted nature of natural and man-made disasters. While some countries like Malaysia and Indonesia have accepted and tolerated some of the irregular migrants, this is currently only a temporary solution. There is a need to find a more permanent solution for this displaced population, which will require the participation of the countries of origin, transit and resettlement to negotiate. It will demonstrate the resilience of ASEAN members if they are able to play a pivotal role in moving this negotiation forward.





SOUTH ASIA PANEL

The South Asia panel looked at national responses to both natural and human-induced disasters. The panel presented their respective vulnerabilities and national disaster plans highlighting different methodologies in addressing crisis situations. Country case studies presented were from India, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Located in or adjacent to the Himalayan Mountain range, India, Nepal and Bangladesh, are all vulnerable to earthquakes and corresponding aftershocks. In addition to these, between these three countries, they are also prone to floods, tsunamis, tidal surge, groundwater contamination, drought, famine, and cyclones. Given their own set of vulnerabilities to natural hazards, India, Bangladesh and Nepal have developed different HADR capabilities.

In India, through their 2006 National Disaster Management Act, a full time national disaster management force (NDRF) was set up to train and equip personnel to respond to disasters. In doing so, a uniquely skilled force can respond to natural or human-induced disaster at home and abroad. In the case of Bangladesh, while there is a national disaster management plan, the plan has not been scaled down to create disaster management plans at a state or district level. This results in discontinuity in understanding the needs of affected people from the top to the bottom of the bureaucracy and government. In Nepal, the 2015 earthquakes exposed the gaps and challenges to responding to an emergency in a landlocked mountainous country. The aftermath of the earthquakes further revealed the lack of preparedness of the Nepali government.

An Indian Response to Disasters

India is susceptible to a multitude of natural hazards because of its geographical location. It is susceptible to earthquakes from the Himalayas, erosion and sedimentation due to wide river plains and coastal areas, and heavy rains, landslides and floods from monsoon rain, to name a few. With this in mind, the Indian policy on HADR is threefold. Firstly, India supports international humanitarian assistance to disaster-affected countries and aims to cooperate with regional and international organizations. Secondly, India will deploy all available resources to domestic disaster situations even if it is from the military in order to ensure a swift and expeditious response. Thirdly, and most importantly, India does not rely upon or receive international humanitarian assistance and disaster

relief. Thus, since 2004, Indian forces have always been the first responders. In light of internal disaster preparedness, the National Disaster Management Act of 2005 formed a National Disaster Management Authority that is chaired by the Prime Minister. Under this act, each province in India also has a State Disaster Management Authority and a District Disaster Management Authority. Therefore, disaster management mechanisms have been scaled down to ensure that Indians can respond to disasters at the national, state and district levels.

In 2006, the National Disaster Management Force was created to better support an Indian response to disasters. This force first consisted of 8 battalions trained to respond to both natural disasters and human-induced crises. To date, there are over 10 battalions in the NDRF, which means that around 1150 police personnel are ready and equipped to respond. The Indian disaster response is also sensitive to local realities through training these battalions at the local level. These response teams are therefore already familiar with the local terrain and populations before a disaster strikes. In doing so, they are arguably the most suitable and appropriate responders for the Indian population.

Bangladesh and Disasters

As with India, Bangladesh is also susceptible to floods, droughts, earthquakes, river erosion, and cyclones, which are the most deadly natural hazard for the country. Bangladesh has passed a Disaster Management Act and established a National Disaster Management Council headed by the Prime Minister to review and create disaster management policies and issue directives of all concerns on disasters. Bangladesh also has numerous nodal agencies for disaster management, like the Inter-Ministerial Disaster Management Council, the Cyclone Preparedness Program Implementation Board, and the NGO Coordination Committee on Disaster Management, to name a few. With nodal agencies headed by different government ministers, variation occurs in response to crises situations. As such there is a need to collaborate and integrate overall HADR

efforts. In addition to this, the majority of Bangladeshi disaster management funding goes towards relief as disaster response, and little attention or resources go towards disaster preparedness and mitigation. Preparedness and mitigation are vital to building a nation's adaptive capacity to disasters. By neglecting to allocate funding for the aforementioned, Bangladeshi forces are continuously going to have to respond to their people every single time a disaster occurs, and people are likely to continue to suffer the same plight. Investing in preparedness and mitigation is essential in disaster risk reduction and it allows for local communities to empower themselves by using their local knowledge and response patterns against the disasters that they face.

While the institutional frameworks for disaster management are established within the Bangladeshi government, harmonization of efforts across ministerial nodal offices remains a challenge. There is a need for collaboration within the government and with other stakeholders such as NGOs and voluntary organizations to ensure the best response for the Bangladeshi people. An area in which stakeholders can be brought together with the government is investing in disaster management technologies to facilitate succinct information dissemination. This would provide a baseline information platform for information sharing amongst Bangladeshi HADR responders and could equip them with early warning systems and typhoon forecasting.

Nepal Earthquakes 2015

The first earthquake, Gorkha struck Nepal on April 25th 2015, with a magnitude of 7.8, while the second earthquake (aftershock), Kodari struck on May 12th, 2015, with a magnitude of 7.3. Combined, over 9,000 deaths and 22,000 injured were recorded. The earthquakes were the most recent major humanitarian response that saw tremendous international reaction and influx of humanitarian resources in monetary donation, in kind, and in personnel. Given the high impact and devastation caused by the earthquake and the multitude of humanitarian actors engaged in disaster relief, there were significant consequences in the field. Two broad areas that responders lacked capacity in were an appreciation of the terrain in which they were deployed and an understanding of local customs and culture.

Firstly, responders underestimated the impact that the mountainous terrain that defines Nepal would have on relief operations. The mountainous terrain made it extremely inaccessible for helicopters and other military assets to land in certain areas. In the earthquake aftermath many villages were cutoff due to collapsed infrastructure making aid delivery very difficult. Secondly, there was a need for responders to better understand local needs. When the earthquake first struck, Nepal opened its doors to the international community without setting standards for response. As such, the humanitarian community brought what they could without being well prepared of local needs. In doing so, this resulted in the duplication of relief items and efforts, leading to aid waste, and in some cases, this aid became entirely unusable. Given the Nepal experience, it is clear that there is a need for humanitarian responders to be sensitive to their operational terrain.

Discussion

In looking at these three countries in South Asia, it can be argued that humanitarian response in any nation must be tailored to the needs of the people and sensitive to local realities. This would ensure that the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief effort is appropriate for the vulnerable communities that they serve.

In responding to disasters in the Asia-Pacific, humanitarian actors need to understand that no two countries are the same, and culture plays a significant role in them. Thus, in order to avoid mishap or negative press, humanitarian actors need to be briefed prior to deployment and undertake sensitivity training for countries most at risk. When operating in affected countries, humanitarian actors need to function in a self-sufficient manner so as to not disrupt local economic and social patterns. Additionally, actors must refrain from bringing in aid that overlaps with others or is unusable to the local community. Both of these are encapsulated in the "do no harm" humanitarian principle, which still remains underappreciated in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. This session drew on the experiences in South Asia both from the standpoint of the preparedness of national authorities as well as an assessment of the response efforts of the international community to Nepal.

ORDER OF EVENTS

Programme

- 08:30–09:00 Arrival of Participants and Registration
- 09:00–09:10 Welcome Remarks
Assoc. Prof. Mely Caballero-Anthony
*Head, Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies,
 S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.*
- 09:10–09:30 Opening Remarks
Re-launch of the NTS-Asia Consortium
Ambassador Ong Keng Yong
*Executive Deputy Chairman of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS),
 Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.*
- 09:30–11:00 Session 1
Disasters in the Asia-Pacific
 Moderator:
Prof. Kim Sung-han
Korea University; President, CSCAP Korea, the Republic of Korea.
- Assessing Natural Hazards in Asia Pacific: Setting Agenda for SFDRR Implementation**
Dr Jonatan Lassa
*Research Fellow,
 Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies, RSIS, NTU, Singapore.*
- Conflict Hotspots in the Asia-Pacific**
Dr Alistair D. B. Cook
*Coordinator of HADR Programme and Research Fellow,
 Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies, RSIS, NTU, Singapore.*
- Cambodia Disaster Management: Lessons Learned**
H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak
Executive Director, Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, Cambodia.
- Brunei's Response to Humanitarian Crises**
Mr Muhammad Shahrul Nizzam Umar
*Director, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies
 (SHHBIDSS), Ministry of Defence, Brunei Darussalam.*
- 11:00–11:30 Photo Session and Tea Break (Foyer, Outside Ballroom 1)
- 11:30–13:00 **Session 2: Northeast Asia Panel**
 Moderator:
Assoc. Prof. Wu Fengshi
*S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies,
 Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.*
- Japanese Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief: Implications for the Asia-Pacific**
Prof. Tomonori Yoshizaki
*Director, Security Studies Department,
 National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan.*
- Non-traditional Security and Compound Disaster Relief – An Analysis of Chinese Humanitarian Assistance**
Prof. Yu Xiaofeng
College of Public Administration, Zhejiang University, China.

The Potential and Limitations to Korean Involvement in Regional HADR Efforts

Dr Lee Jaehyon

*Research Fellow, Director of the Center for ASEAN and Oceania Studies,
Asan Institute for Policy Studies, Republic of Korea.*

Discussant:

Dr Lam Peng Er

Senior Fellow, East-Asia Institute, National University of Singapore.

13:00–14:00 **Session 3: Southeast Asia Panel**

Moderator:

Madam Ton Nu Thi Ninh

President, Ho Chi Minh City Peace and Development Foundation, Vietnam.

Mercy Malaysia's Response to the 2015 Myanmar Floods

Dr Mohammad Iqbal bin Omar

Executive Council Member, Mercy Malaysia.

Local Acehese Rescue and Welcome of Rohingya And Bangladeshi Boat Journey Survivors and the Humanitarian Principles of Aceh's Hukom Adat Laot

Ms Lilianne Fan

Research Associate, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Indonesia.

Local Responses to the Rohingya Boat People: The Malaysian Experience

Dr Azizah Kassim

Principal Research Fellow, Institute of Malaysia & International Studies (IKMAS), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia.

Discussant:

Prof. Carolina Hernandez

Founder & President, Institute for Strategic and Development Studies (ISDS), Philippines.

15:30–16:00 Tea Break (Foyer, Outside Ballroom 1)

16:00–17:20 **Session 4: South Asia Panel**

Moderator:

Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed

Executive Director, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka.

Indian Response to Regional Disasters

Major General (Retd) Dipankar Banerjee

Mentor, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), India.

Bangladesh: On the Front Line of Disaster Risks

Major General (Retd) A N M Muniruzzaman

President, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, Bangladesh.

Responses to the 2015 Nepal Earthquake

Mr Maxim Shrestha

Associate Research Fellow, Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies, RSIS, NTU, Singapore.

Discussant:

Ms Seema Kakran

*Deputy Director, Women in Security,
Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP).*

17:20–17:30 Closing Remarks

Assoc. Prof. Mely Caballero-Anthony

Head, Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies, RSIS, NTU, Singapore.

18:30–20:30 Conference Dinner (Ballroom 2, Level 2)

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RELAUNCHING NTS-ASIA, ADVANCING HUMANITARIAN ACTION BEYOND BORDERS

Contributed by Margareth Sembiring

The RSIS NTS Centre re-launched the NTS-Asia Consortium on 22 February 2016. The event brought 16 of its 20 founding members to the Grand Park City Hall Hotel in Singapore together with 50 other representatives from NTS-related institutions and research centres across Asia. Established in 2007, the NTS-Asia Consortium facilitates networking among NTS scholars and analysts in the region, builds regional capacity for NTS research, and mainstreams and advances NTS studies in Asia.

Since its last meeting in China in 2012, and the completion of the Ford Foundation grant that funded the Consortium, networking activities have been largely virtual; through the online sharing of publications, recent developments in the field and the e-newsletter. The relaunch of the NTS-Asia Consortium reconnected regional researchers, allowing them to share areas of interest and discuss future plans for collaboration and outreach.

Mainstreaming NTS and supporting a younger generation of NTS scholars are a priority. Among the ideas discussed at the meeting was the need to continue the NTS-Asia fellowship scheme, with a greater emphasis on mentorship, including opportunities for professionals such as those from the media industry to gain more awareness and understanding of NTS issues and developments, as well as its relevance to their fields.

NTS-Asia will also tap on technology and social media to better mainstream NTS perspectives and content. A revamped NTS-Asia website synced with social media platforms will be an effective and efficient way of increasing reach and access and will allow Consortium members to better share NTS resources. The website could also host profiles of regional NTS experts and emerging scholars to facilitate networking and knowledge exchange. Suggestions generated also included a webinar series through which Consortium members could begin providing online NTS studies content regardless of their geographic location. E-newsletters will continue, but will new features and more engaging content.

The Consortium is also looking into ways of opening membership to individuals and other practitioners and organisations that are involved in NTS issues. It was therefore timely that the RSIS Conference on Inter-Regional Comparisons of Humanitarian Action was held in conjunction with the re-launch of NTS-Asia. This allowed conference participants to participate in the re-launch and consider potential membership in the Consortium.

About NTS-Asia

The NTS-Asia Consortium was launched in January 2007 as a network of non-traditional security research institutes and think tanks. The RSIS NTS Centre leads and coordinates this Consortium. The aims of the consortium are as follows:

- To develop a platform for networking and intellectual exchange between regional NTS scholars and analysts
- To build long-term and sustainable regional capacity for research on NTS issues
- To mainstream and advance the field of non-traditional security studies in Asia
- To collate and manage a regional database of NTS publications and other resources

The NTS-Asia Consortium is a networking platform that enables intellectual exchange in the field of non-traditional security studies. Annual meetings, conferences and roundtables allow for regional discussions on research outputs and the latest developments in the field. A constant virtual presence is created through the NTS-Asia website, which serves as a one-stop resource centre for all NTS-related matters in the region. The consortium also enables capacity-building of young scholars and analysts; provides opportunities for mentorship and expertise sharing; and facilitates new research partnerships. In future the NTS-Asia Consortium could become the regional centre of expertise in non-traditional security studies, issuing fellowships, awards and grants for research in this area.

ABOUT THE HADR PROGRAMME

RSIS recently established the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Programme to facilitate and enhance policy-relevant and academically rigorous research on preparedness and response strategies to the fragile and unpredictable humanitarian scenarios we face in the Asia Pacific. The HADR programme team comprehensively investigates cooperation and effectiveness in the emerging humanitarian landscape, regional emergency response frameworks, disaster preparedness, humanitarian technology, and the identification and development of response niches for civilian and military actors. The programme also seeks to develop the next generation of global leaders in HADR through capacity-building and training workshops. It draws on the knowledge and expertise of the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre) and the Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS).

Core research areas

- *Future HADR landscape in Asia.* This first pillar of the programme tracks the emergence of new humanitarian actors (both state and non-state) and maps particular successes, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in preparing for disaster relief and conflict response in the region. This research area also focuses on the relationships between civilian and military actors and the emerging points of difference and convergence between the two in responding to HADR in the Asia-Pacific.
- *Community protection and assistance.* The second pillar focuses on the complex security environment brought about by vulnerable communities' varying capacity to protect themselves and the increasing number of responders providing assistance. This research area maps the most vulnerable populations so as to better characterise needs assessments and determine where assistance should be deployed and locally implemented.
- *Humanitarian effectiveness.* The third pillar of the HADR programme addresses the challenge of better emergency disaster response in complex situations. There is a significant challenge in effectively and efficiently responding to natural disasters and conflict; this research area evaluates the quality and impact of both military and civilian organisation emergency responses.
- *Humanitarian technology.* The fourth pillar of the HADR programme examines the field of humanitarian technology as applied to a broadly defined context of crises encompassing both natural disasters and conflict zones. This research area identifies the impact technology has on humanitarian responses as well as the emergent challenges of information technology, big data and technological innovations in humanitarian action.

More information on HADR Programme is available at www.rsis.edu.sg/research/nts-centre/researchprogrammes/humanitarian-assistance.

ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY STUDIES (NTS CENTRE)

The Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre) conducts research and produces policy relevant analyses aimed at furthering awareness, and building the capacity to address NTS issues and challenges in Asia. The centre addresses knowledge gaps, facilitates discussions and analyses, engages policymakers and contributes to building institutional capacity in the following areas: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief; Food, Health and Energy Security; Climate Change, Resilience and Sustainable Development; and Peace and Human Security. The NTS Centre brings together myriad NTS stakeholders in regular workshops and roundtable discussions, as well as provides a networking platform for NTS research institutions in the Asia Pacific through the NTS-Asia Consortium.

More information on NTS Centre and a complete list of available publications, policy briefs and reports can be found here: www.rsis.edu.sg/research/nts-centre.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF DEFENCE AND STRATEGIC STUDIES (IDSS)

The Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) is a key research component of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS). It focuses on defence and security research to serve national needs. IDSS faculty and research staff conducts both academic and policy-oriented research on security-related issues and developments affecting Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific. IDSS is divided into three research clusters: (i) The Asia Pacific cluster—comprising the China, South Asia, United States, and Regional Security Architecture programmes; (ii) The Malay Archipelago cluster—comprising the Indonesia and Malaysia programmes; and (iii) The Military and Security cluster—comprising the Military Transformations, Maritime Security, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) programmes. Finally, the Military Studies Programme, the wing that provides military education, is also a part of IDSS.

For more information about IDSS, please visit www.rsis.edu.sg/research/idss.

ABOUT THE S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) is a professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. RSIS' mission is to develop a community of scholars and policy analysts at the forefront of security studies and international affairs. Its core functions are research, graduate education and networking. It produces cutting-edge research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-Traditional Security, International Political Economy, and Country and Region Studies. RSIS' activities are aimed at assisting policymakers to develop comprehensive approaches to strategic thinking on issues related to security and stability in the Asia Pacific.

For more information about RSIS, please visit www.rsis.edu.sg.



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