Asia's Security Competition by Proxy: Competitive HADR as a Respectable Arena?

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Abstract: Following recent events such as Cyclone Nargis impacting Myanmar, Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, and more recently the MH370 incident, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) has emerged as a new field of security competition in Asia. While dominant analytical narratives seem to treat HADR as an avenue for hard power to transfigure itself into soft power, this chapter asserts that HADR does not fit neatly into a liberal security paradigm. HADR is actually a form of security competition by proxy, implying that there are neoliberal and neorealist possibilities in states engaging in HADR campaigns. HADR allows states to promote images of national technological superiority, models of good governance, and low risk yet high signature contingency deployments of both armed forces and civilian forces. This is perhaps a security competition that allows national rivalries to play out without the risk of outright war. The three illustrative cases mentioned above will support the argument.

When viewed through the lenses of the Asian security landscape, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) is rapidly emerging as a field of competitive international security. It is no longer the exclusive tool of liberal international relations. On the surface, HADR presents the ideal liberal project: state-organized and funded military and police forces rush into post-disaster hotspots without significant political impediments from national interest considerations and local defensiveness about protecting sovereignty. After all, the very definition of either a natural or man-made disaster implies that local sovereignty is voided by the collapse of the normal operation of law and order amidst the massive loss of human lives, livelihood, food, property, and other possessions. External parties intervene to save human lives and restore a semblance of normalcy supposedly on the basis of a cosmopolitan sense of duty. This chapter however argues that this is parochial analysis. Recent multinational rescue efforts pertaining to Cyclone Nargis, Typhoon Haiyan and the MH370 airliner mishap reveal intense international security competition amongst relief sending states. This is security competition by proxy. The competition of compassion is simultaneously a trial of national hard and soft powers.

This chapter will make the case for treating HADR as a field of Asian security competition by proxy by surveying the national security undertones of states' deliberate investment in soft power strategies as a policy that straddles neorealist and neoliberal reasoning. We shall therefore first survey what we call the inklings of HADR as National Security Soft Power. Consequently, by employing the three case studies mentioned earlier, we will argue that national technological superiority, models of good governance, and low risk yet high signature contingency deployments of both armed forces and civilian forces comprise the characteristics of this new substitute for strategic competition. The three most recent large-scale humanitarian disasters in Asia have been chosen for the reason that their data is relatively recent and more accessible than the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Moreover, the political features of the relief effort have been more sharply evident in the events of 2008, 2013 and 2014 than in 2004. The politics behind the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami have served nonetheless as the proverbial tip of the iceberg for the case this chapter is making.

HADR as National Security Soft Power – Inklings of a Doctrine

The phrase 'preparing for disaster' can convey a wide variety of meanings, some of which can be cynically rhetorical, others taking on a more earnest implication in the wake of increasing recognition that the Indo-Pacific region is probably the most natural disaster prone region of the world. It is often said that natural disasters recognize neither geographical borders, distinctions of wealth nor political sensitivities of sovereignty. This is only half correct. The 'correct' half can be extrapolated from the Kantian liberal premise of the cosmopolitan right of nations and individuals to be protected from physical harm. By extension, cosmopolitan right also means that they ought to be allowed the maximum space to exercise the other universal and natural human rights to peace, expression and livelihood. This philosophical prescription appears to be largely embedded in the United Nations Charter and its corollary documents. This in turn behoves the members of the United Nations, which constitute the majority of the world's 196 independent states, to assist one another on the basis of humane reciprocity in the event of a natural calamity. Moreover, some authors of the soft power theme have stressed that the appeal of soft power – as the ability to get others to want what you want through co-optation – must be grounded in a showcase of one's good governance at home or drawn from some lofty philosophical principles. (Nye Jr., 2004; Chong, 2007)

This is all logical on the most basic plane of protecting human rights by delivering aid to disaster stricken territories and their populations, but it also reintroduces the question of the right form of good governance that can anticipate natural disasters and enact pre-disaster measures to cope with possible contingencies. Immanuel Kant's project of 'Perpetual Peace' did not specifically address humanitarian catastrophes but he did inveigh against the evils of authoritarian governments on the basis of their internal lack of accountability and war prone decision making. (Kant, 1996) It does not take much of an imagination to extrapolate Kant's preference for a democratic and representative government for querying the fitness of domestic governance in relation to disaster management. The three cases to be surveyed below deal with this aspect of the social contract between citizens and their governments, freely elected or otherwise. Some basic questions about the social contract can be teased out of this line of argument. Should expenditure on armaments be seen in a zero sum relationship with investing in large capacity health care facilities? Should civilian infrastructure such as homes, shopping malls, schools and factories be hardened for disaster instead of expending resources on population protection through acquiring high technology military weaponry? Are there any other possibilities of spending public monies on dual use infrastructure? In developing economies characterized by large rural agricultural sectors dependent on the sustainability of local eco-systems, shouldn't governments balance priorities for territorial defence with agricultural security, especially the enhancement of the yield of the soil? It does boil down to a question of budgeting and managerial priorities for a good government in the eyes of the population. David Alexander, a scholar of disaster sociology, provides support for this point of view when he writes that 'the normal characteristics of a society will profoundly affect its reaction to disasters and its ability to cope with their impact.' Moreover, 'generally, the larger the social grouping under consideration, the less close-knit it is, which involves a lowering of the intensity of interaction between social groups. In addition, the degree to which the community has experienced disasters on previous occasions and developed the capability to manage crises will affect its ability to cope with present and future impacts and will govern the level of resources it sets aside for the next extreme event.' (Alexander, 1993, p. 556) Therefore, when responses to disaster are studied comparatively on a national level, one can compare degrees of resilience and technical preparedness. Politicians too inevitably assign blame within national boundaries and across them. (Bankoff, 2003) This is a theme that resonates across the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, Typhoon Haiyan and MH370.

Increasingly, analysts and participants in HADR have drawn either operational comparisons or benchmarks from military performances in peacetime and wartime. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 was reportedly compared to fighting insurgency in the American military response to the relief effort on home soil: the storm had blown over, the city was now more in danger from its inhabitants. As it was quoted in one academic study, the US Army described its mission in New Orleans as follows: 'combat operations are now underway on the streets…This place is going to look like little Somalia…We're going to go out and take the city back.' New Orleans was framed, post-Katrina, as a zone of lawlessness, with traumatized citizens vying with criminal elements and organized gangs for ascendancy in re-imposing governance. (Tierney & Bevc, 2007, pp. 40-41) Security was primary, and only then could aid be delivered and consumed. The sceptic might argue that the New Orleans-Somalia analogy was far-fetched and potentially the product of an American society temporarily dominated by the on-going heavy duty US involvement in Iraq at the time, but reports out of Cyclone Nargis in 2008 suggest otherwise. The Indian navy congratulated itself on being among the earliest responders to the disaster in Myanmar on the basis of being regularly on patrol in the Indian Ocean Region. A UNFPA representative drew the lesson that 'half the battle is won when an organization has a preparedness plan and relevant information at their fingertips to deal with the particular details of the country in crisis.' This same UNFPA representative concluded that 'but for Burma, there was no plan in place.' (Steele, 2013) All these revelations suggest that a powerful driver for state-organized agencies for police and military functions to deploy for HADR effectively is to draw on their security preparedness.

The implication of this is that military capabilities are vital to the actualization and promotion of HADR as a projection of national soft power. In engaging the military and police forces for HADR, hard power finds expression in the soft. Hard power represented by military hardware, especially long distance power projection assets, heavy lift capability, surveillance technologies and loitering capability, can technically constitute a coercive signature. In a soft power mode, these same capabilities, are repositioned benignly in a grand narrative of helping and restoring hope to stricken populations and their governments. In this regard, it is logically possible to both engineer, and fear, this alloy of hard and soft power. Defence and security establishments can reasonably be said to possess dual capability translated into dual signatures in HADR operations. This simply means that competing national interests can find expression in HADR deployments. There is no need to fight a 'splendid little war' in Asia to prove one's military mettle if the political costs are reckoned to be prohibitive. HADR is competition by proxy.

To recapitulate, this section suggests that HADR treated as a form of competition in national security soft power, can be illustrated through three characteristics. Firstly, one can assess a nation-state's superiority, or deficiency, in good governance in the face of humanitarian disasters, which in turn invites either praise, support, intervention or condemnation from both fellow aid givers and aid recipients. Secondly, armed forces' operational readiness in conventional security dimensions lead correspondingly into proficiency in delivering HADR. Thirdly, when militaries are tasked for HADR, they are effectively deploying a policy alloy of hard and soft power, whereby the latter's narrative attempts to neutralize the coercive characteristics of the hard power, at least for the moment. HADR competition is neorealist since it increasingly involves a competitive, albeit non-kinetic and non-combat, demonstration of military projection capabilities. The aim in neo-realist HADR is to show up one's immediate and potential opponents. HADR competition is *also* neo-liberal in the sense that it requires the entrepreneurial initiative from one or a number of national leaders to organize a collaborative endeavour across rival sovereignties. While international HADR coalitions exhibit liberal features such as the fusion of hard power and social purpose, they are also means for exercising rivalry between differing visions of regional and world orders. Both neo-realist and neo-liberal trends still fit the paradigm of soft power, since they both anticipate that soft power can mean that one side demonstrates greater communitarian appeal than the other. We can therefore utilize the three characteristics of HADR as national security soft power to organize the three case study illustrations that now follow.

Cyclone Nargis, 2008

After Cyclone Nargis originated in the northern Indian Ocean in late April 2008, it made landfall between 2 and 3 May on a particularly vulnerable part of Myanmar's coast, the Irrawaddy delta. Observers called it a storm surge since it packed winds of 193 kilometres per hour, and drove a wall of water as high as 3.7 metres nearly 40 kilometres inland. This force of devastation from the sea claimed an estimated 100,000 lives and destroyed 95% of the buildings in seven townships. Most of the dead had been sleeping in flimsy shacks located barely above sea level. Additionally, an estimated 1.5 million people had been displaced and in need of food and shelter at the time. Such was the scale of the disaster that it prompted immediate offers of assistance overnight from foreign governments and aid agencies. We shall now scrutinize the reactions of the Myanmar government, foreign governments and aid agencies to illustrate the competitive exercise of national soft power.

An immediate worldwide media narrative that emerged in the aftermath of Nargis posed the central question framing the poverty-environment nexus in exacerbating the scale of human misery. A UN Environment Programme report put it this way in a post-mortem on the calamity:

> While the sources of income for those households with land tenure remain diverse, people's livelihoods rely mainly on the natural environment. Sources of employment include crop farming (mainly paddy rice cultivation), livestock raising, horticulture (mostly fruit trees), paid agricultural labour, fishing (fishponds, shrimp farms, inland and offshore fisheries), small and medium-scale agricultural and fish processing, small-scale forestry activities (firewood, charcoal and timber) and salt production. Some income is derived from commerce and small-scale local trade, but this income is also indirectly reliant on the environment as it relies on servicing those households whose livelihoods are resource-dependent. Landless labourers, on the other hand, derive their income from various sources which are also environment- based, including casual and seasonal labour in agriculture, salt farms, rice mills, fisheries and aquaculture, and fish processing. (UNEP, 2009, p. 10)

It was therefore no wonder why the majority of those who perished were poor agricultural workers with scarcely more than a makeshift roof over their heads. This cannot be read any other way except as an indictment of the negligence of Myanmar's central government for neglecting poverty alleviation programmes during the decades of military rule since 1988. The military rulers sustained even more bad press abroad for refusing to take urgent telephone calls from the UN Secretary General and the leaders of neighbouring states concerning offers of help.

A more egregious charge was levelled by Amnesty International in a report detailing large scale human rights abuses committed by the government of Myanmar in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. Displaced citizens were being forced out of refugee centres in Yangon and the relatively undamaged parts of the Irrawaddy Delta and made to return to their devastated homes within weeks of being displaced. Amnesty also claimed that it had collected sufficient eyewitness accounts of cyclone victims being forced to build helicopter landing pads, repair roads, clear debris, and dismantle relief camps in exchange for material aid. (CBC News, 2008) The Amnesty report further alleged widespread aid diversion for the purposes of lining the pockets of corrupt local officials. The Myanmar generals lashed out at biased international news reports operating according to a neo-imperialist agenda, and even callously suggested on one occasion that it was the lot of the Myanmar people to experience recurring periods of extreme suffering. In one spectacular blast at their foreign detractors, the government-controlled newspaper claimed that survivors of cyclone Nargis 'do not need foreign food aid; they can feed themselves on frogs and fish that abound in the worst hit areas'. (Asia News, 2008) A low ranking US military officer aboard one of four US naval ships anchored off the devastated Irrawaddy Delta openly complained to the international news media that the Myanmar government was denying much needed aid to their people and that since the US flotilla was prevented from landing their stores and personnel to assist with relief, they would sail away to resume normal peacetime operational duties. (CBC News, 2008)

After slightly more than two weeks of diplomatic aloofness, the military junta agreed to allow an aid survey mission contributed by ASEAN to enter the country and that each ASEAN state should be despatching no more than 30 medical personnel for the effort. A CNN reporter also filed a report at the same time alleging that he could verify the neglect of the central government of the Irrawaddy residents only by defying a Myanmar government ban on 'unlicensed' reporting in the area. Moreover, CNN observed that Myanmar's erstwhile military president, Than Shwe, was finally appearing in public two weeks after the disaster in carefully choreographed television and newspaper shots showing him speaking to survivors looking on as aid workers were opening up food and relief packages! (CNN.com, 2008) The competition of attributing good governance in the case of Nargis centred upon the blame game played by the junta and its foreign opponents.

The foreign armed forces' operational readiness vis-à-vis their Myanmar counterparts were also visibly put under the spotlight over the number of helicopters available for relief flights from the major city of Yangon to the furthest reaches of the Irrawaddy Delta. The negotiations between the

UN, ASEAN and the Myanmar junta initially centred upon the number of helicopters available for relief missions. The French foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, speaking from the perspective of liberal interventionist humanitarian aid, suggested that Myanmar be forced to accept aid distribution by external parties given the scale of the tragedy and the generals continued obstinacy in obstructing the flow of aid. (Associated Press (Singapore), 2008) Interestingly, the Myanmar generals accepted US aid only through the 185 C-130 airlift flights from Yokota Air Base in Japan between 12 and 20 May 2008, but only on the condition that the water containers and mosquito netting they delivered to Yangon were to be distributed by the junta's officials. In this regard, the US aid airlift titled 'Joint Task Force Caring Response' was whittled down by Myanmar's political sensitivities. The director of the US Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance, Ky Luu, voiced concern about their inability to track the delivery of aid to the neediest victims in the Irrawaddy region. At the same time President Bush condemned the government of Myanmar in these terms: 'Here they are with a major catastrophe on their hands, and (they) do not allow there to be the full kind of might of a compassionate world to help them.' (Associated Press (Washington), 2008) NGO aid agencies had frequently repeated the complaint that Myanmar lacked the logistical support, experienced personnel, and basing facilities for efficiently processing the aid packages and delivering them.

The cover lent by ASEAN's diplomatic coordination to Myanmar's dilatory response was also enlightening about the latter's fear of the politically damaging consequences of having western hard power appear on Myanmar's sovereign territory dressed as soft power. Singapore's erstwhile foreign minister George Yeo, speaking then as the chair of ASEAN, responded gently but firmly to the demand for forceful military intervention to deliver aid in the following manner: 'That will create unnecessary complication. It will only lead to more suffering for Myanmar people.' (Associated Press (Singapore), 2008) In this sense, ASEAN read the strategic fears of the government of Myanmar correctly even as the latter's own propaganda were already loudly voicing the charge that foreign forces were intruding into the country's sovereignty by openly suggesting that they were scheming to land in Myanmar to deliver aid through a satellite system of governance of the relief effort controlled from outside the country.

Typhoon Haiyan, 2013

Typhoon Haiyan, alternately labelled Typhoon Yolanda locally, barrelled into the central Philippine regions of Eastern Samar, Leyte, Cebu, Iloilo and Palawan from the Pacific Ocean on 6 November 2013 and exited into the South China Sea three days later on 9 November. At its zenith, Haiyan packed winds of up to 237 kilometres per hour (147 mph) and propelled waves of up to six metres (20 feet) in height that ravaged inland areas of high population density. Haiyan caused 6,300 deaths and displaced 4,095,280 persons. In terms of property destruction, 1,084,762 houses were either partially or totally destroyed. The scale and intensity of destruction thus overtook Nargis by quite a measure leading scientists to conclude that Haiyan was the strongest ever recorded.

In this regard, the governance dimension of the disaster's aftermath immediately merited a military response by the Armed Forces of the Philippines which pre-empted much foreign criticism. A significant degree of anarchy reigned in the worse hit town, Tacloban City, where gunshots, stabbings and ambushes coincided with reports that prisoners had taken advantage of the devastation to break out of their jails and that looters had organized themselves to seize supplies at warehouses and deserted shops. An eyewitness account by a BBC correspondent labelled Tacloban City a virtual 'war zone' with accompanying footage showing tanks rumbling through the centre of the city and 'soldiers crouching behind walls with automatic rifles'. (Hodal, 2013) Aid workers and disaster victims alike faced threats from lawlessness, prompting the UN agencies and some NGOs to put their relief programmes on hold until security was restored by the military. Unlike the case of Myanmar in the aftermath of Nargis, the Philippine military was well primed to restore law and order in the urban

centres without being unnecessarily encumbered with aid distribution at the same time. Having suffered natural calamities almost annually, the Philippine government readily accepted from the start a foreign role in delivering aid from offshore naval presences. In particular, the US military and the Armed Forces of the Philippines enjoyed an institutionalised partnership that pre-empted the majority of political sensitivities under emergency conditions. (CEDMHA, 2014, p. 11) The aircraft carrier USS George Washington had arrived in the area within days to conduct relief drops while a hospital ship was scheduled to serve as an offshore healthcare facility on demand. (Hodal, 2013) In this sense, the US-Philippines special relationship shielded both governments from any serious competition on the plane of good governance under emergency conditions.

A US government-linked report commissioned in the wake of the Haiyan relief effort described three key reasons why foreign military capabilities were crucial to the task. These were assessments collated through interviews with humanitarian professionals on the ground. Firstly, Typhoon Haiyan destroyed key infrastructure that would be essential for relief and resupply operations. These included airports, sea ports, roads, electronic communications systems and utility distribution networks. Once the Philippine military provided clearance, the US and other militaries could deploy their heavy lift capabilities to transport construction equipment, temporary substitute systems and relief packages to affected populations. They could 'restore comms' in military parlance. (CEDMHA, 2014, p. 12)

Secondly, given the widespread destruction and scattered locations of the survivors, the logistical capabilities of the most sophisticated militaries – read as mostly, non-Philippine, foreign militaries – would be most needed for successful rescues. And thirdly, because, military logistical capabilities were drilled for speed in deployment and execution of missions, they were critical in saving lives in the initial days following Haiyan's devastation. This allowed lives in immediate mortal danger to be saved while civilian government and NGO agencies organized themselves for a longer term effort amidst the anarchy on the ground. (CEDMHA, 2014, p. 12)

These points of post-mortem reiterate that 'speed and volume' were crucial to the difference that could be made if foreign militaries intervened in a constructive manner in tandem with a sizable infusion of aid monies. Seen in another way, 'speed and volume' in assistance is a credible narrative of one's great power status. Within the first eleven days following Haiyan's devastation, the BBC reported a simple ranking of HADR soft power in the following manner:

Aid at a glance

Asian Development Bank: US$500m (£312m) emergency loans and US$23m in grants

Australia: A$30m (US$28m, £17m)

China: 10m yuan (U$1.6m; £1m) in relief goods plus U$200,000 from government and Red Cross

European Commission: US$11m

Japan: US$50m, 25-person medical team

South Korea: US$5m, 40-strong medical team

UAE: US$10m

UK: US$32m aid package, sending aircraft carrier

US: US$20m, 300 military personnel, aircraft carrier (BBC News, 2013)

Given the widely reported fact that this was a relief effort in the wake of a storm of unprecedented lethality and magnitude, the dominant international media narrative focussed upon the standing of 'responsible great powers and members of the international society of states'. In the list above, the US, UK, Japan, Australia, the Asian Development Bank and the European Commission appear exceptional in their quantitative generosity. China's US$1.6 million was contrasted as 'paltry' and criticised as being inconsistent with its great power status. Other less magnanimous editorials and critics explained away China's impecunious response as a direct result of the flare-up in Sino-Philippine tensions over rival ownership claims in the Spratly islands in the South China Sea. China was signalling displeasure. (BBC News, 2013; Einhorn, 2013) Another perspective suggested that Chinese civil society and bureaucracy were in fact fragmented in their sentiments towards the Philippines: some Chinese believed the initial pledged amount was cautiously framed to test domestic reactions in China, while some Chinese university students criticised their government's public stinginess, and the majority of Chinese domestic netizens polled on the Phoenix News website felt that China ought never to have donated anything to the Philippines. (Perlez, 2013) By 20 November, China had apparently taken a leaf out of the US and UK playbook by announcing the despatch of its hospital ship, the Peace Ark, to Samar Province to support medical relief efforts there.

Yet another winner in the soft power contest in HADR worth noting was Japan. Premier Shinzo Abe's newfound enthusiasm for courting Southeast Asian states to outflank Chinese diplomatic inroads had paid off with his country's contribution of 1,000 troops aboard three naval vessels to the relief effort. Observers touted it as Japan's biggest military deployment since World War Two, and ironically to those areas of the Philippines where Japan suffered one of its worst naval defeats at the hands of US and allied forces. As quoted by the *Agence France Presse* and the *Bangkok Post*, the Philippine reaction on the ground spoke volumes of the psychological payoffs from Japan's embrace of HADR:

> Eulalia Macaya, World War Two survivor and typhoon survivor: 'I don't hold grudges anymore. There's no more bad blood between us.'

> General Roy Deveraturda, Commanding General of the Philippine Armed Forces' Central Command: 'This is a different world. We have seen the generosity of their donation…They have already showed remorse. Their help is most welcome.' (Agence France Presse, 2013)

If this were a subsidiary round in the ongoing Sino-Japanese geopolitical rivalry, this set was won by Japan in a landslide using the alloy of hard and soft power.

Correspondingly, South Korea's initial pledge to commit a rather small contingent of its own personnel, especially when compared to its Japanese counterpart, would significantly increase soon afterward. Though initially pledging a modest amount of only 40 medical staff, the South Korean Ministry of Defence would soon commit a relief delegation comprising of 500 military engineers and medical professionals in total (Jeon & Lee, Korean troops provide aid to Haiyan victims, 2013). Whether the change of heart was due to the Korean government's need to not be perceived as being overshadowed by its traditional rival is not fully known. What is known however is South Korea's enlargement of its dedication to assisting the Philippines soon after Japan's public relations success. Looking at it from this chapter's point of view then, it can at least be conceived that in the gamesmanship of humanitarian power projection, the need to showcase one's national capacity to competitors, all under the auspices of a philanthropic mission, not to mention at little to no political cost to oneself, might have provided an opportunity too tempting to pass up for the South Korean government.

The MH370 Airliner Mishap, 2014

Malaysia Airlines MH370 was supposed to have been a routine non-stop flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing operated by a Boeing 777-200 model airplane equipped with two Rolls Royce RB211 Trent engines with 12 crew members onboard, carrying 227 passengers, when it disappeared. (Chief Inspector of Air Accidents Malaysia, 2014) At 1241H Malaysia time, on 8 March 2014, MH370 took off from Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) following the usual communications clearance procedures from the control tower. Within a minute, ground communications were transferred from KLIA tower to Kuala Lumpur Air Traffic Control Centre (KLATCC). Hence from 1242H, KLATCC directed MH370 to follow a course towards 'waypoint IGARI'. KLATCC also advised MH370 to climb to flight level 250 at 1246H, and subsequently to flight level 350 at 1250H. The MH370 cockpit was recorded as having confirmed twice at 0101H and 0107H that it had attained flying altitude at flight level 350. At 0119H, MH370 was directed by KLATCC to contact Ho Chi Minh Air Traffic Control Centre (HCMATCC) on radio frequency 120.9 MHz, to which MH370 acknowledged with the nondescript phrase 'Goodnight Malaysian Three Seven Zero'. (Chief Inspector of Air Accidents Malaysia, 2014, p. 3) Approximately two minutes later, at 0121H, MH370 was observed on the radar screen at KLATCC as having complied with its direction to fly through 'waypoint IGARI'. The Malaysian official account noted that 'the radar label for MH370 disappeared from the radar screen at LUMPUR RADAR KLATCC.' (Chief Inspector of Air Accidents Malaysia, 2014, p. 3) Since the official preliminary report was silent on whether this disappearance from KLATCC screens was due to structural convention in the handover of navigational jurisdictions, or a reflection of the limited coverage of KLATCC radars, this is liable to be a subject of reasonable speculation and attribution of blame in the months after the airliner's disappearance. The attribution of faults technically covered the gamut from governance of technological competence and bureaucratic probity to competence in operating military radar and in search and rescue efforts.

It is therefore fair to state that debates about good governance have been heavily securitized by all parties involved when discussing aviation safety and accountability in the aftermath of MH370 and trading blame in the process. (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998) For instance, eight days after MH370 was reported as missing, it appeared that Beijing was deliberately securitizing the fact that 153 of the 227 passengers aboard the plane were Chinese nationals who deserved the logical and nationalistic support of their government. It was also an opportune moment given that Malaysian Premier Najib Tun Razak had declared twenty-four hours earlier that the plane was most likely directed off course by human intervention and that the South China Sea had probably been the wrong search area for the past eight days. Beijing's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Qin Gang demanded: 'we urge Malaysia to expand and define the search area for the missing plane and increase the intensity of the search…Chinese technical specialists are on the way to Malaysia to help in the investigation.' (Kor, 3 Countries end South China Sea Search, 2014) Malaysia Airlines' public communication postures had by then also been substituted by official announcements by Premier Najib and his Acting Minister for Transport, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, thereby heightening the interstate rivalry of narratives. (Kor, In Beijing; Relatives torn by latest revelations, 2014) Chinese state-run media and state-associated intellectuals continued to pummel the Malaysian handling of MH370 over the next few days using the theme of good governance and competence. *The China Daily* commented ruefully: 'the contradictory and piecemeal information Malaysia Airlines and its government have provided has made search efforts difficult and the entire incident even more mysterious…It is of the utmost importance that any loopholes that might have been exploited by hijackers or terrorists be identified as soon as possible because we need countermeasures to plug them.' (Channel News Asia, 2014) Apparently, Beijing's efficient online censors deliberately allowed indictments on Malaysia's

quality of governance to circulate on China's equivalent of Twitter, Sina Weibo, of which these were the sharpest:

(1) I'm really getting more and more disappointed in Malaysia and their unreliable government. I'm not planning on travelling there any time in the future.

(2) Vietnam keeps discovering. Malaysia keeps denying. China keeps sending rescue teams.

(3) Malaysia has been telling a week's worth of lies. Vietnam has fished out a week's worth of trash. China has forwarded a week's worth of news. (Channel News Asia, 2014)

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang capped a week's worth of Chinese editorials calling for Malaysia to practice transparency and personal honesty by urging Premier Najib to report the progress of the search 'in a timely, accurate and comprehensive manner' notwithstanding Beijing's own missteps in handling public opinion over the SARS and Bird Flu pandemics between 2003 and 2008 as well as the 2011 high speed rail crash near Wenzhou where 39 people died and nearly 200 were injured. Chinese state media had the audacity to contrast Malaysia's ineptitude with Beijing's handling of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake! (Channel News Asia, 2014) Around this time, Day Ten of the search, even the French aviation authorities issued veiled criticism of Malaysian governance, even as they volunteered to assist with MH370. Jean-Paul Troadec, a special adviser to France's aviation accident investigation bureau, drew on his organization's experience in recovering Air France Flight 447 which went down in the South Atlantic in 2009, but noted that 'the difference is that very soon after the accident of Air France Flight 447, we knew the limited area where the airplane was.' (Channel News Asia, 2014)

Once military assets were involved in the search for the missing airliner, the military technical aspects of each nation's detection capabilities entered into the rivalry: areas of radar coverage, helicopter capabilities and the issuance of official reports on the events and search operations concerned with MH370. The simultaneously defensive and self-aggrandizing tone of this Malaysian government-linked *New Straits Times* editorial hints at this dimension of non-kinetic military rivalry below the surface:

The plethora of questions and issues from this episode are many and understandable.

Among them is the supposed inaction of our air defence organization after its primary radar had tracked the aircraft, or more precisely, tracked an unidentifiable flight that had turned around, maintained a westerly course on a regular flight corridor and route, and flew away from our airspace.

During that time, there had not been any indication that a flight in the region was in distress or had declared emergency. Additionally, our intelligence services had not heard anything about an external air threat, air terrorism or hijacking situation likely to occur during that period of time.

…There is nothing wrong to query what the military knew, especially after MH370 had disappeared in the manner it did….

Nothing else that is unrelated or irrelevant to the search must, however, be elicited from the military. The government has decided that we are giving the search-and-recovery (SAR) effort a higher priority and even placing it above that of national security. That, despite the revelations on the incident, must not come to a stage of baring all of our military capabilities and defensive schemas. It is also not right to denigrate our military professionals or the assets they have just because there is a lacking of capabilities required for the SAR of this incident, which is in many ways unprecedented. (NST, 2014)

In other words, the MH370 incident contained a military dimension by virtue of the deliberate reliance on military detection capabilities. For most military analysts, the revealing of military radar data for SAR raises anew the debate over whether indirect revelations of detection ranges and the degree of sophistication of their radar readings undercuts one's national reputation and military readiness for the sake of humanitarian concerns. This latent competition of radar capabilities in both civilian and military spheres was evident from the first 24 hours when Vietnam accused Malaysia of losing track of MH370 before it ever crossed into the zone managed by the Ho Chi Minh Air Traffic Control Centre (HCMATCC). Subsequently, on 13 March 2014, Malaysian official revelations that their military radar tracked MH370 inadvertently and without deeming it sufficiently hostile to warrant an aerial intercept by a fighter jet stoked the issue further. An unnamed Malaysian official added that MH370 was tracked to the earlier mentioned 'waypoint IGREX' northwest of the Malaysian island of Penang, en route towards the Indian-controlled Andaman islands, and that this was 'the limit of Malaysia's military radar in that part of the country [i.e. Penang].' (The Star, 2014) Malaysian Transport Minister Hishammudin Hussein refused to declare the actual range of his country's military radar and instead suggested to the media that he would ask if neighbouring states could share their radar information.

One day later India was queried by the media over their military radar readings at the time of MH370's purported disappearance. Rear Admiral Sudhir Pillai, chief of staff of India's Andamans and Nicobar Command, told Reuters that 'we have many radar systems operating in this area, but nothing was picked up…It's possible that the military radars were switched off as we operate on an "as required" basis.' When Reuters journalists asked other Indian military officials why radars were never permanently turned on, one replied that it was simply 'too expensive' to do so. (Apps & Daniel, 2014) Even ever vigilant Singapore, boasting a significant long distance maritime patrol aircraft fleet and an 'Information Fusion Centre' hosting international liaison officers from 13 navies including Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, plus Australia, India, France, New Zealand, Peru and the US failed to supply new radar data. Instead, the Chairman of Singapore's Government Parliamentary Committee for Defence and Foreign Affairs blamed Malaysia for firstly, reluctance, and secondly, lateness in sharing military data with its SAR partners at the Information Fusion Centre concerning MH370's turn around towards the Andamans. (Lim, 2014) Although this Singaporean politician was chastised by his Prime Minister for disparaging Malaysian SAR efforts, the image of Malaysian operational tardiness had stuck in the global media. Following Malaysian Premier Najib's press conference on 15 March 2014 announcing the possibility that MH370 could have flown for several hours past the Andamans in a northerly arc towards Central Asia, the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan were quick to emphasize that their radar picked up nothing from MH370. The Head of Kazakhstan's Civil Aviation Authority even suggested that 'before reaching Kazakhstan, the plane would have to cross the territory of other countries en route, where the air zone is also carefully monitored.' (Channel News Asia, 2014)

The sense of military vulnerability was reiterated by multiple quotes from retired air vice-marshals, defence analysts and academics, thereby effectively securitizing 'military radar', 'gaps in Southeast Asian air defences', 'gaps in over ocean air surveillance' and 'gaps in global air surveillance'. China jumped on the bandwagon of electronic surveillance competition by openly berating the dilatory Malaysian responses to SAR and trumpeting its deployment of a fleet of warships, 10 surveillance satellites, icebreaker ships and the Haixun 01 oceanographic vessel into the search. On 20 March 2014, China officially sought Indian permission to join the search off India's Andaman and Nicobar islands, which India rebuffed unequivocally. Indian officials declared to the media that the Andaman and Nicobar islands were a major military outpost, hence 'we don't want Chinese warships sniffing around in the area on the pretext of hunting for the missing jetliner or anti-piracy patrols.' (Pandit, 2014) Australia, being located closest to the projected southern arc of MH370's flight trajectory after 'Waypoint IGREX', likewise began publicizing its radar capabilities, along with its American ally's vastly greater satellite capabilities. This military technological ante was captured approvingly by a Reuters report on 20 March 2014:

Australian civilian radar extends only some 200 km (125 miles) from its coast, an Australian official said on condition of anonymity, although its air defense radar extends much further. Australia's military could not be reached for comment on Saturday and if it did detect a transponder-less aircraft heading south, there is no suggestion any alarm was raised.

U.S. military satellites monitor much of the globe, including some of the remotest oceans, looking primarily for early warning of any ballistic missile launch from a submarine or other vessel.

After the aircraft's initial disappearance a week ago, U.S. officials said their satellites had detected no signs of a mid-air explosion. It is unclear if such systems would have detected a crash landing in the southern Indian Ocean. (Apps & Daniel, 2014)

Although at the time of writing it is still unclear if the bulk of the wreckage of MH370 will ever be recovered by SAR operations mounted either unilaterally or multilaterally, it is quite evident that the preliminary and ongoing SAR operations mounted by the various national militaries and paramilitary agencies have reproduced a form of strategic competition by comparing radar capabilities, as well as pointing out and deflecting shortcomings in detection systems. This game of one-upmanship ought to be treated seriously as a proxy form of security rivalry that can be productively employed to displace a possible opponent's confidence in his own capabilities. This is potentially soft power of technological capability employed with a tinge of menace. Firstly, radar and its associated subsidiary detection devices such as the ACARS, air traffic control and satellites in space, are collectively the only technology capable of detecting aircraft travelling at high speeds. Secondly, depending on the sophistication of radar detection technology operated within national 'flight information regions' and air defence zones, flying heights and speeds can be computed almost instantaneously, and irregularities automatically flagged up on radar plots and computer monitors. Civilian and military air traffic managers can then follow procedures and initiate emergency operations, or direct military aircraft towards airborne intercepts of suspicious targets.

For governments such as China, India, Vietnam and Malaysia, casting doubt on their rivals' radar capabilities, or being at the receiving end of them, signifies the upping of stakes in their ongoing geopolitical rivalries, whether over landed borders or maritime claims on islets in the South China Sea. Between middle and great powers such as Australia, India and the USA vis-à-vis China, the mere demonstration of sophistication and quantity of 'electronic eyes' over the seas, under the seas, over land and in the air conveys subtle deterrent messages about one's capabilities in any future 'theatre information battlespace' since all military operations now require militaries to look deep into their opponents' mobilization signatures and testing of mobile offensive assets. (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1997)

Our treatment of competition amongst radar capabilities is perhaps only the most visible form of military technological competition. Further research on MH370 may unveil other forms of technological competition between the Asia-Pacific militaries in the arena of HADR. Before we conclude this section, we highlight two others as brief illustrations of alternative proxies for security competition. Firstly, naval, shipborne helicopters have been flagged out by Chinese editorials as something the Chinese destroyers, amphibious landing ships and replenishment vessels found themselves short of, in contrast to their US naval rivals, the USS Pinckney and USS Kidd, which each had two MH-30R Seahawk helicopters, capable of nearly round the clock sorties. (Zhao Lei, 2014) Interestingly, the Republic of Singapore Navy, which hardly played a major role in the more expansive Indian Ocean phase of the search, justified in July 2014 its decision to acquire 'Joint

Maritime Mission Ships' featuring dedicated naval helicopter capacity in terms of the need to respond to regional HADR situations by providing *in situ* aerial command and control assets.

Secondly, the publication of nationally sanctioned reports on the progress of SAR operations constitutes a form of security competition by proxy. Not unlike the status of Defence White Papers and UN-generated inspection dossiers diagnosing a violation of norms, reports by Malaysia and Australia respectively on the train of events on 8 March 2014, and on the state of the Indian Ocean phase of the search, allow the national authorities producing them to confer a large degree of legitimacy on their actions in a *post facto* manner. It is of course open to interpretation as to whether these forms of self-conferment of technical authority and image burnishing prove credible in the perception of Asia-Pacific-wide national public opinion. But in the absence of credible scientifically verifiable hard data, these reports may substitute approximations and limited facts for the ultimate truths. Therein lies the political value in producing a 'preliminary official report' in compliance with Malaysian obligations to international regimes such as the ICAO, or in Australia's case, the report titled *MH370 – Definition of Underwater Search Areas* published on 26 June 2014 explains the status of the search through scientific modelling in order to legitimise the next steps in the SAR effort pursued by Australia, Malaysia and China under Australian leadership. If in the eventuality that MH370's debris is never found, these official documents would serve *post facto* to exonerate the respective governments overseeing the critical parts of the SAR operation. (Chief Inspector of Air Accidents Malaysia, 2014; ATSB, 2014)

Towards the Capability of Interchangeability: Hard and Soft Power Conjoined

If one might ever be tempted to ponder a potential competitive analysis to the thesis of soft power, HADR operations in Asia would serve as a fine exploratory vehicle. HADR falls under the broad category of national technical competence, and by extension, it is a reflection of both the recipient and sending states' domestic governance and political culture. Military forces, once authorized to participate in HADR, extend their sender's interests and strategic ostentation. Likewise, the military forces of the host states are under psychological pressure either to measure up against the interveners or to prove their equal in partnering arrangements. This form of non-combat competition is a trial of soft power using hard power means. In an ironic way, despite recent scholarship to the contrary, (Collins, 2013) Asia's human security dimensions may be militarized via a misleadingly titled 'competition of compassion'. It is harmless, and quite respectable, if the major states of the Asian region treat this as a strategically valuable form of competition short of outright kinetic war. Moreover, if one takes seriously the prognosis that the Asia-Pacific is likely to remain one of the most natural disaster-prone regions of the world, then security competition by proxy is here to stay.

Still, if unspoken proxies are indeed taking place via competitive HADR, the looming question of what this could mean for actual armed conflict within Asia, now that tensions in the South China Sea have caused speculation for an up and coming clash, certainly cannot be ignored. Our thesis is in fact related to the scholarship of Ian Storey and Jeffrey Engstrom. (Storey, 2012; Engstrom, 2013) But instead of judging HADR and military upgrades as something binary, which is to view such upgrades as either inclining towards conflict or an implicit balance of power (a.k.a. peace), we are positing that operations for disaster relief may have created a third dimension in which military contests regularly do occur in benign forms. Considering that tensions persist amongst the two biggest players in the region, the United States and China, HADR affiliation between the two has continued to mature notwithstanding on-going tensions. (Johnson, 2015) It would appear that both powers have utilized disaster management as a proto-confidence building measure in which the conflicting forces for diplomacy and those of China's strict interpretation of its territorial sovereignty can still coexist, with HADR greasing the foundations for future progress.

All the same, it is important to keep in mind that what appears to be benign action can easily be modified for combative purposes in this gray world of humanitarian assistance. Occupying that bizarre space where charity and military interests coincide, recent stockpiles for future HADR operations by the US have already begun in places like Vietnam, Cambodia, and others that have yet to be announced. (Freedberg, 2016) Even as the types of hardware stored have been publicised for strictly relief purposes, the fact that such logistical hubs are coming into play is enough to imagine a prospect for gathering lethal ordnance should the US and the host nation deem it necessary. This form of projection, capable of *both* lifesaving and life taking, would certainly allow for that interchangeable option whereby the soft power delivered through hard power means can switch gears should authorities consider it proper to keep certain players, such as China, in check.

From this vantage point, it may not be sacrilegious to consider that the Kantian principles, for which the entire spirit of HADR is ideologically derived from, have been turned upside down in relation to this particular development in international security. (Kant, 1996) While on the surface the assisting of peoples in need may appear to subscribe to the philosopher's recipe for establishing a self-reinforcing peace between giver and recipient, this reciprocity of trust and rationale of not fighting but earning goodwill carries an implicit paradox. In place of exchanging good faith and avoiding conflict, HADR campaigns now offer a testing ground to judiciously size up and even outdo competitors in ways other than kinetic combat, while retaining the assurance of maintaining an existential strategic rivalry with a cleaner political conscience.

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