Calculation of Goodwill: Humanitarianism, Strategic Interests, and the U.S. Response to Typhoon Yolanda

Chris J. Dolan\textsuperscript{A} & Alyynna J. Lyon\textsuperscript{B}

U.S. participation in the global response to Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) was compelled by both humanitarian concerns and strategic interests. U.S. action can be understood as a product of domestic and global discourse, historical milieu, logistical factors, and domestic political determinants highlighting the importance of Asia and the Pacific in U.S. foreign policy. Consistent with previous engagements, it is apparent in this case that humanitarian concerns aligned with strategic interests in shaping the extent of U.S. involvement. Our examination begins with a conceptualizing the determining factors in humanitarian operations. This provides specific focus on the degree with which historical milieu and larger episodes of previous engagements, media coverage and public support, human security and humanitarian concerns, and strategic interests enter into considerations. Our study then applies these concepts to understand the decision-making calculus in Operation Damayan. We conclude that the prevailing literature should focus more on a comprehensive understanding of interactive concepts and dynamic factors that include state actors, norms, domestic determinants, global factors, and historical milieu.

\textbf{Keywords:} Typhoon Yolanda, Operation Damayan, historical milieu, human security, strategic interests

The goal of this examination is to assess the complexities of U.S. participation in humanitarian relief operations in response to Typhoon Yolanda, which made landfall in the Visayas region in the Philippines on November 8, 2013. Not only did the humanitarian mission, dubbed Operation Damayan, garner significant media coverage and public influence, it underscored the strategic importance of the Philippines in the Obama Administration’s foreign policy “pivot” or rebalance to Asia and the Pacific. It was also not the first time the United States participated in a large-scale humanitarian mission with strategic implications in the region. In 2004, when the Indian Ocean Tsunami killed hundreds of thousands of people, the United States participated in relief and recovery efforts that ultimately reestablished order, reconstructed economic institutions, and led to peace in Aceh Indonesia. In 2011, in response to the tsunami that triggered nuclear disaster in Fukushima Japan, the United States moved quickly to bolster its most important ally in the Western Pacific. Therefore, in Operation Damayan, the U.S. role was shaped by several interactive determinants that co-evolved as part of a broader historical episode of humanitarian engagements and strategic considerations.

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Determinants of Involvement in Humanitarian Operations

U.S. involvement in humanitarian operations is determined and shaped by media coverage, public support, historical milieu, as well as strategic interests and human security concerns.

Historical Milieu and Larger Episodes

To examine one humanitarian operation without considering previous engagements and interventions is to ignore or downplay the complexity and dynamism of each case of human suffering. For example, the large-scale U.S.-led humanitarian involvement in multilateral operations in response to Super Typhoon Yolanda cannot be divorced from the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami or the 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan as well as other efforts to alleviate human suffering. This dynamic can be conceptualized in terms of policymaking and decision-making processes shaped by comprehensive, interconnected relationships determining policy outcomes across cases of human suffering. Previous cases of human suffering can be perceived through historical milieu and seen as larger episodes of strategic and humanitarian involvement (Oliver and Myers 2002). Historical milieu can be used to explain how the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan shaped and interacted with the 2013 Super Typhoon Yolanda, two tragedies that prompted far-reaching U.S.-led humanitarian responses.

U.S.-led humanitarian actions also coevolve within a broader context of shifting normative and strategic conditions that demand responsive adaptation strategies by policy elites (McGowen 1974; Rosenau 1970, 36; Thorson 1974). The degree of foreign policy adaption is shaped and determined by an interactive and diffuse set of dynamics functioning on both institutional (policy elites operating in political authority structures) and ideational (policymaker perceptions and images of domestic and global contexts) levels (Rosenau 1992). Our framework captures the idea of “linkage politics” in demonstrating how humanitarian missions launched in response to natural disasters are characterized by both global and domestic forces (Putnam 1988; Rosenau 1969; Wilkenfeld 1973).

Humanitarian operations involve actions and reactions that function in response to altering circumstances, historical narratives containing moral evaluations, and as broader responses to systemic and nonlinear continuity and change. Put simply, historical milieu might increase public and elite confidence in specific operations. This “halo effect” might result in humanitarian relief operations garnering at least the same level of success as past missions (Jentleson 1992).

Media Coverage and the Public

We believe that it is reasonable to suggest that media coverage, public perceptions and awareness, and policymaker decisions within the foreign policymaking process are filtered through humanitarian action. To understand historical milieu and
humanitarian actions, we observe the intensity of news coverage and the role of the public and public perceptions in Operation Damayan in relation to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and the 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan.

Decisions to address human suffering are not only shaped by historical milieu and seen as larger episodes of involvement; they are also shaped by media coverage and the public (Mueller 2005; Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey 1987; Shirky 2011). Livingston (1997) postulates that the media can enhance the role of the public in inducing or impeding an intervention. Media can serve as a “force multiplier” and induce an intervention by shortening the time in which decision makers form their policy responses or act as an “emotional inhibitor” and impede an intervention by covering events with a focus on casualties (Frizis 2013; Livingston 1997). Buzan (2004, 17) argues that the potential for humanitarian action increases when nonstate actors encourage media to raise awareness of a natural disaster, emergency, or armed conflict. Media are likely to exercise more influence and persuasion within foreign policy decision-making circles when there is significant uncertainty and disagreement among policymakers (Bob 2005; Gowing 1994; Minear, Scott, and Weiss 1996, 73; Strobel 1997).

Instances of human suffering are likely to become news events with both traditional and social media outlets intensifying coverage and raising the level of human interest. This ebb and flow contributes to a “media attention cycle,” in which degrees of news reporting and public coverage shape and determine media coverage of human suffering (McPhail, Schweingruber, and McCarthy 1998). These norms influence governmental interests and policy action, especially since different forms of media create perceptions and images of suffering and crisis at particular moments (Finnemore 1996, 2–3; Ignatieff 1998). Research demonstrates public empathy tends to rise and fall when human suffering and crises occur around the world, resulting in so-called compassion fatigue (Belloni 2005; Dean 2003; Minear, Scott, and Weiss 1996). Digital media have the potential to tap into public sympathy by capturing and sharing stories and images of human suffering (Shirky 2011).

Social media coverage has tested conventionally understood boundaries between formal and informal modes of covering global crises while at the same time enhancing citizen journalism (Palen and Liu 2007; Williams 2013). Although the connection between the increase in the number of persons accessing the Internet and social networking sites with political engagement is tenuous at best, one study finds that individuals who seek out information on social networking mediums lead to greater levels of civic and political participation and awareness (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela 2012; Shirky 2011).

The public can play an influential role in shaping policy responses to human suffering by limiting the range of options available to policymakers and making decisions to use military resources politically risky (Feaver 1998). However, intensity of public awareness is determined by the extent of news coverage of human suffering and public opinion. Elites are likely to be influenced by public attitudes prior to or in the wake of foreign policy actions, especially with regard to the use of military force in response to armed conflicts and natural disasters (Baum 2002; Burstein 2003;
Sobel 2003). One study suggests public support for humanitarian interventions can help Congress and the presidency overcome and transcend partisan opposition and ideological constraints (Hildebrandt et al. 2013). The general orientation of the public may lead policymakers to shield themselves from mass public opinion on foreign policy (Jacobs and Page 2005).

Yet, the level of public attention or degree of support for humanitarian operations is unclear. Some assume a policy-driven approach and discuss the notion of human costs, risk and cost-aversion (Ehrlich and Maestas 2010; Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Gartner and Segura 1998; Kam and Kinder 2008). According to Donnelly (1993), governments recognize that the political benefits of humanitarian interventions are low, even if pursued within a multilateral context. Howell and Pevehouse (2005) contend greater levels of public support could increase the probability of a successful mission. On the whole, this literature maintains that public support is largely a function of outcomes (Berinsky 2009; Gartner 2008; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005/2006; Klarevas 2002; Mueller 1994).

**Human Security**

With the end of the Cold War, humanitarian action became an important normative pillar in the emerging new world order. In 1991, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 688 after the Persian Gulf War to assist in the crisis facing the Kurds in Northern Iraq. The operation did not seek authorization from the Iraqi government and altered the terms under which states acting through inter-governmental organizations may intervene. Although this was reinforced by the U.S.-led mission in Somalia one year later, aid and relief operations in the war-torn East African country highlighted the risks of intervention (Chopra and Weiss 1992).


Natural disasters can involve significant loss of innocent human life, damage critical infrastructure, and destruction of social, political, and economic systems, leaving people vulnerable to hazards and jeopardizing their human security (Bankoff, Hilhorst, and Frerks 2004; Pelling 2003; Wisner et al. 2003). Strong and effective humanitarian operations should provide physical and logistical assistance and mitigate suffering from natural disasters and armed conflicts. These missions are based on the norm of the right to receive help and the obligation of actors with means and capabilities to deliver aid to victims (ICRC 1977).

Research demonstrates that normative and ideational factors shape the material resources and physical capacities of states (Biersteker 1989; Linklater 1998). As Wendt (1995, 71–81) states, “material resources only acquire meaning for human action
through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded.” Finnemore (1996, 2–3) adds, the “normative context also changes over time, and as internationally held norms and values change, they create coordinated shifts in state interests and behaviour across the system.” Claude (1966, 367–379) emphasizes the significance of legitimate action and Wheeler (2000, 4) observes that since “legitimacy is constitutive of international action,” norms and beliefs can either constrain states or force them to set criteria for humanitarian operations. Commonly-held beliefs serve as the basis for understanding global norms regarding sovereignty, humanitarian action, and human suffering (Acharya and Buzan 2010; Bellamy 2003; Buzan 2004; Gibbs 2009; Kuperman 2008; Orford 2003; Reus-Smit 2001; Wheeler 2000). Consequently, human security must be incorporated into an understanding of how global actors respond to natural disasters, recover from catastrophe, and help rebuild in the wake of destruction (Cox 1999; Shaw 2000; Sinclair 1996).

Humanitarian action rests on assumptions that people possess rights and freedoms that states and global institutions must protect regardless of social and economic condition (Butler 2001; Devetak 2007; Janse 2006). Shared notions of morality define human rights and sustain a mutual humanity (Fixdal and Smith 1998). Failing to address physical security and basic protections of people suffering from natural disasters would constitute a deprivation of human rights and human security (Coates 2003; ICRC 1977).

Several international legal instruments establish guidelines for minimum standards of humanity. Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions sets out binding standards by maintaining that states should treat persons humanely, prohibit violence and assaults on human dignity, and must treat the injured and sick. Moreover, a state’s failure to consent to the delivery of humanitarian aid within its borders threatens the survival of the civilian population (Stoffels 2004). If states block humanitarian assistance, they would be in violation of international statutes in the Geneva Conventions (Henckaerts and Doswald-Beck 2009, 105, 193). However, the need for the afflicted state to consent to humanitarian operations within its borders is not clearly established. While human security provides a principled basis for humanitarian operations, state sovereignty is a powerful force that limits intervention (Devetak 2007).

Strategic Interests and State Sovereignty

The role of strategic factors, such promoting economic prosperity and balancing against challengers, means that state sovereignty and jurisdictional exclusivity are key to whether states become involved in humanitarian operations (Chayes and Chayes 1996). International statutes reinforce these. The Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS 1967, Article 18) states that “No State or groups of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason what so ever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State.” Article 2 (7) in the U.N. Charter raises the right of state sovereignty, preventing powerful states from violating the territorial integrity of weaker states. Pham (2004) contends that the shroud of humanitarianism might
conceal state interests while Franck and Rodley (1973) emphasize that humanitarian norms provide great potential for major powers to engage in self-interested pursuits.

Others caution against state utilization of economic and military resources for pursuing anything short of national interests defined as self-interested motivations. Bellamy (2003) suggests realists oppose humanitarian interventions because military activities to simply aid others do not work and are not vital to the national interest. Wheeler (2000, 30) explains that “states will not intervene for primarily humanitarian reasons because they are always motivated by considerations of national self-interest.” While some caution against using foreign policy for philanthropy, others might accept intervention in order to help those in need as long as it does not challenge state security interests, impose high financial costs, or result in loss of life (see Wheeler 2004).

Humanitarian operations may be interpreted through a long-term strategic perspective. States might take part in humanitarian actions if they promote efforts to balance against a rival, attain economic goals, or to enhance regional stability. A state might be able to safeguard or improve its image or even build goodwill and trust with other states in a region deemed vital to the national interest (Farer 2005, 228). However, as we observe in the next section of this article, human security concerns converged with strategic considerations in Operation Damayan. Consequently, we cannot separate self-interested state motivations from humanitarian considerations (see figure 1).

**Figure 1: Interactive Framework**

![Interactive Framework Diagram](image)

**Operation Damayan**

On November 8, 2013, for 16 hours, Category 5 super Typhoon Yolanda swept through six provinces in the Philippines, killing more than 6,000, displacing 670,000, affecting roughly 11.3 million people, and causing between $6.5 billion and $15 billion in damages (see figure 2) (Agence France-Presse 2013; Gladstone 2013;
UNOCHA 2013). In the coastal communities of Eastern Samar, and Western Leyte, there was little to no defense against Yolanda. In six provinces, the typhoon destroyed the power and telecommunications infrastructure, disrupted water supply lines, cut-off food provisions, demolished pharmacies, damaged airports, and blocked roads (de Leon and Zavis 2013; Fisher 2014). Although advanced warnings saved many lives and the speed of the storm limited flood damage, the humanitarian crisis hampered relief efforts. The United States responded with Operation Damayan, which allocated military and civilian resources to bolster the Philippines, an important strategic ally.

Figure 2: Residential Damage from Typhoon Yolanda


**Humanitarian Catastrophe and the Multilateral Response**

The lack of available personnel made it difficult for the Philippine government to quell looting and reestablish order (Fisher 2014). Aid workers feared even greater desperation in poorer and more remote areas beyond the cities where there was little or no communication. To save lives, humanitarian assistance offered by the International Red Cross, the United Nations, governments, and private groups needed to reach the victims quickly, especially given the 1,096 evacuation centers near the strike zone could only hold 240,800 people. Although it took 10 days for relief supplies to reach the most devastated areas, especially in Leyte province, the most remote islands and areas received little to no immediate assistance (Jacobs 2013).

Food insecurity was an immediate concern, since the rural population depends on agriculture inputs before the growing season ends in January. Also, 1.1 million
homes were destroyed and tens of thousands were reported missing, raising concerns about human trafficking. In response, the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) supplied assistance and protection to the displaced and the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) assisted families separated by the storm. Although the widespread devastation prompted a number of states to pledge aid (see table 1), a much larger effort was required to coordinate emergency assistance and provide clean drinking water, sanitation, food, shelter, management of the dead and medical treatment to survivors to stave off diseases and infections.

Table 1: Global Relief Efforts and Action Plan in Response to Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 10 Donors to the Emergency</th>
<th>Amount ($US millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private individuals and organizations</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.N. Un-earmarked funds</td>
<td>87.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>51.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>38.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>26.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Emergency Response Fund</td>
<td>25.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>19.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>16.6</td>
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**Global Action and Strategic Response Plan (November 2013–October 2014)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private individuals and organizations</th>
<th>Amount ($US millions)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.N. Un-earmarked funds</td>
<td>87.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>40.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>39.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center Emergency Response Fund</td>
<td>25.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>24.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>19.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>15.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>12.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Commission</td>
<td>11.7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: http://www.unocha.org/crisis/typhoonYolanda (Haiyan)/funding

In order to coordinate rescue and relief efforts, the United States sent military personnel and deployed its advanced logistical capabilities. It dispatched 50 naval ships to the hardest hit areas and aircraft-dropped supplies and equipment from the U.S.S. George Washington carrier to remote locations. Efforts focused on reopening critical links throughout the archipelago, especially on Panay Island where Roxnas
and Tacloban airports are located, so food and water, medical supplies, and other humanitarian assistance could be delivered. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy, Philippine government, nongovernmental organizations, and U.N. agencies released funds to implement the first stage of the emergency response, deployed disaster assistance teams to assess humanitarian needs, positioned emergency relief supplies, and determined levels of aid. Also, the State Department established a crisis response task force to facilitate coordination with other agencies responsible for managing assistance requested by the U.N. Humanitarian Country Team (USAID 2013).

Prior to the typhoon, multilateral assistance to the Philippines remained relatively low from 2000 to 2008 but more than doubled from $40 million to $107 million between 2008 and 2009. The level of assistance increased at a slower rate to roughly $113 million in 2010 and $123 million 2011 (see table 2). The increase was made in response to disasters from earthquakes and other typhoons, as well as to contain the conflict in Mindanao. Disaster assistance largely went to relief and preparedness, which increased from 2.5% in 2007 to 39.2% in 2011 (GHA 2012a).

Regarding U.S. bilateral aid, USAID delivered $65.3 million for disaster relief, recovery, and preparedness to the Philippines; in 2013 alone, it provided over $7 million in aid. Much of this assistance helped with the formulation of a disaster risk reduction program and the adoption of an incident management system aimed at enhancing the capacity of national and local governments by managing the causal factors of disasters and lessening the vulnerability of people and property. The program was implemented in response to Tropical Storm Ketsana (Ondoy) in 2009, Typhoon Megi (Juan) in 2010, Tropical Storm Washi (Sendong) in 2011, and Typhoon Bopha (Pablo) in 2012 (USAID 2014).

Complicating the humanitarian response was the government’s armed struggles with rebel groups operating in the impacted areas. In Mindanao and adjacent islands, conflicts raged between government forces and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Abu Sayyaf, and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). This was exacerbated by violent attacks by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and the New People’s Army (NPA).

In the immediate wake of the typhoon, the Philippine government reached out to armed Communist rebels to cooperate with humanitarian relief operations and help the government with reconstruction (Philips 2013). Just one month after the typhoon struck, the government and MILF rebels signed a peace agreement, ending a decades-long insurgency that killed tens of thousands. Although MILF gave up its demand for independence, they won greater autonomy in Bangsamoro in Mindanao (Marszal 2013).
Table 2: Multilateral Aid to Philippines, 2005–2011 ($ millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Spain</td>
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<td>the Netherlands</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Italy</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
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<td>1.8</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
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<td>the Netherlands</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Japan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<th>Country</th>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
<td>48.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>23.1</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
<td>11.6</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>France</td>
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Source: Development Initiatives based on Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Development Assistance Committee, and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance data, Financial Tracking Service; Reports and data be found at: http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/countryprofile/philippines

Strategic Considerations

Following the U.S. drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Obama Administration placed the Asia-Pacific region at the center of its foreign policy agenda with its so-called pivot or rebalance to Asia (Clinton 2011). Therefore, the U.S. response was not only immediate; it was designed to express support for an important ally and reinforce an already strong bilateral relationship.

The United States imports more goods and services from Asia than any other zone and is now one of the largest export markets in the world. In 2010, 61% of U.S. goods and 72% of agricultural exports went to states in Asia and the Pacific (USTR 2011). East Asia is expected to surpass NAFTA and the Euro zone as the world's largest trading zone as the region adds 175 million more people by 2030 and expects to transport and consume more oil and raw materials (IMF 2011, 31). The widespread destruction of the typhoon had the potential to cause regional economic instability.
Furthermore, Philippine leaders have suggested the U.S. response strengthened the case for a more active and increased military presence in the country (Quismundo 2013; Romualdez 2013). Prior to the typhoon, the United States maintained a considerable air and naval presence in the Western Pacific and stationed thousands of troops in South Korea, Japan, and Guam. The Philippines, in addition to Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, has sought a greater U.S. military presence to check and balance both China and North Korea and to ensure freedom of navigation and commerce.

In addition, the disaster provided the Obama Administration an opportunity to show the region the good it could do, especially in relation to China. Although China did pledge aid to the Philippines, its initial donation totaled just $100,000, but increased its pledge to $1.6 million and dispatched a hospital ship following global media criticism (Perlez 2013). The total package was a small percentage of the overall amount given by governments. China’s response was probably shaped by tensions with the Philippines over disputed islands in the South China Sea and with Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, resulting in a buildup of naval forces and air defense zones.

A more powerful and assertive China will probably shape the region in ways that run counter to U.S. interests (Cohen 2010; Fackler 2013; Nathan and Scobell 2012; Swaine 2011). The worry is that China will seek to alter norms and rules in the region, thereby complicating U.S. efforts to maintain the strategic balance of power (Inboden 2011). U.S. concern was most visibly expressed with its decision to increase its military presence to 2,500 Marines deployed to Darwin, Australia. For years, the United States sought to enhance its ship and aircraft access to Philippine military stations, especially at Subic Bay. While U.S. humanitarian assistance to the Philippines was an expression of goodwill, it helped pave the way for the United States to legitimize and expand its military presence in Southeast Asia and rebalance against China in the region (see figure 3). According to Thayer, “It is not that the United States used assistance to promote rebalancing, but that rebalancing enabled the U.S. to respond so decisively” (Mogato and Belford 2013).

Historical Milieu, Media, and the Public

Historical milieu and the roles of the media and the public in the foreign policymaking process determined and shaped the extent of the U.S. response to the typhoon. Previous natural disasters informed the range of options available to the policy elites formulating the U.S. response to the human suffering; however, the type of media coverage and the degree of public engagement with the disaster varied in relation to previous catastrophic events (Oliver and Myers 2002). The case of Typhoon Yolanda is interactive with previous policies and experiences, especially when it comes to the strategic importance of Asia and the Pacific in U.S. foreign policy as well as efforts to address the image of the United States.

Following the 2004 tsunami, U.S. humanitarian assistance and aid to Indonesia helped build goodwill and appreciation and bring about a significant revival following the tsunami by providing it with aid for childhood immunization and to fight corruption and abuse of women, promote human rights, and to train for disaster relief
and recovery missions. There were also significant military-to-military contacts, such as joint defense operations and the sale of weapons systems (Denmark, Sukma, and Parthemore 2010; Gates 2008; Haseman and Lachica 2005; Rice 2006).

The massive humanitarian operation and subsequent cooperation between the two governments helped improve the image of the United States in Indonesia where anti-U.S. sentiment was strong since the beginning of the Iraq War. Following the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, the percentage of favorable views of the United States fell to 15%, but after the United States participated in humanitarian operations that number jumped to 79%. U.S. assistance improved their impression of the United States.
with positive views increasing from 15% in 2003 to 38% in 2005 (Pew Research Global Attitudes Project 2005). At roughly the same time, U.S. public opinion polls revealed that 83% of Americans approved of the U.S. relief mission (ABC News/Washington Post 2004). Favorable views of the United States from Indonesians did not return to pre-Iraq War levels until 2009. According to Blank (2013), “The goodwill the tsunami relief brought the U.S. is incalculable. Nearly a decade later, the effort may rank as one of the most concrete reasons Southeast Asian nations trust the long-term U.S. commitment to a strategy of Asian re-balancing.”

The 2004 tsunami was one of the first natural disasters in which global news organizations relied on images and video from individuals in locations where waves crashed onto coastal areas (Macmillan 2005a). The human suffering depicted online and delivered by television served as the foundation for citizen media coverage of subsequent natural disasters and armed conflicts (Handwerk 2005; Macmillan 2005b; Pottinger 2005; Regan 2005; Schwartz 2005). However, it was difficult and challenging for media networks to determine the accuracy and veracity of the overall coverage and extent of the damage.

For the United States, Indonesia is important in maintaining stability in Southeast Asia given its strategic location within maritime transport lines (Caryl 2005; Sullivan 2004). Moreover, the country has experienced terrorism, sectarian violence, and armed conflict. According to former Secretary of State Colin Powell, “This is an investment not only in the welfare of these people; it’s an investment in our own national security” (see O’Lery 2005). Given the significance of Indonesia in Asia and the Pacific, the leading government donors of humanitarian assistance committed $717.5 million in 2005 before falling to $184 million in 2011 with U.S. bilateral aid increasing from $43.3 to $82.2 during this same time (GHA 2012).

Then, the United States moved quickly in Japan following the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant on March 11, 2011. The catastrophic failure of three nuclear reactors occurred when the facility was struck by a tsunami triggered by the Tōhoku earthquake leading to what became the worst nuclear catastrophe since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. The U.S. responded with Operation Tomodachi to shore up the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) responding to the disaster with the deployment of roughly 24,000 U.S. military personnel, a carrier group off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture, 19 naval vessels, and 140 aircraft (Wada 2011). U.S. forces aided SDF with the rescue and evacuation of survivors, delivery of meals and safe drinking water, medical assistance, and with repairs to infrastructure (Mizushima 2012). Operation Tomodachi was considered a successful joint humanitarian operation that “validated years of bilateral training, exercises, and planning” and promoted regional economic stability (Mizushima 2012).

Tomodachi was positively received by broad segments of the Japanese population with support for the United States soaring in the wake of the humanitarian operation. Japan’s perception of the United States was already positive prior to the nuclear disaster with 66% expressing favorable views of the United States in a spring 2010 poll. One year later, after the tsunami struck Fukushima, that number skyrocketed to 85%, which was the highest positive rating among the 23 nations included in the
poll of the U.S. global image (see table 3) (Pew 2013). A similar survey conducted at the end of 2011 found that 82% expressed a “friendly feeling” toward the United States (Wike 2012).

Table 3: Favorable Views of the United States

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>85</td>
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Source: Pew Research Global Attitudes Project (2013a, 2013b)

U.S. relief efforts reinforced America’s commitment to Japan, reflecting the significance of the region in U.S. foreign policy and contributing to a general sense of goodwill (Konishi and Oros 2014). For example, 57% of Japanese believed that the United States provided a “great deal” of humanitarian assistance during and after the catastrophe in contrast to the less than 20% who believed the United Nations, European Union, and China provided a “great deal” of aid. Also, many Japanese believed that the United States is a nation that considers the interests of other countries. In 2010, 31% of the Japanese public believed that the United States takes into account the interests of other countries; in the wake of the nuclear disaster and the U.S.-led humanitarian mission, the percentage increases to 51% (Wike 2012). As table 3 demonstrates, the United States received high approval ratings in the Philippines before Typhoon Yolanda with 85% holding favorable views (Pew 2013). Also, many Filipinos consistently viewed the United States as a trusted ally of the Philippines before and after Typhoon Yolanda (see graph 1). In December 2013, one month after the typhoon struck, 82% believed that the United States was the most trusted country, an all-time high (Rood 2014).

The emergence of China as a military power has been viewed with consternation in the Philippines and Japan. Japan has the most negative views of China where only 5% expressed a positive view of China with 82% describing the island disputes and naval tensions as security concerns. While tensions with China are concerns in the Philippines with 84% expressing confidence in President Obama making the right decisions in global affairs. In addition, 67% of Japanese, 67% of Filipinos, and 61% of South Koreans believe that the United States, not China, is the leading economic power in the region (Pew 2013).

Network and social media coverage of the typhoon and its aftermath brought the suffering and plight of the victims to the global community and triggered donations and aid from around the world. CNN International provided 24/7 news coverage of the devastation to Tacloban in Leyete province and the surrounding areas as Philippine government television and private networks were criticized for not providing sufficient exposure of the impact of the typhoon (Reyes 2013). Although the storm was a significant climate event, there were only a few mentions of climate change by some of the global news networks in the coverage of the typhoon. According to Pew, MSNBC
devoted four times as much coverage to healthcare (over 3 hours) than the typhoon (41 minutes) with Fox News giving 80 times more coverage to healthcare than the typhoon. However, CNN devoted more than 3.5 hours of news coverage to healthcare and roughly 5 hours to the typhoon (Jurkowitz, Vogt, and Anderson 2013) (see figure 4).

Coverage of the typhoon on social media was broader and more widespread than more established global media networks. Data collected by the social media monitoring group Radian6 reported more than 3.2 million general mentions of the typhoon on Facebook and Twitter between November 6 and 14. The highest percentage of mentions (74.9%) was on Twitter, followed by Facebook (19.2%) and mainstream news organizations (2.7%) with comments, blogs, videos, and forum replies filling in the remaining percentages. Those on Twitter were able to spread information and images about the natural disaster and kept content about damage and casualties up to date (Bandojo 2013).

Media coverage focused on Tacloban in Leyete province, which garnered 34.2% of the mentions as measured over the 6-day period between November 8 and 14 with other devastated areas overlooked by media. Many believed that the locus of the storm was in Leyete, even though it carved a destructive path in Cebu, Samar, Bohol, Iloilo, Capiz, Palawan, and Aklan. Perhaps even more important, vital information
about making donations and participating in relief efforts were shared via tweets and mentions on Facebook. Roughly 290,729 posts mentioned “relief efforts,” “donations,” medical missions,” and “financial aid” with regard to the global response to Yolanda. These social mentions peaked on November 12, which coincided with the bulk of the coverage on CNN International (Bandojo 2013).

However, the U.S. public was much less engaged with news coverage of the typhoon than previous natural disasters (see table 4). For example, 32% of Americans closely followed news coverage of the typhoon in comparison to the 55% who closely followed the tsunami and nuclear disaster in Fukushima, and the 58% that closely followed the 2004 Indian Ocean, and the 60% that closely followed the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Between November 14 and 17 the typhoon was tied with economic news at 32% with healthcare at 37% as the top news story. The percentage of Americans closely following the typhoon mirrored levels of the 2008 earthquake in China (30%) and the 2010 earthquake in Chile (27%) (Pew 2013).

Figure 4: Media Coverage of Typhoon Yolanda

Table 4: Percentage of Americans Following Typhoon Aftermath “Very Closely”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disaster</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haiti earthquake</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian ocean tsunami</td>
<td>January 2005</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan tsunami</td>
<td>March 2011</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines typhoon</td>
<td>November 2013</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China earthquake</td>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile earthquake</td>
<td>March 2010</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma cyclone</td>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan earthquake</td>
<td>October 2005</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The percentage of Americans donating money and supplies to relief organizations dedicated to helping the Philippines lagged behind efforts to donate to previous natural disasters receiving more media attention. Although many planned to donate to Philippine relief efforts, just 14% made donations, which is less than donations made after Hurricane Katrina (56%), the earthquake in Haiti (52%), and the Indian Ocean (30%), and Fukushima Japan tsunamis (21%). 67% planned on not donating at all, which was the highest of all five natural disasters listed in the Pew survey. U.S. interest in the typhoon was lower across every age cohort. For example 45% of those over 65 closely following the story compared to the 67% who closely followed the 2011 tsunami in Japan and 20% among adults younger than 40 compared with 47% who closely followed the 2011 disaster in Japan (Pew 2013).

Americans contributed more than $300 million to earthquake relief in Haiti within 10 days of the natural disaster compared to more than $33 million to typhoon relief in the Philippines within 7 days of the storm (Hicken 2013; NPR 2010). While private sector donations are more informal and difficult to record, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that private organizations and individuals around the world pledged $150 million of the total contributions to Philippines relief (Troilo 2014). Previous humanitarian crises prompted higher amounts of donations from private organizations and individuals. $3.9 billion was raised in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, $1.2 billion for the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and $450 million was given in response to the 2010 floods in Pakistan (Stoianova 2012). It could be that the implementation of America’s new healthcare law dominated the headlines and drew attention away from typhoon relief efforts. While this may explain the smaller donations, it does not elucidate the lower contributions from private individuals and organizations across the globe.
Moving Forward

Our approach captures the interactive normative expectations and dynamic institutional and legal mechanisms that push and pull the United States into humanitarian operations. News coverage, public engagement and opinion, and historical milieu played significant roles in Operation Damayan. It is difficult to assess the complex array of factors shaping the U.S. relief effort in response to Typhoon Yolanda in isolation from previous cases. Normative factors, such as alleviating human suffering in the immediate wake of the storm by delivering aid and supplying developmental assistance, were consistent with those observed in the two earlier natural disasters. Strategic considerations were also present as the United States sought to improve its global image, build new and shore up existing alliances and partnerships, expand its economic interests, and increase its military presence in Asia and the Pacific.

Given that Operation Damayan involved real costs and benefits, the United States engaged in a strategic decision to uphold and build its image and reputation with allies while advancing its interests relative to China. U.S. participation was based on humanitarian and human rights grounds even though strategic interests and considerations were at stake. Self-interested motivations are integral to humanitarian action, meaning that strategic interests cannot be separated from efforts to alleviate human suffering (Farer 2005, 235).

References


