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Of Dictators and Disasters: Examining authoritarian regimes' obstruction of humanitarian aid following natural disasters

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Chapter One – Introduction

When the Bhola Cyclone struck East Pakistan in November 1970, few predicted that it would cause the deaths of more than 500,000 people. While the initial disaster was devastating, most people died in the following weeks from starvation, dehydration, and disease (Staats 1972). As the military regime downplayed the disaster and obstructed aid efforts, discontent simmered in East Pakistan. When the first general elections since Pakistani independence were held just one month after the disaster, the opposition Awami League won a landslide victory due to the regime's deliberately lackadaisical relief efforts. However, the West Pakistan regime refused to allow the Awami League to form a government. When the continuing unrest led to a military crackdown in East Pakistan, it was followed by the 1971 Bangladesh Genocide, civil war, and the formation of the state of Bangladesh.

The Bhola cyclone is not the only case where a military regime denied and obstructed humanitarian aid following a natural disaster. After the 2008 Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar[1], the regime refused to allow foreign militaries and NGOs to distribute aid within Myanmar's borders. Such behaviour is uncommon and all the stranger when it does occur. The costs associated with poor disaster management are high and include threats to the regime such as the strengthening of rebel groups, violent civil conflict, and foreign intervention. Why authoritarian regimes obstruct aid is therefore puzzling, as is the difference in outcomes. While Pakistan's 1970 obstruction of aid led to the regime suffering extreme costs, Myanmar's actions in 2008 led to a positive outcome for the regime.

This thesis will argue that certain regimes deny foreign aid in order to prevent foreign interference in critical domestic politics. In both Pakistan and Myanmar, the critical domestic politics are the exit strategies of their respective military dictators, which had to be protected even at the cost of a proper aid response. The strength of the military dictator appears to affect the outcome that arises as a result of the obstruction of aid. For example, a strong dictator is less vulnerable to elite rivalry. On the other hand, a weak dictator may be manipulated into acting against their own best interests, thus leading to a negative outcome for the respective regime.

This thesis appears to be the first to explore this field of research. As such, its contribution is substantial, but preliminary. It aims to provide initial explanations for the reasons why some regimes deny foreign aid in the wake of natural disasters. Four potential explanations from the academic literature will be explored before determining which may be worth further study. Ethnic hatred and ideology will be examined first, and it will be argued that regimes do not obstruct aid – and risk suffering the costs – to certain groups due to sheer animosity. Second, it will be shown that the denial of foreign aid is not due to a fear of invasion, but a fear of foreign interference in domestic politics. Third, the presence and nature of elite rivalry will be investigated for each case. The difference in outcomes between cases will be explained as a result of elite manipulation of weak dictators. Finally, the

[1] This thesis will refer to the state once known as Burma as Myanmar, due to the formal recognition of this name by the UN.

obstruction of aid will be explained in relation to how it may interfere with the exit strategy of the military dictator.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1 – The Disaster Conflict Nexus

Key to explaining the behaviour of regimes following natural disasters is an understanding that, if improperly managed, such disasters bring with them an increased risk of violent civil conflict. Natural disasters are understood to be exogenous events that cause a shock to a state, and most of the debate within the literature is whether this exogenous shock increases or decreases the risk of civil conflict (Hollis 2018). Essentially, disasters increase the competition for scarce resources, exacerbate inequality, establish power vacuums, and shift power structures in favour of existing insurgents (Hollis 2018; Nel and Righarts 2008). In such situations, civil conflict can begin as a fight for survival as a lack of food, clean water, and shelter drives individuals to compete for scarce resources. The severity of the disaster affects the resulting civil conflict, with rapid onset disasters posing the highest risk of conflict (Nel and Righarts 2008; Drury and Olson 1998).

The risk of civil conflict increases when relief efforts following a disaster are mismanaged. Some of the disaster-conflict literature argues that disasters decrease the risk of civil conflict, as a large shock to a society will enhance social integration and community cohesion (Le Billon and Waizenegger 2007; Calo-Blanco, et al. 2017). When a disaster strikes, the social group will experience a state of anomie, followed by a sense of a loss of control. As a response to this, individuals will seek normality, leading to social solidarity as concerns for survival beat out ethnic, racial, or political differences (Dynes and Quarantelli 1976). However, the positive effects of a natural disaster are stressed to be short-lived and if poorly managed, conflict may ensue anyway (Dynes and Quarantelli 1976). By placing emphasis on the importance of a coordinated response to a disaster, the argument is no longer, ‘disasters do not lead to conflict,’ but, ‘when properly managed and responded to, disasters do not lead to conflict.’ The inverse is therefore true as well. More explicitly, by saying good governance helps mitigate disaster-related conflict, the literature argues that bad governance can lead to disaster-related conflict.

Whether due to incompetence or malice, bad governance in the wake of a disaster does not just increase the risk of civil conflict, it empowers insurgents, strengthens rebel groups, and threatens the regime itself. If a regime does not administer aid properly to its citizens following a disaster, then citizens will be forced to source their own food, water, and shelter. In the absence of official relief efforts, these citizens will do whatever they need to in order to survive. For example, citizens affected by Myanmar’s Cyclone Nargis in 2008 were often forced to drink from water sources polluted with corpses (Seekins 2009). Rebel groups may capitalise on the vulnerability of such desperate citizens by offering food, shelter, and money if they join the insurgency. Through this, rebel groups can increase their own ranks while simultaneously drawing attention to the failings of the regime.

Rebel groups can also use the distribution of aid as a way to legitimise themselves in the eyes of the civilian population. An insurgency relies on the local population for support, and by stepping in when the regime is unable to do so, rebels are able to highlight the failings of the regime and increase

their local support. The rebels demonstrate that they are capable of looking after civilians when the regime cannot, thus legitimising themselves as a viable alternative to the current regime (Nel and Righarts 2008). When the regime does not provide proper aid to disaster-stricken civilians, rebel groups may be strengthened and thereby threaten the regime's own rule.

The costs that may be borne by a regime which refuses to administer aid are huge, and therefore most regimes do their best to mitigate such costs by distributing aid. Despite the norm of aid distribution, Hollis (2018) claims that ruling governments may deliberately 'mishandle' aid, exploiting ethnic tensions and marginalising social groups, but provides no support for this claim[2]. Moreover, Mandel (2002) argues that even a well-meaning but poorly run regime can suffer the cost of rebel groups with bolstered ranks and increased legitimacy.

Through analysing the disaster-conflict literature we can conclude that a poor response to a natural disaster can threaten the regime as it provides rebel groups with the opportunity to bolster their ranks in exchange for aid and demonstrate their own capacity to govern when the regime cannot. If aid is immediately requested, accepted, and effectively distributed, then the subsequent risk of civil conflict becomes far lower (Paik 2011).

Natural disasters pose a unique threat to authoritarian regimes because they can bring existing failures within the structure of governance into sharp relief, thus legitimising the grievances of rebel groups and increasing the risk of civil conflict (Paik 2011). As such, disasters undermine the legitimacy of rulers who fail to mitigate the damages. If a regime were to refuse aid to victims of a natural disaster, knowing that such an action strengthens rebels and increases the risk of civil conflict, then a logical explanation could be that the regime desired civil conflict to begin in the first place. The scholarship around civil conflict does not, however, present any explanations for why a regime would deliberately invite a civil war (Walter 2009).

In contrast with interstate war, no rational state would desire civil war (Fearon 1995, Fjelde 2010). Fearon argues the central problem with war is that the costs outweigh potential benefits, so states ought to seek to avoid it. While Fearon reduces the causes of war to a breakdown in the bargaining process between states, there are still many reasons why a state would decide that an interstate war is worth engaging in (Van der Maat 2014). Fearon's argument seeks to explain the occurrence of interstate war. It cannot satisfactorily be used to explain the outbreak of civil war as it assumes the costs and risks associated with war to be borne relatively equally by both sides. In a civil war, however, all the costs are borne by the state, and all the regime can hope to gain is a continuation of its rule. Certainly, the state may defeat the insurgents, but all the destruction of infrastructure and livelihood directly affects the state.

[2] Hollis references Mandel (2002) but Mandel focuses almost exclusively on governments that are too poor or ill-equipped to deal with a disaster, and those which attempt to provide aid but do so ineptly.

If authoritarian regimes are aware of the costs of not distributing aid and have no reason to invite those costs, then we would expect to observe regimes doing their best to distribute aid effectively and efficiently. Following the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, all of the worst-affected authoritarian regimes accepted the aid offered to them. While Somalia saw an increase in civil conflict, this was due to issues around the *distribution* of the international aid, not a lack of available aid (Le Billon and Waizenegger 2007). In Somalia, the tsunami had destroyed roads and fishing boats, which led to an increase in piracy over the following years (Arky 2010). Given that Somalia's government were governing whilst in exile in Kenya, they were unable to assist the distribution of relief by foreign aid workers, who struggled to reach the affected areas. Conversely, the province of Aceh in Indonesia saw the tsunami bring the decades-long civil war to a close, as the government and the insurgents were forced to co-operate in order to distribute aid (Waizenegger and Hyndman 2010). These cases share one crucial characteristic: the regime recognised that aid was required and attempted to distribute it properly, often putting aside existing conflicts to do so. Even the Somalian government – such as it was – recognised its own shortcomings and allowed foreign aid workers to attempt to distribute aid (Arky 2010). If the existing norms within authoritarian states are to accept, provide, or distribute aid following a natural disaster, then this only makes the outlying cases that much more puzzling.

If there are high costs associated with a lack of aid following natural disasters, states have no reason to invite such costs, and it goes against existing norms to refuse aid, then the ensuing question is: *Why do authoritarian states deliberately obstruct disaster relief if doing so strengthens rebel groups and increases the risk of civil war?*

2.2 – Existing Explanations of Authoritarian Obstruction of Aid

There are surprisingly few academic studies which offer explanations for why some authoritarian regimes deny or obstruct humanitarian aid following natural disasters. Most case studies which investigate the relationship between the denial of aid and the costs to the regime tend to focus on *how* rather than *why* (Hollis 2018; Mandel 2002; Selth 2008). That is, *how* a regime's denial of aid affects various factors and not *why* the regime denies aid in the first place. However, throughout the literature there exist four main explanations that could influence a regime's decision to obstruct aid. They are: ethnic hatred or ideological differences; foreign politics; elite rivalry; and the exit strategy of the leadership.

2.2.1 – *Ideological Differences and Ethnic Hatred*

The first explanation is that the treatment of the disaster-stricken victims by the regime can be attributed to ethnic hatred or ideological differences. Essentially, pure animosity for the victims of the disaster determines the lack of response by the regime. Both scholars and primary sources alike are often quick to blame historical animosity for a regime's denial of aid as it is both an obvious explanation and a

simple one (Hossain 2017; Khan, Zahoor and Naz 2018). However, attributing a regime's obstruction of aid solely to animosity is misguided because it implies that regimes will willingly strengthen rebels and threaten their own rule out of hatred for a group.

Ethnically-based conflicts have affected almost every society at one point or another, and neither Pakistan nor Myanmar are strangers to such conflict. In 1970, for example, the historical animosity between West and East Pakistan was largely based on ethnicity (Khan, Zahoor and Naz 2018). However, through the ethnic divide, more divisions arose (Hossain 2017). Language, culture, and political ideology, all played a role in the apparent hatred the West Pakistan regime had for the Bengali people, and vice versa (Khan, Zahoor and Naz 2018). As such, untangling specific aspects of ideology is very difficult. Instead, ethnicity became the catch-all way of thinking of the 'other,' as ethnicity seemed to encompass all the social, cultural, and political differences between the two groups. Whilst it is undeniable that ethnic or ideological differences were present in both Myanmar and Pakistan, scholars often overstate the role that they played in the regime's decision to obstruct aid to the affected areas (Kramer 2018).

Scholars have a somewhat regrettable tendency to think of natural disasters as self-contained and fail to recognise how the potential long-term effects of such disasters may influence a regime's decision-making in the short-term (Khan, Zahoor and Naz 2018; Paik 2011). In other words, scholars point to ethnic tensions and ideologies as the sole reasons why a regime would obstruct aid, disregarding the enormous cost the regime may bear for doing so. Authoritarian regimes are rational actors, and it would be an irrational act for a regime to strengthen rebels, suffer international condemnation, and potentially risk its own survival simply out of hatred for a certain group. Therefore, for ethnic or ideological differences to explain the regime's obstruction of aid would depend on the presence of an identifiable 'outgroup' and a history of ethnic or ideological tension.

2.2.2 – *Foreign Politics*

Authoritarian regimes may obstruct or deny foreign aid either to guard against invasion or to prevent foreign interference in domestic politics (CNN 2008; Cordera 2015; Paik 2011; Schanberg, After Pakistani Storm: Grief, Indifference 1970; Selth, Even Paranoids Have Enemies: Cyclone Nargis and Myanmar's Fears of Invasion 2008). Accepting foreign aid would help to ensure that the regime did not suffer the consequences an inappropriate aid response may bring. The potential consequences of an inappropriate aid response are high and may involve the strengthening of rebel groups or other direct threats to the regime. A regime which denies foreign aid must therefore believe the consequences of accepting foreign aid to be greater than the consequences of an inappropriate aid response. What could be the consequences of accepting foreign aid, such that they so outweigh the potential threat to the regime posed by an inappropriate aid response? There are two plausible answers to this question: authoritarian regimes are threatened by the presence of foreign militaries on sovereign soil; and foreign aid may interfere with domestic politics.

First, authoritarian regimes are often depicted as paranoid, and scholars argue that such regimes are so fearful of foreign invasion, they refuse to allow access to foreign troops on humanitarian missions (Selth, Even Paranoids Have Enemies: Cyclone Nargis and Myanmar's Fears of Invasion 2008). Such offers of foreign aid are therefore perceived by the regime to be a Trojan horse; a way of invading the state under a humanitarian guise. Denying aid in such a case is logical because it would involve accepting the increased risk of civil conflict, but mitigating the more immediate threat of a foreign invasion. However, if a regime were concerned over foreign invasion then we would expect to observe the regime deny only aid provided or distributed by foreign militaries. That way, the regime may mitigate the costs of an inappropriate aid response, while still protecting itself against invasion. It is unlikely that a regime would deny humanitarian aid distributed by an NGO out of fear that it may be the beginning of a foreign invasion.

Second, the authoritarian regime may be fearful that foreign aid would be used as a way for the international community to interfere in domestic politics. To refuse aid because of concerns of foreign interference the regime must percieve the cost of foreign interference in domestic politics as greater than the costs associated with an inappropriate aid response (Cordera 2015). Therefore, domestic politics must be fragile enough that foreign interference could be costly, yet not so fragile that the cost of an inappropriate aid response would outweigh the cost of allowing foreign aid. If the regime denied all foreign aid, including NGO and non-military aid, then the implication is that the regime was not fearful of an invasion but of foreign interference in domestic politics.

2.2.3 – *Elite Rivalry*

An authoritarian regime may obstruct aid to mitigate the immediate threat that elite rivalry poses to its leaders. Elite rivalry is one of the most immediate and deadly threats that can affect authoritarian leaders and elites alike. It is therefore not irrational for elites to behave in seemingly abhorrent ways in order to retain their grip on power, as their physical survival often depends upon it (Van der Maat, 2020).

Leaders who feel threatened by elite politics will often trade long-term insecurity for short-term security (Roessler, 2011). Most immediate, short-term threats to a regime come from elites and, in cases where it appears that states are inviting civil conflict, closer examination reveals that the civil conflict is not invited, rather the costs are accepted as such (Sudduth 2017). For example, leaders in sub-Saharan Africa will employ policies of ethnic exclusion despite the increased risk of civil war this brings (Roessler, 2011). Doing so appears counterintuitive, yet such policies are a coup-proofing strategy that comes at the cost of an increase in civil conflict vulnerability. Obstructing aid may therefore enable leaders to combat elite rivalry by 1) preventing elites from increasing their base of support, and 2) using the denial of aid as a form of indiscriminate violence which forces elites either to be complicit in the violence or to demonstrate their disloyalty.

Opportunistic elites may attempt to use the distribution of aid as a way of highlighting the failures of the regime and increasing their own base of support. Elites rely on their support coalitions to

survive and these coalitions are based throughout state institutions (Van der Maat, 2020). If elites seek to survive, they must strengthen the power of their coalition while weakening those of their opponents. The response to a natural disaster will temporarily strengthen certain elites. These elites may find themselves well positioned to use the influx of aid, influence, and powerful foreign actors to increase their own power beyond the duration of the disaster (Paik, 2011). When elites suddenly share more power than normal, they may engage in factional infighting and the international community may become aware of the regime's "dismal governing capacity to mitigate the disaster damages" (Paik 2011). An elite may – by cooperating with foreign actors – highlight the failures of the regime and position themselves as a viable alternative to the current leadership, thus increasing the chance of a coup. Therefore, by denying and obstructing aid, the leader may be able to prevent certain elites from using the disaster to seize more power and threaten the leadership. This obstruction of aid minimises the threat of elite rivalry but accepts the long-term risk that an inadequate aid response poses. While this explanation assumes a passive approach from the leadership – by denying elites a chance to seize power – it is also possible that leaders deny aid as a more active way of combating elite rivalry.

Leaders may deny and obstruct aid as a form of indiscriminate violence, ensuring elites are either complicit or openly disloyal, allowing them to be purged later. This builds off Van der Maat's (2020) theory of genocidal consolidation. Normally, leaders must orchestrate episodes of mass violence by building a "machinery of violence" (Van der Maat 2020), but a natural disaster is its own machinery of violence, and all that is required is for the regime to do nothing. Individual elites are then faced with a choice: do they intervene, helping secure and distribute aid anyway, or do they do nothing? If an elite chooses to intervene, they may save lives and potentially increase their popular support both domestically and internationally, while simultaneously identifying themselves as disloyal to the leadership. If the elite chooses not to intervene, then they are complicit in the unnecessary deaths of civilians, and more likely to be removed alongside the leadership, should the regime collapse.

For this explanation to be satisfactory, the leader who decides to obstruct aid must do so because they feel elite rivalry may threaten their survival. We would therefore expect to observe this behaviour in regimes where the leader is weak. Either they have not been in command long enough to consolidate their power, or their power has weakened over time. What is more, we would expect to observe the leader attempting coup-proofing tactics – such as elite purges and the shuffling of government positions – before the natural disaster.

2.2.4 – *Leadership Goals*

The final explanation is that accepting and distributing aid would conflict with the personal goals of the dictator. Given the potential cost of obstructing aid, these personal goals must be critically important. The literature around threats to authoritarian rule argues that the most important goal a dictator will have – after their immediate survival – is their exit strategy. An exit strategy is critical for a dictator

because it relates both to their immediate survival and to their continued survival throughout their retirement.

The retirement pathway for authoritarian leaders is far less attractive than the one many former democratic leaders find themselves on. While former democratic leaders tend to play golf and write memoirs, former authoritarian leaders are generally lucky to escape with their lives. This is partly due to the nature of their exit from power. Many dictators are ousted by violent coups or revolutions, which only becomes more likely if that was how they assumed power. Even if dictators are willing to relinquish power, they need to ensure they maintain enough status in the new regime to protect them from future prosecution.

It is this need to maintain a certain amount of control over the new regime that prompts many military dictators to initiate a transition to a presidential democracy (Bjørnskov 2020). A transition to a presidential democracy will often preserve the status of the military and ensure that it has certain veto powers within the new government. This enables the former dictator to use the new role of the military to protect themselves in their retirement, particularly from prosecution in either domestic court or the International Criminal Court (ICC). Most military regimes either amend the constitution or draft a new one before the democratic transition occurs, as a way of enshrining the continued power of the military within the new democratic framework (Bjørnskov 2020). For a dictator to obstruct foreign aid as a means of ensuring their exit strategy, then the aid must – in some way – threaten that exit strategy.

If the dictator's exit strategy involves a democratic transition, then it likely also involves a public vote on the adoption of a new or amended constitution, which may be disrupted by a sudden influx of foreign actors as part of an aid program. As an exit strategy is usually both meticulously planned and critically important, it is unsurprising that a dictator may choose their exit strategy over the lives of their citizens, especially if they do not intend to be in command when the full costs of obstructing aid are realised. An influx of foreign aid involves an increase of reporters, military personnel, and foreign actors present in the state, many of which may have been critical of the dictator's regime and their planned, 'democratic transition.' If the exit strategy of the military dictator depended on the public vote going ahead, then it would be rational to obstruct aid until the vote had occurred.

Chapter Three – Research Design

This thesis will investigate two case studies and determine which of the explanations examined in Chapter Two may help to explain why the respective authoritarian regimes obstructed aid following a natural disaster. The two cases are the Bhola Cyclone in Pakistan in 1970, and Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008. These are both idiosyncratic cases which go against the expected norms of authoritarian behaviour. While the regimes behaved in similar ways and appear similar on the surface, the outcome of each case was dramatically different.

Both cases occurred in Southeast Asian states controlled by a military regime undergoing a period of democratic transition. Shortly before a crucial public vote, each state was struck by the worst cyclone it had ever experienced. Both states then denied or obstructed humanitarian aid. However, the outcome of each case differed. The Bhola Cyclone led to genocide, civil war, and Bangladesh's independence, while Cyclone Nargis did not lead to conflict but to the regime's successful democratic transition. Process-tracing will help analyse the decision-making that each regime underwent and explain why the outcomes differed. This thesis will then use the results of this analysis to draw conclusions between the two cases and relate them to broader conclusions of the behaviour of authoritarian regimes.

An in-depth analysis of the processes within each case will provide strong evidence for why Pakistan in 1970 and Myanmar in 2008 decided to deny or obstruct aid. The academic literature provided four potential explanations: ethnic hatred and ideological differences, foreign politics, elite rivalry, and the dictator's exit strategy. Each of these explanations will be tested for both cases using their respective observable implications.

If ethnic and ideological differences did play a role in the regime's obstruction of aid, then there are two factors we would expect to observe. The first is an easily identifiable 'outgroup' with a different ethnic or ideological makeup to the regime itself. The second is a history of animosity between the regime and this outgroup, such as state-sanctioned violence, political exclusion, or other human rights abuses.

Second, Myanmar and Pakistan may have denied aid due to either a fear of invasion or foreign interference in domestic politics. However, if a regime were concerned about invasion then we would expect to observe it only denying aid from foreign militaries, as accepting non-military aid would enable it to mitigate the costs of an improper aid response. Moreover, if the regime was concerned about foreign interference, then we would likely observe domestic politics that were vulnerable to foreign intervention, and the subsequent denial of all foreign aid.

Third, if elite rivalry threatened the military dictators in Myanmar or Pakistan, then we would expect there to be two observable factors. First, the dictator would not have fully consolidated his power, and therefore be vulnerable to elite rivalry. Second, the dictator may have undertaken coup-proofing tactics prior to the natural disaster. If these factors are present, then it is possible the dictator denied aid to prevent elites from gaining power and threatening their continued rule.

Finally, if the exit strategy of the military dictator was behind the decision to obstruct aid, then we would expect to observe three things. First, before the disaster occurred, we would expect to see evidence of a planned transfer of power. Second, we would expect to observe some mechanism by which this transfer of power would ensure the military dictator would be able to retire peacefully, such as protections from prosecution in the new constitution. Finally, we would expect the natural disaster – or the aid that followed it – to have the potential to threaten this transfer of power and thus, the dictator's exit strategy.

Whether each factor can be observed within each case will help to inform which of the explanations is likely to be the most accurate. However, these explanations do not exist in isolation. Each one informs the others, so the conclusions that can be drawn from the case studies are unlikely to point to any one explanation but to a combination of all four. The question, then, is how much weight we can give to each individual explanation.

Chapter Four – The Bhola Cyclone, East Pakistan, 1970

West Pakistan's obstruction of aid following the Bhola Cyclone in 1970 not only resulted in the deaths of more than 500,000 people, it also led to the Bangladesh genocide of 1971, the fall of President Yahya Khan's military junta, and the formation of Bangladesh as a nation state.

The 1970 Bhola Cyclone is still the deadliest storm the world has ever seen. Funnelled up through the Bay of Bengal, the Bhola Cyclone struck the southern coast of East Pakistan in the early hours of November 12, 1970.

Two days after the cyclone, the President of Pakistan, General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan arrived in East Pakistan as scheduled after a five-day state visit to China. The initial response saw just three Pakistani gunboats and a hospital ship dispatched to the devasted islands. Two days after the cyclone, the full extent of the damage was still unknown to most. The journalist, Sydney Schanberg was writing for the New York Times in Dacca throughout the disaster, and on November 14 he wrote,

"The Pakistan radio originally reported from Karachi that nearly 50,000 people were believed dead in the 120-mile-an-hour cyclone and the 20-foot tidal wave. The radio said later today that 11,000 deaths had been confirmed and that the final toll might be at least twice that number" (Schanberg, Thousands of Pakistanis Are Killed by Tidal Wave 1970).

This explains the slow response by the Martial Law Administration (MLA) in the immediate days after the cyclone.

Four days after the disaster, Yahya Khan took a two-hour flight over the affected area before returning to West Pakistan. Schanberg took a similar flight the same day and said he could, "smell death from the air." There is little doubt that Yahya Khan and the MLA were, at this point, fully aware of the extent of the damage. Moreover, it should be emphasised that President Yahya Khan had only been in office since March 1969. His predecessor, Ayub Khan, was forced to hand over power after the 1969 uprising in East Pakistan, which consisted of a series of mass demonstrations and occasional conflicts between armed forces and civilians. Not only were Yahya Khan and the MLA now fully aware of the devastation the cyclone had caused, they were also acutely aware of the threat that civil unrest in East Pakistan posed to the longevity of the regime.

Over the next week, the MLA's response began to be called into question, and accusations of indifference and neglect were thrown around. November 17 also marked the beginning of the overwhelming foreign aid efforts, which helped bring the failings of the MLA into sharp relief. President Nixon promised $10 million in disaster relief, along with blankets, tents, and the use of six helicopters to help distribute aid (Naughton 1970). While things were moving more slowly than they could have been, the MLA was at least perceived to be attempting to ensure that aid was distributed effectively.

Over the next few days, however, public opinion began to turn against the MLA, as their poor response became more obvious. It was not until November 18 that the single military transport plane in East Pakistan was assigned to relief work. Iran, West Germany, the US, Britain, and France had all flown in planeloads of aid, but they could only be distributed by helicopter or by boat. The relief commissioner, A.M. Anisuzzman, noted that the Pakistani Air Force in West Pakistan had the necessary helicopters to distribute relief, but that it was "impossible to get any of them and he did not know why" (Schanberg, After Pakistani Storm: Grief, Indifference 1970).

Yahya Khan returned to Dacca on November 22, as the regime attempted to maintain the appearance of doing all it could to assist with disaster relief. Despite this, international aid workers and East Pakistanis were united in their condemnation of Yahya Khan and the MLA. As Yahya Khan arrived back in Dacca, foreign aid services began to halt shipments of relief, blaming bureaucratic red tape and government unwillingness to co-operate. The next day, East Pakistan's political leaders – led by Sheikh Mujib – publicly accused President Yahya of "gross neglect, callous inattention and utter indifference" (New York Times 1970). They went on to condemn the regime's "sinister attempts to play down news coverage" and said that no ministers were there when Yahya himself left the province after "a cursory glance" (New York Times 1970). This combination of foreign and domestic condemnation troubled the regime, who responded quickly by promising an extra $105 million towards relief operations, on top of their original budget of $11.4 million (Biswas and Daly 2020). By returning to Dacca, Yahya Khan seemed to recognise the danger that such civic dissatisfaction posed to his regime. As he arrived, 50,000 people gathered in the city to protest the MLA's inaction and demand Yahya's resignation.

The parliamentary elections were held in early December, and the Bengali political party – the Awami League – won in a landslide. Hesitant to hand over power to East Pakistan, Yahya Khan held a series of talks with Sheikh Mujib to try and prevent him from taking power or insisting on his six-point plan for East Pakistani autonomy. Eventually, the talks broke down, and on March 25, 1971, Yahya Khan ordered the military to curb the potential secession before it began by killing Bengali political elites and their supporters. This genocide evolved into a civil war, and Pakistan surrendered shortly after India intervened. Finally, Yahya Khan conceded the Presidency of Pakistan to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, while East Pakistan seceded to form Bangladesh.

4.1 – Ideology and Ethnic Hatred

The Bengali people of East Pakistan constituted an easily identifiable 'outgroup' in 1970, as they were underrepresented in Pakistan's economics and politics. In 1970, East and West Pakistan were divided on ethnic lines, with the majority ethnic group in Pakistan – the Bengali people – living almost entirely in East Pakistan, and the Punjabi people dominating in West Pakistan. Despite having the ethnic majority, Bengalis were under-represented in Pakistan's parliament and economy. Moreover, the bias that West Pakistan showed against East Pakistan fuelled the development of its political identity,

leading to calls for independence and eventually resulting in the 1971 genocide (Hossain 2017). Arguably, the conflict between East and West Pakistan can be seen as a war of xenophobia (Khan, Zahoor and Naz 2018). Both sides saw the other as a threat to the formation of their own national identity (Khan, Zahoor and Naz 2018). When the genocide began in East Pakistan, it had been carefully planned to eliminate all political or military Bengali opposition (Khan, Zahoor and Naz 2018).

While there was a history of ethnic animosity between East and West Pakistan, the Bangladesh genocide was primarily motivated by differences in political ideology. The Bengali and Punjabi people were political rivals, and many Punjabi political elites considered handing over power to Bengalis inconceivable. East Pakistan wanted representation and autonomy, and West Pakistan was not prepared to give it to them (Khan, Zahoor and Naz 2018). Moreover, East Pakistan wanted closer ties with India, and would likely concede the Kashmir border dispute to achive this. Therefore, the main causal factor of the genocide can be traced to the differences in political identity that ethnic hatred had fostered (Hossain 2017). The initial goal of the genocide was to eliminate Bengali political elites, indicating that West Pakistan was not just attempting to kill Bengalis, but to prevent them from achieving political power.

Ideological differences fostered by years of ethnic animosity can help explain the Bangladesh genocide, but they cannot explain the regime's obstruction of aid following the cyclone. The MLA only needed to commit genocide because the Awami League won the election. The Awami League only won so easily because the MLA obstructed the aid process. It does not seem rational for the MLA to obstruct aid on the grounds of ethnic hatred if the cost of doing so was a genocide, a civil war, a foreign invasion by India, and the loss of a province which made up half of Pakistan. Therefore, while we can observe both an ethnic and ideological 'outgroup' and a history of animosity, it is unlikely the decision to obstruct aid can be solely attributed to ethnic or ideological differences.

4.2 – Explaining the Refusal of Indian Aid

Ten days after the cyclone it became public knowledge that the MLA had refused generous offers of aid from India. The East Pakistan newspaper, *Holiday* claimed, "Regime Fails the East Wing. Our People Can Bear No More!" (Talbot 2010). The MLA responded to this accusation by claiming that India had refused to grant West Pakistan helicopters clearance to refuel in India so they could not be used to distribute aid. India responded that not only was the MLA's claim false, but India had also offered more aid to East Pakistan, in the form of helicopters, transport planes, river craft, and mobile hospitals. Aid which West Pakistan turned down (Biswas and Daly 2020). Moreover, India had offered vast amounts of aid to be flown to Dacca which the MLA accepted, but forced India to drive the aid slowly across the border by truck (Ibid.). Many scholars attribute this refusal of aid to Pakistan's military paranoia (Biswas and Daly 2020, Talbot 2010). However, the MLA's denial of Indian aid can

be traced not to a fear of invasion but to a fear of Indian-Bengali co-operation, which had already threatened West Pakistan in the Agartala conspiracy of 1968.

The MLA not only denied Indian military aid, but all forms of Indian aid, indicating that the MLA did not fear an Indian invasion but the distribution of aid itself. The most common explanation is that by refusing Indian aid, the regime was trying to safeguard East Pakistan from a possible invasion (Schanberg 1970; Talbot 2010). Likewise, the refusal to airlift West Pakistan's military to the disaster area to help with relief could be attributed to the regime's desire to keep West Pakistan protected in case of a surprise attack from India (Talbot 2010). However, the same day this diatribe against India occurred, the East Pakistan army was finally mobilised for relief work. The concerns over an Indian invasion in East Pakistan clearly no longer trumped the need for disaster relief, yet the Indian aid was not requested again. The argument that the MLA was concerned about the possibility of Indian military actions is weak and lacks any supporting evidence other than the historical animosity between the states.

There is more evidence to support the argument that the MLA's decision to refuse Indian aid was done to prevent East Pakistan from forming closer political ties with India. While the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war is commonly pointed to as evidence of the animosity between the two states, the Agartala conspiracy of 1968 is a more salient example. In 1968, the Home Department of Pakistan claimed to have uncovered a conspiracy among high-ranking members of the Awami League, including Sheikh Mujib, to solicit Indian assistance for an armed revolt against West Pakistan (Cordera 2015). The subsequent trial of the 35 accused was seen by members of the public as a way for the MLA to suppress political opposition ahead of the 1970 elections. However, public support for the alleged conspirators grew and – when one of them was killed in police custody – government buildings were set alight during protests (Talbot 2010). The Agartala conspiracy case was withdrawn in February 1969 and it contributed to President Ayub Khan's forced resignation later that year (Ibid.). Two years later, the MLA was likely to have been suspicious of the offer of Indian assistance following the cyclone.

The Awami League had a strongly pro-India stance, partly because of economic considerations. Raw materials – such as coal and limestone – used to come from India, and after the 1965 war they had to be imported from China at five to ten times the price (Talbot 2010). Furthermore, if the Awami League took office it would likely end the Kashmir dispute, and so lead to closer ties between East Pakistan and India. Such foreign policy directly opposed that of the MLA, who were concerned that India would attempt to use aid to try and garner support for the Awami League before the elections. This argument is supported by an event from 2011. Shawkat Ali, the Deputy Speaker of the Bangladeshi Parliament and surviving conspirator in the Agartala case, confessed in the parliament that the charges the MLA accused them of were accurate (BDnews24 2011). While the timing of the 1968 conspiracy may have been convenient for the MLA, they were genuinely threatened by a conspiracy that would have led to armed revolution and the secession of East Pakistan.

The refusal of Indian aid can therefore be explained through the MLA's fear that such aid could provide political support to rival political parties within the regime. Moreover, the MLA clearly

believed that Indian aid may have helped the Awami League in the elections. This belief was indicative of two things. First, they believed the Awami League would not win the election if they did not receive assistance from India. Second, that accepting Indian aid was more likely to lead to an Awami League landslide than if East Pakistan received minimal aid from the regime. While the denial of Indian aid can be traced to the Agartala conspiracy, the obstruction of other forms of aid cannot be so easily explained.

4.3 – Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Elite Rivalry

Yahya Khan became President in March 1969 and by November 1970 he had not consolidated his power as an authoritarian ruler, leaving him vulnerable to elite rivalry. After Yahya Khan was appointed President, he announced martial law and dismissed President Ayub Khan's civilian officials alongside the parliament. While Yahya Khan may have been threatened by elite rivalry, it seems unlikely that he deliberately obstructed aid to curb elite rivalry because he did not feel that it was a sufficient threat to his power. Yahya Khan's decision to obstruct aid may have been the result of elite rivalry – whether he knew it or not – as demonstrated by the events that led to the Bangladesh Genocide in 1971.

Elite rivalry may have influenced the decision-making process which led to Yahya Khan's obstruction of aid, as it led to the Bangladesh Genocide. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto manipulated Yahya Khan into initiating the Bangladesh Genocide, as the secession of East Pakistan would leave Bhutto as the leader of the political majority in West Pakistan (Ziring 1974). Bhutto was the minister of foreign affairs in President Ayub Khan's regime, and once Ayub removed him from office, Bhutto started the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) to call for democracy and Ayub's removal from power. In the 1970 election, the PPP won the most seats in West Pakistan, with Bhutto as its leader. After the Bangladesh genocide, the civil war, and the subsequent removal of Yahya Khan, Bhutto became President of Pakistan in 1971. Therefore, Bhutto had the necessary political connections within the regime, and the desire to ensure that Yahya Khan did not relinquish power to Sheikh Mujib in East Pakistan.

When Yahya Khan was on the verge of coming to a peaceful solution with Sheikh Mujib, Bhutto was able to convince him to resort to military force (Ziring 1974). Characterised as hungry for power, Bhutto was allegedly prepared to concede East Pakistan to Sheikh Mujib if he could govern West Pakistan (Talbot 2010, Ziring 1974). Yahya Khan was unable to accept the idea of Bengali rule, and so Bhutto urged him to postpone the first meeting of the national assembly, due to be held on the March 3, 1971 (Ziring 1974). In the following weeks, Sheikh Mujib was asked to compromise on his Six Point Program, and Yahya Khan flew to East Pakistan to negotiate (Ziring 1974). Bhutto refused to join them, instead using the opportunity to garner more public support (Ziring 1974). Meanwhile, Yahya Khan conceded to many of Sheikh Mujib's demands (Ibid.). When he was invited to join the negotiations again on March 21, Bhutto accepted, and Yahya Khan told him that if the PPP accepted the negotiated agreement, then the matter would be settled peacefully (Talbot 2010). However, a peaceful solution would mean Bhutto would lose his chance to seize power.

The next day, Bhutto managed to convince Yahya of the discontent within the junta, and that there was no option but to crack down on East Pakistan dissidents (Ziring 1974). On March 25, Yahya left Dacca abruptly, and Pakistan Army units moved into position. In the middle of the night, the shelling started. Sheikh Mujib was seized in his house and flown secretly to West Pakistan. By the time the Bangladesh genocide turned into the Bangladesh civil war, Bhutto was already distancing himself from the MLA, claiming that Yahya's actions had led to the protracted conflict (Ibid.). When Yahya Khan was forced to transfer power to civilian leadership, Bhutto's PPP had the majority, and he became President of Pakistan in December 1971.

Bhutto's manipulation of Yahya Khan demonstrates Yahya Khan's vulnerability to elite rivalry, and he may have been similarly manipulated into obstructing aid following the cyclone (Talbot 2010). It was in Bhutto's best interests \for the Awami League to win the election unexpectedly, as he knew that Yahya Khan and the MLA would not want to hand power over to East Pakistan. If the Awami League did not win the election, Bhutto would likely have been forced to form a coalition with them, thereby compromising on his own political and personal goals. As a political elite, Bhutto likely knew that two things would occur if the Awami League were to win the election. First, the Awami League would not compromise on their six-point plan of autonomy and representation. Second, Yahya Khan and the MLA would not let them govern as the majority. The result would either be secession or civil war, and either way Bhutto would be left as the majority leader in Pakistan. Therefore, it was in Bhutto's best interests to convince Yahya Khan that the Awami League would not win the election, while obstructing aid ensured that they would.

4.4 – Yahya Khan's Miscalculation

Yahya Khan believed the Awami League would not win the parliamentary election, in part because his exit strategy depended on it. Talbot claims that he, "discounted the possibility of an Awami League landslide in East Pakistan" (p.195). In 1970, Yahya Khan had been President for less than two years. He was planning to use the parliamentary elections as his exit strategy, hoping to hand over power to a coalition of West Pakistan political parties. He would thereby secure his own future within the new, democratic Pakistan.

Yahya Khan planned a transition to democracy, indicating that he was prepared to relinquish the presidency. It is important to note that Yahya Khan never *intended* to be President and, by all accounts, he never *wanted* to be (Talbot 2010). When Ayub Khan resigned, he appointed Yahya Khan as his successor. Yahya Khan took office on the guarantee that he would transition Pakistan back to a parliamentary democracy (Ziring 1974). The parliamentary elections in December 1970 were the first step in this transition, and after the elections the new parliament was supposed to meet to decide on a new constitution. However, when the Awami League won in a landslide, Yahya Khan – after being persuaded by Bhutto – postponed the drafting of the new constitution.

Yahya Khan also wanted to ensure his own future was secure after he relinquished power, something he could not do if the Awami League formed the government. By postponing the drafting of the new constitution, Yahya Khan was indicating that he was not prepared to relinquish power to the Awami League. He likely believed that if Bhutto took office, he would either give Yahya Khan future employment – in the form of a cabinet role or senior military position – or a peaceful retirement. If the Awami League formed the next government, there would be no future employment for Yahya Khan, and he may have faced prosecution for his actions while President (Ziring 1974). Therefore, Yahya Khan wanted to ensure the Awami League lost the election because his exit strategy depended on it.

If protecting Yahya Khan's exit strategy was the reason the regime obstructed aid, then we would expect to see some mechanism by which the natural disaster – or the aid that followed – could disrupt the exit strategy. However, the cyclone only disrupted Yahya Khan's exit strategy *because* the MLA deliberately obstructed aid, which led to the Awami League's landslide victory. Therefore, Yahya Khan would have obstructed aid for two reasons. First, if the aid itself would help the Awami League win the election, as demonstrated when the MLA denied Indian aid to prevent closer Indian-Bengali ties. Second, if Yahya Khan believed distributing aid would be pointless. This would only hold true if Yahya Khan never believed the Awami League would win the election, and so saw little point in distributing aid.

Yahya Khan obstructed aid because he fell prey to a "Himalayan miscalculation" (Talbot 2010 p.195): the MLA's prediction that the Awami League not win the election. If the MLA believed the Awami League would win, they would have made more of an effort to provide disaster relief. Yahya Khan thought the Awami League had no chance of winning so he believed there was no point in helping provide East Pakistan with relief. Interestingly, this is supported by the MLA's actions almost two weeks after the cyclone, once international and domestic criticism began to be directed at Yahya Khan and his regime. The MLA started to make a serious attempt to distribute aid once they observed Sheikh Mujib and the Awami League staging protests and gathering more support. This demonstrates that Yahya Khan only distributed aid when he believed that not doing so may help the Awami League, and so jeopardise his exit strategy.

Yahya Khan intended to use the 1970 parliamentary elections as his exit strategy and thus secure his future employment or retirement. He believed the Awami League would not win the election and, as such, he did not feel the need to distribute aid following the cyclone. This obstruction of aid can therefore be traced to the "Himalayan miscalculation," the precise origins of which are unclear. It may be due to simple incompetence by West Pakistan's intelligence services, or it may – as Talbot claimed – "possess more sinister implications (p.195)."

4.5 – Conclusion

Yahya Khan's exit strategy meant he needed to ensure the Awami League lost the election. Furthermore, the reason he obstructed aid was because he believed the Awami League had no chance of winning the election, and so a costly disaster response was unnecessary. Hence his decision to deny Indian aid, preventing the Awami League from forming closer ties with India prior to the election. However, Yahya Khan was vulnerable to elite rivalry, as demonstrated by Bhutto's manipulation of him to initiate the Bangladesh Genocide. As Yahya Khan based his decision to obstruct aid on the prediction that the Awami League would not win the election, elite rivalry may have been behind this faulty prediction as well.

Importantly, this obstruction of aid was also rooted in the ethnic and ideological animosity between West and East Pakistan. Most states – whether authoritarian or democratic – have the default post-disaster response of providing and distributing aid to the victims. Some authoritarian regimes, however, have a reason not to do so. Due to the historic animosity between the MLA and East Pakistan, the default condition changed. The MLA's default position was not to distribute aid, and they needed a reason to do so. When they believed that distributing aid would not bring them any benefit, they defaulted to the condition of not distributing aid.

Chapter Five – Cyclone Nargis, Myanmar, 2008

The international condemnation that was directed at Myanmar's military junta – the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) – following Cyclone Nargis was unlike any the state had experienced before. One year before the cyclone, the SPDC cracked down on Buddhist monks and civilians who were protesting peacefully in the Saffron Revolution, demanding the return of democracy to the nation (Seekins 2009). While the military crackdown was sufficiently brutal to shock many in Western democratic states, the regime's reaction to the Saffron Revolution paled in comparison to its actions following Cyclone Nargis. The degree of international scrutiny, condemnation, and outrage was unprecedented, yet for at least three weeks international aid workers were denied entry to the country (Selth, Even Paranoids Have Enemies: Cyclone Nargis and Myanmar's Fears of Invasion 2008).

This case study will investigate which of the observable implications derived from the academic literature were present in Myanmar in 2008. It will be concluded that the military dictator – Than Shwe – was concerned that foreign aid could increase domestic unrest, exacerbate factional rivalries within the military, and thereby threaten his exit strategy.

On Friday 2 May, 2008, Cyclone Nargis surged through the Irrawaddy Delta before hitting the former capital of Yangon. Homes were flattened, trees were torn from the ground, and rice paddies were drowned in saltwater. By Monday, the junta claimed almost 4,000 people had died. The final death toll would not be published, because the regime stopped counting at 138,000 (Paik 2011). A few days after the cyclone, a CNN correspondent, Dan Rivers, was pursued by the regime after filming government workers dumping dead bodies into a river (CNN 2008). This incident encapsulates the regime's attitude in the first week following the cyclone. While a serious effort was made to cover up the worst of the damage and all offers of aid were refused, the international community was persistent and the damage too great to ignore. Four days after the cyclone, the first international aid arrived in Myanmar from Thailand, only to be confiscated by the regime. As international outrage mounted, France suggested invoking the UN's Responsibility to Protect principle to distribute humanitarian aid without the permission of the junta (Paik 2011). Most other states dismissed the idea but as the debate went on and the regime continued to refuse aid, the death toll continued to rise.

A week after the cyclone, the junta announced that it would begin to accept aid with the caveats that 1) it would only accept food, medicine, and financial aid, and 2) no additional foreign aid workers or military personnel would be permitted to enter the country (Paik 2011). Not only was short-term aid desperately needed but with the winter's rice crop destroyed, long-term aid would become critical as well.

On 10 May, the constitutional referendum took place in areas of the country unaffected by the cyclone. This referendum was a crucial stage in the SPDC's 'roadmap to democracy,' which would see the military enshrine their ongoing power within the new democratic framework (Taylor 2004). Two

weeks after the rest of the country voted in the referendum, the regime forced the affected areas to vote as well. The turnout was apparently 98.1%, and the referendum passed with 92.5% of the vote (Seekins 2009). Less than a week later, the regime began evicting families from state-run temporary dwellings, taking them back to their devastated land and forcing them to remain there (Ibid.). On 19 May, once unaffected areas had voted in the referendum, the regime conceded and announced that they would allow humanitarian efforts from ASEAN to enter the country and distribute aid. The regime's behaviour following the cyclone was deeply unusual, and this case study will investigate which of the explanations derived from the literature can explain why the regime acted in the way it did.

5.1 – Ideological Differences and Ethnic Hatred

Ethnic and ideological differences likely played no role in the SPDC's obstruction of aid, as there was no observable 'outgroup' and no history of animosity between the regime and the areas affected by Cyclone Nargis. Myanmar is both one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, and one of the most ethnically divided (Kramer 2018). Since independence in 1948, much of the country has suffered continuous ethnic armed conflict. However, in the areas of Myanmar most affected by Cyclone Nargis, the majority ethnicity is that of the Bamar people (Kramer 2018). The Bamar are the majority ethnic group in Myanmar, and the socially and politically dominant ethnic group. While the affected areas are home to other ethnicities, it seems unlikely the junta would refuse aid to all ethnicities out of hatred for a few.

Furthermore, there are no obvious ideological differences between the regime and the regions most affected by Cyclone Nargis. In fact, the disaster-affected regions were some of the only places throughout Myanmar that had not been affected by prolonged civil war between 1995 and Cyclone Nargis in 2008 (Paik 2011; Seekins 2009). As such, if there were ideological differences in these regions, they were not enough to drive armed civil conflict. Based on the Saffron Revolution of 2007, however, there were clearly some ideological differences between the junta and the citizens. While the 'revolution' took the form of protests and only lasted a month, the public displays of dissatisfaction with the regime had a lasting impact (Seekins 2009). However, there is no evidence to support the idea that the regime obstructed aid because of ideological differences or because of the Saffron Revolution. While it is unlikely that ethnicity or ideology played a role in the SPDC's decision to obstruct aid, the lasting impact of the pro-democracy Saffron revolution may have led the regime to deny foreign aid.

5.2 – Foreign Politics

Myanmar's military junta denied foreign aid for several weeks following the cyclone. Arguably, it did so because it believed such aid would – directly or indirectly – cause further pro-democracy protests and threaten the regime's rule. The regime denied all forms of foreign aid, whether from military, non-military, or NGO sources, indicating that the regime was not concerned over foreign invasion, but

foreign interference. Moreover, the domestic politics of Myanmar were vulnerable to such foreign interference given the events of the Saffron Revolution in 2007.

In 2008, the regime sought to prevent further popular uprisings on the twenty-year anniversary of the 8888 Uprising (Seekins 2009). The 8888 Uprising occurred in 1988, and Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as a national figure leading hundreds of thousands of protesters, particularly students. After the military retook control in a coup, the uprising was – as appears to be tradition in Myanmar – brutally crushed, and up to 3000 people were killed (Ibid.). Most notably, the result of the 8888 Uprising was the regime's promise to hold democratic elections, and it did so in 1990. However, once Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) emerged as the clear winner with 58.7% of the seats, the military junta refused to recognise the results (Taylor 2004). The junta continued to rule, Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest, and two years later Than Shwe seized control.

2008 was also the one-year anniversary of the Saffron Revolution which lasted from August to September 2007 and involved many of the same activists as the 8888 Uprising. The Saffron Revolution was initiated when the SPDC removed subsidies on fuel which caused prices to double, and the price of natural gas increased by 500% (Selth, Burma's 'saffron revolution' and the limits of international influence 2008). The increase in fuel prices caused food prices to rise, and protesters who began to demonstrate were beaten and arrested. The protests quickly changed from economic ones to pro-democracy ones (Ibid.). Buddhist monks became the figureheads of the Saffron Revolution – which was named after the colour of their robes – and their normally revered status in Burmese society made the ensuing military crackdown all the more shocking to the international community (Ibid.). If the SPDC was concerned that more pro-democracy protests were possible, then foreign interference from antagonistic states would only compound that concern.

In 2008, the SPDC were concerned that the international community wanted to remove them from power and were worried that it would use foreign aid to do so. Several years before the Saffron revolution, some states had introduced sanctions against Myanmar to try and force the junta to relinquish power and recognise the results of the 1990 election. The *Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act* of 2003, passed by the U.S Congress, claimed that its aim was "to strengthen Burma's democratic forces and recognise the National League of Democracy as the legitimate representative of the Burmese people" (Congress of the United States of America 2003). In response to the suppression of pro-democracy activists, many members of the international community expanded both broad and specific sanctions against the regime. When states that had expressed a desire for regime change offered humanitarian aid, the SPDC understandably perceived it as a threat. Such foreign actions explicitly stated that the regime was illegitimate, and the political opposition ought to govern instead of Than Shwe's regime. We can conclude that in 2008, Than Shwe and the SPDC likely feared that not only was there a threat of more pro-democracy protests, but that the international community was trying to replace the regime with a democratic government.

Many contemporary sources claimed the Burmese regime was refusing aid because of its "intense paranoia" towards the international community. This claim is misleading because it implies the regime's paranoia was unfounded (Selth, Even Paranoids Have Enemies: Cyclone Nargis and Myanmar's Fears of Invasion 2008). Than Shwe and the SPDC had good reason to be wary of the international community, and 'paranoia' disregards the legitimate concerns the regime held about potential foreign influence. Barring the deployment of foreign troops on domestic soil, the regime may have been concerned that international humanitarian actors would encourage further uprisings from Burmese pro-democracy advocates, by providing financial and physical support to protesters. Such an uprising could be characterised as a second Saffron revolution, except this time the international community was watching closely from the beginning.

Logically, a second Saffron revolution could threaten the regime in one of two ways. First, the regime might crush it with force, inviting further international condemnation and the possibility of a full-scale civil war. Second, the regime might be forced to make costly concessions to the protesters, thereby losing power and influence over the planned transition to democracy. Clearly, neither of these options was acceptable to the regime. We can therefore conclude that Than Shwe and his junta saw two main threats: the domestic population was prepared to begin another revolt with the anniversary of the 8888 Uprising and the Saffron revolution fresh in their minds; and the international community was prepared to encourage such civil conflict.

If we acknowledge that the regime denied international aid to prevent further domestic uprisings, then this finding lends an interesting new insight to some of the relevant academic literature. As shown in Chapter Two, natural disasters can lead to civil conflict if improperly managed. However, in this case the SPDC deliberately denied aid – thereby mismanaging the relief – in order to mitigate the potential costs associated with accepting foreign aid. Most authoritarian regimes accept international aid to help avoid the increased risk of civil conflict. In this case, Myanmar is truly the exception.

The arguments presented by the literature on authoritarian states and civil conflict hold true in this case. Authoritarian states have no reason to invite the increased risk of strengthened rebels or civil conflict, and in Myanmar the desire to avoid such costs clearly trumped the risk of the international community forcibly intervening. While we can conclude that Than Shwe and the junta were concerned about foreign aid leading to a second Saffron revolution, key pieces of information are still missing. It seems apparent that for the regime to be threatened by the offers of foreign aid, the regime itself must have been internally vulnerable, perhaps due to elite rivalry.

5.3 – Elite Rivalry

Through close examination of Than Shwe's rise to power it can be argued that he was not threatened by elite rivalry, because he had fully consolidated his power and had not undertaken coup-proofing

tactics prior to Cyclone Nargis. Arguably, Myanmar's regime denied foreign aid because it was afraid of the regime falling to "factional infighting" (Paik 2011). By examining Than Shwe's rise to power, it can be argued that in 2008 he was not threatened by elite rivalry, and the threat of factionalism must have come from within the ranks of the military.

Than Shwe seized power in 1992, but for the first few years he was just one of many powerful elites. It was not until 1997 that he was powerful enough to begin purging his rivals. After seizing power from Saw Maung – whom Than Shwe had had sedated and forced to retire – Than Shwe became the Chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). It was then that Than Shwe abolished the SLORC and replaced it with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), which concentrated the power of the SLORC within the hands of a smaller number of military leaders. Together with Vice-Senior General Maung Aye and General Khin Nyunt, Than Shwe shared power relatively equally, as the abolition of the SLORC removed most of the junta members with significant power bases, replacing them with junior officers (Ibid.). Khin Nyunt was, himself, a divisive figure who had been appointed to his role of Chief of Intelligence by Ne Win, the former military dictator who resigned after the 8888 Uprising in 1988 (Ibid.). When Than Shwe replaced the SLORC with the SPDC he removed most of Khin Nyunt's enemies and replaced them with Maung Aye's allies. By removing the more powerful members of the junta, Than Shwe was then able to add or remove members of the junta as he pleased, and he no longer had to compromise on his own goals (Hlaing 2008).

The factionalism that had once plagued the junta was gone, but until Than Shwe was able to purge Ne Win from his position of influence he would be unable to consolidate his power completely. This next step in Than Shwe's consolidation of power occurred in 2002. Ne Win still had influence, if not direct power, within the regime and Myanmar's system of patronage ensured that many of the older military officials owed him their continued loyalty, although Than Shwe had ensured that few of them were still in power. These divided loyalties were clearly a threat to Than Shwe's rule, but there was little he could do about it until Ne Win's son-in-law and grandchildren attempted to stage a coup (Ibid.). Taking the opportunity, Than Shwe was able to remove the officers who were loyal to Ne Win, and could do so with the public's support.

However, Khin Nyunt remained as the last recipient of Ne Win's patronage, and by purging him in 2004 Than Shwe was able to demonstrate that he was unthreatened by elite rivalry. Following the purge of the SLORC, Maung Aye and Khin Nyunt were only competing with each other. Their competition was described as "generally amicable," as the two stayed away from each other's regions of interest and allowed Than Shwe to settle any disputes, further demonstrating Than Shwe's undisputed role as leader of the regime (Ibid.). Over the years, however, the intelligence services had grown increasingly powerful under Khin Nyunt. When Than Shwe purged him, he also disbanded the intelligence services, reforming them as a military branch rather than a separate institution.

Finally, Than Shwe announced that the administrative capital of Myanmar would move from Yangon to the purpose-built city of Naypyidaw, signalling a further shift of power within the regime

(Gettings 2008). Previously, Than Shwe, Maung Aye, and Khin Nyunt had carefully controlled the military by distributing power among them, but now Than Shwe was able to concentrate power for his loyalists. Not least Maung Aye, who remained his second-in-command until they both retired in 2011.

We can draw three conclusions by examining Than Shwe's ascension from junta member to military strongman. The first conclusion is that, by 2008, Than Shwe had completely consolidated his power. Secondly, while he had undertaken coup-proofing tactics the last of these occurred in 2004 and involved the head of the intelligence services. Therefore, by 2008 Than Shwe was not threatened by elite rivalry. Finally, if Than Shwe was not threatened by elite rivalry in 2008, then any "factional infighting" (Paik 2011) would have come from outside the regime, from within the military itself.

The presence of military factionalism is supported by evidence following the military crackdown against the Saffron revolution in 2007. According to Major Aung Lin Htut, officers began to question the self-interest of the generals and called into doubt the morality of their orders to fire on civilians (Htut 2008). It was this "bubbling dissent" which reportedly led to a falling out between Maung Aye and Than Shwe over the response to the Saffron revolution (Ibid.). The rift between the two was clearly not particularly wide, as Maung Aye remained in his position, and was neither demoted nor forced to retire. This further indicates that the threat of factionalism would have come from within the military itself, and not from within the junta.

It is unclear how this potential for factional infighting would be affected by the regime's acceptance of foreign aid. More importantly, what could lower-ranking military officers hope to gain from engaging in such factionalism? One answer is that if forced to quell another popular uprising they would simply refuse on moral grounds. However, Than Shwe's leadership saw potentially hundreds of thousands of civilians die from a lack of relief efforts but did not see the outbreak of military factionalism, so it seems unlikely that Than Shwe was concerned over a moral rebellion within the military. We can therefore conclude that Than Shwe must have been concerned foreign aid would give lower-ranking military officers the chance to improve their situation in a way that could have threatened the regime. The most likely reason for areas of the military to rebel would be the threat of their imminent removal from power, which was likely to occur as the state progressed towards the 'roadmap to democracy.'

5.4 – The Roadmap to Democracy and Than Shwe's Exit Strategy

Than Shwe's 'roadmap to democracy' was an exit strategy that would ensure he could retire comfortably without the fear of prosecution in the ICC. The 'roadmap to democracy' was intended to hand over power to a civilian government, yet it ensured that the military maintained control over key state portfolios (Taylor 2004). If the military were no longer in sole control, the 'roadmap to democracy' would likely see a distinct amount of power drain from the military to the new civilian government. If

protecting Than Shwe's exit strategy was the reason his regime obstructed aid, then there are three things we would expect to observe.

The 'roadmap to democracy' is evidence that Than Shwe was seeking to transfer power from his military regime to a civilian democracy. In August 2003, just over a year before he would be purged by Than Shwe, Khin Nyunt was appointed as the Prime Minister. Five days later, he announced the 'roadmap to democracy.' It described a process which involved: the reconvening of the National Convention to write a new constitution; a national referendum to approve the constitution; general elections to elect members of the legislative body; and Parliamentary sessions to be held (Ibid.). In April 2008 – three weeks before Cyclone Nargis – the SPDC unveiled the new constitution and called for a referendum on May 10 (Seekins 2009). Despite the transfer of power to a civilian democracy, however, the new constitution left the military with significant political power.

Than Shwe was using protections within the new constitution to ensure he was able to retire peacefully, without fear of prosecution either domestically or in the ICC. In 2003 Than Shwe was 70 years old and reportedly suffering from diabetes (Barany 2015). However, the exit strategy available to most democratic leaders was not available to him for two main reasons (Ibid.). Firstly, he knew what had happened to former dictator Ne Win, whom Than Shwe had placed under house arrest for the last five years of his life. Than Shwe therefore had to ensure that he retained enough power after his retirement to avoid a similar fate. Secondly, Than Shwe was terrified of the ICC (Htoo 2010). Than Shwe so feared prosecution by the ICC that the academic Aung Htoo was almost kidnapped by Burmese military intelligence when he gave a lecture in Thailand on Myanmar's human rights record (Htoo 2010). Due to the – almost literally – endless human rights abuses Than Shwe was accused of committing, it is almost certain that if he left power entirely, he would indeed by prosecuted in the ICC. The 'roadmap to democracy' was therefore crucial to Than Shwe's retirement plan as "under Articles 443 and 445 of Chapter XIV of the Constitution, the current regime cannot be held accountable for its wrongdoing in the past" (International Center for Transitional Justice 2009). Overturning this amendment would require 75%+1 in the Burmese parliament, of which 25% is controlled directly by the military (Ibid.). Therefore, Than Shwe knew that if the new constitution could be accepted by a public vote, he would be able to retire peacefully.

Than Shwe believed that accepting foreign aid would threaten the transfer of power due to members of the military being dissatisfied with the 'roadmap to democracy.' Under the new constitution, the military remained a strong political force, as alongside 25% of all seats in parliament it maintained control over three of the key ministries: defence, home affairs, and border affairs. While this undoubtedly gave the military a lot of power, it could also be seen as a major reduction in power for certain groups. Compared to the old regime, the military went from having full control of all government ministries to having control of just three. Importantly, this reduction in power did not involve a reduction in the size of the active military forces, rather a reduction in the relative power of the military itself.

As the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) was then in control of the military, and most of the military-controlled seats in parliament were taken up by high-ranking officers. As a result, the individuals most likely to suffer the effects of this reduction in power would arguably be the mid-ranking officers. Those who were not high-ranked enough to gain the benefits of the new constitution, but high-ranked enough to lose power they had under the old system. This hypothesis is supported by Barany (2015), who argues that in military regimes, swift and drastic changes are inadvisable because they might provoke the indignation of those for whom regime change means the loss of power and privilege. Furthermore, these are the same officers who were the source of the 'bubbling dissent' during the Saffron Revolution, and who questioned the self-interest of the generals and their orders to act immorally. If Than Shwe believed mid-ranking military officers did not support the 'roadmap to democracy,' then accepting foreign aid would place them in close contact with foreign actors who were also highly critical of the roadmap.

Than Shwe's primary goal following Cyclone Nargis was to ensure the constitutional referendum passed. The 'roadmap to democracy' was intended to protect him from future prosecution both domestically and internationally. By denying foreign aid, Than Shwe was trying to ensure nothing disrupted the constitutional referendum, especially not an influx of foreign actors who had publicly denounced it. Worse still, these foreign actors would have come into close contact with potentially seditious military officers who stood to lose the most under the new constitution. This is further supported by Than Shwe's agreement to allow foreign aid workers from ASEAN to be the first to distribute aid, once most of Myanmar had voted to accept the new constitution two and a half weeks after the cyclone. Than Shwe believed ASEAN posed the least threat to the constitutional referendum – which would be held in the disaster-stricken areas in the next few days – as it had publicly supported the 'roadmap to democracy.' Than Shwe used the 'roadmap to democracy' as an exit strategy to ensure his continued influence on Burmese politics and his lasting immunity to prosecution in the ICC.

5.5 – Conclusion

This case study has argued that Than Shwe denied foreign aid out of concern that it could lead to a second Saffron Revolution and the exacerbation of factional rivalries within the military which would threaten his exit strategy, the 'roadmap to democracy'. This case study has compared the events of Cyclone Nargis in 2008 with the observable implications derived from the academic literature, to explain why the regime obstructed aid following the disaster.

First, this case study found that ideological and ethnic differences likely played little role in the regime's denial of aid, as there was no identifiable outgroup and no history of animosity. Second, the SPDC denied all forms of foreign aid to protect the regime from domestic unrest and so avoid a second Saffron Revolution. Third, as Than Shwe had fully consolidated his power by 2008, he was not threatened by elite rivalry, but may have been threatened by factionalism within the military. Finally,

Than Shwe aimed to use the public vote on the new constitution as a way of ensuring he could retire peacefully, free from the threat of prosecution domestically or in the ICC.

Chapter Six – Case Comparison

The cases of the 1970 Bhola Cyclone in East Pakistan and the 2008 Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar seem, at first, very similar. Both cases involve a cyclone striking a Southeast Asian state shortly before a crucial public vote which signalled the beginning of a transition away from military rule and towards democracy. While East Pakistan descended into genocide and civil war, however, Myanmar completed its 'democratic' transition and the dictator retired peacefully. These case studies aimed to discover why authoritarian regimes obstruct humanitarian aid and why the outcomes of these two cases differed so dramatically.

Ethnic hatred played a substantial role in Pakistan's obstruction of aid but likely played no role in Myanmar. The precise effect that this difference had is unclear, except that it changed the default condition of distributing aid. While Myanmar needed a reason not to distribute aid, West Pakistan needed a reason to overcome the ethnic hatred between the Punjabi and the Bengali peoples.

In both cases, the regime denied foreign aid not due to concerns over foreign invasion, but to prevent foreign interference in domestic politics leading to civil conflict. In the case of West Pakistan, the regime denied Indian aid because they were concerned that it would lead to increased Indian-Bengali relations. The regime feared this because of the Agartala conspiracy, where Sheikh Mujib and other East Pakistani political elites attempted to secure Indian support for an armed revolution in East Pakistan. Similarly, one of the explanations offered in the case of Myanmar is that the regime denied foreign aid specifically because Than Shwe believed it may lead to a second Saffron Revolution, as the international community had continuously sanctioned the regime and advocated for regime change.

Elite rivalry threatened Yahya Khan in Pakistan, but it did not threaten Than Shwe in Myanmar. The key difference here appears to be in the strength of the leader. Than Shwe had been the military dictator for over a decade and had fully consolidated his power several years before Cyclone Nargis. Yahya Khan had never wanted to be the President and had neither consolidated nor sought to consolidate his power. While Bhutto was able to manipulate Yahya Khan for his own political ends, Than Shwe was unthreatened by elite rivalry.

Both Yahya Khan and Than Shwe prized their exit strategy over the health and wellbeing of their citizens. The best example of this is when both leaders denied foreign aid. As Myanmar sought to prevent foreign interference in the 'roadmap to democracy,' Pakistan sought to prevent India from influencing the Awami League's chances at the election. The leaders of both Pakistan and Myanmar were more concerned that foreign interference would jeopardise their exit strategy than they were concerned over the deaths of hundreds of thousands of their citizens.

Therefore, the key difference between the two cases appears to be the role that elite rivalry played in the obstruction of aid. Yahya Khan was likely manipulated into obstructing aid in order to further the goals of political elites such as Bhutto, to his own detriment. Than Shwe, however, was able to do only what was best for himself, and so avoided the fate which befell Yahya Khan.

Chapter Seven – Conclusion

This thesis sought to offer explanations for why authoritarian regimes deny or obstruct aid following natural disasters. By building on the explanations derived from the literature, this thesis has proposed that: 1) ethnic hatred or ideological differences are not enough motivation for a regime to incur the cost of obstructing aid; 2) regimes will deny foreign aid to avoid foreign interference in domestic politics, especially if it risks civil conflict; 3) elite rivalry may cause a weak leader to act against their own best interests, as elites competing for leadership may encourage courses of action which are so disastrous the leader must be replaced; and 4) an authoritarian leader will prioritise their exit strategy over the need to distribute aid to their citizens. Of these findings, there are two which are particularly interesting.

First, in both cases studied the authoritarian regime denied foreign aid to avoid civil conflict. This contradicts the academic literature, which claims that because the mismanagement of disasters leads to civil conflict, regimes will accept aid as they wish to avoid civil conflict at all costs. Instead, it appears that regimes will accept the civilian deaths and lack of aid over the increased risk of civil conflict. This thesis can therefore add this addendum to the academic literature: *Authoritarian regimes will deny foreign aid when they believe that doing so will lead to a decreased risk of civil conflict.*

Second, when the leader is weak and their power has not been fully consolidated, they may be vulnerable to elite rivalry. However, this thesis has demonstrated what appears to be a new type of what I term, 'seditious rivalry.' That is, elite rivalry which the leader is not necessarily aware of, and which is able to manipulate the leader into acting against their own interests. For example, Bhutto was able to manipulate Yahya Khan into a course of action which would lead to Yahya Khan's own downfall, thus paving the way for Bhutto to seize power.

This thesis has opened up two particularly interesting avenues of research into the behaviour of authoritarian regimes. First, the precise mechanisms by which leaders believe foreign interference may harm their exit strategy could be clearer. Second, the role which 'seditious rivalry' plays in decision-making processes which lead to costly outcomes for leaders should be investigated in more depth. Moreover, how effective 'seditious rivalry' is at seizing control, particularly when compared with more traditional expressions of elite rivalry, such as coups.

Fortunately, the obstruction of aid by authoritarian regimes is rare. Unfortunately, this means drawing broadly applicable conclusions about the motivations of regimes in such instances is difficult, as they are based off a small body of evidence. With such a small sample size, further research would be more useful if it were qualitative rather than quantitative.

It is rare that an authoritarian regime will prevent humanitarian aid from reaching its own people. As natural disasters become more common, the best way to prevent regimes from obstructing aid is to mitigate the disaster before it begins, with early warning systems, alerts, and disaster shelters. Failing that, it would serve humanitarian actors well to understand that no appeal to humanity will

convince an authoritarian dictator to risk their own personal goals in order to save the lives of citizens who did not vote for them.

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