



Climate Change: Soft Power Opportunities

Lieutenant-Commander Anonymous

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Exercise Solo Flight

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CLIMATE CHANGE: SOFT POWER OPPORTUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

As the world adapts to climate change, there will be opportunities for various countries to use its humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR) as a means of gaining soft power. The intensity and frequency of natural disasters and storms are on the rise. This paper will attempt to answer the following research questions: Should states focus on HADR operations to gain soft power in the international community? Should the state military be doing this role, or should this be left to civilian organizations? This paper will argue that in the global power competition, developed countries will use HADR missions to gain the soft power of developing countries.

This paper will discuss climate change and the forecasted increase in climate-related disasters. It will use recent examples, historical trends, and what is expected in the future. It will also discuss soft power using Joseph S. Nye's concept. Thirdly, it will focus on HADR and its relationship with soft power. Military response and issues that arise in a HADR operation will also be discussed. Finally, it will conclude with opportunities to increase soft power in developing parts of the world, namely the People's Republic of China (PRC) and its HADR operations in Africa.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The world is experiencing significant climate changes. The scientific community is divided on correlation and causation regarding climate change and its relationship with increased natural disasters. However, one aspect of climate change that most scientists agree on is global warming; the temperature has "increased by more than 1.2°F (0.7°C) for the period 1986–2016 relative to 1901–1960."¹ 2023 is the warmest year on record, and global temperatures have reached 1.45 °C above the pre-industrial average.² Scientists can also agree on the increased frequency of natural disasters in the past decades.

There has been an increase in natural disasters in Canada since the 1970s.³ The increase in disasters within Canada can be further categorized by type, and the most frequent have been floods, thunderstorms, wildfires, and winter storms.⁴ These storms have impacted territories and

¹ D.J. Wuebbles, D.R. Easterling, K. Hayhoe, T. Knutson, R.E. Kopp, J.P. Kossin, K.E. Kunkel, A.N. LeGrand, C. Mears, W.V. Sweet, P.C. Taylor, R.S. Vose, and M.F., "Our Globally Changing Climate," Climate Science Special Report: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume I U.S. Global Change Research Program, 2017, 35–72, 36, <https://doi.org/10.7930/J08S4N35>.

² World Meteorological Organization, "State of the Global Climate 2023," World Meteorological Organization (WMO) (Geneva: World Meteorological Organization (WMO), 2024), 3, https://library.wmo.int/viewer/68835/download?file=1347_Statement_2023_en.pdf&type=pdf&navigator=1.

³ Dave Sawyer et al., "Tip Of The Iceberg: Navigating the Known and Unknown Costs of Climate Change for Canada," Canadian Institute for Climate Choices, December 2020, 9, https://climatechoices.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Tip-of-the-Iceberg_-_CoCC_-Institute_-Full.pdf.

⁴ Ibid, 9.

provinces that do not typically experience these kinds of disasters. For example, the wildfires in 2023 affected communities in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, and Halifax, Nova Scotia.^{5,6}

The increase in climate-related disasters in Asia is no different from that in the rest of the world, as there has been an increase since the 1970s.⁷ Asia and the Pacific regions have experienced a sharper increase in storms compared to all of the natural disasters. Out of all of the storms and disasters in the world, approximately half of them occurred in Asia and the Pacific and approximately 75% were related to floods and storms.⁸

Europe is also experiencing an increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, including heat waves, droughts, heavy precipitation, and rising sea levels.⁹ The impacts of these disasters have had widespread consequences, influencing "ecosystems, forestry, agriculture, water supply and human health. More indirect impacts affected energy security, transport services, tourism and the wider economy."¹⁰

Africa is also under threat of climate change. However, there is a stark difference between Africa and other regions of the world. The population living in Africa is more vulnerable and, therefore, has greater difficulty in coping with climate change.¹¹ There are many interrelated reasons for this. One of them is that approximately half of Africa's labour force is involved in agriculture, and climate change is affecting this industry.¹² In comparison, the European Union has 4.2% of its population working in the agricultural industry.¹³ Appropriate land for growing is increasingly scarce, droughts are affecting water supplies, and flooding is affecting crop lands.

If the recent historical trends in increased natural disasters indicate the future frequency of disasters, the world will need to become more resilient when facing these disasters. Part of a risk reduction strategy is having the resources to predict and respond to the events. Having a risk reduction strategy is more accessible for developed countries to achieve than for developing countries. Developed countries often have resources and governance models with solid plans to

⁵ April Hudson, "N.W.T. Fire Crews Eye Direct Attack on Yellowknife Wildfire as Warm, Windy Weather Resumes," CBC, August 20, 2023, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.59117/20.500.11822/43796>.

⁶ CBC, "Nova Scotia Saw Its Most Devastating Wildfire Season on Record in 2023," CBC, October 30, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/nova-scotia-most-devastating-wildfire-season-ever-1.7010205>.

⁷ Vinod Thomas et al., "Contributors to the Frequency of Intense Climate Disasters in Asia-Pacific Countries," *Climatic Change* 126, 126, no. 3–4 (2014): nos. 3–4, 382, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-014-1232-y>.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁹ European Environment Agency, "European Climate Risk Assessment — Executive Summary," European Environment Agency (Copenhagen K, Denmark, January 2024), 5, <https://doi.org/10.2800/204249>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 7.

¹¹ United Nations Ghana, "Africa Suffers Disproportionately from Climate Change," World Meteorological Organization (Nairobi, September 5, 2023), <https://ghana.un.org/en/244689-africa-suffers-disproportionately-climate-change>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Eurostat, "Which EU Regions Rely Heavily on Agriculture?," October 11, 2023, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20231011-1>.

respond to disasters.¹⁴ This, in part, has made developed countries less vulnerable to the risk of natural disasters and developing countries more vulnerable.

Climate change has outpaced many countries' ability to adapt to the new changes. According to the United Nations (UN), "Five out of six Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have established at least one national adaptation plan, strategy or policy."¹⁵ This leaves one out of six countries without a plan, strategy, or policy. When the report was published in 2023, only half of the countries without a plan, strategy, or policy had a notion of developing one. Of the countries that do not have a plan, most of them "are particularly vulnerable to climate impacts."¹⁶ The UN has also estimated that approximately US\$194 to 366 Billion would be needed to bridge the gap.¹⁷ Given this resource gap, many regions and countries will need aid or assistance after a disaster strikes their territory.

With many changes occurring to the climate, there is also an environmentally displaced person's aspect. Many populations have been forced to leave their habitual residence due to the changes in the local area. Displaced persons are not afforded any protection under international law under refugee status, as their reason for being displaced is for environmental reasons.¹⁸ However, if the state in which those people are living is affected by large amounts of violence, perhaps as a result of climate change, then that situation could be interpreted as a situation involving refugees.

An example of this would be the conflict in Syria. Syria faced a significant drought that deteriorated local economies and was also a contributing factor for human migration from rural to suburban areas. This, coupled with already delicate social and political tensions in the area, was the catalyst for the start of the conflict in Syria.¹⁹ Approximately 6 million Syrians have been internally displaced, and another 6 million as refugees in other countries.²⁰

The Institute for Economics and Peace think tank predicts that up to 1.2 billion people will be displaced by the year 2050 due to environmental change, conflict, and civil unrest.²¹ The

¹⁴ WMO UNISDR, "Disaster Risk and Resilience," May 2012, 1–13, 7,

https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/thinkpieces/3_disaster_risk_resilience.pdf.

¹⁵ United Nations Environment Programme, "Adaptation Gap Report 2023: Underfinanced. Underprepared." (Nairobi, November 2, 2023), XII, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.59117/20.500.11822/43796>.

¹⁶ Ibid, XII.

¹⁷ Ibid, XV.

¹⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees" (2010), 14 <https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees>. The UNHCR defines refugee as "any person who [...] as owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it"

¹⁹ Peter H. Gleick, "Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria," *Weather, climate, and society* 6, 6, no. 3 (2014): 331–40, 338, <https://doi.org/10.1175/wcas-d-13-00059.1>.

²⁰ MedGlobal, "Climate Change, War, Displacement, and Health: The Impact on Syrian Refugee Camps," 2022, 5, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/climate-change-war-displacement-and-health-impact-syrian-refugee-camps>.

²¹ Institute for Economics & Peace, "Over One Billion People at Threat of Being Displaced by 2050 Due to Environmental Change, Conflict and Civil Unrest," September 9, 2020, <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Ecological-Threat-Register-Press-Release-27.08-FINAL.pdf>.

regions that are expected to be most affected by population displacement are Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa.²² These regions are expected to be most affected by the increased disasters and the lack of resilience to overcome these events.

In 2022 alone, 71.1M persons were internally displaced for various reasons.²³ Out of the total, 8.7M persons were displaced as a result of disasters, a 45% increase compared to 2021. Many of these persons fleeing were due to the flooding in Pakistan and other disasters in the world. This increase in the number of internally displaced persons is creating a human security challenge across the globe.

In 2024, the UN is forecasting that there will be 302.2M people in need of humanitarian help, and as of Feb 2024, there is only funding to assist 184.1M people.²⁴ The conflicts in Ukraine, Israel, Haiti, and others in the world are contributing to an increased need for humanitarian assistance around the world.²⁵

In summary, climate change is affecting the world dramatically and causing human security challenges with migration, internal displacement and being affected by natural disasters. If the recent trends in natural disasters indicate future weather patterns, we can expect the same or more extreme weather. Many states need to prepare to deal with the frequency and intensity of these disasters, which will likely require assistance from neighbouring states, the UN, or from within. There is also an expected surge of environmentally displaced persons and refugees who will be forced to relocate to a new region. These factors create opportunities for states that want to push their own agenda on other countries or regions for soft power.

SOFT POWER

As with most definitions, there are many variations as various scholars have different perspectives. According to Nye, “power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants.”²⁶ This definition applies to most contexts of power. However, how one influences someone else determines the kind of power one uses.

Before defining soft power, one must first define hard power. Joseph Nye explains hard power as inducements or threats; one could simplify it further using the carrot or stick analogy.²⁷ For example, the 'carrots' could be interpreted as reducing trade barriers, whereas the 'sticks' could be the threat or use of military force. One could use military force, the threat of military

²² Ibid, 1.

²³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, “Global Report on Internal Displacements 2023 Internal Displacement and Food Security,” Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, n.d., 8, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2023>.

²⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), “Global Humanitarian Overview 2024: February Update,” UN OCHA (Geneva: World Meteorological Organization (WMO), February 29, 2024), 2, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-february-update-snapshot-29-february-2024>.

²⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), “Global Humanitarian Overview 2024: February Update,” 2.

²⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 2, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=461952>.

²⁷ Ibid, 5.

force, or economic means as hard power to influence an actor's decision or to coerce them into making the decision that one wants them to. These examples summarize hard power.

When Nye was writing on power, he was able to identify the aspects of hard power but realized that states still achieved outcomes without the use of hard power: "The US was also able to get the outcomes it wanted because of attraction rather than just threats of coercion or payment."²⁸ Nye, who coined the term soft power, defines it as "when one country gets other countries to want what it wants."²⁹ Nye explains that many factors influence the ability to shape preferences to get one to do something. These factors include attraction, leadership, desire to change, and agenda-setting.³⁰

Nye argues that soft power can be derived from three distinct areas: "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.)"³¹ Each of these areas provides states options for how they allocate resources and develop their policies.

When considering culture as a source of soft power, the pop culture that other countries consume will have the most significant impact as it is more appealing to the masses.³² The movies that the country produces have an impact, the education that young people receive has an impact, and the food that the culture eats also influences soft power. Nye argues that Hollywood, Harvard, Microsoft, and Michael Jordan have significantly contributed to American soft power abroad.³³

Political values can take many different shapes. A country's stance on human rights, whether or not it has ratified specific conventions, its humanitarian aid structure, and its effort to combat climate change are all examples of political values. These values may or may not be attractive to other state or non-state actors, indicating the state's level of soft power. Nye argued that the PRC has made significant investments in soft power through various programs since 2007. Despite their significant efforts, the PRC did not see substantial returns on their investments. Nye argues that some of their political views on human rights and censorship were having an adverse effect on soft power.³⁴

Many foreign and domestic policies impact the degree to which a country's level of soft power is affected. For example, in the United States of America (USA), the Obama administration understood the importance of soft power as hard power has its limits: "Democracy, human rights, and civil society are not best promoted with the barrel of a gun."³⁵

²⁸ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power: The Evolution of a Concept," *Journal of Political Power* 14, 14, no. 1 (2021): 196–208, 200, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2021.1879572>.

²⁹ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990): 153–71, 166, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>.

³⁰ Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*, 5-8

³¹ *Ibid*, 11.

³² *Ibid*, 13

³³ *Ibid*, 17

³⁴ Joseph S. Nye, "China's Soft Power Deficit," *Wall Street Journal*, 2012, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/chinas-soft-power-deficit/docview/1011597983/se-2>:

³⁵ Joseph S. Nye, "The War on Soft Power." *Foreign Policy* (April 12, 2011). <https://foreignpolicy-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/2011/04/12/the-war-on-soft-power>.

As such, the USA prioritized reinvigorating United States Agency for International Development (USAID).³⁶

On the contrary, the United States had a reduction of soft power from internal policies. For example, racial segregation in the 1950s had a negative impact on the USA's soft power in Africa. In today's context, the notions of capital punishment and weak gun control laws degrade US soft power in Europe.³⁷

Soft power may have negative consequences depending on who is attracted to what. For example, soft power can have an adverse effect on states and society across the globe if violent extremist organizations (VEO) gain soft power. Before the internet, global communication was costly and, therefore, limited to governments, states, or large corporations.³⁸ The internet, news media, and social media make it easier than ever for people to connect—for good and bad reasons. Given the increase of interconnectedness around the globe and how state and non-state actors can use the internet to their advantage, the importance of soft power for the appropriate actors will increase.³⁹

In addition to the military's role as a hard power, militaries can also assist in generating soft power for their state. Nye argues that through assistance programs in peacetime, training, and officer exchanges, soft power can be increased.⁴⁰ Soft power can also be increased by navies of the world regardless of the missions that they operate in. For example, if warships are operating 'hard power' missions, there are still many opportunities for increasing soft power:

“Army and Air Force are more likely associated with greater threat and destruction. Naval forces are less intrusive and offer a more subtle influence. This offers unique opportunities to create soft power. The diplomatic potential of navies has long been recognized by nations and can be traced back to the heritage of colonial powers that would dispatch their fleets to boost their prestige and to influence events ashore”⁴¹

When warships of a visiting nation arrive at a host nation, their sphere of influence can be felt. Therefore, warship port visit scheduling requires significant strategic thought to ensure that the soft power opportunities are in the desired ports.

The United States Navy (USN) has increased US soft power by employing its hospital ships in disaster relief roles.⁴² If the USN deploys its aircraft carriers in support of disaster relief, there are obvious hard power connotations as aircraft carriers are offensive warships.⁴³ However, those same aircraft carriers can also increase soft power while overtly displaying their hard

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*, 13

³⁸ Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*, 22

³⁹ Ibid, 31

⁴⁰ Joseph S. Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, 616, no. 1 (2008): 94–109, 106, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>.

⁴¹ Larissa Forster, “The Soft Power Currencies of US Navy Hospital Ship Missions,” *International Studies Perspectives* 16, 16, no. 4 (2015): 367–87, 369, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44218792>.

⁴² Ibid, 382.

⁴³ Ibid, 372.

power.⁴⁴ In contrast, a white USN hospital ship with a red cross on its hull is for health diplomacy and soft power.⁴⁵ Even admiration, and therefore soft power, can develop when local populations observe such a large ship with over a thousand beds assisting their community.⁴⁶

When looking at the degree to which democracies tolerate casualties, states may be more inclined to use soft power over hard power based on the loss to their population. Nye argues that “Postindustrial democracies are focused on welfare rather than glory, and they dislike high casualties.”⁴⁷ Additionally, Wells argues that many leaders in democracies are more concerned about casualties than their autocratic equivalents. Wells's data is derived from a counterinsurgency scenario; however, similar links could be made to other kinds of conflict. The democratic leaders have an electoral advantage and public opinion to consider and how sensitive their population is to casualties.⁴⁸ This sensitivity to casualties in democratic countries may incentivize states to pursue soft power over hard power and focus on HADR. Autocratic states may view the soft power improvements that democracies gain from this type of action and adjust their own policies to gain more soft power.

Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR)

There are various interpretations of how HADR are defined. Canadian military doctrine defines humanitarian assistance as “any action taken to save lives, prevent human suffering, and/or mitigate property damage.”⁴⁹ This definition can be interpreted as short-term and long-term activities. Additionally, Canadian military doctrine defines humanitarian relief operations as “to relieve or reduce the impact of natural or man-made disasters in countries or regions outside of Canada.”⁵⁰ This definition is around disasters where immediate action is required to alleviate suffering. Both definitions are similar in that each involves reducing the situation's impact on both property and persons.

The USA defines both foreign disaster relief and foreign humanitarian assistance in its Joint doctrine.⁵¹ Similar to Canada’s doctrine, foreign disaster relief is focused on short term

⁴⁴ David Capie, “The United States and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) in East Asia: Connecting Coercive and Non-Coercive Uses of Military Power,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, 38, no. 3 (2015): 309–31, 321 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2014.1002914>.

⁴⁵ Larissa Forster, “The Soft Power Currencies of US Navy Hospital Ship Missions,” 372.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 372

⁴⁷ Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*, 19.

⁴⁸ Matthew Wells, “Casualties, Regime Type and the Outcomes of Wars of Occupation,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 33, 33, no. 5 (2016): 469–90, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26271439>.

⁴⁹ Canada, Department of National Defence “Canadian Forces Joint Publication 3.0 Operations,” September 2011, 7-9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 8-3.

⁵¹ USA DoD, “Joint Publication 3-29: Foreign Humanitarian Assistance,” May 14, 2019, GL-7, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_29.pdf.

Foreign disaster relief: Assistance that can be used immediately to alleviate the suffering of foreign disaster victims that normally includes services and commodities, as well as the rescue and evacuation of victims; the provision and transportation of food, water, clothing, medicines, beds, bedding, and temporary shelter; the furnishing of medical equipment and medical and technical personnel; and making repairs to essential services

Foreign humanitarian assistance. Department of Defense activities conducted outside the United States and its territories to directly relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger, or privation.

alleviation compared to foreign humanitarian assistance being more broad and able to be interpreted for longer term assistance.

The UN defines humanitarian action as “assistance, protection and advocacy actions in response to human needs resulting from complex emergencies and disasters.”⁵² The UN further describes humanitarian assistance as “short term emergency relief, providing the basics for survival, such as food, water, and shelter.”⁵³ This definition focuses on short-term relief to assist the state in providing basic human needs to its population. This paper will use the term HADR to describe actions taken by state and non-state actors in times of emergencies and disasters.

From the UN's perspective, militaries should be the option of last resort when responding to HADR operations.^{54, 55} Additionally, “The military or civil defence asset must therefore be unique in capability and availability.”⁵⁶ Military activities could include strategic airlift, logistics, water purification, or route clearing. Militaries do not want to provide direct assistance, delivering goods such as food or water to the population in need. Instead, they should provide indirect assistance, warehousing, or delivering the goods so that humanitarian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or local civilians can be seen as the providers.⁵⁷

The intentional gap between military and civilian is also relevant in the motivation for assisting. The UN defines the four humanitarian principles as humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.^{58, 59} These principles are the guiding principles that the UN and NGOs use to

⁵² UN OCHA, “United Nations Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination Field Handbook,” UN OCHA (Geneva, 2018), 9, https://resourcecenter.undac.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Guidance.UNCMCoord-Field-Handbook_2018.pdf.

⁵³ Ibid, 9.

⁵⁴ UN OCHA, “Recommended Practices for Effective Civil-Military Coordination of Foreign Military Assets (FMA) in Natural and Man-Made Disasters,” September 5, 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/recommended-practices-effective-humanitarian-civil-military-coordination-foreign-military-assets-fma-natural-and-man-made-disasters-version-10-september-2018>.

⁵⁵ “Guidelines On The Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets In Disaster Relief - ‘Oslo Guidelines’ ,” 1.1, November 2007, 4, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/254414/15764bcaa23982ccaa19a82c59277d70/oslo-guidelines2-data.pdf>

⁵⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 10.

⁵⁸ “Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the United Nations” (2004), <https://emergency.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/General%20Assembly%20Resolution%2058-114.pdf>.

⁵⁹ UN OCHA, “OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles,” UN OCHA, June 30, 2012, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ocha-message-humanitarian-principles-enar>.

Humanity: Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.

Neutrality: Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature

Impartiality: Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.

provide assistance. However, military assistance in a HADR operation is more challenging than achieving all four principles, given that most militaries are controlled by a state. The state's military providing HADR relief are "[...] seen as complicating the core humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality"⁶⁰ based on the political decision to send them.

NGOs typically operate altruistically and are motivated to provide aid for arguably more pure reasons than a military. NGOs usually meet all four humanitarian principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. NGOs will not take sides in an operation and will provide aid to anyone who requires it, regardless of which side of the conflict they are on. This can cause friction between NGOs and militaries as their motivations differ. As such, the UN created a handbook and courses to outline best practices and how best to coordinate civilian and military responses.⁶¹ In a conflict scenario, a military may perceive an NGO as assisting the enemy or vice versa. Usually, militaries do not provide humanitarian aid in a conflict in which they are involved. In a natural disaster context, friction can be reduced by following the principles and coordination mechanism provided by the UN.

Using a military in a HADR option may not be perceived very well depending on the location or context in which it operates. The state that a military may operate in could have resistance to receiving military assistance. NGOs are usually trained to operate in a HADR environment, whereas militaries are trained for combat. NGOs or humanitarian actors may perceive militaries as doing “a job they are not trained or are competent to do, and they admittedly cringe when militaries depict themselves as humanitarian actors.”⁶² When militaries arrive on the scene, there could be friction and resistance to overcome.

Militaries have been conducting HADR operations in various capacities and in both indirect and indirect assistance roles. An example of indirect assistance is the Berlin Blockade from 1948 to 1949, a humanitarian aid airlift operation. The combination of United States Air Force, the Royal Air Force, and British Civil aircraft delivered over 2 million tons of cargo to Berlin via air.⁶³ An example of military providing direct assistance would be handing out water bottles to a population in need. Militaries are permitted to conduct direct assistance if there is no other organization that can complete the task.⁶⁴

There can even be resistance or hesitation from the military itself when conducting human security or HADR operations. Militaries are trained for combat purposes, and HADR

Independence: Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

⁶⁰ Sheena M. Eagan, “Global Health Diplomacy and Humanitarian Assistance: Understanding the Intentional Divide between Military and Non-Military Actors,” *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 165, 165, no. 4 (2018): no. 4, 246, <https://doi.org/10.1136/jramc-2018-001030>.

⁶¹ UN OCHA, “United Nations Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination Field Handbook,” UN OCHA (Geneva, 2018), https://resourcecenter.undac.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Guidance.UNCMCoord-Field-Handbook_2018.pdf.

⁶² Deon V. Canyon, Benjamin J. Ryan, and Frederick M. Burkle, “Military Provision of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief in Non-Conflict Crises” 14, 14, no. 3 (2017): no. 3, 2, <https://doi.org/10.1515/jhsem-2017-0045>.

⁶³ Roger G. Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift 1948-1949* (US Government printing office), 108, <https://media.defense.gov/2010/Oct/01/2001329741/-1/-1/0/AFD-101001-053.pdf>.

⁶⁴ ‘Oslo Guidelines’, 3.

operations are well outside this scope. HADR and human security operations involve “a mindset that is alien to their education.”⁶⁵ This, however, can be overcome with specially trained military personnel in HADR or security operations.

Additionally, there is a possible perception that states could send their militaries, for national interest purposes, to countries under the guise of humanitarian aid.⁶⁶ Doing so undermines the humanitarian principles NGOs adhere to and could lead to friction between the military and the NGO. If states intervene in another state without the situation being approved or sanctioned by the UN or other multilateral bodies, then there could be perceptions that the intervention is for national interest only.

In recent years, however, despite the military's last resort, there has been a dramatic increase in militaries responding to HADR missions.⁶⁷ This is in the context of international disasters where militaries respond in an expeditionary manner. In the Canadian domestic context, “Since 2010, Canadian Armed Forces operations in response to natural disasters have roughly doubled every five years.”⁶⁸ In 2023, more than 2100 CAF members deployed across Canada to fight forest fires in various provinces and territories.⁶⁹

Even countries that have not typically conducted HADR missions to gain soft power are commencing to do so. The PRC has commenced operations; however, “their efforts lack engagement, coordination, and sophistication and are reminiscent of aid efforts conducted by competent countries over 20 years ago.”⁷⁰ This is also apparent in Africa as “China’s cautious contribution to peacekeeping looks like a pragmatic attempt to advance its interests through the U.N. system.”⁷¹ Regardless of the motivation of the PRC, it understands the value of soft power and allocating resources to pursue more of it.

HADR has been one of the Canadian Armed Forces core missions since it was added to the 2017 Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada Defense policy.⁷² According to the most recent defense review of 2024, *Our North, Strong and Free*, one of the eight core missions of the CAF is to “provide assistance to civil authorities and non-governmental partners in responding to

⁶⁵ Myriam S. Denov, *et al.*, *Evolving Human Security: Frameworks and Considerations for Canada’s Military*, ed. S. M. Lewis-Simpson and Sarah Jane Meharg (Kingston, Ontario: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2023), 143.

⁶⁶ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199252435.001.0001>.

⁶⁷ Deon V. Canyon, Benjamin J. Ryan, and Burkle M., Jr Frederick, “Rationale for Military Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief,” *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* 35, 35, no. 1 (2020): no. 1, 92, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049023X19005168>.

⁶⁸ Department of National Defence, *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada’s Defence* (Ottawa, 2024), 1, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/north-strong-free-2024.html>.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁰ Deon et al., “Rationale for Military Involvement,” 93.

⁷¹ Richard Gowan, “China’s Pragmatic Approach to UN Peacekeeping,” The Brookings Institution, September 14, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-pragmatic-approach-to-un-peacekeeping>.

⁷² Department of National Defence, “Strong Secure, Engaged,” Canadian Defence Academy (Ottawa, 2017), 82 <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2018/strong-secure-engaged/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>.

international and domestic disasters or major emergencies."⁷³ It is apparent that the Government of Canada sees the value of the HADR mission in both international and domestic contexts. Participation in these operations should increase soft power, as the CAF will be used for these purposes.

Although soft power is at play in a HADR operation, the initial perceptions of the state providing aid matter in long-lasting effects. McGinley et al. argue that the pre-conceived attitude determines how much the state receiving aid will adjust their perception. States, "attitude shifts are weaker and less permanent in countries with strongly held pre-existing negative attitudes [...] highlighting a potential conditional limit to the contribution of humanitarian assistance operations and their role as an element of soft power."⁷⁴ McGinley used Japan's perception of the USA before and after the earthquake in 2011 as the argument for an already positive perception that increased.⁷⁵ The Pakistan floods of 2005 were an indicator that perceptions did not increase significantly due to pre-existing attitudes.⁷⁶ McGinley's research concludes that the perception of the US still increased after a HADR operation. However, the limitations and extent of the support varied.

OPPORTUNITIES TO EXTEND SOFT POWER

Given that there are likely to be many natural disasters in the future and many vulnerable states not prepared to deal with these disasters, opportunities present themselves for states to exert their influence to obtain soft power. Many states either send monetary donations, send a section of their government, or send their militaries to conduct humanitarian aid missions around the world. The reasons for sending a type of response vary between each country for which option they chose. This section of the paper will focus on the PRC and its HADR operations to gain soft power as it has done in countries in Africa.

The PRC People's Liberation Army (PLA) is late to the HADR environment compared to Western states. The PRC has only recently been using its military as a mechanism for HADR since the early 2000s.⁷⁷ The PLA has conducted operations in delivering humanitarian aid to Afghanistan in 2002 using their air force. A more recent example is the PLA providing assistance in the Ebola crisis in West Africa between 2014 and 2016.⁷⁸ Their contribution included medical teams to assist in the response. Cabestan argues that the PLA learned how to

⁷³ Department of National Defence, *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence* (Ottawa, 2024), 1, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/north-strong-free-2024.html>.

⁷⁴ James E. McGinley, Louis P. Kelley, and Laura M. Thurston Goodroe, "Soft Power; The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention," *American Intelligence Journal* 30, 30, no. 2 (2012): 34–38, 34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26202012>.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 35.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 36.

⁷⁷ Gregory Coutaz, "Image-Building as Impetus for the Growth of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s Engagement in International Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) Operations," *European journal of East Asian studies* 18, 18, no. 1 (2019): 36–65, 40, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700615-01801006>.

⁷⁸ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "China's Response to the 2014–2016 Ebola Crisis: Enhancing Africa's Soft Security under Sino-US Competition," *China Information* 35, 35, no. 1 (2021): 3–24, <https://doi-org.cfc.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0920203X20978545>.

operate with the World Health Organization (WHO) and from other militaries, government agencies and NGOs during the Ebola response.⁷⁹

Since the PRC's commencement of humanitarian aid, it has learned from other organizations and its own experience. PRC has outlined its goals, philosophy, and principles in its first emergency humanitarian assistance practice document that was issued in 2023. Based on PRC's increase in humanitarian aid operations, the UN humanitarian principles are highlighted in the document. It also mentions multilateralism, respecting the desires of the host state, and coordinating with other agencies operating within the disaster.

A recent example of the PRC providing aid and relief to Africa is its effort during Tropical Cyclone Idai in 2019. The storm impacted areas in Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe with heavy rain, strong winds, and coastal storm surge.⁸⁰ This storm affected over 1.8 million people who needed assistance.⁸¹ The PRC's response included search and rescue (SAR) teams and logistical support.⁸² In addition to the immediate relief, the PRC also included financial support as part of its response, where the funds were used for necessary infrastructure that was destroyed by the storm.⁸³ PRC also worked with other UN agencies in the area during its response.

The PRC is now Africa's number one trading partner, and it has increased its aid relief in Africa in recent years.⁸⁴ Between 2000 and 2014, the PRC had over four thousand development projects worldwide worth approximately US\$ 354 billion.⁸⁵ Of the four thousand projects worldwide, 54% were allocated to African countries.⁸⁶ Between 2018 and 2022, the PRC has used 42% of its total humanitarian funds in Africa.⁸⁷

In addition to development projects, there is also the aspect of financial support. PRC financial development is a kind of loan that is linked to the state of PRC, which can be

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ World Meteorological Organization, "Tropical Cyclone Idai Hits Mozambique," March 15, 2019, <https://wmo.int/fr/node/11530>.

⁸¹ US AID, "https://www.usaid.gov/fact-sheet/southern-africa-tropical-cyclone-idai-fact-sheet-4-fy2019," US AID, April 3, 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/fact-sheet/southern-africa-tropical-cyclone-idai-fact-sheet-4-fy2019>.

⁸² China International Development Cooperation Agency, "Emergency Humanitarian Assistance," International Development Cooperation: China's Practice, April 2023, <http://en.cidca.gov.cn/pdf/InternationalDevelopmentCooperationChina%27sPracticeEmergencyHumanitarianAssistance.pdf>.

⁸³ UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Govt of China Donates USD\$2 Million to Rebuild Houses, Schools and Clinics Destroyed by Cyclone Idai," January 9, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/government-china-provides-usd-2-million-aid-cyclone-idai-affected-families-zimbabwe>.

⁸⁴ Pippa Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa? Unpacking Trade, Investment and Aid," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24, 24, no. 3 (2019): no. 3, 398, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-09592-w>.

⁸⁵ Axel Dreher et al., "Aid, China, and Growth: Evidence from a New Global Development Finance Dataset," *American Economic Journal. Economic Policy* 13, 13, no. 2 (2021): 135–74, 139, <https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.20180631>.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 140.

⁸⁷ China International Development Cooperation Agency, "Emergency Humanitarian Assistance," International Development Cooperation: China's Practice, April 2023, <http://en.cidca.gov.cn/pdf/InternationalDevelopmentCooperationChina%27sPracticeEmergencyHumanitarianAssistance.pdf>.

categorized as "development finance, but not aid."⁸⁸ Some of its loans have severe debt forgiveness contractual obligations such as "future receivables" as in access to minerals and natural resources.⁸⁹ It is clear that the PRC sees the opportunities to obtain soft power through its foreign policy and its financial aid investments in Africa.

PRCs motivation for providing aid to countries in Africa could also be attributed to international support for their national interests. PRC incentives could be influenced by the fact that the African Group within the United Nations consists of 53 African states, each with a vote at the General Assembly.⁹⁰ This represents a substantial percentage of votes within the UN. It is argued that the PRC's motivation in 1971 was to provide aid to Africa in order to gain UN votes in order to achieve diplomatic recognition from the Republic of China (ROC), Taiwan, to the PRC.⁹¹

Alternatively, the PRC could use HADR to collect intelligence on other states providing aid with their military. The PRC could use this to determine their adversaries' capabilities and best practices for future conflicts.⁹² This can cause friction between militaries attempting to have a well-coordinated response effort. An example of this friction would be from the 2015 Nepal earthquake. Nepalese government divided the sector that needed aid into three distinct sectors: an area each for the PRC, India, and the USA. PRC treated their area as a sovereign territory and did not want USA aircraft in their sector to provide aid. This gave the international community reasons that they were not entirely invested in providing aid given their resistance.⁹³ This also undermines the UN's humanitarian principle of neutrality.⁹⁴

Lasting trust between the country in need and the country providing aid rests more than on just economic aid alone. Deon argues that much of what the PRC is doing is focused on its own economic gains and does not take into account the perspectives of the local country or community. Much of the soft power from the local community will be built on using local labour and resources, health, and education.⁹⁵ This is an area where the PRC could allocate more resources to gain more soft power by assisting and empowering the local population in the affected area.

⁸⁸ Yun Sun, "China's Aid to Africa: Monster or Messiah?," February 7, 2014, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-aid-to-africa-monster-or-messiah/#_ftn13.

⁸⁹ Deborah Brautigam, Yufan Huang, and Kevin Acker, "Risky Business: New Data on Chinese Loans and Africa's Debt Problem," SAIS-CARI Briefing Paper 3, 3 (July 2020): vol. 3, 5, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5652847de4b033f56d2bdc29/t/6033fad7ba591794b0a9dff/1614019291794/BP+3+-+Brautigam%2C+Huang%2C+Acker+-+Chinese+Loans+African+Debt.pdf>.

⁹⁰ United Nations, "Model United Nations: Groups of Member States," accessed April 29, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/model-united-nations/groups-member-states>.

⁹¹ Pippa Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa? Unpacking Trade, Investment and Aid," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24, 24, no. 3 (2019): no. 3, 394, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-09592-w>.

⁹² Matthew Southerland, "The Chinese Military's Role in Overseas Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief: Contributions and Concerns," U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (Nairobi, July 11, 2019), 3, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.59117/20.500.11822/43796>.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁴ UN OCHA, "OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles," UN OCHA, June 30, 2012, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ocha-message-humanitarian-principles-enar>.

⁹⁵ Deon et al., "Rationale for Military Involvement," 95.

Measuring soft power is very difficult as it usually involves polling and surveys, which is subjective in nature and may not stand up to the test of qualitative data. However, in a survey conducted by Afrobarometer, on average, 63% of respondents found that the PRC has had a positive economic and political influence in their country.⁹⁶ The same study indicates that Africans preferred the national development model to the USA, followed by the PRC.⁹⁷ Given the limitations of this survey, it is likely that the PRC initiatives are working, as they are having a more significant influence within the states of Africa.

Studies have indicated increases in PRCs soft power. According to a Brand Finance survey on countries' soft power ranking, the PRC has ranked third, following the USA as number one and the United Kingdom as second.⁹⁸ The study measures soft power in eight different pillars of soft power. The PRC's high ranking is attributable to their business and trade, education and science pillars.⁹⁹ The areas that the PRC could most improve are its people and values, media and communications, and governance.

In summary, has room to increase its HADR response in order to obtain more soft power. Its motivation to increase its operations can be argued that they are there for more than just increasing its soft power. However, regardless of their motivation, the PRC has increased its HADR operations, both in funding and boots on the ground, in the African region and is learning from other militaries in the area. The PRC will likely increase its soft power over the region by continuing to increase its presence and operations.

CONCLUSION

With climate change affecting the world with increased frequency and intensity of disasters, the world is expected to require an increase in HADR missions. This will require many states to work together to provide immediate assistance to the affected population. With the disasters, countries will turn these crises and disasters into opportunities to increase their soft power in the region. There has already been an increase in the number of militaries filling this HADR role.

Another result of climate change is that populations will be forced to migrate to new locations. Perhaps those countries that conduct HADR operations will be the same ones that the persons departing will choose to immigrate to, and as a result of the HADR operation, could be more attracted to that country. As the world navigates the future climate change issues, more research will be required to determine how more developed countries use HADR missions to gain the soft power of developing countries.

⁹⁶ Mogopodi Lekorwe et al., "China's Growing Presence in Africa Wins Largely Positive Popular Reviews," Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 122, October 24, 2016,14, https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/migrated/files/publications/Dispatches/ab_r6_dispatchno122_perceptions_of_china_in_africa1.pdf.

⁹⁷ Mogopodi Lekorwe, "China's Growing Presence" 3.

⁹⁸ Brand Finance, "Global Soft Power Index 2024," Brand Finance, 2024, <https://static.brandirectory.com/reports/brand-finance-soft-power-index-2024-digital.pdf>.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 35.

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