

Reforming Rebels
Case of the United Nations Action Plans

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Abstract

Can external international actors change the behavior of rebel groups in internal civil wars through non-violent means? World politics has witnessed interactions among non-state actors, with implications for political and societal changes. One of such attempts is the United Nations action plans with non-state armed groups to reduce the use of child soldiers in conflict zones around the world. As a state-centric organization like the United Nations, this engagement is a unique recent phenomenon that begs in-depth analysis. Such humanitarian engagements often occur in conflict zones with actors that difficult to stage reforms. What are the political processes of those engagements? Our examination of political incentives and conflict circumstances lead us to expect that the confluence of rebel incentive to engage externally, government consent, as well as UN capacity affects rebel groups signing onto UN action plans. Our statistical analysis of UN action plans between 2000 and 2015 test our arguments, complemented with four case analyses of the Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, the Philippines, and Sudan. Our study has implications for international community's external engagement operations in internal conflict zones.

In August 2009, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a rebel group in the Philippines, signed an “action plan” with the United Nations (UN) to halt and prevent the recruitment and use of children in the armed conflict.³ For the United Nations, this was an unprecedented move to engage non-state armed groups. After all, the UN is as an inter-governmental organization with state-centric focus, so such moves mark a significant departure from usual UN’s projects and practices. On the part of the non-state actor, MILF has waged rebellion for three decades and have used child soldiers in their ranks most of their armed struggle. In the mist of reducing the number of child soldiers, MILF also engaged in peace talks with the Philippines government in 2012 and subsequently changed its internal code of conduct to fit into the action plan. This behavior is in stark contrast to Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) that continued its extremist path, without signing any action plans.

Is the MILF just a happy case where the UN engagement bore some fruits? More generally, can external actors catalyze rebel groups to change their behavior for the purpose of improving humanitarian situations? Rebel groups took up arms with strong motivations to fight to achieve their goals. They usually wage their armed struggle in the shortage of manpower and thus have strong motivation to use children in their ranks.⁵ At face value, reforming rebels appears to be difficult at the outset. Especially by international actors with few leverage and with no coercive capacity, how the change is brought about is not abundantly clear. Would it be through providing material benefits such as humanitarian aid? Or, would it be persuasive power of international actors that bring about domestic and local political change, say, by engaging local elites? Or, does the engagement for reforms hinge on choosing the right set of armed groups that are particularly vulnerable to persuasion and international action and engagement?

We approach the question of humanitarian engagement in conflict zones by considering the motives of key stakeholders and their political constraints: rebel groups, national governments, and external actors (i.e. the United Nations). We demonstrate that the initiation of external of engagement hinges on three conditions: 1) when rebel groups have territorial control , 2) when the national government does not block the UN access to their internal enemies, and 3) when the UN has the existing capacity and infrastructure such as peacekeeping forces on the ground. When these three conditions do not meet, the process of reforming rebels via UN action plans cannot be initiated. This carries general lessons for humanitarian engagement in conflict zones more broadly, where engagement with non-state actors are usually consent-based and highly contingent on conflict situations.

The research question on reforming rebels has significance and relevance to the contemporary global human security. External actors in conflict zones is a salient feature of global politics today. These areas tend to be with “limited statehood” where states are weak.⁶ Filling the void of state capacity, non-governmental organizations as well as outside states try to build governance and develop capacity locally. We observe many cases of humanitarian engagement, or interaction with non-state actors to achieve humanitarian goals of reducing suffering in conflict zones. The phenomena generally occur in this context where state capacity is weak, and there, NGOs act as new political authority to address governance issues or

³ UN News Center. “Philippines: UN official welcomes impact of government-rebel peace accord on children in armed conflict” 24 October 2012. Accessed on 11 October 2017. Available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=43365#.Wd3beWhSzZs>

⁵ In fact, while “no-child-soldier” norm is violated by a couple of governments (the list of shame includes Myanmar, Afghanistan and a few countries), the list is a lot longer for non-state actors like rebel groups.

⁶ Risse et al. 2018.

conformity of international norms. Under what conditions these humanitarian engagement takes place should be of interest to students of international relations as well as international policymakers. This is especially so when we know other international policies such as military interventions rarely solve the problem of internal conflicts. Small-scale programs that are directly linked to conflict actors might have some promise of success in bringing about change in conflict-ridden societies. Especially, in light of our history of outside interventions in internal conflicts, we come to recognize that imposed international measures rarely work, but then engagement or consensus-based approach that can confer some ownership to conflict actors might have potential to affect social and political changes. In what follows, we lay out our arguments about the conditions for the initiation of humanitarian engagement using the case of the UN action plans, and test our arguments in the dataset of global civil wars between 2000 and 2015.

Theorizing humanitarian engagement in conflict zones

Engaging an armed actor as an outsider does not start easy. Recall that rebel groups in civil conflicts took up arms to defend and protect their political positions. Outside actors sometimes take military approach, but humanitarian military interventions are rare⁷ and many outside interventions stem from the interveners' foreign policy interests.⁸ Humanitarian engagement starts against the backdrop of these facts.

We will call humanitarian engagement by international actors in conflict zones as “soft interventions.” The phenomenon of soft interventions distinguishes itself from other kinds of international interventions using “hard” means such as military interventions or punitive, accountability measures such as sanctions or indictments by the International Criminal Court. It is “soft” in the sense that it is often using the measures and intervention tools that are not based on coercive military capacities or punitive economic means. The phenomenon of soft interventions is related to humanitarian aid, but it is a particular category where international actors directly engage conflict actors. In this sense, soft interventions saddle between emergency aid and development aid. It takes place amid man-made disasters (not natural disasters), so it is related to emergency aid; and since its eventual goal is to contribute to human welfare beyond conflict situations, humanitarian engagement is ultimately linked to development goals.

The puzzle is when and how such seemingly weak and non-coercive measures can work to produce meaningful changes in conflict-ridden societies. The key for the first step, we argue, will be to find a meeting point for involved actors – rebel groups, governments, as well as international actors. Soft international interventions should work with existing political conditions, and recognizing key political obstacles to bringing about the consent to implement such interventions will help us understand when and how humanitarian engagement occurs.

Using the bargaining framework to see where the agreement points (or meeting points) are, we will derive the favorable conditions that could lead to soft international interventions. Exploiting actors' main interests and political circumstances is the key, and we will argue soft interventions can only occur when the three parties agree and politically comfortable with intervention conditions. Governments should be acceptant, or at least permissive to international

⁷ International military interventions in Kosovo and Libya are usually considered humanitarian military interventions, but these are rare cases given that we observe 30-40 civil wars annually (Themner & Wallenstein 2014). See Finnemore 2003 for cases of humanitarian interventions.

⁸ See for example Gent 2008.

engagement with their enemies; rebel groups should be organizationally and structurally primed to accept the external interventions; and international organizations on their part should be able to use their resources and networks to affect change. National governments, although dealing with internal enemies, are the authorities that provide unhindered access to international actors in their engagement with non-state actors. Rebel groups, on their part, should be susceptible to outside engagement for humanitarian purposes. And lastly and importantly, international actors should be equipped to initiate the interaction with non-state armed actors. We start our discussion with this simple theoretical point.

Characterizing humanitarian engagement

Humanitarian engagement in this paper deals with the interaction with non-state actors to achieve humanitarian goals of reducing suffering in conflict zones. Humanitarian engagement covers **non-military means** by **external actors** with the aim of changing the behavior of rebel groups to be aligned with **humanitarian norms**. Non-military tools include persuasion, assistance, and negotiation using legal instruments. External actors relevant in this effort include international humanitarian organizations, governmental and non-governmental. The goal of engagement is usually to promote international humanitarian norms – one of which is to protect children.

Use of **non-military tools** require consensus. Non-military tools exclude the option of imposition or coercion, but rather favor bargaining approach in attaining the goal of prevention and improvement. The method is also different from deterrence using accountability measures such as prosecution possibilities via the International Criminal Court. In this picture of what looks like diplomacy, access is critically important as the first step of engagement.

The characteristic of **external actors** is important to understand in the kinds of influence they would have. Military involvement and assistance in internal conflicts by powerful and resourceful countries is heavily studied subject.¹¹ General conclusion is that military interventions and subsequent state-building projects have a poor success record.¹² What about non-military interventions by international actors for humanitarian purposes? The effectiveness of foreign aid for development purposes has been hotly debated with arguments and evidence for both sides.¹³ Sanctions often fail especially when non-state actors are adaptive to acquire non-sanctioned resources for their benefit.¹⁴ Humanitarian engagement has not been thus far under systematic scholarly scrutiny, as it involves non-state actor interactions – the United Nations and rebel groups as laid out in this paper.

International **humanitarian norms** and improving the related practice is the goal of these engagements – urging to respect civilian life, to reduce the instances of sexual violence, to ban the use of child soldiers. These individual rights in civil conflicts are often merged with the concerns of human rights in fragile societies. We cannot expect that the changes are felt over night after the engagement, but there might be some conditions where external interventions, albeit using soft measures, could work to reduce human suffering.

¹¹ See for example, Wood, Salehyan, and Siroky 2014; San-akca 2016.

¹² Krasner and Weinstein 2016; Lake 2016.

¹³ I cannot do justice for this massive literature, but the most recent development is encapsulated in Radelet, Steve. 2017. “Once more into the breach: does foreign aid work?” in Brookings Future Development series. Monday May 8, 2017. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2017/05/08/once-more-into-the-breach-does-foreign-aid-work/>

¹⁴ Radtke and Jo 2018.

Background for UN action plans

UN action plans is one of humanitarian engagement examples that we explore in this paper. It is a recent phenomenon that has been initiated by the United Nations, and the program has feature of interacting with non-state actors. It is difficult to come up with a comprehensive map of humanitarian engagement, but the UN action plans will give us an illustrative example of humanitarian action in a systematic fashion, especially in terms of the universe of relevant actors and their behaviors. Scholars have studied some engagement initiated by non-governmental actors such as the Geneva Call's deed of commitment,¹⁵ and our work will complement theirs by providing framework for general humanitarian action.

For the purpose of child protection, UN action plan is defined as “a written, signed commitment between the United Nations and those parties who are listed as having committed grave violations against children” in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict.¹⁶ The key aim of the UN action plans is to stop the use and recruitment of child soldiers among state and non-state actors. The problem of child soldiering is a persistent problem in active combat zones where incentives to recruit help are abundant. Approximately 60 warring parties use child soldiers.¹⁷ The child soldier use by states has been decreasing over time, but non-state uses have cropped up as conflicts become severe. Some examples are illustrative: in Colombia, FARC child soldiers are demobilizing after 2016 peace agreement; in Yemen, the Houthis has back-tracked their negotiation with the United Nations after the flare-up of conflict in 2017; in Myanmar, Tatmadaw – Myanmar's state military is walking the steps to reduce the number of child soldiers – only on board in 2017, and many non-state actor rebel groups in Myanmar are still using children in their ranks.

The Office of the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict is the organ that oversees the action plans, charged with the goal of protecting children during armed conflicts around the globe.¹⁸ The Office starts with the list of violators (so-called shame list) that use and recruit child soldiers around the world. Approximately 40 rebel groups and 10 states are on the shame list. Once the list is identified, the United Nations delegation or staff try to contact non-state actors as well as states. The negotiation takes place when the conflict parties are willing to commit to the action plans. Since these are time-bound plans with action steps that usually come with monitoring and reporting mechanisms (MRM), the plans themselves are essentially consent-based and often confidential. Within the state-centric structure of global governance, differences exist when it comes to how humanitarian engagement is done. Some governments will sign on their volition and decide themselves for these action plans.¹⁹ Rebel groups, on the other hand, can only conclude the UN action plans when they are willing “and” when their governments let the United Nations to interact with rebel groups.

¹⁵ Gleditsch et al. 2018.

¹⁶ <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/our-work/action-plans/> accessed 12 October 2017.

¹⁷ See Haer and Böhmelt 2016 and Jo 2015 for the patterns of child soldiering.

¹⁸ The complete list of agenda includes what the OSRSG calls “six grave violations”: 1) killing & maiming, 2) child recruitment and use, 3) sexual violence against children, 4) abduction, 5) attacks on schools & hospitals, 6) denial of humanitarian access. See more at the annual report of the office at United Nations General Assembly/Security Council. 2018.

¹⁹ Sudan, Chad, Sri Lanka, Yemen are among the state parties that have signed onto these action plans.

Since the UN action plans starts with the shaming element, more focus is more on negotiating how the release of children is done, as well as the identification of child soldiers beforehand. The psychological and social and community-based programs are also discussed on the way – which are general features of soft interventions and humanitarian engagement.

Three conditions for rebel engagement

The essential feature of the UN action plans is the consensus approach within the confines of political authorities of national government, rebel actors, as well as the United Nations as an inter-governmental body. In light of the political process of making UN action plans described above, we propose that the following triad conditions on the part of rebel groups, national government, and the United Nations, should be present to get to the signing of the UN action plans.

Condition #1: rebel groups' political control

First, rebel groups should have their own willingness and capacity to make an international commitment to stop child soldiering. Recent studies have shown that the key motivation to interact with and reach out to international community stems from rebel groups' desire to establish political legitimacy vis-à-vis national governments.²⁰ When rebel groups have social bases with local communities, this incentive becomes stronger. The minimum standard is to have some level of central command and control within ranks, as decentralized and fragmented rebel organization loses its basic capacity to respond coherently to outside actors.

Territorial control provides one such condition to form rebel groups' motive and capacity to consult with the international actors. When rebel groups seize a firm control in a certain boundary, their time horizons for remaining in the region are likely to be long. This provides the groups with the incentives to govern rather than to fully exploit their social bases. Rebel groups with a territorial control would be more likely to be interested in advancing the welfare of the population as well as drawing its support. In contrast, rebel groups without a clear territorial basis, frequently called as "roaming bandits" would be more likely to recruit soldiers in an exploitative and nonsystematic manner such as kidnapping, since they do not have an incentive to take account of long-term interaction with civilians.²¹ This comparison between rebel group with and without territorial control leads us to expect that rebel group with territorial control would be more willing to sign the Action Plan which provides a course of actions designed to ameliorate the conditions of the population.

Furthermore, rebel groups with territorial boundaries imply two important conditions that enable the UN actor to locate and access to its negotiation partner: a clear chain of command and their visibility to the outside world. On the one hand, territorial control indicates that a rebel group constitutes some degree of hierarchical command structure. When rebel groups hold a territory, they need to constantly defend its boundary. The defensive mission in the periphery then requires a degree of hierarchical delegation from the center, since the points of contact against the opponents become multiple. Thus, territorial rebels would be likely to be the groups

²⁰ Jo 2015; Stanton 2016; Fazal 2018.

²¹ Abu Sayyaf is a primary case. For the reason why the roaming bandits are more likely to exploit their socioeconomic resources, see Olson 1993. Olson argued that political powers with the short-term time horizon do not have an incentive to protect and invest in its socio-economic resources.

who centralized the leadership. Those groups are more capable of engaging in political decision-making and working as a reliable negotiating partner with the international actor. It also implies their later capacity to comply with the plan, since those groups would effectively control and monitor local-level activities and violations. On the other hand, with the rebel groups' physical presence in a geographical boundary, rebel activities and recruitments are much more visible to the outside observers. Thus, child recruitment and other abuses against children are more likely to be watched by the outside communities and also more likely to be confirmed, which provides a reason for the UN actor to prioritize these groups incorporating in the Action Plan framework. These conditions combined, we propose that the rebel groups with territory would be more willing to and capable of make an international commitment.

Condition #2: Government acceptance

Second, in bringing out external engagement such as the UN action plans, national governments as conflict parties should be acceptant to the United Nations interacting with their internal enemies. Recall the fundamental nature of civil wars where rebel groups took up arms against national governments. In this setting, national governments have diverse responses to rebellion, including accommodation, co-optation, to repression.²² Some governments will be more acceptant to the idea of international organizations actively interacting with rebel groups. Other governments that do not allow opposition to flourish will use the heavy-handed approach and block the international access upfront. In the instances of government blockage, therefore, we are not going to see the UN access to non-state armed actors.

In general, political constraints for external engagement with non-state actors abound. But the most critical is the government's willingness to recognize civil wars as civil wars and let external actors engage their internal enemies. National governments, often in defense of their political legitimacy, do not admit that they are going through civil wars, or are afraid their legitimacy would be lost if external actors fruitfully engage rebel groups in their territory.²³ We posit this government blockage is more likely if governments are more autocratic than democratic. General political tendencies might not be fully attributable to specific situations of humanitarians, but we think theoretically, those regime characteristics would have carry over to governments' attitude toward outside actors' engagement within their own political jurisdiction.

Condition #3: UN infrastructure

Third, the United Nations will have to have the capacity and infrastructure to lead the mission. The engagement with non-state armed actors is a recent phenomenon with small contingent of staff in a special representative office, in particular. With the existing infrastructure such as peacekeeping forces that can aid the identification of rebel groups and security assessment, the UNICEF country delegations that can assist the monitoring and reporting mechanisms (MRM) of the six grave violations against children, the start and conclusion of the UN action plans would be easier to carry out. Additionally, external actors, such as the United Nations, have easier time for engagement if the location of rebel leadership is easily identified

²² Staniland 2017 documents different political approaches of national governments in dealing with their rebel groups.

²³ Walter 2002 presents evidence of governments' reputation in civil conflicts vis-à-vis rebel groups.

and accessible – and the existing infrastructure, personnel and resources can help the process of interaction and engagement.

The considerations of preferences of three major actors, as well as the political process of UN action plans, lead us to the following triad hypotheses.

H1 (rebel organization) UN action plan is more likely when a rebel group is organized with civilian base, specifically when the group exhibits a stable control over territory than lacks such a control.

H2 (government acceptance) UN action plan is more likely if national government gives consent than blocks the process. Blockage is more likely if governments are more autocratic than democratic.

H3 (UN infrastructure) UN action plan is more likely if UN infrastructure (e.g. peacekeeping) is present than absent.

The framework of three conditions highlighted in H1, H2, and H3 are going to be generally applicable to any settings where external international organizations engage non-state armed groups in conflict zones. Without one or the other, external engagement cannot occur or succeed in bringing peace or humanitarian outcomes. Without the willingness of rebel groups, humanitarian engagement cannot occur in the first place. Without the government consent, international actors will have difficult time engaging non-state actors in conflict zones. Also, without the capacity to engage on the part of international actors, external engagement will not have sufficient back-up to assist and foster ownership in local conflict settings. We therefore note that these are necessary conditions to get the fruit of the UN action plans and first step of engagement. In addition, we also note that these are not sufficient conditions. Even though these three conditions are present, there might be other factors such as intensity of the conflict or rebel fragmentation that could prevent the conclusion of the UN action plans. Even without government blockage, external engagement is difficult when the security of their own personnel is at risk, or the roads are simply inaccessible because of heavy fighting.²⁴

Just as a short illustration of a case in point, the MILF in the Philippines witnessed the fortuitous combination of the three listed factors. The commanders and leaders of the MILF pushed external engagement that lead to decade long engagement with UN actors as well as non-governmental organizations. MILF organized itself to revise its internal code of conduct, and it even organized internal non-governmental organizations for external engagement. The Philippines government did not adamantly block the access of external actors to interact with their rebel groups. This allowed MILF to develop relationships with external actors, such as UNICEF and the Geneva Call. MILF's over-time moderated political aim, being shifted from territorial autonomy to political autonomy, allowed them to further engage when peace talks were opened with the demobilization and disarmament 2017, resulting in the subsequent delisting from the UN's shame list.

With the above three hypotheses in mind, we will empirically examine our theoretical expectations in what follows. We first present quantitative evidence of rebel group comparison

²⁴ Fast 2014 shows the insecurity of aid workers and international staff working in conflict zones.

over the years, with respect to UN action plans, and then provide qualitative evidence of in the case of Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Philippines, and Sudan.

Statistical Analysis of UN action plans

Given our argument about the conditions that lead to the conclusion of the UN action plans, empirical evidence has to also show cases where UN action plans did not occur, in addition to the cases that experienced UN action plans. We started with all the rebel groups as in the Non-State Actor dataset,²⁷ and then reduced the rebel list to the groups that used child soldiers.²⁸ The empirical universe of child soldiering by non-state actors is not all the countries in conflict, but most. Among 56 countries that were embroiled in civil wars between 2000 and 2015 in our sample, about 52 had experienced the use and recruitment of child soldiers by non-state armed actors.²⁹ Since external engagement using the UN action plans is a contemporary phenomenon, we assembled the dataset with the temporal scope of 2000-2015.³⁰ In our data, the unit of observation is rebel-year, where each observation marks yearly data for each rebel group. This yearly observation allows us to track down the fluctuations of conflict events.

With the assembled data, we analyze the rebel groups' commitment to UN action plans and examine which rebel groups signed action plans and which didn't. We do that with the data for UN action plans from the reports by the UN Special Office on Children and Armed Conflict and marked the signers and non-signers.³¹ For key independent variables, we collected data to measure the triad factors related to rebel groups' organization (territorial control), government blockage (Polity IV), and UN factor (presence of peacekeeping forces). Territorial control dummy is from the NSA dataset (Cunningham et al. 2014). Political regime variable, scaled from -10 (most autocratic) to 10 (most democratic), is from Polity IV project.³³ The peacekeeping presence variable is from the UN peacekeeping website.³⁴ For estimation, since we are interested in the factors that eventually contribute to the signing of the UN action plans, we run the event history analysis³⁵ and report the results in Table 1.

²⁷ Cunningham et al. 2014.

²⁸ The NSA dataset we started with as a platform covers until 2011, so the new groups having emerged after 2011 such as SPLA in Opposition, in South Sudan is not incorporated into the dataset. Also, we should note that identifying the universe of rebel groups is always difficult. The convention adopted by the NSA data team is to focus on the conflict that generated 25 battledeaths but this criterion leaves out low-intensity conflicts.

²⁹ This count is based on Haer and Böhmelt (2016). Note that this dataset reports higher frequency of child soldiers from non-state armed group, compared to Jo (2015)'s rebel groups and international law dataset, and the UN's List of Shame.

³⁰ in this particular analysis, we set 2000 as starting point for long running groups. if a rebel group enters the dataset after 2000, we set the starting point as whenever a rebel group enters the dataset.

³¹ See the series of reports by UNCAC in the reference list at the end of this paper.

³³ <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html>

³⁴ <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/open-data-portal>

³⁵ Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004.

Table 1. Event History Analysis of UN Action Plans

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4 All variables
Territorial control	5.168* (4.204)			4.038* (2.987)
Polity		.898* (.044)		0.893** (0.0486)
UN Peacekeeping			2.976 (2.038)	3.792** (2.558)
<i>N</i>	1286	1228	1286	1228
Number of rebel groups	118	114	118	114
Number of UN action plans concluded	9	9	9	9

Note: Results are reported from cox proportional hazard model. The sample is rebel groups using child soldiers, identified in Haer and Böhmelt (2016). The unit of observation is rebel group-year. The dependent variable is un-action-plan onset. Hazard ratios are reported with standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

The results are from cox hazard models, estimating the effect of each variable in predicting the occurrence of UN action plans. Hazard ratios are reported in Table 1: ratio less than one indicates negative relationship between engagement factors and UN action plan occurrence, and ratio greater than one indicates positive relationship between engagement factors and UN action plan occurrence.

Models 1-3 assess each of three conditions proposed in Hypothesis 1-3 in bivariate models. Model 1 indicates that rebel groups with territorial control are more likely to engage in for the conclusion of UN action plans. Model 2 indicates that government blockage is one factor that affects the UN action plans, but in a different direction from our expectation. We expected democratic regimes would favor international engagement of their non-state armed actors, but it was democratic regimes that are less likely to grant UN action plans, compared to their autocratic counterparts. Model 3 shows weak support for Hypothesis 3, showing that UN peacekeeping presence is positively (although not statistically significantly) linked to the conclusion of UN action plans. Model 4 brings all variables into one model, where all three variables are shown to be factored in when it comes to the outcome of UN action plans.

Regarding Model 1, we further examined the relationship between territorial control, and centralization. This is because our theoretical argument involved the capacity and willingness of rebel groups in engaging with outside actors, and the strength of central control and command might be associated with the capacity of rebel organizations. Unfortunately for our analytical purposes, almost all groups that used child soldiers are to some extent centralized, according to the standard measure in non-state actor dataset (Cunningham et al. 2014),³⁶ giving us not enough

³⁶ Cunningham et al. 2014.

variation to distinguish very centralized ones from not centralized ones. Our current interpretation is that the rebel organization that controls territory would have both capacity and willingness because of their alleged strength to control within their ranks, as well as some social ties that they build among their populations. Just control within their rebel ranks might not be a good condition that could lead to external engagement.

Recall that Model 2 produced the effect that we did not expect. This may be due to the inadequate measurement where political regime measures do not get at governments' preferences for external actors engaging with their internal enemies. When we employed country-dummies for each government in order to capture government blockage, the government of Sudan, Ivory Coast, Central African Republic, and for a lesser degree the Philippine are acceptant that the UN interacts with non-state armed groups in their territory.³⁸ Other country dummies were not significant, indicating their allowance for UN accessing non-state armed groups are not as systematic as in Sudan, Ivory Coast and CAR. Interestingly, when government signs UN action plan, rebels do not sign their UN action plans. In Chad, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Uganda, and Yemen, only the government force signed.³⁹ No rebel groups in those country territories signed UN action plans. That is, there is no case where both rebel groups and governments sign on to action plans.⁴⁰ This is despite the fact that many conflict areas where governments use child soldiers, rebels also use child soldiers. There is no reciprocity going on in terms of signing the UN action plans and pledging commitment to international standards of using no child soldiers. Our interpretation is that governments sign but do not allow rebels to sign UN action plans, indicating legitimacy battle between national governments and rebel groups.

As for Model 3 and the effect of UN infrastructure on the UN action occurrence, we see some support there when we look at some cases as well as in the multivariate model. Among nine countries where the UN Action Plan was signed, six countries - Central African Republic, Cote D'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, South Sudan. and Sudan - observed the UN peacekeeping forces operation. In the Philippines, Nepal, and Sri Lanka where the UN peacekeeping force did not operate, two rebel groups and one government force signed the Action Plan.

Although we need more work employing alternative measures and probing each case more closely, the data analysis overall demonstrates some usefulness of our theoretical framework. In the theory section, we explained the phenomenon of UN action plans as the fruit of contractual relationships among international organization (UN), rebel, and government. In the data, we see some places do not enter into the realm of UN action plans due to the failure of one of the triad factors: either because of rebel group's rejection (e.g. al-Shabaab in Somalia), or because of government consent factor (e.g. Myanmar until the political opening, Syria under Assad regime), or because of the insufficient UN capacity (e.g. Yemen).

We acknowledge some of the limitations of the current preliminary analysis, with an eye toward improving our quantitative study further. First, we plan to try alternative measures. We see the possibility of refining the measure of government preferences. We have tried Polity IV score, the usual go-to measure for the political regime's tendency for each country, but a better measure could be human rights or how a government allows individual freedom (in terms of

³⁸ Results on file with the authors.

³⁹ Sudan exhibits an interesting pattern where rebel groups sign the action plan first, and then the government signed. This pattern is consistent with what was reported in Gleditsch et al. 2018.

⁴⁰ Sudan is one exception. The Sudanese government signed in 2016 after several rebel groups signed UN action plans. However, 2016 is out of temporal scope for the current data.

treatment of opposition) or measure of how governments deal with dissenters. One of the reasons we did not get support for our second hypothesis regarding government blockage is might be that polity scores do not capture what is going on with the governments with respect to their humanitarian policies. Humanitarian community is developing a related measure recently but the measure does not go far beyond 2017.⁴² Second, we plan to employ additional control variables. One is conflict intensity to distinguish peacekeeping effect from actual conflict intensity – primarily because peacekeepers usually go where the conflict is intense.⁴³ The other is the total number of groups government is facing, following the reputational argument⁴⁴ – that the government will block the international access if they face multiple groups at the same time. The factor may help our understanding of what prompts governments’ blockage of international actors to the non-state armed actors in their territory. Thirdly, we plan to improve the analysis by using subsets of the dataset, for example, with regional proximity, or calculate similarities using matching analysis. Nonetheless, the evidence we present in this paper is suggestive to demonstrate the confluence of rebel organization, government consent, and the UN factor – in understanding rebel engagement in conflict zones.

Case studies

We present four cases (Sudan, Philippines, Central African Republic, and Ivory Coast) out of 13 cases where the UN action plans took place with non-state actors. Our criteria for selecting cases is to maximize the variation in our independent variables, especially the one with regard to rebel organization.⁴⁸ The key commonality of the four selected conflict situations is the presence of multiple rebel groups – which would allow us to explore the effect of rebel group organization in a comparative fashion. Without the presence of multiple rebel groups, it would be difficult for us to look at the variation of organizational aspect of rebel groups. The cases where UN action plan took place (or even negotiated but failed, like Yemen) in a single rebel group environment – for example, Nepal, do not give us good leverage to see the effect of the group organization. Also, it was important for us to look at the cases where at least one rebel group signed an action plan. Conflicts in Myanmar or Chad for instance involved multiple rebel groups but only the Myanmar national army (Tatmadaw), and the Chadian National Army signed the UN action plan, with no rebel group signing complete.⁴⁹ These cases therefore fell out of our case inquiry.

As well, government acceptance/blockage and UN peacekeeping presence may vary over time within one case. In terms of UN peacekeeping, every case (Sudan, CAR, and Ivory Coast) except the Philippines case. Even in the Philippines case, there was UN presence due to UNDP and UNICEF’s work, so the role of UN infrastructure cannot be underestimated there either. This pattern across 4 cases comports with our expectation that UN infrastructure helps out the fruitful engagement.⁵⁰

⁴² See for example, “Humanitarian Access Overview (August 2018)” published by ACAPS. Available at https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/acaps_humanitarian_access_overview_august_2018_0.pdf

⁴³ Fortna 2008.

⁴⁴ A la Walter 2007.

⁴⁸ King, Keohane, and Verba 1994.

⁴⁹ For instance, UN mentioned in the Philippines case that “the Government of the Philippines gave its full consent to the United Nations efforts to initiate dialogue with the group [NDFP]” (United Nations April 8, 2011)

⁵⁰ Of course there are cases where UN peacekeeping forces exist but UN action plans don’t take place (e.g. DRC).

In addition to the variation in independent variables, we present the case studies to augment our data having only a few cases of UN action plans. The phenomenon does not have long history and we have about 10 cases out of many rebel group instances (300 or so). So, this narrative augments and supplements our quantitative data analysis.

Another reason to present case studies is to trace the process of UN action plans and qualitatively assess the impact of our independent variables (access factors) on the conclusion of UN action plans. Illustrating the dynamics present in cases will enrich the operations of our theoretical discussions in empirical cases and situate them in real situations of humanitarian actions.

Case #1. Conflict in Sudan

Nine rebel groups in Sudan had been accused of recruiting and using child soldiers by the United Nations.⁵² Among nine groups in Sudan, six groups - JEM, SLM-Free Will, SLM-Minni Minawi, SLM-Mother Wing, SPLA, and SPLA-N - signed the Action Plan, while the other three groups - SLM-Abdul Wahid, SLM-Unity, and LJM - did not sign the Action Plan.⁵³ For the rebel group side, our theory expects that the territorial status of rebel group is associated with the likelihood (especially, centralized command, interest in civilian welfares, and visibility) that the group favorably responds to the Action Plan efforts. While six groups signing the Action Plan have shown strong military presence on the ground as well as a clear leadership structure mostly commanded by a single leader, SLM-Abdul Wahid, SLM-Unity, and LJM lacked such conditions.

SLM-Abdul Wahid had been plagued by a number of internal disputes, clearly giving a reason for the consecutive factionalization of SLM. After splitting into Fur and Zaghawa tribes, Abdul Wahid, leading the Zaghawa ethnic group lost the control over military, while Minna Minawi, leading the Fur ethnic group commanded military.⁵⁴ The leader, Abdul Wahid himself had been out of country even when the Abuja Peace Agreement was signed in 2006 and only moved to Nairobi in 2010 when he was threatened to be expelled by the French government.⁵⁵

SLM-Unity and LJM emerged as umbrella organizations of several factions, short of a single, unified command structure as well as fraught with danger of internal division and

⁵²United Nations Security Council. 2009a.

⁵³ LJM (Liberation and Justice Movement). SLM (Sudan Liberation Army). SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army). JEM (Justice and Equality Movement). The rebel groups in Sudan are selected based both on whether the group is originated from Sudan and the conflict occurred in the Sudanese territory. The first criterion excludes the group originally developed from the exterior, such as Lord's Resistance Army from Uganda yet having been active in the Sudanese territory. The second condition rules out the Sudanese rebel group yet active in the foreign territory, such as SPLA after South Sudan's independence. These scope conditions ensure the rebel groups in the Sudanese conflict had been exposed to similar conditions as possible. Although the history of conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan intertwined each other but it makes more sense to confine the scope of analysis into only Sudanese case, considering that the dynamic of conflict in Darfur, which the UN Action Plan originally targeted differs a lot in the new conflict dynamics in South Sudan, where the new rebel groups now opposes the new-born South Sudanese government, not the old Sudanese government.

The case selection criteria thus yield four rebel group families: Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and its factions, Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and SPLA-North, Justice and Equality Movement, and Liberation and Justice movement (MLJ). SLM factions include the main faction of SLMs, also known as SLM-Abdul Wahid, SLM-Free Will, SLM-Minni Minawi, SLM-Mother Wing, and SLM-Unity.

⁵⁴ PBS Wide Angle. 2008

⁵⁵Sudanese Tribune 2012

discords. SLA-Unity appeared as a multi-tribal coalition characterized by a loose coalition among 19 commanders who had been alienated by SLM-Minni Minawi and SLM-Abdul Wahid and consequently rejecting the two SLM groups. SLM-Unity sought a 'unity' among the membership, but the leadership fall short of a clear structure and political objectives.⁵⁶

The **LJM** case also illuminates the importance of independent military presence on the ground. Signing the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) in 2011, LJM had championed as the main dialoguer of international community in its initial years. However, the group's cohesion was questionable afterwards.⁵⁷ The group's nebulous affiliation among ten rebel groups had been fiercely attacked by non-signer of the DDPD as claimed by JEM that "this group has no representation in Darfur and does not have military presence on the ground."⁵⁸ Around the time the group signed the DDPD, a number of factions either refused to cooperate with the group or simply left LJM.⁵⁹ It consequently weakened LJM's capacity and credibility to implement the initial agreement of children's rights in the DDPD. Although the following consultation after the signing of the DDPD led the group to submit its action plan through UNAMID, it has become completely obsolete as the group soon disintegrated. As a consequence, LJM's submission of the Action Plan had never been reported to the UN Security Council nor counted as a formal signatory of the Action Plan.⁶⁰

Compared to these cases, other six groups have been organized more as 'stationary bandits.' **SPLA** politically and militarily controlled the southern Sudan area, including large amount of Equatoria, Bahr al Ghazal and Upper Nile provinces. Based on the firm territorial basis, SPLA had been long acknowledged as its deep commitment to the goal of independence as well as the centralized command structure led by a heroic figure John Garang.⁶¹ Since the leadership of Garang firmly stood, the UN found no problems to consult the child protection issue with SPLA. The first direct contact between the UN Special Representative and the SPLA Chairman, John Garang was as early as 1998, which was the second official visit of the Special Representative to Sudan in 1998.⁶² The leader of SPLA had both will and capacity to take account of the welfare of civilians under control. In the meeting, the Special Representative discussed and committed with the Chairman that "the protection and welfare of children should be placed on the agenda of the peace process sponsored by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development."⁶³

Even before the formal signing of the Action Plan, several commitments had already been made to prevent child soldier uses, and many of the commitments had been strictly implemented despite few cases of child recruitment and stalled demobilization.⁶⁴ In 2007, 60 Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and SPLA commanders "committed to end child recruitment and developed an Area Joint Military Committee," which also shows the top-level leadership was

⁵⁶PBS Wide Angle 2008; Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment 2010; Small Arms Survey. 2010.

⁵⁷It was questioned "whether it can sustain a tenuous cohesion through the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur peace agreement." Small Arms Survey 2012, p.2

⁵⁸Sudanese Tribune 2010

⁵⁹Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan 2012, pp.2-3

⁶⁰United Nations – African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur 2012

⁶¹Jo and Bryant 2013, pp.250-253

⁶²United Nations General Assembly. 1999, p.17

⁶³United Nations General Assembly. 1999, p.17

⁶⁴ For example, in 2006, SPLA and other small rebel groups released 1,004 children from their profile. (UN. Secretary General 2007a, p.6) SPLA also released few more soldiers each year before its signing of the Action Plan.

effectively coordinated with the child protection issues.⁶⁵ The SPLA leadership had been continuously accessible to the UN counterpart, and the consultation between two kept sustained until its final signing of the Action Plan on November 20, 2009.⁶⁶

SPLA's compliance to the Action Plan features subtle dimensions to make any conclusive evaluation. In general, the group stopped to recruit child soldiers except 33 re-recruitment in 2010 during the reporting period of 2009-2011.⁶⁷ Also, the group more vigorously disengaged the child soldiers from their ranks, 210 released in 2010.⁶⁸ However, since the independence of South Sudan, the record of SPLA, now the government force had been deteriorated as the new conflict in South Sudan initiated.

SPLA-North is a banned political party from the Sudanese government, originated from a splinter faction from SPLA. Its operation has been based on the Sudanese territory of Blue Nile and South Kordofan.⁶⁹ The political goal of the group is clearly manifested as “a Sudanese national movement that seeks to change the policies of the center in Khartoum and to build a new center for the benefit of all Sudanese people regardless of their religion, gender or ethnicity background.”⁷⁰ Similar to SPLA, SPLA-North has been led by a strong leadership under Malik Agar, a Chairman and Commander in Chief, also known as one of the ‘Garang boys’ who had long commanded the SPLA forces in South Kordofan area.⁷¹ The UN could easily access to the SPLA-North's leadership, and the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict could meet the leadership of SPLM-North three times in September 2012 and in May and November 2016. The continuous engagement filled in this period led the final signing of the Action Plan on November 23, 2016.⁷²

The SLA had been generally notorious for internal disputes. However, once split, those independent groups seemed to possess smaller, but unified armed forces controlling its core geographical boundary. It also suffers less from the leadership challenges and coordination problems. Despite scarce information about the leadership of SLA factions, the factions signing the Action Plan had been represented by a single general - Minni Minawi, Abu Gasim (Mother Wing), and Abdel Rahman Musa (Free Will). **SLA-MM** has been active in the extended areas of Darfur, including Um Berro, al Fasher, and south-east of the South Darfur state capital, Nyala.⁷³ In these zones, Minni Minawi had been known as a notorious figure to build his power upon the narrow ethnic network of the Zaghawa, which partially evinces consolidation of his power over the group.⁷⁴ Also, SLA-MM was the signatories of the Darfur Peace Agreement in which the Security Council requests that “that the protection of children be addressed in the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement and asks for continued monitoring of and reporting on grave violations against children and protection dialogue with parties to conflict for the elaboration of action plans.”⁷⁵ In the post-war election, SLA-MM gained parliament seats in

⁶⁵UN General Assembly/Security Council 2007, pp.22-23

⁶⁶ United Nations Security Council. 2010a, p.3

⁶⁷United Nations Security Council. 2010a, p.29

⁶⁸United Nations Security Council.2011a, p.11

⁶⁹ Small Arms Survey. 2016. It holds the Nuba Mountains, reaching to the area of newly created state of West Kordofan. Note that the NSA dataset codes that this group does not hold territory.

⁷⁰Sudanese Tribune N.d.b

⁷¹Sudanese Tribune N.d.a

⁷²United Nations Security Council. 2017b, p.15.

⁷³ Small Arms Survey 2010.

⁷⁴Flint and De Waal 2008, p.139.

⁷⁵ United Nations Security Council. 2007b, pp.10-11. Mother Wings and Free Will were also the signatory of the Darfur Peace Agreement.

North and South Darfur (Kutum, Gereida), which also shows its political influence over the Darfur area.⁷⁶

Lastly, **JEM** has been reported to possess a coherent, unified leadership structure with its clear political propaganda of national reform and regime change.⁷⁷ Although the group's leadership started to be severely divided over the issue of acceding the DDPD in 2011 as well as due to the death of the Chairman Khalil Ibrahim by a government airstrike,⁷⁸ the memorandum of understanding was initially signed between JEM and the UN on July 21 2010, before the leadership started to be highly fragmented. Indeed, the signing process went through difficulty due to the group's departure from the its stronghold in North Darfur area. The UN report states that this initial momentum had been delayed due to "the departure of JEM from many parts of Darfur and their dispersal as a result of renewed clashes with Government forces."⁷⁹ Yet, the ongoing dialogue between JEM and the UNAMID yield the meeting in Austria, July 2012, leading to the group's issuance of the command order to prohibit the recruitment of children and signing of the Action Plan in September 2012. Before its fragmentation and geographical spread to South Kordofan area, JEM remained as "the strongest and most cohesive military force in Darfur."⁸⁰ While its military presence became geographically sparser, the group retained its strength both in Darfur and its new foothold in South Kordofan.⁸¹

Moving on to the UN-side factor, UN peacekeeping forces appear to have facilitated the UN action plans. The United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) and the United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) deeply engaged in promoting the Action Plan framework. UNMIS and UNAMIS operated to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers and to legalize the prevention of it each in southern Sudan and Darfur. The early presence of the UN peacekeeping forces clearly encouraged the development of the UN Action Plan framework in the country. In 2004, the task force on the Sudan included the "issues relating to children affected by armed conflict" by referring to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations mission to the Sudan, as well as staffed six posts for child protection advisors.⁸³ In the following year, the Special Representative endeavored with the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) "to ensure that children's concerns are adequately reflected in the ongoing negotiations and in the peace agreements."⁸⁴

Government consent features as a facilitator for the UN engagement with rebel groups in Sudan. The government of Sudan has been committed to the prevention of child soldier uses since 1998, although the government's own practices in its armed force had not been clearly matched with its claim. The Sudanese government had clearly shown its cooperative position toward the child soldier issues in its country. In the visit in 1998, the Government of Sudan reaffirmed "its commitment, as a matter of policy and law, not to recruit or deploy children under the age of 18 years."⁸⁵ Although the Sudanese Armed Force (SAF) had been constantly accused of its grave violation against children, it is still important to note that the government did not explicitly oppose to the international intervention directly engaging with the rebel groups.

⁷⁶ Small Arms Survey 2010.

⁷⁷ Jo and Bryant 2013, p.253

⁷⁸ Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan 2013

⁷⁹ United Nations Security Council. 2011a, p.15

⁸⁰ Small Arms Survey 2013. p.1

⁸¹ Small Arms Survey 2013.

⁸³United Nations General Assembly 2004, p.9

⁸⁴United Nations General Assembly.2005, p.5

⁸⁵United Nations General Assembly. 1998, p.14

Case #2. Conflict in the Philippines

Three main rebel groups exist in the Philippines: 1) Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA), 2) Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and 3) Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). MILF is the only one that signed the UN action plan – with eventual delisting in 2017. ASG⁸⁸ and CPP still recruit and use children in their ranks.⁸⁹ While MILF and Abu Sayyaf share similar historical lineage in the southern Philippines of Mindanao, CPP had a different trajectory with the Marxist ideology in the central region of the Philippines. ASG, for its part had been plagued with many internal fights.⁹⁰ Our case discussion will focus on why and how these three groups treaded different trajectory with respect to the signing of UN action plans. MILF and CPP had been organized as 'stationary bandits', holding strong military presence in their area of influence, while at the same establishing political leadership representing its agenda and policy. ASG is highly contrasted with two, forming loose networks over sparse geographical area without coherent political platform.

In its early years, **MILF** separated from its mother organization, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1984, by refusing to settle with the autonomous zone the government provided. The group primarily attempted to build and secure social bases in Mindanao area, gaining wide support from the Moros through its Islamic orientation and provision of administrative functions. It benefited from its "effective community engagement, government services, and dedication to Islam."⁹¹ In the early 1990s, the MILF had about 6,000 and the number of military force increased to 15,000 in 1999.⁹²

MILF took many steps from the commitment to UN action plans to the implementation.⁹³ It first reached out other international actors like the Geneva Call. It revised its internal code of conduct⁹⁴ in light of the signing of the UN action plans. It also implemented its plans and participated in monitoring procedures.⁹⁵ Its eventual peace talks with the government facilitated the whole process of the UN action plans. The signing of UN action plans was primarily a coincidence of favorable events and factors – peace talks, open rebel aims, and central command. Internalization likely assisted adequate implementation; the timing was right such that the rebel group was open for releasing child soldiers.⁹⁶

⁸⁸ This includes the Bansamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, splinter of ASG.

⁸⁹ United Nations General Assembly/Security Council. 2018.

⁹⁰ It even had forged networks with al-Qaeda elements.

⁹¹ The Mapping Militants Project 2017a.

⁹² Vitug and Gloria 2000, p.111

⁹³ We do not discuss MNLF here because the group signed the autonomy agreement with the Government of the Philippines in 1985. Since the UN action plan started after 2000, this group is not relevant.

⁹⁴ The full document title is as follows: "Supplemental General Order for General Order Nos. 1&2: and in support of the Action Plan between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) regarding the issue of recruitment and use of child soldiers in the armed conflict in Mindanao" (can be found in Their words.org). Additionally, the titles for General Orders are as follows: Moro Islamic Liberation Front/Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (MILF/BIAF), General Order Number 1: An order promulgating a code of conducting regulating the affairs of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, prescribing its powers, duties and functions, and other related purposes, 2005 and General Order Number 2: An order amending Articles 34 and 36 of the Code of Conduct of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces and for other purposes, 2006, http://theirwords.org/media/transfer/doc/1_ph_milf_biaf_2006_10-dab1e2f6c0a66ae79efc1ba1f39f6077.pdf.

⁹⁵ IRIN news.

⁹⁶ Public opinion in Mindanao also signaled that civilians did not support MILF's use of children in the ranks. See Podder 2012.

In the MILF's case, the group was easily approachable for the UN mostly due to the group's willingness to follow and comply to prevention of child soldier uses as well as due to the timely opportunity provided by the progress in the peace talk. The group was also accessible to other humanitarian organizations which could link to the UN. Furthermore, the group clearly possessed the centralized command structure which could negotiate and transmit the political settlement.

Socialization factor was also present to facilitate the conclusion of the action plan. Throughout the group's history, it had enough chances to learn the importance of third-party actors that could help realize the group's strategic goal. In other words, before the group began to shrink after the counterinsurgency campaigns, the group had already positioned itself quite open to the international actors. During the 1980s and the early 1990s, as the MILF rose as a contending power to MNLF, the MILF sought to be recognized as a representative force in the Bangsamoro region, representing the popular will of the Moro people. As a consequence, the group knew that the connection to the international actors would be imperative for them. Michael Mastura, the former congressman of Maguindanao and the member of the MILF's Peace Panels acknowledge that "isolation from the international community, more specifically, from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) would not serve the interest of the movement."⁹⁷

The government consent (overall political approach to rebels) was important as well. In order to accelerate the progress in the peace negotiation with the MILF, the Filipino president Arroyo persuaded the U.S. Bush administration not to designate the MILF as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in the early 2010.⁹⁸ Thus, the MILF remained as neither winner nor loser against the government offensives, and still posed substantial threats to the government of Republic of Philippine. It retained the status that Filipino government should consider to reach the term with the group.⁹⁹

It is relatively more puzzling why **CCP** have not signed the Action Plan, while MILF did. The CCP had some favorable conditions for signing the Action Plan. The group emerged in the clear geographical boundary lined by ocean, the Philippines' largest island of Luzon, and later spread out to Visayas and Southern Tagalog.¹⁰⁰ It retained a clear political wing, National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), to represent the group and to negotiate and implement possible settlement. It kept issuing its normative commitment to the protection of children. Also, the government was also supportive to develop the legal framework between the rebel group and the UN; and the UN could contact with the group directly and indirectly to initiate the negotiation. The reason for the group's non-signing seems to lie in the logistics; the access to the group has been intermittently suspended due to the breakdown of peace talk between the government and CCP, which critically hampered further progress in signing the Action Plan.

⁹⁷Taya 2007, p.69

⁹⁸ See the Mapping Militants Project 2017a; Bale 2003. However, there exists exactly the opposite illustration as well. According to Taya (2007), the Arroyo administration attempted to persuade the United States to list the MILF as a terrorist organization, and it was the MILF who stopped this effort by directly contacting with the US president Bush, and convincing him that the MILF was not a terrorist organization. See Taya (2007, p. 74).

⁹⁹Santos, Santos and Dinampo 2010, p.77

¹⁰⁰ The Mapping Militant Project 2017b.

In fact, the CPP's political wing, NDFP, was able to negotiate action plan in 2011,¹⁰¹ but it did not materialize into the eventual conclusion of the action plans. UN had maintained the opened communication channel with the NDFP, by launching the joint monitoring committee in 2006. Yet, more comprehensive environment to negotiate the child soldier issues opened in February 2011 when the government and NDFP resumed formal talks. The Joint Monitoring Committee for the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Law, originally in place in 2004, was reassembled to gather and examine various human rights issue. During this time in April 2011, with the Filipino government's support, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General visited the NDFP members who were negotiating the peace term in the talk. The Special Representative sounded out the possibility of signing the Action Plan, the consecutive meetings followed in Utrecht, the Netherlands.¹⁰² The NDFP kept revoking the allegation that the child soldiers are affiliated in the group's rank, and answered children might be accompanied with the purpose of self-defense and non-combat role. However, the talk had postponed until mid-2012 and promised to resume in October 2012 but it officially collapsed in May 2013 since the government did not satisfy the rebel group's precondition to release prisoners, based on the government's concern to implementation of truce.¹⁰³

On June 29 2012, not abiding by the international legal framework such as the Secretary General's annual report, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and the provisions of the Paris Principles, the group unilaterally declared its "programme of action on the rights, protection and welfare of children."¹⁰⁴ The programme officially provides "the minimum age for recruitment for combat by the New People's Army at 18 years of age," but still allows the recruitment for the non-combat and self-defense purpose.¹⁰⁵ Not led to signing the Action Plan though, it could be regarded as an intermediate progress under the UN Action Plan framework. Until now, it seems to be the case that NDFP/ CPP/NPA are willing to provide some child-protection measures, but not necessarily assenting to sign the Action Plan.

As MILF did, CPP repeatedly announced its normative commitment to protect the children; kept revealing its internal policy not to recruit child soldiers; refuted the international allegation of the reported incidents of child soldiering. The group retained its political wing, NDF, which allows the environment for political consultation. Yet, in the CCP case, the UN Access was more restrained by the repeated suspension of the peace talks.¹⁰⁶ The CCP would have some chance to sign the Action Plan, but it would be halted by the closing window of opportunity with the access problem.

As for the **ASG**, the group's organizational structure counted on the localized kinship and personal ties. It does not yield a strong territorial control, evinced by its notorious reputation for kidnap-for-ransom tactic and small number of soldiers about 400. One description of this group entails "the ASG as more of a criminal gang rather than an ideologically driven organization."¹⁰⁷ Mostly due to unstable security situations, the UN and other international organizations could not

¹⁰¹<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/8apr11/>National Democratic Front Of The Philippines Agrees To An Action Plan With The UN To Ensure No Children Are Among Their Ranks, Press Release. 8 April 2011. OSRSG/040811-7

¹⁰²United Nations Security Council 2013, p.14

¹⁰³United Nations Security Council 2013, p.4

¹⁰⁴United Nations Security Council 2013, p.14

¹⁰⁵United Nations Security Council 2017a, p.16

¹⁰⁶United Nations Security Council 2010a, p.13

¹⁰⁷ The Mapping Militant Project 2017c.

easily access to the group.¹⁰⁸ Even if the security concerns be alleviated, political negotiations for the UN action plans might not have been viable.

The government of the Philippines has shown a favorable attitude to the UN approaching into all three groups. Celebrating the signing of the Action Plan by the MILF, the government was optimistically expected that “this action plan could be the springboard of similar negotiations with other non-State actors to halt the recruitment and use of children.”¹⁰⁹ In general, the Filipino government had been clearly aware of the child soldier problem in its country as well as to be willing to allow the international participation for dealing with the issue. In respect to the recruitment of child soldiers in its paramilitary forces, the Joint Secretariat of the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (Joint Monitoring Committee¹¹⁰) and United Nations partners received the abduction and killings of child soldiers together.¹¹¹ Also, the government allowed the UN-level monitoring and reporting mechanisms to place in the country.¹¹²

Case #3. Conflict in the Cote d’Ivoire

In Côte d’Ivoire, a substantial number was for the children in rebel ranks – 3,000 child soldiers among 26,000 FAFN, with neighboring countries in conflict (e.g. Sierra Leone and Liberia) also witnessed many child soldiers.¹¹⁸ In the country, one umbrella rebel group, Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles (FAFN)¹¹⁹ and four pro-government militias, Front de libération du Grand Ouest (FLGO), Mouvement Ivoirien de Libération de l’Ouest de la Côte d’Ivoire (MILOCI), Alliance patriotique de l’ethnie Wè (APWé), and Union patriotique de résistance du Grand Ouest (UPRGO) signed the Action Plan in November 2005, and in September 2006 respectively. Those groups had been delisted from the parties committed the grave violation against children, following compliance with the Action Plan.

FAFN seized the northern territory of Côte d’Ivoire and established defensive borders along it. It held over 60 percents of national territory and the population density of this area was even higher than the government-controlled areas.¹²⁰ The leadership structure was formed around the Chief of Staff Commander Soumalia Bakayoko, and his control over the local regions were divided into ten, where the chief of war took charge of each of them. Owing to the clear leadership structure of FAFN, the UNOCI could open a communication channel to inform that the group was listed on the violating parties and to provide the subsequent conclusions and recommendations of the Security Council.¹²¹ In this meeting in Bouaké, the leadership reiterated

¹⁰⁸In fact, the group abducted numerous human rights activists and journalists, represented by its kidnapping of three Red Cross workers on January 2009. (UN. Secretary General 2010b, p.3)

¹⁰⁹United Nations Security Council 2010a, p.13

¹¹⁰ "the Joint Monitoring Committee for the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law."

¹¹¹United Nations General Assembly/Security Council 2006. p.23

¹¹²“The Philippine country-level task force on monitoring and reporting was convened on 26 March 2007, comprising of United Nations system agencies and local human rights organizations.” (United Nations General Assembly/Security Council 2007, p.28)

¹¹⁸ Child Soldier International 2008.

¹¹⁹The rebel groups in the northern Côte d’Ivoire formed an united front, Forces Nouvelles. The representative groups affiliated to FN were the Ivorian People's Movement of the Great West (MPIGO), the Patriotic Movement of Côte d’Ivoire (MPCI) and the Justice and Peace Movement (MJP).

¹²⁰ The Small Arms Survey 2011. p.5

¹²¹United Nations Security Council 2007, p.7

that the group had no policy to recruit children, although some children might be associated with the rebel group in terms of basic assistance such as food. Evidently, FAFN held the internal coordination to be approached by the UN actor as well as to assure that the commitment made by the leadership could be employed through the line of command. Other four militias, the national government played a bridging role to link the UN actors to the militias by incorporating the militias into the national disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program.¹²²

Delisting from the UN report is one indication for a significant degree of compliance to the UN Action Plan. As the UN Action Plan specifies the time-bounded actions following the agreement, the rebel groups had been obliged to implement the clauses, such as the identification and release of child soldiers from their ranks. The FAFN successfully implemented the provision of child rights and protection training; the identification of all child soldiers in its rank; and the release of all the identified soldiers.¹²³

Following the Security Council resolution 1612, which had called the establishment of the Action Plan to protect children affected by conflicts, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) disseminates the information on the resolution to a relevant peacekeeping personnel as well as FAFN, Forces armées nationales de Côte d'Ivoire (FANCI), the national armed force of Côte d'Ivoire and other pro-government militia forces. Participated by UNOCI, UNICEF and the Office of Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflicts, they urged on the time-bound action plan monitored and engaged with the UN actors. In contrast, the sign of the Action Plan by the pro-militia groups had been processed via the national disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program.¹²⁴

Case #4. Conflict in the Central African Republic

Approximately a dozen rebel groups and rebel fractionalization operated within the conflict of the Central African Republic (CAR).¹²⁶ Out of a dozen, three groups participated in the United Nations action plans: 1) Armée Populaire pour La Restauration de La Démocratie (APRD), 2) Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix (CPJP), and 3) Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement (UFDR). APRD and CPJP signed in 2011. UFDR did not sign the time-bounded action plan, but it signed the agreements for the separation and reintegration of children in 2007.¹²⁷ UFDR did release the child soldiers in its rank following the agreement. Although many rebel groups in CAR had quickly changed, merged with other groups or disappeared, those three who signed the Action Plan had maintained relatively a stable local control over its geographical boundary.

As in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the central obstacles for the UN Action Plan in CAR was the difficulties from accessing the rebel groups and identifying the chain of commands.¹²⁸ The

¹²²United Nations Security Council 2006

¹²³United Nations Security Council 2007, p.8

¹²⁴United Nations Security Council 2006

¹²⁶Although it is difficult to accurately count the number of rebel groups having been active in the CAR, we can identify 12 major rebel groups. The groups are 1) APRD, 2) CPJP, 3) UFDR, 4) Forces of André Kolingba, 5) Faction of Francois Bozize, 6) Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC), 7) Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), 8) Front démocratique pour le peuple centrafricain (FDPC), 9) Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice (MLCJ), 10) Forces pour l'unification de la République centrafricaine, 11) Séléka (coalition forged in 2013), and 12) anti-Balaka factions. Those are counted from the NSA dataset as well as the UNSC reports for the CAR.

¹²⁷ United Nations Security Council 2009b, p.13

¹²⁸ United Nations Security Council 2006, p.10; United Nations Security Council 2016, p.16

UN actors had been unable to establish a formal dialogue with rebel groups when the leadership had been quickly replaced and when the chain of command remained unclear. The fragmented nature of rebel organization in CAR critically affected the final commitment to the Action Plan. For example, in the case of Front démocratique pour le progrès de la Centrafrique (FDPC), it was due to “lack of clarity in the parties’ chain of command” the negotiation for humanitarian access had been denied.¹²⁹

Armée Populaire pour La Restauration de La Démocratie (**APRD**) and Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix (CPJP) signed the Action Plan in 2011. More recently in June 2018, Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique – signed the Action Plan. Initially, APRD movement had been widely associated with the road bandits *Zaraguinas* that had been reported to be lack of coherent political platform.¹³⁰ Yet, APRD turned out to be the most active rebel group until its peace deal with the government and yielded some degree of central control over its legions. It at least sustained the chain of command extending throughout its local footholds. For example, APRD had not “recruit(ed) children as combatants in the central north, owing mainly to the strict control of the local commander, who wishes to send a positive message both to the population and to the international community.”¹³¹

The Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (**CPJP**), on the other hand, was reported to be better organized around the northeastern territory of CAR,¹³² compared to APRD. In 2010, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs opened a communication channel with CPJP, and CPJP welcomed the verification mission to examine the child soldier uses in its rank.¹³³ The president of CPJP, Abdoulaye Hissene, signed the Action Plan in 2011 in N’dele, and the process was witnessed by the Special Representative of the UNSC Secretary General, Radhika Coomaraswamy, in addition to Margaret Vogt representing the UN Integrated Peace Building, as well as Tanya Chapisat from the UNICEF.¹³⁴ This inter-agency actions within the United Nations partly demonstrates our point about the infrastructure of international organizations in bringing about humanitarian engagement with non-state armed actors in conflict zones.

Conclusion

In this paper, we demonstrated that three main factors dominate the signing and implementation of UN action plans, and the initiation of humanitarian engagement, more broadly. First, understanding the target – rebel organization is important. Rebel groups are able to sign if they have willingness and capacity to engage interactions with outside humanitarian actors. However, contacting rebel organization is not enough. Government consent is also necessary. Some rebel groups with willingness and capacity cannot sign onto UN action plans if government blocks the access of UN to non-state actors. Thirdly, on the part of the UN, resources and infrastructure appear to be important to materialize soft interventions. Other than

¹²⁹ United Nations Security Council 2011b, p.8

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch. 2007.

¹³¹ United Nations Security Council 2009b, p.9

¹³² Global Security.org. N.d.

¹³³ United Nations Security Council 2011b, p.13

¹³⁴ Reliefweb 2011. “SRSG Coomaraswamy witnesses action plan signing for the release of children in the Central African Republic” 21 November 2011. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/srsg-coomaraswamy-witnesses-action-plan-signing-release-children>

these factors, conflict intensity is a big obstacle to UN action plans. Houthis in Yemen for example was in the process of negotiation but then the negotiation faulted because of the intensity of fighting. However, these are not systematic factors that are not incorporated by political bargaining framework we suggested in understanding humanitarian engagement in conflict zones.

Reforming rebels for the purpose of violence reduction is difficult but that it can be done. It is difficult because of the rampant commitment problems and the inherent political problems international organizations have. in terms of resources and the need for private diplomacy. However, it can be done when the circumstances are right – with the right kind of rebel groups and with fortuitous conflict situations where the government also give permissive consent to those international intervention efforts.

The theory and empirical findings presented in this paper can be extended to recent rebel engagement in other conflict settings where international actors are involved to alter the behavior of non-state armed groups. Bargaining and negotiation for access and the contents of interactions often characterize these types of interactions,¹⁴⁶ and understanding when these contractual relationships work can further our knowledge about conflict processes. Our analysis also charts future directions for the need to study further the interactions among intervention efforts – for example, how humanitarian engagement can be assessed, mindful of other hard intervention events such as military interventions and peacekeeping activities. Such understanding will perhaps help us reduce violence in conflict-ridden societies around the world.

¹⁴⁶ Krasner and Weinstein 2014.

Appendix Table A1. List of UN Action Plans
(as of August 10, 2018)

Rebel group name	Country	Action plan year	Status (party cease to exist, Delisted, under implementation)	UN peacekeeping
Armée Populaire pour La Restauration de La Démocratie (APRD)	Central African Republic	19 October 2011	Party ceased to exist	MINURCAT (United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad) September 2007 – December 2010 MINUSCA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic) April 2014 – Present
Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix (CPJP)	Central African Republic	20 November 2011	Party ceased to exist	MINURCAT (United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad) September 2007 – December 2010 MINUSCA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic) April 2014 – Present
Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique	Central African Republic	14 June 2018	Under implementation	MINURCAT (United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad) September 2007 – December 2010 MINUSCA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic) April 2014 – Present
Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles (FAFN)	Cote d'Ivoire	November 2005	Delisted following compliance with Action Plan	MINUCI (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire) May 2003 – April 2004 UNOCI (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire) April 2004 – May 2017
Front de libération du Grand Ouest (FLGO)	Cote d'Ivoire	September 2006	Delisted following compliance with Action Plan	MINUCI (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire) May 2003 – April 2004 UNOCI (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire) April 2004 – May 2017
Mouvement Ivoirien de Libération de l'Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire (MILOCI)	Cote d'Ivoire	September 2006	Delisted following compliance with Action Plan	MINUCI (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire) May 2003 – April 2004 UNOCI (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire) April 2004 – May 2017
Alliance patriotique de l'ethnie Wè (APWé)	Cote d'Ivoire	September 2006	Delisted following compliance with	MINUCI (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire) May

			Action Plan	2003 – April 2004 UNOCI (United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire) April 2004 – May 2017
Union patriotique de résistance du Grand Ouest (UPRGO)	Cote d’Ivoire	September 2006	Delisted following compliance with Action Plan	MINUCI (United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire) May 2003 – April 2004 UNOCI (United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire) April 2004 – May 2017
Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC)	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Action plans on recruitment and use of children and Sexual Violence – 4 Oct 2012	*Delisted in 2017 following compliance with Action Plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. Action Plan on ending and preventing sexual violence against children under implementation.	MONUC (United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) November 1999 - June 2010 MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) July 2010 - Present
Coordination des mouvements de l’Azawad, including the Mouvement national de libération de l’Azawad,	Mali	Action Plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and sexual violence against children – 5 March 2017	*Under implementation	MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) April 2013 - Present
Unified Communist Party of Nepal Maoist (UCPN-M)	Nepal	16 December 2009	Delisted in 2011 following compliance with Action Plan	None
Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)	Philippines	July 2009	Delisted in 2017 following compliance with Action Plan	None
Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA)	South Sudan	12 March 2012 (Action Plan signed as the country’s armed forces following independence in 2011);Recommitment to Action Plan signed on 24 June 2014	Under implementation	UNMIS (United Nations Mission in the Sudan) March 2005 - July 2011 UNMISS (United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan) July 2011 - Present
Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition	South Sudan	December 2015	Under implementation	UNMISS (United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan) July 2011 - Present
Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) –	Sri Lanka	01 December 2008	Delisted in 2011 following compliance with Action Plan	None
Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA)	Sudan	2 November 2009 (Signed as an armed group before South Sudan’s Independence)		UNMIS (United Nations Mission in the Sudan) March 2005 - July 2011 UNAMID (African Union – United Nations Hybrid Operation

				in Darfur) July 2007 – Present
Sudan Liberation Army/ Minni Minnawi	Sudan	11 June 2007	Under implementation	UNMIS (United Nations Mission in the Sudan) March 2005 - July 2011 UNAMID (African Union – United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur) July 2007 – Present
Sudan Liberation Army /Free Will	Sudan	June 2010		UNMIS (United Nations Mission in the Sudan) March 2005 - July 2011 UNAMID (African Union – United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur) July 2007 – Present
Sudan Liberation Army /Abu Gasim	Sudan	August 2010		UNMIS (United Nations Mission in the Sudan) March 2005 - July 2011 UNAMID (African Union – United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur) July 2007 – Present
Justice and Equality Movement	Sudan	25 September 2012	Under implementation	UNMIS (United Nations Mission in the Sudan) March 2005 - July 2011 UNAMID (African Union – United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur) July 2007 – Present
Sudan People’s Liberation Movement- North (SPLM-N)	Sudan	23 November 2016	Under implementation	UNMIS (United Nations Mission in the Sudan) March 2005 - July 2011 UNAMID (African Union – United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur) July 2007 – Present

Source: Children and Armed Conflict UN Office¹⁴⁸; The UN official peacekeeping timeline¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ United Nations. 2018. “Action Plans” Main website of the United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, accessed on August 10, 2018.

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¹⁴⁹ United Nations. “List of Peacekeeping Operations, 1948-2018.” United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Accessed 29 January 29, 2019. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/180413_unpeacekeeping-operationlist_2.pdf

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