

**Engaging Rebels:
Politics of Consent and Control in International Humanitarian Engagement**

Abstract

Many international actors engage rebel groups for humanitarian outcomes. What are the political conditions under which such external engagement occurs in internal conflict zones? Why would sovereignty-guarding governments allow outsiders to interact with their internal enemies? Under what conditions do rebels say yes to outside involvement to restrain their wartime behavior? We develop a theory of humanitarian engagements by analyzing associated political processes and identifying key conditions. International involvement with rebel groups is likely to occur when host governments are ineffective in managing internal threats and let outsiders in. Once the host government says yes to the process, rebel groups who control territory are likely to participate in international engagement, partly due to their relationship with civilians and partly because of international actors' ease of access. We provide empirical evidence using the case of the United Nations action plans in which a dozen rebel groups committed to reducing the practice of child soldiering between 2000 and 2015. We find that the politics of consent and control by host governments and rebel groups play an important role in making or breaking international humanitarian engagement. Our analysis has implications for the role of external actors in internal conflict zones around the world.

Since the post-Cold War period, international efforts in internal conflicts have grown with the means of peacekeeping, mediation, or sanctions (Howard and Stark 2017). The presence of external actors in conflict zones is a salient feature of global politics today (Hoeffler 2014; Breslawski and Cunningham 2019; Matanock 2020) where shared sovereignty (Krasner 2004) became a norm over time, although this trend could be reversed due to the backlashes to global influences (Börzel and Zürn 2021).

Amid the variety of international involvement in conflict zones, we observe numerous efforts of humanitarian engagement. International humanitarian engagement is characterized by direct interaction of international actors with non-state armed actors to achieve humanitarian goals of reducing suffering in conflict zones. For instance, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been interacting with non-state armed actors for the matters of detention and humanitarian restraints via training and dialogue (Bussmann and Schneider 2016). The Geneva Call, a Swiss-based non-governmental organization, has been negotiating the Deeds of Commitment, whereby non-state armed actors can commit to international humanitarian norms, with some substantial outcomes on the issue of anti-personnel mines (Gleditsch et al. 2018; Fazal and Konaev 2019). Since 2000, the United Nations Children and Armed Conflict (UN/CAAC) office has engaged with a dozen non-state armed groups around the world to reduce the practice of child soldiering. These examples illustrate that the phenomenon of engaging violent actors is making its mark in contemporary global human security scenes. Under what conditions do international actors engage violent non-state armed actors in conflict zones? What are the political processes of engagement for the purpose of better humanitarian outcomes?

Our research is driven by several interlocking puzzles. Rebel groups are military organizations that fight against their own national government. They often fight with political goals to subvert or secede from the government. In the case of international humanitarian engagement, it is not obvious why national governments would accept external actors to deal with their own internal domestic political affairs. National governments might prefer dealing with their internal enemies on their own terms. As well, it is not apparent either as to why rebel groups would accept international actors to restrain their wartime behavior when they can choose to exploit the military advantage without outside interference.

In this paper, we develop a theory of international humanitarian engagement with rebel groups in internal conflicts. We examine the political processes by which international humanitarian engagement occurs, and study the preferences of key political stakeholders such as host government and rebel groups. The analysis leads us to expect that humanitarian engagement can be attributed to two crucial factors. The first is national governments' acceptance of international help when they are ineffective in maintaining their own stable political order. The second is territory-holding rebels' engagement with outside actors. Territory-holding rebels are likely to have established firm rebel-civilian relations and at times serve as viable interlocutors to outside actors. These two factors of sovereignty-guarding governments and territory-holding rebels constitute key parts of our theoretical story of humanitarian engagement of rebel groups.

The question of rebel engagement by international humanitarian actors in conflict zones is important for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, the phenomenon of rebel engagement raises important questions about contemporary international involvement in conflict zones. International relations scholars have studied the role of international security institutions, such as the UN Security Council transmitting information of superpowers (Thompson 2006) or peacekeepers protecting civilians and operating as a buffer zone (Fortna 2004; Hultman, Kathman

and Shannon 2013). As well, external actors help combatants to solve commitment problems inherent in a civil war context (Matanock 2018).

Analogous to the general problems of international involvement in domestic conflict zones, the phenomenon of international humanitarian engagement can inform us about the politics of consent and control that permeates the interactions between international actors and domestic warring parties. The theoretical importance also carries practical reasons to it. Promoting restraints among non-state armed actors has the potential to reduce civilian suffering in many war-torn countries. As such, scholars and practitioners have given due attention to this important question of engaging violent actors (Zartman and Faure 2011; Jackson 2012; MacLeod et al. 2016). Understanding the political processes as well as the associated obstacles and opportunities will be relevant as the international community forges a way forward with diverse methods of engagement in conflict zones around the world. This practical importance is bolstered by the retrenchment the world is experiencing currently, where small-scale international programs in contrast to large military operations are expected to stay in the future.¹

In what follows, we first lay out the theory of humanitarian engagement in conflict zones by examining the preferences and goals of key stakeholders, namely rebel groups and host governments, in their interactions with international humanitarian actors. We then test our expectations with the case of the UN action plans utilizing the dataset of global civil wars between 2000 and 2015. We conclude with the implications of our findings, highlighting the importance of understanding the politics of consent and control on the part of host governments and rebel groups, in order to identify the opportunities and constraints of international engagement with violent actors in conflict zones.

A Theory of Humanitarian Engagement

In the process of humanitarian engagement in conflict zones, the most important actors are two warring parties: host governments and rebel groups.² The two “nodes” are necessary and essential to analyze the phenomenon of humanitarian engagement. We first examine how host governments operate as gatekeepers, either by providing political environments for such engagement to occur or by vetoing the whole process. We then examine how rebel groups, as the violent actors in internal conflicts, are directly engaged by external actors for humanitarian purposes.

Sovereignty-Guarding Gatekeeper Governments

The politics of consent is central to many settings of international involvement, be it the situation of peacekeeping³, election monitoring⁴, or humanitarian intervention.⁵ The context of internal conflicts magnifies the role of gatekeeper governments. Civil conflicts involve the situation where opposition groups took up arms against national governments, challenging the

¹ For the perils and challenges of big heavy-footed outside interventions in conflict zones and fragile states, see Krasner and Weinstein 2014; Lake 2016.

² Here, international actors such as international organizations or non-governmental actors, are assumed to be passive in terms of strategically selecting the pool of host states or rebel groups.

³ Piccolino and Karlsrud 2011; Karreth et al. 2021.

⁴ Kelley 2008 and Hyde 2011.

⁵ Binder 2015.

authority of the government. This pushes national governments in civil conflicts to walk on the tight rope balancing internal sovereignty and external sovereignty. Governments, on the one hand, want to keep internal sovereignty by maintaining their own tight grip and implement their own solutions to rebellion. On the other hand, governments care about their face in the external world and decide to accept or reject the outside engagement, or intervention, into their internal affairs.

Some governments may be effective in managing their internal security threats. Within the confines of their sovereign territory, national governments have diverse options to respond to internal rebellion, including accommodation, co-optation, to repression (Heger and Salehyan 2007; Staniland 2017; Asal et al. 2019). When host governments are effective in their internal security utilizing the various policy options, they might prefer dealing with internal conflicts by themselves without external involvement. In these situations, governments might block the international access upfront. In the instances of government blockage, it is unlikely that we observe international access to rebel groups. This is because, without consent, international actors cannot enter the sovereign territory with ease, especially on the matter of what is considered to be the matter of national security. Additionally, counter-terrorism laws often restrict the movement of international actors engaging non-state armed groups in national sovereign territories (Modirzadeh et al. 2012).

There are several reasons to think gatekeeper-governments are the norm rather than an exception. Some national governments, often in defense of their political legitimacy, do not even admit that they are going through civil wars, or are afraid their legitimacy would be lost if external actors fruitfully engage their internal enemies on their political turf. Conferring legitimacy to their internal enemies has always been a thorny issue (Walter 2006), as manifested in states' efforts to call their enemies terrorists, various measures of repression, and military crackdowns. Along these lines, some gatekeeper-governments guard their sovereignty jealously. The tools they employ range from outright rejection of international access⁶ to the subtle measures that require many bureaucratic obstacles for civil society to operate (Dupuy et al. 2016). In some cases, host governments may accept international actors but then obstruct the international efforts in various ways.⁷

In contrast, governments that are ineffective in managing their internal security situations might not afford to guard their sovereignty vis-à-vis external actors. The incentive to invite external interventions can be more acute when the government cannot deal with its enemies alone. These ineffective governments will be more accepting of the idea of international actors actively interacting with rebel groups in their sovereign territory, mainly because they have no good alternative policy options domestically. Some governments might have an additional incentive to invite external interventions when they see the benefit of taming their internal enemies. Others might recognize the benefits of external actors doing humanitarian engagement in the hope that rebel groups might become weaker militarily by exercising restraints in the conduct and method of warfare. Simply reducing the capacity of opposition armed groups could be appealing to some national governments that are wrecked by unmanageable internal threats. This political motivation to utilize and rely on the external actor capacity in internal affairs can occur in the issue of rebels using child soldiering, for example. National governments lose the grip and control over their internal enemies when they invite external actors in, but the gain could be sometimes substantial if their armed opposition reduces its recruitment pool by giving up children in their ranks. This

⁶ Examples abound, from al-Bashir's expulsion of international aid agencies in 2009 (Rice and Branigan 2009), to the recent ones in Venezuela and Syria's Assad government. For more examples, see ACAPS (2020).

⁷ In the context of election monitoring obstructions, see Simpser and Donno 2012. In the case of "pinioning peacekeepers" see Duursma 2020.

acceptance of external actors need not be from sincere humanitarian considerations from the government side but might make political and military sense. The instrumental use of international norms is highly plausible in this setting of humanitarian invitation.

The above logic suggests that whether governments agree to invite external humanitarian engagement, in part, depends on how vulnerable host governments are to internal threats and how capable they are to deal with those security threats. Vulnerable and ineffective governments are not going to be able to deal with their internal security threats on their own. Those governments whose sovereignty is seriously threatened from inside and imperiled by domestic challengers may be likely to concede to external actors entering its territory and accessing their rebel groups. In this case of weak and ineffective governments, the potential gains of reducing armed opposition with the external help outweigh the potential risk of sovereignty loss.

Conversely, sovereignty-guarding governments would resist international involvement and block international humanitarian engagement by affirming their exclusive control over the rebel groups. In this case of gatekeeper governments, the benefits of inviting external actors would be small. For one, they can themselves deal with their internal enemies, and also, allowing international actors to roam around their internal territory might not boost their political or military advantage, only to lose their own sovereignty and give rebels the opportunity to look legitimate in the eyes of external actors. Therefore, in the case of sovereignty-guarding gatekeeper governments in relatively secure and effective security situations, we are likely to observe little chance of international humanitarian engagement taking place. It will be the politically vulnerable and ineffective governments in dealing with internal threats, which would open the opportunity for international actors to engage with the rebel groups.

Territory-Holding Rebels

Even if host governments give the green light to international actors to engage their internal enemies, international humanitarian actors still face the second obstacle of getting the consent of the rebel actors. Under what conditions is the rebel groups' consent to humanitarian engagement likely to happen?

Not all rebel groups would be susceptible to the idea of humanitarian engagement by external actors. External actors telling them to exercise restraint might not be palatable to many groups that actively fight the government. Some rebel groups, however, might be interested in forging relationships with international actors. When rebel groups are relatively civilian-regarding, those groups might be likely to say yes to international humanitarian engagement. Civilian-regarding groups are the ones that might have developed a long-term relationship with civilians, unlike foreign fighters that victimize civilians without social embeddedness (Moore 2019). Research has shown inclusive groups are less likely to kill civilians (Stanton 2016), indicating that some rebel groups are concerned about the humanitarian consequences of their own civilians. Some groups might even provide inclusive social services to their domestic constituencies in their controlled area (Stewart 2018). Also, rebels tend to kill civilians outside of their controlled zones, not inside their own controlling territory (Holtermann 2019). The collection of the above findings indicates that some territory-holding rebels might have an incentive to distinguish their own constituencies in their controlled territory from those in the regions that are outside of their control. This reasoning leads us to think that territory-holding rebels may be susceptible to international humanitarian engagement.

The information environment provides a favorable situation for territory-holding rebels to interact with international actors, compared to rebels that do not hold territory. Territorial control by rebel groups creates a particular informational environment that defines the close relationship between rebels and civilians (Mampilly 2015). In rebel-held areas where a rebel group solely wields its influence, rebel-civilian relations would be more likely to be stable, compared to the situation of heavily contested zones where questions of loyalty arise (Kalyvas 2008, 406). Weak control of territory facilitates the defection behaviors by civilians, heading their loyalty to rival groups or the government. In fear of potential disloyalty and consequent information loss, rebel groups are more willing to adopt the ‘reign of terror,’ which might erode any incentive for international humanitarian engagement. If territorial control is undisputed by rival groups or the government, rebels worry less about the civilian defection (Berman et al. 2011). To a certain degree, strong and consolidated control of territory mitigates the problem of potential defectors, consequently providing a stable recruitment environment for rebels. When humanitarian action often purports to reduce human suffering, territory-holding rebels have an incentive to agree to such a proposition since they do not have to worry too much about civilians defecting to become government sympathizers. This informational logic leads us to expect that territory-holding rebels with relatively secure civilian control should care about improving civilian welfare, compared to those who do not hold territory.

Time-horizon is the additional reason territory-holding rebels are likely to engage international actors, relative to those without territorial control. Strong rebel presence on the ground increases the political time horizon on staying in the controlled area rather than playing the “roving bandits” (Olson 1993). The consideration of long-term horizon can provide some rebel groups with the incentives to govern rather than to exhaust, exploit and plunder their social bases.⁸ As rebels become stationary, rebel groups are more likely to care about the relations with civilians in the long run. This mechanism resonates with the existing finding that rebel groups with long-term time horizons would be more likely to provide a social order (Arjona 2017). In contrast, rebel groups without a clear territorial basis would have no qualms in civilian abuse, consequently, no interest in investing in international humanitarian engagement. Rebels without a set designated operation area are likely to plunder, whereas territory-holding rebels have an incentive to develop long-term relations in the area. For these reasons, territory-holding rebels, relative to no-territory holding rebels, may be willing to pay higher costs on agreeing to the international humanitarian engagement, even if such engagement might mean restricting their scope of military actions.

Not always is the case that territory-holding rebels invite international actors for benign reasons. In some rebels’ calculation, the international interactions might come with material benefits such as humanitarian aid, as is the case in some conflict situations (Terry 2002). Rebel groups can also control where the aid goes, probably retaining their political control in the rebel-held zones. The international engagement could also have putative and side-benefits of legitimacy that some groups desire and aspire to have on the world’s stage (Jo 2015; Huang 2016; Fazal 2018). Humanitarians strive to be neutral, impartial, and unbiased, but often the realities of conflict zones might generate such incentives of control and leverage on the side of rebels’ ledger (Rubenstein 2015; Barnett 2011).

On a practical level, territory-holding rebels also provide the simple ease of establishing contacts. From the perspective of international actors, territory-holding rebels are prime candidates for identifiable interlocutors for international humanitarian engagement. International engagement

⁸ Revkin (2020) shows that even the Islamic State at times provided governance appealing to the population.

often takes time to identify the leadership within rebel ranks, as well as time to forge trust with the key actors (Grace 2012). When rebels shift positions and mobile operations, it is difficult for international actors to engage them fully. Territory-holding rebels confer some advantage on these practical grounds. As well, territorial control of rebels can heighten the expectation of international actors that these territory-holding rebels might follow through the promises made in the humanitarian commitments that might come with timelines and specific tasks.

It is important to note that international humanitarian engagement comes at a cost on the part of rebels. Humanitarian engagement entails demands for restraints, which could affect rebels' military advantage in fighting government (Fazal and Konaev 2019). In the case of the child soldiering issue, for example, research shows that child soldiering is linked to rebels' fighting capacity (Haer and Böhmelt 2016). We also know that rebel groups use child soldiers because children are easily manipulatable (Beber and Blattman 2013) and susceptible to recruitment (Achvarina and Reich 2006). The demand from an international actor to give up the possibility of gaining military advantage will be difficult to stomach for many groups. When the international demand for such restraint is aligned with the rebel incentive, humanitarian engagement may be possible. Facilitating situations include 1) when rebel groups care about civilian welfare in their controlled zones, 2) when there is the rebel incentive to gain material or non-material benefits from international actors, or/and 3) when the moderation of military incentives can also enter when rebels start talking peace. Near peace negotiations, rebel groups have modulated military incentives and are therefore more willing to engage with international humanitarian actors.

Taking stock of our arguments about sovereignty-guarding governments and territory-holding rebels, we come to the two theoretical conjectures. First, weak and ineffective governments in managing internal threats are more likely to accept international humanitarian engagement with their internal enemies compared to strong and effective gatekeeper governments. Second, territory-holding rebel groups are more likely to accept international humanitarian engagement, compared to non-territory-holding rebel groups. Under these two conditions can international humanitarian organizations hold a better chance of success in facilitating humanitarian engagement with violent actors.

A note on generalizability and theoretical scope is in order. Our theory provides a simple framework to the general and analogous international relations problem of how states engage with the outside world in their internal matters, and how non-state violent actors open up to the outside world. Although we concentrated our analytical effort to examine the interactions among the government, international humanitarian organizations, and rebel groups, the theoretical framework of consent and control from the host governments and rebel groups should be applicable to other settings of international involvement, beyond rebel groups and international humanitarian actors.

Humanitarian Engagement and the United Nations Action Plans

We test the plausibility of our claims about humanitarian engagement by studying the United Nations (UN) action plans from the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) office. The UN/CAAC action plan is “a written, signed commitment between the United Nations and those parties who are listed as having committed grave violations against children” (UN/CAAC 2020). As of November 2020, 32 action plans have been signed, including 12 government forces and 20

non-state armed groups (UN/CAAC 2020).⁹ The key aim of the UN action plans is to stop the use and recruitment of child soldiers among state and non-state armed forces. Child soldiering has been a persistent problem in active combat zones where incentives to recruit help are abundant (Beber and Blattman 2013). Not only are children used for combat roles, but also as porters, informants, or even for sexual exploitation.¹⁰ Child soldier use by states has been decreasing over time, but non-state uses have cropped up as conflicts become severe.¹¹ It is estimated that approximately 30,000 verified cases of child soldiers existed between 2012 and 2017 (Child Soldiers International 2019). These are only verified cases, so actual numbers are likely to be larger. In Yemen, the Houthis were open to UN action plan engagement but back-tracked their negotiation with the UN after the flare-up of conflict in 2017 (UN/GA-SC 2018, 28-30). In Colombia, FARC child soldiers were demobilizing after the 2016 peace agreement but started increasing its recruitment in 2018 (UN/GA-SC 2019, 9-10). In Myanmar, many non-state ethnic armed groups are still using children in their ranks while the government restricts the UN access to those groups using bureaucratic hurdles (UN/GA-SC 2020, 17-19).

Since 2000, the UN/CAAC office has exerted efforts to engage non-state armed groups to reduce the number of child soldiers, with the help of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).¹² The first case of Ivory Coast bore fruit in 2005, and then the effort was extended to other parts of the world. Sometimes negotiations succeed (e.g., negotiations with some groups in the Central African Republic); other times fail (e.g., Yemen with Houthis, recently). Charged broadly with the task of protecting children during armed conflicts around the globe,¹³ the UN/CAAC 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 annually.¹⁴ Once the list is identified, the UN delegation or staff try to contact states as well as non-state actors. In some cases, rebel groups take the initiative to contact international actors.¹⁵ The negotiation takes place when the conflict parties are willing to commit to the action plans. As such, the plans themselves are essentially consent-based and often confidential.¹⁶ The details include time-bound plans that come with action steps, such as issuing commander orders.¹⁷ The actions are subject to monitoring and reporting mechanisms (MRM) that

⁹ Non-state armed groups include rebel groups as well as paramilitary groups. The excluded groups from our analysis due to temporal coverage and the mismatch between the NSA dataset and UN list are discussed in the appendix Table A1.

¹⁰ See UN/CAAC annual reports, various years. Also, see Haer and Böhmelt (2018) for the practice of girl soldiers.

¹¹ See Haer and Böhmelt (2016) for the patterns of child soldiering. Child soldiers have been used in about 20 countries around the world, and the UN lists about 50-60 “conflict parties” every year that violate children’s rights, including the child soldier use. However, the UN list is not exhaustive and usually lists severe violations.

¹² Due to the mandates related to children, the UNICEF is often involved in the CAAC actions. Also, since some groups engage in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process of child soldiers, naturally, the DPKO is involved as well (Dorussen et al. 2021).

¹³ The complete list of agenda includes what the SRSR 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 UN/GA-SC (2018).

¹⁴ Sudan, Chad, Sri Lanka, Yemen are among the state parties that have signed onto these action plans.

¹⁵ It is not directly observable whether the UN initiates the process or whether rebel groups voluntarily contact the UN. Nonetheless, the UN initial contact appears to be the norm, with only a few cases where rebel groups conduct diplomacy to reach out to international actors. Interview with Alec Wargo, UN official at the UN/CAAC (April 2015).

¹⁶ Ibid. It is often the preference of armed groups not to disclose all the details of the agreement.

¹⁷ For the incorporation of the UN action plans into internal code of conduct, see Moro Islamic Liberation Front/Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (2010).

allow international monitors to access rebel-held areas. The psychological and social, and community-based programs are also discussed on the way of negotiations as part of a humanitarian engagement.

From a research design perspective, the case of the UN/CAAC action plans provides both unique and generalizable aspects of humanitarian engagement. The case is unique in providing a relatively difficult case for humanitarian engagement with non-state armed actors. The United Nations is primarily an inter-governmental body, bound by political constraints from member states. In contrast, international non-governmental organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)/Doctors Without Borders, have no such political constraints from member states.¹⁸ Compared to the international non-governmental organizations, governments in civil conflicts are more likely to block the UN efforts because of the sovereignty concerns. If we can identify the conditions where humanitarian engagement can operate in the case of UN action plans, then we are likely to find those conditions in the case of other international actors as well.

The case is also unique as it deals with the issue of child soldiering. The issue is arguably more difficult to solve than other humanitarian issues since child soldiering is a socially rooted problem. Much like the issue of other humanitarian politics, such as anti-personnel mines issue or civilian killing issue, child soldiering involves incentives to exploit military advantage, in this case, using children as weapons and resources to wage war. Unlike anti-personnel mines issue where the technological issue of de-mining is prominent, child soldiering is a social issue that penetrates the social norms. Engaging rebel groups for detecting and de-mining the mine-laden fields is a qualitatively different task from the engagement that convinces the social community with their own norms of childhood and adulthood. The child soldiering issue involves social and cultural issues such as the Islam society treating the age 13 as legitimate adults while international standards have it as 18. The case of the UN/CAAC action plans will especially carry implications for how humanitarians engage deeply social problems, such as sexual violence, as opposed to the problems that involve military technologies.

Structurally, the problem of child soldiering is essentially analogous to other humanitarian issues related to wartime conduct that presents the tension between military advantage and humanitarian restraints. Why would rebel groups give up child soldiering (or use of anti-personnel mines) when they could benefit from such an act? Why would governments give up their sovereign prerogatives to allow international actors to operate in their conflict zones? Considering these commonalities, the analysis employed here can be utilized for other humanitarian engagements and possibly be scaled up beyond the issue of child soldiering. The logic of consent and control involving government-gatekeeping activities and territory-holding rebels should travel to other cases of humanitarian engagement and negotiation. In sum, the core analytical features of engagement process and environment should be transportable to other cases of humanitarian action in conflict zones around the world.

In our theory section, we hypothesized that the host governments in vulnerable security situations are willing to say yes to international engagement. In contrast, governments that can effectively deal with internal actors without external help are going to jealously guard their sovereignty. On the part of rebel groups, strong territorial control gives them an incentive to engage internationally. In our empirical analysis, we test two observable implications based on our

¹⁸ And in fact, in the issue of anti-personnel mines, the Geneva Call was able to engage more than 60 (out of approximately 200-300 rebel groups around the world at any given time). In the case of the UN action plans, only a dozen was engaged.

theoretical analysis. Hypothesis 1 concerns our argument about sovereignty-guarding governments and the governments' own vulnerability to their internal enemies. Host governments that can afford to deal with their own internal enemies are likely to block the UN access. In contrast, the host governments that are ineffective in their security situations are more likely to accept the UN intervention. Hypothesis 2 concerns our argument about the category of rebel groups that are likely to accept the UN for humanitarian engagement. These are the territory-holding rebel groups, as we reasoned, due to relatively civilian-regarding tendencies and, at the same time, due to the likelihood of serving as credible and identifiable interlocutors for international actors. We sum up these expectations below, situating the theoretical implications in the context of the UN action plans.

H1 (gatekeeper government hypothesis): UN action plan is more likely when the host government is ineffective in dealing with its own domestic security challenges, compared to the situation where host governments are effective in dealing with their internal enemies.

H2 (territory-holding rebel hypothesis): UN action plan is more likely when a rebel group exhibits control over territory, compared to the situation when a rebel group lacks such control.

Sample and Data

We test our hypotheses with the sample of rebel groups in contemporary civil wars between 2000 and 2015. To construct a sample that could be potentially targeted for the UN/CAAC action plans, we first started with all the rebel groups as in the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset by Cunningham et al. (2013).¹⁹ The empirical universe of child soldiering by rebel groups is not all the countries in conflict, but most of them. This is going to be our list of "potential" rebel groups that could have been "candidates" for the UN/CAAC action plans. 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.²⁰ At the rebel-group level, among 136 groups in the sample between 2000 and 2015, 120 groups have a history of child soldiering, and ten groups signed onto the UN action plans.²¹ The UN action plans started with the Ivory Coast case in 2005, and we assembled the dataset with the temporal scope of 2000-2015, in order to ensure comparisons before and after.²² The unit of observation is rebel-year, where each

¹⁹ The NSA dataset we started with as a platform (version 3.4) 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. The NSA dataset focuses on the conflict that generated more than 25 battle-related deaths, but this criterion leaves out some groups that generated low-intensity conflicts. For example, some groups (e.g. SLA-Abu Gasim) are in the UN action plan list, but do not exist in the NSA dataset. These groups are excluded from the current analysis to maintain the entry barrier at the same level for all rebel groups.

²⁰ This count is based on Haer and Böhmelt (2016).

²¹ These 10 groups, with the host country and signing year information, are MPIGO (Ivory Coast 2005), FRCI (Ivory Coast 2005), MPCCI (Ivory Coast 2005), MJP (Ivory Coast 2005), CPJP (Central African Republic 2011), SLA/A-MM (Sudan 2006), SPLM (Sudan 2009), JEM (Sudan 2012), CPN-M/UPF (Nepal 2009), MILF (Philippines 2009).

²² In this particular analysis, we set 2000 as the 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.

observation marks yearly data for each rebel group within a specific conflict-ridden country. This yearly observation allows us to track down the fluctuations of conflict events. With the assembled data, we analyze the occurrence of the UN/CAAC action plans, along with the other contextual factors of humanitarian engagement.

Variables

The dependent variable is the UN/CAAC action plan occurrence. The variable is coded as 1 for the years a rebel group within a specific country signs and implements the UN/CAAC action plan.²³ For a rebel group that does not sign, all the years are coded as zero. We coded the occurrence of UN action plans from the reports by the UN/CAAC Office.²⁴ Out of 120 groups between 2000 and 2015 that have a history of child soldiering, we have ten groups that signed the UN/CAAC action plans. The signer groups are clustered in 8 countries (Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Mali, Nepal, Philippines, Sudan, South Sudan, and Sri Lanka).²⁵ This setup gives us variation across countries as well as across rebel groups within a country. At one level, we observe a cross-rebel variation within one country, where some rebel groups within one country sign the UN/CAAC action plans (e.g., MILF in the Philippines) while others don't (e.g., Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines). At another level, we observe cross-country variation, where some countries allow rebel groups to sign UN/CAAC action plans (e.g., Central African Republic and Ivory Coast) while others don't (e.g., Colombia, India, and Myanmar).

Key explanatory variables include the measures of sovereignty-guarding host governments and territory-holding rebels. We use "political effectiveness" score from the state fragility index provided by the Center for Systemic Peace (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017). The index is composed of various dimensions of internal security threats, such as regime durability, leader years in office, and the number of coup events, ranging from 0 (more effective) to 3 (less effective) (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017, 52). For our purposes, we label this variable as *Government ineffectiveness*, given that the higher value represents a lesser degree of political effectiveness. A higher political ineffectiveness score would mean a vulnerable regime with instability. Conversely, lower political ineffectiveness would indicate regimes that are relatively secure and stable. The *Government ineffectiveness* variable approximates our theoretical concept of sovereignty-guarding preference of a government, as the measure captures the ability to deal with internal enemies effectively. Our theory expects that "politically effective" and secure governments will guard their sovereignty and will not allow international actors within their jurisdiction. In contrast, "politically ineffective" governments will not be able to afford to guard their sovereignty and let outsiders in for humanitarian action. The variable is almost evenly distributed. In the dataset, twelve governments are politically effective (lower than 1); fourteen are politically ineffective (higher than 2); fifteen governments are at the medium range (higher than 1 and lower than 2). For the explanatory variable on the rebel side, we use *Rebel territorial control*, a dummy variable taken from the NSA dataset. In our dataset, approximately 35% rebel-years are associated with territorial control, the other 65% with no territorial control.

²³ In the appendix, we also report the results with the onset of UN action plan which equals to one only in the signing year.

²⁴ For example, see the series of reports by UN/CAAC in the reference list at the end of this paper.

²⁵ Groups that do not sign include the ones that are in Myanmar, Colombia, India, and Yemen, for instance.

We control for several rebel and government characteristics that could simultaneously influence two main explanatory variables and the occurrence of the UN/CAAC action plans. The core purpose of controlling for these factors is to estimate the independent effect of our key explanatory variables, *Government ineffectiveness* and *Rebel territorial control*. As well, our additional goal is to account for previous explanations and rule out other potential explanations.

On the government side, we control for the variables that can affect the government's capacity to deal with internal security threats as well as the governments' incentive to allow external actors within their sovereign territories. We control for the level of economic development (*GDP, logged*) to account for the government's overall capacity. We also control for the number of rebel groups (*Rebel number*),²⁶ as the government's reputational costs in internal civil wars are well known (Walter 2006). Political regime type is also controlled for, with the characteristics of the political regime on the autocracy-democracy scale (*Regime type*),²⁷ as is the tendency of democracies to open up for international interactions for humanitarian purposes (Gleditsch et al. 2018). Since reciprocity is the centerpiece of any humanitarian politics (Morrow 2007), we add the government's signing of the Optional Protocol for the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (*OPCRC*, so-called Child Soldier Treaty). Lastly, we include the support by P-5 members for the government (*Gov't P5 support*), as the support by the five permanent members (P5) in the UN Security Council might also condition the government's willingness to open up their security situations to external actors.²⁸

On the rebel side, we control for the variables that can capture various military, political, and organizational factors, which can be potentially associated with the rebels' incentives to sign the UN action plans. As for military factors, the capacity to fight and mobilize will be important to control since militarily strong rebels may have less incentive to engage in humanitarian engagement (Fazal and Konaev 2019). We use the "rebel strength" variable in the NSA data (*Rebel strength*) to capture this notion of rebel military incentives. To account for rebel groups' moderation of military incentives and increased motivation for political option, we include the variable, *Peace agreement and after*, the years of and after signing a peace agreement. We expect that rebel groups signing peace talks have modulated military incentives that increase the likelihood of international engagement, including UN action plans. For additional political factors on the rebel side, we include the secessionist groups (*Secessionist*) as one of the potential correlates of rebel groups' interaction with outside actors and rebel diplomacy (Huang 2016). As for the organizational factors, we include the degree of central control and command (*Rebel central control*), following the logic of discipline within rebel organizations affecting rebel wartime behaviors (Weinstein 2008; Johansson and Hultman 2019). External support structures and resources also might condition rebel group engagement with outside actors (Wood et al. 2014), so we include the rebel support by P-5 members (*Rebel P5 support*).

All the variables are sourced from the NSA data, as described in Cunningham et al. 2013, except the peace agreement variable sourced from the UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset (Pettersson and Öberg 2019).²⁹ *Rebel central control* is the variable related to rebel organizations in the NSA dataset. *Rebel strength* is an ordinal measure (high, medium, and low), rated relative to the

²⁶ The number of rebel groups ranges from 1 to 16. The governments in the sample face 1-4 rebels for most rebel-years (approx. 60%), but the rest experience multiple rebel groups in a given year.

²⁷ We use polity score 2 from Polity IV project (Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2017), which fills in the political regime scores throughout the observation years, which better suit our purposes.

²⁸ Sources and measures are further described and summarized in the appendix Table A2.

²⁹ Descriptive statistics in the appendix Table A2.

government. *Rebel P5 support* is extrapolated from the narrative related to rebel support in the NSA dataset, and the *Secessionist* variable comes from “conflict type” variable in the NSA dataset.

We additionally included a couple of control variables on the side of the international actor. The capacity of the UN/CAAC office is often assisted by the existing UNICEF presence.³⁰ For this, we control for the number of UNICEF personnel (*UNICEF personnel, logged*). We also control for the conflict intensity, since the severe security situations are pointed out as practical reasons to keep the international actors out. Houthis in Yemen, for example, were in the process of negotiation, but then the negotiation was faulted because of the intensity of the fighting (UN/SC 2019). *Conflict intensity* variable comes from the UCDP Armed Conflict Dataset (Gleditsch et al. 2002). 0 indicates no visible military confrontations; 1 refers to minor conflict; 2 refers to major conflict.

Results

We estimate time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) logistic model with random effects. TSCS logistic random-effects model allows us to control for unknown unit-specific effects and exploit the maximum variance in our data. In particular, the random effects framework provides leverage to control for rebel group-specific unobservable confounders. As well, given the rare event nature of our dependent variable, this TSCS setup allows us to overcome the separation problem since the model exploits the maximum variation – both space and time – in our data. Since one of our main explanatory variables – *Rebel territorial control* – does not vary with time, we specify a random-effects model as an alternative to using rebel group-level fixed-effects.³¹

Table 1 reports the results. Model 1 reports the baseline result only with two explanatory variables, controlling for the time dependence of the outcome variable (Carter and Signorino 2010). The coefficient of *Government ineffectiveness* is positive and statistically significant. The result indicates that the UN action plans are more likely when their national government is more politically ineffective. The finding is consistent with our theoretical explanation that effective governments are likely to afford to deal with their internal enemies and therefore could remain sovereignty-guarding gatekeepers. On the part of rebel groups, they are more likely to sign the UN action plans when they control territory. The coefficient of *Rebel territorial control* is positive and statistically significant. Collectively, this baseline result provides some support for H1 and H2.

In Model 2, we include the control variables related to host governments. Again, both the coefficients for *Government ineffectiveness* and *Rebel territorial control* are positive and statistically significant, supporting H1 and H2. Under the situation of their rebel groups using child soldiers, the states with more democratic governments and with P5 member support are more likely to see the rebel groups signing UN action plans.

In Model 3, we introduce control variables that are varying at the level of rebel groups. The central result – rebel group is more likely to sign UN action plan when the government is less politically effective and when rebel group holds territory – is also tested out in this model. The

³⁰ In our separate analysis, we also looked at the peacekeeping engagement, as the DPKO assists the demobilization of child soldiers and assists the monitoring process of the UN action plans. Together with the UNICEF presence, peacekeeping also assists the UN/CAAC office function. Results on file with the author.

³¹ On the efficiency gain of the random-effects model versus fixed effects models when within unit variation is low, see Clark and Linzer (2015). In our case, within unit variation is the variation within each conflict in a country. Most of the variation comes from across-unit variation in our data. Therefore, random effects specification is more appealing to us..

model shows that the effects of rebel side factors, including central command, the strength of rebel forces, and receiving P5 support, do not reach conventional significance levels. *Secessionist* results are also not significant. We interpret the result to mean that the secessionist might be more likely to open to the outside world but most likely blocked by sovereignty-guarding states.

Table 1.
Statistical analysis of the UN action plan occurrence
Time-series cross-sectional random-effects logistic models

	Model 1 Baseline	Model 2 Gov't	Model 3 Rebel	Model 4 All	Model 5 All
Gov't ineffectiveness	3.746*** (0.540)	4.707*** (1.418)	2.686*** (0.995)	6.664*** (1.109)	12.07*** (3.994)
Rebel territorial control	4.050** (1.688)	3.453** (1.566)	5.463** (2.158)	5.298*** (1.859)	13.78** (5.570)
GDP (logged)		1.109 (0.927)		3.365*** (0.628)	5.127** (2.364)
Rebel number		0.00316 (0.220)		-0.0383 (0.433)	0.426 (0.709)
Regime type		0.173** (0.0732)		0.00804 (0.210)	0.172 (0.248)
OPCRC		1.123 (0.777)		0.842 (1.097)	3.228 (2.996)
Gov't P5 support		3.449* (1.772)		7.671*** (1.638)	13.07*** (4.538)
Peace agreement and after			7.563*** (1.361)	6.668*** (1.091)	9.772*** (1.787)
Rebel central command			-0.605 (1.338)	-1.673** (0.798)	-0.710 (1.205)
Rebel strength			1.363 (1.475)	2.186*** (0.817)	2.369** (1.017)
Rebel P5 support			1.168 (1.501)	-5.820*** (1.944)	-11.65** (4.944)
Secessionist			2.517 (2.577)	-1.795 (1.743)	-5.593 (4.727)
UNICEF personnel (logged)					-3.725** (1.509)
Conflict intensity					-9.247* (5.391)
Number of UN action plans	10	10	9	9	9
Number of rebel groups	107	102	96	92	92
Observations	1356	1265	1235	1152	1152

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The time cubic polynomial approximation (t, t2, and t3) are included in the models but not reported. Constant suppressed. Error terms are clustered at each rebel group in the dataset. The sample is rebel groups using child soldiers, identified in Haer and Böhmelt (2016).

In Model 4, we introduce both government and rebel-related control variables in the model. The effects of two main explanatory variables remain robust. We also note the effects of other control variables. The positive and significant effect of *Rebel strength* on the rebel groups' UN action signing hints at the possibility that strong rebels do not have to resort to low-cost rapid mobilization of children in their war efforts (Faulkner and Doctor 2021), unlike weak groups often do. As well, the moderated war incentives under the peace agreements significantly impact the rebel groups' chance of international engagement with the UN/CAAC office. The results suggest that the peace agreement periods may be the prime time international actors can bear the fruits of humanitarian engagement. The positive effect of *Gov't P5 support* interestingly contrasts to the negative effect of *Rebel P5 support*, gleaning the asymmetric nature of civil conflicts. While the supports from the permanent five on the government side facilitates the signing of UN action plans, the same support on the rebel side operates as an inhibitor to the UN action plans. Rebel groups receiving enough external supports may not feel the need for gains that can be earned via engaging with the UN actors.

Lastly in Model 5, we examine the effect of conflict intensity. We expected that conflict intensity hinders the conclusion of UN action plans because it is an obstacle to international actors for security reasons primarily. The result indicates that conflict intensity is an inhibitor, but the effect is statistically significant only at the 90% level. This implies that the physical intensity of the conflict might be a less significant and salient factor in explaining the rebel engagement phenomenon, compared to the governments' sovereignty-guarding tendencies or rebels' territorial control. This hints at the possibility that political obstacles are salient features of humanitarian engagement, even compared to the physical vicissitudes of conflict.

How substantial is the effect of *Gov't ineffectiveness* and *Rebel territorial control* on the occurrence of the UN/CAAC action plans? We calculate average marginal effects based on Model 5 and plot them in Figure 1 with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 1.
Average marginal effects of key correlates on the UN action plan occurrence

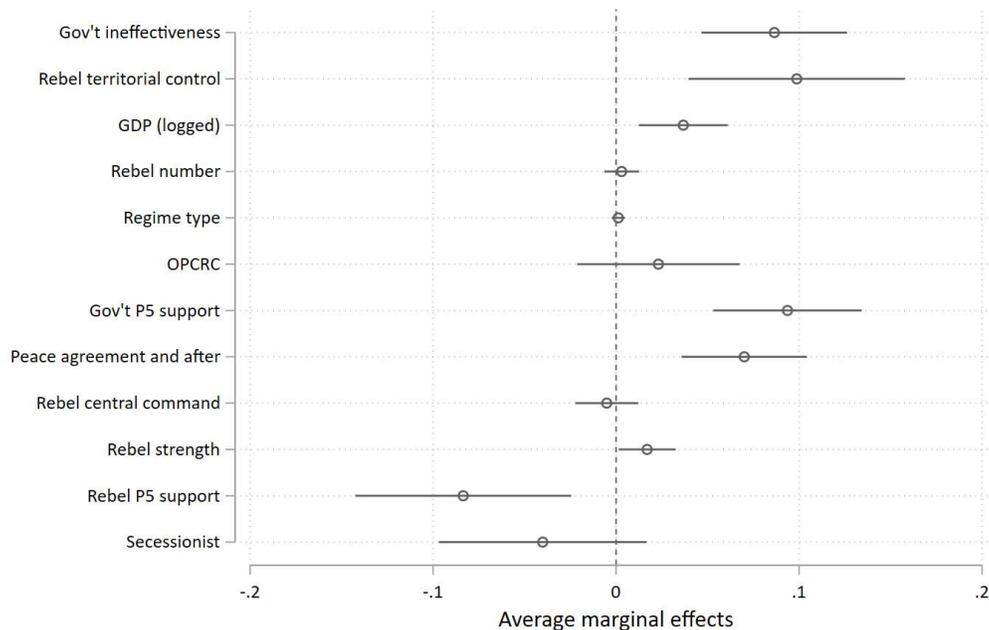


Figure 1 indicates that a one-unit increase in *Gov't ineffectiveness* increases the probability of signing UN action plan by about 8.6%. As the government becomes politically ineffective in maintaining the stability of the political regime – for instance, the score increases from 0 to 1, 1 to 2, or 2 to 3 – the probability of rebel groups signing UN action plan increases about 8.6% on average. This again is consistent with our expectation that it is less politically effective governments that would open up to outside intervention in dealing with rebel groups for humanitarian engagement. Turning to the rebel side, switching from non-territorial rebel group to territorial one increases the probability of signing UN action plan about 9.9%.

Exploring mechanism: how international engagement operates

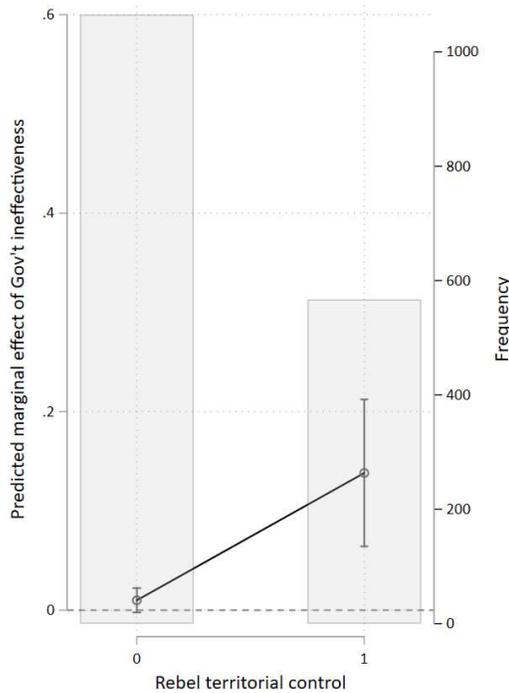
The statistical analysis lends support for our gatekeeper-government hypothesis as well as the hypothesis on the territory-holding rebels. Based on this empirical result, we further test additional implications on how international engagement works. We do not fully observe whether the government blocked the access or the rebel groups rejected the access. What we observe as researchers is whether the UN action plans occurred or not. We theorized the process starting with the UN in negotiation with the government first and then getting the consent from the rebel group. It implies that to conclude UN action plan, the presence of either condition only – rebel territorial control or government openness – might not be sufficient. Even if the government is willing to open its border to international actors, the prospect of signing a deal is very low if rebel groups are not willing to negotiate. Similarly, even if rebel groups embrace international engagement, sovereignty-guarding governments will deprive rebels of such opportunities.

Given this consideration, we specify the interaction model in which other settings are equivalent to Model 5 in Table 1, and test whether the effect of rebel territorial control and security vulnerability of government is conditional upon each other. Figure 2 reports two conditional marginal effect graphs, one for *Rebel territorial control* and the other for *Gov't ineffectiveness*. The left panel demonstrates that the effect of *Gov't ineffectiveness* is positive and statistically significant at 95% level only when rebel groups hold territory. This pattern illustrates that even if the government opens an opportunity for international actors to approach with rebels, the UN action plans are less likely to occur when rebel groups are not interested in negotiating.

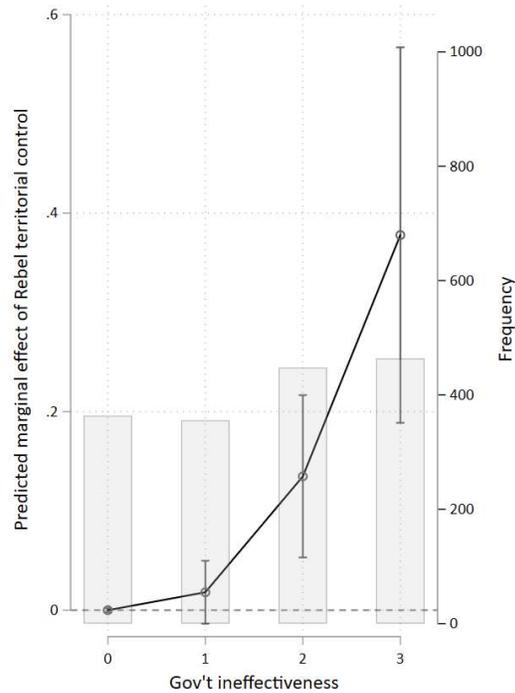
Similarly, the right panel shows that the effect of *Rebel territorial control* is conditional upon *Gov't ineffectiveness*. The effect is only positive and statistically significant when the host government is more politically vulnerable, and it is not when the government has the power to guard its sovereignty. The result is consistent with our theory of international humanitarian engagement. It indicates that rebel groups have a chance to engage with international actors only when the government is ineffective in its political control within its borders. When the government doesn't allow international actors to come in, signing UN action plan is unlikely, even if rebel groups are willing to do so.

Figure 2.
Interactive effects of *Gov't ineffectiveness* and *Rebel territorial control*

Marginal effects of *Gov't ineffectiveness* conditional on *Rebel territorial control*



Marginal effects of *Rebel territorial control* conditional on *Gov't ineffectiveness*



Note: The vertical lines in the left panel plot the marginal effects of *Gov't ineffectiveness* conditional on *Rebel territorial control*, with 95% confidence intervals. The vertical lines in the right panel present the marginal effects of *Rebel territorial control* conditional on *Gov't ineffectiveness*, with 95% confidence intervals. The bars in both graphs present the number of observations for each category.

The results give some support for our theoretical expectations about gatekeeper governments and territory-holding rebels. When we comb through the cases in the data, we see that UN action plans do not occur potentially due to the failure of one of these two 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). Our case investigation of the conflict in the Philippines, presented in the appendix, further corroborates our finding on the role of government openness to bring international actors in as well as the role of rebel territorial control. Taken together, the evidence we present in this paper suggests that the confluence of government consent and rebel control in understanding rebel engagement in conflict zones is crucial for successful international engagement.

Process-wise, humanitarian engagement appears to be operating much like a filter. Humanitarian organizations are hemmed by sovereignty-guarding governments and then screened by unwilling rebel groups. We have about 200 countries in the world, about 40 of them in civil conflicts, and about ten countries opening up to the UN engagement with UN action plans during

the timeframe between 2000 and 2015. Among those ten governments, about five opened up to reform their own national security forces,³² and the other five opened up to the rebel groups as well (Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Nepal, Philippines, Sudan). Among about 120 rebel groups with child soldier experience, only a dozen rebel groups within those five host governments had finalized the action plans with the UN. This filter-characterization of humanitarian engagement, based on political motivations of the government and rebels, can be useful in understanding humanitarians political access to conflict zones.

Conclusion

Our analysis identified two main contributing factors to the humanitarian engagement of rebel groups in conflict zones. First, government openness appears to be the most important factor because the government first decides whether rebel groups and international actors can engage with each other. Second, the target characteristic is also important. Rebel groups are subject to international engagement if they have the willingness and capacity to engage in interactions with outside humanitarian actors. Our analysis has shown that these characteristics are associated with territory-holding rebel groups in civil wars.

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 in aiming to alter the behavior of non-state armed groups. The theory of consent and control can also be extended to other non-state armed actors and militant groups, such as paramilitary organizations or terrorist organizations, going beyond traditional rebel insurgents.³³ Additionally, the theory of humanitarian engagement would be applicable to other settings of international engagement, such as aid distribution in conflict zones by state agencies (e.g., USAID) or non-governmental organizations.³⁴ Beyond the engagement by the UN, other international non-governmental actors often fill the diversity of humanitarian map, presumably attuned to operate in the similar environment of the politics of consent and control.³⁵ We analyzed the child soldier issue, but the framework of consent and control can be modified to other types of international engagement and access politics in conflict zones.³⁶ Our analysis will be useful since the interactions between and

³² The five countries are Afghanistan (signed in 2011), Chad (signed in 2011 and delisted in 2014), Democratic Republic of Congo (signed in 2012; delisted in 2017), Myanmar (signed in 2012), Uganda (signed in 2007 and delisted in 2008). All the listing information comes from UN/CAAC 2021.

³³ In the case of pro-government paramilitary organizations, we would expect the government's gatekeeper role to be prominent and salient due to the government's incentive to hide their involvement (Bapat 2012; Mitchell, et al. 2014). In the case of terrorist organizations, the ones that control territory, as the Islamic State did at one point (Revkin 2020), will be applicable in terms of what international actors can or cannot do in terms of engagement activities.

³⁴ This set would include, for example, the Doctors without Borders (to deliver medical service in conflict areas), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (to provide assistance to refugee population), or the World Food Programme (to distribute food aid).

³⁵ Operational leeway and the mode of negotiation will be different, as the governments might give fewer restrictions to some actors (e.g., NGOs) but restrict access of international organizations. Governments might be more conscious about guarding their sovereignty vis-à-vis international organizations, compared to international NGOs.

³⁶ Granted, the consideration of military advantage might be exclusive to the phenomenon of humanitarian engagement that directly deals with the issues of restraints in conflict behaviors. Such consideration of military aspects might be absent to international organizations, NGOs, or foreign state agencies that simply negotiate access to conflict areas to do their aid work, for instance.

among non-state actors (international organizations, civil society, or non-state armed groups) and state actors are common and salient features of contemporary international relations.

In this paper, we have investigated the political process of engaging rebel groups by international actors. Going beyond engagement, “reforming rebels” might be more difficult to achieve, but it can be done. Gleditsch et al. (2018) has provided a proof of concept in reporting some evidence that non-state armed groups reduced the use of anti-personnel mines after signing the Deeds of Commitment. International actors are expanding the engagement into more social issues, such as child soldiers, sexual violence, or health matters. But currently, our understanding of the success in international engagement is limited. In all the dozen cases of UN/CAAC action plan cases in the Central African Republic, the Philippines, Sudan, Nepal, and Ivory Coast, some cases such as the Philippines and Nepal were successful in terms of no apparent surge of child soldiering while some child soldiering cases still remain in South Sudan (UN/GA-SC 2019). Within the Central African Republic, though, it is notable that anti-Seleka factions used a fewer number of child soldiers, compared to the anti-Balaka faction that did not sign the UN action plans (UN/GA-SC 2020). Why this variation exists in terms of compliance with international actions, we leave for future research. Such a deeper understanding of how non-violent engagement can bear fruits vis-à-vis violent actors will help us reduce violence and human suffering in conflict-ridden societies around the world.

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