

Natural resources and violent conflict assignment

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Why do disputes over natural resources sometimes turn violent while others don't? The following analysis will contribute to the debate over why natural resource disputes in particular regions turn into violent conflict in comparison to others. In order to address this question, it is crucial to understand the historical, economic, political and cultural context in which these conflicts arise. The approach taken in this essay is one that sees the exploitation of natural resources as only one of several influencing factors which express ND legitimate collective violent action and rebellion.

To do so we must firstly discuss the two most common theoretical approaches to this inquisition. These common approaches include the theory or "greed" and that of "grievance". The severe conflicts over natural resources which occurred in Indonesian region of Cache and Papua New Guinea's Bougainvillea province will be closely examined for the purpose of proving the plausibility of the "grievance" based approach while simultaneously invalidating the "greed" model of explanation.

To put it briefly, in accordance with the empirical endings from the analyzed case studies, it is clear that natural resource disputes cannot individually account for the causation of violent conflict, rather, the impacts of resource exploitation further fuels preexisting feelings of resentment which then contribute along with many other factors concerning a regions history and identity in mutually influencing the sense of grievance which as a result necessitates collective violence.

Many debates following the causes of violent conflicts arising from disputes over natural resources draw much focus on two major driving factors; these

determinants, as previously stated, include the forces of “greed” and that of “grievances” The greed based model of explanation recognizes the quest for self-enrichment and economic interests as the foundation for violent conflict.

Among the prominent theorists who promote a “greed” based model include the works of Paul Collier and Anne Hoofer who believe that the relationship between violent disputes and natural resources are best understood in terms of the benefits these natural resources provide for the rebels as well as its ability to finance them. Although in their more recent studies they began to shift their emphasis from motives to a focus on the “opportunity to rebel”, the variants that they present still largely remain focused on the ways in which greed and economic gains remain to be the driving forces in violent conflict.

On the contrary, the works of Edward Spinalis and Anthony Reagan offer explanations which are more linear to the view offered by Michael Ross. They believe that while economic interests certainly play a significant role in the causation of violent conflict, these interests cannot be isolated from other political and historical factors. It is therefore useful for the understanding of why disputes over natural resources turn violent in some cases rather than others, to take a “grievance” based approach as it incorporates multiple causal explanations and not one which is based solely on economic benefit and self interest.

Therefore, the argument made in this essay is one that aligns with the work of Spinalis and Reagan and returns the focus to factors which contribute to

the sense of grievances that more accurately demonstrates under which conditions disputes over natural resources turn into full blown violent conflicts. This is an alternative approach than that presented by Collier and Hoofer which instead draws several conclusions which maintain a grievance over greed based model of explanations.

For that reason, the analysis of two case studies will concentrate on the impacts of historical, political and cultural identity in contributing to the sense of grievances fueling rebellion and necessitating violent action. To address the question presented in this essay as well as lend support for the preferred approach of explanations, close analysis of the natural resource conflicts in Cache and Bougainvillea have proven to be relevant as they both present instances of historical, political and cultural factors which validate the grievance based approach required for necessitating violent action.

The Bougainvillea region has a history of conflict which includes territory disputes that began from a map drawing error which integrated the region into PANG although it is a part of the Solomon Islands according to its geography, culture and language. Bougainvillea has had a very contemptuous relationship with past colonial rule and therefore confirming the idea that the conflicts over natural resources in he region only amplified already existing grievances which the region have accrued from the impacts of colonial power.

The Pangaea copper mine which operated in Bougainvillea was the most essential economic asset in PANG as it contributed major to the country's GAP. If there was indeed a preexisting sense of resentment amongst the

civilians of Bougainvillea towards PANG and colonial rule, then this resentment only grew stronger as a variety of issues regarding mining operations together with the distribution of the revenue it generated began to surface as an injustice.

Contributing to this sense of refinance more specifically was the insensitive nature of Pang's government over concerns expressed by the local communities over environmental impacts as well as the lack of compensation and unfair distribution of mining revenues to the local landholders, communities and the whole region of Bougainvillea altogether. Pang's governmental policies stated that subsurface minerals were state-owned and therefore PANG all together would receive the benefits.

This notion of state-owned subsurface minerals collided with the customary beliefs of property tenure held by Bougainvilleas who understood their landholder rights to extend and include the subsurface minerals on their land that state governments were claiming. Although there was compensation offered to the affected landholders for damages and destruction, the landowners came to view this compensation as inadequate and were appalled by the fact that compensation was mostly limited to the use of land and excluded a reasonable portion of the revenue generated from the mine itself.

This compensation did not recompense for the population growth due to the influx of mine workers to the region from other revisions or for the relocation of many Bougainvilleas to other areas. Therefore, along with the concerns over the destructive impacts of the mine on the region, the lack of

compensation as well as the unfair distribution of mining revenues together fueled further resentment and contributed to historical grievances and in turn legitimated violent uprising and rebellion. In a similar case the conflict in Cache over the expropriation of natural resources can also be explained in terms of the effects of grievances.

Parallel to the conflict in Bougainvillea, the exploitation of natural resources in Cache did not eely drive the disputes into violent collective action; rather, it further contributed to the sense of grievances preexisting within the region. Disputes over the natural resources turned violent as they became tangled in the course of identity formation and was therefore understood by the community in terms of injustice and exploitation. Another major factor significantly influencing the sense grievances includes the lasting effects of a rich history Of conflicts in the territory.

These cultural and historical references contribute widely to the sense of grievances which are crucial for legitimating violent action. Like the presence of on-going historical conflicts in Bougainvillea, Cache since sass has also had its fair share of long-standing territorial disputes. One of the major contributing factors to the sense of grievance and discontent felt by the Chances was based on the feelings of betrayal by Indonesia after they were classified as a special region and promised special treatment. Along with this, was also discontent over the unfair distribution of the revenue generated by the oil and gas industry.

In an analysis of the allocation of resource revenue by the Indonesian government, it became evident that while Cache had to bear the brunt of the

industries environmental impacts, only a very limited amount Of the benefits which it actually accrued was reimbursed back into the region. The central government had failed to compensate for the destructive impacts the gas fields had on surrounding neighborhoods including pollution and effects on water, fishing and agricultural sectors as well as the relocation of several Chances residents.

These elements of grievance generated by the exploitation of natural resources were almost identical to those which also forced the people of Bougainvillea into taking violent action. Both conflicts in Bougainvillea and Cache disprove the “ greed” based approach promoted by Collier and Hooper. While the distribution of resource revenues definitely contributed immensely to local grievances, the violent uprisings were not merely in pursuit for wealth from the resources, nor did the revenue generated by the resources provide funding for rebel movements.

Instead, local disgruntlement over the effects Of operations on mining and gas industries together with the unjust distribution of revenues it produced only added to issues of cultural, economic and political inequality concerning the exploited provinces. Closer analysis of the cases proved that several factors including economic, political and many others combined together to fuel the sense of grievance which necessitated and provided the spark for collective violent action, this demonstrates why violent conflict arises from disputes over natural resources in some places rather than others.

To contradict the theory of “ greed” presented by Collier and Hooper, the profusion and wealth of the natural resource industries did not present rebels

with an “ opportunity to rebel”, instead, the effects of depriving Bougainvilleas and Chances from receiving the economic benefits they deserved from the substantial revenues produced by the industries caused an increased sense of grievance.

Therefore the essential findings regarding the argument presented in this essay is that the existence of rich natural resources and its exploitation by outsiders does not individually cause violent conflict, instead, it is the way in which the exploitation and many factors related to these operations are interpreted by the local communities in terms of grievances which all add up to a wider web of resentment accumulated from previous historical, cultural and political injustices and as a result necessitate and justify collective actions Of violence by the rebels in certain cases in comparison to others.

As a result, any attempt to explain the motivations behind violent conflicts over natural resources in terms of a “ greed” based approach have been invalidated by the examination of the conflict cases in Cache and Bougainvillea. Neither conflict over the natural resources in these two regions were seen as merely driven by economic interests or self-enrichment but rather by the unfairness of the striation of resource revenues considering the large amount of benefits the resource generated; nor were the revenues generated used to fund any rebel movements as supporters of the “ greed” based approach would suggest.

The people of Cache and those of Bougainvillea similarly believed that they had continuously been subjected to suffering, mistreatment and abuse at the hands of the state of PANG and Indonesia and the exploitation of their

natural resources and the unfair distribution and compensation for this exploitation and its impacts on the local communities was viewed as the last Tara in a long history of grievances endured by these vulnerable provinces.

In both cases of disputes over natural resources which have been analysed in this essay, economic factors alone cannot provide sufficient motivation for violent conflict, rather these factors are intertwined with political and cultural factors and therefore cannot provide meaningful explanations when they are isolated. To understand the range of causes operating to produce the grievances required for rebellion and violent action, attention must be focused on the contextual understanding of Bougainvillea and Cache's historical ND cultural identity.

Therefore, the economic factors that precipitated the Bougainvillea and Cache conflict cannot accurately be captured by the concept of "greed" which Collier and Hofer have offered. Consistently, they fought for more equitable compensation, both for unrealized local communities and for their provinces as a whole. For that reason, economic, historical, political and cultural factors all mutually contributed to the context which pushed the exploitation of natural resources in the analyzed cases to translate into violent conflict.

It is only within this multi-causal framework that the disjointed sense of resentment accumulated from past and present injustices can be transformed into the sense of grievance that is needed to mandate violent conflict in specific regions rather than others who face similar natural resource disputes but consequently do not turn into violent conflict.