

# Editorial: What Typhoon Haiyan Means for National Security

Andrew Holland | Published: Nov 13, 2013, 2:38 PM EST



## TYPHOON HAIYAN HOW YOU CAN HELP

Four Ways YOU Can Help

Autoplay  ON  OFF

On Friday, November 8, Super **Typhoon Haiyan** made landfall in the Central **Philippines**, around the island of Leyte, and was possibly the most powerful tropical cyclone on record. Estimates of the death toll range into the thousands, with President Corazón Aquino **believing** the final toll will likely be in the range of 2,000-2,500. Since the **Typhoon** passed through, the situation of the survivors has become dire – with over **600,000 people** displaced and food and fresh water in short supply.

US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel has ordered the **USS George Washington** and her battle group from Hong Kong to the **Philippines** to provide humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of the **Typhoon**. Already, about 90 U.S. Marines and sailors have deployed from Okinawa to the Philippines and are on the ground providing support. UK Prime Minister David Cameron has ordered the Royal Navy's HMS Daring to the region as well. This disaster response mission is part of the Department of Defense's growing humanitarian response mission to help affected regions. Simply put, if the U.S. military and allies did not provide fast-acting logistical support to relief missions like this, there are no other entities that can provide the heavy lift or logistical expertise necessary to get large quantities of aid to a region in time.

### (MORE ON TYPHOON HAIYAN: [How to Help](#))

Last week, prior to the storm, in reference to Pacific Command's disaster response mission and capability, the **PACOM Commander Admiral Locklear said**

It's the right thing to do ... Also, if something is going to happen in the Pacific that is going to create a churn in the security environment, the most likely thing will be a humanitarian disaster problem of some kind – whether it is horrific typhoons or tsunamis or floods or something else.

He's right. Beyond the clear threats to the human security of the residents of the affected area – loss of life, home, food, electricity, and clean water – natural disasters can act as a clear threat to **national security**, especially when the government is unable to respond effectively. That's because a government failure can create the opportunity for other security threats to develop, ranging from crime and corruption to insurgency or terrorism. Unfortunately, we may already be seeing this in the Philippines; there are reports of massive **looting** after the storm passed over, and unverified reports that the Filipino military has **engaged and killed** a group from the New People's Army, a communist rebel group in Leyte, as they tried to attack a government relief convoy.

I'm not going to spend much time debating whether or not man-made climate change was responsible for this storm in particular. There is an ongoing debate about whether climate change will both increase the number of tropical cyclones as well as their intensity. The latest **IPCC report** only expressed a "low confidence" in the impact of climate change on tropical cyclones – that doesn't mean

there's no impact, but it means we don't know. What we do know is that the water in the Pacific has been warmer than average –and that warmer water is an important part of cyclone intensity. Phil Plait's blog, [Bad Astronomy](#), has a good explanation of the climate-cyclone link. Suffice it to say that climate change is another risk that must be considered when planning for security threats in the region.

These are precisely the reasons that the U.S. Department of Defense has labeled climate change as an “accelerant of instability” in the [2010 QDR](#). PACOM, which has responsibility for all American forces in the Pacific region, has operationalized that guidance from the QDR to include real and significant planning for the many natural disasters that happen around the Pacific Rim. Admiral Locklear has stated that climate change “is probably the most likely thing that is going to happen ... that will cripple the security environment, probably more likely than the other scenarios we all often talk about.”

As ASP has determined in our [Global Security Defense Index](#) on Climate Change, the U.S. is not the only country that is planning for the security threats of climate change; over 70% of the world also deems climate change to be a security threat. The Philippines's [National Security Policy](#) specifically gives the security forces the mission to “Help Protect the Country's Natural Resources and Reduce the Risks of Disasters” and goes on to say that “the government must focus on establishing disaster and calamity [preparedness](#) and effective response mechanisms.” Clearly, [Typhoon Haiyan](#) has overwhelmed the ability of Philippines security services to effectively respond to this calamity; it is appropriate for the U.S. and international community to help as much as possible.

Climate change acts as a threat multiplier and an accelerant of instability. Whether this storm was ‘caused’ by climate change is a moot point now. Even with concerted international action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, like those proposed at the UNFCCC negotiations in Warsaw, the Pacific will likely see these disasters for decades to come. Efforts to reduce risk should include military preparations for response, readiness that increases the capacity to prevent such harm, as well as greenhouse gas mitigation to reduce the chance of future storms. The net effect, unfortunately will be that the military is likely to have many opportunities to practice disaster response: it should be treated as a key mission.

*Andrew Holland is Senior Fellow for Energy and Climate at the American Security Project, a nonpartisan [national](#) security think tank. For more, follow him on twitter [@TheAndyHolland](#).*

*This article originally appeared on the [American Security Project's blog](#).*