The Politics of Pressure: Political and Diplomatic Factors Influencing Non-State Armed Group Compliance with Humanitarian Norms

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Abstract:

Armed conflicts have existed since the beginning of recorded human history. While these conflicts have always negatively affected different groups of people, there have likewise been different attempts to limit the brutality of war and its adverse affects. Since the mid-nineteenth century, these attempts have been codified in international humanitarian law, a growing body of laws that governs the conduct of armed conflict between, as well as, to a lesser extent, within states. However, before this era of codification, armed conflicts were governed by societal and political norms between actors, with reciprocity of respect of norms paving the way for eventual peace between warring parties.

Since the end of the Second World War, the world has seen a dramatic reduction in the number of international armed conflicts (armed conflicts between states) and a similarly dramatic increase in the number of less-regulated non-international armed conflicts (armed conflicts between a state or states and non-state armed groups). While there has been a significant amount of research and discussion on expanding international humanitarian law’s framework to address the proliferation of these conflicts, the conduct of hostilities by non-state armed groups within these conflicts shows that many armed groups still follow norms. The object of this study is to better understand what influences non-state armed groups compliance with international humanitarian norms on the conduct of hostilities. By examining these norms through the lens of norm diffusion theory, instead of through international law, the project re-approach the issue from a different standpoint than most current research on the topic.