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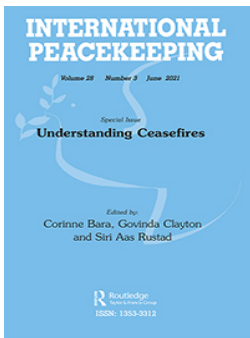
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Deciding on the Tit for the Tat: Decision-Making in the Wake of Ceasefire Violations

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ABSTRACT

Ceasefires are agreed in most intra-state conflicts and the majority of these agreements are violated. Yet, the subsequent dynamics of retaliation are still poorly understood. This article proposes a novel conceptual framework, describing the decision-making of conflict parties after ceasefire violations. I argue that the conflict parties face the two-fold decision-making problem of choosing a proportionate reaction: a reaction that assures their interest in the ongoing conflict and in the continuation of the agreement. When proportionate reactions are chosen, mutual compliance with the ceasefire can be re-established. The empirical implications of this framework are illustrated with evidence from two ceasefires in the Mindanao conflict in the Philippines. This article advances our analytical understanding of an overlooked period during armed conflict, i.e. while a ceasefire is in place. This is critical since collapsing ceasefires can lead to a deterioration of the humanitarian situation and of the prospects for peace. More generally, this article draws the attention to the counter-intuitive function of violence to secure cooperation in intra-state conflicts.

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KEYWORDS Ceasefires; information asymmetry; reciprocity; Mindanao

1. Introduction

Ceasefires, i.e. arrangements to cease hostilities from a specific point in time, are concluded in the course of nearly all armed intra-state conflicts.¹ Violations are frequent – either through military attacks or other regulated behaviours like recruitment or the movement of troops.² Indeed, some scholars and practitioners claim that violations are inevitable.³ Given that ceasefires take place in an adversarial context characterized by mistrust and fear,

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¹Winokur, “Before the Peace,” 2.

²Lane, “Mitigating Humanitarian Crises,” 14.

³E.g. Potter, “Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification,” 6; Randle, *The Origins of Peace*, 30.

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such violations can trigger a re-escalation of violence that endangers the continuation of the agreement. For example, heavy fighting resumed between the government of Burundi and the Palipehutu-FNL only eleven days after they had concluded a ceasefire. Both sides blamed each other for violating the agreement, doubting the good faith of their opponent.⁴ Not all violations, however, lead to an escalation of violence. This was equally the case in Burundi: Just a couple of days before, an escalation was prevented after the government apologized to the Palipehutu-FNL for having violated the truce, excusing the incident with internal communication problems.⁵

This variation in reactions to ceasefire violations is poorly understood. Indeed, a fundamental question remains unanswered: Why do some ceasefires break down after violations while others do not? This question arises in particular since some agreements fail although the conflict parties ostensibly have an interest to continue with them.⁶ Scholars have identified a number of factors as contributing to ceasefire duration or stability, including ceasefire design⁷, the characteristics of the armed groups⁸, or the balance of power between them.⁹ Yet, it remains unclear how exactly these factors have an impact. For example, it is often assumed that agreement clarity increases ceasefire duration by preventing misunderstandings – but why would misunderstanding necessarily lead to ceasefire breakdown? Why do the conflict parties fail to solve their misunderstandings non-violently?

This paper suggests a conceptual framework to outline the decision-making process after ceasefire violations. As such, the framework *alone* does not have the power to predict or explain variation in ceasefire outcomes. This is because the framework describes a decision-making logic which does not vary across cases or time. The framework can, however, be leveraged as a mechanism to explain how variables of interest – such as the discussed agreement design – produce outcomes like ceasefire stability or resilience.¹⁰ From this perspective, the development of the conceptual framework is a necessary step *before* one can understand how a variable produces one specific outcome but not another. Illustrating evidence is provided for two ceasefires in the secessionist conflict between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the government of the Philippines.

I suggest that ceasefire violations pose a two-fold decision-making problem to the conflict parties. Without the possibility of third party

⁴“Burundi. UN urges army.”

⁵“Ceasefire Suffers Setback.”

⁶Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work?*, 95f; Smith, *Stopping Wars*, 8.

⁷Fortna, *Peace time*; Karakus and Svensson, “Between the Bombs”; Clayton and Sticher, “The Logic of Ceasefires.”

⁸Winokur, “Before the Peace”; Cunningham, *Barriers to Peace*.

⁹Werner and Yuen, “Making and Keeping Peace.”

¹⁰In my understanding, a ceasefire is stable if it returns to be effective after a specific violation. It is resilient if it remains effective despite several ceasefire violations across its lifetime.

enforcement, the conflict parties must rely on the logic of reciprocity to enforce the agreement, i.e. good is repaid with good and bad with bad. The resulting decision-making problem is rooted in the need to safeguard two interests: to avoid an exploitation of cooperative behaviour and to allow for the continuation of the agreement. This need is met through choosing proportionate reactions, i.e. reactions that are strong enough to compel the other side to return to compliance but weak enough to avoid a full resumption of hostilities. The problem is two-fold because the conflict parties have to decide whether to retaliate at all and, if so, how strongly. This decision-making problem is exacerbated by uncertainty with regard to the violation as well as the intention and preferences of the opponent. Due to this uncertainty, the conflict parties face the risk of over- or underreacting to the violation. To avoid this, they seek to mitigate this uncertainty by receiving private but credible information about the violation from the other side, for example in the form of costly signals.

The article speaks to the emerging academic community interested in ceasefires and the empirical conflict literature. It seeks to mitigate the lack of work that theorizes processes *while* a ceasefire is in place.¹¹ The dynamics between the conflict parties during the ceasefire have remained a blind spot in the literature.¹² More generally, the article points to a seemingly counter-intuitive function of violence in armed conflict. The dominant, rationalist explanations to war consider violence as an instrument to increase the parties' share of a contested issue or to exchange information about bargaining positions.¹³ I show that – under specific conditions – violence is also an instrument to maintain cooperation.¹⁴

From a practitioner perspective, the conceptual framework matters as it enables the identification of entry points for third parties seeking to stabilize ceasefires in the case of violation. There is a vivid debate on the relevance and effectiveness of ceasefire design and the framework helps to understand through which mechanisms ceasefire design can make a difference. Stable ceasefires can have positive externalities for those affected by conflict by improving the humanitarian situation¹⁵ and creating confidence needed for the negotiation of a peace agreement.¹⁶

¹¹ Åkebo, "Coexistence Ceasefire' in Mindanao"; The existing work on ceasefire processes mostly focuses on the consequences for statebuilding and governance, e.g. Sosnowski, "Ceasefires as Violent Statebuilding"; Waterman, "Ceasefires and State Order."

¹² See, Höglund, "Violence in Peace Negotiations," for an exception.

¹³ For a review, see Reiter, "Bargaining Model"; Findley, "Bargaining and Resolution"

¹⁴ I am grateful to Valerie Sticher for clarifying this point.

¹⁵ Potter, *Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification*, 8.

¹⁶ Höglund, "Violence in Peace Negotiations"; Åkebo, *Ceasefire Agreements and Peace Processes*.

2. Ceasefires: Cooperation Enforced Through Reciprocity

Ceasefires during intra-state conflict can be understood as a form of cooperation in a setting without external enforcement.¹⁷ A ceasefire is a voluntary arrangement during armed conflict between at least two conflict parties to cease hostilities and other agreed behaviours from a specific point in time.¹⁸ This article is only interested in non-definitive ceasefires, i.e. ceasefires that are not accompanied by a peace agreement.¹⁹ The dynamics of enforcement are different for definitive ceasefires due to the regulation of the incompatibility combined with disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. As soon as one side is disarmed and/or reintegrated into the armed forces of the other, retaliation is not possible any longer and reciprocity can hence not be used for enforcement.²⁰ A ceasefire violation is the execution of a behaviour that the ceasefire agreement prohibited, i.e. non-compliant behaviour. The type of behaviour that is prohibited varies, but the cessation of hostilities is part of every ceasefire. Prohibited behaviour can take the form of isolated events like an ambush or be a continuous activity like recruitment.

During intra-state conflict, the state is challenged over its monopoly of violence and there is hence no superior force to prosecute agreement violations. Consequently, the conflict parties themselves have to safeguard their interests.²¹ In this aspect, situations of intra-state conflict resemble the international system. Similar to states, conflict parties face a credible commitment problem.²² In such situations, reciprocity can be an effective self-help mechanism. It means that ‘the actions of each party are contingent on the prior action of the others in such a way that good is returned for good, and bad for bad’²³ – a dynamic commonly known as tit-for-tat. Axelrod²⁴ shows that reciprocity is able to secure cooperation in settings without trust. International Relations and game theory scholars, however, identify noise and the identification of a proportionate retaliation as two problems of this means.²⁵ Critically, a mistaken retaliation likely triggers further non-compliance.²⁶ Prominently, Fortna²⁷ reasons why and how reciprocity is key for the enforcement of inter-state ceasefires.

¹⁷Winokur, “Before the Peace,” 30.

¹⁸Clayton et al., “Introducing the Ceasefire Dataset.”

¹⁹For the underlying ceasefire typology, see: Clayton et al., *Ceasefires in Peace Processes*.

²⁰Walter, *Committing to Peace*, 25.

²¹Morrow, “Laws of War,” 559.

²²Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” 401.

²³Keohane, “Reciprocity in International Relations,” 8.

²⁴Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*.

²⁵E.g. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, 176; Keohane, “Reciprocity in International Relations,” 8.

²⁶Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, 176.

²⁷Fortna, *Peace Time*.

In contrast, the conflict resolution literature focuses mostly on structural sources of ceasefire outcomes like durability²⁸ or stability²⁹ respectively. A lively debate evolved over the question whether diligent agreement design³⁰ can make a difference or whether structural factors are ultimately decisive.³¹ A central argument is that design can help containing ceasefire violations, for examples through monitoring and verification mechanisms or preciseness of the text.³² To my knowledge, none of these authors focuses on the actual behaviour of the conflict parties once a ceasefire entered into effect. Therefore, it remains unclear how conflict parties react to violations and why exactly the mentioned design aspects would stabilize the ceasefire.

An exception is Höglund³³ who explicitly theorizes the role of ceasefire violations during peace processes. Assuming that ceasefires are confidence-building measures during negotiations, she argues that violations could be contained if the alleged violator is able to signal its trustworthiness and good intentions.³⁴ While this is an important observation, her argument only applies in the contexts of peace processes. Also, it remains unclear how conflict parties can successfully demonstrate their peaceful intentions in settings with high uncertainty. Building on this research, I first seek to demonstrate that the reciprocity logic outlined by Fortna³⁵ is applicable to intra-state ceasefires as well. Second, I broaden the argument by Höglund³⁶ to be applicable not only to ceasefires in peace processes but also to those concluded for other purposes.³⁷

3. Decision-Making After Ceasefire Violations

Reciprocity is the central enforcement mechanism for ceasefires. Perceived ceasefire violations therefore pose a two-fold decision-making problem to the conflict parties.³⁸ The conceptual framework describing the related decision-making process is applicable if, first, the ceasefire has entered into effect whereas this is defined as a significant reduction in combat violence; second, all conflict parties have some minimum interest in the continuation

²⁸Fortna, *Peace Time*; Cunningham, *Barriers to Peace*; Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work?*; Werner and Yuen, "Making and Keeping Peace."

²⁹Karakus and Svensson, "Between the Bombs"; Gartner and Bercovitch, "Overcoming Obstacles to Peace."

³⁰E.g. Chounet-Cambas, *Negotiating Ceasefires*; Fortna, *Peace Time*; Potter, *Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification*.

³¹Werner and Yuen, "Making and Keeping Peace"; Winokur, "Before the Peace"; Cunningham, *Barriers to Peace*.

³²Åkebo, "'Coexistence Ceasefire' in Mindanao"; Haysom and Hottinger, *Do's and Don'ts*.

³³Höglund, "Violence in Peace Negotiations"; Höglund, *Peace Negotiations*.

³⁴Höglund, "Violence in Peace Negotiations."

³⁵Fortna, *Peace Time*.

³⁶Höglund, "Violence in Peace Negotiations."

³⁷For an overview of ceasefire purposes, see Clayton, Nathan, and Wiehler, "Ceasefire success."

³⁸It does not matter whether a violation indeed took place as long as one side is convinced that it did. This subjectivity is implied in the following.

of the ceasefire and in not being exploited in this cooperative relationship. Without the latter assumption, conflict parties would have no incentive to enforce the agreement or to return to compliance after retaliation.³⁹ Table 1 at the end of this section provides an overview of the framework.

3.1. Ceasefire Violations as a Decision-Making Problem

Confronted with a ceasefire violation, the compliant party⁴⁰ needs to decide on a reaction: whether it retaliates, and if so, how strongly. Retaliation is an effective means of enforcement if it prevents that the non-compliant side can enjoy a double benefit: from the cooperative behaviour of the other and from the one-sided violation of the obligations.⁴¹ If violations are not a beneficial strategy, the violator has no incentive to continue the violations and mutual compliance is re-established. The ceasefire becomes effective again.⁴² This is the optimal outcome for the compliant side because it safeguards the two interests to not be exploited in its cooperative behaviour and to continue with the agreement. I refer to a reaction that is effective in securing the optimal outcome for the compliant side as 'proportionate'. A simple example for this logic is the violation of the ceasefire through additional recruitment by conflict party 'A'. 'A' has an asymmetric advantage because it enjoys the benefit from the recruitment – ultimately an improvement of its bargaining position – as well as the benefit from the ceasefire, i.e. that the other side ceases attacks and recruitment. A form of effective retaliation could be additional recruitment by 'B': It evens out 'A's advantage thereby lowering the incentive for future recruitment.

Besides the optimal outcome of mutual compliance, two more outcomes can occur for which the ceasefire is ineffective. On the one hand, a reaction that is stronger than the actual violation – an overreaction – is likely to trigger a spiral of counter-retaliations, bearing a high risk of agreement breakdown through the resumption of hostilities.⁴³ The violating side has an incentive to use counter-retaliations if it perceives itself unduly disadvantaged through the retaliation. This outcome would leave one of the key interests of the compliant side dissatisfied, i.e. the continuation of the agreement. Referring to the recruitment

³⁹The reduction in scope is limited because only purely declaratory ceasefires are excluded. Also, it is reasonable to assume that parties would abandon a voluntary agreement if they do not have any interest in it. These restrictions are less drastic than the often implicit assumption that ceasefires shall contribute towards peace. See, e.g. Cunningham, *Barriers to Peace*; Fortna, *Peace Time*.

⁴⁰In the following, I use the term 'compliant' or 'violated' for the actor that considers retaliation and 'non-compliant' or 'violating' to refer to the side that allegedly violated the agreement. This shall not imply that one of the parties is always compliant.

⁴¹Winokur, "Before the Peace," 30.

⁴²If the violation took the form of an event, retaliation is effective in preventing the repetition of this event. If the violation was a continuous activity, this means that this activity is stopped. In each case, the result is the same: compliance is re-established.

⁴³Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work?*, 97; Randle, *The origins of Peace*, 30; Morrow, "Laws of War," 561.

example, an extreme form of retaliation would be an air-strike against the camp where the recruitment is assumed to take place. ‘A’ would have little incentive to accept this damage and return to compliance.⁴⁴

The third potential outcome, on the other hand, is that ceasefire violations continue but without an open re-escalation of hostilities. This leaves the other interest of the compliant side violated because its cooperative behaviour is exploited. This outcome arises if the retaliation is weaker than the violation – an underreaction, rendering violations of the agreement beneficial. For example, if ‘B’ starts recruiting as well but far less, ‘A’ has an incentive to continue with the violations as it is still gaining relatively. Whether a reaction is proportionate, that is able to secure the optimal outcome, is not only a function of the chosen reaction, however. How the non-compliant side reacts to the retaliation depends also on its preference order of the very same key interests (non-exploitation and agreement continuation). A conflict party that values the continuation of the agreement higher is potentially more willing to tolerate overreactions and vice versa.

Identifying a proportionate reaction securing the optimal outcome poses a decision-making problem to the compliant side: First, the compliant side needs to decide whether retaliation is a proportionate way of reacting at all. Second – if a retaliation as such seems proportionate – it needs to decide on the strength of retaliation. This corresponds to Part I and II in [Figure 1](#). The concrete form of proportionate reactions varies for the two stages of the decision-making problem. At the first stage, any act of retaliation is ineffective if the violation was actually none or not intended by the

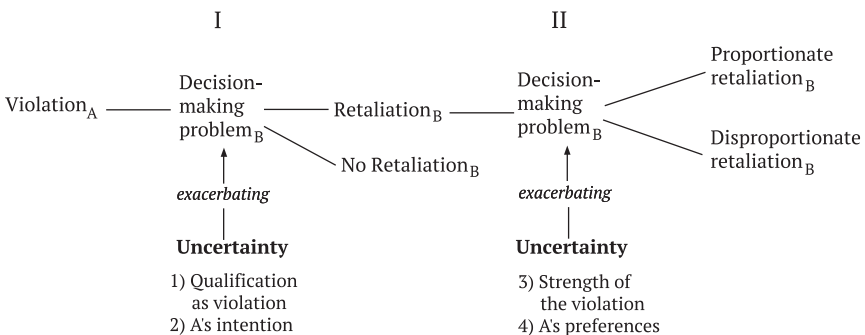


Figure 1. The decision-making problem of proportionate reactions (own figure).

⁴⁴One might argue that a strong retaliation has a deterrence effect so that the non-compliant party does not dare to counter-retaliate. However, I exclude this scenario through my assumption that also the non-compliant side has an interest in not being exploited. If a retaliation is much stronger than the original violation, the violating side becomes the disadvantaged side and has in turn an incentive to prevent this through counter-retaliation. A deterrence effect would only be applicable if the violating side values its interest in agreement continuation much higher than its interest in preventing exploitation.

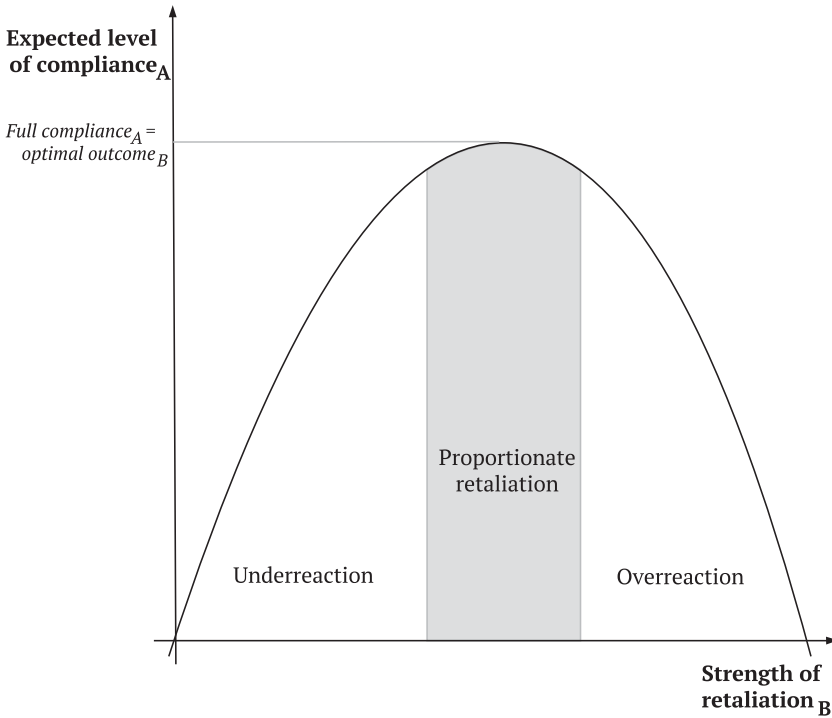


Figure 2. Identification of a proportionate act of retaliation (own figure).

group leadership.⁴⁵ Unintended violations occur, for instance, due to lack of control or communication problems.⁴⁶ Having said this, precautionary non-action is neither an option as it bears the risk of underreacting. Once the compliant party has decided to retaliate, it needs to decide on the strength⁴⁷ of the retaliation, bearing in mind the outlined problems of under- and overreacting. The relationship between strength and expected compliance can be described through an inverted u-shape (see [Figure 2](#)).

3.2. Uncertainty Exacerbating the Decision-Making Problem

This decision-making problem is exacerbated by the uncertainty prevailing in intra-state conflict. This uncertainty results from two sources: First, the activities of the conflict parties are surrounded by noise: they take place outside the direct sphere of influence of the group leadership;⁴⁸ disinformation can be prevalent;⁴⁹ and the ‘fog of war’ – the uncertainties and ambiguities in the

⁴⁵Chayes and Chayes, “On Compliance.”

⁴⁶Chounet-Cambas, *Negotiating Ceasefires*, 22; Haysom and Hottinger, *Do’s and Don’ts*; Potter, *Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification*, 7.

⁴⁷I understand strength as a function of the type of action and its intensity.

⁴⁸Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*, 147, 165; Betz, “The More You Know,” 515.

battlefield – make it difficult to reconstruct what had happened.⁵⁰ Second, conflict parties have private information about their activities, intentions, and preferences and incentives to misrepresent this information.⁵¹ Uncertainty is potentially central to four issues, affecting both stages of the decision-making problem (see lower part of Figure 1). Empirically, the degree of uncertainty varies across ceasefires and violations.

First, the compliant side faces uncertainty over the qualification of the respective action as a violation, i.e. the activity might actually not be prohibited according to the agreement. This is not always clear given that ceasefire texts can be ambiguous.⁵² Alternatively, the action could have been executed by an actor that is not party to the ceasefire. Second, uncertainty surrounds the intentionality of the violation as this is private information of the violating party.⁵³ Violations can be unintentional due to the internal heterogeneity of conflict parties. Even if the leadership of a group is truly committed to a ceasefire, capacity problems can prevent a full implementation of the agreement.⁵⁴ Research on spoilers shows that parts of an armed group sometimes voluntarily sabotage agreements they perceive threatening to their interests.⁵⁵ Critically, the intentionality is likely to be misrepresented in order to avoid retaliation.⁵⁶

Once retaliation as a reaction is considered proportionate, two other types of uncertainty become relevant. The third type concerns the strength of the violation which needs to be known for calibrating the retaliation. Due to the noise described above, it is not always directly observable. In the recruitment example, this kind of uncertainty refers to a situation in which conflict party 'B' comes to know rumours about 'A's recruitment but lacks more detailed information. Finally, uncertainty prevails regarding the preferences of the other side. It is unclear how the non-compliant side weights the interests in not being exploited and in the continuation of the agreement. Again, the preferences can only be inferred but not observed.

Despite this uncertainty the compliant side needs to take a decision on its reaction, rendering disproportionate reactions likely. I argue that in the context of armed conflict these are biased towards overreactions for three reasons. Armed conflict has an essential dimension, given that military victory often means the organizational or physical death of the defeated. Therefore, there is a tendency that conflict parties value the interest to avoid

⁴⁹Morrow, "Laws of War"; Lewandowsky et al., "Misinformation, Disinformation, and Conflict," 488.

⁵⁰See, Kiesling, "On War Without Fog"; Lieberman et al., "The Fog of War."

⁵¹See, Walter, *Committing to Peace*; Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War."

⁵²Chounet-Cambas, *Negotiating Ceasefires*, 29; Haysom and Hottinger, *Do's and Don'ts*.

⁵³See, Morrow, "Laws of War," 561; Chayes and Chayes, "On Compliance."

⁵⁴Chounet-Cambas, *Negotiating Ceasefires*, 22; Haysom and Hottinger, *Do's and Don'ts*; Potter, *Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification*, 7.

⁵⁵E.g. Stedman, "Spoiler Problems"; Pearlman, "Spoiling Inside and Out."

⁵⁶Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War"; Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work?*, 95.

exploitation higher than their interest in agreement continuation. Exploitation is more likely if the retaliation is too weak. Conflict parties are hence risk-averse towards underreactions. Second, conflict parties care about their reputation. The same ceasefire can be violated several times, implying that the described process is a repeated game. If the compliant side reacts reluctantly, the violating side learns that it does not need to fear a strong backlash, increasing the risk of future violations. Lastly, the compliant side is likely biased in its assessment of the violation. Due to the mistrust, plausibly hatred, prevailing in conflict⁵⁷ as well as the strong incentive to misrepresent, conflict parties tend to assume the malice of the other side and interpret the available evidence to the detriment of the opponent. Assuming a stronger violation when in doubt, this leads to retaliations biased towards overreactions.

3.3. *Exchanging Credible Information to Reduce Uncertainty*

To solve the decision-making problem, both sides attempt to exchange credible information. They cooperate because their interests are partly compatible. The compliant side aims for a proportionate retaliation. For the non-compliant side, a retaliation as weak as possible is ideal. This means both sides seek to avoid an overreaction. Typically, the compliant side will accuse the non-compliant side of the violation and, eventually, demand information about the violation. Thereby, the compliant side reveals information about its perspective on the violation, potential retaliation, and its preferences regarding the continuation of the ceasefire. The non-compliant side, in turn, has an incentive to reveal information in a way that convinces the adversary of an itself-favouring understanding of the event. Concretely, this includes (1) revealing private details about the event and/or (2) the party's preference regarding the ceasefire; (3) framing the event in a certain way, e.g. as non-violation, spoiling, or accident; (4) (costly) signalling of the intention to observe the agreement in good faith.

Being aware of the other side's incentive to misrepresent, such information is not valuable to the compliant side as long as it is not credible. To tell credible and non-credible information apart, costly signals⁵⁸ or the verification through third parties is required. A costly signal by the non-compliant side is, for example, the punishment of group members for the ceasefire violation. Here, the leadership of the non-compliant party faces potential costs because it risks the unity of the group and to lose in-group support.⁵⁹ Besides, trust and

⁵⁷Kelman and Fisher, "Dimensions of International Conflict"; Darby, *The Effects of Violence*, 52.

⁵⁸Höglund, "Violence in Peace Negotiations," 39; see Gambetta, "Signaling," for an introduction to signaling theory.

⁵⁹During long ongoing conflict, the conflict parties and their constituencies develop a sociopsychological infrastructure that simplifies reality and glosses-over the in-group. As a consequence, actions against the in-group and cooperation with the 'enemy' are seen highly critical. See, Bar-Tal, "Sociopsychological Foundations"; Kelman and Fisher, "Dimensions of International Conflict."

reputation can make up for the lack of credibility of the information. This means the compliant side infers the intentions and preferences of the violating side from its earlier behaviour.

3.4. From Description to Explanation: The Role of Context Factors

I provided a conceptualization of the decision-making process in the wake of ceasefire violations. Three possible outcomes have been identified, yet the conceptual framework alone does not explain which of these outcomes is realized. This depends on the context and the framework helps us to understand the role of specific context factors in shaping ceasefire outcomes. I focus on a parallel peace process and the role of third parties as an example, but the framework can equally be applied to understand the impact of previous violations

Table 1. Overview of the framework and empirical implications.

	Theoretical assumption	Supporting evidence	Contradicting evidence
Reciprocity	Reactions follow logic of reciprocity	Actors justify their behaviour as retaliation or threat to retaliate	Actors reject reciprocity as motive of their actions
	Actors aim for proportionate reactions	Actors warn against over- or underreactions	Actors always react in the same way
Uncertainty about:	Qualification as violation	Actors publicly offer diverging interpretations of events as (un)compliant	Immediate agreement on the qualification as violation
	Intentionality of violation	Actors claim that violation was unintentional; they question the intentionality of their opponent	Violating side publicly admits that violation was intentional; compliant side quickly accepts the claimed lack of intentionality
	Strength of violation	Actors downplay or emphasize the strength of a violation; actors admit that they do not know what happened	Strength of violation is not discussed or seems uncontroversial to both sides
	Preferences of the violating side	Actors issue threats to abandon the agreement if retaliation follows or stress to observe the agreement in good faith	Actors claim to know the preferences of the other side or never discuss it
Information credibility	Provided information has low authenticity	Actors provide private information but credibility is publicly questioned	Actors accept private information at face value
	Verification	Actors call in third parties to verify their claims	External verification is never considered or implemented
	Costly signals	Actors engage in costly activities to make their claims credible or demand costly signals from their opponents	Actors avoid commitments or actions that create audience cost

Note: 'Actors' refers to the involved conflict parties.

and ceasefire design, among other things. The central question is how these factors change the level of uncertainty and the preferences of the conflict parties, and thereby ultimately the trajectory of the conflict parties' interaction.

An ongoing peace process has the potential to make a full resumption of hostilities after violations less likely by lowering the risk of overreactions. When the parties are genuinely interested in finding a negotiated settlement, they are likely to value the continuation of the ceasefire high, for instance to demonstrate command and control or to facilitate the negotiations.⁶⁰ In addition, an advancing peace process improves their relationship.⁶¹ This increases the compliant side's confidence in the 'good will' of the violating side, increasing its willingness to accept information with low credibility. For example, the compliant side is more likely to accept claims that a violation was not intentional. Finally, conflict parties need communication channels to exchange information. Peace processes, partly enduring years, can entrench such channels. Closely related is the role of third parties. They can contribute to the identification of proportionate reactions not only by verifying information – thereby reducing noise surrounding violations – but also by extending their efforts to disputes over violations.⁶²

4. Ceasefire Violations in the MILF Conflict

I draw on two ceasefires in the conflict between the MILF and the Philippine government to illustrate the relevance of the proposed conceptual framework. The analysis aims at showing that the framework is able to (1) capture the decision-making process, (2) provide a lens to understand the behaviour of the MILF and the Philippine government, and (3) identify factors that should be considered in future analysis of ceasefire stability.⁶³

4.1. Methodological Approach

The analysis is conducted as a structured and focused comparison.⁶⁴ An overview of the observable implications as well as the specification of supporting and contradicting evidence can be found in [Table 1](#). I derive the evidence from newspaper articles and complement them with academic case studies and agreement texts (if available). The newspaper articles are obtained from the database Factiva (see [Appendix A.1](#)). An important caveat applies: The outlined decision-making process is challenging to observe given that it is largely concerned with internal deliberations,

⁶⁰Clayton et al., *Ceasefires in Peace Processes*.

⁶¹Dyrstad et al., "Microfoundations of Civil Conflict Reconciliation."

⁶²Fortna, *Peace Time*, 195

⁶³The case study is not meant as a comparison that allows causal conclusions about specific factors.

⁶⁴George, "Structured, Focused Comparison."

Table 2. Key information on selected ceasefires.

	1997 Ceasefire (I)	1997 Ceasefire (II)	2003 Ceasefire
Start	27/01/1997	18/07/1997	18/07/2003
End	–	10/1998	08/2008
Geographic scope	local (Buldon)	general	general
Implementation mechanism	none	Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH)	CCCH + International Monitoring Team
Peace talks	no peace talks	Peace talks resumed with the ceasefire	Peace talks resumed, mediated by Malaysia

intentions, and preferences. It is in the interaction between the conflict parties and in their statements that the implications can be examined. This problem is further aggravated by the sparsity of information. For the two ceasefires, there is neither a comprehensive list of violations available nor are the reactions of the conflict parties documented in detail. The analysis is therefore limited to showing that the overarching logic of the decision-making problem applies.

The MILF–government dyad in the Mindanao conflict – a self-determination conflict over the archipelago Mindanao in the South of the Philippines – is selected as a most-likely case.⁶⁵ If the framework is not supported in a case where I am confident that the theorized process is at play, it is even less likely that the framework will be relevant in other cases.⁶⁶ It is a most-likely case because both parties have vital interests in the continuation of the ceasefires and can hence be expected to invest some effort into identifying proportionate reactions. The government required the cooperation of the MILF to fight other armed groups and both sides aimed at a negotiated settlement for years, establishing a state of ‘coexistence’.⁶⁷ Finally, the media landscape in the Philippines is advantageous: the media are relatively free⁶⁸ and have been characterized as reporting mostly direct statements, lowering the risk of distortion.⁶⁹

Between 1989 and 2017, 35 ceasefires have been concluded in the Mindanao conflict.⁷⁰ I select two ceasefires which are written and bilateral agreements.⁷¹ This increases the likelihood that the conflict parties communicate over and interpret them. The key information on each ceasefire is summarized in Table 2. The first ceasefire can be divided into two phases: being first

⁶⁵Information on the conflict background can be found in the Appendix A.2.

⁶⁶Eckstein, *Regarding Politics*, 151.

⁶⁷Åkebo, “Coexistence Ceasefire’ in Mindanao,” 487.

⁶⁸According to Freedom House (“Freedom of the Press Data”), the Philippines scored 30 points of 100 on the press freedom index between 1997 and 2002. Since then, it deteriorated to 45 points by 2008.

⁶⁹Cole, “The Philippines Media,” 70.

⁷⁰Ryland et al., *Ceasefires in Philippine Peace Processes*.

⁷¹Of the 149 ceasefires in the Philippines, only 21 ceasefires are bilateral (ibid.).

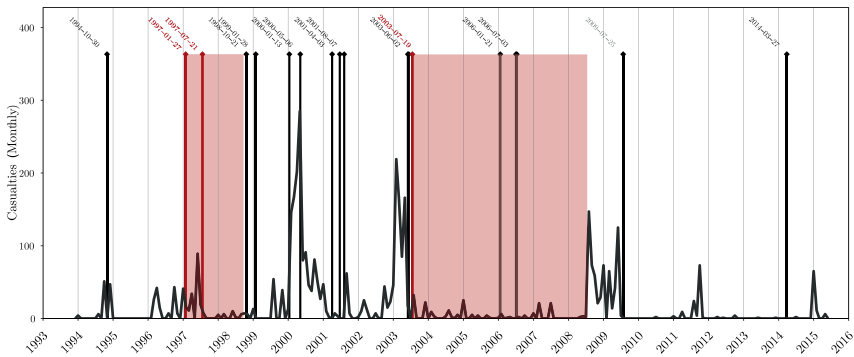


Figure 3. Timeline of MILF ceasefires.

Note: The figure is reproduced and adapted with the permission of the ETH/PRIO ceasefire data project. It shows all ceasefires that involved the MILF (bilaterally or unilaterally) according to the respective data set. I do not consider the 2006 ceasefires relevant for my analysis because they concern other dyads or are most likely based on a false report respectively.

declared for the area around Buldon, Maguindanao, in January 1997,⁷² the agreement was upgraded to a general ceasefire for the whole of Mindanao half a year later.⁷³

The timeline in Figure 3 shows in red the duration of the selected ceasefires in contrast to the monthly conflict casualties. It has to be kept in mind, however, that ceasefire violations can take a variety of forms (e.g. troop movements). The 1997 ceasefire endured for one year and three months. In October 1998, fighting spiralled out of control for around a week until the conflict parties concluded a new local ceasefire.⁷⁴ The 2003 ceasefire collapsed in 2008 after peace negotiations had broken down. The conflict parties had negotiated a memorandum but it was declared unconstitutional afterwards.⁷⁵ The timeline indicates that there were several but small outbursts of violence while the ceasefires were in place. This fits the evidence on frequent violations in newspaper articles and the article by Åkebo.⁷⁶ The 2003 ceasefire was particularly frequently violated during the first two years.⁷⁷

4.2. The Relevance of Retaliation

The analysis of the empirical material supports my key theoretical assumption: the conflict parties follow a logic of reciprocity and care about the proportionality of their actions. It could not be observed that the conflict parties

⁷²"Philippine Army, Rebels Sign."

⁷³"Government, Rebels Sign Pact."

⁷⁴"Govt, Rebels Sign Ceasefire."

⁷⁵Franco, "Malaysia," 212.

⁷⁶E.g. Åkebo, "Coexistence Ceasefire' in Mindanao," 481; Robles, "Steer-Clear Plan"; "Rebels Urged to be Sincere"; "Peace Talks Go On."

⁷⁷*Philippines. Mindanao.*

would always react in the same way to violations or explicitly reject reciprocity as a guiding principle.

During the 1997 ceasefire, the conflict parties framed their actions as retaliation, using it as a legitimization of their own use of violence. The actors also seem to expect their opponents and the wider public to embrace the logic of reciprocity. For example, an army commander publicly justified an attack on a MILF camp as retaliation to a mortar attack by the group.⁷⁸ Similarly, the MILF stated on another occasion that it ‘launched offensives only to retaliate for their [the military’s] earlier attack’.⁷⁹ Also, the parties seem aware of the potential for escalation. A government negotiator acknowledged: ‘There is an urgent need to address these localized conflicts and confrontations immediately as they happen’.⁸⁰

Similar evidence is found for the 2003 ceasefire. The army justified its shelling of MILF positions as retaliation for alleged violations.⁸¹ The problem of proportionality is discussed even more explicitly than during the earlier ceasefire. The military rejected an attack by MILF as disproportionate retaliation, arguing that the non-compliant troop movement ‘was not enough reason to attack the military convoy’.⁸² On the other hand, a government official cautioned: ‘We have to do everything so that we won’t commit any mistakes and this activity will not escalate or spill over’.⁸³ In line with this, a MILF spokesperson warned that ‘the military should exercise extreme caution so we can avoid a new round of skirmishes in relation to the ceasefire’.⁸⁴

4.3. Profound Uncertainty

A key theoretical assumption of the conceptual framework is that the conflict parties are occupied with four sources of uncertainty (cf. Table 1). A significant source of uncertainty in the Mindanao conflict is the activity of other armed groups (e.g. Abu Sayyaf or the Communist Party of the Philippines) and of spoilers from within the MILF ranks.⁸⁵ This makes it challenging to attribute activities to specific actors and provides the MILF with a strong incentive to shift the blame. The activity of multiple armed groups implies that intelligence gathering is difficult because none of the armed groups is in full control of the territory.

The evidence from the newspaper articles underlines the importance of uncertainty. For both ceasefires, arguments over the *qualification* of an action

⁷⁸“AFP Admits Shelling.”

⁷⁹“Political & Civil Unrest.”

⁸⁰“FVR Downplays Report”; for a similar example, see: “MILF Members Attack Gov’t.”

⁸¹“Feud Blamed for Violence”; Jacinto, “Maguindanao Clashes Threaten Talks.”

⁸²Usman, “3-party probe.”

⁸³“Philippine Troops Prepare.”

⁸⁴“Al-Ghozi Hunt May Spoil.”

⁸⁵Verbrugge and Adam, “Questioning the State-Rebel Divide”; Åkebo, “‘Coexistence Ceasefire’ in Mindanao,” 486.

as ceasefire violation are central and display similar patterns. The government justified military activities as targeting ‘criminals’, therefore not constituting ceasefire violations.⁸⁶ The MILF sought to reject responsibility and to shift the blame, for example to ‘bandits and cattle rustlers’.⁸⁷ A government statement indicates that the attribution of responsibility is indeed a problem: ‘The military says it cannot confirm the MILF’s involvement in the fighting although it admits the MILF is active in the area’.⁸⁸ In cases with clear involvement of both sides, the parties often framed their actions as self-defence.⁸⁹ There are two main differences between the ceasefires. During the 1997 ceasefire, disagreement over the implementation of provisions was more pronounced. This concerned the removal of checkpoints⁹⁰ and the deployment of government troops.⁹¹ For the 2003 ceasefire, fighting ‘occasionally’ re-escalated over disputes about the interpretation of ceasefire terms.⁹² Interestingly, I did not encounter similar reports for the earlier ceasefire. Disputes might have been prevented through the detailed Operational Guidelines that were agreed upon in November 1997.⁹³

Intentionality is the second source of uncertainty according to the conceptual framework. It is found for both ceasefires that the parties acknowledged responsibility but insisted on the lack of intentionality behind the violation.⁹⁴ It is striking that the conflict parties often agreed in this point, contradicting my expectation. As I discuss below, this is likely due to the trust between the parties. During the 1997 ceasefire, the MILF and the Philippine army agreed on two occasions that spoilers would try to derail the peace process.⁹⁵ The military even defended the MILF publicly: ‘It’s just the ground commanders perpetrating these – disobeying the instructions of the higher command’.⁹⁶ Similar behaviour could be observed during the 2003 ceasefire.⁹⁷ Such an understanding is not always reached, however, and the intentions of the opponent are publicly questioned. The MILF stated in 1997, for example, that it became wary of entering into additional agreements due to the continuous government violations.⁹⁸ Similarly, the government claimed

⁸⁶“MILF Attacks Violated Truce”; Robles, “Peace at Risk”; “17 Pentagon Men Killed”; “Philippine Troops Prepare.”

⁸⁷“Military Says 3 Killed”; see, “Rebels on Full Alert”; “Philippine Military Accuses MILF,” for additional examples.

⁸⁸“Heavy Fighting Reported.”

⁸⁹“Renewed Gov’t-MILF Hostility”; “Gov’t-MILF Talks Moved”; “Philippines Soldiers Kill 15”; “Clashes Erupt”; “Muslim Rebels Attack.”

⁹⁰Government of the Philippines and MILF, *Interim Cessation of Hostilities*; “Tensions Remain.”

⁹¹“AFP Violated Local Ceasefire.”

⁹²“Eager for Deal.”

⁹³Government of the Philippines and MILF, *Operational Guidelines*.

⁹⁴“Rebels in Deadly Rampage”; Fernandez, “Governor Asks MILF to Leave”; “Renewed Gov’t-MILF Hostility.”

⁹⁵Robles, “Peace at Risk”; “Military Launches Offensive.”

⁹⁶“...as MILF Hits Buildup.”

⁹⁷Peart, “MILF Violates Ceasefire”; “21 killed.”

⁹⁸“...as MILF Hits Buildup.”

during the 2003 ceasefire that the violations would ‘reflect [...] the organization’s lack of sincerity’.⁹⁹

The evidence supports the assumption that the conflict parties have difficulties to assert what is happening on the ground, i.e. to determine the *strength* of the violations. During the 1997 ceasefire, they even admit this publicly. For example, then-President Fidel Ramos admitted that he would be waiting on the report by one military division to understand what had happened.¹⁰⁰ On another occasion, the government waited for information by the MILF to complement its internal reports before deciding on any further action.¹⁰¹ Similar examples can be found for the 2003 ceasefire. A Philippine politician admitted: ‘we do not know who has silenced their guns and who has not’.¹⁰² During a later incident, the MILF admitted the attack of government soldiers but rejected responsibility for their beheading.¹⁰³ The government had to concede that they would not know whether this was true.¹⁰⁴

Lastly, the conceptual framework stipulates that the *preferences* of the violator matter to identify a proportionate reaction. The non-compliant side has an incentive to misrepresent them by threatening to resume hostilities or by emphasizing its good faith. Both strategies can be found for the two ceasefires. The MILF underlined its preference for continuing the ceasefire¹⁰⁵ and promised to ‘prevent such type of action from re-occurring’.¹⁰⁶ Yet, on another occasions, the MILF explicitly warned against retaliations for both ceasefires. Against my expectation, they did not threat to resume hostilities but to abandon the peace talks.¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, the peace negotiations seem to widen the repertoire of possible retaliations.

4.4. Increasing the Credibility of Information

While the conflict parties are expected to provide each other with information to reduce the described uncertainty, the information has low credibility; in particular, if the revealed information contradicts the actual behaviour or statements. For instance, the MILF doubted the reassurances by the government, considering their repeated violations of the 1997 ceasefire.¹⁰⁸ The same pattern could be observed for the 2003 ceasefire, this time with flipped

⁹⁹Ubac, Uy, and Papa, “‘Hunt Rebels; Talk Peace.’”

¹⁰⁰“Renewed Gov’t-MILF Hostility.”

¹⁰¹“MILF Camp in Zamboanga Attacked.”

¹⁰²“Peace Talks to Start.”

¹⁰³“Bracing for ‘Major Defensive.’”

¹⁰⁴Macapagal-Arroyo et al., “Arroyo Orders Military. Get the Savages.”

¹⁰⁵“...as MILF Hits Buildup.”

¹⁰⁶Galvez, “Commanders Face Murder Raps.”

¹⁰⁷“Rebels Warn Against Retaliation”; “MILF Leader Admits Attack.”

¹⁰⁸“...as MILF Hits Buildup.”

roles: the MILF excused violations as communication problems but the government finally resumed attacks when the violations did not stop.¹⁰⁹ The problem of contradicting statements became clear towards the end of the 2003 ceasefire. While the leadership claimed that the violation had not been authorized, the commander in charge emphasized: 'We are not outside the MILF. We are MILF and are not a lost command'.¹¹⁰

I suggest that the conflict parties follow two strategies to increase the credibility of information: third-party verification or costly signals. This assumption was corroborated through the rich evidence for the 2003 ceasefire. Costly signals were demanded frequently, including: taking concrete measures to prevent future violations,¹¹¹ withholding troop support for violating commanders,¹¹² and surrendering the violating commanders.¹¹³ Executed costly signals included the release of prisoners of war,¹¹⁴ the implementation of information campaigns to prevent future violations,¹¹⁵ and the punishment of the violating lower-ranks.¹¹⁶ The monitoring mechanisms of the 2003 ceasefire offered the parties an immediate mechanism for verification.¹¹⁷ For example, a report by the International Monitoring Team confirmed MILF's innocence in the case of the beheaded soldiers.¹¹⁸

Some but less examples can also be found for the 1997 ceasefire. The bombing of a school during the 1997 ceasefire killed ten Muslim students.¹¹⁹ Since both sides denied responsibility, they agreed to establish an investigation commission which ultimately held the Philippines army responsible.¹²⁰ As a response, the MILF demanded a costly signal in the form of public punishment.¹²¹ The government refused but apologized officially with the affected families.¹²² Support from third parties in form of an ad-hoc mission was also sought after the government killed civilians when shelling a MILF camp.¹²³ A call for verification can also be a costly signal in itself: when the government blamed the MILF for the attack on one of their camps, the MILF proposed to install a 'fact finding

¹⁰⁹"Military Launches Offensives"; Ubac, Uy, and Papa, "Hunt Rebels; Talk Peace'."

¹¹⁰Cruz, "We are MILF."

¹¹¹Santos, "War and Peace."

¹¹²"MILF Defiant."

¹¹³"Army Fights Muslim Rebels."

¹¹⁴To show that we do not want the fighting to escalate, we will turn over the soldiers our men captured', in: Manar, "MILF to Turn Over 4."

¹¹⁵"Military Exercises with US."

¹¹⁶E.g. "Rebels Replace Panel Chief"; Fernandez and Maitem, "Erring Rebels"; "Christmas truce"; "Peace Pact Likely"; Galvez, "Commanders Face Murder Raps."

¹¹⁷Franco, "Malaysia"; Herbolzheimer, *Peace Process in Mindanao*; Åkebo, "Coexistence Ceasefire' in Mindanao."

¹¹⁸"Malacanang to Support War."

¹¹⁹"Renewed Gov't-MILF Hostility."

¹²⁰Robles, "Army 'Must Apologize'"; "Logging Firm did Shelling."

¹²¹"AFP Violated Local Ceasefire."

¹²²Robles, "Army 'Must Apologize'."

¹²³Robles, "Rebels Call for Talks."

committee'. Thereby, MILF signalled that they would not have to fear such an investigation.¹²⁴ The MILF also invited media outlets for verification.¹²⁵

4.5. Identifying Candidates for Explaining Ceasefire Outcomes

Both ceasefires were resilient against a number of violations, even if they finally broke down. I argue that the conceptual framework can help us to understand which factors contributed to the resilience. First, trust between the conflict parties seemed high, considering that the parties would publicly agree on the lack of intentionality behind the violations. The high level of trust is also confirmed in the literature.¹²⁶ When intentionality was indeed not given, this probably prevented overreactions and subsequent escalation. The analysis further points to the importance of verification to allow for a measured response. Interestingly, the conflict parties did not only rely on formal mechanisms but also leveraged the legitimacy of civil society actors or the media.¹²⁷ While the importance of verification is not a new insight, the analysis suggests that their relevance does not lie only in creating accountability but also in the reduction of uncertainty about violations and in the possibility to send costly signals. By actively asking for verification, the violator can make a credible case that the group was not responsible.

Finally, the institutions of the peace process provided critical resources for the decision-making process. The MILF and the government used the panels established for the peace negotiations to resolve their differences over ceasefire violations.¹²⁸ The evidence for the 2003 ceasefire, mediated by Malaysia, suggests that mediators can mitigate uncertainty and foster the exchange of credible information after violations – a function that is often overlooked. The Malaysian mediators shuttled between the parties after violations and addressed complaints.¹²⁹

5. Conclusion

Reactions to ceasefire violations reach from no retaliation to a full resumption of hostilities. This article proposed a conceptualization of the decision-making process underlying this discrepancy. I argued that ceasefire violations pose a two-fold decision-making problem to the conflict parties. In a situation characterized by high uncertainty, the conflict parties face

¹²⁴"MILF Leader Admits Attack."

¹²⁵"Tensions Remain."

¹²⁶E.g. Santos, "War and Peace," 79; Herbolzheimer, *Peace Process in Mindanao*, 6.

¹²⁷Colletta, "Citizen Security"; "Tensions Remain."

¹²⁸Herbolzheimer, *Peace Process in Mindanao*, 3; Åkebo, "'Coexistence Ceasefire' in Mindanao," 482; See, "Rebels on Full Alert"; "Gov't-MILF Talks Start," for concrete examples.

¹²⁹For shuttling, see: Chua, "Pow-Wow to Cover Weapons"; Lam, "Japan's Peace-Building," 55; for complaints, see: e.g. "Fight vs KFR Groups"; Fernandez, "Monitors Meet with MILF."

difficulties to find a proportionate reaction. Such a reaction is needed for a return to mutual compliance. An exchange of credible information, in contrast, can contribute to identifying such a reaction. Evidence from the MILF conflict in the Philippines illustrated this argument.

Future research is required to investigate the validity of this framework beyond this case. Anecdotal evidence underlines the relevance of key elements like reciprocity, uncertainty, and costly signals for a diverse set of cases. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a faction of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) accused the government of violating the ceasefire agreement while they themselves would only respond in self-defence. This claim was rejected by the government as false information, denying that any fighting would be ongoing.¹³⁰ Costly signals could be observed in Liberia, where Roosevelt Johnson, a Liberian government official, was ousted because the faction under his control violated a ceasefire agreement.¹³¹ Israel explicitly refrained from retaliation against attacks on Israeli communities during a ceasefire in 1994 because it considered Palestinian spoilers responsible.¹³²

The empirical analysis points to two preliminary policy implications. Third parties can potentially play an important role in mitigating tensions after ceasefire violations by reducing uncertainty. When the situation does not allow for the establishment of formal verification mechanisms, intervening third parties can try to leverage the legitimacy of actors like the media or civil society initiatives, e.g. Bantay Ceasefires in the Philippine case, for informal verification.¹³³ It will be interesting to shed light on the role of UN peacekeeping missions in this regard, in particular if the verification of violations is not part of the mandate.¹³⁴ Second, conflict resolution practitioners need to be aware of the 'double function' of peace process institutions as a space to negotiate about ceasefire violations.

The added value of the article lies in the systematic description of the process unfolding after ceasefire violations. This shall enable future scholars to explain variation in ceasefire outcomes like stability or resilience. Beyond the phenomenon of ceasefires, I aimed to show that targeted violence in intra-state conflicts can serve the enforcement of cooperation. Eventually, this idea might be transferable to less formal situations of cooperation, for example in the war economy. Importantly, this is not to say that violence is desirable. On the contrary, I suggest that we need a

¹³⁰"Rebels Accuse Kabila's Army."

¹³¹"Soldiers, Rebel Clash."

¹³²"Escalation in South."

¹³³Colletta, "Citizen Security."

¹³⁴See Lindley, *Promoting Peace*, for the increase of transparency through UN peacekeeping missions and its security implications.

nanced understanding of what violence is actually used for in order to prevent it.

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Appendix

The Appendix provides additional information on the data collection based on the online database Factiva and the conflict background.

A.1. Data Collection Using Factiva

The news database Factiva¹³⁵ has been used to gather the newspaper articles for the empirical analysis. The articles have been downloaded in PDF format with one hundred articles per document. For legal reasons, I am not allowed to share the material with third parties. I therefore provide the search string below to make the analysis replicable. I manually searched the articles for suitable corroborating or contradicting evidence, following the implications I have outlined in [Table A1](#). The following search string has been used:

(cease-fire* or ceasefire* or (cessation near5 hostilit*) or (suspen* near5 hostilit*)) and (MILF or Moslem or Muslim)

¹³⁵<https://www.dowjones.com/products/factiva/>

Table A1. Overview of the Factiva search results.

	Timespan	No. of articles	Average per week (approx.)
1997 Ceasefire	27/01/1997–01/11/1998	286	3
2003 Ceasefire	18/07/2003–15/09/2008	4,396	72

This search string allows to capture variation in the language used, e.g. in the labelling of the ceasefire as well as in the designation of the MILF. I also tried other string specifications, for example by including 'truce', but this did not lead to a noteworthy increase of received articles. The language settings were set to English and the region to the Philippines. Duplicates were set to exclude identical articles only. The table below depicts the time span chosen for each ceasefire and the corresponding number of articles received (including duplicates). The last column indicates the average number of articles per week to show the differences in the density of news articles for the two ceasefires.

A.2. Conflict Background

The conflict between the government of the Philippines and the MILF is commonly framed as a self-determination conflict¹³⁶ over the archipelago Mindanao in the South of the Philippines.¹³⁷ The conflict has an ethnic dimension: large parts of the population of Mindanao identify as Bangsamoro people and Muslims, while the majority in the rest of the Philippines identify as Christian.¹³⁸ The roots of the conflict are usually traced back to horizontal inequalities between Mindanao and the rest of the Philippines and resulting grievances. Mindanao is one of the poorest regions of the country and land disputes between Christian settlers and the Bangsamoro people are common.¹³⁹ The conflict is considered intractable, nowadays looking back to more than four decades of armed violence.¹⁴⁰ In 1972, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) began to challenge the government violently. Five years later, the MILF split away from the MNLF, emphasizing the religious dimension of the conflict and rejecting an autonomy deal between the MNLF and the government.¹⁴¹ Over the course of the years, additional splinter groups emerged including the MNLF Misuari faction (MNLF-NM) and the Abu Sayyaf Group.¹⁴²

Attempts to find a negotiated settlement started relatively early in 1976 but it took another 20 years until the MNLF reached its final peace agreement with the government.¹⁴³ The agreement was again rejected by the MILF, but the group subsequently entered into peace talks with the government.¹⁴⁴ During the peace process, both sides signed 12 different agreements before the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro was reached in 2014.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁶While the MILF originally demanded independence, it showed willingness during the peace process to settle on autonomy, see Santos, "War and Peace," 66.

¹³⁷Jeffery, "Amnesties and Intractable Conflicts," 1.

¹³⁸*Philippines. Mindanao.*

¹³⁹Curaming, "Historical Injustice," 121f; Herbolzheimer, *Peace Process in Mindanao*, 2.

¹⁴⁰*Philippines. Mindanao*; Santos, "War and Peace."

¹⁴¹Santos, "War and Peace," 63.

¹⁴²Ryland et al., *Ceasefires in Philippine Peace Processes.*

¹⁴³*Philippines. Mindanao.*

¹⁴⁴Santos, "War and Peace," 68; based on the secondary sources, it is difficult to ascertain when exactly the peace talks started since there are several contradicting accounts, see Jeffery, "Amnesties and Intractable Conflicts"; *Philippines. Mindanao*; Herbolzheimer, *Peace Process in Mindanao*, 2.

¹⁴⁵Jeffery, "Amnesties and Intractable Conflicts."