Anxiety and (In)Security in Times of Calamity
The 2014 flood and the Kashmir Conflict

Rasmus Andrén

Doctoral Thesis

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science at the Swedish Defence University, to be publicly defended on Friday 26 January 2024 at 13:00 in Sverigesalen, Swedish Defence University, Drottning Kristinas väg 37, Stockholm. The examination will be conducted in English.

Faculty opponent

Associate professor Scott Watson, University of Victoria
Anxiety and (In)Security in Times of Calamity
The 2014 flood and the Kashmir Conflict

Abstract

Environmental calamities and disasters are increasingly found to affect political stability and conflicts. Despite a plethora of research across a range of disciplines, however, explanations remain elusive. The theoretical shortcomings of prior research coalesce into an overarching problem concerning how to conceptualize disasters as influencing conflicts through the disruptions they impose on identities. I argue that how identities intermingle with the disaster-conflict nexus can be further advanced by drawing on ontological security studies (OSS). By investigating the disastrous flood in the Kashmir valley in 2014, and its role in the brewing unrest that climaxed in 2016 amid separatist conflict, I argue that disasters influence conflicts through processes of securitizing and desecuritizing an ontologically secure Self. That is to say, that the search for stable and coherent identities following disasters can mitigate and reinforce conflicts. Nested within this argument are three core contributions. First, I address the multifaceted dynamics by which the Self and identities are unsettled and challenged, or affirmed and reified amid disasters and conflict, to show how we can read disasters as disruptive amid already ongoing crises. Second, I theorize how the search for stable and ontologically secure identities can engender securitization and desecuritization of subjectivity at the same time, exacerbating and mitigating different dynamics in a conflict. Third, in doing so, the dissertation suggests that future research on disasters, and environmental challenges more broadly, should be less concerned with a binary understanding of their impact on conflicts and more concerned about their multidimensional relations.

Keywords
Disaster, conflict, disruption, anxiety, ontological security, Kashmir