

Fighting Insurgency, Ruining the Environment: towards an understanding of the causal relationship between conflict and forest fires

Reporting

Project Information

FIRE

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Closed project

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Coordinated by

LUNDS UNIVERSITET



Sweden

Periodic Reporting for period 1 - FIRE (Fighting Insurgency, Ruining the Environment: towards an understanding of the causal relationship between conflict and forest fires)

Reporting period: 2018-10-01 to 2020-09-30

Summary of the context and overall objectives of the project



The FIRE (Fighting Insurgency Ruining the Environment) project was built on three main research questions:

- 1- How do armed conflicts affect human-environment systems?
- 2- How are forest fires used discursively by conflicting groups?
- 3- Is there a positive correlation between inter- and intra-state conflict and forest fires?

In this research project, the overall objective was to produce reliable data on the selected cases in Turkey, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and Syria that can allow us to better understand the conflict-human environment nexus and can provide insights for a broader sustained engagement with the correlation of their interrelationship. Building on qualitative research (i.e. content analysis, interviews, fieldwork) we have identified certain regions where forest fires and conflict simultaneously occur. We have then used open-access fire data provided by NASA (MODIS) and conflict data provided by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) to focus on the selected areas, and analysed the correlation between the occurrence of fires and instances of manifest conflict.

This interdisciplinary research aimed to make an academic contribution (i.e. using available data to explain the relationship between fires and conflict) as well as raise societal awareness on environmental damage related to the conflict. With an interdisciplinary approach, the project produced charts, maps, and in-depth analysis of the different accounts of forest fires and conflict in the selected cases. Given the limited literature that focuses on the environmental damage and tree loss in the Middle East, which is not only due to climate stress but also to ongoing conflict, the project's findings will be of interest to many other communities, beyond its original focus on the specific cases of Turkey, Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Syria, and will help further integrating environmental degradation and restoration/restitution to peacebuilding projects.

Work performed from the beginning of the project to the end of the period covered by the report and main results achieved so far ^

We started the project by collecting available data on fires from NASA (MODIS) and UCDP for the areas (Turkey, Israel, Palestinian Territories, Syria).

Due to various reasons, the PI of the project was unable to cover all the cases initially proposed. With her existing knowledge on the field, the PI was able to produce maps and charts on the correlation between fires and conflict in the selected provinces in Turkey (i.e. Dersim, Diyarbakir, Sirnak, Hakkari). Fire data for Syria, Palestine, and Israel have been partially collected and the qualitative research on these cases is yet to be conducted.

As part of the Turkey analysis, a student from the Physical Geography department has written her thesis on the case of Dersim. The PI, together with the Supervisor of the project, acted as co-supervisor for this graduate thesis.

The PI has given several audio and video interviews to the news channels in Turkey, on the height of forest fires happening in her area of study in 2020. She has published a semi-academic article in Birikim (in Turkish), which was followed by online interviews/seminars on the subject.

Together with other colleagues from the Department of Geography, the PI has submitted an academic article to the journal of Human Ecology, which is currently under review. She has also signed a contract to contribute to the book (tentative title: Kurdish Ecology, Lexington Books / Rowman & Littlefield) with a chapter on the conflict and forest fires nexus in Turkey's Kurdistan. Although the project has come to an end, the PI is still in collaboration with other researchers to produce research outcomes for the other cases. There are several working papers to be submitted in the coming year.

There will be a closed virtual workshop for the FIRE project in October 2020, where around 30 researchers from different institutions around the world will come together to discuss methodological issues, different cases, and future research avenues on the forest fires and conflict nexus.

Progress beyond the state of the art and expected potential impact (including the socio-economic impact and the wider societal implications of the project so far)

The findings for Turkey's Kurdish provinces were important to show scientific evidence on the correlation between fires and conflict.

As the conflict in Turkey, Syria, Israel, and Palestine continues, we continue to observe conflict-related environmental damage in these countries. By creating reliable data on the conflict and forest fires nexus, we aim to highlight not only the socio-economic impacts of conflict but also the environmental impacts of conflicts.

The PI will continue to write/co-author academic and popular science articles on the issue to raise societal awareness on the subject matter and provide scientific data and analysis on the forest fires and conflict nexus. The PI is also planning to give several talks about the findings of the project in different platforms.

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