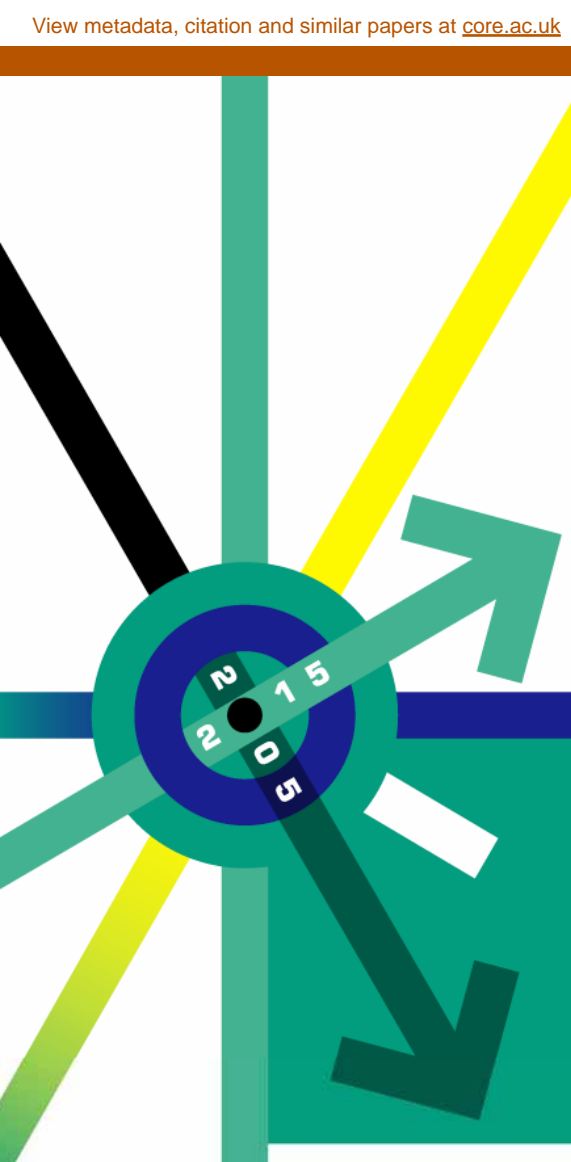




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A decorative graphic on the left side of the cover. It consists of a central circular hub with a black dot in the middle. The numbers '2005' are arranged around the hub: '2' at the top, '0' at the bottom, and '5' on the left and right sides. From the hub, several thick, colored lines radiate outwards: a black line pointing up-left, a yellow line pointing up-right, a light green line pointing right, and a dark green line pointing down-right. There are also two large, stylized arrows: one light green arrow pointing right and one dark green arrow pointing down-right, both originating from the central hub area.

Room to Manoeuvre: Challenges of Linking Humanitarian Action and Post- Conflict Recovery in the New Global Security Environment

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The Challenges of Linking Humanitarian Action
and Post-conflict Recovery in the New Global Security Environment

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Summary: Humanitarian challenges in conflict and post-conflict scenarios

Humanitarian providers play vital roles in countries undergoing and emerging from conflict, filling crucial needs and representing an important part of the international work toward stabilization and recovery. Never a politically simple matter, despite the apolitical humanitarian ideal, the policies and practices of humanitarian action now face new and intensified challenges in the current international environment.

One set of challenges has to do with the uncertain role of humanitarian actors in transitional or post-conflict situations. International assistance actors have arrived at some points of consensus regarding what makes effective programming in transitions, and the necessary shift from life-saving to life-normalizing and life-improving interventions. However, dilemmas arise regarding how to preserve an independent humanitarian presence within a broader political mission, and whether and how humanitarians are to engage with state structures, political actors, and militaries.

Following on from these issues is the more pointed debate over the erosion of neutral humanitarian space as a result of recent political and security developments. The US-led Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), situations of asymmetric warfare and counter-insurgency operations, and the increased blending of civil and military responses have created an environment in which humanitarians see their core neutrality principle increasingly compromised.

And finally, at the most immediate level, humanitarian actors struggle also with the erosion of their physical security – most certainly in the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, and possibly as a general trend. Whether the risk of violence for humanitarian actors has increased over time is not yet known definitively, pending a comprehensive compiling and analysis of the data. What is not in question, however, is that the UN organizational response to the security challenge has had major implications for its own agencies’ humanitarian access and methods of operations in some places, and is creating ripple effects throughout the entire humanitarian system.

I. Uncertain terms: Securing an independent humanitarian role in transitions and other “non-emergency” contexts

Over the past several years, international political and assistance actors arrived at a shared understanding on some key principles regarding the relationship of humanitarian action and recovery efforts in conflict-affected states. Among the points of this informal consensus were the necessity of safeguarding a humanitarian space for neutral assistance efforts, importance of maintaining a “light footprint” of the international community, and, once the acute crisis has passed, shifting the focus of international aid efforts away from direct service delivery to partnering and mentoring relationships with local state and civil institutions. The primary goal of assistance in these scenarios is to strengthen local governance to help shore up the fragile peace and prevent a slide back into conflict and crisis.

The international community has been slow to operationalize this consensus around transitional assistance. It presents a formidable challenge for a number of reasons, among them the multiplicity of actors and mandates involved, and a lack of clarity around whether and how the humanitarian and development communities have a shared agenda in assistance strategies.

Humanitarian Action and Post-Conflict Recovery: Competing or complementary agendas?

The international aid community's thinking on transitions during the previous decade centered on the need to bridge the funding and operational gap that typically arose between emergency aid and normal development programming.¹ These efforts resulted in few concrete changes in the funding area, largely because the donor government architecture was itself split between relief and development assistance, and resistant to change.²

The gap concept implied a chronological continuum between relief and development phases, which international aid actors later dismissed as overly simplistic. However, the fundamental problem they identified remained: countries transitioning to peace and state-building efforts received inadequate and/or misdirected aid resources, with much of it flowing to the international community's aid efforts rather than into local capacity; people saw little or no evidence of their daily lives improving; and fledgling state institutions lacked the capacity and legitimacy required to steer the nation to stability and development. The track record of post conflict recovery efforts bears out the worst-case

scenario predictions. The World Bank cites recent research showing 50 percent of post-conflict countries fall back into conflict within five years, and evidence points to slow and spotty disbursements of pledged contributions as a major factor in the failure of reconstruction and descent back into war.³

A joint working group of UN agencies and offices engaged in development and humanitarian affairs (UNDG-ECHA) began work on transitions in 2002. The group agreed on a working definition of transition as "the period in crisis when external assistance is most crucial in supporting or underpinning still fragile cease fires or peace processes by helping create the conditions for political stability, security, justice and social equality." It emphasizes the fragility of the post-conflict environment and the need to work with and through national authorities, lending them credibility and legitimacy, and providing technical and financial support as they take on crucial governance functions. The ultimate aim of transition is consolidating peace, which requires a broader variety of actors, including the World Bank and other IFIs, the political arms of the UN, donors, and aid agencies, as well as new modalities such as trust funds.⁴

In transitions, UN aid agencies see not only underserved needs, but also a niche opportunity to expand their programming at a time when their service delivery role is increasingly called into question in difficult security environments. However, the transition issue raises problems for the broader community of humanitarian actors. For one thing, the community lacks a common definition of itself. Until recently, there were no clear, shared parameters for what constitutes humanitarian action. Indeed, the trend

over the past decade has been to expand the humanitarian concept to encompass a wider range of activities and allow for more actors to find a place at the humanitarian table. The most direct cause for the expanding “humanitarian” sphere may be found in the large flows of donor aid to high profile emergencies, and the desire of UN development agencies to tap into these resources and establish themselves as players early on in the crisis. In the competitive environment that exists within the UN system of agencies and larger aid community, to do otherwise is to risk marginalization. In the view of many humanitarians, however, this represents an unhelpful development, as it dilutes the existing consensus that humanitarian action is a special category of assistance with objectives and protections that need to remain distinct. Under the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative launched in Stockholm in 2003, efforts have begun among donors and other stakeholders to reach a common definition of humanitarian action for the immediate purpose of tracking and reporting aid flows within the OECD/DAC. While this signals a positive shift in policy approaches, there are a number of challenges in measuring the realization of this goal.⁵

Twin features of developing country crises that emerged in the post-Cold War period are the weakened or outright failed state apparatus on the one hand, and the increasing importance of non-state actors (NSAs) such as rebel groups, warlords/militias, as well as indigenous NGOs on the other. The UN has maintained an important, if not central, role in international humanitarian response, but as an institution remains constitutionally *state-centered* in its mission and conduct in country.⁶ The UN Resident Coordinators, the senior officials in developing countries have at times been reluctant to declare

humanitarian emergencies or highlight human rights abuses for fear of damaging diplomatic relations and development partnerships with the host government. International NGOs enjoy more flexibility in this regard, but there are also tensions for multi-mandated agencies with both developmental and humanitarian objectives. NGOs also run the real risk of exacerbating political tensions by engaging directly with one group of belligerents or another, and as a community lack common benchmarks on what are the necessary conditions for their continued operational presence. In situations of transition, UN and NGO humanitarians alike face difficult decisions as to who, beyond the state, are the appropriate interlocutors in terms of advancing humanitarian concerns.

Protracted crises

Post-conflict transitions represent just one of two scenarios in which humanitarian actors operate where there is currently no acute, widespread emergency, but where there still may be pockets or instances of urgent humanitarian need. The other is in the case of protracted crisis, known as “chronic emergencies” or, as some have termed them, “complex development scenarios.” In these cases – Sudan, Angola, Liberia, and pre-9/11 Afghanistan are among the examples - development is stalled, the state may be failed or failing, the population or certain groups are especially vulnerable, and there is the constant threat of new violence and/or major humanitarian crisis. The international community has yet to expend serious effort on addressing the special nature and needs of countries characterized by this phenomenon. These country cases, some entering their second decade of “emergency” status, run a major risk of donor fatigue and further waning of public attention, and stand to benefit greatly from an infusion of new ideas and

approaches to their limbo status. Aid practitioners in such countries such as argue that a new framework is needed for addressing these long-running emergencies that clearly fall between the CAP and the UNDAF frameworks but nonetheless have areas or population groups facing extreme vulnerabilities and urgent needs.

International actors have also not yet developed a shared strategy on how address the weakened capacities of governments and populations in southern Africa caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, or the conflict systems perpetuated by illicit economies. The principal policy response to these challenges has been to expand the definition of emergency and insert development organizations into the humanitarian sphere.⁷ This again ascribes at least in part to the rigidity of donor agency structures and the fact that any contributions to aid countries under corrupt, failing or repressive governments must be classified as emergency relief to circumvent government control of the aid resources. At the same time, there has not been a great deal of programming innovations from the field either, as the organization tendency is for agencies to “stick to their knitting” when confronted with new and uncertain states of affairs. The bureaucratic and daily operational constraints have thus arguably constrained innovative thinking around these situations.

The UN and the future of integrated missions

Until 1992, UN peacekeeping and assistance activities were entirely separate, and there was little coordination even among the UN agencies within the humanitarian sphere. Widespread dissatisfaction over the competitive and duplicative inter-agency structure in

humanitarian efforts led to the passage of Resolution 46/182 - a major step towards recognizing the importance of a more coordinated humanitarian system that includes the roles played by humanitarian NGOs as well as UN agencies.

In 1994 the first Humanitarian Coordinator was appointed in Somalia. Over the years some of the more effective HCs have brought NGOs, as well as donors and local actors, into the field-based dialogue with the UN actors, in arrangements sometimes referred to as “Country Team-plus.” Gradually, in increasing numbers of countries, these non-UN actors were brought into a common discussion on planning and operations, and this has been credited with significantly improved overall humanitarian response in these countries.

The UN reform package of 1997, however, inadvertently undercut the growing cohesion in the broader humanitarian sphere by promoting greater *intra-UN* cohesion between the political, peacekeeping, development, and humanitarian departments. Driving the reform package as it related to field operations were pointed critiques of the UN’s performance in problem states, and the particular dissatisfaction of member governments not only with costly duplication of support structures for each agency, but also with and what they saw as the fragmented political presence of UN. Members demanded the UN begin to speak with a single voice in these situations. Enter the concept of the integrated mission, led by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) exercising “authority over all UN entities in the field,”⁸ and “whereby all UN resources are harnessed under common

direction towards consolidating peace and supporting the re-establishment of stable and legitimate central government with viable institutions.”⁹

Humanitarian NGOs (who are effectively shut out of this process), as well as some UN humanitarian agencies resist the movement toward integrated missions for the same reason they sought a separate Humanitarian Coordinator independent of the UN diplomatic presence in a country – to shield humanitarian action from the constraining effects of political considerations. These actors do not discount the benefits of coordination and complementary activities, rather it is the fear of that the humanitarian agenda will become subsumed by or secondary to political and peacekeeping goals. As one observer put it, “In effect 'integration' may serve to undermine humanitarian action by transforming it from a fundamental and inalienable right of those in need into simply another tool of diplomacy.”¹⁰ NGOs have called attention to the situation in a number of countries including, Angola and Liberia, as to how integration can hinder humanitarian action. In Angola, the rebel movement UNITA collapsed, hundreds of thousands of people streamed out of the former UNITA-held areas, and were in fairly desperate need of assistance. MSF identified the need for a straightforward aid response, but claimed that because the UN and donor community did not push the Angolan government for increased access for humanitarian responders, thousands of lives were lost. MSF reports that the UN went so far as to ask some donors not to fund individual agencies for rapid response, but to wait until the full community could go in together under a coordinated structure. Aid was thus held hostage to political agenda.¹¹

The case of Liberia is also cited often by the anti-integrated mission camp as a particular failure from the standpoint of humanitarian concerns,¹² and certain NGOs have held it up as a reason they will not participate in other integrated mission frameworks elsewhere. Many NGOs in Liberia were unhappy with UNAMIL's incorporation of the Humanitarian Coordinator role (as a dual function of the DSRSG) as well as OCHA into the integrated mission framework.

“This step, which could be seen as the final step in realizing the full integration of humanitarian coordination under a political banner, may involve humanitarian concerns becoming subservient to the political process and/or the UN neglecting immediate humanitarian needs. The coordination of humanitarian action needs, however, its own humanitarian space.”¹³

Others hope that the presence of the humanitarian function within UNAMIL will raise the profile of humanitarian issues among political actors in the mission. The lack of consensus among the NGOs as to whether the costs of integration outweigh its benefits is itself damaging to humanitarian coordination.

There are some in the UN who support a flexible and case-based approach to applying the integrated mission framework. Their reasoning holds that integrated missions are to be used when possible, humanitarian independence when necessary (for instance in cases active conflict). In past experience, however, the UN has not had much success in establishing criteria to guide case-based decision-making, but like all large organizations naturally veers toward a default management structure. Additionally, amid the current concerns for staff security, the push for integrated missions in all contexts promises to grow stronger, as security favors a centralized command structure.

Political and operational challenges of multi-mandated agencies in engaging across the 'divide'

Emergency humanitarian assistance exists outside the human development paradigm. It often involves the provision of non-renewable, non-sustainable aid inputs meant as stopgap for emergency needs. Although it is to be avoided as a rule, humanitarian emergencies sometimes necessitate the creation of parallel mechanisms, such as temporary schools, health clinics, and civil administration institutions. Humanitarian action is inherently direct and grassroots, targeted at individuals and communities while circumventing authorities.

While its practitioners may agree that humanitarian action represents a special category of assistance, the vast majority of assistance entities are in fact multi-mandated organizations, with programs spanning humanitarian relief, recovery, and development activities. The challenge to these agencies, is deciding when to make the shift from direct aid provision to partnerships in peace- and nation-building. Ideally this should be based on accurate assessments of needs and conditions on the ground, but political and funding considerations are often at play as well. The prevalence of integrated missions has in some sense taken the decision away from the individual agency, centralizing decision-making for UN agencies and requiring NGOs to choose between either operating within or outside the system or to leave (MSF in Afghanistan ultimately did both, as discussed further below). At the heart of this dilemma in highly contested environments is the issue

of humanitarian neutrality, which, as the next section illustrates, has moved from the realm of abstract principle to a very real and pressing operational challenge.

II. Humanitarian action in the post-9/11 environment: Challenges to neutrality

The US-led global security agenda embodied in GWOT has created a new framework for the conduct of international relations with fragile states, which are now viewed as potential harbors and staging grounds for global militant Islamist networks. This interest has been driven on another level by a renewed interest in reaching the Millennium Development Goals as an expression of pro-poor policies, and recognition of the failure of sanctions and conditionality policies. In this way the west has reversed its policy of disengagement from many of those developing countries that had ceased to be of strategic interest during the post-Cold War period (at least in principle, if not yet in practice).¹⁴ Moreover, western governments are beginning to look at the linkages between aid, stable states, and security. In this context humanitarian aid and recovery assistance has become integral to the security agenda, and is seen as a “soft” tool, to be used in combination with political and military instruments, to achieve counter-terror objectives.

The evolving relationship between aid and counter-terrorism efforts

Several donor governments have adopted policy changes reflecting a more coherent approach to the failed states-security linkage. Conflict, insecurity, and weak

governments have come to be seen as causes of poverty as well as the reverse. Trade, aid (both relief and development), and defense policy are all seen as important and linked components of combating global terror. In the UN system, the concept of “human security” presaged the integration of hard and soft international instruments now playing out under GWOT. The human security agenda is concerned with the security of people within states, requires international and multidisciplinary efforts, and sovereignty is respected conditionally contingent on the state protecting its citizens and meeting its responsibilities. It is based on the merging of the human development concept with theories of conflict causation and prevention.¹⁵

Perhaps the most striking change from previous periods can be seen in the reinforcement of a trend in political instrumentalism, some would say co-option of humanitarian assistance. In countries where security interests are seen most clearly at stake, humanitarian assistance has gone from being the sole embodiment of the international response to a feature of the securitization and peace-building process. The securitization of aid is also reflected in the greater emphasis of Afghanistan PRT model of the military performing aid work as part of or in addition to their normal duties.

This first became apparent in Afghanistan. NGOs previously open to dialoguing with the military found their arguments for the importance of their independence and neutrality had limited impact, as US forces took on new small scale aid endeavors, and administration officials spoke of humanitarian NGOs as “force multipliers.”¹⁶ According

to the US NGOs, the latest crop of senior officers has not shown interest in NGO concerns¹⁷ an estrangement that has continued and solidified in Iraq.

The NGO Médecins sans Frontières, renowned for working under the most difficult and dangerous of conditions, regretfully but pointedly withdrew their staff from Afghanistan in June 2004 after the unsolved ambush and murder of five of their staff, and a few months later withdrew from Iraq. The reasons they cited were intolerable security conditions, which in Afghanistan was due in large part to the US military forces assumption of the humanitarian mantle, traveling in unmarked vehicles in civilian clothes, carrying concealed weapons, and identifying themselves as humanitarians or “on a humanitarian mission,” all in violation of the Geneva Convention. MSF has reported that their Afghan contacts warned them repeatedly not to go to certain places lest they be mistaken for coalition soldiers.¹⁸ The increased engagement of private sector actors, including private security firms and even vigilantes and bounty hunters operating outside any legitimate auspices, has added to the confusion.

One must use caution in ascribing the developments in the Afghanistan and Iraq cases - both highly complex and irregular diplomatic environments - to a universal shift in great power policy that harnesses humanitarian activities to political ends. For although the GWOT does appear to lay down a global blueprint for dealing with unstable developing states, thus far there is no evidence of a universal application of these new policies. Rather, some have observed what appears to be an emerging two-tier system of emergencies, with countries of particular concern to counter-terror operations on the one

hand, versus vs. “normal” humanitarian crises on the other.¹⁹ In first tier countries, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, three features are evident: first, great power security interests are predominant and all other aspects of politics and assistance are drafted to these ends; second, massive new private sector involvement has emerged in the reconstruction effort, including some areas – such as education and health – traditionally considered the province of humanitarian actors; and third, individual humanitarian actors such as UN agencies and NGOs face greater pressures and ethical dilemmas, as well as greater physical risk from those who target them as agents of the western power structure. Elsewhere in the world, the “second tier” emergency countries such as Sudan and Liberia continue to conform to an older paradigm, where aid per capita remains relatively low and aid workers are seen as benign and for the most part not deliberately targeted. Sudan warrants particular mention in this context, for although the regime has been labeled as terrorist-supporting, and the conflict involves issues of Islamic and Arabic identity, aid workers see the situation much more along the lines of business-as-usual.²⁰

Though overall government expenditures for first tier emergency countries is much higher, driven by large reconstruction contracts with for-profit contractors,²¹ there is to date no conclusive evidence to suggest that humanitarian actors in these crises are being deprived of usual funding; nor are humanitarian emergencies elsewhere in the world receiving lower amounts as a result of diversion of funding to areas of geo-strategic interests.

Humanitarian action under occupation: principles and perceptions

According to the Geneva Conventions, the occupying power is primarily responsible for aid to civilians and reconstruction in the post-conflict occupied country. In the case of Iraq however, the international humanitarian system geared up and initially began operations as per previous emergencies. The scenario that unfolded on the ground made clear that the Iraq case involved many complex choices and challenges for the humanitarian implementing organizations, particularly in the absence of major displacements or critical humanitarian need.

Many (mainly US-based) NGOs, for their part, made the conscious choice to participate within a Pentagon-led reconstruction effort in Iraq, some say as the inexorable result of pre-war fundraising and mobilization in anticipation of a major humanitarian disaster. This choice created ethical and operational problems for these organizations as well as significant security challenges. Most of the NGOs entering Iraq after the US takeover did not have the longstanding ground presence in Iraq that would afford them the familiarity of local populations and the communications networks to elicit crucial security information. Rather, they entered a highly uncertain situation where they were inevitably closely identified with the coalition occupation and reconstruction efforts. More so than the NGOs, the UN found itself in an extremely difficult position in Iraq. It too was identified with the occupying power, and had already been the target of much popular resentment for its role in enforcing the 12-year sanctions regime. There was no clear understanding internally or between the UN and the coalition leaders about what the UN's post-war role would be, and how, precisely, it would relate to the occupying power,

beyond taking up part of the burden for reconstruction. The horrific bombing of the UN offices in Baghdad on 19 August 2003 drove home the precariousness and the ambiguity of the UN's position in the country.

In the aftermath of 19 August and the subsequent bombing of the ICRC's offices there has been a great deal of discussion as to whether these entities were targeted because they were seen as allies of the coalition, or whether they were merely convenient targets to create an atmosphere of disorder and terror, disrupting the effort to reconstruct and stabilize Iraq. The bombings assuredly accomplished the latter, and their ramifications are being felt throughout the UN system.

Potential responses for humanitarian providers

In most country cases the dilemmas do not present themselves quite so starkly as the MSF pullout from Afghanistan, but humanitarian actors operating in the most highly insecure environments find themselves between the proverbial rock and a hard place. They face pressures by western governments to conform to their broader security agenda, and by the UN to participate in integrated missions, yet to do so they believe they would be contributing to their own insecurity – essentially setting themselves up as targets. In addition they see it as betraying the humanitarian principles central to their mission. Potential approaches in such situations are few and underdeveloped. They include the traditionalist or “back-to-basics” approach now being promoted by MSF that seeks to reinforce the separateness of humanitarian action from political agendas. This approach calls for humanitarians to remain outside the dialogue on political and peace-building

affairs, to focus efforts on meeting needs in the most narrowly defined scope humanitarian action.²² Notwithstanding its birthright as an outspoken advocate for victims rights to humanitarian aid, MSF seems to have come to the conclusion that when advocacy crosses the line into policy prescription humanitarian principles are compromised; and when humanitarian efforts and actors are coordinated under a broader international response, humanitarian action invariably becomes a tool of political agendas.²³ MSF has thus declared its policy of speaking only within its field of expertise, and only calling for military intervention, for example, in cases of genocide.

An alternate approach offered by a representative of CARE argues that rather than “depoliticizing humanitarianism” the humanitarian community should work actively toward “humanitarianizing politics.”²⁴ In other words, humanitarian organizations would do better to adopt a politically attuned, rights-based approach that resists co-option by any political party, while actively engaging with governments to hold them responsible for meeting the humanitarian needs of civilians in crisis.²⁵

A third alternative, that is only just beginning to be raised in this context, though it is as old as any debate in humanitarianism, is the question of indigenization of humanitarian response. Some, though certainly not all, of the dilemmas touched on by this paper could be avoided if humanitarian response did not rely on the international, northern-based system of aid implementers and donors. In this line of thinking, humanitarianism must do more than merely de-westernize its “face,” but thoroughly devolve its institutions and response capacities to national and regional entities.

Humanitarian-military relations: New strains on an uncomfortable coexistence

Beginning with the Kurdish displacement crisis on Northern Iraq in 1991 military forces and humanitarian actors found themselves increasingly thrown together in developing country crises, and began a dialogue on issues surrounding their coexistence and cooperation in humanitarian emergency settings.²⁶ The common understanding they reached held there were areas of complementarity between the two sets of actors; that flexible and case-based cooperation was possible; and there was an urgent need for greater mutual understanding of roles and objectives, and of where they do and do not overlap. Central to this consensus was the point that the key role of the military actors, where they were present in humanitarian crises, was in “fostering security and creating the space to enable humanitarian organizations to carry out their work.”²⁷ This was seen as acknowledging the comparative advantage of each set of actors while not seeing the humanitarian effort as an arm of the military operations, nor treating the military as a logistics service contractor for the humanitarians. This point was reflected in certain examples of national military doctrine.²⁸ For example, British doctrine enshrines the separateness of the humanitarian and military spheres, wherein mutual reinforcement between the humanitarian and the political is occasional, not inevitable.

The NGO community has never had universal consensus regarding relations with the military, and they have behaved in contradictory ways. There were and are those among them who maintain that fundamental humanitarian principles are inevitably compromised in a collaborative relationship with the military, and that humanitarians have no business

calling for military intervention in a crisis country for humanitarian reasons unless it is to halt a genocide. Disagreements between NGOs over whether and to what extent to cooperate with military forces have complicated humanitarian coordination in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia, and in Tsunami-affected Indonesia, among other cases. Information sharing, so crucial in emergency contexts has suffered when some NGOs have chosen to withhold what they know rather than share it with other agencies who are cooperating with and feeding information to the military. NGOs who choose not to avail themselves of military armed escorts resent those who do, fearing the association will taint the whole of the NGO community. Nonetheless, over the past decade most NGOs and UN agencies will and have worked in cooperation or coordination with military forces in conflicts and post-conflict scenarios. Successful communication and coexistence has depended largely on the personalities involved and the civil-military liaison structures they established at the field level.

The undoing of the nascent 1990s consensus has been among the major shifts in the humanitarian landscape under the new counter-terror global security agenda, as even the US-based humanitarian actors are faced with a “sea change”²⁹ in the political-military actors’ relationship to the humanitarian sphere. Recent attempts by European governments to establish more policy-based frameworks for civilian-military dialogue might prove important, though they remain in their infancy.³⁰

III. The security challenge and its implications for humanitarian operations

Though it has not yet been determined with statistical certainty, it is widely held that casualty levels among aid workers have increased significantly over the years, particularly in the post 9-11 period. Until a denominator can be calculated representing the number of relief workers operating in the field in a given year, it remains unclear whether the level of risk to this work has increased, or if there are simply more workers in the field experiencing a corresponding number of dangerous incidents. In any event, as organizations perceived their staff to be increasingly directly affected by violence, humanitarian security has risen in importance and sophistication. The professionalization and standards movement that swept the community of humanitarian organizations included security planning and management as a key feature. Organizations began differentiating the area of personnel safety (e.g. common sense guidelines preventing vehicle accidents and illness) from the more complex issue of security (targeted violence, acts of war) that required greater resources and skills, and a strategic approach that encompassed the whole of programming.³¹

It is not uncommon now for the largest UN humanitarian agencies and NGOs to lose five or more staff members a year to violence in the field. Among the most common causes of casualties to aid workers are banditry on the roads (ambushes with beatings or killings, car-jackings or simple robbery); landmines; kidnappings; and in some cases armed attacks on premises or aerial bombardment. In addition there is the risk of common crime for which aid workers are often identifiable and appealing targets. Local staff or contractors, especially drivers hauling relief supplies, continue to bear the brunt of the violent incidents, but the threat to international staff is also perceived to have risen over

the past decade, particularly in the rise of cases of kidnapping/hostage taking. Along with physical risks go the very real psychological risks and aftereffects to humanitarian workers. Post-traumatic stress disorder, “burnout”, and vicarious traumatization (i.e. witnessing violence and atrocities against others) are growing problems among field staff, and detrimental to aid work in multiple ways.

Evolving policies and practices in humanitarian security

International humanitarian actors have attempted to counter the security challenge with a variety of mechanisms. Security has perhaps been the biggest factor in driving interagency coordination in the field, and at the headquarters level with joint training efforts. Traditionally the theory of enhancing the security of aid workers was based on the “security triangle” paradigm, comprised of three crucial components, emphasized to varying degrees by different types of organizations. The first, *protection* seeks to reduce vulnerability, i.e. harden the target. To this end humanitarian agencies have hired professionally trained security coordinators, provided training to staff members, and have invested in resources such as thick skinned vehicles, body armor, gates and alarms, communications equipment, and explosive-proof materials. The second strategy, *deterrence*, entails presenting a counter threat, such as the presence of armed escorts or proximity to military forces. The third, *acceptance*, is viewed by many in the NGO community as the most difficult yet most effective and principled means to reduce the threat to humanitarian actors. It entails the aid agency working towards becoming a familiar and trusted entity by local communities at the ground level, cultivating a network of contacts and intermediaries to maintain open lines of communications with key parties,

and usually requires a long-term presence in country pre-, during, and post-conflict. All three of these strategies require as their basis a detailed and thorough security assessment, which is undertaken prior to the mission and updated continually as conditions change.

In the late 1990s and the past five years have seen new efforts in security enhancement of both UN agencies and NGOs, individually and jointly (through the major consortia and international networks such as RedR and People in Aid). However, it has not resulted in a sense of greater comfort in field operations or any diminishment of the threat. In recent years, as will be discussed more below, rather the opposite has occurred. Although the major UN and NGO humanitarian actors universally concur on the importance of security, in actual practice the level of sophistication and investment into security measures varies enormously from one to another. Despite general improvements, much remains to be done, particularly in the area of security training, for a constantly changing and peripatetic field staff.³² National staff, moreover, although they represent the majority of victims, receive a disproportionately low share of the training and material resources allotted by their organizations to enhance staff security.³³

The changing UN security regime and the phenomenon of “aid by remote control”

In October 2003 the Secretary-General announced a plan to reconfigure, strengthen, and modernize the UN security apparatus - a process that has recently begun under the new Under Secretary General for the Department of Safety and Security. At the same time he cautioned that the UN must not “succumb to a 'bunker mentality' and shrink from the

work the world's people expect it to do.”³⁴ Yet many of the organization’s humanitarian agencies and their partners fear this is precisely what has happened since the Canal Hotel bombing.

One agency director noted that the Iraq bombing was pivotal, but the process had actually started before. He warned that the UN was nearing the point where UN humanitarian action was beginning to resemble a national foreign service in its priorities – an example of a “force and fortress mentality” indeed. The strongest critics have accused the UN of an institutional overreaction to the August 19 horror, and reminded that risk comes with the territory and will be greatest precisely where the UN presence is needed most.³⁵

Senior officials at UNDSS emphasize that their role is to provide an “enabling” security environment for programming, not a restrictive one. The department, with the help of over \$3 million in new resources allocated by the UN’s General Assembly, is now struggling to staff up and modernize UN security in ways comparable to multinational corporations and banks, who find ways to continue operating and safeguard their personnel in the some of the most unstable situations. The key to this endeavor is the concept of *risk management* analysis and strategy. The centerpiece of the risk management framework in the field is the Security Risk Assessment (SRA), which takes as a starting point the agencies’ programming priorities and institutes the necessary security conditions to make these possible.

For their part, the agencies and NGOs note some early improvements in the UN security system along these lines, but charge that there are a great many UN security officers in the field yet who use evacuation as a principal security strategy and approach risk by restricting movement. UNDSS officials regretfully admit that this mentality does persist among some of its field officers, but countercharge that the agencies too often don't know what it is they want or need to do and make it inordinately difficult to engineer the security umbrella.

The UN plays both a functional and a coordinating role in humanitarian and post-conflict scenarios, and to the extent that these roles are now being driven, or at least severely constrained, by security concerns in insecure environments has ripple effects on the entire humanitarian system. Certain UN humanitarian officials lament that donors are recoiling from the high cost of additional security provisions, and NGOs are seeking to distance themselves as well to avoid the risk of association.³⁶ In extraordinarily high-risk environments like Iraq, even NGOs constrain the movements of their personnel, and by the time of this writing most have withdrawn from that country completely. Without the NGOs as implementing partners, and unable to move about freely themselves, UN agencies and donor governments are also turning to private contractors to carry out aid delivery in the most rudimentary forms of assistance programming. Humanitarian professionals in the UN and NGOs speak of the intense frustration with being confined to compounds or residences, hiring out aid services which cannot even be monitored visually but rely on telephone reports. Local aid organizations are also typically counted on to fill the breach when the risks are too high for international implementers. Yet in

high-risk counter-terror scenarios they face enormous hurdles as objects of suspicion as potential fronts for terrorist organizations, and as targets themselves.

The relationship between the UN and NGOs on matters of security has, since the mid 1990s, been a source of frustration and false starts. In 1996 the UN Security Coordinator issued a Memorandum of Understanding for including NGOs in UN security arrangements – developed without any NGO input - that was rejected by NGOs as unacceptable. While NGOs in principle are in favor of the UN playing a role in security coordination, they are unwilling to surrender operational independence and their own judgment on matters of security. To many observers, the greater problem is the reluctance among many NGO to invest in, establish, and consistently implement security procedures. Explanations for this reluctance include the conscious decision by some organizations to concentrate their finite resources on programming goals, simple inexperience or incompetence on the part of others, and still others not wanting to scare off potential field workers with an excess of talk and training centered on worst-case scenarios. There is also a disconnect between donors’ expressions of willingness to fund additional security measures for their implementers’ programs, and many organizations’ doubts that such funding is available - and their fears that requesting it would detract from their programming capacity and/or competitiveness.

Another trend signals a different sort of NGO reasoning. In the post-9-11 political atmosphere, where humanitarians perceive a risk of targeting for their association with western interests, some organizations have moved even further toward an emphasis on

acceptance strategies and blending in to local communities as their best hope – even as the UN and other international entities invest more heavily on protection and deterrence measures.

UN relief agencies also express concern that the emphasis on security within the framework of integrated missions threatens to paralyze UN humanitarian action. UN humanitarian actors are increasingly forced to choose between being good team players in integrated missions and being an effective humanitarian presence in areas where both need and risk are high.³⁷

Real or perceived? Assessing the risks to aid workers in the new global environment

Are humanitarian workers at greater risk today than in previous years? The widespread sense among humanitarian practitioners holds the answer to be a resounding yes. Afghanistan is readily singled out, as a country where more aid workers have been killed in the nearly four years since the coalition campaign than in the prior 20 years of war and strife in that country. Iraq has seen a particularly terrifying trend of kidnappings and beheading of expatriate aid workers and contractors. However it would be a mistake to draw definitive conclusions from these two exceptional cases. And data on the aid worker casualties remains soft and for the most part dependent on voluntary reporting. Various studies³⁸ published in the past have contained different parameters – some for instance including deaths caused by vehicle accidents and disease, some including UN peacekeepers to the tally, etc. None of them have the figures to provide the denominator

– the number of aid workers in the field – an important consideration given the changing size of the humanitarian presence in insecure areas. In terms of total numbers, however, the short-term trend in violence against aid workers does appear to be on the rise.

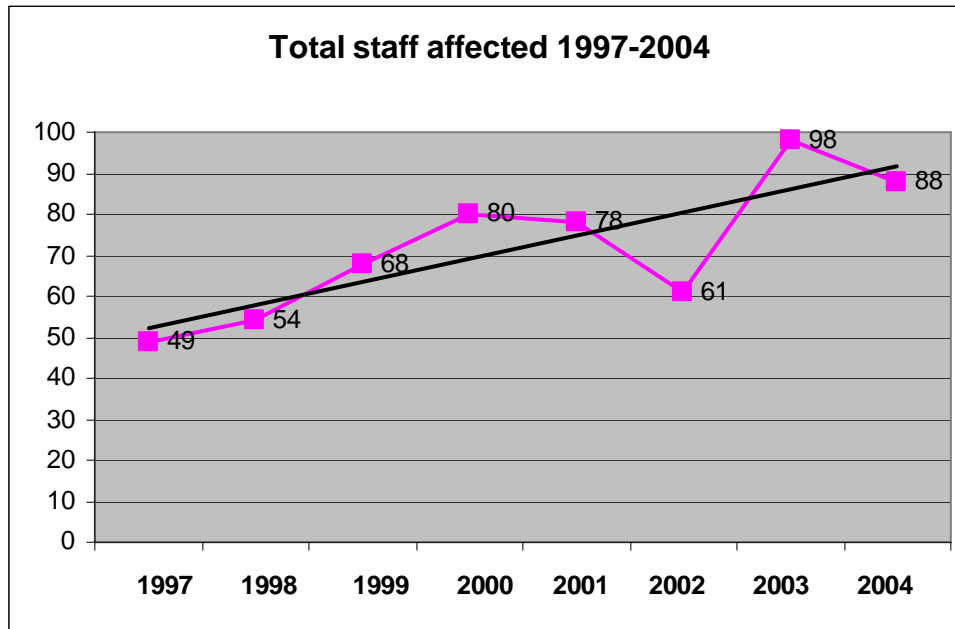
Table 1: Aid workers affected by major violent incidents 1997-2004

| | Total | UN | Red Cross | NGO | Nationals | Expatriates |
|-------------|--------------|----|-----------|-----|-----------|-------------|
| 1997 | 49 | 20 | 16 | 13 | 28 | 21 |
| 1998 | 54 | 24 | 18 | 12 | 42 | 12 |
| 1999 | 67 | 12 | 21 | 34 | 37 | 30 |
| 2000 | 80 | 31 | 5 | 44 | 62 | 18 |
| 2001 | 78 | 25 | 10 | 54 | 24 | 13 |
| 2002 | 62 | 15 | 7 | 40 | 53 | 9 |
| 2003 | 98 | 24 | 23 | 51 | 74 | 24 |
| 2004 | 88 | 15 | 6 | 67 | 61 | 27 |

Source: CIC/HPG Humanitarian Security Project preliminary data set

According to the data currently available³⁹, an average of 66 aid workers per year were victims of major violence (killed, wounded, or kidnapped) during 1997-2000, four years prior to the advent of GWOT and the new global security environment. During the four years since, 2001-2004, the annual average was 83. The risk to national staffers increased even more in the latter period, becoming three times as likely to be victims of violence as expatriate staff, a number that reflects their greater representation in frontline field work.

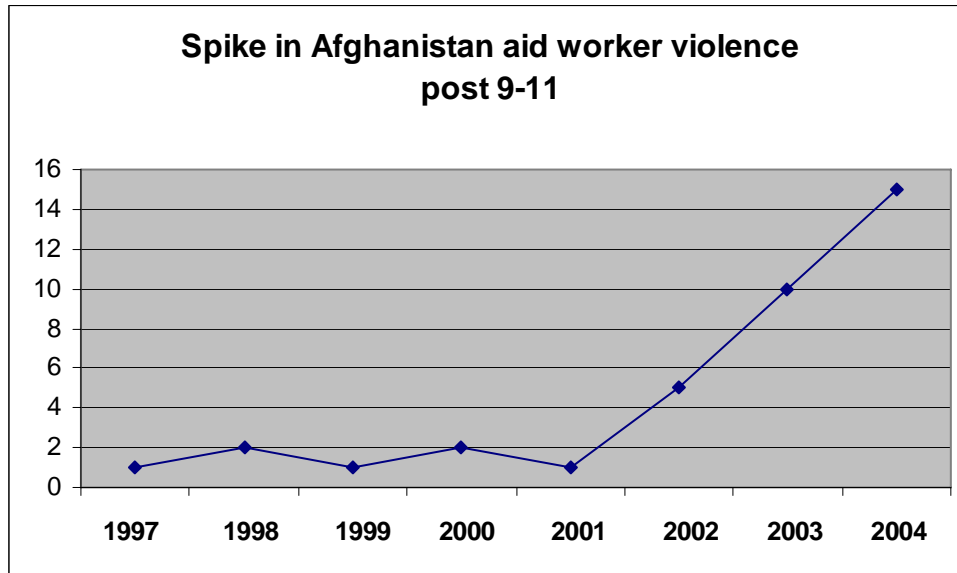
Figure 1: Short-term trend appears to show increase in risk to aid workers



Source: CIC/HPG Humanitarian Security Project preliminary data set

A theory often cited for the apparent rise - and one which is believed deeply by certain aid organizations who have suspended operations as a result - is the securitization of aid by western governments in the global counter-terror campaign, which has created a political association of aid organizations with this western agenda. Another explanation has militants choosing aid institutions as soft targets, for the purpose of sparking conflict or general disorder. Others refute the importance of the targeting issue, insisting that the majority of violent incidents are crimes of opportunity having nothing whatever to do with politics of humanitarian action and everything to do with its material resources. Clearly, attribution of increased risk solely to GWOT line-blurring or the sitting duck syndrome does not capture the full complexity of the situation, and humanitarian

organizations need to arm themselves with more sophisticated analysis in order to be credible⁴⁰ – another indication of the need for a thorough and accurate accounting.



Source: CIC/HPG Humanitarian Security Project preliminary data set

Some in the humanitarian community have also posited a growing environment of impunity, spurred by such events as abuses of prisoners under GWOT, which has had the effect of easing pressures on allies and foes alike to respect internationally sanctioned principles of humane treatment and human rights.⁴¹ It is certainly the case that when it comes to the killing of aid workers, governments rarely resolve or even adequately investigate crimes against aid workers. One source quotes a figure of only 22 out of 214 cases of violent deaths of UN staffers having been solved.⁴²

It is possible that a longer-range analysis of casualty statistics may determine that 9/11 and advent of GWOT did not represent the watershed in humanitarian security that they

might now seem to be. Looking back at prior security incidents one sees a tendency to treat each horrific act of violence against aid workers as a turning point. Before the UN and ICRC bombings in Baghdad and the upsurge of violence against international targets in Afghanistan there was the brutal murder of UNHCR staff in West Timor rampages in September 2000. And before that, December 1996 saw the execution-style murders of ICRC workers as they slept in their residence in Chechnya. All of these had the effect of motivating the humanitarian community to take action to enhance security measures, and all denoted problems in perceptions, a lack of trust, and a basic disconnect or distancing between the aid organizations and the community they served. What 9/11 seems to have done, in countries of counter-terror concern in particular, is increase that distance. NGOs, traditionally the members of the humanitarian community closest to the ground, have decried the fact that in these places they don't know who to talk to anymore, whereas before if they couldn't speak directly to the armed parties they could at least communicate through intermediaries. In Iraq and parts of Afghanistan, they acknowledge, there is little understanding even of who the key players are.

Conclusions

Given the prodigious efforts and analysis devoted to humanitarianism over the past 15 years, it seems implausible that issues of coordination, civil-military relations, operational security and principled programming should be thornier and more elusive than ever before. Yet here we are. Whether the challenges involve operational effectiveness, deeply held principles, or matters of life and limb, humanitarian actors

cannot hope to resolve these dilemmas in isolation. Rather, solutions will require the will and action of political actors in the UN and donor community as well as members of the development sphere.

As regards the issues examined here, the following are seen as potential areas for action:

1) Preserving space for neutral humanitarian action, unfettered but narrowly defined

Integrated missions may well be the future of UN engagement in complex emergencies or transitions but it must not become a *de facto* template, lest the costs to humanitarian response outweigh the benefits of strategic coordination. In instances of acute crisis or humanitarian need, humanitarian actors need scope to save lives and reduce suffering without regard to political agendas. UN political actors should therefore be held to the credo of “integration when possible, independence when necessary.” For their part, humanitarian and multi-mandated actors need to be much more rigorous in developing (and consistent in implementing) benchmarks for programming and positioning in situations of transition, determining if and when to shift focus and partners towards longer term stabilization and recovery objectives.

Humanitarian actors would also do well to jointly develop an agreed definition of what constitutes humanitarian action. The OECD/DAC’s current efforts to define humanitarian action for the purposes of transparency and harmonization in reporting might serve as a useful starting point for building consensus. Both relief and development actors must resist the tendency to define all aid efforts as emergency

response, as any short term funding advantages will likely give way to long term donor fatigue.

2) *Addressing the other gray area: assisting countries in “chronic emergencies”*

There is an urgent need for strategizing and innovative thinking around aid policy in protracted crises, involving both the humanitarian and development practitioners, political actors, and the international financial institutions. Insofar as failed state scenarios have now garnered the attention of the developed world for security reasons, civil-military relations, particularly as regards humanitarian actors, will come to the fore. Recent efforts at finding common ground between military and humanitarian actors and reinforcing the concept of neutral humanitarian space have thus far been sporadic and fragmented.

3) *Rethinking security*

a. Acknowledging and accepting risk in the humanitarian sphere

Humanitarian action in disasters and conflict scenarios inherently involves greater risk to personnel than most development or diplomatic activities. Applying universal security protocols to all UN personnel will effectively strip UN humanitarian agencies of their operationality and place them in a role more akin to donors or contracting entities. If UN humanitarian actors choose to retain access and an operational role, gradated security structures will need to be developed, both within agencies and for the UN system as a

whole. UN agencies, like NGOs would then be able to determine their own risk threshold, providing an “informed consent” mechanism is established for personnel, who would receive the additional training, equipment, and insurance provisions required for employment at the higher risk levels.

a. Greater security through indigenization of aid?

It is generally agreed that that security of aid efforts is best achieved through the acceptance of the aiding entity by the local community. This accepted wisdom, combined with the uncomfortable phenomenon of western based agencies performing ‘aid by remote control’ in insecure areas, reinforces the need to give local organizations greater ownership and control of humanitarian assistance operations. This has been raised in humanitarian fora with new urgency of late, but beyond touting the familiar mantra of ‘capacity building’, the humanitarian community has expended very little in the past toward developing indigenous response capacity for humanitarian emergencies. Perhaps the security imperative will give new impetus to creating these capacities.

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- ¹ In addition to the Brookings Roundtable, related efforts have included the CPR Network and UNHCR's "4R" process.
- ² Adele Harmer and Joanna Macrae, *Beyond the Continuum: The Changing Role of Aid Policy in Protracted Crises*, HPG Report 18, London: ODI (July 2004)
- ³ Shepard Forman and Stewart Patrick, *Good Intentions: Pledges of Aid for Postconflict Recovery*, Boulder: Lynne Reiner, 2000.
- ⁴ "Report of the UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition Issues" New York: UNDG/ECHA.
- ⁵ Adele Harmer, Lin Cotterell, Abby Stoddard "From Stockholm to Ottawa: A Progress Review of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative" London: HPG, October 2004.
- ⁶ Bruce D. Jones, "The Changing Role of UN Political and Development Actors in Situations of Protracted Crisis" in Macrae and Harmer, *Beyond the Continuum: The Changing Role of Aid Policy in Protracted Crises*, HPG Report 18, London: ODI (July 2004)
- ⁷ Harmer and Macrae.
- ⁸ From *Renewing the UN: A Programme for Reform (A/51/950)*, para 117. Also states "An integrated approach is particularly important in the field, where a lack of cohesion or differences among UN entities can be exploited by the parties...In countries where large where large multi-disciplinary field operations are in place, the SRSG will ensure that the efforts of the different components of the system are mutually reinforcing."
- ⁹ Terms of Reference for Expanded ECHA Core Group Joint Study on "The Peacekeeping-Humanitarian/Development Interface" 2004.
- ¹⁰ Stuart Gordon, "Military - Humanitarian Relationships and the Invasion of Iraq (2003): Reforging Certainties?" *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* (6 July 2004) <<http://www.jha.ac/articles/a137.htm>>, 2.
- ¹¹ Remarks by Nicholas de Torrente, MSF, at the Carnegie Corporation for Ethics and International Affairs, December 2004.
- ¹² Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop, "The Humanitarian Response in Liberia: Some Observations by the ICVA Coordinator" Geneva: International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), 17 June 2004.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Joanna Macrae and Adele Harmer, *Humanitarian Action and the Global War on Terror: A Review of Trends and Issues*, HPG Report 14, London: ODI (July 2003)
- ¹⁵ Bruce Jones, "The Changing Role of UN Political and Development Actors in Situations of Protracted Crisis" in Harmer and Macrae
- ¹⁶ "Remarks by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell to the National Foreign Policy Conference For Leaders of Non-Governmental Organizations" (October 26, 2001) <http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/01102606.htm>
- ¹⁷ James K. Bishop, "Combat role strains relations between America's military and its NGOs" *Humanitarian Action Review Iraq Special Edition*, Summer 2003.
- ¹⁸ Michelle Kelly and Morten Rostrup, MSF "Identify Yourselves" MSF website posted 01/02/2002, www.msf.org, (article originally appeared in *The Guardian*)
- ¹⁹ Antonio Donini, "The Future of Humanitarian Action: Implications of Iraq and other Recent Crises" Issues Note for Brainstorming Workshop, Boston (October 9, 2003)
- ²⁰ Remarks by Rudolph von Bernuth, Vice President, Save the Children (US), Columbia University (October 20, 2004).

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- ²¹ By way of example, in post-war Iraq the US government has awarded \$78 million in grants to UN agencies and NGOs, compared to \$3.4 billion awarded in contracts to private firms
<http://www.usaid.gov/iraq/activities.html#contracts>
- ²² Nicolas de Torrente, "Humanitarian Action Under Attack: Reflections on the Iraq War," *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, Vol. 17, Spring 2004.
- ²³ Rafa Vila San Juan, MSF, "Humanitarian action must not be a tool of political interests" Speech delivered to the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, 7/18/02,
<http://www.msf.org/content/page.cfm?articleid=065797A6-5322-4EE6-88C8BF97B39CB5AC>
- ²⁴ Paul O'Brien, "If humanitarianism has been politicized, should NGOs humanitarianize politics? A Response to Nicholas De Torrente and Medecins Sans Frontiers" *Harvard Human Rights Journal*
- ²⁵ Paul O'Brien makes his argument based on field experience in Afghanistan: "A second reason for adopting new humanitarianism is that the nature of NGO work in Afghanistan is changing, and demands political acumen. Emergency response is being replaced by peace strengthening as a donor priority. Donors need organizations with ground presence to mobilize war-weary communities to resist the short-term false promises of warlords. More than ever, NGOs need to understand local politics and the actors that would happily manipulate or threaten them to achieve economic or military gain." From O'Brien, "Old Woods, New Paths, and Diverging Choices For NGOs" in *Nation Building Unraveled: Aid, Peace, and Justice in Afghanistan*, Antonio Donini, Ed, Kumarian Press, 2004.
- ²⁶ Humanitarian actors also spent a great deal of time on the topic amongst themselves. The UN-led Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (IASC) over the past decade has produced four different sets of guidelines on how humanitarian action should interact with military operations, and created a special organizational unit on the issue.
- ²⁷ ICVA, "NGOs and the Military Find Common Ground" *Talk Back Report on Pre-EXCOM Consultations in Geneva with UNHCR, NATO, and NGOs*.
- ²⁸ Stuart Gordon, "Military - Humanitarian Relationships and the Invasion of Iraq (2003): Reforging Certainties?" *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, <http://www.jha.ac/articles/a137.htm> (2004)
- ²⁹ James K. Bishop, "Combat role strains relations between America's military and its NGOs" *Humanitarian Affairs Review*, Summer 2003 < <http://www.humanitarian-review.org>>, 28.
- ³⁰ The majority of donors lack clear lines for dialogue with their defense and military counterparts. However some European donors have developed such frameworks, for example Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, which have specific protocols between foreign affairs and defense ministries covering the principles, objectives and practical procedures of civil-military cooperation. ECHO launched the UN's guidelines jointly with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and intends to support the development of a field manual covering their implementation (See www.reliefweb.int/mcdls/mcdu/Guidelines/guidelines)
- ³¹ Koenraad Van Brabant, "Operational Security: Management in Violent Environment", Good Practice Review HPG, ODI. 2000.
- ³² Von Brabant 2000, InterAction, "InterAction Members Condemn Killing of Aid Workers in West Timor" *Monday Developments*, 18, 17, (9/25/00)
- ³³ ECHO, "Report on Security of Humanitarian Personnel: Standards and Practices for the Security of Humanitarian Personnel and Advocacy for Humanitarian Space," Commissioned by ECHO, 2004.
- ³⁴ UN News Service, "Annan calls for overhaul in security structure to better protect UN personnel" 11 Oct 2004, <www.reliefweb.int>
- ³⁵ David Malone, "UN staff must get a grip: insecurity is normal" *Daily Star*, Wednesday, September 22, 2004).
- ³⁶ Interview with Mark Bowden, OCHA
- ³⁷ Abby Stoddard, "Assessment of UNICEF's Contribution to UN Reform and its Impact on UNICEF in the Humanitarian Sector," New York: UNICEF, August 2004.
- ³⁸ Mani Sheik, et al., "Deaths Among Humanitarian Workers," *British Medical Journal*, vol. 321, 15 July 2000. This article, using voluntarily supplied information found in the 14 years between 1985 and 1998, a total of 375 deaths among civilian staffers of the UN and NGOs - a figure which includes UN peacekeepers, vehicle accidents and unspecified accidental deaths.
- ³⁹ Data drawn from previous compilations, including Dennis King, "Chronology of Humanitarian Aid Workers Killed: 1997-2004" US Department of State, November 2004, supplemented by ReliefWeb postings and other media sources. These preliminary figures do not include accidental deaths or

injuries, or incidents involving personnel associated with de-mining, election monitoring or voter registration, private contracting for reconstruction, or peacekeeping operations.

⁴⁰ Interview with Nancy Lindborg, Vice President, Mercy Corps International

⁴¹ RedR, “The ‘Global War on Terror’ and its Implications for NGO Security Management” Seminar background paper, November 27-28 2003, London.

⁴² Anthony Lake “Honoring Relief Workers” *New York Times*, Op Ed (July 22, 2002)