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## HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN A NEW SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

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# HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN A NEW SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Katarina West<sup>1</sup>

**There has been an unprecedented growth of humanitarian action since the end of the Cold War. Its expansion has coincided with the proliferation of humanitarian organisations. Thus, both the quantitative and the qualitative roles of the humanitarian agencies have significantly changed.**

**This article describes both the form and background of the proliferation. It aims to explain why and how the humanitarian system was able to expand to such an unprecedented level. The first and second parts sketch the changes within the humanitarian sphere (dealing with both actors and action). The third part describes the political background behind current humanitarian action, and searches for causal relationships between the two. The fourth part is an evaluation of how this expanded system works out at the practical level, and, finally, the conclusion assesses the implications of an expanded humanitarian system.**

## *I. Changes in humanitarian action*

The events of 1989 created an atmosphere of optimism about multilateral security co-operation. This atmosphere has, however, eroded in the course of the 1990s, but despite declining optimism, humanitarian action has taken more forms in more conflicts than ever before.

Yet before one can focus on the changes in humanitarian action, it is necessary to understand what is meant by “humanitarian”. Moreover, as the gaps between different types of international action are narrowing, it is important to know what are the specific features of “humanitarian action”.

Humanitarianism is a flexible concept which descends from various intellectual, religious and cultural traditions. Its foundations vary from a charitable urge to alleviate hardship; to *jus in bello* tradition and the laws of war; and, finally, to unconditional notions of individual rights and radical attempts to solve the causes of suffering. Traditional humanitarian action, which emerged in the 19th Century, has aimed to alleviate human suffering caused by sudden disastrous occurrences. It is a concrete set of practices targeting the victims in the disaster region, and delivering them medicine or food aid. It comprises limited and neutral operations which are directed by specific objectives.

However, recent conflict-related humanitarian crises (the so called complex emergencies)<sup>2</sup> have made the traditional form of humanitarianism outdated. Fighting has prompted food insecurity, famine,

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<sup>2</sup>For definitions and descriptions of “complex emergencies”, see Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi eds., *War*

environmental disasters, or massive population displacements; and it has demolished vulnerable economic and political systems. Complex emergencies have both demolished the old distinction between natural and man-made humanitarian crisis, and rendered the substance of humanitarian action more labyrinthine and muddling.

That is why current humanitarianism deals with more than just traditional issues, and handles social and political difficulties in the conflict region. In the absence of long-term policies, humanitarianism has also become a means to enhance political stability - thus intertwining with conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution. Occasionally humanitarianism has taken more forceful or punitive forms, and moved closer to the human rights regime. If “previously the term “humanitarian” applied largely to the ultimate rationale of the operation”, notes Adam Roberts, “it now relates more to the type of activity with which it is conspicuously associated throughout.”<sup>3</sup>

So how can one identify the changes in humanitarian action? One possibility, one which is used here, is to categorise all forms of enlarged humanitarian action. A review of operations which differ from the traditional relief action (but are still labelled “humanitarian”) creates five categories of humanitarian action: preventive, protective, punitive, forcible and restorative. When this broad humanitarian system is compared with the limited and neutral humanitarian sphere operating during the Cold War, the profundity of recent changes becomes more understandable.

### **Preventive action**

An improved climate for international co-operation and the persistence of violent conflicts have increased calls for preventive diplomacy and early warning mechanisms. Though these actions must be seen first and foremost as political and security operations, they also entail a humanitarian dimension. In addition to security objectives, there are ample illustrations of preventive humanitarian action. Preventive humanitarianism aims to ward off any social, political and security developments that may cause serious

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*and Hunger - Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*, Save the Children Fund, 1994, pp. 21-31, 50-69; Andrew Natsios, *Illusions of Influence: The CNN Effect in Complex Emergencies*, in Robert I. Rotberg and Thomas G. Weiss eds., “From Massacres to Genocide - the Media, Public Policy and Humanitarian Crises”, World Peace Foundation, 1996, pp. 150-151; Mark Duffield, *NGOs, Disaster Relief and Asset Transfer in the Horn: Political Survival in a Permanent Emergency*, *Development and Change*, Vol. 24, 1993; Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Mercy Under Fire - War and Global Humanitarian Community*, Westview Press, 1995, p. 17; Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian Action in War - Aid, protection and impartiality in a policy vacuum*, Adelphi Paper No. 305, IISS, London, 1996, pp. 10-11; John Harriss ed., *The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention*, Pinter Publishers, London and New York, 1995.

<sup>3</sup>Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian War: military intervention and human rights*, *International Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 3, July 1993, p. 445.

distress to the civilian population. Its instruments range from mediation, monitoring and fact-finding to development programs.

Due to increased demands, international organisations - especially regional organisations - have tried to focus on monitoring and conflict management in the 1990s. Examples of preventive humanitarian action include the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which has conducted monitoring and preventive diplomacy tasks in the Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union. Another example is the Organization of African Unity, which has - after a period of inertia - announced that its revised objective is “the anticipation and prevention of conflicts”.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, it has attempted to mediate the crisis in Congo/Brazzaville, Rwanda and Burundi with various success. The Organisation of American States passed the Resolution 1080 in 1991, enhancing its role as a conflict mediator<sup>5</sup> in such countries as Guatemala.

### **Protective action**

Because of “the steady increase of refugee flows since the mid-1970s”<sup>6</sup> and the unconventional nature of current conflicts, protective humanitarian action is broader and more visible than ever before. It seeks to maintain basic order in the conflict region, and to shield the civilian population and the aid workers from fighting or from the combatants’ deliberate or indiscriminate attacks. Furthermore, in situations where political and social systems have collapsed, it includes any immediate undertakings to keep anarchy at bay.

Enlarged mandates of the UN system provide good examples of protective humanitarian action. First, the UN peacekeeping forces have recently carried out such new tasks as establishing “safe havens”, protecting humanitarian and relief convoys, ensuring partial demilitarisation in specific areas<sup>7</sup> or mediation between the belligerents.<sup>8</sup> Second, the role of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has expanded to deal with large influxes of refugees and internally displaced persons.

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<sup>4</sup>Michael S. Lund, *Early Warning and Preventive Diplomacy*. In Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall eds., “Managing Global Chaos . Sources of and Responses to International Conflict”, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D.C., 1996, p. 381. Europe (OSCE), and its High Commission for National Minorities. See also William DeMars, *Waiting for Early Warning: Humanitarian Action After the Cold War*. Journal of Refugee Studies, vol. 8, no. 4.

<sup>5</sup>William DeMars, *Waiting for Early Warning: Humanitarian Action After the Cold War*, Journal of Refugee Studies, vol. 8, no. 4, p. 393.

<sup>6</sup>Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian Action in War - Aid, protection and impartiality in a policy vacuum*. Adelphi Paper, no. 305, IISS, London, 1996, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>In the case of the former Yugoslavia, this included areas around Sarajevo and Gorazde in Bosnia.

<sup>8</sup>Adam Roberts, op.cit., p. 35; Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall eds., *Managing Global Chaos - Sources of and Responses to International Conflict*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D.C., 1996, pp. 300-301; Leon Gorkender and Thomas G. Weiss eds., *Soldiers, Peacekeepers and Disasters*, International Peace Academy and Macmillan, 1991. Thomas G. Weiss, David P. Forsythe and Roger A. Coate describe the rebirth of the UN security operations after 1988: for example, UNGGOMAP in Afghanistan and Pakistan, UNIIMOG in Iraq, UNAVEM I in Angola, UNTAG in Namibia, ONUCA in Central America, ONUVEN in Nicaragua, ONUSAL in El Salvador, and ONUVEH in Haiti. *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, Westview Press, 1994, pp. 63-81. Moreover, Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse refer to large-scale operations in the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia and Somalia, reminding that the period between 1945 and 1987 included only 13 peacekeeping operations, whereas the period between 1987 and 1994 entailed 18 peacekeeping operations. See *Humanitarian*

## **Punitive action**

Punitive humanitarian action has surfaced mostly because the international community has prosecuted grave offenders of international humanitarian law - for the first time since the Nuremburg and Tokyo trials. Punitive humanitarian action is to penalise severe violations that have already taken place and which cannot be ameliorated by any other means than by seeking justice. The UN Security Council Resolutions to establish war crime tribunals in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda<sup>9</sup> are significant illustrations of such action.

## **Forcible action**

The importance of humanitarian intervention in international relations has been a significant academic and diplomatic debate in the 1990s. It evolves from UNSC Resolutions 688 and 794, setting up Operation Provide Comfort in Iraq and the Operation Restore Hope in Somalia.<sup>10</sup> The subject of the debate, whether to use military force for humanitarian ends, is also the essence of forcible humanitarian action. The *stated* justifications and objectives of the Security Council resolutions highlight the nature of forcible humanitarian action. It aims to put an immediate end to grave humanitarian violations and state of anarchy, or to deliver relief aid to seriously deprived areas - whether the host government gives its consent or not.

However, the authenticity of forcible humanitarian action is widely debated. The sudden forcefulness of the Security Council decisions has either been viewed as a significant blow to the principle of non-intervention and thus as a significant legal precedent in the international community, or, alternatively, the Security Council actions have been criticised for their ambiguity and incoherence. The criticism has entailed accusations that humanitarian operations are directed by political factors and the interests of the major states.<sup>11</sup> (The latter part of this article examines these issues at an empirical level.)<sup>12</sup> Whatever the

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*Intervention in Contemporary Conflict - A Reconceptualization*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1996.

<sup>9</sup>The UNSC Resolution 827 establishing a tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was passed in 1993, and the UNSC Resolution 955 was passed in 1994. Theodor Meron, *International Criminalization of Internal Atrocities*, the American Journal of International Law, vol. 89, 1995; and James O'Brien, *Current Developments - the International Tribunal for Violations of Humanitarian Law in the Former Yugoslavia*, American Journal of International Law, vol. 87, 1993.

<sup>10</sup>Good descriptions of recent humanitarian interventions are offered by James Mayall, *The New Interventionism 1991-1994 - United Nations experience in Cambodia, former Yugoslavia and Somalia*, Cambridge University Press, 1996; by Thomas G. Weiss and Kurt M. Campbell, *Military Humanitarianism*, Survival, vol. XXXIII, no. 5, September/October 1991; by Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, *Humanitarian Intervention in Contemporary Conflict - A Reconceptualization*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1996; by John Harriss ed., *The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention*, Pinter Publishers, London and New York, 1995, especially pp. 194-106. Jarat Chopra and Thomas G. Weiss examine the legal implications of humanitarian intervention (*Sovereignty is No Longer Sacrosanct: Codifying Humanitarian Intervention*, Ethics and International Relations, vol. 6, 1992) and Kelly Kate Pease and David P. Forsythe focus on the normative side of humanitarian intervention (*Human Rights, Humanitarian Intervention and World Politics*, Human Rights Quarterly, vol. 15, 1993).

<sup>11</sup>Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi, *War and Hunger - Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*. Save the Children, London, 1994, p. 229.

<sup>12</sup>See section IV, "Operational level".

ultimate motives behind the recent humanitarian interventions, they do not remove the fact that the Security Council has given an unprecedented focus on humanitarian issues in the 1990s.<sup>13</sup> Because the Security Council decisions mentioned above have been internationally sanctioned acts of force which - among potential security or geopolitical interests - have aimed to end grave humanitarian violations or to deliver relief aid to deprived areas, they include elements of forcible humanitarian action.

### **Restorative action**

Whether in El Salvador, Cambodia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Namibia, Angola or Mozambique<sup>14</sup>, the post-Cold War international community has initiated many operations to rebuild and stabilise war-torn societies. These operations fall into the category of restorative humanitarian action. They seek to deal with social, political and economic reconstruction after the war has ended, and to ameliorate the massive damages caused by fighting. Therefore they include such objectives as improvement of general security, establishment of legitimate political institutions, or the societal and economic recovery. Although restorative humanitarian action shares many objectives and instruments with preventive humanitarian action, in a temporal sense the two categories are opposites. Thus, the difference between preventive and restorative humanitarian action is as significant as the difference between conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

### **Relief action**

In addition to the five new forms of humanitarian action, traditional relief operations have greatly expanded in size and scope within the last decade. A good illustration of the increased role of relief action is the overall funding of relief agencies in the 1990s. "Reflecting the increased instability in the post cold war world", the *Reality of Aid 1996* states, "spending by official aid agencies on emergencies rose from 4.5 billion US dollars to about 6 billion US dollars between 1993 and 1994. It has quadrupled over a decade."<sup>15</sup> Relief funding reached its high point in the early 1990s and started to decline after 1993.<sup>16</sup> In 1994, almost one third of the Development Assistance Committee's member states decreased their *development* aid, with the result that overall spending on external aid was 56, 737 billion US dollars - the lowest figure for twenty years.<sup>17</sup> In the Netherlands, for example, growth in peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance has reduced the overall aid assistance by 32 million US dollars.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>"The opinions concerning humanitarian intervention depend where one stands", noted one researcher in humanitarian issues. "To some the UNSC Resolutions were a great legal precedent; to others, a necessary diplomatic compromise." (Interviews, the UK, March 1997) Also, Adam Roberts mentions the "unprecedented frequency" of Security Council actions that are directly linked to humanitarian issues. See *Humanitarian Action in War - Aid, protection and impartiality in a policy vacuum*, op.cit., p. 15.

<sup>14</sup>Nicole Ball, *The Challenge of Rebuilding War-Torn Societies*, in "Managing Global Chaos - Sources of and Responses to International Conflict", Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall eds., op.cit.

<sup>15</sup>Judith Randel and Tony German eds., *The Reality of Aid - An Independent Review of International Aid*. Eurostep and ICVA, Earthscan Publications, 1996, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup>Adam Roberts, op.cit., p. 17.

<sup>17</sup>The DAC is a special committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and it comprises of twenty-one donor states. Further references on financial trends: Jon Bennet and Mary Kayetisi-Blewitt, *Beyond "Working in Conflict" - Understanding Conflict and Building Peace*, Overseas Development Institute, London, 1996; Judith Randel, *Aid, Military and Humanitarian Assistance: An Attempt to Identify Recent*



To illustrate the financial trends further, official aid to nongovernmental organisations has skyrocketed in ten years from 32 million US dollars to 1 billion US dollars in 1994.<sup>19</sup> Since the NGOs added contract agencies in the South, they have become the fourth largest collective donors in the world. Whereas public donations (that is, funds from emergency appeals or public campaigns) to northern NGOs have decreased recently, direct funding of local (southern) NGOs has become popular among the government donor agencies.<sup>20</sup> As the governments have squeezed their overall aid budgets, intergovernmental organisations and financial institutions have suffered most from it: bilateral aid has become a more preferable solution than multilateral aid.<sup>21</sup>

All these forms of humanitarian action create a challenging yet ambiguous picture which ranges from refugee programmes to supply of food and medicine; from visits to prisoners of war to the monitoring of the general security situation; from conflict mediation to post-war reconstruction; or from war crime trials to peacekeeping operations. Behind this operational scene is an informal system of humanitarian actors (IGOs, NGOs, peacekeeping forces, donor agencies).<sup>22</sup> The system is seen to be governed by a general division of labour, shaping the task a certain type of actor may carry out in a certain type of situation<sup>23</sup> - and giving the humanitarian actors their source of power.

If the first change of the humanitarian system is the shift from simplicity to diversity, the second change is that diverse humanitarian operations are no longer separable from political or security scenes. The delivery of emergency aid is increasingly linked with refugee flows, peacekeeping, regional politics or the maintenance of local authority. Since it is difficult to define where humanitarian action starts and where it ends, one cannot but conclude that aid has become a part of the conflict. Local belligerents charge the aid agencies for protection; access to the conflict region, airfields or ports; for leasing apartments and so on. Mushrooming humanitarian actors and aims become a part of the dynamism within the war zone.

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*Trends*, Journal of International Development, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1994; John Borton, *Recent Trends in the International Relief System*, Disasters, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1993.

<sup>18</sup>Judith Randel, op.cit., p. 335.

<sup>19</sup>Jon Bennett and Mary Kayetisi-Blewitt, op.cit., p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>Jon Bennett and Mary Kayetisi-Blewitt, op.cit., pp. 12-13.

<sup>21</sup>Jon Bennett and Mary Kayetisi-Blewitt, op.cit., p. 12.

<sup>22</sup>See section II, "Changes among humanitarian actors".

<sup>23</sup>For example, the protective role of the UNCHR or the UN forces; the humanitarian, developmental or advocacy roles of the NGOs; the financial role of the donor agencies; the fact-finding or monitoring role of IGOs and NGOs and so on.

## II Changes among humanitarian actors

The changes in the humanitarian scene have created new demands and challenges for the humanitarian actors: few general changes have influenced all agencies operating in the conflict region. First of all, their mandates have expanded from the restricted authorisations common during the Cold War era.<sup>24</sup> As the states seem reluctant to deal with the recent complex emergencies, the expansion of mandates has been neither an intended nor controlled development. Hence the humanitarian agencies' limits, responsibilities and rights in the conflict region remain vague.

Furthermore, expanded mandates have given the humanitarian actors an unprecedented visibility both in the international arena and in the conflict region. In countries where the central authority has crumbled (say, Somalia or Rwanda), the humanitarian agencies have become de facto political actors. "Relief agencies are now empowered to make important political judgements, implicit and explicit, which go far beyond their traditional role", write Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar.<sup>25</sup> Yet, as humanitarian actors have gained political importance in unconventional conflicts, they have lost their image of neutrality - the very hallmark which traditionally has assured good relations with all parties to the conflict, and guaranteed the security of the relief workers.

But the changes have benefited some humanitarian actors more than others. Because their capabilities have dramatically changed in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, new relationships and hierarchies have emerged among them. The changes have boosted those who were quick to adapt to the new situation, and diminished the more inflexible. The following section describes briefly how the new security environment and enlarged humanitarian system have changed the roles of the IGOs, NGOs and the media.

### Intergovernmental organisations

Perhaps the greatest change among the intergovernmental organisations has been the revised position of the United Nations. Both the disappearance of the Cold War restraints within the Security Council and the states' passivity in peripheral conflicts raised expectations that a remodelled UN-system could respond to humanitarian crises and maintain international security. High expectations led to the revision of the traditional mandates and structures of the UN disaster response system.<sup>26</sup> Examples of new

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<sup>24</sup>Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar, *Humanitarianism Unbound? Current Dilemmas Facing Multi-Mandate Relief Operations in Political Emergencies*. African Rights, Discussion paper No. 5, November 1994, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup>Following writings highlight the UN debate: Roland Paris, *Blue Helmet Blues: The End of the UN as a Security Organization?* Washington Quarterly, Winter 1997, vol. 20, no. 1; Carl Kaysen and Georg W. Rathjens, *Send in the Troops: A UN Foreign Legion*, Washington Quarterly, vol. 20, no. 1, Winter 1997; Abba Evan, *The U.N. Idea Revisited*, Foreign Affairs, September/October 1995, vol. 74, no. 5; Paul Kennedy and Bruce Russett, *Reforming the United Nations*, Foreign Affairs, September/October 1995, vol. 74, no. 5; Yasushi Akashi, *The Limits of UN Diplomacy and the Future of Conflict Mediation*, Survival, vol. 37, no. 4, Winter 1995-1996; Gareth Evans, *Cooperating for Peace - the Global Agenda for the 1990s and Beyond*, Allen&Unwin Pty Ltd, St Leonards, NSW, 1993; Jesse Helms, *Saving the U.N. - A Challenge to the Next-Secretary General*, Foreign Affairs, September/October 1996, vol. 75, no. 5; Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "An Agenda For Peace": *One Year Later*, Orbis, Summer 1993, vol. 37, no. 3; Ingvar Carlsson, *The U.N. at 50: A Time to Reform*, Fall 1995, no. 100.

pressures are numerous: such as the 1991 General Assembly Resolution 46/182 creating a high-level emergency coordinator and the establishment of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs<sup>27</sup>; reduction of the UN finances and staff; calls to develop traditional peacekeeping into “peace-enforcement”<sup>28</sup>; or the changes in the UN’s operational style in the conflict region.<sup>29</sup> Yet, as the demands for change remained greater than the UN’s actual resources, high expectations led to pessimism and criticism about the UN’s ineffectiveness, lack of coordination, inconsistency or bureaucracy.

A further change in the intergovernmental level is growing presence of multinational military forces in humanitarian crises. “Since the breaching of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent end of the Cold War”, writes Roger Palin, “there has been a marked increase in attention paid to multinational military forces.”<sup>30</sup> Examples of increased multinational security orientation include the restructuring of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation<sup>31</sup>; the Partnership for Peace programme; the Combined Joint Task Force initiated in the 1994 NATO summit meeting<sup>32</sup>; the formation of the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps; or the 50,000 German, French, Belgian and Spanish soldiers constituting the Euro-Corps.<sup>33</sup> In a more humanitarian context, examples of increased multilateralism entail the UN/NATO operations in the former Yugoslavia; the coalition forces carrying out Operation Provide Comfort in Iraq; the multinational UNTAC mission dealing with the establishment of a legitimate government in Cambodia, or the US-led multinational forces that secured the delivery of humanitarian aid in Somalia and so on.<sup>34</sup> These operations and the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s

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<sup>27</sup>Several authors have focused on the origins and role of the DHA. See, for example, Paul Taylor, *Options for the reform of the international system humanitarian assistance*, in John Harriss ed., “The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention”, Pinter Publishers, London and New York, 1995; Cindy Collins and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Challenges and Intervention - World Politics and the Dilemmas of Help*, Westview Press, 1996; James Ingram, *The Future Architecture for International Humanitarian Assistance*, in Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear ed., *Humanitarianism Across Borders - Sustaining Civilians in Times of War*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1993; and Andrew S. Natsios, *The International Humanitarian Response System*, Parameters, Spring 1995.

<sup>28</sup>The most prominent demand was in the *Agenda for Peace*, where the former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali recommended that the Security Council “consider the utilization of peace-enforcement units in clearly defined circumstances and with their terms of reference specified in advance.” UN Documents S/26450 and A/48/403, March 14, 1994, para. 44. Also quoted by Adam Roberts in *The Crisis of UN Peacekeeping*, in Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall eds., op.cit., p. 304.

<sup>29</sup>Jon Bennett, *Recent Trends in Relief Aid: Structural Crisis and the Quest for a New Consensus*, in John Bennett ed., “Meeting Needs - NGO Coordination in Practise”, ICVA, Earthscan Publications Ltd., London, 1995.

<sup>30</sup>Roger Palin, *Multinational Military Forces: Problems and Prospects*, Adelphi Paper 294, Oxford University Press and the IISS, 1995, London, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup>Illustrated, for example, in NATO’s 1990 “London Declaration”, which took steps to form multinational structures. Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>32</sup>Roger Palin, op.cit., p. 65.

<sup>33</sup>Roger Palin, op.cit., p. 63.

<sup>34</sup>Sources: Martha Finnemore, *Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention*, in P.J. Katzenstein ed., “The Culture of National Security”, Columbia University Press; Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, *Humanitarian Challenges and Intervention - World Politics and Dilemmas of Help*, Westview Press, 1996. However, there are differing opinions about how humanitarian these multinational operations actually were.

call for permanent UN forces<sup>35</sup> highlight the expanding interaction between the humanitarian and military actors in the post-Cold War conflicts.

Another new player in the humanitarian scene of the 1990s is the EC Humanitarian Office, ECHO. Created in March 1992 after the Kurdish refugee crisis, the aims of the new humanitarian agency included the “heightening the effectiveness of the Community’s relief operations and contributing to a clearer perception of its overall humanitarian assistance”.<sup>36</sup> Although its primary role was to distribute EU relief aid<sup>37</sup> and to coordinate between EU donor states, ECHO has also enhanced its operational role in humanitarian crisis - a trend which “is seen by some NGOs and the ICRC as a threat to their own role in relief operations”.<sup>38</sup>

### **Nongovernmental organisations**

However, perhaps the most significant expansion in the humanitarian system has been that of the nongovernmental organisations. The emergence of the international NGOs during the past two decades is seen as “one of the most striking global phenomena of the late 20th Century”<sup>39</sup>, which is “paralleling, although not equalling, the expanding role of intergovernmental organisations in the political sphere and rapid globalization in the economic sphere”.<sup>40</sup> The Union of International Associations listed in 1993-94 over 15 000 NGOs.<sup>41</sup> That figure includes, for example, “4,000 development NGOs in OECD member countries alone...dispensing almost three billion US dollars’ worth of assistance”<sup>42</sup>; the 1500 NGOs registered with the UN system<sup>43</sup>; the 130 NGOs which surfaced within a month in Rwanda in 1994 and so on.<sup>44</sup> The quantitative rise of NGOs has been spectacular during the 1980s and 1990s. In France

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<sup>35</sup>Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping*, United Nations, New York, 1992.

<sup>36</sup>ECHO, 1995. Quoted by Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, op.cit, p. 117. Further sources on the origins and tasks of the ECHO: Jon Bennett, *Recent Trends in Relief Aid: Structural Crisis and the Quest for a New Consensus*, in Jon Bennett ed., “Meeting Needs - NGO Coordination in Practise”, Earthscan Publications Ltd., London, 1995; and John Borton, op.cit.

<sup>37</sup>In 1994 it provided relief assistance in 60 countries, totalling some 970 million US dollars. Inter Press Service, 23 May 1995; also quoted by Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, op.cit., p. 117.

<sup>38</sup>John Borton, op.cit., p. 198.

<sup>39</sup>Rice and Ritchie quoted by Bonnie Koenig, *The Management of international non-governmental organisations in the 1990s*. Transnational Associations, 2, 1996, p. 66.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup>*The Yearbook of International Associations*, Brussels, Union of International Associations, 1993/1994; also quoted by Leon Gorkender and Thomas G. Weiss, *NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, London, 1996, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup>J. Clark quoted by Michael Edwards and David Hulme, *Making Difference - NGOs and development in a changing world*. Earthscan Publications, 1992, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup>Andrew S. Natsios, *NGOs and the UN System in Complex Emergencies*. In Thomas G. Weiss and Leon Gorkender eds., “NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance”, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder and London, 1996, p. 68.

<sup>44</sup>*After Rwanda - The Coordination of United Nations Humanitarian Assistance*, Jim Whitman and David

54,000 new organisations have been established since 1987. Democratisation has created 21,000 NGOs in the Philippines and 27,000 NGOs in Chile.<sup>45</sup>

The proliferation of *humanitarian* NGOs<sup>46</sup> has changed from a small community into a complex set of actors, that includes humanitarian actors from quasi-governmental agencies to single-issue organisations. The international NGOs have grown into massive conglomerations, which have been rendered business-wise and market efficient. As the gigantic international NGOs<sup>47</sup> today more resemble IGOs than smaller NGOs, they have started to challenge the supremacy of the IGOs.

“In the future, the IGOs like the UNCHR and the DHA will be much more like the international NGOs”, observed one relief official. “If the UN continues to have financial problems, it will have to come down to the same level as the NGOs in competing for funds. This means that the humanitarian field is polarised between the big titans and small NGOs. (The small agencies) are these young people who set up offices in Washington, and who are aggressive and professional. They lobby only for one issue and they do it well.”<sup>48</sup>

A further example of the NGOs’ rise in the late 1980s and early 1990s is that the “short-term money available to NGOs - albeit mostly Northern NGOs - exceeded even that of the UN”, writes Jon Bennett<sup>49</sup>. In 1989 180,000 tonnes of food aid was channelled through the European NGOs, but two years later that amount had increased to 450,000 tonnes.<sup>50</sup> In 1993 the US government channelled 17% non-military aid through the NGOs, yet in 1995 the US Vice-President Gore announced that in few years the figure would be more than 50%<sup>51</sup>. Expansion of humanitarian actors (both the NGOs and IGOs) has led to increased competition for visibility and funds.<sup>52</sup>

The NGOs’ flexibility, quick response, disregard of sovereign borders, on-the-ground experience and lack of bureaucracy have made them the greatest beneficiaries of the current humanitarian system.

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Pocock eds., Macmillan Press Ltd., London and Basingstoke, 1996, p. 136.

<sup>45</sup>These trends are mentioned by the former UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros -Ghali, in Thomas G. Weiss and Leon Gorkender eds., *NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance*, op.cit., p. 7.

<sup>46</sup>Briefly defined, “humanitarianism” means that the agency is dealing with conflict-related issues, either in concrete operations or in its objectives. Thus, the focus is more on emergency action than development.

<sup>47</sup>Of international NGOs, “perhaps 10 US and another 10 European NGOs receive 75% of all public funds spent by NGOs in complex emergencies”, writes Andrew S. Natsios. See *NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance*, op.cit., pp. 68-69. These giants entail such agencies as, say, CARE, Oxfam, Save the Children Médecins Sans Frontières and so on.

<sup>48</sup>If the humanitarian system is going to be polarised, the only way it can survive financially is to be located either at the bottom or at the peak of the pyramid. Source: Interviews, Geneva, February 1997.

<sup>49</sup>Jon Bennett, *Meeting Needs - NGO Coordination in Practice*, Earthscan Publications, London, 1995, p. xii.

<sup>50</sup>John Harriss ed., *Politics of Humanitarian Intervention*, op.cit. p. 72.

<sup>51</sup>David Sogge ed., *Compassion and Calculation - The Business of Private Foreign Aid*, Transnational Institute, Pluto Press, London, Chicago, 1996, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup>Thus, despite increased cooperation, tension or mutual suspicion characterise interorganisational relations. In Somalia, a UN official was quoted saying that the “UN has two enemies in Mogadishu, General Aideed and the Save the Children. And the General is easier to deal with.” *Politics of Humanitarian Intervention*, op.cit, p. 74.

Moreover, the increased scepticism of bureaucratic intergovernmental humanitarian agencies has led the governments to favour the relatively cheaper NGOs.<sup>53</sup>

The NGOs' qualitative role has changed significantly during the last decade or so, but initial enthusiasm about the growing visibility of humanitarian NGOs has shifted to a more sceptical view.<sup>54</sup> Yet, whatever their usefulness, the NGOs are more powerful than ever before. The symbiotic relationship with the media made them visible advocates of humanitarian issues. Growing use of information technology and official links (whether governmental or intergovernmental) enabled the NGOs to be more effective in campaigning, lobbying or fund-raising. The links between nongovernmental and intergovernmental organisations have become so complex and frequent<sup>55</sup> that coordination of these relations is one of the most acute problems of the humanitarian system. "The last decade has seen a discernible shift in favour of closer, more routine cooperation among those who deal with the ever increasing demands of humanitarian assistance", writes Jon Bennett.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, closer links between official bodies and the NGOs have increased pressures to improve the NGOs' cooperation, accountability and professionalism.

As mentioned, the lack of ability of the IGOs to deal with complex emergencies, quick action and crossborder operations has increased the status of the NGOs. Yet an improved status has shifted the style and tasks of the international NGOs closer to those of the IGOs<sup>57</sup> and governments. In Ethiopia, for example, the humanitarian NGOs negotiated an agreement between the combatants to get the humanitarian aid across the front line.<sup>58</sup> In Bosnia and in most of the African conflicts the power relations between the NGOs and the crumbling local authority are shifting in favour of the former. Hence, local actors in the conflict region are at times unable to see any difference between diverse humanitarian agencies, whether nongovernmental or intergovernmental.

### **International media**

The rise of the humanitarian NGOs has coincided with the heightened importance of international media with regard to humanitarian crises. Unrestrained from the Cold War phraseology, equipped with the latest communications technology, and freer than ever before to penetrate to the war zone, the international media plays a pivotal role in the humanitarian system. From a humanitarian perspective the

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<sup>53</sup>*Humanitarianism Across Borders - Sustaining Civilians in Times of War*, op.cit., p. 163; and *Recent Trends in the International Relief System*, op.cit., p. 193.

<sup>54</sup>The NGOs operational problems are outlined in the section IV.

<sup>55</sup>An example of growing NGO-presence in the UN-system is the establishment of Inter-Agency Standing Committee in 1992. Alternatively, an example of heightened links between the EU and NGOs is the fact that in 1994 ECHO sub-contracted approximately 80 NGOs. (See ICVA/Eurostep/Actionaid, 1994).

<sup>56</sup>Jon Bennett ed., *Meeting Needs - NGO Coordination in Practice*, Earthscan Publications Ltd., London, 1995, Introduction, p. i.

<sup>57</sup>An interesting parallel development has been that such intergovernmental humanitarian agencies as UNICEF has become more "NGO-like" in visibility and style - and in their occasional readiness to carry out cross-border operations.

<sup>58</sup>*After Rwanda - the Coordination of United Nations Humanitarian Assistance*, op.cit., p. 107.

role of the media is to focus public attention on a specific humanitarian crisis and, through reporting, to pressure the governments to take action.

Examples from the mid-1980s onwards illustrate the media's increasing influence on the relief system: the BBC 1984 film on the Ethiopian famine and hugely successful rock concerts<sup>59</sup>; Roy Gutman's articles in *Newsday* and ITN's shocking television images in 1992 of the Serb-controlled concentration camps in the former Yugoslavia<sup>60</sup>; the public outcry with regard to the Kurds in Northern Iraq in 1991; images of starving civilians in Somalia or Rwandan refugee camps after the 1994 massacre - and finally, the immediate television coverage of the Sarajevo "marketplace massacre" in 1994.

Nonetheless, the impact of the media has been both simplified and exaggerated.<sup>61</sup> Media is not a unitary actor with fixed interests and patterns of behaviour. Instead, the term 'media' refers to a cluster of actors - broadcast and print corporations - which all have different audiences, constraints, interests and resources. Although the media does not control the relief operations, it controls the global transmission of information concerning humanitarian crises. If to have information is to have power, the media is too influential a determinant of the relief system to be left outside.<sup>62</sup> Unlike the humanitarian agencies, which have a direct task in the conflict region (that is, to limit humanitarian suffering), the media has no explicit aim other than innocently to "observe" and "report" on what is taking place. But as soon as the conflict is transferred to media language, it starts to live a life of its own. Due to journalists' lack of writing time, editorial pressures on broadcast time or article size, lack of knowledge about the language, history and politics about the conflict region, the issues are simplified and categorised into easily digestible form. This is why the "actual war" and the "image of war" are not necessarily the same things. Yet, ironically, both of them are essential for the relief system to operate. Therefore, the media is a crucial determinant of the current humanitarian system; well revealed by phrasings as "the CNN-effect" or "public outcry".

### ***III. Political background***

The relief system does not exist in a vacuum. The size and resources of humanitarian organisations - or multiple links with other international actors - reflect the prevailing nature of international relations. They mirror which issues are given preference, how international treaties and norms are interpreted, and how power is diffused between the state and non-state actors.

Hence, the humanitarian system cannot be separated from a wider political and economic context. Financial arrangements between the North and South and the general state of global economy effect the

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<sup>59</sup>Martin Griffiths, Iain Levine and Mark Weller, *Sovereignty and Suffering*, in John Harriss ed., "Politics of Humanitarian Intervention", op.cit., p. 64.

<sup>60</sup>Warren P. Strobel, *The Media and U.S. Policies Toward Intervention*, in Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall eds., "Managing Global Chaos - Sources of and Responses to International Conflict", op.cit., p. 367.

<sup>61</sup>For a simple causal mechanism of media's role, see Nick Gowing's description: 1. television imports images of atrocities, 2. journalists and opinion leaders criticise the government policies in the media, 3. pressure on the governments "to do something" becomes unbearable, 4. the government "does something". In *National Interest, Humanitarianism or CNN: What Triggers UN peace Enforcement After the Cold War?*, Peter Viggo Jakobsen, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 33. no. 2, 1996, page 206.

<sup>62</sup>John Harriss, op.cit., pp. 4-5, 17-31.

resources flowing to the humanitarian system. Changing military and security factors determine where the humanitarian agencies operate and how. The diplomatic atmosphere and the gradually changing international practices shape how such issues as sovereignty or humanitarianism are addressed, or if they are addressed at all. In order to link the post-Cold War political and humanitarian developments into a comprehensive portrayal, it is best to outline those political factors that had the greatest impact on the humanitarian system.

### **What kind of change?**

Evidently a causal link subsists between the high political background and the humanitarian system. So the first question is, how did the political background change the humanitarian system? Or, to phrase the same issue differently, what kind of political developments have affected humanitarian action?

In the conflict region, the first development is the increase of certain war-related occurrences. Although internal conflicts have steadily risen after the Second World War, many internal conflicts during the Cold War period were clashes within the political system that easily became internationalised.<sup>63</sup> In contrast, the majority of the post-Cold War internal conflicts were collapses of entire political systems, reflecting the judgement that “there seem to be more territories that no longer are under de facto central government authority, but where independence has not been internationally recognised”.<sup>64</sup> Serious erosion or complete collapse of central authority makes it difficult to limit the destructiveness of fighting, or to protect the civilian population. Thus the relative number of civilian casualties has been rising: in Somalia and Rwanda they constituted 95% of all casualties.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the number of people affected by humanitarian crises have increased from 100 million in 1980 to over 310 million in 1991.<sup>66</sup> “Refugee numbers in the same decade more than doubled to 17.5 million”, writes Jon Bennett, “and in 1992 the number of internally displaced people stood at 24 million in 31 countries”.<sup>67</sup> Thus, a new term, “complex emergency”, emerged in the scholarly literature to describe conflicts which are linked with food insecurity and starvation, massive population displacement, collapse of domestic economy, ethnic and religious violence and natural disasters.<sup>68</sup> The steady increase of complex emergencies in the 1980s - and especially in the 1990s<sup>69</sup> - has increased the demand for humanitarian action.

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<sup>63</sup>Adam Roberts: *Humanitarian Action in War*, op.cit., p. 10.

<sup>64</sup>Peter Wallerstein and Margareta Sollenberg, *After the Cold War: Emerging Patterns of Armed Conflict 1989-94*, Journal of Peace Research, vol. 32, no. 3, 1995, p. 348. As examples of this trend between 1989-1994, Wallerstein and Sollenberg give such regions as the Kurdish areas in Northern Iraq, Somaliland in Somalia, Jaffna region in Sri Lanka, Nagorno-Karabach in Azerbaijan, or the Serb-controlled areas in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

<sup>65</sup>Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear, *Mercy Under Fire - War and the Global Humanitarian Community*, Westview Press, 1995, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup>IFRC, *World Disaster Report*, Geneva, 1993; or Jon Bennett, *Recent Trends in Relief Aid: Structural Crisis and the Quest for A New Consensus*, in Jon Bennett ed., “Meeting Needs - NGO Coordination in Practise”, Earthscan Publications Ltd., London, 1995.

<sup>67</sup>Jon Bennett, *Recent Trends in Relief Aid: Structural Crisis and the Quest for a New Consensus*, op.cit., p. xiii.

<sup>68</sup>For descriptions and definitions, see footnote 1. Complex emergencies were mentioned in the beginning of this article.

<sup>69</sup>There has been a steady rise in conflict-related deaths since 1945. The peak in conflicts with more than 1,000



The erosion or collapse of central authority in the conflict region are consequences of reactivated self-determination claims.<sup>70</sup> Even if self-determination claims are nothing new in international relations,<sup>71</sup> recent claims differ from their Cold War counterparts.<sup>72</sup> The break-up of the Soviet Union (and the explosion of independence movements that followed) seriously fragmented central authorities, and initiated a vacuum of power that all local actors competed to fill. Yet self-determination claims have not just risen quantitatively, but also changed qualitatively. As self-determination claims during the Cold War were linked to the superpower antagonism, the superpowers accepted only anti-colonial independence claims.<sup>73</sup> Because this international restraint gradually faded in the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s, “the relations between the states and the rights of the citizens”<sup>74</sup> were fundamentally changed.<sup>75</sup> From the point of view of humanitarian operations, increased self-determination claims, fragmenting local authorities and vacuums of power meant that the humanitarian space<sup>76</sup> became both larger and more complex than ever before.<sup>77</sup> “Before there were only two dividing lines in the conflict region”, notes a

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casualties was in 1992-1993. *Mercy Under Fire - War and Global Humanitarian Community*, op.cit., p. 17. Peter Wallerstein and Margareta Sollenberg specify: “The number of deaths from interstate armed conflict after 1815 peaked with the Second World War, while deaths from intrastate violence peaked in the most recent period. For the first time, in the period 1975-1994, intrastate deaths exceeded the interstate war deaths.” *The End of International War? Armed Conflict 1989- 95*, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 33, no. 3, 1996, p. 356. “Between 1978 and 1985”, writes Andrew S. Natsios, “there were an average of five complex emergencies each year. In 1989, the number grew to fourteen. In 1994, there were twenty.” *From Massacres to Genocide - The Media, Public Policy and Humanitarian Crises*, op.cit., p.150. Also, see *Politics of Humanitarian Intervention*, op.cit., p. 1; or *The International Humanitarian Response System*, Andrew S. Natsios, Parameters, Spring 1995, p. 68.

<sup>70</sup>Examples of self-determination claims in the 1980s and 1990s include the Kurds and the Shia in Iraq; the Palestinians; the republics of the former Soviet Union; the Kashmir and Sikh insurgents in India; the Basque liberation movement in Spain and the IRA in the Northern Ireland; Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka; the Eritrean Liberation Front in Ethiopia; the republics of the former Yugoslavia and so on.

<sup>71</sup>Nevertheless, the current claimants have a very traditional aim: i.e., to establish a legitimate government.

<sup>72</sup>*Self-Determination in the New World Order*, Morton H. Halperin, David J. Scheffer and Patricia L. Small, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 1992.

<sup>73</sup>Chapter 2, *Self-Determination Claims During the Cold War*, in Morton H. Halperin, David J. Scheffer, and Patricia L. Small, “Self-Determination in the New World Order”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 1992.

<sup>74</sup>Martin Griffiths, Iain Levine and Mark Weller, *Sovereignty and suffering*, in “The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention”, op.cit., p. 81.

<sup>75</sup>Some observers saw the revival of self-determination claims as a signal of a fundamental watershed in international relations. “The start of the 1990s has thus witnessed the culmination of the decolonization process that started at the same time as the Cold War and has now pushed it to one side”, writes Lawrence Freedman. *Order and Disorder in the New World Order*, *Foreign Affairs*, 1991/1992, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup>Briefly, Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss define humanitarian space as the available access to vulnerable populations; it is a dynamic concept which changes according to political and security developments in the conflict region. *Mercy Under Fire - War and the Global Humanitarian Community*. Westview Press, op.cit., p.38.

<sup>77</sup>The firmness of local authority effects the ultimate limits of humanitarian action. For example, it effects the scale of humanitarian operations; the possibility of military intervention, the necessity of gaining permission from local authorities, the number of belligerents with whom the humanitarian actors must negotiate, and the number of humanitarian agencies working on the ground. The fewer limits humanitarian operations have, the more humanitarian

relief worker. “Now the lines are complex. Instead of one issue, there are several intertwined issues. Instead of few parties to the conflict, the humanitarians must negotiate with several actors. And that just by negotiating with the belligerents, the humanitarians themselves modify the conflict situation.”<sup>78</sup>

A shift to international level shows two contradictory developments, both which have influenced the quantitative and qualitative expansion of humanitarian action. The first development hints to a looser interpretation of sovereignty and non-intervention,<sup>79</sup> growing multilateralism, or to attempts to build international order according to democratic principles. Indeed, the potential legal and political importance of the UNSC resolution 688<sup>80</sup>, increased references to humanitarian factors as justifications for international action<sup>81</sup>, or conditions of “good governance” and democratisation in change for financial assistance signal that the governments at least acknowledge new issues in their foreign policy agendas. Thus, some observers have spoken about emerging “moral interdependence”<sup>82</sup>, or about “irresistible shift in public attitudes...toward the defence of the oppressed”.<sup>83</sup> They have viewed the post-Cold War era as a “window of opportunity”<sup>84</sup> that is characterised by a new international humanitarian duty<sup>85</sup> and normative standards.<sup>86</sup>

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issues are intertwined with political issues.

<sup>78</sup>“Before when the humanitarians only negotiated with the states, they knew the limits; they knew that they got what they were promised”, added another humanitarian. “But what about conflicts when you do not even know who the authorities are?” Interviews, Geneva, 1997.

<sup>79</sup>Mario Bettati describes how the relationship between the rights of the states and of the individuals have changed after the WW II; from the development of the human rights treaties to crossborder operations and to humanitarian intervention. *Le droit d'ingérence - mutation de l'ordre international*, Éditions Odile Jacob, Paris, 1996, pp. 11-245.

<sup>80</sup>Examined, for example, by Jarat Chopra and Thomas G. Weiss in *Sovereignty Is No Longer Sacrosanct: Codifying Humanitarian Intervention*, Ethics and International Affairs, 1992, vol. 6. See also James Mayall, *Non-Intervention, self-determination and the “new world”*, International Affairs, 1991, vol. 67, no. 3; James Mayall, *The New Interventionism 1991-1994 - United Nations experience in Cambodia, former Yugoslavia and Somalia*, Cambridge University Press, 1996 (esp. introductory chapter); John Chipman, *The Future of Strategic Studies: Beyond Even Grand Strategy*, Survival, the IISS Quarterly, Spring 1992, pp. 117-118; and Martin Griffiths, Iain Levine and Mark Weller, *Sovereignty and Suffering*, in “The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention”, op.cit..

<sup>81</sup>Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian Action in War - Aid, protection and impartiality in a policy vacuum*, op.cit., pp. 15-16; and Martha Finnemore, *Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention*, in P.J. Katzenstein ed., “The Culture of National Security”, Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 180-185.

<sup>82</sup>Jack Donnelly, *International Human Rights: A Regime Analysis*, International Organisation, vol. 40, pp. 599-642. Also quoted in Thomas G. Weiss, David P. Forsythe and Roger A. Coate, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, Westview Press, 1994, p. 110.

<sup>83</sup>Former United Nations Secretary General Javier Pèrez de Cuellar quoted in Kurt M. Campbell and Thomas G. Weiss, *Military humanitarianism*, op.cit., p. 455.

<sup>84</sup>Frederick C. Cuny, *Humanitarian Assistance in the Post-Cold War Era*, in “Humanitarianism Across Borders - Sustaining Civilians in Times of War”, op.cit., p. 151.

<sup>85</sup>Mario Bettati, *The Right to Interfere*, The Washington Post, April 14, 1991, p. B7. See also Mario Bettati, *Le droit d'ingérence - mutation de l'ordre international*, Éditions Odile Jacob, Paris, 1996.

<sup>86</sup>Martha Finnemore, *Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention*, in “The Culture of National Security”, op.cit., pp. 153-156.

Paradoxically, the second development is international isolationism. “Perhaps there is a such thing as a rising transnational solidarity”, observed one scholar. “But if that is true, it is led by the NGOs and the media - and there are no political structures to match it.”<sup>87</sup> Although the states pay more tribute to humanitarianism, in many cases it serves their interests to do so, and although the states have broader foreign policy agendas than during the Cold War, they are also more reluctant to take direct action in muddled and perplexing internal conflicts. “By the end of 1993 there were clear signs that the governments of the major powers were more interested in limiting than extending their international commitments”, writes James Mayall.<sup>88</sup> The priority of the major states has shifted from foreign affairs to domestic issues. Moreover, domestic policies of the Northern governments have entailed structural adjustment programs; that is, heavy reductions in public expenditure and reductions in the size and scope of state institutions.<sup>89</sup> As a consequence, the states’ readiness to pay the cost of internationalism and humanitarianism is declining, just as “their strategic and commercial interest in the poorer countries is declining”.<sup>90</sup> In most humanitarian crises the governments have preferred an indirect role of a donor, delegating the operational role to the intergovernmental or nongovernmental organisations. Therefore, alongside the states’ newly created moral consciousness persist hard-headed and pragmatic calculations. To apply the words of Robert Tucker in a humanitarian context, the states’ foreign policies within complex emergencies are contradictions between a new priority on humanitarian issues, and an aversion to bear costs of this priority.<sup>91</sup> As puzzling as it may seem, *both* international trends - solidarism and

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<sup>87</sup>Interviews, the UK, 1997.

<sup>88</sup>*The New Interventionism 1991-1994 - United Nations Experience in Cambodia, Former Yugoslavia and Somalia*, op.cit., p. 1.

<sup>89</sup>Mark Robinson, *Privatising the Voluntary Sector*, in David Hulme and Michael Edwards eds., “NGOs, States and Donors - Too Close for Comfort?” Save the Children, London, 1997, p. 61.

<sup>90</sup>Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar, *Humanitarianism Unbound?*, op.cit., p. 6.

<sup>91</sup>Robert Tucker’s observation actually dealt with the current US foreign policy, of which the fundamental problem is “the contradiction between the persisting desire to remain the premier global power and an ever-deepening aversion to bear the costs of this position.” See Robert W. Tucker, *The Future of Contradiction*, National Interest, Spring 1996, vol. 43, p. 20.

isolationism - have expanded the resources and scope of the humanitarian actors. Since the governments have both given greater visibility to humanitarian issues and avoided taking direct action in recent crises, the main emissaries of humanitarian operations have been the intergovernmental and nongovernmental organisations.

### **Why change?**

Yet the previous political developments only describe some factual occurrences taking place in the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s. They neither explain why these particular developments should be linked with humanitarian action, nor do they answer why change occurred in the first place.

The second question is, therefore, why did the political background change the humanitarian system? Admittedly, there is no single answer to this question. The two explanations briefly described here approach the question from opposite sides. If nothing else, they show the difficulty of linking system-level political changes with concrete humanitarian action.

The first view maintains that since the Cold War superpowers had strategic interests to keep humanitarian operations strictly outside the political sphere, humanitarian action expanded as an outcome to the collapsing bipolarity. "During the Cold War, a small and sharply-circumscribed space was labelled as 'humanitarian'. The space was defined by western governments and host governments, in ways that suited their political interests", write Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar.<sup>92</sup> Ironically, if humanitarian action was curbed, it was also unambiguous and clear. All humanitarian agencies knew "the rules of the game", and with whom to negotiate in order to operate in the conflict region.<sup>93</sup> Since the states gave only limited mandates to the humanitarian actors, the international humanitarian system remained restrained - both in number of actors or in resources, and in objectives or style.

The collapse of East-West antagonism means that a security straightjacket no longer overshadows the humanitarian sphere. There has been more open discussion about human rights, humanitarianism, sovereignty or security issues, without the debates escalating into ideological confrontations. Yet it also means that the major states are indifferent about commercially or strategically unimportant conflicts. As the states have been reluctant to take direct action in such conflicts as Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia, "alongside the growth of humanitarian action there has been a policy vacuum".<sup>94</sup> The policies of the states (and thus, international organisations) have been ad hoc or short term responses to the sporadic developments in the conflict regions. Lack of strategic interests implies that there are no clear security principles or policy instruments.<sup>95</sup> Yet, to follow this logic to the end, one can only conclude that the current expansion of humanitarian action is a consequence of deficient political action. Humanitarian action has become a substitute for direct and effective political measures.<sup>96</sup> The increase of relief

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<sup>92</sup>*Humanitarianism Unbound? Current Dilemmas Facing Multi-Mandate Relief Operations in Political Emergencies*, op.cit., p. 4.

<sup>93</sup>Interviews, February 1997: the ICRC, ICVA, CRS, UN.

<sup>94</sup>Adam Roberts, op.cit., p. 9.

<sup>95</sup>Lawrence Freedman, op. cit., pp. 28-35.

<sup>96</sup>"The spirit of Geneva is that of Machiavelli", noted one relief official in Geneva; a comment which highlights well the current pessimism of the humanitarian agencies. Interviews in Geneva, February, 1997, and in Oxford and London, March, 1997.

operations, write Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal, “and the western disengagement from poor countries are two sides of the same coin”.<sup>97</sup>

The second view holds that humanitarian action has proliferated due to the changing norms and practices in international relations. For example, the post-1945 period shows that humanitarianism has developed according to prevailing international circumstances: from non-material intervention<sup>98</sup> to charitable intervention<sup>99</sup>, and finally, to forced intervention<sup>100</sup>. What is more, humanitarian actors have not just been passive recipients of resources and authorisations. As the NGOs’ cross-border operations in the late 1970s and 1980s highlight,<sup>101</sup> they have actively pushed for change. Similarly, the post-WW II human rights regime has prospered because the non-state actors have been able to mobilise public opinion, and to pressure the governments to respond to human rights violations. The post-war human rights regime has both affected and benefited from the changing lobbying, advocacy and consultancy practises between the states and international organisations.

Heightened visibility of humanitarianism and humanitarian actors in the 1990s indicate that “the interactions between and among three sets of outside actors responding to civil wars: the media, civilian (from both NGOs and the UN) as well as military actors and governmental policy makers...have quickened and sharpened”.<sup>102</sup> The states’ ad hoc security policies in the 1990s highlight, first and foremost, their incapability to use old, state-centric foreign policy instruments in an altered international environment.<sup>103</sup> The heightened influence of the media and public opinion<sup>104</sup> also explains why the states’ policies post-Cold War conflicts are so fluctuating. Because the current security problems include a diverse set of non-state or normative questions, and because the states are handicapped in dealing with

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<sup>97</sup>*Humanitarianism Unbound? Current Dilemmas Facing Multi-Mandate Relief Operations in Political Emergencies*, op.cit., p. 6.

<sup>98</sup>Mario Bettati, *Le Droit d'ingèrence - Mutation de l'ordre international*, Éditions Odile Jacob, Paris, 1996, pp. 11-48. Non-material intervention, *l'ingèrence immatérielle*, refers to the postwar human rights treaties (ibid., p. 44) and to the first transnational humanitarian operations.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., pp. 51-139. *L'ingèrence caritative*, charitable intervention, refers to the neutral and practical postwar humanitarian operations. Their steady growth and the emergence of secular cross-borderism highlights the gradual development of charitable intervention.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., pp. 143- 239. *L'ingèrence forcée* refers to humanitarian interventions from the late-1980s onwards.

<sup>101</sup>For example, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan. Jon Bennett, *Recent Trends in Relief Aid: Structural Crisis and the Quest for a New Consensus*, in “Meeting Needs - NGO Coordination in Practise”, Earthscan Publications Ltd., London, 1995.

<sup>102</sup>This, the authors write, is due to changes in communications technology. Robert I. Rotberg and Thomas G. Weiss, op.cit., p. 2.

<sup>103</sup>The states’ inactivity or unsystematic responses may be viewed both as a sign of indifference or as a sign of confusion. Indifference would be a consequence of changed power relations, creating a power vacuum in the conflict level. Conversely, confusion would be a consequence of changing social circumstances, creating an institutional vacuum in the conflict level.

<sup>104</sup>“The public has an extraordinary capacity to demonstrate its concern as long as the information gets through”, observed a director of a major relief agency. (Quoted in *From Massacres to Genocide - The Media, Public Policy and Humanitarian Crises*, op.cit., p. 58.) However, the influence of the media (and public opinion) is limited to crises which threaten the major’ states geopolitical interests. Ibid., p. 153.

these issues, the non-state actors have presented the governments new models and rationales in order to operate in the changed international environment<sup>105</sup> - and one of the new principles is that of humanitarianism. Yet if the governments' security policies have expanded, it means that the strict separation of humanitarian and security spheres is no longer valid. The links between humanitarian and security spheres, or between the international agencies and states, indicate that humanitarianism is momentous in international relations in its own right.

Obviously the two approaches create opposing views of the post-Cold War humanitarian scene. In order to find out how well they match with the empirical level it is best to turn to the operational level of humanitarian actions.

#### ***IV. Operational level***

Humanitarian operations in Iraq, Somalia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia are among the most cited cases of widened humanitarian action.

##### **Iraq**

"From a humanitarian perspective", Cindy Collins and Thomas G. Weiss write, "the Gulf conflict actually consisted of three distinct crises."<sup>106</sup> The first crisis took place in August 1990, when 300,000 refugees from Iraq and Kuwait fled to Jordan. The second consisted of the conflict between Iraq and the US -led allied coalition, as the latter party was authorised by the UNSC Resolution 678 to use all necessary means against Iraq. The third crisis followed Iraq's defeat and the cease-fire in February, 1991, when approximately two million<sup>107</sup> people fled Saddam Hussein's repression into Iran and Turkey.

The first two crises evoked confused and disarranged humanitarian responses. Although the UNCHR was assigned as a lead agency, the UN's performance in the two crises clearly revealed the requirement for co-ordination.<sup>108</sup> The UN was also criticised for the delayed response, and for organising the humanitarian response according to the political interests of the major donors.<sup>109</sup> In contrast, the humanitarian response in April 1991 to the third crisis was different. As an external military

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<sup>105</sup> "Much of international relations theory rests on the assumption that states know what they want", writes Martha Finnemore. "Instead, state preferences are malleable. States may not always know what they want and are receptive to teaching about what are appropriate and useful actions to take." *National Interests and International Society*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1996, p. 11.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, op.cit., p. 74. Other sources on humanitarian action in Iraq: James Mayall, *Non-Intervention, self-determination and the "new world order"*, International Affairs, 1991, vol.67, no. 3; John Borton, *Recent Trends in the International System*, op.cit., pp. 194-195; Thomas G. Weiss and Kurt M. Campbell, op.cit., pp. 456-457; Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian War: military intervention and human rights*, International Affairs, 1993, vol. 69, no. 3, pp. 436-439; Thomas G. Weiss, David P. Forsythe, Roger A. Coate, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, Westview Press, 1994, pp. 68-72.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins estimate the number of refugees was 2.5 million. Op.cit., p. 74. Yet, according to John Borton, 1.9 million people fled Iraq. Op.cit., p. 194.

<sup>108</sup> Indeed, the experience of these two conflict influenced the creation of the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, op.cit., p. 76.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

intervention for humanitarian causes was sanctioned by the UNSC Resolution 688, approximately 13,000 US soldiers and 10,000 soldiers from 12 other nations conveyed 25 million pounds of emergency aid to Northern Iraq.<sup>110</sup> The delivery of relief aid entailed close interaction and cooperation between the UN agencies, the international NGOs and the multinational military forces. Furthermore, the military forces established safe havens in Northern Iraq so that the Kurds could transfer to areas covered from the Iraqi regime's aggression. Yet if the Operation Provide Comfort was distinctive in its legal mandate and massiveness, it also occurred in an exceptional political context: the collapse of the Soviet Union provided new consensus in the Security Council, unanimously condemning the Iraqi actions.

## Somalia

The success of the Operation Desert Storm in the Gulf war and massive media coverage of the Somali people's suffering were the chief generators of humanitarian action in Somalia. Even though the fall of General Mohammed Siad Barre in January 1991 had broken into factional fighting - causing severe malnutrition and even starvation<sup>111</sup> - the international community neglected the Somalian crisis until December 1992<sup>112</sup>, when, given the severity of the humanitarian situation and the increasing difficulty of carrying out relief operations<sup>113</sup>, the NGOs started to call for international humanitarian intervention.<sup>114</sup> In April 1992, the UN authorised 50 UN personnel to monitor the cease-fire (i.e., UNOSOM I). The UNSC Resolution 775 authorised a modest protection for relief operations. In September 1992, 500 peacekeepers arrived in Somalia. As the UN's mediation efforts failed<sup>115</sup> and the peacekeepers were unable to act, the Security Council requested the establishment of multinational forces to protect humanitarian operations. The US-led UNITAF forces containing troops from various countries were

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<sup>110</sup>Kurt M. Campbell and Thomas G. Weiss, op.cit., p. 456.

<sup>111</sup>According to the ICRC's estimation's, 95% of the Somalian population suffered from malnutrition, and in September 1992 it predicted that 1.5 million Somalis were threatened by immediate starvation. In addition, about one million Somalis fled to refugee camps in Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. See Cindy Collins and Thomas G. Weiss, op.cit., p. 79; and Michael E. Brown, *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*, The MIT Press, 1996, p. 254.

<sup>112</sup>Sources on the Somali case: James Mayall ed., *The new interventionism 1991-1994 - United Nations experience in Cambodia, former Yugoslavia and Somalia*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, chapter 4; Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian War: military intervention and human rights*, op.cit., pp. 439-444; Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, op.cit., pp. 77-81; Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar, op.cit., pp. 17-20; Michael Brown ed., *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*, The MIT Press, 1995, pp. 254-258.

<sup>113</sup>Emergency aid became an asset in the conflict. The militias charged the relief workers for office and accommodation (approximately 10,000-12,000 US dollars per month), armed escorts (approximately 2,000 US dollars per month), or transportation (a "technical" car costed 300 US dollars per day, arrival fee for a boat 10,000 US dollars) and so on. Of 160,000 metric tons of food aid only about 20-60 % reached the civilian population. Cindy Collins and Thomas G. Weiss, op.cit., p. 79. The UN Secretary General's condemnation of "extortion, blackmail and robbery" of international relief convoys highlights the disarray of the humanitarian scene in Somalia. (Source: A letter of Boutros Boutros-Ghali to the President of the Security Council, UN document S/24868, 30 November 1992, p. 1. Also quoted by Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian War: military action and human rights*, op.cit., p. 439.)

<sup>114</sup>Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Wall, op.cit., p. 19.

<sup>115</sup>Michael E. Brown, *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*, the MIT Press, 1996, pp. 254-255.

created on December 3, 1992. Thus, as Adam Roberts has observed, “Somalia represents a clear case in which a humanitarian relief effort led to a major military action, Operation Restore Hope.”<sup>116</sup>

Moreover, the Somalian crisis highlights both the magnitude of current humanitarian action and the problems that the uncontrolled boundlessness has created. Since state authority had collapsed in Somalia, and the UN personnel and diplomats had escaped from the anarchical situation, the humanitarian NGOs carried out tasks that usually belonged to the UN. Hence the NGOs became the only distributors of social services and health care in Somalia.<sup>117</sup> Yet, though the remaining NGOs risked personal danger and “played a vital role as the sole expression of international solidarity with the Somali people...by August 1992, much of Somalia had become a media-NGO circus”.<sup>118</sup> The media competed to cover the suffering of the civilians, “while NGOs felt compelled to compete in their responses”.<sup>119</sup>

As the Operation Restore Hope changed into a chase to capture General Aidid, humanitarian and political objectives became ever further intertwined. Relief workers and peacekeepers became direct targets of the belligerents’ attacks; and the relief agencies’ payments for security, access or transportation made them part of the war economy. Moreover, the major states saw the misfortune of military operations in Somalia as a warning example, and became increasingly reluctant to take decisive military action in other conflicts.

### **Former Yugoslavia**

Similar problems were evident in the conflict in former Yugoslavia.<sup>120</sup> The intergovernmental organisations’ - notably the EC and the UN - efforts to negotiate a political settlement failed, because the regional military and political balances of power developed separately from the international level. Waning peace negotiations and the international community’s quarrels over a proper strategy to punish the local aggressors meant that international response to the conflict was unexpectedly humanitarian.<sup>121</sup>

Conflicting political climates created equally conflicting humanitarian and military outcomes. On one hand, one cannot neglect the fact that the massive humanitarian response eased suffering. For example, the 1992 14,000 UN troops in the UN Protected Areas in Croatia and in 1993 6,500 NATO troops in Bosnia and Herzegovina carried out such diverse tasks as “creating no-fly zones, undertaking vast

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<sup>116</sup>Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian War*, op.cit., p. 439.

<sup>117</sup>Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal, op.cit., p. 18.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>120</sup>Following authors deal with humanitarian action in the former Yugoslavia: Thomas G. Weiss, David P. Forsythe, and Roger A. Coate, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, Westview Press, 1994; Robert Murray Lyman, *Possibilities for “Humanitarian War” by the International Community in Bosnia Herzegovina, 1992-1995*, The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, The Occasional, no. 27, 1997; Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian War: military intervention and human rights*, op.cit., pp. 442-444; Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, op.cit., pp. 81-89; Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Mercy Under Fire*, op.cit.

<sup>121</sup>For example, in the end of 1995, there were 50,000 peacekeeping forces from 36 countries in the former Yugoslavia, with the annual budget of 2 billion US dollars. Similarly, 3,000 humanitarian workers operated in the conflict region. See Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, op.cit., p. 88.



humanitarian efforts, implementing numerous Security Council resolutions, and holding endless negotiation sessions and cease-fires”.<sup>122</sup> The relief workers operating in the conflict region provided emergency aid to at least 1 million refugees and 3 million internally displaced persons.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, humanitarian issues played a great role in the Security Council resolutions and international statements concerning former Yugoslavia<sup>124</sup>; and they became instruments of pressure in establishing an international war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

On the other hand, peacekeeping and humanitarian operations became a dynamic part of the conflict itself. Thus the operations were vulnerable to the belligerents’ manipulation. For example, assistance to refugees enhanced the flood of unwanted populations and the policies of ethnic cleansing.<sup>125</sup> Even though UNSC Resolution 770 gave the UNPROFOR forces “all measures necessary to facilitate...humanitarian assistance”,<sup>126</sup> the multinational forces had neither the resources<sup>127</sup> nor the political will to execute their mandate. Since the forceful mandate was not applied on the ground, the UN forces were unable to make the belligerents honour the 1949 Geneva Conventions, or to protect the civilian population and the relief convoys. Thus, 325 peacekeepers were taken as hostages in 1992 by the Serb forces; and, according to some estimates, only 25% of humanitarian aid got through to the Bosnian population.<sup>128</sup> The exploitation or deliberate manipulation of the humanitarian situation became an instrument of warfare for the belligerents. For example, the Serb forces blocked relief convoys to Muslim areas in order to eliminate the Muslim presence in the Serb-held territories. In 1994 they responded to increased international military presence by attacking such safe areas as Srebrenica and Zepa.<sup>129</sup> Finally, despite numerous Security Council resolutions or mediation attempts, the response of the international community lacked systemacy and long-term objectives. Rather than trying to stop unlawful violence, the policies mostly aimed to ease the suffering caused by the violence.<sup>130</sup>

## Rwanda

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<sup>122</sup>Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Mercy Under Fire*, op.cit., p. 216.

<sup>123</sup>Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, op.cit., p. 88.

<sup>124</sup>Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian War*, op.cit., p. 442.

<sup>125</sup>Thomas G. Weiss, David P. Forsythe and Roger A. Coate, *The UN and Changing World Politics*, Westview Press, 1994, p. 78.

<sup>126</sup>Martin Griffiths, Iain Levine and Mark Weller, *Sovereignty and Suffering*, in “The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention”, op.cit. p. 54.

<sup>127</sup>When the UNSC Resolution 743 was passed, the secretary-general reckoned that an effective peacekeeping operation would cost around 600 million US dollars, the UNSC members donated only 250 million US dollars. (Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, op.cit., p. 83.)

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84-85.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 83, 86.

<sup>130</sup>According to Rosalind Higgins, the UN chose “to respond to major violence, not by stopping that violence but by trying to provide relief to the suffering”. Quoted by Robert Murray Lyman, op.cit., p. 28.

Perhaps the clearest case of the uncontrollability and magnitude of the current humanitarian response was the 1994 Rwandan massacre.<sup>131</sup> This was the ultimate product of regular cycles of ethnic violence that have occurred since Rwanda gained its independence. However, the Rwandan government's deliberate genocide strategy was linked to the eroding Arusha peace negotiations, and to the hard-line Hutu-factions' fears that the negotiations would weaken their position. As the President Juvenal Habyarimana's plane was shot down in April, 1994, the violence erupted at an unprecedented level. Both the Hutu extremists and the Tutsi rebels were determined to exterminate their enemy, with the result that more than 500,000 people were killed and more than 2 million people fled the country.

Despite earlier warnings that the Hutu government was planning to conduct genocide, and despite awareness of the atrocities that were taking place in April 1994, the international community was reluctant to speak about the subject. Had the international actors used the term "genocide", the provisions of the 1948 Genocide Convention would have obliged them to take action. In contrast, the aggressors were given a clear signal when the Security Council reduced the size of the UNAMIR troops<sup>132</sup> in Rwanda to only 250 soldiers on 21 April. In May President Clinton signed a Presidential Decision Directive that set up complex conditions for the future US involvement in peacekeeping operations - thus preventing the earlier embarrassment in Somalia.<sup>133</sup> Even though the French government started Opération Turquoise on 23 June, the most decisive political (and humanitarian) development was the consolidation of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front. In mid-July 1994 it announced an establishment of a national government. At that time the genocide ceased.

In the face of genocide, the humanitarian agencies' traditional commitment to neutrality became less sure. To speak about genocide in clear terms would have implied that the humanitarian agencies had taken a radical position in the international arena. Yet neither their operational styles nor their dependence on relief funding allowed them to take a clear stand against genocide.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the chaotic Rwandan situation, logistical problems and the flight of the UN staff meant that the chances of conducting a lucid examination of the security or humanitarian situation were limited. Thus, most humanitarian agencies focused on emergency aid and the refugee crises that followed the 1994 massacre.

The tragedy of Rwanda is that the massive response came only after the massacre had taken place. During the period between April-December, approximately 1.29 billion US dollars was allocated to the humanitarian agencies.<sup>135</sup> After the French troops had left Rwanda, the UNAMIR returned. "In August 1994, UNAMIR personnel transported more than fourteen thousand metric tons of relief supplies and produced and distributed more than 7 million gallons of potable water to refugees in and around Goma",

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<sup>131</sup>Glynnne Evans, *Responding to Crises in the African Great Lakes*, Adelphi Paper 311, IISS, 1997; Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, op.cit.; Michael E. Brown, op.cit.; Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar, op.cit.; Jim Whitman and David Pocock, op.cit.

<sup>132</sup>That is, the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda, aimed to observe the peace process.

<sup>133</sup>Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, op.cit., pp. 90-91.

<sup>134</sup>Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar, op.cit., pp. 28-36.

<sup>135</sup>Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience - Study 3: Humanitarian Aid and Effects*, ODI, London, p. 24.

wrote Cindy Collins and Thomas Weiss.<sup>136</sup> Humanitarian agencies returned to Rwanda in greater numbers than ever before - in 1995 several hundreds of UN personnel and close to one thousand NGO relief workers operated in Rwanda. The number of humanitarian NGOs operating in Rwanda was over 200.<sup>137</sup> The UNCHR dealt with the refugee camps, while the DHA was responsible for internally displaced Rwandans, and general coordination between different humanitarian agencies. As in Somalia and in the former Yugoslavia, the distribution of relief aid was politicised. Assistance to refugees in Tanzania and Zaire consolidated in power the people who had planned the massacre, and made it even more difficult to condemn their actions.

### **Operational problems**

The vast literature emerging after the Rwandese massacre shows that the humanitarians are among the first to admit these problems. The humanitarian agencies' inability neither to warn nor to respond quickly to the massacre has led into deep "moral hangover and soul-search (sic) within the humanitarian community".<sup>138</sup> Evidently, current opinions about the state of humanitarian response seem unashamedly gloomy. "The response system cannot continue to function as it does now; it is on the verge of breakdown", writes Andrew Natsios.<sup>139</sup> Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar add: "A succession of cases, notably Sudan, Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda, indicate that the humanitarian international has overreached itself".<sup>140</sup> Pessimism is intertwined with straightforward and even embarrassed self-reflection. "The image of humanitarianism (is) tarnished...international aid community is undergoing one of its most intense periods of...self-doubt in 20 years", reviews Jon Bennett.<sup>141</sup>

However, future assessments still include an ethos of moderate confidence, despite operational failures. "Given universally shared values about sharing civilian lives, especially those of women and children, getting access to all victims ought to be a realistic goal", maintains James Ingram.<sup>142</sup> As Adam Roberts' comment highlights, criticism also includes calm recognition: "Humanitarian action as a response to war, and to violent crises within states, has been tried in the 1990s as never before...(yet it contains) many elements of idealism."<sup>143</sup> But unlike the observations in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, even the most optimistic estimations retreat quickly back to perplexity. "The international humanitarian assistance business is flourishing...(it is) one of the most unregulated markets in the world today", caution

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<sup>136</sup>Cindy Collins and Thomas Weiss, op.cit., p. 93.

<sup>137</sup>Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience - Study 3: Humanitarian Aid and Effects*, ODI, p. 24.

<sup>138</sup>"Rwanda was a popular place for development agencies: the government was so responsive for aid programs", notes a relief official. "So when the the genocide took place, there were all these agencies around that could not prevent it from happening." Interviews, Geneva, 1997.

<sup>139</sup>*NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance*, op.cit., p. 79.

<sup>140</sup>Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal, op.cit, p. 36.

<sup>141</sup>*After Rwanda - the Coordination of United Nations Humanitarian Assistance*, op.cit., p. 136.

<sup>142</sup>*Humanitarianism Across Borders - Sustaining Civilians in Times of War*, op.cit, p. 185.

<sup>143</sup>Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian Action in War*, op.cit., pp. 7,8.

Thomas Weiss and Cindy Collins.<sup>144</sup> A decade which started an unprecedented period of international humanitarian action, turned after the 1994 Rwandan massacre into confusion and self-reflection.

Previous examples of humanitarian action showed that the most severe operational dilemmas are common in all current operations. In order to get a general picture of the complexity of the operational level, it is worth revising the most acute problems.

First of all, the proliferation of humanitarian organisations operating in the conflict region has increased calls for coordination.<sup>145</sup> When it comes to fact-finding or common appeal campaigns, systematisation and rationalisation of humanitarian activities poses concrete, yet manageable, dilemmas. However, the real problem is to coordinate overlapping humanitarian mandates and operations. Effective coordination requires a centralised coordination mechanism, whose authority would, logically, limit the independence of atomised agencies. Further, James Ingram questions whether a single organisation could effectively govern the relief system and thus improve coordination. “The appearance of improved coordination in the centre”, he points out, “does not necessarily lead to more effective and timely interventions in the field.”<sup>146</sup> Such doubts are aggrandised by the inability of the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs to meet its original purpose.<sup>147</sup>

Another problem is the lack of systematic humanitarian response. The rush of aid agencies into the former Yugoslavia, Somalia or Rwanda reveals that emergency action neither addresses the causes of the conflicts, nor improves humanitarian conditions in the long term. Moreover, a comparison between much-publicised and “forgotten” conflicts shows that the humanitarian agencies have inconsistent and ambiguous criteria upon which they intervene and act. The relief system has not yet learned its major lesson, Larry Minear and Thomas Weiss mark; and that is to “intervene effectively or not at all.”<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, such dilemmas as the inconsistency in humanitarian response, lack of accountability or clashing humanitarian objectives may be symptoms of greater underlying troubles. One of the deeper problems is the humanitarian agencies’ confusion with the concept of humanitarianism, and their difficulty in translating humanitarian objectives into coherent policies. In a way, the humanitarian system falls between two stools. On one hand, it is funded and pressured by the governments to respond quickly; on the other, it harbours suspicions about quick response. Is relief action truly the best way to help the victims of complex emergencies? And if it is not, what is?

Some writers suggest that more emphasis should shift to preventive humanitarian action. “Improvements...by the global community in its humanitarian system must be accompanied by greater

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<sup>144</sup>Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, op.cit., p. 175.

<sup>145</sup>Defined by Larry Minear as “the systematic utilisation of policy instruments to deliver humanitarian assistance in a cohesive and effective manner”. Quoted in *Politics of Humanitarian Intervention*, op.cit., p. 74.

<sup>146</sup>*Humanitarianism Across Borders - Sustaining Civilians in Times of War*, op.cit., pp. 181, 174.

<sup>147</sup>That is, to “combine the functions at present carried out in the coordination of United Nations response by representatives of the Secretary-General for major and complex emergencies, as well as by the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator”; to “be involved with the systematic pooling and analysis of early-warning information”; to act as “central focal point with the governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations” and “mobilize their emergency relief capacities”. The 1991 General Assembly Resolution 46/182 quoted in *Politics of Humanitarian Intervention*, op.cit., p. 115.

<sup>148</sup>Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Mercy Under Fire*, op.cit., p. 217.

effort to prevent major human cataclysms”<sup>149</sup>, write Larry Minear and Thomas Weiss. Others see view that “the underlying problem has been the inability to ensure security”<sup>150</sup>; whether in the conflict region in general, or among the aid workers in particular. Hence the insufficiency of emergency action is not ultimately a *humanitarian* problem - instead, it reveals that political or military response to the conflicts is ineffective or lacking. Further, increasing funding of southern NGOs<sup>151</sup> highlights the awareness that whatever form of response is preferred, local actors must be more involved in it.

Local manipulation of emergency aid (and the aid workers loss of neutrality and security) conceal complex, structural developments within the economic and political spheres of the conflict region.<sup>152</sup> The politicisation of humanitarian action implies that aid can easily become a de facto source of income to certain groups in the conflict region, and an indirect part of the war economy - and thus shape the political and military balance of power in the conflict region. Yet, manipulation of aid also illustrates the humanitarian agencies’ organisational inability to meet the diverse and often ambiguous post-Cold War demands “to do something”.

A manifest case of organisational inability is the United Nations. First and foremost, the cause of the UN’s troubles is political. It is highlighted by the member states’ disagreements concerning international humanitarian response, the Security Council’s lack of systematic action, unpaid dues, or the accusations of the UN’s serving western interests. “The United Nations is above all an organization of states”, writes James Ingram. “Even its humanitarian agencies are not apolitical.”<sup>153</sup> Political factors make it difficult to overcome structural problems. The structural problems include administrative downsizing, coordination of humanitarian activities or the revision of outmoded and overlapping humanitarian mandates. Moreover, they touch on the confusion and even mistrust between the self-governing humanitarian agencies, or on the UN system’s inability to assimilate the vast amounts of humanitarian and security information, and act according the assessments. Thus, the diagnosis of the UN hints at a schizoid personality disorder. It is an organisation which, after decades of inertia, tries to respond to opposite demands with limited resources. But how can it bow to the member states, without turning its back on the demands of genuine and effective humanitarian action?

When it comes to the humanitarian NGOs, each advantage boosting their growth in the 1980s and 1990s may easily turn into a disadvantage in the chaotic conflict region. Innovation and lack of bureaucracy may result in poor practice and lack of professionalism. Organisational independence and freedom from formal constraints can endanger accountability, openness to external scrutiny and willingness to coordinate.<sup>154</sup> Cost-effectiveness and smallness may pave the way to a chaotic band of

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<sup>149</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>150</sup>Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian Action in War*, op.cit., p. 79.

<sup>151</sup>Jon Bennett in *After Rwanda - the Coordination of United Nations Humanitarian Assistance*, op.cit., p. 139.

<sup>152</sup>Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi eds., *War and Hunger - Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*, Save the Children, London, 1994, pp. 6-37 and 222-233.

<sup>153</sup>*Humanitarianism Across Borders - Sustaining Civilians in Times of War*, op.cit., p. 187.

<sup>154</sup>Jon Bennett, *Recent Trends in Relief Aid: Structural Crisis and the Quest for a New Consensus* (in Jon Bennett ed., “Meeting Needs - NGO Coordination in Practise”, Earthscan Publications Ltd., 1995, p.xii); and Jon Bennett in *After Rwanda - The Coordination of United Nations Humanitarian Assistance*, op.cit., p. 137.

atomised NGOs that “are over-stretched and under-resourced...and face major logistical constraints.”<sup>155</sup>

At times the need for speedy response blinds the NGOs from seeing that aid can do as much harm as good, or that careful planning is as important an ability as rapid response. “Impatience with well-known constraints”, remark Larry Minear and Thomas Weiss, “may reflect a naïveté about the highly political contexts in which they (NGOs) operate and about the extent of their activities’ political and humanitarian ramifications.”<sup>156</sup> The NGOs’ solidarity with certain ethnic or communal groups might be perceived as open political support and thus make them unwilling parties of the conflict. Or, as Mark Duffield, Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi point out, relief operations can have unplanned side effects and provide indirect support for the combatants, strengthen ‘war economies’, and legitimise such unsanctioned policies as displacement of civilians.<sup>157</sup> Finally, impatience to respond to humanitarian crisis may shadow the fact that popularity among official donors narrows the vital gap between the non-state and state sector. Such an arranged marriage is likely to make the non-governmental organisations more quiescent, conformative and, at worst, a feeble mirror image of the master which the non-state sector was supposed to counterbalance.<sup>158</sup> The tension becomes more visible in cases when the NGOs recognise that the projects contracted to them actually run counter to many of their own objectives, such as sustainable development or empowerment of local levels. “The NGOs are faced with a dilemma. They know that short term funds do not solve the structural problems in the conflict region”, noted a humanitarian with a NGO-background. “But they need funds. So to take money or not to take money? That is the question.”<sup>159</sup>

## **VI. Conclusion**

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<sup>155</sup>Mark Duffield, *NGOs, Disaster Relief and Asset Transfer in the Horn: Political Survival in a Permanent Emergency*. Development and Change, Vol. 24, 1993, p. 144.

<sup>156</sup>*Mercy Under Fire*, op.cit., p. 164.

<sup>157</sup>Joanna Macrae, Anthony Zwi, Mark Duffield and Hugo Slim eds., *War and Hunger - Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*. Save the Children, London, 1994, p. 227.

<sup>158</sup>Jennifer R. Wolch, *The Shadow State - Government and Voluntary Sector in Transition*. The Foundation Center, New York, 1990, pp. 74, 211, 215-217, 222, 223.

<sup>159</sup>Interviews, the UK, 1997.

Why has humanitarian action expanded at such an unforeseen level? If the general changes in humanitarian action are combined with practical outcomes at an operational level, one clearly sees that there is no single answer explaining the growth. In contrast, conflicting yet simultaneous trends in humanitarian action hint at equally diverging causes. Both the flexibility (or, indeed, vagueness) of humanitarianism and the confusion of current international system have enabled the actors in humanitarian crises<sup>160</sup> to interpret humanitarianism according to their social, political or professional identity. The motivations for enlarged humanitarian action vary from pragmatic calculations to new normative standards. It is not possible to prove that any of the motives is more genuine or accurate than others.

Moreover, once the multiform links and actors have emerged, it is extremely difficult to simplify or control the system. A heterogeneous humanitarian system is therefore likely to remain in the future. The heterogeneity also implies that a single actor can have different motivations in different arenas of humanitarian action - and still perceive the diverse motivations as equally genuine.

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<sup>160</sup>Voluntary workers, representatives of international NGOs and IGOs, military personnel, government officials, belligerents in the conflict region and so on

At the international level, the states' unsystematic or slow response and reluctance to take direct political action in complex emergencies suggest that realpolitik calculations have been significant determinants of policy choices. The neglect of long-term structural problems in the war zones hints that the states prefer a kind of "convenient humanitarianism"<sup>161</sup> - that is, humanitarianism which does not demand political action, and does not create long-term institutional commitments<sup>162</sup>.

However, realpolitik calculations cannot explain why the demand for humanitarian action has been unexpectedly visible in the 1990s. Furthermore, they are unable to account for the existence of multiple links between humanitarian and security spheres, or links between the states and the non-state actors. More than that, if one neglects the societal demand and the non-state influence in governmental decision-making, it is extremely difficult to respond to the challenges that the current international situation poses. Thus, one must see the states' foreign policy making as a mixed setting of national interests, "new priorities and often contradictory objectives, of the maintenance of trade, the global environment and population and nuclear non-proliferation."<sup>163</sup> The states have enlarged both their foreign policy priorities and instruments, but at an implementation level the new determinants are often surpassed by realist calculations.

The situation is equally mixed at the operational level. The humanitarian agencies' lack of accountability or clear policy lines, competition for funds, the emergence of ad hoc humanitarian organisations, and bias towards emergency aid hint that, even in the humanitarian system, pragmatism is all too alive. "It has become almost a trend to criticise the 'humanitarian markets'. But it is true that the younger generation is running the show now, and it is much closer to the fundraising logic" said a senior relief official. "And it is true that there are significant commercial benefits in humanitarian operations."<sup>164</sup> Yet the humanitarians' worthy attempt to respond to emerging crises - not to mention the increasing security risk - requires more than pragmatic motivations. Neither the forcefulness of the post-WW II human rights regime nor the tireless work of current humanitarian agencies could be explained if one only concentrated on realism.

With regard to the actual conflicts, the situation is no less confused. Even if the Clausewitzian logic of war to compel the enemy to do one's will has not changed, it has gradually become linked to a diverse set of actors or issues. Further, permanent emergencies have created complex structural

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<sup>161</sup>"The NGOs are very convenient to the states", claimed a relief worker. "Humanitarians do the dirty work that the soldiers would do if they were sent to the conflict region. But if the soldiers were sent to the conflict region, then the voters might get disturbed." Interviews, the UK, 1997.

<sup>162</sup>"Humanitarians claim that today there is a mandate for humanitarian intervention and that the international norms have changed. But the states do not certainly think so", maintained an official of a major humanitarian agency. "And this means three things. First it means that relief funds are mostly the only funds available. Secondly, there are no rules governing the combatants...whatever the ICRC says, it is unreasonable to assume that a Liberian warlord knows or even cares about some conventions...And thirdly, it means that humanitarian operations are no longer neutral." Interviews, Geneva, 1997.

<sup>163</sup>John Seaman, *The International System of Humanitarian Relief*, in John Harriss ed., "The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention", Pinter Publishers, London, 1995, p. 28.

<sup>164</sup>Another humanitarian expert expressed the view that the WorldAid '96 at Geneva's Palexpo was a watershed between the clearly non-profit making humanitarian system and the current situation in which humanitarianism and profit-making are intertwined. This trend, he added, will not fade away: "The donors do not care who implements the programme, as long as it is implemented effectively. There is no moral reason to give funds to non-profit agencies - and what does 'non-profit making' mean today, anyway?" Interviews, Geneva and the UK, 1997.



economic, social and ecological consequences. For a humanitarian observer, the main question is: how to improve international humanitarian law and the preventive, punitive or restorative forms of humanitarian action, so that they respond to the complexity of current conflicts? The answer is contradictory: in order to understand the slowness and unsystematicity of change, one has to view the humanitarian system from a utilitarian perspective and, in order to understand the diversity of issues and actors, one has to search for the long-term changes and norms that restrict utilitarian behaviour.

But because there is no coherent definition of “humanitarianism”, contradictory answers may only further complicate the current situation. Contradictions makes it even less clear what is a genuine “humanitarian operation” or how to discuss and agree on more specific issues.<sup>165</sup> That is why the current situation requires so much from the actors involved with humanitarianism. First of all, it invokes the researchers of security studies to “go beyond grand strategy”<sup>166</sup>, and to study links between armed conflicts and global arms trade, organised crime, drugs trafficking, ethical questions or the role of media. Contemporary permanent emergencies make it also crucial to understand the de facto economic and social structures<sup>167</sup> that are created by the erosion of central authority and protracted political violence. Secondly, the current complexity necessitates more links between humanitarian experts - usually taking distinctively legal approach to humanitarian questions - and international relations scholars. Moreover, many officials of humanitarian agencies underline the need to revise existing humanitarian principles and strategies. “There was a fifty years of stability (sic) in the field, and then all these changes erupted”, noted one humanitarian. “All the organisations, the NGOs and IGOs alike, are going through strategic planning sessions and are confused by what will happen.”<sup>168</sup> Yet in order to survive the period of uncertainty, international relations theories are among the best instruments to help understand the changed international situation and the challenges it poses.

The perplexity of the 1990s create equally irrefutable implications for the governments. The most important issue is not whether the states are more humanitarian or not, but instead, whether they

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<sup>165</sup>Ranging from the validity of emergency aid; and the development of a permanent war crimes tribunal; to the authenticity of the aid agencies’ humanitarian principles.

<sup>166</sup>John Chipman, *The Future of strategic studies: beyond even grand strategy*, Survival, the IISS Quarterly, Spring 1992.

<sup>167</sup>About the creation of war economies, see Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi, *War and Hunger - Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*, Save the Children, London, 1994; and Mark Duffield, *NGOs, Disaster Relief and Asset Transfer in the Horn: Political Survival in a Permanent Emergency*, Development and Change, vol. 24, 1993.

<sup>168</sup>Source: interviews, Geneva, February 1997.

understand what obligations or restrictions humanitarianism generates. It is crucial for the states to understand that casually defined humanitarian assignments may actually change into much costlier operations than carefully defined political commitments. Furthermore, if one follows the realist logic, and interprets the states' references to humanitarian causes as convenient disguises for pragmatism, it is important to remember that any stated commitments - genuine or not - shape and restrict the general course of action. Thus, what is loosely promised today may ricochet back tomorrow.

Finally, if it is important for the governments to understand what humanitarian commitments entail, it is no less important for the humanitarian agencies to understand the effects of increased state funding. Official aid gives the humanitarian agencies more resources, but it also shapes the aims, instruments and styles of humanitarian operations. The only way of combating the "statisation" of humanitarian actors is to elaborate the objectives and instruments of humanitarianism. One way to do this is to develop the division of labour within the humanitarian system - both by clarifying currently ambiguous responsibilities, and by improving coordination among different but equally valuable actors. The humanitarian agencies ought to remember that enlarged humanitarian action is not an end in itself, but an instrument to help the victims of war. In order to use that instrument flawlessly, the humanitarian actors must know where they stand in the international arena; what their relations are to the states, to the combatants, to other agencies; and finally, to their stated principles. Certainly it is not an easy task to find oneself between the devil and the deep blue sea - and still effectively ease humanitarian suffering.

So perhaps humanitarian politics is nothing but the art of the *impossible*? If that is true, then one has to remember that the art of shaping the future is to seize opportunities in impossible situations and to realise the improbable.

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