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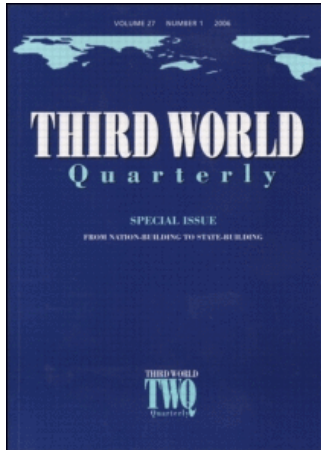
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NGO relief in war zones: towards an analysis of the new aid paradigm

MARK DUFFIELD

Relief in war zones provides a metaphor for the post-cold war era, which is part of its complexity. It signals and reflects some of the most profound historical changes of our time. Although often associated with Africa or the Balkans, the *modus operandi* of war relief also reflects the essence of social change *within* industrialised countries. External humanitarian aid is similarly concerned with the changing role of governments and the increasing importance of subcontracting public functions to private or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In many respects, the present international relief system is a projection of the way in which the West is attempting to solve its own internal problems. In both cases, the focus of public policy has shifted from attempting to manage growth and redistribution to trying to contain the effects of poverty and social exclusion.

This structural association between internal and external public policy is to be expected. It would be surprising if Western governments were advocating wildly different scenarios. In both situations, governance is being redefined in more complex ways as the privatisation of public and economic life advances. Relief in war zones is also conditioned by the perceived national and regional interests of Western governments. Thus, while there is a structural similarity at policy level, in practice there is a marked unevenness in application.

The present background to relief in war zones is the growing polarisation of the global economy. The existence of a wealth gap between the richest and poorest parts of the world is long-standing. The size of the this gap, however, is widening. Over the last three decades, for example, compared to the poorest fifth of the world's population, the richest fifth has doubled its share of global income from 30 to 61.¹ At the same time, more than a quarter of the world's population now have incomes lower than in previous decades. In some cases lower than 20 years ago.

This polarisation is not a random process but is associated with the regionalisation of the global economy. Since the 1980s its most dynamic elements have been increasingly integrated within North American, West European and East Asian regional systems. This process has recreated an interest in the existence of economic blocs.² Of related concern is evidence suggesting that it is those areas which lie outside the main regional configurations where the effects of global polarisation are most pronounced: Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

(CIS) countries.³ Across much of this broad area, average economic indicators have been going backwards as the dynamic regions have continued to grow.

Regional differentiation and increasing polarisation have recast the boundaries of 'North' and 'South'. A working hypothesis would now define the North as the main bloc areas, including East Asia, while the South represents those regions lying outside or only partially integrated into these regional systems. This includes parts of Eastern Europe and the CIS countries. As the global economy has concentrated within the dynamic regions, a process of withdrawal from non-bloc areas has begun. In place of dynamism, many countries are increasingly unstable.⁴ Indeed, while there are exceptions, the broad Africa–Eurasia axis subsumes the overwhelming majority of what the UN classifies as complex emergencies.

It is misleading to see economic polarisation and impoverishment as a direct cause of instability. While important contributory factors, functional considerations are insufficient explanations on their own. More significantly, the process of regionalisation has given rise to differing political or regulatory dynamics. At the risk of over-simplification, the emergence of free market North American, social democratic West European and strong-state East Asian models of regional integration suggests the existence of different 'species' of capitalism.⁵ Rather than differences among the main blocs, however, it is between the dynamic and the crisis regions where the key discontinuity lies.

Contrary regional dynamics

That the nature of governance is changing at the national and international levels is widely remarked. While this is true generally, the actual process of governmental change within bloc and non-bloc areas is different. Within the dynamic areas of the global economy the process of competitive state formation has largely come to an end. Indeed, the main emphasis is on redefining sovereignty within the context of new forms of regional economic integration. The process has gone further within the European Union (EU) where, albeit with hesitation, political unification is developing.

Within the crisis regions beyond the wealth gap, however, the forceful redefinition of political authority is still underway. Indeed, the instability that is associated with this process is the predominant focus of relief in war zones. Rather than new forms of regional integration arising, the opposite is occurring. Over large parts of Africa, Eastern Europe and the CIS countries, regional fragmentation and political separatism have accelerated.

Either new states have been established or have been redefined as ethnocentric or fundamentalist arrangements. In the 40 years before 1989, for example, only two new states emerged based on the principle of ethnic succession—Singapore and Bangladesh. During the early 1990s, 10 such states were created, almost all of them in Eastern Europe.⁶ The trend toward Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East and parts of Africa is also part of this process. In some areas, warlord structures have emerged within states. Where the resource base is insufficient for formal state creation, competing warlords have fashioned so-called failed or weak states.⁷

Global regionalisation and polarisation has given rise to two contrary developments: complex forms of economic and political integration within the main bloc areas, as opposed to ethnocentric or fundamentalist assertion or breakdown outside. Under these circumstances, Western aid policy assumes an added importance. For conventional wisdom this divisive trend is a temporary phase in the process of development and transition toward liberal democracy. If this is wrong, however, and instability represents the emergence of new types socio-political formation adapted to exist on the margins of the global economy, then the implications are profound. Policy makers would not even be asking the right questions, let alone providing the answers.

From convergence to relative development

Humanitarian assistance has become the West's favoured response to political crisis beyond its borders. Largely through agreements with warring parties, the ability of NGOs to deliver humanitarian aid has grown considerably. It is difficult to discuss relief, however, without mentioning how the concept of development has changed. Through so-called continuum thinking, both are inter-linked within the new aid paradigm.

The response of aid agencies to systemic crisis in non-bloc areas has been to redefine earlier developmental goals to accommodate global polarisation. Since the 1970s, there has been a move away from modernist ideas premised on eventual social convergence, ie the underdeveloped world eventually approximating the developed. From a contrary perspective, premised on an exploitative link between core (developed) and periphery (underdeveloped), neo-Marxist dependency and world system theories have also gone out of fashion.⁸ Rather than a convergence or necessary exploitation, the new paradigm is premised on separate development.

Practical development has been redefined as a multicultural enterprise: the celebration of diversity and the empowerment of cultural and gender difference.⁹ Rather than being an absolute quantity, as implied by the now outmoded terms of 'development' and 'underdevelopment', progress has become a relative concept—little more than whatever private aid agencies can actually do. Its NGO proponents have criticised the government-led infrastructural programmes of the 1960s and 1970s. They have been replaced by ideas of local partnership based on empowerment and capacity building.¹⁰ Budget-conscious donors have been more than willing to accept this social redefinition of the problem. As a consequence, not only has development changed its meaning, contracting of official aid programmes has grown apace.

Compared to the infrastructural programmes of the past, the development projects that emerged during the 1980s provide little more than a basic level of public welfare for targeted groups and communities. Ideally through self-help, they aim to lessen the vulnerability of marginal groups to the rigours of their increasingly precarious existence. Through health, education, agricultural and employment projects NGOs have established what Clark has called 'compensatory programmes' in societies enduring the rigours of structural adjustment.¹¹ The latter is, in many cases, a prelude to systemic crisis. Earlier notions of social

convergence have thus been transmuted into the provision of sustainable welfare safety-nets by private agencies.

Ideas of relief and development have become somewhat blurred. Increasingly, development has been reduced to welfare and, indeed, relief. This situation is well reflected in the current debate on the relief to development continuum.¹² Rather than regarding these two as separate practices, conventional wisdom now holds that relief should be provided in such a way as to foster people-centred development. Given the decline in overall development funding and the high levels of damage and social disruption in conflict-affected areas, continuum thinking makes little sense in an increasingly polarised world without a relativisation of development goals.

Exclusion and internalisation

If there is one single factor that points towards separate development and social exclusion at a global level, it is the changing status of the refugee. There has been a steady move away from an international refugee regime focused almost exclusively on the obligations of receiving states and the rights of asylum seekers within them. Increasingly, no-one wants to accept refugees, even neighbouring countries within the crisis regions. This has prompted attempts to prevent large scale population movements crossing international boundaries and, through humanitarian assistance, to support war-affected populations within their home countries. Such developments are central to the new aid and security paradigm.

For several decades the total number of people for whom the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible has increased relentlessly. In 1991, for example, the figure stood at around 17 million; by mid-1995 it had risen to 27.4 million. This increase, however, conceals an historic change. From the beginning of the 1990s the number of actual refugees, that is, people who have crossed an international boundary and been granted asylum in another state, has been declining. The continued rise in total numbers has been the result of UNHCR's involvement with non-refugees. At 12.9 million in 1995, this new category has rapidly grown to become 47% of its total caseload. This non-traditional group roughly divides into internally displaced and war-affected populations within their home countries, people outside their home country but without asylum status and for whom UNHCR feels concern, and returnees to their original countries.¹³

The growing importance of non-refugees to UNHCR graphically illustrates the changed humanitarian and security environment. In less than a decade, attempting to assist such populations, especially the internally displaced and war-affected, has radically transformed the nature of humanitarian assistance.¹⁴ Largely through a series of *ad hoc* Security Council resolutions, a key development has been the ability to provide relief assistance even under war conditions. This has been a major opportunity for NGO expansion. In post-conflict situations a complementary focus on democratisation and support for civil society has also emerged. At the same time, barriers aimed at preventing refugees settling not only in the West,¹⁵ but even in countries within the crisis regions have grown.¹⁶

Although the 1951 Refugee Convention is still in force, its provisions are ignored as a new and contrary paradigm takes shape.

Apart from its welfare function, the policy role of relief under war conditions is to help keep conflict-affected populations within their countries of origin. In countries where safe areas have been tried, this has usually been backed by military protection. Where the military is not involved, as in some of the negotiated programmes in Africa, the availability of humanitarian aid itself can discourage population flight.¹⁷ Through the growing influence of continuum thinking, providing relief in war zones has been cast as a first step to recovery and social reconstruction.

Sovereignty through partnership

One could describe the cold war humanitarian system as one in which the external relations between states, and the obligations of receiving states towards asylum seekers were the predominant political and moral factors. Since the 1980s the trend has been increasingly to internalise the effects of political crisis within unstable regions. Whereas the multicultural revision of development demands partnership at the local level, humanitarian aid in war conditions requires partnership at a political level. Indeed, it is this factor that has significantly contributed to the politicisation of humanitarian assistance.

The attempt to internalise the effects of political crisis demands a change of attitude towards governments and political authorities within unstable countries. The 1951 Refugee Convention, while detailing the rights of refugees within receiving countries, makes no mention of the sending country. The new paradigm, however, places this rectification at its centre.¹⁸ It is still recognised that indigenous political actors often instigate social disruption. At the same time, however, the notion of state responsibility has been redefined. Within the new paradigm, not only are governments held to account for causing conflict, they must also be encouraged and assisted to normalise the situation.

This duality is the central contradiction within continuum thinking. In practice it can only work if justice is downplayed in favour of the possibility of reconstruction. This possibility, moreover, requires the existence of a benign developmental state. Such contradictions and assumptions clash with the reality of internal war. Moreover, they suggest that as a general approach to political instability in the crisis regions, the continuum idea is seriously flawed. Such considerations, however, have not prevented aid agencies, desperate for technical solutions, from elevating it to a hegemonic position.

Since the 1980s political authorities and local actors in refugee-producing countries have approved and been involved in new forms of external intervention by Western aid agencies. New operational tools have emerged in which the subcontracting of welfare and security services has been central. The implications of the emerging paradigm are profound.

By the early 1990s it was recognised that the age of absolute sovereignty had passed, that notions based on non-interference in internal affairs were quaint. Sovereignty itself, however, has not disappeared and is still a key element in international relations. Indeed, the new aid paradigm is dependent on its

restatement. If political authorities are to be made responsible for preventing population displacement and promoting democracy instead of ethnic exclusivism, then their position has to be recognised. What is striking, however, is the contrast in global dynamics. As new forms of regional integration emerge within the main bloc areas, Western aid policy is to reassert a form of sovereignty within the crisis regions.

One could argue that, rather than countering regional fragmentation and political exclusivism, the new paradigm *encourages* these developments. While this might be an indirect consequence, it is not the intention. The bottom line of international policy seems clear. The West is unable or unwilling to take comprehensive responsibility for alleviating impoverishment and instability in crisis regions. The only feasible alternative is to encourage political authorities and local institutions within the countries concerned, which has helped push relief and development policy in a self-help direction. Given the extent of global polarisation, whether this is enough on its own is a different question.

Partnership with warring parties or sectarian political entities involves a complex redefinition of sovereignty. While formal sovereignty is upheld, it is reshaped to create the space for an emerging pattern of external involvement. Central to this process is an agreement among all concerned—including the UN's member states—that the West's new operational instruments are essentially non-political. Typically, in a relief situation this involves an agreement between the UN and the warring parties that all humanitarian assistance is neutral and designed only to assist civilians in a non-strategic way.¹⁹ Any aid agency that wishes to be part of such operations must abide by such rules. The non-political prescription also extends to social reconstruction and conflict resolution.

Welfare safety-nets and public sector decay

Recasting development in welfare terms signifies a form of disengagement from crisis regions. It represents a break with the approach to underdevelopment that would have been advocated 30 years ago. At the same time, however, the multicultural ethic of the new paradigm simultaneously provides a new way of re-engaging non-bloc areas. Over the past decade or more, a simultaneous process of disengagement and re-engagement has been taking place.

Regarding the present humanitarian system, the current re-engagement with protracted crises began properly in the 1980s. Associated with the growing presence of NGOs, these initial agency interventions were part of a key organisational innovation. By the mid-1980s, a noticeable change in donor funding policy had occurred, from direct donor assistance to recognised governments in favour of international support for private, non-governmental sectors.²⁰ This change reflected the decline in support for large-scale infrastructural programmes in favour of smaller, community-based projects. It also established a form of aid market where none had properly existed.

In part, encouraging NGOs reflected the international predominance of neo-liberal thinking and opposition to the claimed excesses of big government. In relation to relief in war zones, however, it was not the whole story. The growing

association between human rights abuse and internal war increasingly led donors to distance themselves from the actions of refugee-producing governments. The introduction of NGO-managed relief programmes was an initial step in the move towards new forms of partnership. Ethiopia during the mid 1980s is an example of this type of re-engagement,²¹ albeit, at that stage, only on the government side. At the same time, decaying state capacity elsewhere within crisis regions further encouraged the appearance of international welfare safety-nets. The result was a growing NGO influence at both the policy and operational levels.

The involvement of NGOs in welfare provision would not have been possible without a growth of subcontracting. In its basic form, this involves donor governments contracting out their aid programmes to NGO implementers. It has been called 'public service contracting' by some commentators.²² Within this subcontracting relationship, lines of funding and accountability usually reside between donors and the NGOs concerned. While not universal, strong national ties are common. Other than attempting to provide some form of registration, host governments are often absent from such contractual relationships.

The degree to which individual NGOs are dependent upon donor funding can vary. The relationship, however, is pervasive and of growing importance. Within large emergency programmes, owing to the relatively high cost of transport and commodity procurement, donor funding is critical. Even established international NGOs that regard themselves as having an independent development capacity by virtue of public support, generally find themselves relying on donor funding in complex emergencies.

Although there is no necessary causal relationship, international NGO presence has tended to expand as indigenous public provision has contracted. The growth of donor/NGO subcontracting, for example, has been especially marked in regions characterised by internal war, political exclusivism and public sector decay. In such areas, NGOs have increasingly taken responsibility for welfare. In places like Angola, where the recognised government has largely deserted the public sector, NGOs have become the main service providers.²³

In the mid-1980s, the Horn of Africa was one of the first regions in which international donor/NGO welfare safety-nets developed. Despite their uneven and fragmentary character, by the end of the decade they had become an established feature in many other parts of the continent. Until the end of the 1980s, however, conflict was a limiting factor in the spread of the aid market. It was not until new forms of partnership with warring parties were forged with the end of the Cold War that further expansion was possible. In Eastern Europe and Eurasia, for example, welfare safety nets have expanded from the outset as parts of wider UN or regional systems.

Negotiated access and ongoing conflict

Up to the end of the 1980s, warring parties usually attempted to deny humanitarian assistance to areas controlled by opponents. They were able to pursue a strategy of humanitarian denial largely as a result of the importance previously attached to traditional notions of non-interference in internal matters. As a result, during the Cold War non-government areas in internal wars were out of bounds

for most aid agencies. NGOs tended to operate on the side of the recognised government.²⁴ During this time, relief programmes often took the form of dealing with the symptoms of counter-insurgency and humanitarian denial, of supporting displaced people outside the war zone or as refugees beyond recognised borders.

Within the new paradigm, negotiated access has become the principle means of expanding welfare safety-nets in internal wars. In its most basic form, negotiated access involves gaining the consent of warring parties for the movement and delivery of humanitarian aid to civilian populations. Negotiated access is not particularly new. This type of approach has a long pedigree in the field of diplomacy and crisis management.²⁵ Negotiation was also part of more limited relief operations during the Cold War. What is new is that attempting to secure the consent of warring parties has become the principal means of establishing internationally mandated relief operations that cover all sides in an ongoing conflict.

Negotiated access has supplied a post-cold war framework within which integrated multisectoral humanitarian programmes have been created. While remaining operationally problematic, it has legitimised cross-border or cross-line type programmes that were previously out of bounds for most aid agencies. An early example of this approach was the UN's Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) in 1989. Variants have emerged in places such as Angola (1990), Ethiopia (1990), Kurdistan (1991), Bosnia (1992) and Rwanda (1994).

Where consent is forthcoming, negotiated access has greatly expanded the scope of humanitarian operations. NGOs are now able to work in situations where, less than a decade ago, this would have been unthinkable. The enlargement of the sphere of UN and NGO activity, however, is not the only factor of significance. Based on consent, negotiated humanitarian programmes are vulnerable to obstruction and interference by warring parties. The repeated humiliation of the UN in Bosnia, or the frequent obstruction of OLS by the Sudanese government, are examples of this general problem. Nevertheless, negotiated access has great historic and political importance.

During the Cold War, although UN intervention was relatively uncommon, when it did take place it was on the basis of agreed ceasefire or clear peacekeeping arrangements.²⁶ UN agencies did not attempt to operate in the context of an ongoing conflict. The *ad hoc* UN resolutions that have made negotiated access possible, however, send a different signal. The new paradigm, while not condoning conflict, now appears to accept that political instability is an unfortunate reality in the South. Unable to prevent internal war, the West has resigned itself to finding ways of working within ongoing crises and managing their symptoms.

Integrated programmes and UN/NGO subcontracting

Negotiated access provided the framework for expansion of the aid market in war zones. One of the first operational innovations within this framework was the UN-led integrated relief programme. These have been characterised by an expansion of UN/NGO subcontracting and, in some places, military protection.

The international capacity to respond to complex emergencies, however, has continued to expand. Subcontracting has become more complex. There has been an increase in the role of regional bodies discharging UN responsibilities. This can be seen as a form of political subcontracting. At the same time, the growing use of military and government assets in non-protection roles, for example logistic and engineering capabilities, has extended service delivery into areas beyond the capacity of most welfare NGOs.

Although details differ, reflecting the existence of a shared paradigm, integrated programmes in places like Angola, southern Sudan and Bosnia, for example, share a similar basic structure.²⁷ The move to improve integration has also been encouraged by parallel organisational developments. In the wake of the Gulf War, for example, the UN's Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) was formed to rationalise and enhance agency coordination and funding. Corresponding aims also underpinned the formation of the EU's European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) in 1992. Many donor governments have also recently become operational in the humanitarian field. The trend towards more coordination and integration is reflected in the UN Secretary General's 1992 *An Agenda for Peace*.²⁸

In practice, the extent of coordination is often minimal. In theory, however integrated or comprehensive programming operates at several levels. An elementary organisational model for complex emergencies is as follows. On a day-to-day basis, relief operations are usually managed by a UN lead agency with the other UN specialist agencies playing their traditional roles in an integrated division of labour (World Food Programme (WFP)/food aid, UNHCR/refugees and displaced persons, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)/child health, etc). In addition to any specialist function, the lead agency plays a coordinating role. Either on its own, or with the assistance of DHA, it also helps to secure access through negotiation with the warring parties. In Bosnia the lead agency was UNHCR, in South Sudan it is UNICEF, while in Angola DHA plays this role.

Within a complex emergency, NGOs usually operate on the basis of a written agreement with the UN lead agency. In order to work within a mandated system, NGOs have to become affiliated bodies. This often involves accepting notions of neutrality and security guidelines agreed by the lead agency with the warring parties. For the southern Sudan, these are known as 'Letters of Understanding'. In return, the movement of NGOs and relief supplies in and out of the war-zone is facilitated by the UN through agreed logistical corridors and modes of transport.

The development of this type of comprehensive programme has meant that earlier donor/NGO safety-nets have expanded. At the same time, UN/NGO subcontracting arrangements have also grown. The end of the Cold War has given the UN a new role. At the same time, it has exposed the weak operational capacity within most of its specialist agencies. UNHCR, for example, has been unable to take direct responsibility for its growing case load.²⁹ As in Bosnia, this vacuum has largely been filled by NGO subcontractors.³⁰

An added consideration in relation to UN integrated programmes is the significance of major powers or regional arrangements for NGO contractors. For example, US Agency for International Development (USAID) and ECHO are able

to mobilise resources on a scale that exceeds the capabilities of most donor governments. Through their NGO clients this can give such donors a significant leverage within UN integrated programmes. OLS in the south of the Sudan is a case in point. At the same time, in other operations, major donors can play a more independent and operational role. The engineering activities of ECHO in Bosnia is one example. Together with UN/NGO subcontracting, such developments reflect a growing organisational complexity of relief work in war zones.

Conflict, security and protection

Working in ongoing conflict has pushed security issues to the fore. During the Cold War, internal conflicts had an organisational cohesion that seems lacking today. Opposition movements usually had defined command structures, clear nationalist or socialist platforms and often held liberated base areas,³¹ a situation that superpower rivalry tended to support. Today conflicts are often more fluid. Political ideologies are either less in evidence or take an exclusively ethnic or fundamentalist character. The ending of superpower confrontation has also seen a decline in the significance of borders. The recent military maps of southern Sudan, Angola, Bosnia or Afghanistan have often taken on a leopard spot pattern as political movements have become more fragmented. As a consequence, providing humanitarian aid is more dangerous and often represents the acceptance of situations of high and continuous risk.

The security of aid personnel and relief supplies in negotiated access programmes has been tackled in two main ways. The first, and most common, is what can be called non-military security.

Non-military security

In situations of continuous risk, security planning has become a relative rather than an absolute exercise. In integrated programmes where military protection is not provided, it is common to find civilian (sometimes ex-military) security personnel charged with assessing the changing nature of risks. Southern Sudan is an example where such advisors are employed by the United Nations. Agencies are regularly briefed on security matters and evacuation procedures. Through an agreed gradation of response, agency staff are routinely withdrawn and returned to the field according to the security situation. Aid workers and relief supplies consequently ebb and flow with the level of violence. A movement which graphically illustrates the extent to which aid has been incorporated into the rhythm of internal conflict—a situation perhaps unique in the history of warfare.

Military security

The military protection of humanitarian aid is associated with relief operations in Kurdistan (1991), Bosnia (1992–95), Somalia (1992–95) and Rwanda (1994). It is also linked to the central tenet of the new paradigm—that is, to avert large-scale population movements crossing international boundaries by securing

the distribution of humanitarian relief within war-affected countries. In compliance with partnership requirements that such interventions be non-political, military humanitarianism avoids direct involvement in the internal affairs of the affected country. The *ad hoc* UN resolutions that have framed military humanitarianism have therefore commonly focused on the protection of agency personnel and relief supplies rather than pacification activities. At most, military protection has frequently involved some form of so-called safe area policy.

The new paradigm, geared to working in unresolved political crises, has radically changed the nature of peacekeeping. It has given rise to a much broader range of peacekeeping activities. The British Army, for example, has developed an approach termed 'wider peacekeeping'.³² Consent is central to wider peacekeeping and distinguishes it from enforcement. While vital for protection operations, consent in modern internal wars is no longer a given. It is a variable factor and in some circumstances may only be partial. Securing consent is often a long-term process. The idea of variable consent is a refinement of the concept of negotiated access. Wider peacekeeping, and helping secure and maintain humanitarian access, hinges upon the management of consent.

In organisational terms, military protection is best understood as an optional appendage to an integrated and negotiated relief programme. In the case of Bosnia, for example, UNHCR as lead agency negotiated access on behalf of the aid agencies working under its umbrella. Appropriate protection for convoys was then agreed with the military on the basis of the arrangement reached by UNHCR with the warring parties. It is worth emphasising the optional nature of military protection because numerous integrated relief programmes, such as in Sudan and Angola, are not protected. Indeed, within the crisis regions, non-protected relief programmes would seem to predominate.

Regional and joint operations

While the UN is the single most important body addressing the issue of relief in war zones, it does not have a monopoly on the necessary skills and functions—for example, the ability to deliver relief, apply sanctions or field military personnel. Under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, regional arrangements are able to assume UN responsibilities. Less clear under the Charter but usually under some form of UN mandate, there has also been a growth of strong-state interventions. Since the beginning of the 1990s, and especially since 1994, these types of operations have become increasingly common.

Some commentators have seen this development as resulting from 'strategic over-reach' on the part of the UN.³³ The world organisation is now unable to respond in equal measure following the marked growth in conflict-related demands. In these circumstances it has, perforce, conceded the lead to others. While welfare-related activities are often involved, this situation can be seen as a form of political subcontracting.

Although increasingly common, the basis for such operations remains largely *ad hoc* and, in some cases, a UN mandate has been sought *post facto*. The 1991 EU arms embargo on Serbia and ceasefire monitoring in Slovenia and Bosnia are examples. In the same year, the Nigerian-led intervention in Liberia took place

under the umbrella of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In 1994 Russian troops were deployed in Georgia to end the civil war. At the same time there was an Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) agreement for the CIS to intervene in Nagorno-Karabakh. In the same year French troops intervened in Rwanda and the US-led invasion of Haiti reversed an earlier military coup. The NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia was also an example of the trend.

One interesting feature of regional or strong-state operations is the degree of force involved. While most operate within some form of UN mandate, the prescriptions of the new paradigm are weakened. One often encounters a more overt and robust use of military power. In some cases this has blurred the distinction between humanitarian intervention and regional policing. The NATO involvement in Bosnia, for example, has distanced itself from humanitarian operations in favour of supporting the political process established at Dayton. Some of these operations, however, have also provided opportunities for NGOs to expand their activities. In the case of Bosnia, for example, during the war the majority of NGOs based their activities in Croatia. This was despite UNHCR's role in negotiating access. Following the Dayton peace agreement, most have now left Croatia and established themselves in Bosnia.

Service-packages and non-welfare subcontracting

The involvement of the military in relief operations has begun to expand beyond that of providing protection. The effect of conflict and the systemic crisis within non-bloc areas has led to the erosion and collapse of vital infrastructure. Indeed, such is the extent of global polarisation that, in many complex emergencies, the local facilities necessary to mount a large-scale relief operation no longer exist. Aid subcontracting has increasingly involved NGOs, but in many emergencies the skills and resources required now go beyond the welfare services that most provide. For example, aircraft logistics, air-drops, large-scale commodity handling, engineering repairs, civilian policing, judicial structures, and so on.

Since 1992 DHA has been coordinating attempts to encourage donor governments to make available non-offensive military and civilian assets in the form of service-packages, or self-contained operational units that bring together specific strategic skills or resources. UNHCR has been particularly active in developing the service-package approach. The agency's poor showing in the aftermath of the Gulf war first prompted a need to increase strategic capacity. The Sarajevo airlift, however, is held to be the turning point.³⁴ This indicated that governments were willing to second skilled personnel and military equipment to UNHCR. Some 20 nations provided components that variously supported the airlift through the Geneva based air-cell, the air-hub at Zagreb, and the logistical, transport and liaison facilities at Sarajevo. With the assets provided, UNHCR was able to give the necessary vertical coordination. UNHCR subsequently employed the service-package approach in Rwanda in 1994 to cover logistics, sanitation, civil engineering and security services.

The military and civilian assets of governments are an important constituent of service packages. IGOs and the larger NGOs, however, can also act as service

providers. Standby agreements with governments or agencies regarding service provision are seen by UNHCR as central to improving emergency preparedness. Service-packages also illustrate an important feature of the new paradigm: the more complex relief operations become, the greater the spread of international responsibility. At the same time, they illustrate the manner in which military assets are being separated from protection duties. The potential for Western military involvement is therefore widening.

In relation to NGOs, service packages can be seen as a development of public service contracting. At the same time, however, they have allowed new players to compete for contracts. In the logistics field, for example, in both Bosnia and Rwanda one has seen the emergence of private non-profit organisations providing niche services. In southern Sudan, USAID has taken the service-package trend even further. Reflecting an earlier stance in the North, it has called for the logistics component of the OLS operation to be handed over to private contractors. In many respects, where some services are concerned NGOs can claim no major advantage over private contractors.

Relief expenditure and the aid market

The development of the new operational tools sketched above has important cost implications. For the past couple of decades relief expenditures have been increasing. Indeed, since the beginning of the 1990s, this trend has been marked and reflects the spread of protracted crises and internal wars in non-bloc areas. At around \$3.2 billion in 1993, since the mid 1980s there has been a six-fold increase in emergency spending.³⁵ This figure, however, is an underestimate. For example, it excludes food aid and the cost of military peacekeeping. These military costs have multiplied since the beginning of the 1990s. By 1994 total peacekeeping expenditure was estimated to be in the region of \$3.2 billion per year and rising.³⁶ The early part of the 1990s had consumed around a third of all UN peacekeeping costs since 1948. If one allows for food aid and other ancillary costs, even excluding Rwanda in 1994, the West could on average be spending around \$10 billion annually on emergencies in the crisis regions.

The upward trend in relief expenditure is occurring at a time when overall development funding is stagnating and declining. This contrast is exaggerated in many complex emergencies where relief funding is the only significant form of external aid. This would caution against being dazzled by rising humanitarian expenditure. In practice, as the crisis regions are re-engaged through humanitarian intervention, the overall bill to the West is probably declining. It is also tempting to interpret rising expenditure as a direct indication of increasing humanitarian need. This would seem logical. The emergence of an aid market, however, again urges caution.

Apart from being of poor quality, the nature of reporting in complex emergencies means that there is usually no direct empirical link between expenditure and need.³⁷ Food aid requirements, for example, can be estimated one year and deliveries made the next. The two figures are rarely reconciled. Even in large integrated programmes, the extent and nature of need is often intuitive rather than proven. A good example is the alleged continuum from

relief to development within the OLS operation. This concept has achieved a quasi-religious status among UN agencies and NGOs. A recent review, however, concluded that no agency had produced any evidence to prove that emergency conditions had passed in the Sudan. Nor, for that matter, had anyone analysed the actually existing development process being pursued by the government.³⁸ The evidence that did exist not only indicated the continuation of emergency conditions, but that the strategies pursued by the warring parties were as destabilising as before.

Growing relief expenditure, apart from reflecting an unknown quantity of need, is also symptomatic of increasing numbers of NGOs and fierce competition for funding. In other words, an unidentified proportion of increasing relief expenditure arises from the privatisation of aid. There are several factors involved. Increasing relief expenditure is partly related to the rising fixed costs within the system, with hundreds of subcontractors delivering similar products in an often disorganised and competitive fashion. Moreover, agencies often grow quickly in emergency situations and new ones emerge. Competition for funding becomes increasingly interdependent with the need to maintain core staff and essential infrastructure.

As mentioned, relief is one of the few areas of the aid market that is currently expanding. Not only does the new paradigm reassert sovereignty, it also offers political authorities new forms of partnership. Many regimes and local political actors have lost little time in reorganising to incorporate the new pattern of aid provision. Even during the Cold War recognised governments were experimenting with new ways of aid diversion. In Africa this included exploiting tacit agency support for government counter-insurgency strategies.³⁹ It also involved the manipulation of exchange rates, diversion of relief commodities and the integration of parallel economic activities within officially controlled aid programmes.⁴⁰ The new aid paradigm has allowed this integration to develop further. For example, the partnership suggested by negotiated access has often given warring parties an influence over the assessment and delivery process.⁴¹

Opportunities, limits and dangers

As the West adapts to the new aid paradigm, the former roles of governments and the founding mandates of UN agencies are dissolving and changing. While far from perfect, the involvement of states at least gave the previous humanitarian regime a statutory aspect. The privatisation of aid has changed this situation. The current debate among NGOs concerning voluntary codes of conduct and professional standards is symptomatic of the move towards a more flexible and selective system. This situation presents dangers and opportunities. Regarding the latter, the current interest in humanitarian issues between and within agencies suggests that improvement is possible. Moreover, new operational tools have given agencies unprecedented access to war-affected populations. At the same time, in broadening responsibility by including new players the emerging aid paradigm has reconfirmed the principle of collective responsibility, a helpful antidote to isolationism.

The key issue is defining the real opportunities and limits within the new

system. A sober appraisal would suggest that, at best, both directly and through the political protection that it can offer, humanitarian intervention can help stabilise a crisis situation. For the people who benefit, this is justification enough. Even achieving this limited outcome, however, as opposed to compounding and entrenching problems, demands effort. Rather than superficial functional prescriptions, more serious analysis of social and political structures is required. At the same time, without a greater harmonisation of agendas among the key humanitarian players, stabilisation is undermined. Stabilisation, however, is time limited. Lacking a wider political and economic settlement—something with more meat than the continuum—humanitarian aid, even at its best, quickly reaches the limits of the system.

The fundamental danger within the new paradigm is that it is adapted to manage the symptoms of global polarisation and exclusion. The fusion of development and security concerns, together with the proliferation of new operational tools, means that Western governments now have the ideological and practical means for selective intervention in a divided world. Rather than acting as a stabiliser pending a comprehensive settlement, humanitarian aid becomes a necessary ingredient of political containment. The adaptations sketched in this paper already contain the seeds of a futuristic nightmare: a world in which a vast and glittering wealth gap separates the core and crisis regions, in which dynamic areas are securely ring-fenced while those conflagrations within the seething hinterland that threaten core interests are policed by mobile and technologically replete humo-cops. At the same time, dynamic regions continue to grow but are deeply divided. Here the image of outside chaos, with its message that it could be worse, is one of the few palliatives that weak politicians can offer an insecure and fractious populous.

Nobody wants such an outcome. Exactly how fanciful this scenario is, however, is a moot point. The need for humanitarian assistance is symptomatic of increasing global polarisation and the erosion of life-chances on a huge scale. In terms of their numbers, and the people whom they now employ, NGOs have been winners. The growing requirement for international welfare assistance should itself be a powerful argument in support of a global new deal. Somehow, however, in the search for technical fixes, this argument has been lost. A first step would be for NGOs, if they are still able, to place the greater good before income and position within the humanitarian marketplace. To coin a phrase, however, this may be one more market that cannot be bucked.

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