BEYOND NEUTRALITY:
ON THE COMPATIBILITY OF MILITARY INTERVENTION AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

————————— ANTONIO DONINI —————————

Once again the pendulum is swinging: from daring and dazzled, to dazed and distraught. The current confusion in the debate between the hawks and doves of intervention, and in particular of military intervention in support of humanitarian objectives, provides an opportunity to take a hard look at some of this debates underlying concepts and realities. This paper will look at military intervention from the point of view of humanitarianism and will try to respond to the following questions: Is the policy of force compatible with the policy of mercy, or should these be kept separate? If intervention clashes with mercy, what are the alternatives? Should not the international community re-examine its understanding of crises where the provision of relief is contested or used as a weapon to influence the outcome of the conflict?

After half a decade of a stammering New International Intervention Order (NIIO)—or of the "Kouchner era," as it has sometimes been called[1]—it is not without an element of nostalgia that some analysts look back to the crisp and simple concepts of the Cold War era. Everything seemed to make sense then, and it was easy to make stubborn facts conform to grand theory. One of the distinct differences between the old and the new order is that, until the late 1980s, the rules of the game in international relations did not allow for an integrated or cohesive response to complex humanitarian/political emergencies. Indeed, "crises" seemed to be primarily mono-dimensional. In a world political situation characterized by stalemate and confrontation, the very concept of "complex emergency" was not relevant. The Cold War dictated the parameters of conflict and provided the glue that kept countries and alliances together. Likewise, the idea of a *continuum* between conflict, humanitarian relief, peacekeeping, reconstruction, and development was not one whose time had come. Just to give a couple of examples, there was no desire or political

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[1] See Charles Zorgbibe, *Le droit d'igérence* (P.U.F.: Paris, 1994), 5.

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consensus for the international community to mount a humanitarian intervention during the Vietnam War, nor to launch a peace mission in Biafra, during the Ethiopian famine, or when Czechoslovakia was invaded. The various regimes of U.N. activities—political and peacekeeping, development, humanitarian, human rights—were kept in separate, if not watertight, compartments. Furthermore, the Security Council dealt with security and not with humanitarian issues. As it was often gridlocked by crossed vetoes, it was easier to maintain a clearcut distinction between the prerogatives of the Council and those of the Secretary-General, who was often effective in behind-the-scenes good offices or mediation missions.[2]

The structures and mechanisms for dealing with humanitarian assistance largely developed incrementally, responding on an ad-hoc basis to emerging needs rather than in a coherent manner. Given the deep roots of the U.N. system in functionalist theory, the state of North-South and East-West relations, and the prevalence of rhetoric and ideology in the mainstream U.N. political fora, this was perhaps inevitable. The result has been a separate development of the clusters of U.N. activity dealing with political and peacekeeping affairs from those dealing with human rights and humanitarian activities on the one side, and with the various facets of economic and social development on the other. This "separateness" was also sanctioned and reinforced by different funding mechanisms: assessed contributions in the case of the former and voluntary for the others. Moreover, until recently, the main players in the United Nations and other international fora were governments and their delegates. These were eminently predictable actors, working within the rigid parameters of the state-centric tradition (bureaucracy, well-oiled rituals of diplomacy, transactional relationships based on *Realpolitik*, if not rationality, etc.).

In the space of a few years, the sea changes from those more predictable times have been enormous. Issues now refuse to stay in separate compartments, some have become so complex that experts no longer automatically mirror the positions of their governments, and the new nonstate actors are becoming numerous, vocal, and often unpredictable. States themselves are becoming increasingly porous and subject to factors (finance, environment, migration, etc.) they are unable to control. States, civil societies, and even individuals are increasingly subjected to the opposite forces of globalization and fragmentation. It is still unclear whether this dialectical polarization of forces will lead to some kind of superior synthesis—a new compact, if not a new order. The managerial and ideological tools available to statesmen and global governors do not seem to have kept pace with the complexity and urgency of the problems to be addressed. This results in "complex substantive issue linkage" and in a "package" approach to problem solving, on the one hand, or in its opposite, excessive simplification, (i.e. the temptation to "decompose" complex problems into seemingly treatable slices). The realization that "humankind seems to lack the managerial skills to solve megaproblems" is not compensated by the fact that

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[2] On this point see Giandomenico Picco, "The U.N. and the Use of Force," *Foreign Affairs*, 73 (September-October 1994).

"full decomposability facilitates action, but the action is less and less frequently effective. . . ."[3]

One would be tempted to argue that the recent, apparently short-lived, infatuation with multilateral military interventionism—whether to counter acts of aggression or in support of humanitarian objectives, or both—was the product of an excess in decomposability in the international community's approach to crisis resolution. Generally speaking, although the objective was the establishment of a workable system for peace and order in world affairs, what has often resulted is the application of a "quick fix" to problems of overwhelming complexity. This may well have been the case in some of the more ill-guided attempts at aggressive peace enforcement. Somalia and Bosnia may indeed qualify as examples of "intervention decomposed." Complex realities were overly simplified in the mistaken hope that this would make them easier to conceptualize and address. This resulted in the selection of mono or at most bi-dimensional causal patterns (i.e., ethnic/tribal conflict, humanitarian needs) in the explanation of the situation and in the justification for intervention. Addressing such causes in isolation and failing to seek out other principles of causality in the history, social fabric, and economic base of the concerned countries, not to mention linkages with the outside world, is tantamount to treating crises as irrational occurrences, mere accidents on the highway to development and modernity.[4]

Furthermore, such simplification of issues seems to go hand in hand with temporal blinkers which lead the intervenors to believe that the "abnormal crisis" can be solved through a time-limited intervention. When this does not happen, the intervenors are left with the options of digging in and facing the consequences, simply claiming success and leaving, or leaving with their tail between their legs blaming the victims for a lack of understanding or donors for fatigue. The U.N. operation in Mozambique, ONUMOZ, despite its success, is an example of this. ONUMOZ was a time-limited affair with relatively clear and limited objectives (i.e., peace was to be achieved through the demobilization of both sides, return of displaced and refugee populations, monitoring of the electoral process, and provision of humanitarian assistance). Being time-limited, however, the operation in Mozambique folded up and departed as soon as the elections were over, taking with it the important U.N. humanitarian coordination function, simply ignoring the fact that there had been humanitarian needs before the arrival of ONUMOZ, and that these would continue after its departure. In fact, the abrupt disappearance of the office responsible for the coordination of humanitarian assistance could well breed trouble in the coming months since the international development system is still far from moving into

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[3] See Peter M. Haas and Ernst B. Haas, "Learning to Learn, Some Thoughts on Improving Global Governance," paper prepared for the Commission on Global Governance, Geneva, May 1993.

[4] On this point see Mark Duffield, "Complex Emergencies and the Crisis of Developmentalism," *IDS Bulletin: Linking Relief and Development*, 25 (October 1994): ". . . emergencies are seen from a modernist perspective. That is, as temporary interruptions to the process of linear development" (p. 6), and "given the deference to the universality of rational political action, it is difficult for developmentalists to comprehend that emergencies can originate within a social structure" (p. 4).

gear to pick up the slack. A similar "vote and forget" approach was followed in Cambodia.

It has become fashionable to use Somalia as an illustration of the ills of military intervention. With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see that the operation probably suffered from excessive decomposition. It was basically a one-track affair, although it must be said that the primary objective of the operation seemed to shift over time from humanitarian succor to policing the tribes to some form of king fixing or imposed "democratization," with heavy undertones of score-settling and then facesaving. It was weak on causality: the complexity of Somali society, the well documented history of clan interaction, traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, and the economic roots and outside implications of the crisis were deliberately shunned in favor of a *tabula rasa* approach. It resulted in the militarization of humanitarian assistance to an extent never before seen (with U.N. agencies, NGOs, and even the ICRC having to resort to armed gangs for their "protection"). This, in turn, may have further increased the militarization of Somali society, with humanitarian assistance being used as a weapon for building local power bases and large amounts of international aid money devoted to the payment of armed guards for the protection of aid staff, goods, and property. The lack of a clear and consistent political will by the "intervenors" on the ground and in the Security Council made the operation extremely sensitive to media manipulation and to shifts in public opinion "back home." Military logic and might rather than political acumen seemed to rule, with the military operating in a "Desert Storm mode" in an urban environment. The operation suffered from serious logistical and managerial shortcomings (ranging from chain of command problems among contingents to a theft of three million dollars from the coffers of UNOSOM), and so on.[5]

The point here is that, from a strictly humanitarian point of view, intervention in Somalia has missed the forest for the trees. Yes, the problem of widespread famine has been solved, at least for now, but at what price? This is not merely a question of cost effectiveness, although with a ratio of one to ten between humanitarian and military costs,[6] one can wonder if there might not have been a better way to spend substantial sums of international taxpayer money. The question is one of effectiveness of the international community's approach *tout court*. What have the U.N. blue helmets left behind when they waved goodbye on 1 March 1995? A country that is perhaps better fed, but not much better able to cope with its problems than when they landed under media spotlights on the beaches of Mogadishu. Not only is the struggle for power among the vying elites still unresolved and likely to re-escalate at any moment (with the nightmarish

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[5] On UNOSOM, see Jean Marc Coicaud, "L'ONU en Somalie: entre maintien et imposition de la paix," *Le Trimestre du Monde*, no. 25, (Spring 1994); also Samuel Makinda, "Seeking Peace from Chaos: Humanitarian Intervention in Somalia," International Peace Academy Occasional Papers series, 1993.

[6] Jan Eliasson, former U.N. Coordinator for Humanitarian Assistance, noted in several public speeches, in late 1993, that for every dollar of humanitarian assistance provided to Somalia ten were being spent on the UNOSOM military operation.

possibility that this will provoke another famine) but, worse, the U.N. military intervention has made the patching up of the social fabric even more elusive. The preexisting nonmilitary actors in Somali civil society—traditional and religious leaders, local support groups, fledgling local NGOs including women's organizations—have been completely marginalized, if not dismembered.

The predicament of humanitarian actors is illustrated by the fact that in areas where, before the deployment of U.N. troops, U.N. agencies and NGOs had been able to operate on the basis of agreements with the local authorities, whether traditional chiefs or military commanders, this has now become impossible. The UNOSOM presence has polarized and militarized local situations—perhaps because it chose to put a premium on warlords as interlocutors—even in areas which had been relatively shielded from the war. Nineteen ninety-five may well be worse than 1992: not surprisingly, most humanitarian actors are planning to scale down their presence, leaving national staff to run their programs, or to pull out altogether. As one analyst has put it, "Two years and four billion dollars later, the warring parties are rested, better armed, and ready to resume civil war."[7]

So, could Somalia have been "done" differently? It would be presumptuous of the author who has neither been there nor studied the U.N. operation in Somalia in any detail to pass judgment on such a complex, tortuous, and difficult undertaking. A few more general points may perhaps be made as working hypotheses aimed at stimulating the debate on the issues, rather than as hard and fast conclusions.

The first lesson of Somalia is that, the United Nations being what it is—the Temple of States—the operation in Somalia suffered from being "state-centric" and therefore excessively focused on the capital. This is somewhat ironic given all the waxing on failed states. The causes of the problem and their solution were perceived to be in Mogadishu. Here was the flash point where the clan leaders were fighting, here were the airport and the harbor which were the privileged access points for both visiting dignitaries and international assistance, here were the gutted embassies of the major players, here was the natural location for U.N. agencies, NGOs, and media organizations to establish their bases, etc. It could be argued that this "fixation on Moga" had deleterious effects. With all the food being channeled through the capital (and most of the aid agency staff, not to mention the UNOSOM military and civilian staff established there in fortified bunkers), relief supplies and their distribution became extremely vulnerable to ransom and pillage, which in turn led to a "bunker mentality" with staff and commodities scurrying hurriedly from one fortified camp to another.

Although aid did eventually reach the vulnerable groups for which it was

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7 Thomas G. Weiss, "Overcoming the Somalia Syndrome—'Operation Rekindle Hope?'," *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations,* 1, 2 (Spring 1995). The same point is made in "Humanitarian Aid to Somalia, Evaluation Report," Netherlands Development Cooperation Evaluation Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (The Hague: 1994): the U.N. operation in Somalia amounted to "putting the civil war in the 'deep freeze' " (p. 162).

intended, the levels of "spillage" reached wuthering heights—up to 80 percent in some cases,[8] and on average well above the 10 to 20 percent which is considered "tolerable" in emergency food aid operations. Given the extent of the looting, one can only conclude that international assistance became a stake in clan warfare and directly fueled the war economy.

Had excessive "decomposition" not clouded the vision of the operations strategists, it might have been possible to look for less invasive tactics for addressing humanitarian issues. (The writer is not concerned with the UNOSOM approach to security, though a reflection on possibly less invasive security tactics might also be in order). Instead of militarizing humanitarian assistance in order to reach vulnerable groups, it might have been possible to use market mechanisms and private transport. The argument here is that in even the worst civil war situations the market seldom breaks down completely: private traders and truckers have their own ways of getting through road blocks with their goods. This is obviously much more difficult if bags are marked "gift of . . ." in which case they are likely to be considered as a free good but, in a situation where losses are colossal, the extra cost of rebagging commodities in local bags might be well worth the extra effort. This has been done routinely and successfully in other civil war situations, particularly in Afghanistan.

The other obvious avenue for international aid would have involved short-circuiting Mogadishu altogether: given the costs, both financial and political, of funneling the overwhelming proportion of food through the capital, it would have been worthwhile to look aggressively at crossborder land routes to reach vulnerable groups, either using market mechanisms or U.N. convoys. Even moving or attracting the vulnerable groups to safe areas where traditional law and order mechanisms had not broken down might have been a viable and more cost-effective option.[9] A variant of this would have involved designating U.N. protected areas close to the borders or accessible from the borders.

The only agency to attempt this approach was ICRC, which made deliveries by barge to a dozen points along the coast, and by land in border areas. It should be recalled that, prior to the UNITAF operation of December 1992, ICRC bore the brunt of the humanitarian effort. In humanitarian terms, this was a qualified success.[10] By the time UNITAF was able to deploy, the famine had peaked, thanks to the efforts of ICRC which had mounted an operation of unprecedented magnitude and complexity. Despite the fact that it had to seek armed protection for the first time in its history, ICRC was able to establish a system which reached Somalia's most vulnerable groups. This involved providing wet food through kitchens which, at the height of the emergency, in the fall of 1992, were feeding

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[8] Coicaud, see note 5. This figure has since been disputed, but the fact remains that looting reached unprecedented levels.

[9] But then cost effectiveness is not necessarily a criterion for military operations. It is said that mineral water for UNOSOM contingents was being shipped (initially airlifted) from Israel at high cost when it could have been made available far cheaper overland from e.g. Kenya. It is also said that the labels had to be taken off the bottles because of the objections of some contingents.

[10] For a detailed discussion of ICRC operations in Somalia, see note 7, "Humanitarian Aid to Somalia," 129-80.

one million people per day. The advantage of this approach over traditional dry food distribution was that, to a large extent, it was self-targeting and less susceptible to looting.[11] After the arrival of UNITAF, with the U.N. relief agencies in tow, ICRC scaled down and phased out its program. The point here is that ICRC was able to set up a large-scale famine relief program at the community level without any outside military protection. This involved complex negotiations with local authorities (i.e. more often than not warlords), armed protection, and some losses, but the fact remains that the deployment of UNITAF, and the militarization of humanitarian assistance, sharply reduced the mobility of the humanitarian agencies.

U.N. and NGO staff, like ICRC, were able to operate relatively effectively in outlying areas by developing relationships of mutual trust and understanding with local leaders, prior to the deployment (one is tempted to say until the deployment) of UNITAF and UNOSOM. This reinforces the point that, even in a failed state where conflict is rampant, it is sometimes possible to identify reliable interlocutors and implementing partners provided there is a clear agreement on what both sides want to achieve.

The second lesson relates to the commitment behind the intervention and its implications for humanitarian actors. Now that we are back at square one, shouldn't some tough questions be asked? If the provision of humanitarian assistance is now as problematic, or more so, than in 1992, should there have been a military intervention in the first place? The cynical argument is that efforts aimed at imposing peace through an outside intervention merely prolong conflict or stalemate or both. The point has been made, not entirely in jest, that if Blue Helmets had been deployed to Spain during the Civil War . . . they would most probably still be there.[12] The lack of political muscle to forge a solution (Bosnia) or the unclear and shifting objectives followed by loss of strategic interest (Somalia) just compound the problem. While moving in with military might to protect humanitarian assistance may make sense if it is the only option (which, as we have seen, is still a disputed point) and if it is the manifestation of a clear and consistent policy of the international community, what about moving out and leaving the humanitarians in the lurch? Would it ultimately be less damaging to let wars play themselves out until a clear winner emerges, thereby making a semblance of peace and political compromise possible? Should the international community limit itself to providing humanitarian assistance to the victims and refrain from interfering in the internal struggle for power and resources?

Given the international community's double standards—why Somalia and not Sudan, why Haiti and not Afghanistan?—it is tempting to follow this proposition, morally unsatisfying as it may be. Brute military force is not an

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[11] The success of the program was demonstrated by the rapid decline in the market prices of basic staples, see "Humanitarian Aid," 143.

[12] See Matthew Parris, "Imagine a Peacekeeping Force in the American Civil War or U.N. Sanctions Against the Roundheads," *The Times* (London), 6 June 1994. For a more balanced discussion of the same argument, see Jean-Cristophe Rufin, *Le piège humanitaire* (Paris: Lattès, 1993), 368 and ff.

answer to the wave of complex political-ethnic-social-economic crises which have beset the post-Cold War world. Kingmaking or imposing democratization is no business for outsiders. Keep out unless there is no other option, you are sure you can do the job, or there is an overwhelming consensus that it should be done. But how overwhelming must this be? One cannot be too sure given the threshold that had to be reached before a response could be mounted in Rwanda.

Perhaps it would be prudent to conclude that military intervention should be the last resort and that "(i)f competing and mutually distrustful ethnic groups are determined to fight for a given territory there is very little an IO [International Organization] can do to deter them other than cutting off the supply of arms and threatening neighboring states about to intervene with punitive sanctions."[13] While it is undoubtedly true that "IOs can do relatively little to establish and consolidate new democracies because the social forces and institutions that buttress democratic governance must grow at home in the political experiences of the local populace," one might add that massive violations of human rights cannot go unpunished and that a functioning mechanism to stigmatize and where possible punish the perpetrators of such acts could over time become a powerful deterrent. Having argued that "intervention is fraught with dangers," a recent study has concluded that it should be restricted to "cases that constitute a violation of the security of people so gross and extreme that it requires an international response on humanitarian grounds."[14] Unless there are overwhelming reasons to intervene militarily—genocide, massive violations of human rights, clear and manifest dangers of escalation into global war—and overwhelming consensus behind the intervention, perhaps one might best be guided by Peter Bergers axiom that social processes—and the resolution of internal conflict is basically a political and social if not socio-economic matter—are likely to succeed only if they are "illuminated from within."[15] While there are some clear-cut cases where military intervention has complicated matters which might more appropriately have been solved from within—Liberia may well be a case in point[16] —relying on internal coping mechanisms and conflict solving capabilities is no easy matter. In our interconnected global village

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[13] Haas and Haas, see note 3.

[14] Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 90. See also 93: "Both ethical and practical reasons dictate an approach that elevates persuasion, conciliation and arbitration above coercion, and nonviolent coercion above the use of force."

[15] Peter Berger, *Pyramids of Sacrifice, Political Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 216.

[16] The ECOMOG military intervention effectively robbed Charles Taylor and his faction of victory. With the benefit of hindsight it can be argued that, had there been no intervention, some form of peace, and even political compromise, would have prevailed. Intervention, directly or indirectly, has resulted in continuing war, suffering, displacement, massive economic disruption and large-scale humanitarian assistance needs. Because of its fungibility, the latter has indirectly fueled the war efforts of rapidly disintegrating factions which have become smaller in size, and therefore more difficult for humanitarians to deal with, and whose political credentials appear to be increasingly dubious. Peace was briefly in sight but no longer is. War is extending into Sierra Leone, with potentially destabilizing effects in other countries of the region.

"internal conflict" has become a relative term. The difficulty therefore resides in defining "overwhelming." In Rwanda, when should the problem have become overwhelming for the international community: at 5,000, 50,000 or 500,000 deaths? Moreover, when internal strife is not unrelated to actions by outside players (read Belgium and France in the case of Rwanda) or is directly fueled by external support or arms supplies, it is obviously much more difficult to argue for solutions from within.

The third and more general lesson relates to the very nature of military intervention and of its conceptual compatibility with the humanitarian imperative. The roots of the two concepts could not be more different: the first derives its legitimacy from a political compromise in the U.N. Security Council (if not from unilateral action by a big power that is blessed more or less reluctantly by the Security Council). Its legitimacy is therefore transient and fickle since, by definition, the political will or equilibrium can be changed. The second is universal and based in natural law. It stems, as Rousseau would have it, from "pity" or compassion.[17] As such it is a moral obligation, which in theory at least, should in no way be subsumed under "politics." Hence the obligation for the humanitarians to "put the victims first" and the just claim that the right to assistance should be recognized as a fundamental human right.

Intervention appears therefore as a product of *Realpolitik* or, even, of *Mediapolitik*. It has its sources in the concept of collective security which is enshrined in the spirit if not the letter of the U.N. Charter, i.e. the expectation that the victorious allies of World War II would establish a workable system to keep peace in the world. Some authors[18] have argued that this concept was not only flawed from the start, it was basically a functional tool for the benefit of one part of the membership of the club—the West—to the detriment of others. If anything, the end of the Cold War has further reinforced this flaw.[19] The international community's approach to security, as it is embodied in the actions of the Security Council is essentially repressive. It gives a premium to the use of force over other methods of conflict resolution or prevention.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Security Council has occasionally found itself on a collision course with the humanitarian imperative to save lives. This has been particularly clear in Bosnia and Somalia, but the temptation to utilize

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[17] On this point see J.J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, part I: ". . . avec toute leur morale les hommes neussent jamais été que des monstres, si la nature ne leur eût donné la pitié à l'appui de la raison. . . . De cette seule qualité découlent toutes les vertus sociales. . . . En effet, qu'est-ce que la générosité, la clémence, l'humanité, sinon la pitié appliquée aux faibles, aux coupables, ou à l'espèce humaine en général?"

[18] Maurice Bertrand, "Une organisation périmée," *Le Monde des débats*, no. 21, July-August 1994. See also by the same author, *Une nouvelle Charte pour l'organization mondiale?* paper prepared for a seminar on the same subject, I.U.H.E.I., Geneva, 2728 February 1995. Similar views are expressed by Richard Gott, "Nations Divided by a Lost Vision," *Guardian Weekly*, 12 September 1993.

[19] Erskine Childers speaking at the 1994 Annual Human Rights Lecture, Oxford University, on 16 November 1994, compared the U.N. Charter to "a marvellous constitution brutally amended in a fascist coup d'état."

humanitarian assistance as a pawn to achieve political goals (or worse, its use to cover up the shortcomings of the international community when it is unable to prevent or address conflict situations) is often there. Of particular concern are Chapter VII operations where, by definition, the intervenor abandons neutrality and takes sides. This puts the humanitarian actors at risk not only in their theatre of operations but sometimes thousands of miles away.[20] The confusion this creates in the minds of the local population encourages a "good cop, bad cop" mentality.[21] In the eyes of exasperated civilians it is difficult to understand that the "United Nations that sends the military" (the Security Council) works on the basis of different rules (Charter VII and the possible use of force) than "the United Nations that feeds the victims" (the humanitarian agencies who work under the imperative of "putting the victims first," whether or not a U.N.-mandated military force is present). This incompatibility remains a serious stumbling block for both intervenors and humanitarians and no fully satisfactory practical or conceptual framework for its resolution is yet in sight.[22] Despite considerable soul-searching and progress in defining the respective mandates of the political, peacekeeping, and humanitarian arms of the United Nations, the problem remains. In fact, the only satisfactory answer to this contradiction lies in avoiding the conflict altogether. Given, however, that conflicts do happen, and that the number of "civil" wars is perpetually escalating,[23] and given that, as we have seen above, military intervention is best viewed as a last resort, much more attention should be devoted to previous resorts.

The most obvious alternative to intervention is . . . nonintervention, i.e. the provision of humanitarian assistance in civil war situations in the absence of military intervention or support. A comparison between Somalia and Afghanistan (or Sudan) would illustrate the point that, in conflicts where different factions are vying for power and territory, perhaps the most sensible thing to do is provide humanitarian assistance in an impartial and non-intrusive manner, while at the same time undertaking low-key mediation or good offices efforts under the authority of the Secretary-General, rather than of the Security Council.

After the departure of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the various parties to the conflict were equally if not more polarized than in Somalia. There were also widespread humanitarian needs, including food shortages and displacement (though, admittedly, not a famine of the same proportions). Yet, through

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[20] The writer can attest that, when the Gulf War began, the ripple effect was immediately felt as far away as Islamabad where U.N. staff were seen as the "enemy" by those segments of the population which supported Saddam Hussein and therefore became legitimate targets for stonethrowing, or worse.

[21] Picco, see note 2.

[22] Weiss, in "Overcoming the Somalia Syndrome," see note 7, argues for the establishment of a new civilian delivery unit for humanitarian aid under Chapter VII situations. This unit would be part of a unified command reporting directly to the Security Council. Under this scenario the traditional U.N. humanitarian agencies would withdraw from the theatre when Chapter VII is in effect.

[23] According to the *Financial Times* of 2 June 1994, 79 of the 82 conflicts counted between 1989 and 1992 were within states. Duffield, see note 4, notes that, since the 1960s "Each year more wars have started than have ended and they are also lasting longer" (p. 2).

a combination of "humanitarian consensus" (aid was to be distributed impartially on the basis of a needs assessment done by the United Nations) and "humanitarian encirclement" (it would be delivered from neighboring countries, including the then Soviet Union, it was possible for the United Nations to address the most urgent humanitarian needs. This was not without difficulty since initially some mujahedin groups refused to work with U.N. teams working cross line out of government held cities (the "bad United Nations") and would only contemplate crossborder assistance from the "good United Nations" in Pakistan and Iran. The U.N. agencies were able to develop relationships of confidence with local de facto authorities in order to negotiate security and access (deliveries were done—sometimes effectively, sometimes less so—but with tolerable losses for a country at war, mainly through private truckers). There was no militarization of humanitarian assistance, despite the militarized and highly politicized surroundings. Nor was there a need to hire protection at great cost as happened in Somalia. Security was normally provided by the recipient local authorities at little or no cost. Access was by no means uniform, some areas were out of bounds for reasons of security or geography, but by and large the program (emergency food deliveries, food-for-work projects, reconstruction of local infrastructure, and an ambitious demining program implemented by Afghan NGOs and created, financed, and supervised by the United Nations) was effective. A military intervention would most probably have made all this much more difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

An interesting aspect of the Afghan experience which also applies elsewhere was the indirect humanitarian diplomacy role of the U.N. presence. Dealing with nonstate actors such as mujahedin groups can be tricky: they are well-armed and not particularly versed in the subtleties of international diplomacy. The humanitarians working in the area—whether U.N. or NGO—are, however, probably better suited than an outside military force to understand what is going on politically and to act as a local informal conflict prevention mechanism. Commanders are normally keen not to lose their pet projects which, apart from the benefits to the local populace, give them added visibility. More importantly, humanitarian assistance, and activities such as mine clearance, repairs to roads, and irrigation systems, foster a sense of normalcy or at least of the re-emergence of civil society. They often act as important indirect confidence-building measures. Even when this is not possible because the actors are locked into active conflict, humanitarian diplomacy sometimes allows the negotiation of "zones of tranquillity" or "corridors of peace" through which at least the most important humanitarian needs can be addressed. Such negotiations—often very difficult and based in large part on personal trust between the individuals directly involved—can serve to "prime the pump" for more political discussions. The impartial distribution of humanitarian assistance, according to needs identified by the United Nations rather than by the local authorities, can be an important vehicle for moving into second "political gear."

Indeed, humanitarian diplomacy can often be utilized successfully to open up areas to outside assistance, but also to a political or peace process. To some

extent, though at the local rather than at the national level, this has been Afghanistan's experience. It is clearer still in Mozambique where the provision of humanitarian aid to hitherto untouched RENAMO areas was instrumental in bringing RENAMO into the peace process. Military intervention has produced the opposite result in Somalia, as we have seen, but also in Liberia where the ECOMOG intervention has made the delivery of humanitarian assistance to certain parts of the country all but impossible.[24]

The point here is that humanitarian assistance has become an integral and sometimes central feature of maintaining peace and security. Synergies between humanitarian assistance and peace missions can be positive and build on each others strengths if there is a well managed connection between the two. They will be negative, however, if humanitarian assistance is integrated into a poorly managed peace effort. The manner in which assistance is distributed—whether this is done impartially or with a hidden political agenda, whether the aid is militarized, handed out to clan leaders or directly to vulnerable beneficiaries, available freely or through self-regulating market mechanisms—has obvious implications for how local communities and their leaders will look upon the United Nations and the other humanitarian actors. The challenge of humanitarian diplomacy is to use it as an effective tool to build bridges between the parties in conflict.

The last obvious alternative to military force is the use of international economic sanctions. The record here, at best, is mixed. While sanctions against South Africa did not really bite into the equation that kept apartheid in place, it might be argued that they served as a "mobilizing myth" for the struggle for democracy both inside and outside the country. Sanctions against Yugoslavia seemed, for a while at least, to have been reasonably effective in creating a wedge between Belgrade and the Bosnian Serbs. Recent events now cast this into doubt. Sanctions against Libya and Iraq did not weaken the authoritarian leaders that they were aimed to affect. Nor did they force these leaders to significantly change their policies. The same applies to Haiti where economic sanctions were far from sufficient to force the military to step down. International sanctions affect primarily the most vulnerable groups. Invariably, the human cost of the punishment has been high since it amounts to penalizing the weak and innocent rather than those responsible for the situation that the international community is trying to redress. In the case of Iraq, there is strong evidence that Saddam Hussein's hold on the country has been bolstered despite, or perhaps even because of the sanctions (this can be seen for instance in the way the ration system—a crucial factor for survival in a sanctions regime—has been manipulated as a means to exert control over the population).[25] Sanctions therefore seem hard to justify on humanitarian grounds. Even on political

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[24] ECOMOG even imposed, or tried to impose, a ban on aid to certain areas. On this see Colin Scott, in collaboration with Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Action and Security in Liberia, 1989-1994* (Providence RI: Watson Institute, forthcoming 1995).

[25] On the impact of sanctions on Iraq and for a more general discussion of the issue see Sarah Helm, "Famine after the Desert Storm," in *The Independent on Sunday* (London), 8 January 1995.

grounds, however, the international community seems to be hesitant on if and how to use this "penultimate weapon." The Secretary-General himself has mirrored this point of view by calling for the establishment of a new mechanism to assess the impact of international sanctions prior to their imposition.[26]

Beyond Intervention

The best alternative to intervention is prevention. This is easier said than done, but prevention, as mentioned above, is the only true way to solve the inherent contradiction between force and the humanitarian imperative, between coercion and consent. The Secretary-General has recently stated that "preventive diplomacy is the most important issue facing us today. . . . It would cost about 1 percent of what we are paying after the beginning of a conflict escalates."[27] This makes eminent sense. Early warning and aggressive diplomatic efforts are a part of the solution, but getting the message across remains the real problem. Had prevention been effective in Rwanda—where all the warning lights had been flashing for months and months—a massacre of horrific proportions could have been avoided. The fact that the international community now has to deal with the consequences of genocide, and with a caseload of some three million refugees and internally displaced which may cost up to $1.5 billion a year to support and protect, not to mention the costs of reconstruction and development of Rwanda itself, only compounds the problem. For the donor community, a few more Rwandas is a nightmare scenario. But somehow statesmen and politicians have been unable to convince themselves and their taxpayers that prevention costs less than handwringing or muscle-flexing.

The international community must face the fact that prevention will require much more than diplomatic efforts to defuse conflicts. The only form of prevention that makes sense is to address root causes. We are often led to believe that conflicts are caused by identity, ethnicity, and nationalism. More often than not, however, civil wars and resulting complex emergencies are internal to political and socio-economic structures. They are rooted in poverty, and its corollary, dispossession. This is where we have to act in order to reconcile the contradiction between misguided intervention and ever-increasing costs of band-aid humanitarianism. We must learn that excessive decomposition of issues into "slices" that seem more manageable to address does not, ultimately, pay. We need to have a framework through which to address conflicts and their causes in all of their complexity. We also need the capacity to look at the defusing of potential conflicts in the long term. Even in a relatively homogeneous geographical area such as the European Union, reaching the point where the threshold of potential conflict has become unthinkable has taken decades, unprecedented economic growth, and increases in the standard of living of the

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[26] U.N. press briefing 5 January 1995. The case for and against sanctions is also argued by the Secretary-General in his *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace: Position Paper of the Secretary General on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations*, U.N. doc. A/50/60, S/1995/1, paras 6676.

[27] Comments in Helsinki, 11 January 1995 (AP report).

average European citizen. Experience in nearby Yugoslavia confirms that making the prospect of war unthinkable takes time in the best case scenario. But this is not an excuse for avoiding the root problems of conflict. In fact, one of the cruel lessons of the Cold War is that "it was a massive distraction from, but also a framework for suppressing, people's discontent over cultural, ethnic, political and economic legacies of the age of Northern empires."[28] In other words, the Cold War papered over root conflicts with ideology and repression. Real problems are now coming back with a vengeance. The notion of a kind of super Marshall Plan for large tracts of the Third World (and parts of the ex-Second as well) may seem pie-in-the-sky today. Nonetheless, another decade of failed states, collapsed development, and rampant internal violence may force the international community to conclude that it would have been the most sensible and cost-effective form of prevention and peace-insurance.

Consider Rwanda. Thirty years of efforts by external experts and untold millions spent in technical assistance and development aid have left the root causes of conflict unscathed. Contrary to the oft-quoted maxim, in Rwanda peace, development, and democracy did not go hand in hand. Given the fact that the international community was unable to prevent genocide, the least it could do is ask itself why this happened and if the manner in which international development aid was provided, and manipulated by a narrowly based regime, did not exacerbate divisions in Rwandan society and therefore contribute to the problem.

Beyond Neutrality

Is the conclusion, then, that being neutral and impartial is not enough? This is a rather fundamental issue. Consider Rwanda again: it is difficult for the concerned observer—and certainly for anyone who has been involved in providing humanitarian relief to the country—not to feel very strongly that the moral imperative of compassion must extend beyond the mere provision of assistance to the victims of genocide and displacement or to kickstart the economy so that Rwanda can return to "development as usual." As a recent U.N. report has stated: "As a minimum, the international community must ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. As a maximum, durable, sustainable and regional solutions to the problems created by the politics of hatred must be sought."[29] Root causes must be addressed, but more profound ethical issues cannot be escaped. Humanitarian assistance alone will not solve the problems of failed states or of failed development. Raising the issue of root causes will inevitably lead to the questioning of other paradigms of the global system. Is there a collective international responsibility for the functioning of this system? If so, how can this responsibility be separated from the issue of justice, both in the strict sense of the punishment of perpetrators of genocide and other heinous

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[28] Childers, see note 19.

[29] United Nations, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, *Rwanda: Lessons Learned. A Report on the Coordination of Humanitarian Activities*, New York, November 1994.

crimes, and in the larger sense of the quest for a just approach to the problems of violence and poverty in areas of the world that seem to be increasingly marginal—strategically, economically, and politically. If, as stated repeatedly in this paper, emergencies are not aberrations in a linear process but internal to the social, economic, and political structures of societies, can we afford to remain indifferent vis-à-vis these structures? Is neutrality compatible with solidarity?[30] In this context, some have argued convincingly that after Rwanda it is no longer possible for humanitarians to maintain an equanimous impartiality between victims and executioners.[31]

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[30] Duffield, see note 4, concludes that "the notion of neutrality requires thorough critique. Solidarity rather than neutrality has to be the guiding hand" (p. 11).

[31] *Populations in Danger 1995. A Médecins sans Frontières Report*, MSF, 1995, 14.