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Humanitarian action in an age of terrorism

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Introduction

This paper seeks to identify the major issues of policy and operations for humanitarian organizations both as a function of global terrorism and, no less important, in relation to responses in the form of anti-terrorism strategies. The analysis draws on a conference held three years ago at the White Oak Plantation in Yulee, Florida, sponsored by the Humanitarianism and War Project.¹ It was prepared for a conference sponsored by Columbia University, “Security and Humanitarian Action: Who is Winning?”²

While the reality of terrorism did not figure in the 1999 discussion, that conference explored tensions during the first post-Cold War decade between North American and European perspectives, between the delivery of emergency relief and the protection of basic human rights, and between practitioners and researchers.³ Today’s preoccupation with terrorism has confirmed and deepened some of the fissures identified three years ago.

The thesis of this paper, reflecting the 24 case studies and 13 books published by the Humanitarianism and War Project to date (and drawing, in turn, on more than 6,000 interviews with practitioners since 1991) is an unambiguous one. It is that while humanitarianism in an age of terrorism may enjoy a higher profile, its new-found visibility is a mixed blessing. Terrorism creates additional humanitarian need and complicates efforts to alleviate it. Likewise, current anti-terrorist policies and programs, while ostensibly providing new space to enhance human security broadly understood, themselves heighten the difficulty of humanitarian work.

The paper establishes the historical context and reviews four major intersections between humanitarian action and terrorism/anti-terrorism: in the humanitarian apparatus itself, between the humanitarian enterprise and military/security forces, between humanitarian action and political factors, and in the area of nation-building. The paper does not seek to define “terrorism,” the “war” against it, or the whether we have indeed entered an “age” or “era” of terrorism. These concepts themselves have quite different transatlantic interpretations and priority.

The historical setting

During the first decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, policy-makers had searched for a new global paradigm to replace the division of the world into communist and anti-communist ideologies. A number of schemas were tried, including democratic capitalism, economic globalization, free trade, human rights, and human security. However, none provided the coherence desired for readily understanding and managing the political, military, and humanitarian cross-currents of the day. Enter terrorism and the fight against it as the new and latest post-Cold War organizing principle.

Continuities

It is tempting to view the events of September 11, so cataclysmic in nature and so wide-rippling in their effects, as totally new and wholly unprecedented. That is one of the themes of the recent volume, *The*

¹ The author directs the Humanitarianism and War Project in the Feinstein International Famine Center of Tufts University’s Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy. He expresses appreciation for research assistance to Peter Hoffman, a graduate student at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Some of the material in this paper is adapted from a forthcoming book by Larry Minear, *The Humanitarian Enterprise: Dilemmas and Discoveries* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, July 2002), particularly its epilogue.

² Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, International Expert Conference, A U.S. Europe Dialogue in the Wake of September 11, 2001, May 24-25, 2002, Arden House, New York.

³ The report on the earlier conference has been made available to participants in the Columbia consultation: Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., *Humanitarian Action: A Transatlantic Agenda for Operations and Research* (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 2000). It is also available as Occasional Paper 39 at hwproject.tufts.edu.

*Age of Terror: America and the World After Sept. 11.*⁴ “The post-cold war era,” writes Yale history professor John Lewis Gaddis, began with the collapse of one structure, the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, and ended with the collapse of another, the World Trade Center’s twin towers on September 11, 2001.” The era of terrorism, in his view, calls challenges the U.S. “to regain the clarity of strategic vision that served us well during the cold war, and that seemed to desert us during its aftermath.”⁵

A humanitarian lens provides a rather different picture. While the attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon may indeed represent something of a watershed in the perceptions of publics and policy makers, the “era of global terrorism” which they have ushered in is in reality an extension of the post-Cold War era that immediately preceded it. Similarly, the post-Cold War itself represented an extension of its predecessor Cold War decades. In other words, beneath apparent radical discontinuities among eras are all-important continuities.

With respect to the humanitarian challenges of the day, the continuities are important for a number of reasons. First, the problems confronted by humanitarian institutions in all three eras are generic ones: access to populations in need of humanitarian action, negotiating terms of engagement with non-state actors, extracting from belligerents compliance with international norms, strengthening local institutions, and making the necessary links between relief and development needs. Those challenges have not changed as a result of the prevailing constructs through which geo-political events have been understood.

Those challenges underlay the Reagan doctrine, when humanitarian action was skewed by the geopolitical fault lines in Cold War face-offs in such locations as Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique, and Afghanistan. In the post-Cold War era, with conflicts more internal than international, sovereignty more porous, and international political will more diffuse, belligerents in Kigali and Goma, in Mogadishu and Srebrenica posed challenges to humanitarian actors comparable to their Cold War predecessors. In the current age of terrorism, humanitarian actors confront similar dilemmas in mounting and maintaining programs in Sri Lanka, the Philippines, the Occupied Territories, and, of course, Afghanistan.

In historical perspective, terrorism/antiterrorism is but the latest in a long history of politicized theaters for humanitarian action. Despite surface differences, no conflict or type of conflict is unique, although to be sure the dynamics differ from place to place. Lessons-learning – a fruitless task if idiosyncrasies are viewed as controlling – becomes not a luxury but an essential. Whatever the era, the projection of political and, with it, military power on the international stage always impinges on humanitarian action and always affects the contours of the humanitarian response. Consistent from one era to the next, humanitarian imperatives are often the bridesmaid but rarely the bride.⁶

Second, the humanitarian – and, for that matter, the political – institutions themselves are the very same ones that have responded to emergencies since the advent of the Cold War and before: UN assistance agencies, bilateral aid organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. The broad outlines of the humanitarian enterprise have changed surprising little in recent decades, with flagship agencies such as the ICRC and several individual NGOs predating even the advent of UN and bilateral humanitarian and development organizations. In this broad sense, no configuration of institutions on the ground in any given emergency is unique. However, the mixture may vary from place to place, with more of a UN presence in one setting, a more diverse array of NGOs in another, a heavier role for international security forces in the humanitarian sphere in a third, and so on. Without doubt, the number of institutional actors has increased over time.

⁴ Strobe Talbott and Nayan Chanda, eds., *The Age of Terror: America and the World After September 11* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, “And Now this: Lessons from the old era for the New One,” Talbott and Chanda, op. cit., 3, 18.

⁶ For an elaboration of this theme, see two monographs in the Humanitarianism and War series by S. Neil MacFarlane, *Politics and Humanitarian Action* (Occasional Paper 41) and *Humanitarian Action: The Conflict Connection*, Occasional Paper 43 (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 2000).

In fact, the research of the Humanitarianism and War Project suggests that the external environment for humanitarian action has changed more significantly than have the agencies themselves. What we wrote in 1995 with reference to the UN system applies equally in the new millennium to the humanitarian enterprise as a whole. “With the ebbing of East-West tensions and the advent of the post-Cold War era, the world has changed more quickly and profoundly than has the UN system. It is not unprecedented, of course, for institutions to have to play catch-up with current events and historical trends. Yet the new geopolitical picture, freighted with negative humanitarian potential, has caught the world body largely off guard.”⁷ The lack of change is particularly ironic in that the United Nations may be inherently more suited to a multipolar world than to the Cold War world within which for generations it was required to function.

Third, the countries which top the current terrorism agenda are countries that have had been graced over the years with international aid programs, and with international political-military involvement: Afghanistan, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Yemen, and North Korea. Again ironically, terrorism and humanitarian crises share some of the same roots in the form of poverty, underdevelopment, social exclusion, identity-based conflict, structural violence, and even globalization itself.

What has changed is not the theaters in which international activities are mounted – and there are indeed some highly theatrical elements about the history of international involvement. In some settings, what is different about the era of terrorism is nothing discernible in the day-to-day hard-scrabble existence of the world’s impoverished people. What has been transformed is the optic through which the terrain is viewed, and the prevailing objectives of outside intervenor.

In a number of important respects, therefore, little radical discontinuity distinguishes the pre- and post-September 11 worlds, either for humanitarian organizations or for most of the world’s people. An emergency in Afghanistan had existed for decades before U.S. policy-makers determined first to weed out Al Qaeda operatives and then to target the Taliban authorities who were their hosts. The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians had been festering for generations, with Israeli tactics against Palestinian “terrorists” emboldened in the wake of the U.S. response to global terrorism. Into each of the other theaters to which the United States and its allies now extend now extend their anti-terrorism concerns – the Philippines, Georgia, Colombia, Yemen – there is a history to be reckoned with and a play already in progress.

There had even been specific wake-up calls in the Nineties and earlier of a terrorist sort: attacks on U.S. military housing and naval assets in the Middle East and, in 1998, the bombings of U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. The September 11 events were not the first global terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, as the February 26, 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center reminds. Already in 1992 the Security Council determined that international terrorism was a threat to international peace and security.⁸

One of the reasons that the United States as leader of the anti-terrorism coalition has found it so hard to assess and address the terrorist threat, however, has been its inextricable linkage to decades of U.S. foreign policy decisions and foreign assistance flows, which from an probing analytical viewpoint can now hardly escape review. The current focus of U.S. policy on terrorism by non-state actors also begs the essential question about terrorism by states, including the United States itself, whether directly or through proxies. In short, while terrorism itself is not new, the U.S.-led preoccupation with it has, since September 11, reached hitherto unprecedented levels.

⁷ Larry Minear, “The Evolving Humanitarian Enterprise,” in Thomas G. Weiss, ed., *The United Nations and Civil Wars* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 89.

⁸ Resolution S/RES.748, March 31, 1992.

Discontinuities

That said, two particular discontinuities between pre- and post-September 11 worlds deserve mention at the outset. First, the public – in this instance, the American public – has developed a much deeper sense about the fragility of its own national security. Modern de Toquevilles itinerating around the United States in recent months have noted a distinct difference. “[H]istory will record the existence of two Americans,” observed Richard Tomkins in the *Financial Times* during a trip to Middle America three weeks after the events, “the one that prevailed before September 11, in which America was America and the rest of the world was another place, and the one that will exist hereafter, in which America reluctantly becomes a part of that sometimes hostile and frightening world.”⁹

The change is a significant one, not only for security policy but also for humanitarian activities. For better or worse, the perceptions of many Americans of the rest of the world had been influenced by their involvement with and through humanitarian organizations. This not only gave ordinary citizens a connection with the wider world but contributed to certain national delusions of humanitarian grandeur. These delusions affected perceptions of both the scale and importance of public and private aid largesse as well as the efficacy of outside assistance.

Some aid agencies in the U.S. and abroad have already felt a post-September 11 backlash in giving, while others have hesitated to make, or have downplayed for a time, their customary public appeals.¹⁰ The post-Cold War era had already lowered the curtain on what some considered the halcyon days of humanitarian Cold War action in which expatriates who worked among victims of human and natural disasters lived a charmed life. Will humanitarian activities and, more basically still, humanitarian impulses be sustainable in terrorist-era world of perceived hostility to international engagement on human needs and human rights?

In order for the global reach of the humanitarian impulse to be sustained, agencies will have to work harder than in the past to ensure that, as in the Cold War, assistance does not follow the flag. In fact, they will need to resist the temptation – some will surely succumb to it – to keep their humanitarian activities alive precisely by wrapping humanitarian action in the flag.

An editorial on “Humanitarian Assistance and Communism” in the *Washington Times* during the peak of the Cold War held that “Anyone who examines the historical record of communism must conclude that any aid directed at overthrowing communism is humanitarian aid.”¹¹ How long will it be before the same sentiments once again prevail, substituting only “terrorism” for “communism”?

“We are a compassionate nation,” President George W. Bush observed in remarks to U.S. State Department employees several weeks after the September events, “but our compassion is limited.”¹² Will the U.S. pick up its compassion and go home, reducing governmentally underwritten assistance activities to what the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act calls “friendly nations.” The early days after September 11, in which the focus of attention was quite properly on the human devastation in this country, could well become the harbinger of a new concentrating of American charitable giving on “its own people.” The Monterrey Summit, which featured a substantial increase in U.S. assistance levels, suggests otherwise, although the details of the new funding have yet to be filled in.

Faced with terrorism and national security as the twin issues of the day, the humanitarian enterprise will once again be forced to make a case for the independence and neutrality of humanitarian action – but also for the importance of such action to U.S. national security and the country’s standing in the world. Humanitarian organizations failed to articulate such a case in the 1980s, conflating neutrality

⁹ Richard Tomkins, “Fortitude in a Fearful New World,” *Financial Times*, September 29-30, 2001, 2.

¹⁰ Severin Carrell, “Fear and hostility put TV refugee appeal at risk,” *The Independent*, Sept. 30, 2001.

¹¹ *The Washington Times*, “Humanitarian Assistance and Communism,” [editorial], May 10, 1985, quoted in Larry Minear, *Helping People in an Age of Conflict: Toward a New Professionalism in U.S. Voluntary Humanitarian Assistance* (New York and Washington: InterAction, 1988), 36.

¹² Washington, D.C., October 4, 2002.

with naivete and overseas assistance with patriotism.¹³ However, the enterprise today better understands the political dimensions of humanitarian action and the need for more political savvy in positioning its activities in relation to the prevailing political winds.

There are dangers beyond red-white-and-blue humanitarianism. Barring reforms in the UN itself, humanitarian action should not necessarily be tied to the UN flag either. Multilateral aid agencies, which did not escape unscathed from either Cold War or post-Cold War skirmishes, are once again being whipsawed post-September 11 by strong-minded donors.

An additional liability is the recurrent inability of the United Nations system, accountable to sovereign states, to relate – even on specifically humanitarian issues – to non-state actors. The absence of the U.N. aid officials, even simply on fact-finding missions, in Nagorno-Karabakh or Chechnya during periods of intense warfare and human need provides cases in point.¹⁴

There is a second discontinuity with recent and not-so-recent history as well. International terrorism has been shown to be more widespread, more able to penetrate wealthy nations, more technologically sophisticated, more ruthless, and perhaps backed by a more enthusiastic and determined following than its predecessors. The task now concerns less that of taking terrorism seriously than of overreacting, both to terrorism as a global reality and to specific incidents of it.

“The difficulty now for America is precisely in judging the relative merit of any given threat,” comments one analyst. “The spectacular uniqueness of suicidal hijackers flying planes into the WTC and the subsequent collapse of the towers has fundamentally altered our ability to calculate relative merit.”¹⁵

The determination to win the “war,” this time against terrorism, again, as in predecessor eras, trump concerns about how the war is won and what residue the “victory” leaves behind for future generations. The nuanced understanding of context, necessary for effective humanitarian action, is at odds with the spirit of the current U.S.-led anti-terrorism crusade.

The pivotal issue concerns not the reality of terrorism but the most effective mechanisms for counteracting it. Each of those mechanisms – legal, diplomatic, political, military as well as emergency relief and longer term development assistance – has implications for the humanitarian enterprise. Successive sections of this paper examine the impacts on the humanitarian undertaking itself, the blurring between humanitarian and military actors, the broader political context, and the challenge of nation-building in an age of terrorism.

The humanitarian enterprise

Every major humanitarian crisis has a way of threatening to throw the international humanitarian apparatus off-stride, and Afghanistan is no exception. The principle of impartiality – that is, proportionality of international response according to the severity and extent of need – is often the first casualty. International political and media profile drives resource allocations. While there is no belying the likely cost of relief and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, these are likely, if past is prologue, to come at the expense of other equally needy emergencies.

In the Kosovo crisis, one worker transferred by her agency from Sierra Leone to Albania and Macedonia “could scarcely believe the largess of the camps and the creature comforts provided.” Upon

¹³ For a review of discussions among U.S. NGOs of politics and humanitarian action at the height of the Cold War during the years 1985-1987, see Minear, *Helping People*, op.cit.

¹⁴ For an elaboration of the structural problem involved for the UN in dealing with insurgent forces that challenge governments in internal armed conflicts, see Larry Minear, “The Evolving Humanitarian Enterprise,” in Thomas G. Weiss, ed., *The United Nations and Civil Wars*, op.cit., pp. 89-108. Chapters by other analysts elaborate on the theme.

¹⁵ Michael Corbin, “Six months later, a new America,” *Baltimore Sun*, March 10, 2002, p. 3F

her return to Freetown, she was viewed as a “pariah” by colleagues, who felt she had deserted people in greater extremity.¹⁶

The issue, of course, is not the embarrassment of an individual staff person at inequitable distribution of international resources but the integrity of the global apparatus itself. Anticipating the problem, 23 U.S. NGOs early on urged the administration to appropriate new funds for Afghanistan rather than having them come “at the expense of other development and humanitarian programs.”¹⁷

In Afghanistan, early indications are that similar distortions may be at work. The UN has requested fully 20 percent of global international assistance in 2002 for this particular crisis. Afghanistan is also likely to command a larger fraction of its twenty percent than will other more silent emergencies of their more meager shares. The situation is reminiscent of the skewing of aid allocations, multilateral as well as bilateral, to reflect Cold War political priorities.

A second challenge to the humanitarian enterprise involves the selection of local organizations as operational partners. During the early stages of the bombing of Afghanistan following withdrawal of expatriate personnel, international assistance efforts were sustained by the national staffs of UN agencies and NGOs, some of which numbered in the hundreds. Had it not been for their continued presence and work, the humanitarian crisis associated with the bombing would have been even greater.

Local staff of international organizations, and staff of local Afghan organizations as well, continued their considerable efforts at great personal risk. “For most aid organizations, communications with local staff members still inside Afghanistan all but ended with the Taliban’s edict a few days after the U.S. air strikes began that anyone caught using a satellite telephone would be executed on the spot.”¹⁸ Four local employees of the Afghan Technical Consultancy, a demining agency, were killed by U.S. bombs after they volunteered to stay behind to protect agency property from expropriation by the Taliban.

One of the encouraging elements following the removal of the Taliban was the commitment by international humanitarian organizations to the “Afghanization” of the subsequent relief and reconstruction effort. The commitment to local capacity building was a welcome change from earlier emergencies, in which it was largely an afterthought rather than an element in the strategic planning process.¹⁹

“How dare we think about rebuilding Afghanistan without listening to the sovereign people?”, asked one World Bank vice president at a November aid conference in Islamabad.²⁰ “One of the biggest problems of the last 10 years of aid to Afghanistan,” noted a senior UNDP official, “has been the extremely high overhead cost paid by donors to deliver aid, and we need to design future programs around as few international staff as possible, with extensive management and control by Afghans. This is a moral and political imperative.”²¹ For reasons of efficiency as well as effectiveness, aid agencies were thus committed from the outset to the building of local capacity.

The humanitarian record

Six months into the orchestration of the international response, however, the prevailing sentiment among humanitarian agencies seems to be that the approach is largely a matter of business as usual.

¹⁶ Larry Minear, Ted van Baarda, and Marc Sommers, *NATO and Humanitarian Action during the Kosovo Crisis* (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 2000), 61.

¹⁷ Letter by 23 InterAction agencies, Dec. 18, 2001.

¹⁸ Tyler Marshall and Megan Garvey, “Humanitarian Aid: Relief Efforts Trumped by Air War,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 2001.

¹⁹ For a presentation and analysis of six country case studies, see Ian Smillie, ed., *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Emergencies* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2001).

²⁰ Mieko Nishimizu, World Bank Vice President for South Asia, quoted in John Donnelly, “Heavy lifting seen in Afghans’ hands,” *Boston Globe*, Nov. 28, 2001.

²¹ David E. Lockwood, Deputy Regional UNDP Director for Asia and the Pacific, in Donnelly, op.cit.

Problems encountered both within the humanitarian enterprise and external to it have frustrated the implementation of well-identified lessons from earlier crises, including local capacity building.

Humanitarian organizations have also had major difficulties with coordination. A generic problem, the terrorist landscape may have heightened the degree of difficulty involved by creating additional insecurity and targeting expatriate and local aid officials. The current situation in Afghanistan involves multiple coordinating mechanisms, no one of which encompasses the entire enterprise.

A recent fact-finding mission by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) noted that “To a certain degree, the NGO community must ensure and prove that it is able to organise itself.”²² As of April, with a plethora of actors on the ground, NGOs have yet to do so, and the UN itself is almost equally buffeted by centrifugal forces. The major positive difference to date appears to be not in the approach put into place by the humanitarian agencies themselves but instead in the firm direction provided by the Afghan Interim Administration. While ownership of aid activities by the Afghan authorities is a definite plus, it brings with it its own set of problems.²³

The humanitarian effort, local and international, has been further complicated by pressures brought to bear by donor governments on private agencies. From the early months of the humanitarian response, Muslim NGOs have been subjected to close scrutiny. Several such agencies based in North America have had their assets seized by the U.S. and Canadian governments. UNICEF has reportedly come under pressure from the United States for its past funding of a Muslim NGO. Pakistan has reportedly expelled expatriate staff of several agencies identified as sympathetic to the Taliban. Several Saudi-based groups have been publicly identified as suspect, although Saudi authorities have challenged the allegation.

The fears expressed by donor governments have some foundation in fact. Some aid workers have confirmed the suspicious nature and questionable activities of certain individual NGO groups from the countries involved. However, the dilemma raised is a serious one. Cutting off funding to such agencies undercuts the commitment of outsiders to building local capacity, and, as noted below, retards the growth of more self-reliant and resilient societies. It also shines an uncomfortable spotlight on western or northern NGOs some of which have highly political and religious agendas, most of which accept some government funding, and many of which lack well-established systems of accountability.

The humanitarian response to Afghanistan has some potentially positive features. One is the possibility of a greater sense of solidarity between North Americans and Europeans, on the one hand, and, on the other, people in crisis countries whose everyday lives are characterized by insecurity and violence. Whether or not that sense of solidarity impels more decisive and sustained international action within a policy framework more oriented toward human security, however, remains to be seen.

The military/security connection

With the advent of the U.S.-led war on terrorism, “military humanitarianism” has come into its own. The term, used with approbation by my colleague Thomas G. Weiss and others, refers to “the application of deadly force without the consent of a sovereign state to sustain human values.”²⁴ Employed half-heartedly in the Former Yugoslavia but with greater determination and success in Kosovo and Afghanistan, military humanitarianism is for Weiss and others an overdue indication that the community of states is finally getting serious about assisting and protecting vulnerable civilian populations, with military force if necessary. The evolving understanding of sovereignty, which in the post-Cold War era has a higher affirmative humanitarian obligation on the part of governments, reinforces thinking along such lines.²⁵

²² Ed Schenkenberg, “NGO Coordination and Some Other Relevant Issues in the Context of Afghanistan from an NGO Perspective,” (Geneva: ICVA, April 9, 2002).

²³ See Paula R. Newberg, “What does it take to rebuild a state?,” in *Forced Migration Review*, Vol. 13, June 2002, 38-39.

²⁴ See Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, *Humanitarian Challenges and Intervention: World Politics and Dilemmas* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

²⁵ For an extended discussion, see International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect*, December 2001.

Other analysts, myself included, see military humanitarianism and its next-of-kin, humanitarian intervention, as contradictions in terms. We acknowledge the need for secure surroundings in order for humanitarian activities to be carried out. At the same time, we believe in the importance of winning the consent of the belligerents to international presence and, lacking that, in putting some distance between humanitarian organizations and the sometimes necessary dispatch of military assets to restore law and order. We also view humanitarian activities themselves as a civilian function, not normally suited to military personnel whose comparative advantage lies in providing security and whose presence may convey “implicit ethical messages” rationalizing dispute settlement by means of force.

Roles of the military

Leaving aside the debate within our own research group, the data accumulated by the Humanitarianism and War Project since 1991 indicate that in major conflicts of the post-Cold War period, international military assets have played three basic functions. First, they have fostered a secure environment for civilians and humanitarian agencies. Second, they have supported the protection and assistance work of the agencies. Third, they have provided direct assistance to civilians in need.

Our overall conclusion, based on studies of the military contribution in northern Iraq,²⁶ the Former Yugoslavia,²⁷ Rwanda,²⁸ and Kosovo,²⁹ has been that troops have tended to reverse the order of their comparative advantages. That is, they have been least willing and/or able to provide security and most comfortable assisting people at the local level. The result has been an unhelpful blurring of roles between the military as providers of security and humanitarian as providers of assistance and protection.

This trend has continued – once again, there is more continuity than novelty – during the early months of the anti-terrorist response to the Afghanistan situation. Confusion between military and humanitarian objectives and actors was signaled from the outset by the dropping of “humanitarian daily rations” (HDRs) by U.S. military aircraft, packaged, like cluster bombs, in yellow wrapping.³⁰ Both the U.S. Agency for International Development and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) sought to dissuade the Pentagon from its HDR initiative, only to be told that the airdrops would continue until needs of civilians on the ground were otherwise met by humanitarian agencies.

The dynamics of the Afghan situation also dramatized the importance of security to humanitarian operations. There is no disputing that the lay of the land in Afghanistan is perilous, that humanitarian actors are exposed, and that most of them welcome protection by international military forces both for their own work and for civilian populations. During the latter months of 2001 and even during the first quarter of 2002, insecurity was produced not only by die-hard Taliban and Al Qaeda remnants but also reflected in fighting among warlords and even among members of the new cabinet.

At a time when only modest numbers were being discussed for the new International Security Assistance Force, US NGOs advocated more rather than fewer soldiers, quicker rather than slower deployment, and use outside of Kabul and other cities and in the more insecure hinterlands. A number of members of InterAction, wrote a sign-on letter to U.S. officials that affirmed the lesson of earlier conflicts: the provision of security is the most indispensable contribution of the military.

²⁶ Larry Minear, U.B.P. Chelliah, Jeff Crisp, John Mackinlay, and Thomas G. Weiss, *United Nations Coordination of the International Humanitarian Response to the Gulf Crisis, 1990-1992*, Occasional Paper 13 (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 1992).

²⁷ Larry Minear, Jeffrey Clark, Roberta Cohen, Dennis Gallagher, Iain Guest, and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Action in the Former Yugoslavia: The UN's Role, 1991-1993*, Occasional Paper 18 (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 1994).

²⁸ Larry Minear and Philippe Guillot, *Soldiers to the Rescue: Humanitarian Lessons from Rwanda* (Paris: OECD Development Centre, 1996).

²⁹ Larry Minear, Ted van Baarda, and Marc Sommers, *NATO and Humanitarian Action in the Kosovo Crisis*, Occasional Paper 36 (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 2000).

³⁰ Cf. Deborah Zabarenko, “Both yellow: one is food, one a bomb,” *National Post* (Canada), October 31, 2001.

Over time, U.S. troops began to reach out to local communities with civic action activities. In late February, NGOs received letters from military officials requesting project suggestions and funds to carry them out. "As a military organization," read one such letter, "the Coalition Joint Military Operations Task Force has some assets, approved by the Department of Defense, with which to conduct projects. We are attempting to locate organizations that are willing to help out the school and hospitals we are rebuilding ... Would your organization be interested in providing resources in the form of professional expertise, financial contributions, training or materiel to help this effort? Could you help by guiding us to other humanitarian organizations that could help this country?"³¹

The particular NGO replied in the negative, citing the preferred division of labor between military and humanitarian roles that many relief and rights agencies affirm. "As we all know, there is plenty of work to be done and we urge you to reconsider USAR [US Army Reserves] projects and concentrate on what the USAR does really well ... Rebuilding of bombed roads and bridges is essential so that the people of Afghanistan can, again, have access to markets. This would be a clear and genuine contribution that could be accomplished while in uniform and the people of Afghanistan, as well as the NGOs and GOA [Government of Afghanistan] would know and appreciate the excellent value of this assistance."³²

The NGO reference to uniforms spoke to a concern shared by many humanitarian agencies that U.S. military personnel engaged in civic action programs wore civilian clothes and carried weapons. Sixteen executives of InterAction member agencies flagged for the U.S. National Security Adviser in a letter dated April 2 what they considered a policy that "increases the security risks of every humanitarian aid worker" in Afghanistan. The policy of having "civil affairs and Special Forces personnel ... engage in humanitarian activity while dressed in civilian clothes and carrying weapons risks confusing military and humanitarian personnel in the minds of local populations."

The letter noted that "The decision contradicts a consensus reached in years of discussions between American NGOs and senior American military officers, as well as practice in previous crises of the past decade in which we have delivered humanitarian aid in conflict or post-conflict areas where U.S. military forces have been present."³³ The U.S. military dismissed NGO objections on the grounds that in such insecure terrain, soldiers needed the protective cover of civilian clothes to avoid drawing attention to themselves, along with sidearms to defend themselves.

Confusion between military and humanitarian missions is nothing new. The blurring of military and humanitarian was a prevailing reality in the Kosovo crisis, where NATO was both belligerent and assistance provider. On the tarmac in Tirana, NATO aircraft in the Albania Force (AFOR), which had a humanitarian mission, stood side-by-side with U.S. Apache helicopters, on hand in case an invasion of Kosovo proved necessary. Bilateral military forces with and without connections to NATO also provided an important "surge protector" role during the outflux of Kosovars in April 1999 at a time when many civilian aid agencies were overwhelmed.

Over time, however, their involvement of the troops in ongoing civic action activities in the Kosovo crisis proved an embarrassment. Not only were the troops uninformed about the basic principles of humanitarian operations. Various national contingents competed with each other in an unseemly bilateral sweepstakes by dangling amenities before the Kosovar refugees.

The use of troops for activities in the humanitarian sphere in Afghanistan represents a step backward in terms of the Kosovo lessons identified by NATO. After the Kosovo crisis, NATO adopted new policy that affirmed the primary function of its troops (and, by implication, troops provided by NATO member states) to be the performance of "security related" tasks. Civic action activities by the military are to be limited to exceptional circumstances, and undertaken only in collaboration with humanitarian

³¹ Correspondence between LTC CA USAR Alex Sonski, Resource Project Officer, on behalf of Brigadier General David Kratzer, to James Bowman, Executive Director, Lutheran World Relief, Feb. 13, 2002.

³² Reply by Kenlynn K. Schroeder, Director for Grants, Emergencies, and Material Resources, Lutheran World Relief, Feb. 25, 2002.

³³ InterAction, Letter to Dr. Condoleezza Rice (copied to senior U.S. defense, diplomatic, assistance, and military officials), April 2, 2002.

agencies and civil authorities.³⁴ Not involved in Afghanistan, NATO was not in a position to test its new policy, although its new policy is more compatible with the wishes of humanitarian actors than the U.S. policy in place.

The anti-terrorist response in Afghanistan underscores – and arguably increases – the already existing vulnerability of aid workers. The reprisals against the U.S. bombing of selected targets in Afghanistan and the Sudan following attacks on American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998 were a harbinger of things to come. Two U.N. personnel – an Italian peacekeeper and a French aid worker – were shot; the former was killed and the latter required hospitalization. In early April 2002, al Qaeda announced a bounty on Americans, dead or alive. If past is prologue, there may ultimately be more humanitarian than military casualties in the Afghan theater.

Conflicting views among practitioners

Among NGOs, the advent of “military humanitarianism” is applauded by some but lamented by others. There was, and is, something of a division between European and U.S. aid agencies on the use of force in Afghanistan, reflecting, perhaps, public opinion on the two continents. European agencies appear to have felt they had more scope for questioning the rationale for a heavily military rather than diplomatic approach and for highlighting the extent of the damage from U.S. bombing to Afghan civilians and aid property and operations. One international aid federation with chapters in Europe and the United States found its European members more willing to criticize the bombing; the reluctance of its U.S. member delayed international advocacy of that viewpoint.

At root, the civilian humanitarian apparatus as developed over the years fits more comfortably into a multilateral response to terrorism framed by a framework of international law and diplomacy, which may include military action, than into a political rubric that makes heavy use of military assets and gives low priority to the laws of war and to international human rights obligations.

In this context, the coming into force of the International Criminal Court illustrates the value to the humanitarian enterprise of concerted action to increase international accountability for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. It also illustrates the isolation of the United States government on fundamental issues of central humanitarian consequence. Reluctance to embrace multilateral institutions and joint problem solving at the international level – a temptation for other powerful nations as well – has a certain parallel in proposals and practices by the Bush administration that involve cutting domestic legal corners in pursuit of the war against terrorism.

The reality of terrorism and the need for an effective international response challenge the broad security framework within which international relations are set. Here, too, there are major differences in perception and approach between the United States and Europe. In a helpful analysis on “World Politics at the Crossroads: The 11th of September 2001 and the Aftermath,” four German analysts note significant differences between European and American perceptions of both the problem and the response. They call for “a reorientation of world politics” and the creation of a “global governance architecture” in which Europe plays a more active role vis à vis the United States and in which the security of individual nations is viewed as bearing a more integral relationship to global security and the rule of law.³⁵

Professor Paul Kennedy, who directs Yale’s International Security Studies Program, sees the age of terrorism challenging the structure of security assumptions in ways yet unexplored. A new direction, he muses, would “favor the diffusion of power and responsibility and burden, and a voluntary alteration of America’s role from being the hegemonic policeman to being the senior partner in a world of democratic states that work out global problems through international structures and shared

³⁴ NATO Military Policy on Civil-Military Co-operations, MCC/411/1.

³⁵ Brigitte Hamm, Jochen Hippler, Dirk Messner, and Christoph Weller, “World Politics at the Crossroads: The 11th of September 2001 and the Aftermath,” Policy Paper 19, Bonn: Development and Peace Foundation/Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden, March 2002.

problems.”³⁶ Thus the reality of terrorism and the need for an anti-terrorist response lead to fundamental issues of domestic and international policy and politics.

The politics of terrorism and anti-terrorism

Is humanitarian action neutral, independent, and impartial, or is it part and parcel of an international political agenda? The past decade has debated this issue as it has surfaced from crisis to crisis. The issue lies quite naturally at the heart of what are called complex political emergencies. It has formed a leitmotiv of the case studies, analysis, and recommendations of the Humanitarianism and War Project.

In one sense, there is nothing new about the political terrain on which humanitarian action in an age of terrorism is mounted. All aid activities in armed conflicts are to one degree or another politicized, with recurring features from one crisis to the next, whether at the international, regional, or national political level.³⁷ Some humanitarian agencies are sensing, however, that the new overlay of the war against terrorism may have a potentially deeper and more dramatic impact on the humanitarian enterprise than garden-variety post-Cold War politics.

Recent events and uncertainties in Afghanistan have complicated the social-political environment for international assistance. Uncertainty may continue even as the Afghan Interim Administration gives way to new and more permanent national structures and polity.

At the same time, decisive leadership by Dr. Ashraf Ghani, director of the Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority, has already begun to embed humanitarian and reconstruction activities within evolving government structures and policies. Viewed from abroad, where the political stakes are demonstrably higher than other crises, humanitarian space may become increasingly constricted and the possibilities of conducting aid activities outside the antiterrorism rubric increasingly scant. At the same time, there may be offsetting gains in coordination and effectiveness.

Positioning humanitarian work

It should come as no surprise that humanitarian organizations, particularly NGOs but also the United Nations itself, have had difficulty positioning themselves in relation to the prevailing anti-terrorist policy towards Afghanistan. Some organizations have sought to avoid too-close identification with the anti-terrorism coalition and its heavily political approach. During the bombing phase, the UN, for example, was reluctant in discussions to be “cornered” into accepting eventual responsibility for assistance within the prevailing framework.

Other organizations are more comfortable with, or resigned to, working within the political context. Some U.S. NGOs, for example, acknowledge that the aid funds available to them and the humanitarian space within which they operate reflect political givens.³⁸ One of those likely givens, in the words of analyst Graham Allison, is that “American policy makers must not think of the humanitarian campaign as an afterthought or charity work. It should be regarded as a genuine second front.”³⁹

By contrast, other NGOs and the ICRC are keeping their distance. Some have opted not to seek or accept U.S. government resources for Afghan-related activities. Some are relying on private donations, which come with fewer strings. Some are using funds provided by other governments or the UN, although the UN’s humanitarian organizations are themselves facing difficult choices in positioning themselves relative to the anti-terrorism project.

³⁶ Paul Kennedy, “Maintaining American Power: From Injury to Recovery,” in Talbott and Chanda, *op. cit.*, 77.

³⁷ For a more extended discussion, see S. Neil MacFarlane, *Politics and Humanitarian Action*, Occasional Paper 41 (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 2000).

³⁸ The political context for humanitarian action was the subject of one in a series of policy dialogues among North American NGOs, hosted on November 15, 2001 by the Humanitarianism and War Project (For the background paper and a summary of the discussion, visit hwproject.tufts.edu)

³⁹ Graham T. Allison, “Bombing Afghanistan with Food: War’s Second Front,” *Boston Globe*, October 14, 2001.

On this issue, too, the view is different from Geneva and Washington. Ed Schenkenberg, executive director of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, has written that “During the days and weeks to come, political grounds and humanitarian goals will totally interfere with each other. Those who wish to provide aid in Afghanistan under American management will have to put aside the principles of independence and impartiality.”

Meanwhile, InterAction, like the United Nations itself, has stationed personnel in the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Cell at the Tampa headquarters of the U.S. Central Command. Their purpose is to keep the lines of communication open and to share NGO concerns with U.S. military planners. Other humanitarian organizations, including the ICRC, have declined the Pentagon’s invitation.

Synergies between humanitarian action and politics

One of the discoveries of our research over the past decade has been that, properly understood, humanitarian action can make a contribution to political objectives, and vice versa. The interplay is captured by a comment made in mid-April to Hamid Karzai, Chairman of the Afghan Interim Administration, by UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers. “Lubbers told Karzai that security is indispensable to repatriation. But more importantly, he said, successful reintegration would lead to stability.”⁴⁰

That was in fact the experience in Central America and Cambodia. Comparing the different dynamics in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, we concluded that “Humanitarian action has been a key element in the regional movement toward lasting peace that began in the mid-1980s. The importance of humanitarian concerns – both as an impetus to and as a beneficiary of diplomatic action – transcends all three countries involved.”⁴¹ In the Cambodian experience, “the decisions of tens of thousands of returnees and their presence back in Cambodia represented visible votes of confidence in the peace process.” In fact, “the process of resettlement loosened the holds of [Cambodian] factions on their respective populations,” indirectly facilitating the reconstruction process.⁴²

Yet synergies between the humanitarian and the political are more often than not elusive. Our research found that in the case of the conflict over Abkhazia, for example, the premature encouragement of refugee return by UNHCR worsened tensions and delayed reconciliation as well as subjecting persons to bodily harm. Likewise, the absence of insistence on international humanitarian presence in both Nagorno-Karabakh and Chechnya made the parties to the conflict more intransigent and less open to diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflicts. Indeed, we found that in Chechnya diplomatic initiatives “often made humanitarian activity more difficult and dangerous.”⁴³

Reviewing the record

Our overall conclusion, based on analysis of scores of political and humanitarian interactions in many post-Cold War conflicts, is that rather than giving hegemony in the relationship to either politics or humanitarian action, the most effective paradigm involves a limited partnership between the two. “[H]umanitarian and political action need to be conceived and implemented on parallel tracks, each reinforcing but not preempting the other. Neither humanitarian nor political action is sufficient in itself; both are necessary. Absorbed as part of a political strategy, humanitarian action may suffer. Devoid of humane values, political action can precipitate a humanitarian disaster. Political action

⁴⁰ UNHCR Briefing Notes, April 16, 2002 [updates@unhcr.dc.org]

⁴¹ Cristina Equizábal, David Lewis, Larry Minear, Peter Sollis, and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Challenges in Central America Learning the Lessons of Recent Armed Conflicts*, Occasional Paper 14 (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 1993), xi.

⁴² Jarat Chopra, *United Nations Authority in Cambodia*, Occasional Paper 15 (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 1994), 66.

⁴³ For a more detailed discussion, see Greg Hansen, *Humanitarian Action in the Caucasus: A Guide for Practitioners*, Occasional Paper 32 (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 1998), 65.

benefits from making space for humanitarian action; humane values require supportive politics to sustain them.”⁴⁴

Some positive post-September 11 synergies may already be taking shape in various conflicts around the world. In “an apparent breakthrough in relations between Sudan and Uganda,” Ugandan military forces have been allowed to enter the Sudan in pursuit of the Lord’s Resistance Army. “Such progress could not have happened,” observes one analyst, “without the additional pressure provided by the U.S.’s ‘war on terrorism’ after September 11.”⁴⁵

Similarly, with respect to the Sudan’s civil war itself, “the U.S. war on terrorism has strengthened its leverage over both the Khartoum authorities and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army. U.S. efforts to promote peace have energized previously moribund peace initiatives.”⁴⁶ “The government of Sudan is stepping away from its terrorist past, and both the governments and the rebels seem exhausted by a civil war that neither can win,” notes another observer. But the role of U.S. policy is complex. “It is precisely because this administration is willing to take seriously and even upgrade relations with the terrorist-tainted government in Khartoum that there is some hope of ending the war.”⁴⁷

Despite the occasional positive development, recent public debate has been dominated with widespread concern about negative synergies between the U.S.-led anti-terrorism policy and the prospects of peace and the protection of fundamental human rights. Within weeks of September 11, concerns were being expressed by rights groups that “human rights issues among new [U.S.] allies are likely to be handled with greater delicacy, if they are mentioned at all.”⁴⁸ Several months later, the annual Human Rights Report confirmed the slippage. “The anti-terror campaign is inspiring opportunistic attacks on civil liberation around the world,” explained Human Rights Watch’s executive director.⁴⁹

In any event, rich experience may help devise the best possible political framework for international relief and rights efforts in an age of terrorism. In fact, a systematic attempt has been made to inform international aid policies for Afghanistan by distilling lessons from recent experience. In late 2001, the chair of the Development Assistance Committee’s Working Party on Evaluation requested the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) to identify lessons that should inform the approaches of the humanitarian enterprise in Afghanistan. Based on a review of scores of recent evaluations, nine lessons were listed, including the development of a coherent policy framework that recognizes that humanitarian action needs its own space.⁵⁰

In a larger sense, the humanitarian – and political – costs of U.S. Cold War policies have yet to be the subject of a clarifying national debate in the United States. Indeed, as noted earlier, some analysts would take the retrospective back only as far as the post-Cold War, leaving the Cold War itself unexamined. Beginning the retrospective with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 may prove too limiting, however, in that similarities between the era of terrorism and the Cold War are at least as relevant to the humanitarian enterprise as are similarities with the post-Cold War era. A reprise on “winning” the Cold War, with appropriate attention to the negative aspects of the victory, could be as useful as it would be controversial. But the need for a post-mortem is clear, both globally and with respect to Afghanistan.

Such a debate would provide necessary context for the “blowback” experienced in Afghanistan, in both political-military and humanitarian respects. “Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime,” wrote Strobe Talbott

⁴⁴ Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Politics*, (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1995), 50-51.

⁴⁵ Alex de Waal, “Prospects for Peace in Sudan,” March 2002 Briefing.

⁴⁶ Alex de Waal, interview with the author, April 22, 2002.

⁴⁷ Nicholas D. Kristof, “The Bloodiest War.” *New York Times*, April 19, 2002, A27.

⁴⁸ Steven Mufson, “American Foreign Policy Suddenly Shifts Course: From Chechnya to China, New Priorities Rule,” *International Herald Tribune*, Sept. 28, 2001, 3.

⁴⁹ Kenneth Roth, quoted in Eun-Kyung Kim, “Rights group says fight against terrorism covers abuses,” Associated Press, January 17, 2002.

⁵⁰ The effort was led by John Borton of ALNAP. The text of the study is available at www.alnap.org. See also Kathleen Newland, Erin Patrick, Joanne van Selm, and Monette Zard, “Introduction,” *Forced Migration Review*, Volume 13, June 2002 [Special Issue: September 11th: has anything changed?], 4-7.

and Nayan Chanda in their edited volume shortly after September 11, “were ... discomfiting case studies in the perils of expediency. These two entities, now on the receiving end of American bombs and cruise missiles, were incubated in the U.S. proxy war against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s.”⁵¹

There have also been “blowbacks” from the provision of humanitarian assistance during the Eighties. “The competing political agendas of the mujahidin parties” in the Eighties, notes OCHA’s Antonio Donini earlier on, “resulted in competing pressures on humanitarian programs. Assistance, even if it was labeled humanitarian, often supported the military effort of the mujahidin and was provided to or through military fronts.”⁵²

The favored Cold War recipient of U.S. “humanitarian” and military aid, Gulbuddin Hekmatyr, was most recently associated with an Iran-based rump military action against the Interim Government and U.S. nationals. Former *mujahidin* commanders, now in positions of authority in the interim government, may take some persuasion regarding the avowed neutrality of this current anti-terrorist generation of humanitarian assistance. A post-mortem is particularly necessary because the Bush Administration has appointed to senior positions a number of persons identified with U.S. Cold War policies in Central American and Afghanistan.

With the passage of time, greater historical reflection and the formulation of a wider range of alternatives is indeed taking place. One such is a publication, “Lessons from US-Latin America Policy for the post-September 11th World,” identifies eight lessons of relevance to combating terrorism. They include: “Don’t turn a blind eye to human rights violations,” “Be careful what you leave behind: weapons and training skills have a long shelf life,” and “Investing in people helps cut terror at the roots.”⁵³ Alternative approaches have been formulated by a variety of groups in Europe and the United States, including the Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden mentioned earlier and the Friends Committee on National Legislation.⁵⁴

Multifaceted responses

A homely adage may have some utility regarding the challenge of shaping anti-terrorism policy that avoids humanitarian collateral damage or, better yet, promotes humanitarian values and outcomes. “When the only tool in your kit is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.”

This was the message of an InterAction letter to President Bush a week after the terrorist events. The NGO community affirmed “the need for a comprehensive approach to attack and weed out terrorism over the coming months and years through military, economic, legal, diplomatic and other means ... including working, through global partnership, to combat the poverty and exclusion that can create fertile ground for the hatred and violence we have just witnessed.”⁵⁵

A tool kit for an era of terrorism requires an array of tools, not simply hammers of different sizes.⁵⁶ Perhaps, however, there is a fundamental contradiction between an anti-terrorism that divides the world into good guys and bad guys and a humanitarianism that refuses to draw invidious distinctions among people whose governments espouse hostile political or military philosophies.

⁵¹ Strobe Talbott and Nayan Chanda, “Introduction,” in Talbott and Chanda, op.cit., xiv-sv.

⁵² Antonio Donini, *The Policies of Mercy: UN Coordination in Afghanistan, Mozambique, and Rwanda*, Occasional Paper 22 (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, 1996), 45-46.

⁵³ Hugh Byrne, “We will be known by the company we keep: Lessons from US-Latin America Policy for the post-September 11th World,” (Washington, D.C.: Latin America Working Group, 2002), 14-15.

⁵⁴ See, for example, FCNL Newsletter No. 663, February 2002, “The Peaceful Prevention of Deadly Conflict: An Alternative to the War on Terror,” and No. 664, March 2002, “‘Axis of Evil’ Rhetoric: No Way to Peace and Security.”

⁵⁵ InterAction letter to President George W. Bush, Sept. 19, 2001, signed by Mary E. McClymont, President and CEO, and Nancy A. Aosse, Chairman of the Board.

⁵⁶ The U.S. currently accounts for more than a third of the defense expenditures of all 190 nations, according to Paul Kennedy, op.cit., 59.

One approach to the contradiction is to separate humanitarian “hawks” from humanitarian “doves,” according to their attitudes toward the use of military force and the preferred shape of anti-terrorist initiatives. Governments then identify and underwrite those aid agencies with worldviews most compatible with their own.

More constructive, however, and perhaps more representative of the sentiments of the humanitarian community in Europe and North America alike, would be to provide serious agencies with the space needed to implement effective and reasonably independent assistance and protection efforts. Many humanitarian practitioners find common ground in the view that “America’s new ‘war’ ought to be waged by the State Department and the US Agency for International Development, not the Defense Department.”⁵⁷

Nation-building in the post-September 11 world

The impacts of terrorism on nation-building need no explanation. The devastation wrought by the September 11 attacks in the United States alone has been monumental and wide-ranging. One calculation puts the direct and indirect costs at upwards of a half-trillion dollars, comprised of loss of wealth destroyed (US \$70 billion), of corporate profits (US \$50 billion), of production (US \$100 billion), of federal revenue generated (US \$80 billion), and of the legislated appropriations for recovery and stimulus (US \$175 billion). The aggregate sum represents between 4 and 5 percent of the nation’s annual Gross Development Product, or roughly US \$1700 per person in America.⁵⁸

The devastation wrought by both terrorist and anti-terrorist agendas is evident, among various places, in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Suicide bombers, part of a concerted campaign against “state terrorism,” have made life largely unlivable for Jewish citizens of Israel. Conversely, attacks against the “infrastructure of terror” by Israeli Defense Forces have devastated “the infrastructure of life itself and of any future Palestinian state – roads, schools, electricity pylons, water pipes, telephone lines [in] a calamitous setback to what had been a steady development of the Palestinian homelands.”⁵⁹

The costs of rebuilding in Israel and the Occupied Territories is only beginning to be calculated. A senior World Bank administrator, interviewed in April 2002, noted that in the Occupied Territories up until the last 19 months of the second *Intifada*, “there was a government out there that was functioning,” delivering an array of services. The Bank’s report concluded that “all semblance of a modern economy would have disappeared by now,” had it not been for the support from international quarters, in particular the European Union and the Arab League.⁶⁰

Underwriting the costs

If there is no doubt about the economic and other costs of terrorism, there is considerable debate about the responsibility and role of the community of states in rebuilding. In the case of Afghanistan, the Bush administration has made funding the relief effort (at least 70 per cent of the emergency assistance is U.S. in origin) the special priority of the United States. Left for the most part to Europeans and others are contributions to rehabilitation and development. On the security side, the U.S. has led and underwritten the military effort against al Qaeda and the Taliban but left the costs and staffing of the international security force largely to Britain and other countries.

Here, too, however, there is a history. The U.S. has made a name for itself by its selective commitments of security and economic assistance for generations. During and after the Cold War, the U.S. justified embarrassingly low percentages of official development assistance (ODA) as a function of the United States’ heavy military and military assistance budgets: the cost, in effect, of its global

⁵⁷ Greg Hansen, “War could make the terrorist threat worse,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Sept. 24, 2001

⁵⁸ FAIR, “The Cost of the Terrorist Attacks v. Immigration Benefits,” Research Update, Dec. 1, 2001. [www.fairus.org/html/07271121.htm]

⁵⁹ Serge Schmemmann, “Attacks Turn Palestinian Plans Into Bent Metal and Piles of Dust,” *New York Times*, April 11, 2002.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

superpower responsibilities. The U.S. even used its muscle to broaden the OECD Development Assistance Committee's definition of ODA to suit its own purposes.

However grudgingly the rationalization of low ODA contributions was received by its friends in the donor club in earlier decades, Europeans and others have less patience today for the "We gave at the Pentagon" response. The American reflex is about as respected as is the United States' multilateral opportunism – or, as it has been labeled, "multilateralism à la carte."

At the International Conference on Funding for Development in Monterrey, Mexico in April, President Bush announced an increase in foreign aid of US \$5 billion over the next three fiscal years, with special attention to recipients committed to good governance, health and education, and foreign investment opportunities. Presumably bilateral in orientation, the new "compact for development" was presented within a clear security framework. "The foundation of development is security," the President told a meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank, "because there can be no development in an atmosphere of chaos and violence. Today, the U.S. is leading a broad and vast coalition defending global security by defeating global terror."⁶¹

The initiative received decidedly mixed reviews, both at home and abroad. *Die Tageszeitung* in Germany congratulated the president on realizing that fighting terrorism effectively requires fighting global poverty. The German development minister urged that the international coalition against terrorism become a coalition against poverty. NGOs welcomed the initiative, but pointed out that US \$5 billion over 36 months paled by comparison with current U.S. expenditures of US \$1 billion monthly for the war against terrorism. Oxfam chided the Monterrey Summit for failing to fix numerical targets for aid within a time certain. A month after the Summit, it seems unlikely that even with a not-too-gentle push from terrorism, development will not succeed in receiving higher international priority and profile.

There is a deeper critique of the new U.S. Millennium Fund as well. U.S. foreign aid itself has a history. "Both Democrats and Republicans have picked at the carcass of foreign assistance for so long," observes Jeffrey D. Sachs, "that they don't know what to do when the need arises to activate these programs."⁶² NGOs who for decades have been tirelessly advocating for a more effective, accountable, and needs-based U.S. assistance program, with reduced military aid and greater trade access and debt forgiveness, can be allowed their deep skepticism that a new assistance millennium has arrived.

Positive aspects

There is, of course, a more sanguine reading of events: that decisive anti-terrorist action can provide a new impulse to nation-building. In a speech at the Virginia Military Institute in mid-April, President Bush commented on the Marshall Plan as a model for Afghanistan. "Marshall knew that our military victory in World War II had to be followed by a moral victory that resulted in better lives for individual human beings," he said. "[I]t will not be enough to make the world safer. We must also work to make the world better." The *New York Times* reporter covering the event observed that "In his comments about Afghanistan, Mr. Bush seemed to complete a reversal of policy that began six months ago with the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington and the American military response in Afghanistan."⁶³

Among U.S. officials at lower levels, there are also signs of change. One American reporter in mid-January 2002 noted that in the quiet corners of the State Department, "hushed voices are wondering ... whether the greatest threat to world stability might not be nuclear proliferation but youth unemployment." Certainly the foreign service apparatus, "America's official umbilical cord to the

⁶¹ Remarks by the President on Global Development, Washington, D.C. March 14, 2001.

⁶² Jeffrey D. Sachs, "One-Tenth of 1 Percent to Make the World Safer," *Washington Post*, Nov. 21, 2001

⁶³ James Dao, "Bush Sets Role for U.S. in Afghan Rebuilding," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2002.

world,”⁶⁴ is aware that of the fragility of the “broad and vast” anti-terrorism coalition and the need for addressing the root causes of terrorism.

Indeed, as Paul Kennedy writes, “the terrorist attacks changed the meaning of power – not entirely, but to a degree that forces us to re-examine so much of America’s policies and assumptions.”⁶⁵ The friends as well as the adversaries of the United States stand ready to join in the long-overdue reassessment, which would perhaps result in higher priority to serious nation-building efforts.

After the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings, there seemed to be “little prospect that humanitarian values will soon receive appropriate weight in the councils of U.S. decision-making on political and security matters.”⁶⁶ The September 11 “wake-up call,” while louder, has yet to result in a serious national debate about the fundamental assumptions and policy directions of the “indispensable nation.”

For the moment, the anti-terrorism coalition is restive but still in place. Governments, European or Arab, who have signed on for Afghanistan are not necessarily prepared to answer the next anti-terrorist muster, even if it is not Iraq. NGOs, too, are hedging their bets. At the NGO policy dialogue on Afghanistan mentioned earlier, some aid groups that were prepared to collaborate with the U.S. government on humanitarian issues in the current conflict expressed wariness about what the future holds.

One NGO noted that its association with the U.S. effort in Afghanistan may have value from an operational and constituency viewpoint in those particular circumstances, but that there were risks as well. Could its reconciliation and peacebuilding work in the Philippines, the agency wondered out loud, be negatively affected by the presence of U.S. Special Forces assisting the Philippines Army in hunting down terrorists on Mindanao?

Negative crosscurrents

For the moment, the United States is committed only to nation-building à la carte. Indeed, the flip side of nation-building is, when U.S. national security ostensibly so warrants, nation-destroying. Some anti-terrorist measures put into place by the U.S.-led coalition in the wake of Sept. 11 have already had serious effects on the ability of countries to pursue their chosen reconstruction and development agendas.

One early target was a private commercial company sending remittances from Somalis working in the United States back to their homeland. The conclusion that terrorist elements in the Horn of Africa and beyond were benefiting led to the closure of the company. The interruption of remittances, however, was a serious jolt to family security and, writ large, the Somali economy.

Equally serious in impact is the attempt to isolate groups that may have begun with terrorist agendas but have subsequently morphed into agencies engaged in serious relief and development work. “As the war [against terrorism] turns truly global,” notes one reporter, “we will confront a new challenge for which we are profoundly unprepared: Kalashnikov-toting terrorist groups that have earned large followings by providing basic social services, like medical care, to people the rest of the world has abandoned.”⁶⁷ The work of Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are cited as cases in point.

On this issue, too, there are different perspectives in Europe and the United States. In January, “the European Union refused to put Hezbollah on its terrorist list. Bush no doubt found it infuriating that our closest allies would balk at labeling the group believed responsible for the 1983 killing of 241 US

⁶⁴ John Mulaa, “Is US mislabelling al Qaida captives”, *Sunday Standard*, [Nairobi, Kenya], Feb. 3, 2002, 19.

⁶⁵ Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 79.

⁶⁶ See Larry Minear, “Terrorism vs. humanitarianism,” *Providence [RI] Sunday Journal*, August 30, 1998.

⁶⁷ Neil Swidey, “Devils of Mercy,” *Boston Sunday Globe*, Jan. 20, 2002, E3.

servicemen in Beirut as a terrorist organization. But the EU's strategy to try to isolate the killers within Hezbollah makes more sense."⁶⁸

The United States thus finds itself in an increasingly precarious position. It is committed, however reluctantly, to nation-building, as long as it results in certain kinds of nations. Its instinctive unilateralism alienates the community of states that it needs in order for its political-military as well as humanitarian and development objectives to succeed. The resources the U.S. is prepared to make available are limited, both in scale and in imagination.

Generally speaking and diversity and an occasional exception notwithstanding, Europe has a more thorough-going commitment to multilateralism, a better track record in accountable and effective economic assistance, and a more internationally literate public. Of course, domestic and international politics, too, increasingly infiltrate Europe's assistance allocations and apparatus. However, the policies pursued, for the most part, express greater proportionality and solidarity with those in need of assistance and protection.

Conclusion

Terrorism and anti-terrorism are increasingly dominating the humanitarian landscape. They are winning the war of profile, of resources, of public opinion. They are for the moment outmatching the weapons in the humanitarian arsenal – relief and rights programs based on need, education of constituencies, strengthening of local capacities, advocacy with policy makers for approaches with a higher humanitarian content, and appeals to international legal obligations.

A series of actions is available to humanitarian interests, be they UN agencies, donor governments, relief and rights NGOs, or diplomats and politicians with a sense of the importance of effective humanitarian action. The actions include more creative trans-Atlantic networking, a more authentically non-governmental ethos, more action-oriented policy research, greater attention to the root causes of terrorism, and structural change within humanitarian and political institutions themselves. Realistically speaking, however, the chances of placing the human being, rather than the terrorist, in the center of policy and programming concern seem increasingly remote.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*