3 Keeping the peace

Returnee reception centre at Otaki ,western Cambodia, April 1992
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'Hatred, displacement, destruction, systematic human rights violations and atrocities... Civilians killed, wounded, taken hostage, trapped or held in detention and concentration camps... Deliberate attacks on humanitarian convoys and staff, lack of access, open hostility, increasing numbers of displaced persons and a lack of respect for the humanitarian character of UNHCR activities.' Those are the words used by one senior UNHCR official to describe the dangers and dilemmas confronting the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the organizations attempting to assist them.

Sadly, such circumstances are not an isolated phenomenon. From Angola, Burundi and Chechnya to Yemen and Zaire, displaced people and aid agency personnel have recently been caught up in a succession of armed conflicts, in which longstanding agreements relating to the protection of civilians and humanitarian organizations have been routinely ignored by the combatants. 'We are living a scenario,' the same UNHCR staff member concludes, 'that not even the most pessimistic among us could have predicted.'

This sense of pessimism has been reinforced by a recognition that the UN's traditional peacekeeping techniques, developed to meet the needs of the Cold War era, are not appropriate in contemporary circumstances. Reflecting on this challenge, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has observed that 'the world in which the United Nations must act is radically different from that which emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. Today it is no longer a question of maintaining peace between states and respecting the sovereignty of each of them. Remedies now have to be found for the conflicts which divide people within states. It is these conflicts that require us to invent new responses and to find new solutions.'

New directions in peacekeeping

The last five years have witnessed some major transformations in UNHCR's efforts to protect and assist refugees and to find solutions to their plight. Explaining the nature of this change, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, has observed that 'traditionally, UNHCR's programmes have been concentrated in the relatively safe and stable environment provided by countries of asylum. Since 1990, however, a growing proportion of the organization's activities have taken the form of special operations in countries of origin and in zones of active conflict.' 'At the same time,' the High Commissioner continues, 'the organization has increasingly been called upon to work alongside military forces, within the context of large-scale United Nations peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations.'

The impact of these developments has been mixed. On one hand, the changes described in the High Commissioner's statement have effectively undermined the old myth that refugee problems are purely humanitarian in nature, and have allowed the question of human displacement to assume its rightful place at the top of the international agenda. In operational terms, UNHCR's evolving relationship with UN peacekeepers and other military forces has also enhanced the organization's capacity to provide relief to displaced populations and to assist in their repatriation and reintegration.

These new opportunities, however, have been matched by some equally important dangers: the risk that the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian activities will be compromised by their association with the use of armed force; the possibility that emergency relief efforts will be employed as a substitute for decisive international action to prevent or halt refugee-producing conflicts; and the potential threat posed to the right of asylum by the international community's growing efforts to assist war-affected populations within their own country.

Map ▶ **UN peacekeeping operations**

Quantitative and qualitative changes

The rapid evolution of UNHCR's operational activities over the past few years is closely related to the new and increased role which the United Nations has been asked to play in the maintenance of international peace and security. Between 1988 and 1994, for example, the number of resolutions passed by the Security Council in relation to such issues jumped from 15 to 78. In the same period, the number of UN peacekeeping operations increased from five to seventeen, while the military and police personnel deployed by the world body soared from just under 10,000 to around 75,000. As a result of this increased level of activity, the UN's annual peacekeeping budget also grown very rapidly: from around US$230 million in 1987-88 to US$3.6 billion in 1993-94. Significantly, more was spent on UN peacekeeping operations in 1993 alone than in the whole of the preceding 48 years.

These quantitative changes in the UN's peacekeeping activities have been matched (and in many senses surpassed) by the qualitative transformation of the organization's efforts in this area.

Until the late 1980s, UN peacekeeping normally involved the deployment of lightly armed multinational forces in areas of past, potential or ongoing conflict, where they acted as a neutral buffer between the opposing armies, monitoring ceasefires and assisting with troop withdrawals. By maintaining some calm in situations of great tension, such operations were intended to create an environment in which the politicians and peacemakers could negotiate a settlement to international disputes. In practice, however, these initiatives have sometimes had the effect of freezing the frontlines of a military conflict and acting as a disincentive to the search for political solutions.

UN peacekeeping operations of the traditional type have been mounted in many of the world's hotspots during the past five decades, including the border areas of Israel and its Arab neighbours, as well as the frontier regions of India and Pakistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. In each of these cases, the UN's peacekeeping role has been strictly based on the consent and cooperation of the governments concerned. When one or both of the parties to a dispute decided that it could no longer tolerate a UN presence, the peacekeeping force had no option but to withdraw.

The UN's traditional peacekeeping activities shared a number of other important characteristics. First, they were almost exclusively intended to deal with disputes between states rather than within countries. Of the many civil wars which took place between the late 1940s and the 1980s, only one - in the Congo - led to a substantive involvement of UN peacekeeping forces. Second, they were generally modest in scale. In most of the 13 operations launched between 1945 and 1988, the number of military and civilian personnel deployed by the UN ran into dozens or hundreds rather than thousands. Third, because the deployment of UN peacekeepers was generally confined to situations where there was a consent to their presence and where ceasefires had already been agreed, the level of danger to which the 'blue helmets' were exposed remained relatively low.

Fourth and finally, the UN's traditional peacekeeping activities remained overwhelmingly military in composition and function. Of the 13 operations mounted in the period prior to 1989, just three - the Congo, Cyprus and southern Lebanon - involved the provision of humanitarian assistance. And in none of these cases was emergency relief the initial or the primary purpose of the UN mission. Only in Cyprus, moreover, did UNHCR assume a role which brought the organization into close contact with the UN's peacekeeping forces.

Until the late 1980s, therefore, the interface between the UN's efforts to maintain peace and security and the international community's endeavours to resolve refugee problems remained extremely limited. Peacekeeping forces, operating under the supervision of the UN Security Council, and refugee relief organizations, functioning under the leadership of UNHCR, generally worked in different locations, with different objectives, and brought different skills to their task. Throughout that period, moreover, the notion of establishing a closer relationship between the two functions of the United Nations would have gained very little support. UNHCR deliberately sought to steer clear of superpower politics by distancing itself from the UN's peacekeeping and political functions, while the UN's member states recognized that humanitarian action could be paralyzed if it became too closely associated with those activities of the world body.

During the past five years, this picture has changed beyond all recognition. On a number of occasions, UN peacekeepers and other military forces mandated by the world body have been deployed in situations of internal conflict and in locations where there is no consent or only limited consent to their presence. As a result, peacekeeping operations have become more dangerous, larger in scale and more complex in nature.

At the same time, the post-Cold War period has witnessed the establishment of a much closer relationship between the UN's efforts to maintain international peace and security, its efforts to provide conflict-affected populations with humanitarian assistance, and its efforts to prevent and resolve refugee problems. As the following sections demonstrate, these developments are the result of two distinct phenomena: the launch of several large-scale UN field operations, intended to oversee the implementation of peace plans in countries where longstanding wars were drawing to an end; and the intervention of the United Nations, its member states and their military forces in a new generation of refugee-producing conflicts.

Comprehensive peace-plan operations

Since the final days of the Cold War, the United Nations has played an important role in bringing a peaceful conclusion to a number of longstanding regional conflicts, all of which were rooted in and sustained by the struggle between the superpowers: Cambodia, Mozambique and Namibia, as well as the Central American region. These efforts have given rise to an entirely new kind of UN peacekeeping operation, designed to supervise the implementation of comprehensive peace agreements and the transition to democratic political systems.

In contrast to the organization's traditional peacekeeping activities, the UN's peace-plan operations have been established in the context of civil wars (or an anti-colonial struggle in the case of Namibia) rather than international disputes. Moreover, while these operations have all included military functions such as disarmament, demobilization and the monitoring of ceasefires, they have also involved a wide range of activities involving civilian personnel and humanitarian organizations. These have included, for example:

- assisting in the establishment of new judicial systems;
- promoting and verifying respect for human rights;
- supervising constitutional and administrative reforms;
- providing training to government personnel and strengthening official structures;
- registering voters, as well as organizing and monitoring elections;
- coordinating rehabilitation and development activities; and,
- organizing repatriation and reintegration programmes for refugees and displaced people.

As might be expected, UNHCR and its operational partners have played a leading role in the last of these activities and a supporting role in many others. In Namibia, for example, the first in this new generation of peace-plan operations, UNHCR's principal contribution to the work of the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) was to ensure that more than 42,000 Namibian exiles living elsewhere in Africa and in other parts of the world were able to return to their homeland and participate in the country's first democratic election in 1989.

UNHCR assumed a similar responsibility in Cambodia, where, acting as the Repatriation Component of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), the organization coordinated the repatriation and reintegration of 370,000 refugees from

neighbouring Thailand in 1992-93. More recently, UNHCR contributed to the work of ONUMOZ, the UN Operation in Mozambique, by assisting some 1.6 million refugees to repatriate prior to the October 1994 election.

These multifunctional peace-plan operations have been of a scale and complexity which bears little resemblance to the UN's traditional peacekeeping missions. The UN Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL), for example, cost approximately US$ 120 million to implement. UNTAG involved the expenditure of around US$368 million and the deployment of around 8,000 military and civilian personnel. UNTAC was much larger, involving 22,000 UN troops and civilians and costing about US$2.5 billion to implement, US$880 million of which was devoted to refugee repatriation and reintegration.

Consensus and consent

> The substantial cost of the UN's recent peace-plan operations has proven to be a useful investment, not least in the resolution of refugee problems.

The substantial cost of the UN's recent peace-plan operations has proven to be a useful investment, not least in the resolution of refugee problems. In each of the cases mentioned above, UNHCR and its partners have been able to arrange the safe and voluntary return of very substantial numbers of refugees, the majority of whom had been living in exile for many years. In all of the countries concerned, moreover, the refugees have repatriated to places where armed conflicts have been halted or substantially reduced in scale, where respect for human rights has been considerably strengthened, and where free and fair elections have been held to establish legitimate governments.

El Salvador, for example, has undergone a substantial transformation during the past five years. Where human rights were once violated with impunity, new structures are being put into place to safeguard the rights of citizens and to ensure that their voice can be heard in the political process. Where large numbers of people were once oppressed by social injustice, civil strife and politically motivated violence, Salvadorians are now able to devote their efforts to reconciliation, reconstruction and longer-term development. Some serious problems remain to be resolved, among them grinding poverty, incomplete reforms and the fear that the former antagonists will remain politically polarized. Nevertheless, with the support of the United Nations, the country has now built a solid foundation for a more peaceful and prosperous future.

While relatively little time has elapsed since most of the UN's recent peace plan operations were completed, the evidence to date suggests that most of the returnees in the five countries of Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique, Namibia and Nicaragua have been able to reintegrate within their own communities, and have not been subjected to any targeted human rights abuses since returning to their homeland. It is true to say that the peace agreements implemented in several of these countries

remain somewhat fragile. Nevertheless, the UN's peace-plan operations can be said to have played a valuable role in facilitating (and to some extent consolidating) the solution of voluntary repatriation.

Some important lessons can be learned from the largely positive outcome of these initiatives. For while the UN's recent peace-plan operations and UNHCR's associated repatriation programmes have differed considerably in their size and structure, their overall effectiveness in resolving longstanding conflicts and refugee situations would appear to derive from a similar combination of variables. At the same time, these examples demonstrate that the search for solutions to refugee problems is in many ways dependent upon factors which lie beyond the control of UNHCR and its partners. The role of humanitarian organizations must therefore be to maximize the opportunities which become available as a result of political processes and to underpin the quest for peace by means of measures which promote repatriation, reintegration and reconciliation.

Weariness of war. In all of the countries under discussion, the principal parties involved in the conflict - both governments and opposition movements - had reached the stage where they wanted to extricate themselves from protracted and unwinnable wars, and where they were prepared (and in some senses obliged) to make political compromises to achieve that result. Only in Cambodia, where the Khmer Rouge withdrew from the peace process during the UNTAC operation, did one of the signatories renege on its commitment to a comprehensive settlement.

External pressures. Outside influences played an important role in the quest for peace in all five of the countries concerned. In Mozambique, for example, the socialist government of Frelimo was to some extent driven to the negotiating table by the collapse of the Soviet bloc, while the Renamo opposition movement was pushed into the peace process by the radical changes taking place in South Africa, a country which had itself been under heavy international pressure to introduce sweeping changes in its domestic and foreign policies. In Cambodia, the USSR and China are known to have used their influence to bring the Phnom Penh authorities and the Khmer Rouge into the peace process, while in El Salvador, a group of states consisting of Colombia, Mexico, Spain, the USA and Venezuela, known as 'the friends of the UN Secretary-General' played a valuable role by providing diplomatic and material support to the peace process.

Unifying mechanisms. One of the most interesting and useful features of the UN's peace-plan operations has been the creation of mechanisms intended to establish a degree of common interest amongst the conflicting parties. In Cambodia, for example, the four parties contending for power were brought together on a regular basis in the Supreme National Council, a semi-sovereign body chaired by Prince Sihanouk, which was intended to represent the interests of the country as a whole during the transitional period. In El Salvador, the Commission on the Peace assumed a related role, acting as a forum for consultation between the government, the principal opposition movement and other political parties. In Mozambique and Namibia, the transitional arrangements supervised by the UN also obliged a degree of consensus-building to take place between the competing parties prior to the election of a new government.

Clarity of roles and objectives. In all five of the countries under discussion, the parties to the conflict took part in extensive negotiations in order to determine the

objectives and timetable of the peace process, the precise role which the UN was to play in the transitional period, and the functions that its various military and civilian elements were to perform. As a result of such agreements, the neutral and impartial nature of the UN's presence was generally respected, and the organization's peacekeeping troops were able to function with a minimal use of force. Such arrangements worked in a particularly effective manner in Cambodia, where UNHCR was able to play an active role throughout the lengthy discussions which preceded the signing of a peace agreement. As a result, the final document included a section dealing specifically with the voluntary repatriation of exiles, thereby enabling the refugee problem to be tackled as an integral part of a much broader political and military settlement.

Military impact and assets. Another advantage of the integrated approach to the resolution of conflicts and refugee problems has been the extent to which UNHCR and its partners have benefited from the presence of multilateral peacekeeping forces. By undertaking tasks such as the demobilization of combatants, the destruction of weapons and the identification and removal of land-mines, for example, the blue helmets assisted in the creation of conditions that were conducive to the return and reintegration of refugees. In these peace-plan operations, UNHCR and its partners have also been able to draw upon the many logistical assets of the military and civilian police, thereby enhancing the organization's operational capacity. These assets have included soldiers to accompany repatriation convoys, guard reception centres and monitor the welfare of returnees; aircraft and trucks to transport UNHCR staff and equipment as well as returnees; and the machinery and skilled manpower needed to rehabilitate roads and bridge and other infrastructural resources.

Popular support. A final and easily neglected element in the success of the UN's recent peace-plan operations has been the strength of the support which they have drawn from ordinary citizens. In all five of the cases under discussion, local men and women have manifested a very evident desire for peace and an enthusiasm to participate in the electoral process. At the same time, refugees from these war-torn countries have generally demonstrated a tremendous eagerness to return to their homeland. As a UNHCR review of the Cambodia repatriation operation observed, 'the ardent wish of the Cambodian refugees to return to their own country and families was perhaps the most important determinant of the operation's success. If anyone is to take credit for the success of the repatriation, it should ultimately be the refugees themselves.' In very similar vein, a UN Headquarters analysis of the peace process in El Salvador concluded that 'whatever plaudits might be given to the United Nations and the international communty for the successful ONUSAL operation, the victory belongs first and foremost to the Salvadorian people.'

Repatriation, reconciliation and the peace process

Providing refugees with the opportunity to go home and to express their political preferences is inherent in the concept of a free, fair and representative election.

Recent experience in countries such as Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique and Namibia demonstrates that when the UN's involvement in a country is based on agreement and when its impartiality is broadly recognized, it is possible to plan and implement the humanitarian, political and military elements of a multifunctional operation in an integrated manner. In fact, it has now become quite clear that when consensus and consent exists, the UN's activities in these three areas can complement and reinforce each other. As the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has suggested, 'resolving the plight of refugees is inseparable from the UN's broader aim of preventing and resolving armed conflicts. The peace process cannot proceed without addressing the problem of displaced populations.'

How exactly can humanitarian activities, particularly those relating to refugees and displaced people, contribute to the broader quest for peace and reconciliation in war-affected countries? The evidence from UNHCR's recent field operations suggests that there are at least five different linkages between these two functions.

First, pre-election repatriation programmes of the type implemented by UNHCR in Cambodia and Mozambique can bring an important degree of legitimacy to a UN-supervised ballot. Providing refugees with the opportunity to go home and to express their political preferences is not only inherent in the concept of a free, fair and representative election, but also deprives the parties involved of a pretext to challenge the results of the vote.

Second, the repatriation of a refugee population and demobilization of an army in exile may be a precondition for a comprehensive political settlement in situations such as Cambodia and Namibia, where countries of asylum have been used as a base for military operations in the country of origin. No government can realistically be expected to sign a peace agreement with an opposition movement which insists on maintaining a military force in a neighbouring state.

Third, voluntary repatriation programmes can perform a valuable confidence-building function by demonstrating in a very tangible manner that the peace process is moving forward and having tangible results. Experience in several conflict-affected countries has demonstrated that for ordinary men and women, the safe return of friends and relatives who have been living in exile for many years is often a more meaningful and moving experience than any number of formal peace agreements and UN resolutions.

Fourth, when the UN personnel deployed in a peace-plan operation are of a predominantly military character (and that has normally been the case), then it may encounter some difficulties in gaining the support and confidence of the local community. Indeed, recent events in Cambodia and other countries suggest that the population of a conflict-affected country may actually be alienated by a large and sudden influx of foreign troops, acting in a manner which is not always consistent with local cultural norms. In such circumstances, the presence of civilian and humanitarian personnel, not to mention the tangible resources which they bring with them, can play a valuable part in mobilizing local support for the peace-plan operation as a whole.

Fifth and finally, there is now considerable evidence to show that humanitarian efforts can be used as an instrument of reconciliation, bringing different parties, factions and social groups together on the basis of common needs and interests. In

Cambodia, for example, UNHCR was able to maintain an effective working relationship with the Khmer Rouge throughout the UNTAC operation, even when that faction had effectively withdrawn from the political process and declared its hostility to the UN's presence. More significantly, perhaps, by establishing roads and other rehabilitation projects, which brought benefits to areas controlled by a number of different political groups, UNHCR was able to convene regular meetings between the Khmer Rouge and other Cambodian parties. In this way, the consensus-building function of the Supreme National Council was replicated at the local level.

Despite these important achievements, it would be misleading to suggest that the UN's recent peace-plan operations have been entirely without difficulties. At the political and military levels, for example, there have been several nervous moments with regard to the continued participation of opposition movements such as SWAPO in Namibia (which eventually went on to form the new government), the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and Renamo in Mozambique. In Angola, moreover, where the UNITA opposition movement recommenced military activities after rejecting the results of a UN-supervised election held in 1992, this problem led to the effective (but hopefully only temporary) derailment of the whole peace process.

With regard to the management of the UN's peace-plan operations, perhaps the most common criticism heard concerns the social and economic distortion which can occur when large numbers of international personnel and massive amounts of material resources are suddenly pumped into the world's poorest countries. In a related critique, some analysts have queried the amount of attention which the UN and its member states have devoted to immediate and high-profile tasks such as voter registration, election monitoring, constitutional reform and refugee repatriation. In the process, it has been argued, the international community has tended to neglect the longer-term activities which are needed to develop and demilitarize societies which have been affected by years of war (see Box 3.1). It is for precisely this reason that the peacekeeping and repatriation functions of the United Nations must be closely linked to the rehabilitation and reconstruction activities discussed in Chapter Four.

Working in war zones

Few analysts would seriously question the UN Secretary-General's assertion that the peace-plan operations undertaken since the late 1980s have been 'conspicuously successful' in meeting their objectives. But when it comes to the involvement and intervention of UN-mandated forces in countries which are still embroiled in armed conflict, the record is much more mixed. As the Secretary-General himself has acknowledged, the world body has had to accept a number of setbacks in its recent efforts to bring peace to war-affected countries. 'In this second generation of peacekeeping operations,' he observes, 'there are no easy solutions.'

Internal conflicts

Contrary to the impression given by many contemporary analysts, civil wars and other forms of internal conflict are not simply a product of the post-Cold War era. In Africa alone, a considerable number of states experienced violent upheavals in the 25 years which preceded the collapse of the Soviet bloc: Nigeria in the 1960s, Sudan in the 1970s, Uganda in the 1980s, and Ethiopia throughout most of this period, to give just a few examples. Similarly, in Asia, states such as Cambodia, Myanmar, the

Philippines, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam were all affected by armed conflicts of a primarily or partly internal nature during the years of superpower rivalry.

Civil wars, secessionist struggles and communal violence may not, therefore, be particularly recent phenomena. Nevertheless, the scale, geographical scope and level of violence of such conflicts has undoubtedly increased with the collapse of the bipolar state system. According to most sources, at least 35 internal wars are currently taking place around the world, around a fifth of them in the former Soviet Union. Just as significantly, perhaps, since the Persian Gulf crisis of 1991, the number of wars between sovereign states has dropped to a negligible level.

Many of the world's more recent internal conflicts have proven to be unusually violent, destructive and unmanageable. As recent experience in countries such as Afghanistan, Rwanda and Somalia has demonstrated, they are often fought by militia forces and other armed groups which have little sense of discipline, a poorly-defined chain of command and no discernable political programme. When regular armies are involved, they tend to consist of soldiers who are underpaid, underfed and undertrained, and who readily supplement their meagre income by means of theft and extortion.

In the course of such conflicts, institutions such as the judiciary and the police force have tended to disappear, leading to a general breakdown of law and order and a descent into social violence and banditry. The easy availability of automatic weapons and other small arms has undoubtedly played a part in this process. According to some analysts, it is the increasing violence manifested in each civil war, rather than any growth in the number of conflicts, that accounts for much of the recent increase in the global refugee population.

Sadly, the politicians, rebel leaders and warlords associated with these conflicts often appear to be as indifferent to the norms of international diplomacy and humanitarian law as they are to the suffering of their compatriots. Just as disturbingly, as the case of Liberia has so tragically demonstrated, violent turmoil and population displacements in one state can very easily spill over into neighbouring countries, creating complex regional conflicts and refugee movements which are even more difficult to contain and resolve (see Box 3.2).

The internal conflicts of the post-Cold War years have acquired a particular resonance by raising the spectre of 'ethno-nationalism': a virulent loyalty to one particular social group, accompanied by equally strong feelings of antipathy towards other social groups living within the same state. As can be concluded from the mass expulsions and other human rights violations which have taken place in former Yugoslavia and in parts of the former Soviet Union, there is nothing imaginary about the threat which such sentiments can pose to national and international security. At the same time, one of the most frightening features of this breed of nationalism is its ability to rewrite history and to redefine social relationships, and the ease with which it has been mobilized and manipulated by ethnic entrepreneurs and other political opportunists.

The relationship between ethno-nationalism and mass population displacement is in many senses an inherent one, for in conflicts which are fuelled by this sentiment, refugee movements tend to be the purpose as well as the result of social and political violence. As experience in former Yugoslavia has so cruelly demonstrated, a

logical consequence of the ambition to establish ethnically homogenous territories is the forcible expulsion of people who are deemed to be different. Moreover, as the case of Rwanda indicates, large-scale population movements may also be a strategic weapon in the ethno-nationalist arsenal, used by a defeated government to regroup its forces in exile and to deprive the new administration of a population to govern.

International responses to internal wars

The humanitarian, political and military elements of the UN system have been brought into a new and very intensive relationship.

During the Cold War years, the question of multilateral intervention in civil war situations hardly featured on the international agenda, primarily because of the absence of consensus amongst the permanent members of the Security Council, the division of the world into relatively clear spheres of influence, and the continued existence of centralized state structures, even in countries affected by war. Interventions in zones of active conflict consequently tended to take a unilateral (and frequently surrogate) form, while United Nations operations were confined to disputes between sovereign states in which some accommodation had already been reached by the parties concerned.

The world's more powerful states and the United Nations itself have been placed in a considerable dilemma by the rash of internal conflicts and humanitarian emergencies which have erupted since the demise of the bipolar state system. While the old rules of the game have evidently changed, the international community has found it extremely difficult to articulate a coherent set of principles and practices which are geared to contemporary circumstances. Such uncertainty arises from a number of different considerations.

The 1990s have witnessed a process of disengagement from the poorest and least stable countries of the world. As a result, the world's major powers no longer have a substantial interest in countries such as Liberia, Rwanda and Somalia - states which lack any geopolitical significance, which are marginal to the international economy, and which have negligible constituencies in the developed world. As one author has written in an account of the international response to the crisis in Central Africa, 'Rwanda has no wealth, too many people and not enough land. It is therefore of little interest to the world powers.'

While the most powerful states have a much greater strategic and economic interest in conflict-affected areas such as former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union, they have generally not succeeded in resolving these wars by diplomatic means. In situations such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Abkhazia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the passions involved have been too strong, the objectives of the different parties too divergent and their willingness to compromise simply insufficient to enable any agreement to be reached around the negotiating table. The alternative

course of action, however - to impose peace by military means - has never been a realistic option, given the political risks and financial costs involved.

Another and increasingly significant determinant of governmental policy is to be seen in the growing impact of the international media and relief organizations. While numerous commentators have in recent months drawn attention to the role of the 'CNN factor' in shaping international responses to humanitarian emergencies, the degree and nature of the media's impact is difficult to assess with any precision. At the very least, however, one might conclude from experience in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, northern Iraq, Rwanda and Somalia, that the world's richer states have sometimes found it difficult to stand by when large numbers of human lives are at risk, and when pictures of such suffering are being shown every day on live television broadcasts. At the same time, however, and as experience in Somalia has also demonstrated, media exposure can discourage the engagement of the world's more powerful states when it publicizes the deaths of nationals involved in peacekeeping operations.

Humanitarian organizations have often added to the pressure exerted by the media, partly because of the close working relationship which they enjoy with many journalists and television crews, and partly because of the increasing power and responsibilities which they have assumed in international affairs. As one recent analysis has argued, the operations of humanitarian organizations, especially NGOs, were traditionally modest in scale and worked within clearly-defined parameters, established by the governments of recipient states. In recent years, however, the collapse of the state in several less-developed countries has given humanitarian organizations much greater operational autonomy in the field and a considerably increased role in the provision of scarce resources such as social welfare services, paid employment and commercial contracts.

At the same time, donor states have channelled much larger amounts of assistance through the NGOs, appreciating the speed and flexibility with which they can respond to emergencies, as well as their high public profile. As a result, this analysis concludes, relief organizations have now gained a far more influential voice in shaping the international response to armed conflicts and mass population displacements.

Confronted with this cluster of different (and to some extent contradictory) considerations, the world's more powerful states might have hoped to pursue the two-track strategy initially attempted in the case of former Yugoslavia, combining the dogged pursuit of a negotiated political settlement with the generous provision of humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected populations. The very nature of these emergencies, however, has made it impossible to pursue such a strategy without also considering the use of military force.

In Somalia, for example, the collapse of the government and its replacement by a multitude of warring factions made it impossible for aid agencies to work with any degree of security and to gain access to many affected communities. In the case of Iraq, a central government certainly existed, but that regime had to be subjected to considerable pressure before it would allow the Kurdish population to benefit from international protection and assistance. In former Yugoslavia, the conventional relief activities that were launched in the early stages of the conflict were quickly threatened by the escalation of the war, the intensification of the ethnic cleansing

campaign, and the efforts of the combatants to obstruct or divert the delivery of assistance. And in Rwanda, the sheer scale of the disaster and the threat of additional population displacements called for something other than a traditional emergency response programme.

As the following sections indicate, these circumstances have had a number of significant consequences. First, refugee problems have, for the first time, become a principal item on the agenda of the UN Security Council. Second, contrary to traditional peacekeeping practice, the Security Council has regularly endorsed the deployment of military forces in zones of active conflict, albeit with different mandates and command structures. Third, UNHCR and other international organizations have found themselves working in the same locations and in close cooperation with UN-mandated forces, sharing responsibility for the welfare of civilian populations. As a result of these developments, the humanitarian, political and military elements of the UN system have been brought into a new and very intensive relationship.

Northern Iraq

On 5 April 1991, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 688, which deemed that the human rights violations which had led to an exodus of well over 1.5 million people from northern Iraq, most of them of Kurdish origin, were a threat to international peace and security. While Resolution 688 did not explicitly authorize military intervention, it insisted that Iraq grant immediate international access to those of its citizens who were in need of assistance, and called upon all states to assist such efforts. The resolution placed the population of northern Iraq under the effective protection of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which entitles the Security Council to initiate or endorse 'such action by air, sea or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security.'

This decision was interpreted by a US-led coalition of forces as an encouragement to intervene militarily and to create a 'safety zone' in northern Iraq, where protection and assistance was provided to the population, many of whom were able to return from the Turkish border area and from the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the largest number had sought refuge. In June 1991, responsibility for 'Operation Provide Comfort' was handed over to UNHCR, while the coalition forces withdrew their troops and continued to provide air cover to the safety zone.

As well as providing emergency relief to the Kurdish refugees, returnees and displaced people, UNHCR subsequently launched an intensive rehabilitation programme within northern Iraq, designed to provide shelter to homeless people before the winter set in. Between October and December 1991 reconstruction work was carried out in more than 1,500 of the 4,000 villages which had been destroyed in the area. With this phase of the operation over, UNHCR scaled down its activities, leaving other international and non-governmental agencies to continue the humanitarian programme.

UNHCR's assumption of responsibility for the humanitarian operation initiated by the coalition forces was not, it should be noted, based upon the US-led military intervention, but upon a formal agreement signed between the United Nations and the Baghdad government on 18 April 1991. UNHCR thus benefited from a convergence of interest between the coalition governments, who wished to

disengage their troops from the north of the country as quickly as possible, and the Iraqi government, which was pleased to see the coalition troops replaced by UN relief personnel and a contingent of 500 lightly armed UN guards.

Former Yugoslavia

In former Yugoslavia, the UN's military mandate has also been closely interwoven with humanitarian activities. Unlike northern Iraq, however, UNHCR was already present as the lead UN agency when, in June 1992, the Security Council mandated the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) to ensure the security and functioning of Sarajevo airport so that UNHCR could continue to deliver humanitarian assistance to the city and its environs. Operating under the control of the United Nations, UNPROFOR had been established three months earlier, as an interim arrangement intended to create the conditions of peace and security required for the negotiation of an overall settlement to the crisis in former Yugoslavia. In pursuit of this objective, UNPROFOR also established a presence in parts of Croatia with large populations of Serbs, known as UN Protected Areas.

In September 1992, the Security Council passed Resolution 776, expanding UNPROFOR's mandate to include the protection of UNHCR's humanitarian activities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, at the request of the International Committee of the Red Cross, to protect convoys of released civilian detainees. Under a number of subsequent resolutions, the Security Council also designated six 'safe areas' in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and gave UNPROFOR the responsibility, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, to protect these areas and their civilian populations. At the same time, the Security Council took a number of other decisions under the same chapter of the Charter, imposing sanctions on Serbia and creating a NATO-protected 'no-fly zone' over Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result of a further decision taken in March 1995, the UN operation in Croatia was separated from UNPROFOR and renamed UNCRO - the UN Confidence Restoration Operation.

The crisis in former Yugoslavia has led to what is perhaps the largest, most complex and riskiest humanitarian operation the world has ever witnessed. Led by UNHCR, which first became involved in the conflict in November 1991, the operation had over 3.5 million beneficiaries in March 1995, more than two-thirds of them in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By that date, UNHCR had spent more than US$ 1 billion on its programme in the area, delivering more than 630,000 metric tons of assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina alone.

Figure 3.4 ▶ **Beneficiaries of UN humanitarian assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1995**

Figure 3.5 ▶ **Beneficiaries of UN humanitarian assistance in former Yugoslavia, 1995**

Somalia

Widespread turmoil began in Somalia in January 1991, when the incumbent government was ousted and a number of clans and warlords began to compete for political power and territorial control. The country was quickly gripped by violence and famine, provoking massive suffering and population movements within Somalia and a refugee exodus to Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen.

These events prompted a somewhat complicated succession of UN peacekeeping initiatives. The UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) was originally established in April 1992 to monitor a ceasefire in Mogadishu, to secure the airport and seaport and to safeguard the delivery of humanitarian supplies to the capital city and surrounding areas. Five months later, UNOSOM's mandate and strength were enlarged to enable it to protect humanitarian activities throughout the country. Following a further deterioration of the security situation, however, in December 1992 the Security Council passed Resolution 794, endorsing military action by UN member states under Chapter VII of the Charter. A Unified Task Force (UNITAF) organized and led by the US, arrived in the country, with a UN authorization to use 'all necessary means' to create secure conditions for the delivery of humanitarian relief throughout the country.

In March 1993, the Security Council, again acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, passed a resolution approving the Secretary-General's proposal for a UN-controlled operation known as UNISOM II to take over from UNITAF. This transfer took place three months later. Following a number of armed attacks on UNOSOM II troops, a strengthened US task force, operating under a Security Council mandate, attempted to detain and forcibly disarm those responsible. In the subsequent fighting, several US soldiers and a larger number of Somali citizens were killed.

In early October 1993, the US, followed by a number of other countries, announced their intention to withdraw their forces from Somalia by the end of March 1994, while the principal faction implicated in the attacks on UNOSOM II declared a unilateral cessation of hostilities against the United Nations. However, as a result of the ensuing deadlock between the warring factions and their failure to establish a national government, the Secretary-General recommended the withdrawal of all UNOSOM II troops by the end of March 1995.

While other organizations have assumed primary responsibility for humanitarian activities in the Mogadishu area, UNHCR's efforts have focused on a cross-border programme from Kenya, undertaken in the southern part of the country. This initiative has three closely related objectives: to facilitate the return of Somalis who have sought sanctuary outside of their homeland; to assist with the reintegration of returning refugees and other displaced populations; and to stabilize the resident population in areas affected by severe economic disruption, thereby averting further refugee movements to Kenya and other states. By mid-1995, more than 200,000 Somalis had gone back to their homes, primarily in the south-west of the country, where UNHCR had implemented more than 360 small-scale reintegration and rehabilitation projects.

Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire

Fighting between Rwandese government forces and the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) first broke out in October 1990, across the border between Rwanda and Uganda. Despite a number of ceasefire agreements, hostilities resumed in February 1993, prompting the Security Council to establish an observer mission on the Ugandan side of the frontier, primarily to verify that no military assistance was being provided across the border.

A further UN-controlled operation known as UNAMIR (UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda) was originally deployed inside Rwanda under Security Council Resolution 872 of October 1993, to assist in the implementation of the Arusha peace agreement between the Rwandese government and the RPF. In the event, however, this proved to be impossible, due to the widespread massacres which began throughout the country after 6 April 1994, when the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi were killed in a plane crash. Following the murder of 10 Belgian peacekeepers, a large proportion of the 2,500 UNAMIR troops were evacuated by the contributing states, and a further Security Council resolution was passed, reducing the UNAMIR troop strength to 270.

Despite urgent appeals from the UN Secretary-General, it was not until 17 May 1994 that the Security Council authorized UNAMIR to expand its troop strength to 5,500 and to extend its activities to include the protection of civilians. While a number of African countries agreed to make such troops available, their deployment was delayed by a lack of logistical support. On 22 June, as the RPF began its final advance on Kigali and other key towns, the Security Council adopted another resolution under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, authorizing member states to use 'all necessary means' to establish 'a temporary operation under national command and control for the security and protection of displaced persons, refugees and civilians at risk.' This resolution effectively endorsed a French military intervention, intended to create a 'humanitarian protection zone' within the south-west of the country. At the same time, massive numbers of Rwandese began to move from the north-west and south-east of the country to Zaire nd Tanzania respectively, fearing RPF reprisals for the earlier massacres.

The scale of this exodus was such that in mid-July, UNHCR was obliged to look for new methods of reinforcing the relief effort. Thus was born the idea of 'service packages', whereby UNHCR requested governments to provide self-contained facilities in sectors such as airport services, water management and refugee camp preparation, primarily but not exclusively from their military establishments. More than a dozen governments responded to this initiative, which was implemented with the full consent of the Tanzanian and Zairian authorities, which had given refuge to well over two million Rwandese by the end of 1994.

As well as leading the international community's humanitarian response to the Rwandese refugee crisis - one of the fastest and largest cross-border movements witnessed in recent years - UNHCR has played a central role within the country of origin. This has entailed providing transport and short-term relief assistance to those refugees who wish to return to Rwanda, establishing community-based rehabilitation and reintegration projects in areas of return, and supporting ministries and other governmental bodies in their efforts to rebuild the country.

Of more importance, perhaps, given the nature of the Rwandese refugee problem, UNHCR has posted its staff members to areas where refugees and internally displaced people are returning, in order to monitor their security and welfare, to ensure their registration with the local authorities, to help them reclaim their land and property and to assist in the creation of conditions which are conducive to repatriation. This function is undertaken in close collaboration with UNAMIR and a team of monitors deployed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Making use of military assets

The UN's involvement in countries affected by active conflict has in many senses proven to be a bruising experience for the world body. In each of the cases examined above, there have been difficult decisions to make, contradictory interests to satisfy and strongly-worded criticisms to endure.

The United Nations has in many senses had to act as a scapegoat for governments as they struggle to come to terms with the recent changes which have taken place in the international system. For if one thing has become clear during the past five years, it is that the UN's member states remain divided and confused in deciding how the provisions of the organization's Charter and the peacekeeping practices of the bipolar years can best be adapted to meet contemporary needs. Significantly, some commentators have suggested that the new generation of UN military operations, especially those which entail an absence of consent and the use of force, should not even be described as 'peacekeeping', but as 'wider peacekeeping,' 'peace support operations', or even 'peace enforcement'.

UNHCR's new role within countries of origin, working alongside military forces in zones of active conflict, has also created some agonizing dilemmas and practical problems for the organization. What can be done, for example, to protect people who find themselves trapped in areas where fighting is taking place? Should civilian populations be evacuated from areas where their security is at risk, even if it inadvertently contributes to the process of ethnic cleansing? What steps can be taken to ensure that humanitarian relief does not fall into the hands of combatants and civilians who have been implicated in grave human rights abuses? How can the activities of UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations be most effectively coordinated with UN-mandated military forces? What kind of training do aid agency personnel require if they are to work safely and effectively in war zones? What can be done to ensure the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian assistance? And, as the High Commissioner for Refugees herselfhas asked, 'how long and how far can a humanitarian institution go in assisting, and to some extent saving the victims of war, in the face of manipulation, blackmail, abuse, humiliation and murder, without damaging its credibility, principles and the self-respect of its staff?'

The military contribution

The armed forces possess an abundance of the logistical resources which are in shortest supply during humanitarian emergencies.

One of the most important issues to arise from the new generation of peace support operations concerns the deployment of military resources for humanitarian purposes. This question is of such significant interest that UNHCR now employs a former army officer to provide advice on military and logistical issues, the first organization within the UN to take such an initiative.

The world's military establishments have in general been content to take up a renewed role in the humanitarian arena. With the end of the Cold War, the deployment of the armed forces in humanitarian operations has provided the military with a new rationale and increased public support. At the same time, it has enabled military commanders to test their troops, equipment and logistical systems under something approaching battlefield conditions.

The military's renewed involvement in humanitarian operations was initially greeted with a degree of scepticism by aid agency personnel. Over the past few years, however, relief workers have developed a considerable respect for the contribution which the military can make to their work. As experience in countries such as Iraq, Somalia and former Yugoslavia has demonstrated, the armed forces possess an abundance of precisely those resources which are normally in shortest supply when a disaster strikes: fuel, communications facilities, building equipment, medicines, large stockpiles of off-the-shelf supplies and highly trained manpower. In addition, the military is noted for its 'can-do' mentality, hierarchical discipline and organizational skills, attributes which are extremely useful in the turmoil of an emergency.

The most valuable contribution which the armed forces have made in situations of mass suffering and human displacement has been in supporting the speedy delivery and distribution of assistance. In former Yugoslavia, for example, despite systematic harassment and interference, direct military attacks and deliberate sabotage, UNPROFOR has assisted UNHCR and other organizations to limit the scale of the humanitarian disaster and to ensure the survival of millions of people throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. The military has performed functions which no humanitarian organization could have assumed, such as providing security to relief convoys, conducting airdrops into Bosnian enclaves that were inaccessible by road and maintaining the Sarajevo airlift. In addition, UN troops deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina have assisted in tasks such as demining and the repair of roads and public utilities, functions which have undoubtedly contributed to the welfare of displaced and besieged populations (see Box 3.4).

As well as keeping people alive while efforts are made to resolve the conflicts responsible for their suffering and displacement, recent experience suggests that the presence of military forces, albeit in a non-combatant role, can also have a stabilizing effect in conflict-affected areas. Even the UN operation in Somalia, which has been written off as a failure by some commentators, is widely acknowledged amongst humanitarian organizations to have saved many lives and to have brought a degree of security to communities affected by conflict and severe economic disruption.

The limitations of military support

Despite the valuable contribution which the military can make in supporting and safeguarding humanitarian efforts, the involvement of the armed forces in situations of internal conflict and population displacement does not, of course, provide any kind of panacea in the search for solutions to refugee problems.

Humanitarian operations can buy time and space for political action, and can help to create a climate which is conducive to political negotiations. But the assistance and protection provided by UNHCR and its partners must not be used as a substitute for the decisive political and military action which is sometimes required to deter aggression, halt human rights abuses and prevent mass population displacements. In the case of former Yugoslavia, for example, western governments have attempted to satisfy public and parliamentary opinion by contributing troops to UNPROFOR and by providing massive support to UNHCR's relief operation. The hard reality, however, is that the conflict itself still shows no sign at all of coming to an end.

As experience in former Yugoslavia has also demonstrated, the involvement of a military force can in some senses have a negative impact on the search for solutions to an armed conflict, particularly when it takes place without a clear political strategy to bring an end to the war. The intervention of an armed force can, for example, generate unrealistic expectations amongst the very people it is intended to benefit, thereby contributing to their sense of bitterness and frustration and their leaders' reluctance to compromise. Thus when UNPROFOR arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was widely presumed that the UN troops would put a halt to the atrocities that were taking place and provide the protection which people needed, functions which fell outside of the mandate and resources provided to the force. While the Security Council subsequently declared that 'all necessary measures' would be taken to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance, UNHCR and UNPROFOR have had to engage in a continuous process ofnegotiation to gain access to needy populations.

In addition, some commentators have argued, by creating 'safe areas' and by providing UNHCR with generous support in its efforts to provide the population with material assistance and a degree of protection, European states have sought to legitimize their efforts to contain the Bosnians within their own country (see Box 3.5). As one analyst has argued, 'the UN Security Council passed a series of resolutions that amounted to little more than empty rhetoric... It designated 'safe areas' that easily rated as the most unsafe places in the Balkans, if not the world.'

Finally, the support which the military can provide to humanitarian operations is not inexhaustible, nor is it at the automatic disposal of UNHCR and other UN agencies. Furthermore, while the military may have unrivalled skills and capacity in limited fields such as large-scale logistics, they lack the training and experience required to contribute to many of the other aspects of a relief operation, especially those involving contact with the beneficiary population. Indeed, at a time when humanitarian organizations are stressing the importance of refugee participation and gender awareness in the management of relief programmes, the hierarchical and male-dominated culture of the military may be particularly inappropriate. While the military may well be called upon to assist in the rapid mobilization of future refugee relief operations, it cannot be a substitute for the governmental and non-governmental partners on whom UNHCR has traditionally relied.

Operational control

Another issue which has arisen with regard to the involvement of the military in humanitarian efforts concerns the issue of UN control. When UN-mandated forces are deployed to protect the relief convoys of civilian organizations such as UNHCR, who exactly decides to do what, when and where? And who is responsible for ascertaining when conditions in the field are so difficult or dangerous that relief activities should be halted? The organizations which are delivering assistance? The military forces protecting them? Or the political organs of the UN system which are responsible for mandating their deployment?

Such questions are relevant not only for the day-to-day running of an operation, but also in relation to issues of overall policy and objectives. If peacekeeping forces assume the right to negotiate on humanitarian issues as well as political and military concerns, then there is a distinct danger that linkages will be made between these different aspects of a UN operation. As far as most humanitarian organizations are concerned, it would, for example, be totally unacceptable to make promises of relief to any party in a conflict in exchange for a commitment to the release of prisoners or the withdrawal of troops and weapons from a particular area. Humanitarian assistance must be treated as a right which is enjoyed by needy individuals, not as a bargaining chip which can be used to modify or moderate the behaviour of an army.

In order to avoid such difficulties, the military should ideally operate under the authority and structures of civilian political staff, with the close advice and collaboration of humanitarian personnel. Such arrangements may be possible in a situation where foreign forces are deployed in a purely logistical capacity, in an area unaffected by armed conflict, and with the full consent of the host government. They are much less likely, however, in the context of a non-consensual peace enforcement operation.

Military commanders place a great deal of emphasis on the issue of control partly because it forms such an important part of the organizational culture of the armed forces, but also because they are ultimately accountable to their governments. And governments are extremely sensitive about the political implications of any non-consensual military operation, particularly in situations where there are no immediate national interests at stake.

Thus in former Yugoslavia, for example, UNHCR employees have found that the armed forces are generally much more cautious when operating in zones of active conflict than personnel employed by humanitarian organizations. As one UNHCR review has observed 'troop-contributing governments, afraid of the political fallout of military deaths, ensured that priority was given to self-defence. This absorbed most of the military contingents' time and resources.'

The question of 'political fall-out' also arises in relation to the decision to deploy military forces in the context of civil wars. States are inconsistent in their willingness to make such commitments. In some situations where human rights abuses and mass population movements are taking place - Haiti, Iraq, Somalia and former Yugoslavia, for example - governments have been willing to deploy their troops and to seek a Security Council mandate for their activities. But in other situations of internal conflict and displacement they have not deemed such action to be necessary or desirable. This is not a reason to reject the deployment of UN-mandated forces in

situations where states are willing to deploy their troops. It does, however, raise the issue of how the UN can respond most effectively to crises when such a commitment does not exist.

Humanitarianism, politics and war

During the Cold War years, it became common to make a sharp distinction between the 'political' and 'humanitarian' activities of the United Nations. Maintaining international peace and security fell into the former category, while resolving refugee problems belonged to the latter.

This separation of functions had a number of significant consequences. First, it enabled the rival power blocs to demonstrate their ability to rise above national and ideological interests and to act on behalf of humanity as a whole. Second, it camoflagued the extent to which they actually used and exploited humanitarian issues in their struggle for supremacy. And third, it reduced the extent to which aid organizations such as UNHCR came under direct governmental control, and thereby provided them with a valuable element of autonomy and independence. In a bipolar world, it was in everyone's interest to maintain this distinction.

Distorted images

One of the more negative consequences of this arrangement, however, was to create a distorted image of the relationship between humanitarian and political action. Although the Cold War is now over, some idealists continue to believe that humanitarian action takes place in a political vacuum, unaffected by the interests of the countries that receive or provide assistance. According to this view, humanitarianism reflects the noblest and most charitable of sentiments; it means helping people, irrespective of who they are, where they are located, and why they are in need. Politics, in contrast, is to be found at the other end of the moral spectrum, and is characterized by cynicism and the determined pursuit of self-interest.

While few would subscribe to this stereotype, governments and aid agencies alike have a mutual interest in perpetuating the distinction between politics and humanitarian action. Indeed, humanitarian organizations go to great lengths to present themselves as non-political and engage in frequent affirmations of their impartiality and neutrality. They tell their constituencies what they would like to hear; namely that the contributions they collect from the public are being used for the simple purpose of alleviating human suffering.

There is, however, a far richer texture to the relationship between humanitarian action and politics than these simplistic images suggest. As almost anyone employed by a relief organization will privately acknowledge, humanitarian assistance, even if it is intended to be completely impartial and neutral, is always liable to have political consequences and is often deliberately manipulated by the parties to a conflict for their own ends.

Political intrusions

Humanitarian assistance is always liable to have political consequences and is often manipulated by the parties to a conflict for their own ends.

The refugee emergencies of the past five years have demonstrated in a particularly graphic manner the intimate relationship between humanitarian and political action. The decision to launch Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq and to establish a 'safety zone' there, for example, can only be understood in the context of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and its subsequent military defeat at the hands of the coalition forces. Somalia, on the other hand, provides a very clear example of an operation which was initially launched with very clear humanitarian objectives, but which quickly became embroiled in local politics.

In operational terms, politics also intrude in a very direct manner in the work of humanitarian organizations. The negotiations that have been required to get relief supplies through the numerous military checkpoints in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, or the hiring of 'technicals' (heavily armed pick-up trucks) to accompany relief convoys in Somalia are examples of this reality. The dilemmas which have arisen in Tanzania and Zaire, where international assistance is being provided to refugee populations which include suspected war criminals, provide a further illustration. At a more mundane level, humanitarian organizations are normally - and justifiably - required to seek the permission of the authorities if they wish to establish and maintain a presence in any country. In situations where the machinery of state has collapsed and law and order have broken down, of course, relief organizations are often subjected to much cruder forms of control.

Although they are important enough in any situation involving people with urgent human needs, such considerations become even more pertinent during internal conflicts, when two or more parties are struggling for control of the same territory. As has been seen in countries such as Angola, Sudan and former Yugoslavia, the question of access to war-affected populations is ultimately a political and military issue, and one which is unashamedly treated as such by both government and rebel forces.

At the same time, it would be wrong to portray humanitarian organizations as the passive victims of political manipulation. Whether they are raising funds for their activities, promoting international awareness of particular emergencies or attempting to remove the operational obstacles confronting their operations, such agencies are rarely averse to making use of their influence with governments, opposition movements and the media.

Impartiality and neutrality

While the distinction between humanitarian and political action may in many senses be an artificial one, there is an evident value in maximizing the neutrality and impartiality of relief efforts. For more than a century, the delivery of humanitarian aid in situations of armed conflict has been predicated upon a respect for certain

basic principles. These principles require that humanitarian aid be provided only to non-combatants, solely on the basis of need, and regardless of the origins, beliefs or ideology of the beneficiaries. Traditionally, humanitarian action has been based on the consent of the parties to a conflict, and assumes that when they consent, they will also respect the basic principles of international humanitarian law (see Box 3.6).

While these principles have never been universally respected, humanitarian organizations agree that they have been flouted in a particularly shameless manner during the conflicts of the past five or six years. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to persuade the parties to a conflict to respect the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian assistance. In earlier years, the United Nations tended to avoid or limit its involvement in any situation where humanitarian principles were blatantly disregarded and where the provision of relief was confronted with exceptional practical or political constraints. Today, however, there is a much greater expectation, fuelled by the media, that international and non-governmental organizations will assist the victims of conflict, however difficult or dangerous the circumstances.

This combination of trends has provided UNHCR and its partners with some particular problems. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, nearly every able-bodied male has been mobilized, rendering the traditional distinction between combatants and civilians largely meaningless. At the same time, all of the parties involved in the conflict have accused the UNHCR-led relief effort of providing direct support to their enemies. In the eyes of the Serbian forces surrounding the government-held enclaves in Bosnia, for example, the relief effort has demonstrably not been neutral, as it has undermined their military efforts by breaking the siege and prolonging the war. By means of political pressures and the presence of UNPROFOR it has been possible to provide some assistance to these besieged populations. The consent on which such deliveries are based, however, is at best a grudging one and is liable to be withdrawn at any time.

All of the parties involved in the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been prone to use relief assistance for political and military purposes. For the government forces in Sarajevo and the Bosnian enclaves, the alternative sources of food have simply been too limited to give them much choice in the matter. The provision of fuel for humanitarian purposes has given rise to even greater challenges to the neutrality of assistance. The fact that UNHCR has supervised the delivery of fuel supplies in former Yugoslavia, ensuring that it is being used for humanitarian purposes, is in many senses irrelevant, because it has simply enabled other fuel supplies to be used by the military. But is that a justification for withdrawing the supply of fuel to schools, hospitals and other civilian amenities?

In humanitarian operations which are supported by UN-mandated forces, particular difficulties can arise with regard to the neutrality of the military presence. The provision of air support to UNPROFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, revealed a major divergence between NATO and the humanitarian organizations working in the area. As far as NATO was concerned, a relief effort which had been endorsed by the UN Security Council was being obstructed, and so force or the threat of force should be used to remove the obstruction. Thus in announcing its August 1993 decision to draw up 'options for air strikes', the North Atlantic Council stressed, somewhat confusingly, 'the humanitarian purpose of the military measures foreseen.' For the relief organizations, however, this argument was extremely

dangerous. Once force was used to secure access to vulnerable populations, their neutrality would be lost and they would inevitably become military targets.

Map ▶ **Former Yugoslavia: UNHCR road convoy routes**

Intervention and consent

UNHCR cannot keep a public silence when it has evidence that systematic human rights violations are being committed.

Recent events in countries such as Haiti, Iraq and Somalia have provoked a lively debate regarding the deployment of UN-mandated forces for the delivery of relief and the prevention of human rights abuses. According to some states, humanitarian crises and internal conflicts should not be portrayed as threats to international peace and security, subject to Security Council decisions taken under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Many other actors within the international community, however, take the position that military intervention for such purposes is entirely legitimate, not only morally but also in terms of international law. Proponents of the latter view must recognize, however, that such interventions cannot pretend to be neutral. An enforcement operation carried out under Chapter VII of the Charter is incompatible with a humanitarian operation which, like the traditional peacekeeping model, must be based upon consent. 'Realistically,' the UN Secretary-General has acknowledged, 'no operation can use force n one part of the theatre while serving as a neutral humanitarian mission and an impartial partner to agreements in another.'

As explained earlier, in northern Iraq this issue was neatly sidestepped by the fact that the Baghdad government signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations, consenting to the organization's presence and activities in the area. In former Yugoslavia, the question of neutrality has not been so easily avoided. UNHCR has constantly sought to stress the impartiality of its role and its readiness to help all populations in need of assistance. At the same time, however, the Security Council has passed a series of resolutions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, condemning the actions of the Bosnian Serbs, establishing 'safe areas' in a number of enclaves surrounded by Serb forces, and authorizing the use of NATO air strikes to deter attacks on these areas.

As a result of these decisions, the Bosnian Serbs concluded that the United Nations as a whole had taken the side of their enemies. In the eyes of the Serbian forces, whatever was left of the relief operation's neutrality quickly evaporated, as did the

distinction between UNHCR and UNPROFOR. And when NATO eventually undertook limited airstrikes against them, UNHCR was held responsible for the decision. This misperception was reinforced, perhaps, by the regularity with which UNHCR had spoken out against the activities of the Serbian military. For while UNHCR seeks to maintain its neutrality in any conflict, the organization cannot keep a public silence when it has evidence that systematic human rights violations are being committed and that humanitarian assistance is being used for political ends.

The use of sanctions

Recent experience in former Yugoslavia and other countries has demonstrated that the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian activities can be compromised not only by the use of force, but also by the imposition of military and economic sanctions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

Sanctions are a double-edged sword as far as humanitarian organizations are concerned. On one hand, they represent an important tool for the international community in its efforts to deal with threats to peace and security. As such, they can be regarded as a means of deterring aggression and averting mass population displacements. On the other hand, however, unless clear provisions are made to exempt humanitarian activities from sanctions, thereby allowing food, medicines and other essential items to reach people in need, they are likely to have the most serious consequences for the weakest and least influential members of a population.

Moreover, by creating material hardship and generating social tensions, sanctions can also have the effect of provoking migratory and refugee movements. Thus in Jordan, for example, UNHCR and the government have had to cope with a substantial influx of Iraqi asylum seekers, many of whom are escaping from the increasingly harsh conditions of life in their own country. As the UN Secretary-General has observed, sanctions 'raise the ethical question of whether suffering inflicted on vulnerable groups in a target country is a legitimate means of exerting pressure on political leaders, whose behaviour is unlikely to be affected by the plight of their subjects.'

Just as seriously, the imposition of sanctions can place practical obstacles in the way of humanitarian activities (relief shipments to Serbia were at one point delayed by two months because of the need for clearance from the UN's Sanctions Committee) thus reinforcing the perception that such efforts are not so neutral as they are claimed to be. As the case of former Yugoslavia has demonstrated, in the highly charged atmosphere of an armed conflict, it is extremely difficult to convince people of the distinction between the 'humanitarian UN', which helps people in need, and the 'political UN', which helps to create those needs. And yet Security Council resolutions regarding sanctions rarely mention humanitarian mandates and have often been introduced without any real consultation with the organization's relief agencies.

Maintaining humanitarian mandates

Because refugee problems are invariably rooted in political conflicts, UNHCR has long been a strong advocate of placing the issue of human displacement squarely on the political agenda. In numerous public policy statements, the High Commissioner for Refugees has welcomed the greater interest and involvement of the UN's political

organs in refugee and humanitarian issues. Close cooperation is required between UNHCR and those organs if refugee problems are to be resolved and prevented from happening in the first place.

At the same time, there is an obvious risk in the politicization of humanitarian mandates. For in any situation of armed violence and mass population displacement, the political and humanitarian imperatives will not necessarily be coincidental and may even conflict. The repatriation of an exiled population, for example, may be politically desirable but unsafe for the refugees concerned. The evacuation of civilians from a war zone may meet humanitarian needs but not be politically acceptable to one or more parties to the conflict. Food assistance may be needed by victims on all sides to a war but dilute the effects of sanctions on a recalcitrant party or undermine its military efforts.

In short, it is not a question of whether humanitarian and political activities intersect, but rather how that relationship is managed. Recent experience has demonstrated that the independence and impartiality of humanitarian action is much easier to maintain in peace-plan operations of the Cambodia or Mozambique type, because the parties have already agreed to a cessation of hostilities, because the objectives of such operations have already been determined, and because the role of the United Nations has already been defined and agreed. Much more caution is needed in extended peacekeeping operations and peace enforcement activities of the type seen in Somalia and former Yugoslavia, which share none of these attributes.

The activities of humanitarian organizations cannot resolve problems that are political in nature. In the absence of a desire for peace and a willingness to compromise on the part of those involved in a war, the solution of those problems requires the necessary will on the part of states to prevent human rights violations, to halt armed aggression and to address the underlying causes of conflict. If the international community is prepared to use force to keep the peace, then such action should, to the extent possible, be taken independently of a humanitarian operation. In situations where the two functions become muddled and where humanitarian principles are compromised, the rationale for continued relief may have to be reviewed. Sadly, there can be circumstances in which a humanitarian operation has to be halted.

The future of peacekeeping

There is a growing awareness that the deployment of UN-mandated troops with an enforcement mandate represents a strategy of last resort.

There is now considerable evidence to suggest that the recent confusion between consensual and non-consensual peacekeeping operations will occur less frequently in the future. During the past five years, the UN and its member states have learned just how dangerous this confusion can be, and how difficult it is to restore the peace in situations where a war is already raging, where the parties to the conflict see no

reason to end the fighting, and where the armaments required to sustain the violence are readily available. Military intervention in such circumstances, the world seems to have recognized, is financially costly and politically risky, and yet the chances of success are slim.

As a result of these developments, there is a growing awareness that the deployment of UN-mandated troops with an enforcement mandate represents a strategy of last resort, a response which becomes necessary when proactive and preventive efforts have not worked or pursued with sufficient vigour. At the same time, there is currently a desire amongst many of the world's more influential governments to avoid the approach once characterized by the US administration as 'assertive mulilateralism'. Indeed, the unhappy outcome of the UN and US involvement in Somalia, coupled with recent changes in US domestic politics, will almost certainly lead the world's most powerful state to withhold support from any further UN operations unless some very clear criteria are met.

Under the terms of a recent presidential directive, for example, Washington will not approve any new UN operation, with or without US soldiers, unless it has clear objectives, a realistic exit strategy and the consent of the parties concerned. Before committing any troops to a UN operation, the US must also be satisfied that such operations have congressional approval, public support, and appropriate command and control arrangements. At a more general level, a similar caution can be seen in the Security Council's approach to the Angolan conflict, which foresees a phased deployment of UN forces, dependent upon a series of actions by the warring parties, demonstrating their continued commitment to the peace process.

Within the United Nations itself, the Secretary-General has also acknowledged the need to learn lessons from the experience of the past five years. 'The United Nations can be proud of the speed with which peacekeeping has evolved in response to the new political environment resulting from the end of the Cold War,' the UN Secretary-General stated in a recent report to the Security Council. 'But the last few years have confirmed that respect for certain basic principles of peacekeeping are essential to its success,' namely, 'the consent of the parties, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence.' Peacekeeping and peace enforcement, the Secretary-General concludes, 'should be seen as alternative techniques and not as adjacent points on a continuum.'

The sense of pessimism generated by the UN's experience in war-torn countries such as Rwanda, Somalia and former Yugoslavia is understandable but in some sense unwarranted. As suggested earlier in this chapter, the world body's efforts to bring a peaceful conclusion to an earlier generation of conflicts have met with considerable success. And even in situations where peacekeeping efforts have failed or met with limited success, millions of lives have been saved by means of effective humanitarian action.

More significantly, perhaps, efforts to protect and assist displaced populations are taking place within a new normative environment. As one study of this issue suggests, 'the transformation in world politics has illuminated the extent of human need and elevated the relative importance of humanitarian considerations. Humanitarian values are coming to be viewed as important in their own right, not as a means to the attainment of political objectives.'

Efforts must now be made to take advantage of the opportunities presented by this new environment by re-examining the whole arsenal of techniques which can be used to prevent armed conflicts and to reduce the scale of the suffering and displacement which they cause. How, for example, can the notion of deterrence, a central pillar of military strategy during the years of the bipolar state system, be employed by the international community to deter or end conflicts in the post-Cold War era? What can be done to influence the behaviour of belligerent groups and to ensure that they observe basic humanitarian principles and respect the laws of war? How can the flow of small arms into zones of conflict be reduced? What action can be taken to limit the development and dissemination of deadly new weapons such as the laser gun? And, as the following chapter asks, how can the underlying causes of so many armed conflicts - poverty, inequality and distorted development patterns - be addressed and resolved?

Box 3.1 Demobilization, disarmament and demilitarization

Bringing peace to countries affected by internal wars calls for much more than the simple cessation of hostilities. While formal peace agreements may be an essential first step in the reconciliation process, simultaneous efforts are needed to demobilize, disarm and demilitarize societies which have been involved in longstanding armed conflicts. Without such action, there is always a risk that the conflict will be renewed or that the civil war will be succeeded by social violence and banditry, preventing the reintegration of former refugees and provoking new population displacements.

Returning to civilian society

Civil wars typically involve very substantial numbers of volunteer and conscript soldiers. At the time of the Nicaraguan peace settlement, for example, more than 115,000 men were engaged in the government and rebel armies, while in Mozambique, the figure stood closer to 140,000.

Soldiers in low-income countries tend to be young, poorly educated and lacking in civilian skills. When peace was restored to Zimbabwe, 13 per cent of the guerrilla forces had no formal education at all, while less than 20 per cent had progressed beyond the primary stage. A study in Namibia found that members of the guerrilla army had become so dependent upon the military lifestyle and were so used to living in a cashless community that they lacked the skills and the capacity to make the personal decisions required in civilian society.

If they are to be demobilized and reintegrated into civilian society, therefore, former combatants must be provided with employment, land, training and credit. They may also need treatment for physical and psychological injuries. During Uganda's demobilization programme, for example, half the ex-soldiers were estimated to be disabled, severely ill or socially maladjusted. Many soldiers also have families whose needs have to be considered when demobilization programmes are designed.

A variety of different strategies have been used to help former soldiers and their dependents make the transition from military to civilian life. In many conflict-affected countries, cash payments, made on a lump-sum or periodic basis to ex-combatants, have been combined with other forms of assistance. In Zimbabwe, for example, guerrilla soldiers who were waiting to be demobilized were accommodated in camps where they were provided with basic education and agricultural employment. In Uganda, the government helped ex-soldiers by paying their childrens' school fees for the first year after their demobilization. And in Nicaragua, former combatants were provided with reintegration kits consisting of tools and household items.

Demobilization programmes are both politically problematic and financially costly. Civil wars are often settled by negotiation rather than outright military victory by one side or the other. Demobilization therefore has to be completed on a voluntary basis, a task which requires a substantial degree of trust between the former enemies. In situations where government and guerrilla soldiers are merged into new national armies, disputes may emerge regarding the relative number of soldiers taken from each force, as well as the rankings and duties which they are assigned.

Demobilization does not come cheap. In Chad, the cost was over US$1,000 per soldier, or US$19 million in total, while for Nicaragua it came to nearly US$2,000 per soldier, or US$44 million overall. And even the best planned and most generously funded programme may produce only a qualified success. Although the Zimbabwean demobilization programme cost a total of US$230 million - US$3,000 per soldier - 17 per cent of the former soldiers were still unemployed eight years after they had left the army.

The cost of doing nothing, however, may be even greater. Namibia, for example, did not initially provide any reintegration programmes for former combatants, with the result that 80 per cent of the ex-guerrillas were still unemployed 16 months after their demobilization - a factor which some analysts have linked to the country's increased crime rate.

Weapons of war

It is difficult to bring peace to societies which are saturated with small arms. When such weapons are readily available and income-earning opportunities are few and far between, there will always be a temptation for people to support themselves by means of crime and banditry. Domestic, social and political disputes are also more likely to be resolved in a violent manner when the local market is flooded with cheap guns, rifles and automatic weapons.

As well as representing an immediate threat to personal security, such violence can also have a very negative impact on the reconciliation and reconstruction processes. Chronic instability prevents displaced communities from settling down and resuming productive lives.

The presence of land-mines, as well as unexploded cluster bombs and artillery shells, also represents a major obstacle to repatriation, reintegration and post-conflict rehabilitation. Landmines remain active for decades after they have been laid, causing indiscriminate death and injury and placing an additional burden on hard-pressed families, health facilities and social welfare services.

According to one estimate, more than 100 million landmines, manufactured almost exclusively by the word's more affluent nations, have been laid around the world. As the UN Secretary-General has observed, 'in many cases, their removal is a prerequisite for all other post-conflict peace-building activities.'

Demobilization and disarmament have proven to be two of the most problematic aspects of the UN's peace-plan operations. In Cambodia, for example, the UN Transitional Authority (UNTAC) was unable to disarm the different factions as the country's comprehensive peace settlement required. In Angola, the failure to disarm the rebel forces and to establish a unified army before the multi-party election of September 1992 set the stage for a resurgence of the civil war. Substantial numbers of former refugees were caught up in the fighting, which also prompted a massive new wave of population displacements. In Mozambique, demobilization started more than a year after the date established in the original peace-plan schedule. And in a number of locations, demining has been hindered by the absence of a single UN organization with clear responsibility for this important task.

According to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, a number of lessons have been learned from this experience. Demobilization and disarmament are not simply technical tasks. They must be based on a thorough understanding of local conditions and the dynamics of conflict in each country where a peace-plan operation is established. The UN must assume a central role in the formulation and implementation of such operations, and the institutional arrangements established during the transitional period must not rely too heavily on the good faith of the conflicting parties.

Finally, the Institute notes, the timetable for demobilization and disarmament efforts must be realistic. 'Civil wars, by their very nature, generate deep-seated hatreds and mutual suspicions. Fostering mutual trust, the essential requirement for successful demobilization, is by definition a long-term process.'

Afghan land-mine victims in Quetta, Pakistan, 1994
© Z. Ahad

Box 3.2 The Liberian conflict: no solution in sight

Displaced Sierra Leoneans arriving at Yandohun, Liberia, November 1993
© UNHCR/L. Taylor

One of the most destructive, intractable and yet least publicized civil wars to be found anywhere in the world is taking place in the West African state of Liberia. Since the conflict began five years ago, more than 800,000 of the country's 2.4 million citizens have been forced into exile. A similar if not greater number have

been displaced within their homeland, half a million of whom are beyond the reach of emergency assistance programmes.

Statistics alone cannot tell the whole tragedy of the Liberian story. The country came into being as the result of a humanitarian initiative nearly 150 years ago, when slaves who had been emancipated in the USA returned to Africa to establish a new and independent country. Although these settlers and their descendants constituted only a small minority of the territory's population, they retained control of the country until 1980, when the incumbent regime was ousted in a coup led by Samuel Doe, a junior army officer. Unfortunately, the new government continued to pursue the authoritarian policies of its predecessors, and at the same time, attempted to reinforce its weakening grip on power by mobilizing and manipulating ethnic loyalties.

Armed factions

The current armed conflict dates from the end of 1989, when Charles Taylor, a former member of the Doe regime, founded the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and launched an insurrection in the north-east of the country. The NPFL attracted considerable support from the local population, and within a year, the rebels had made their way to the outskirts of the capital city.

Although the Doe regime quickly collapsed under this pressure, the establishment of a new government proved to be a much more difficult task. The NPFL was unable to sustain a united front, and at least half a dozen armed factions have emerged throughout the country, frequently dividing, regrouping and splitting up again. According to most analysts, few if any of these factions have a discernable ideology or political programme. Their primary objective is the control of territory and resources.

The Liberian civil war has always had an important regional dimension. In terms of refugee movements, five West African states have been affected by the Liberian exodus: Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, which had a refugee population of around 400,000 and 360,000 respectively by mid-1995, as well as Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria, which have a combined refugee population of some 35,000 refugees. While many of these refugees have now lived in exile since the beginning of the 1990s, the fighting and the population displacements have not stooped. Around one fifth of the Liberian refugees in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, for example, arrived in the first two months of 1995 alone.

Sierra Leone

On the military front, neighbouring and nearby states have also been affected by and drawn into the war. With the apparent backing of the NPFL, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) of Sierra Leone was established in 1991, and contributed to the downfall of that country's government the following year. Since that time, the level of disorder, violence and banditry has steadily increased in eastern Sierra Leone, where the RUF is continuing to attack the government, seeking control of some important gold, diamond and ore-producing areas.

As a result of this conflict, a large proportion of the 70,000 Liberian refugees who had previously fled to Sierra Leone returned to their homeland or moved on to

Guinea. In addition, more than 300,000 Sierra Leoneans have themselves fled the country, 120,000 to Liberia and 190,000 to Guinea. Within Sierra Leone itself, some 600,000 people are thought to have been displaced by armed conflict and banditry. By mid-1995, this turmoil had reached the vicinity of the capital city, threatening the security of Liberian refugees living in the area and prompting some to return to their homeland.

The regionalization of the Liberian conflict has also been manifested in the involvement of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has maintained a multinational military force in the country for the past five years, endorsed by the UN Security Council. The 16,000-strong peacekeeping force, known as ECOMOG, has sought to maintain law and order in Monrovia and the surrounding areas, guarding against attacks by the various Liberian factions. ECOMOG, however, has neither the means nor the mandate to impose peace on the various parties to the conflict.

Victims of war

The Liberian conflict, like so many other of the world's contemporary civil wars, has been characterized by extreme violence and brutality. Civilian populations have frequently been attacked, and an estimated 150,000 non-combatants have been killed in the conflict. Humanitarian assistance to the victims of the war has often been blocked or diverted, while boys and adolescents have been routinely drafted into the armies of the conflicting factions and forced to commit atrocities.
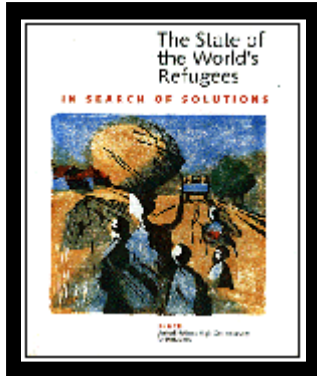
Recent years have witnessed an almost constant round of diplomatic negotiations, intended to end the Liberian conflict and to install a national government. While these initiatives have led to a succession of ceasefires, peace agreements, demobilization deadlines and electoral timetables, all have quickly broken down.

Many analysts now wonder whether, rather than when, peace will be restored to Liberia and the country's refugees and displaced people will be able to go back to their homes. Prior to 1980, Liberia was marked by an absence of clear ethnic division and rivalry. But the country has now become so sharply divided by 15 years of human rights violations and war that there would appear to be no immediate prospect of a return to normal life. At the same time, there is a very real risk that the disorder generated by the Liberian conflict will continue to spread throughout the region, provoking further violence and population displacements. In such circumstances, it is to be hoped that the countries of the region will continue to demonstrate the same kind of hospitality that they have hitherto offered to the Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees.

Map F
Displaced Liberians and Sierra Leoneans

CONAKRY

SIERRA LEONE

16,000 Liberians
300,000 internally displaced
(estimate)

FREETOWN

GUINEA

399,000 Liberians
120,000 Sierra Leonans

LIBERIA

120,000 Sierra Leonans
800,000 internally displaced
(estimate)

MONROVIA

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

360,000 Liberians

ABIDJAN

Atlantic Ocean

GHANA : 16,000 Liberians
NIGERIA : 4,000 Liberians
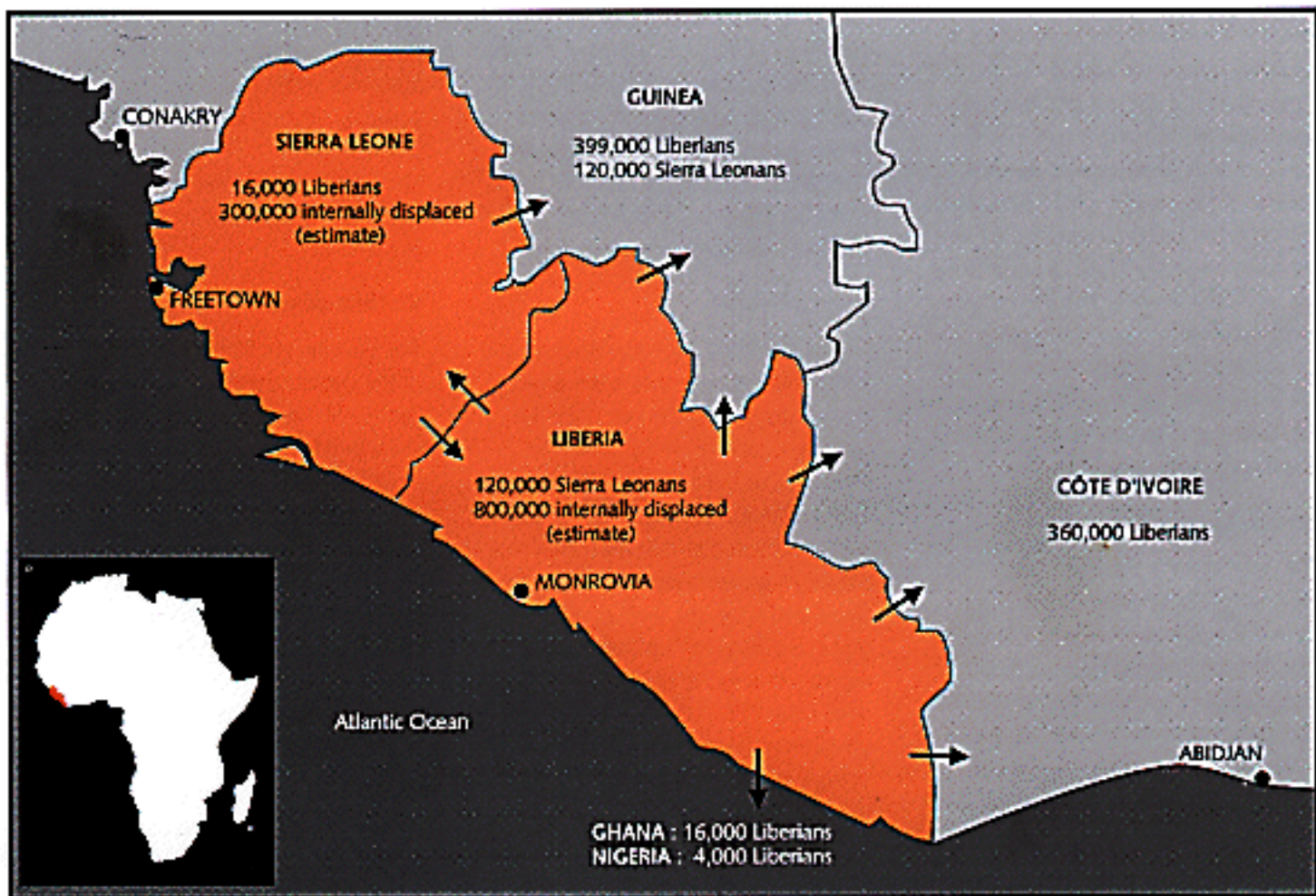
Statistics dated January 1995

The State of The World's Refugees
in search of solutions

Published by Oxford University Press

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Box 3.3 Responding to the Rwandese refugee crisis: the military contribution

It was the fastest and most overwhelming refugee exodus in modern times. In less than one week in mid-July 1994, nearly a million terrified Rwandese poured into the lakeside town of Goma in neighbouring Zaire. Spreading out into the surrounding volcanic land, the refugees quickly began to die in massive numbers, victims of dysentry, dehydration, cholera and other deadly diseases.

For a few days, UNHCR staff and personnel from other relief agencies were gripped by a sense of doom. Almost 200 different humanitarian agencies eventually arrived on the spot, working around the clock to provide the new arrivals with food, water, shelter and medical care. But the sheer number of refugees threatened to overwhelm their efforts.

Alarming mortality rates

From the first days of the crisis, it became obvious that traditional approaches would not constitute an effective response to this very large and complex emergency. With its own emergency resources fully deployed in the region and in other parts of the world, UNHCR became convinced that only the large-scale involvement of military units could help to reduce the alarming mortality rates recorded in the camps around Goma. In New York and Geneva, high-level contacts were established with governments capable of providing such assistance, and by mid-August, military contingents from several countries had joined the relief effort.

In an operation called Support Hope, the United States deployed 300 soldiers in Goma and an additional 2,700 in the neighbouring states of Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya in key logistical support functions. One of the most critical US contributions to the operation in Zaire was to establish a permanent water link to more than 200,000 Rwandese who were suffering from dehydration at the Kimbumba refugee camp, a task which involved establishing purification units at Lake Kivu in Goma and then using water tankers to move the water to the refugees. The first purification unit was

in operation within hours of the troops' arrival. Other American engineers using heavy-duty bulldozers carved out vital access roads across the volcanic landscape.

The French military, already engaged in the UN-mandated Operation Turquoise in south-west Rwanda, diverted troops for air traffic control duty at Goma airport, as well as cargo handling, runway repair, water transport and food distribution. As the death toll mounted to several thousand per day, some French soldiers had the particularly gruesome task of collecting and burying the bodies. Contingents from Ireland, Israel, Japan and the Netherlands provided logistical and medical expertise to the overworked aid agencies. To facilitate this task, UNHCR had devised a series of self-contained 'service packages', whereby governments provided the expertise and equipment needed in specialized areas such as air traffic control, road-building and sanitation.

Military aircraft were vital in supplementing a civilian airlift to Goma, a particularly inhospitable and inaccessible area. Underlining the capability available only to the military, one giant American Galaxy transport aircraft carrying a water purification plant and two fire engines flew non-stop from California to Zaire, refuelling in mid-air three times.

Critical lessons

Within two months of the influx, a degree of stability had been brought to the situation. The cholera epidemic had been brought under control. Immunization campaigns had been undertaken throughout the Goma area. And medical activities were shifting from crisis intervention to preventive and primary health care. While many refugees had died, far more would have lost their lives had it not been for the participation of military units in the relief effort.

The Goma crisis underlined a critical lesson: that a successful response to any emergency is dependent on preparedness, which in turn is dependent on stand-by capacity. This is true not only for civilian agencies but also for the military. Early assessments of the Rwanda emergency indicate that once military units were fully committed in Goma they proved invaluable, but there was some initial confusion and delay. It took too long to establish adequate lines of communication between UNHCR and the different military units. Specific requirements and objectives were not always identified at a sufficiently early stage.

While it is clear that Goma was in many ways an unusual emergency, the experience of recent years suggests that there could be further disasters of this magnitude, requiring established humanitarian organizations to call upon the assistance of the military. Both parties, however, agree that they must pursue such cooperation with caution in order to safeguard the strictly humanitarian nature of any relief operation. Military participation is therefore likely to remain an exceptional occurence, used only in situations where regular relief arrangements are unable to cope with a crisis.
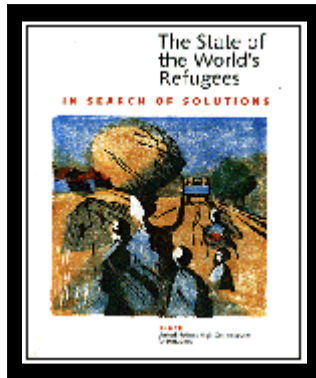
Box 3.4 Saving Sarajevo: the UNHCR airlift operation

Through three winters of war, the large transport planes landing at Sarajevo's shell-scarred Butmir airport have not only delivered many tons of life-saving food, medicine and other humanitarian aid. They have also provided proof that the 440,000 people living in the besieged capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina have not been forgotten by the outside world. As the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has observed, 'for the residents of Sarajevo, the UNHCR airlift is much more than a symbolic humanitarian gesture. It is an act of solidarity to try to save the people of Sarajevo from destruction.'

Vulnerable land routes

When the Sarajevo airlift began, few believed it would be required for more than a few months. Overland convoys are a much more efficient and economical method of delivering assistance, and UNHCR was hopeful that its trucks would soon be delivering aid to the city. Unfortunately, those land routes have proven to be extremely vulnerable, and during many months of the war, the airlift provided more than 85 percent of all assistance reaching Sarajevo.

The Sarajevo operation has become the longest-running humanitarian airbridge in history, surpassing in duration (although not in total tonnage) the 1948-49 Berlin airlift. By mid-March 1995, it had flown more than 12,100 sorties and delivered more than 150,500 metric tons of humanitarian supplies to Sarajevo, including 136,000 metric tons of food and 14,500 metric tons of medical supplies.

As well as delivering aid, the planes used for the airlift have been involved in the medical evacuation of nearly 1,100 patients and 1,400 accompanying relatives from Bosnia. During much of the war, the airlift also provided the only access to Sarajevo for many official delegations and thousands of journalists covering the conflict in former Yugoslavia.

The Sarajevo airlift has provided a remarkable demonstration of cooperation between governments, military forces and humanitarian organizations. Some 20 nations have participated in the airlift since the operation began, although for much of the time, five countries have played a central role: Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the British Overseas Development Adminstration, the Soros Foundation and Médecins du Monde have all contributed to the operation.

Italy has assumed some particularly important responsibilities, both flying in the airlift itself and providing ground facilities at Falconara Airport in Ancona. In the early days of the airlift, planes flew to Sarajevo from Zagreb and Split in Croatia, as well as Frankfurt in Germany. In early 1995, however, UNHCR decided to consolidate all ground operations in Ancona for reasons of efficiency.

The human price

The airlift has not been without a human price. By March 1995, there had been more than 260 security incidents involving airlift planes and personnel. The most tragic incident was the shooting down of an Italian airforce cargo plane on 3 September 1992, which claimed the lives of all four crewmen. An official Italian investigation later reported that the aircraft was struck by a surface-to-air missile fired by an unknown source about 17 miles from Sarajevo.

The airlift has been grounded numerous times, sometimes for weeks on end. In 1994, for example, there were 102 security incidents and a total of 104 'no-fly' days. But the participating countries and crews have always chosen to get the planes back in the air as soon as they deem it safe; they know that too many lives depend on their work.

The running of the airlift is overseen by UNHCR's airlift operations cells in Geneva and Ancona, which also work in close coordination with the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia and with the participating countries. The airlift operations cells are staffed by military officers seconded by the participating nations as well as UNHCR staff.

UNHCR was able to make good use of the expertise gained by the Geneva air operations cell in the summer of 1994, when an emergency airlift had to be mounted at short notice for more than a million Rwandese refugees who had flooded into Zaire. While continuing with their Sarajevo duties, the airlift experts at UNHCR brought in additional staff and established a round-the-clock schedule that allowed them to coordinate flights to Central Africa from many places around the world.

According to some analysts, the vulnerability of the Sarajevo airlift to hostile action is symptomatic of the international community's lack of will to resolve the conflict in former Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, the operation was suspended on 8 April 1995 and had not resumed by the end of July. Moreover, as UNHCR has always acknowledged, although the operation keeps many people alive, it cannot bring a lasting peace to this war-torn region. Nevertheless, in a war marked by numerous failures, the airlift represents a substantial operational success.
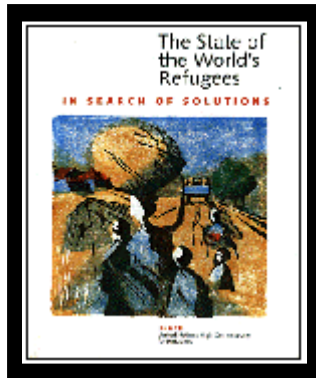
Box 3.5 Safe areas: a substitute for asylum?

Can refugee problems be averted through the creation of internationally protected 'safe areas' within war-affected countries? And to what extent can that objective be achieved without jeopardizing the right to seek asylum in another state? Those are just two of the issues raised by recent events in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Rwanda and Sri Lanka.

The safe area notion is not an entirely new one. Under the laws of war, armed forces are prohibited from attacking areas which have been reserved for the care of civilians and soldiers in need of medical attention. The Geneva Conventions also contain a little-used provision whereby the parties to a conflict can formally agree to the establishment of 'non-defended localities' - neutral and demilitarized zones where civilian populations can take refuge.

Four examples

While a variety of different safe areas have been established in recent years, none of these initiatives conforms to the arrangements envisaged in the Geneva Conventions. In north-eastern Sri Lanka, for example, UNHCR has established two 'open relief centres' (ORCs), where local villagers can take refuge when they feel threatened by the conflict between government forces and Tamil rebels. While the humanitarian character of these facilities has generally been respected, the ORCs are not the product of a formal agreement between the conflicting parties.

Elsewhere in the world, the creation of safe havens has been accompanied by the deployment of UN-mandated military forces. In 1991, a US-led coalition established a safe haven in northern Iraq, with the intention of providing protection and assistance to more than 1.5 million people, the majority of them Kurds, who had been subjected to a military offensive by the Baghdad government.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the UN Security Council has declared six government-held enclaves - Bihac, Gorazde, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Tuzla and Zepa - to be safe areas, with the purpose of safeguarding civilians from attack and ensuring that they

receive the humanitarian assistance which they need to survive. Established in 1993, the Security Council placed the safe areas under the protection of the United Nations and the NATO military alliance.

The creation of a safe area or 'humanitarian protection zone' in south-west Rwanda took place in July 1994, in the context of a French-led military intervention known as Operation Turquoise. Authorizing this initiative, the Security Council did not explicitly refer to the creation of a safe area, but approved instead 'the establishment of a temporary operation under national command and control, aimed at contributing, in an impartial way, to the security and protection of displaced persons, refugees and civilians at risk.'

Positive results

In principle, there is much to be said for any strategy which provides war-affected populations with additional protection and which enables displaced people to remain in or return to their homes. In practice too, the establishment of the safe areas described above has yielded a number of positive results. With regard to Sri Lanka, for example, it is widely acknowledged that the creation of the ORCs has helped to improve the security of the civilian population and to limit the scale of the refugee outflow to India. Despite the intensity of the civil war, there has not been a single death in an ORC as a result of military action.

In northern Iraq, the coalition intervention and creation of a safe haven obliged the army to halt its attacks on the Kurdish population. As a result, a large proportion of the people who had been uprooted by the government offensive were able to return to their homes, thereby enabling the speedy resolution of a large and potentially long-term refugee problem in the neighbouring states. While the record of the safe area initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina is generally much less positive, the UN Secretary-General has observed that 'when the consent and cooperation of the parties has been forthcoming... the presence of UN observers and patrols has enabled the monitoring of ceasefires, stabilized surrounding confrontation lines and improved security by resolving localized disputes or outbreaks of fighting.'

Reporting to the United Nations on the outcome of Operation Turquoise, the French government has suggested that the creation of a security zone in southwest Rwanda had four principal achievements to its credit: halting the massacres which were taking place in the area, providing protection to the population, allowing humanitarian activities to be launched, and assisting in the collection of information about human rights abuses. Other commentators have suggested that the outflow of refugees from this part of the country to the neighbouring country of Zaire was reduced as a result of the operation.

The French NGO Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), is less positive in its assessment, arguing that Operation Turquoise was 'too little and too late.' The genocide, MSF suggests, was halted by the advance of the Rwandese Patriotic Front, rather than the UN-mandated force. And while acknowledging that Operation Turquoise 'saved a few thousand lives and helped stabilize population movements within Rwanda,' the French agency argues that the security zone established in south-west Rwanda 'also gave shelter to the militias and perpetrators of the massacres.'

Standards and criteria

At a more general level, the safe area strategy is open to a number of different criticisms.

Although phrases such as safe haven and security zone are now regularly used by governments and international organizations, they have hitherto been employed in a very loose manner. Little effort has been made to define these concepts or to identify the criteria and standards which should be met when safe areas are established. As the UN Secretary-General has commented with regard to the Security Council's resolutions on Bosnia and Herzegovina, 'the problem with safe areas is first of all that we have not received a definition of what is meant by a safe area.'

Without clear criteria and standards, the safe area concept is liable to used in a misleading way, as a declaration of intent rather than an accurate statement of fact. For the inescapable truth is that some of the safe areas established in recent years have not been safe at all for the people living in them. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, the 'consent and cooperation' mentioned by the UN Secretary-General has been conspicuous by its absence. The six safe areas have been under constant siege and intermittent bombardment by the Bosnian Serbs, jeopardizing the safety of the residents. Thus in 1994, the former chief of UNHCR's Bosnia operation wrote that 'surrounded by enemy forces, without basic shelter, medical assistance or infrastructure, isolated and living under sporadic shelling or sniper fire, these areas are becoming more and more like detention centres, administered by the UN and assisted by UNHCR.'

Events in Srebrenica and Zepa in July 1995 underlined even more graphically the vulnerability of the safe areas to armed attack. Having endured the siege for many months, these two safe areas were finally seized by Bosnian Serb forces, and the population expelled from the enclaves. By early August, a substantial number of men remained unaccounted for, following their detention by the victorious army. After an intense round of diplomatic negotiations, NATO announced that it would launch intensive air strikes against the Bosnian Serb forces, should they advance upon the remaining safe areas, particularly Gorazde in the east of the country.

As the Secretary-General has acknowledged, the safe areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not only dangerous, but have also been drawn into the deadly logic of the war. 'What is happening now,' he observed in May 1995, 'is that certain safe areas are used by the two parties to the conflict to sustain their confrontation.' Established without the consent of the Bosnian Serbs, and used as military bases by the Bosnian government forces, the safe areas could even be said to provoke attacks on the residents and relief personnel they are intended to protect.

Threat of force

The population of northern Iraq has not suffered from the same degree of insecurity, largely because the western powers have been prepared to maintain the integrity of the safe haven with the effective threat of force. Nevertheless, the non-consensual way in which the safe haven was established and the absence of any recognized authority in the area has had some adverse consequences. Residents have had to contend with a stringent economic blockade imposed by the Baghdad government,

which has itself been subjected to sanctions by the Security Council. Living conditions in the area are consequently very tough.
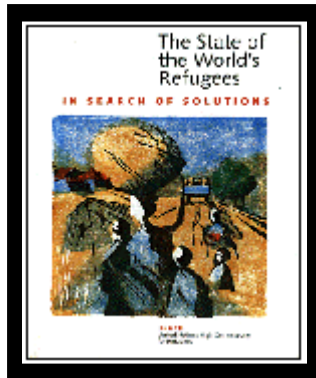
In some parts of the safe haven, communities have been caught in the crossfire between rival Kurdish militias. And in March 1995, some 35,000 Turkish troops moved into northern Iraq to conduct an offensive against Turkish Kurd guerillas, an operation which obliged the western powers to suspend their protective air flights over the safe haven. As a result of this military intervention, humanitarian activities in the safe haven had to be temporarily halted, thousands of Iraqi citizens were displaced from their homes, and UNHCR was obliged to relocate more than 2,500 Turkish refugees living in the area.

Freedom of movement

A final danger associated with the safe area strategy is the threat which it can pose to the principle of asylum and the right of freedom of movement. In Sri Lanka, this has not been a major problem. Local villagers are free to move in and out of the ORCs, and, if they have the means and the determination, can still take refuge in India.

In northern Iraq, however, the creation of the safe haven was a direct result of Turkey's refusal to admit the fleeing Kurds, a decision which had left thousands of people stranded and dying in the mountainous border area. And in former Yugoslavia, the freedom of people to leave the safe areas has been constrained by both the Serbian siege and by the Bosnian government's reluctance to allow the depletion of the population in areas remaining under its control.

As the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has suggested, 'we must prevent refugee flows, not by building barriers or border controls, but by defending the right of people to remain in peace in their own homes and countries.' The safe area concept could contribute to the pursuit of this objective. But at a time when governments are wearying of the refugee problem and expressing a reluctance to host large numbers of asylum seekers, it could also contribute towards a deterioration of protection standards. As the High Commissioner has also commented, 'faced with the obvious difficulties of in-country protection, it is essential that we safeguard the institution of asylum.'

Box 3.6 The laws of war

The great majority of today's refugees are fleeing from situations of armed conflict. Any strategy intended to avert or limit mass population displacements must therefore seek to reduce the scale of the violence committed by combatants and to safeguard civilian populations from the effects of war.

At first glance, the notion of 'laws of war' may appear to be a contradiction in terms. War involves organized and intentional killing, sometimes on a massive scale, and is usually responsible for creating high levels of chaos and lawlessness.

Throughout history, however, states and societies have recognized the need to place restraints on the conduct of war. Whether motivated by individual conscience, a sense of honour or the fear of reprisals and punishment, politicians, military commanders and their troops have all demonstrated a willingness to take such rules into account in situations of armed conflict. The laws of war have varied considerably from one time and place to another, and have rarely (if ever) been fully respected. Nevertheless, mankind would appear to have recognized that even if war cannot be eliminated, its human consequences can at least be mitigated.

Basic principles

The laws of war which exist today have been evolving for more than 100 years. They are to found primarily in the four Geneva Conventions of 1948 and two Additional Protocols, all of which have been widely ratified by states.

Three important principles underlie this body of international humanitarian law. The first is that of limitation: armed forces are not free to pursue their objectives by any means which they consider necessary or convenient. Military utility is always subject to the broader interests of humanity.

The second principle is that of distinction: in wars, only military personnel and property can be targeted. It is permissible to inflict harm on civilians only if it is an unavoidable by-product of an attack on a military target.

Proportionality forms the third principle of the laws of war. It is unlawful for an armed force to engage in any attack or operation if the anticipated suffering of either soldiers or civilians is disproportionate to the military gains which might be made. Activities which inflict excessive collateral damage on civilians are therefore outlawed, as are those which cause unnecessary suffering and casualties amongst the soldiers themselves.

On the basis of these three principles, specific laws have been established to prohibit actions such as the rape, torture and killing of civilians, including the use of starvation or terror as a military tactic. Under the laws of war, combatants must also grant access to civilian populations for the purpose of humanitarian relief.

Soldiers are also protected by the laws of war. Military prisoners must not be mistreated, while the use of inhumane weapons such as exploding bullets and chemical agents has been outlawed or restricted. Legal provisions also exist to encourage and enforce compliance with the laws of war. According to the Geneva Conventions, combatants must be trained in international humanitarian law, while commanders are responsible for controlling the conduct of their troops. Furthermore, violators must be disciplined.

While there is some overlap between international humanitarian law and international human rights law, there are also some significant differences. By permitting acts of violence under specified circumstances, the laws of war create exceptions or derogations to human rights law. Under human rights law, for example, no-one shall be 'arbitrarily deprived' of life. Although the killing of a civilian by a lawful act of war is tragic, it is not arbitrary, and therefore does not constitute a violation of human rights law. In addition, derogations from many basic human rights, such as freedom of speech and movement, are expressly permitted by human rights treaties in times of national emergency such as an armed conflict. Finally, serious violations of the laws of war can be prosecuted by any state which is party to the Geneva Conventions. No similar enforcement mechanism exists in most human rights treaties.

The Red Cross role

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is the guardian of humanitarian law. The Geneva Conventions and Protocols were established at diplomatic conferences convened by the ICRC, which has more recently taken a lead in calling for changes to the laws of war in order to ban the use of land-mines and newly developed laser weapons which can cause instant and permanent blindness over a range of many kilometres.

The ICRC also breathes life into the written rules of war by providing protection and assistance to civilians, as well as wounded and imprisoned soldiers. In 1993 alone, the organization visited 144,000 detainees in 55 countries. Through its central tracing agency, the ICRC located 10,000 missing persons and reunited 2,200 families. And to ease the pain of separation, it acted as a conduit for an astonishing 4.7 million messages between family members. In addition, the ICRC devotes approximately half of its annual budget to the provision of specialized medical services, food, shelter and other essential items to populations affected by war.

The ICRC's neutrality and independence, strictly maintained for more than 130 years, have enabled the organization to assume a unique role in humanitarian affairs. While the ICRC assiduously promotes respect for the laws of war through research, publications, teaching and training activities, it does not always feature prominently in the international media. Unlike many human rights monitoring organizations, which operate through public disclosure and condemnation, the ICRC almost always attempts to gain compliance with the laws of war by means of confidential diplomacy. In the effort to prevent and resolve refugee problems, these different forms of action have complementary roles to play.

Conforming to norms

How can states and soldiers be persuaded to respect the laws of war? In times of peace, most people obey the law because they perceive an advantage in doing so. Guilt and shame, family and peer pressure act as powerful enforcement mechanisms. These social and psychological pressures are supplemented by the activities of institutions such as the police, courts and prisons, which provide a strong disincentive to potential law-breakers.

In the case of the laws of war, the situation is not so simple. The recent creation of an international war crimes tribunal for Rwanda and former Yugoslavia represents a significant attempt to hold individuals accountable for their actions. But as the ICRC has observed, 'today's combatants are all too often ignorant of the rules of international humanitarian law.' It is therefore imperative that decision-makers, military officers and soldiers be exposed to and trained in the laws of war. This, however, can be a very difficult task, given the number of contemporary conflicts being fought by irregular armies and militia groups with decentralized structures and weak chains of command, as well as the limited application of the Geneva Conventions to situations of internal conflict.

If they are to influence behaviour, humanitarian principles must also be internalized - not just by decision-makers and combatants, but by countries and communities as a whole. While politicians and military leaders may in some countries act is if they are a law unto themselves, experience has demonstrated that the behaviour of combatants is often conditioned by the norms and values of the societies in which they live. Reinforcing respect for the laws of war will evidently not prevent the suffering and destruction which is inherent in all armed conflicts. But by reducing the threat which military activities pose to the safety and security of civilian populations, it has an important role to play in the prevention and containment of mass population displacements.
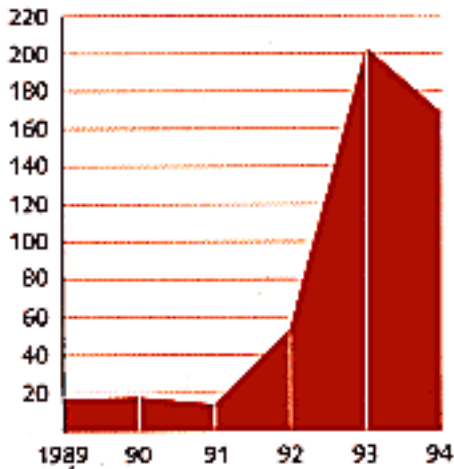
**Fig. 3.1
UN peacekeeping expenditures,
1989-1994**

US$ millions
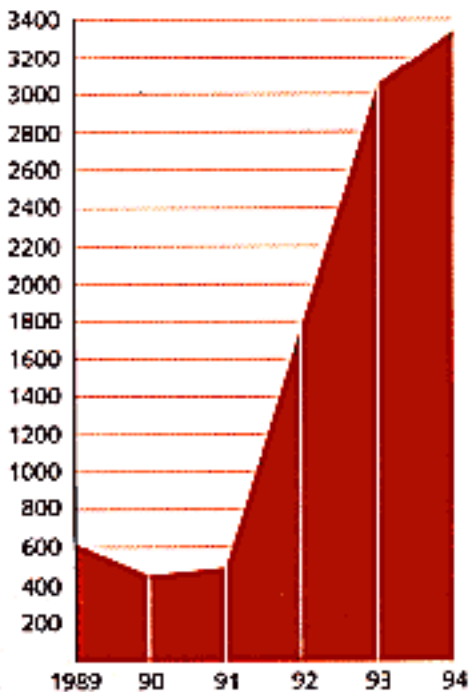
**Fig. 3.2
Fatalities in UN peacekeeping operations, 1989-1994**

Fig. 3.3
Personnel deployed in UN peacekeeping operations, 1990-1994
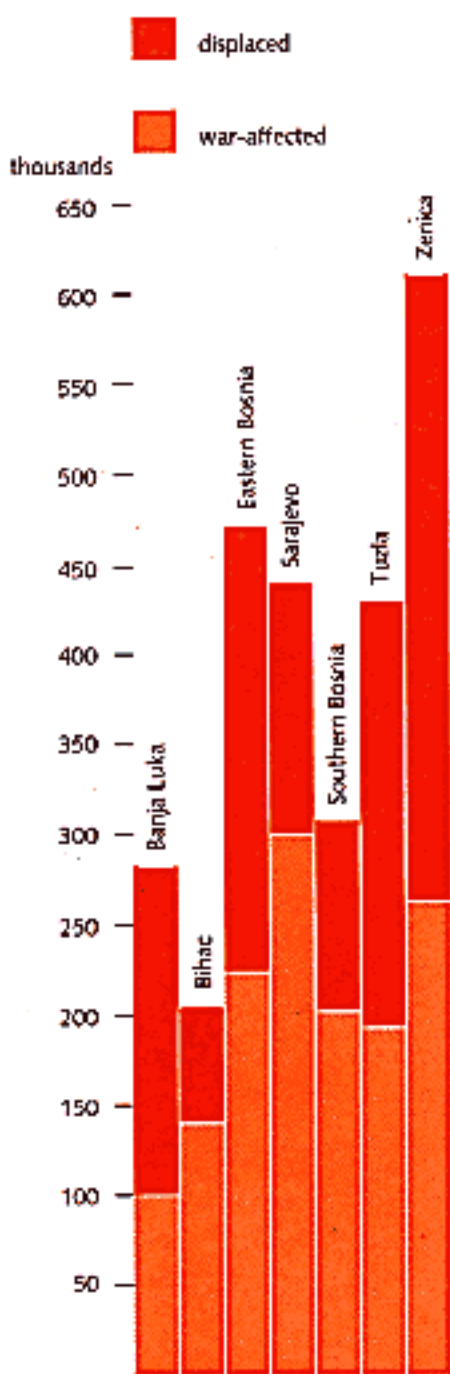

Figures at year end.
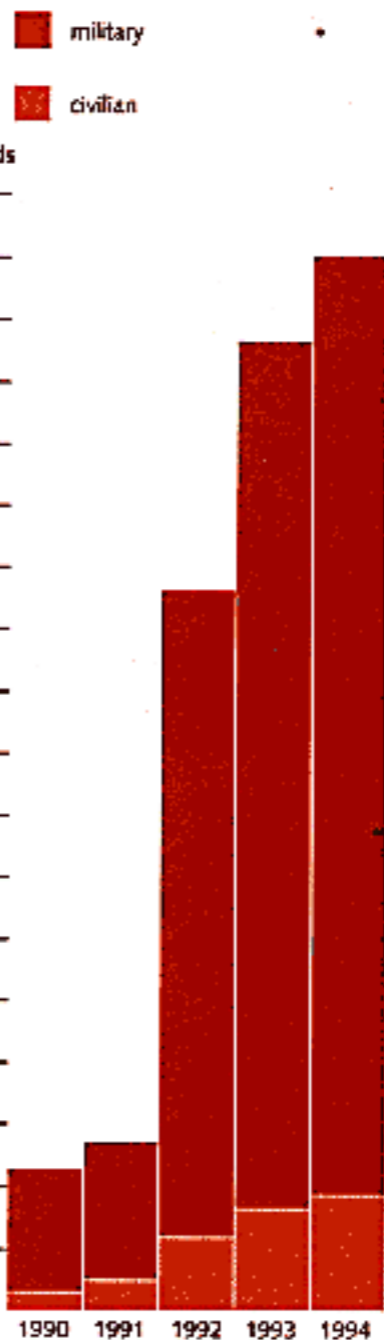
Fig. 3.4
Beneficiaries of UN humanitarian assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1995

displaced

war-affected

Statistics dated April 1995.

Fig. 3.5
Beneficiaries of UN humanitarian assistance in former Yugoslavia, 1995

Location	Beneficiaries
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2,749,000
Croatia	385,000
UN Protected Areas	110,000
FYRM*	18,000
Montenegro	41,000
Serbia	231,000
Slovenia	27,000
TOTAL	3,722,000

* Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
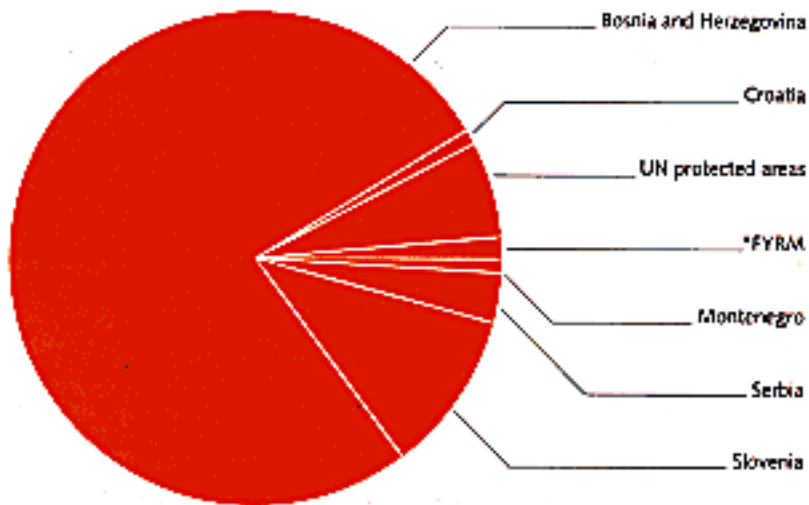
Map E
UN peacekeeping operations
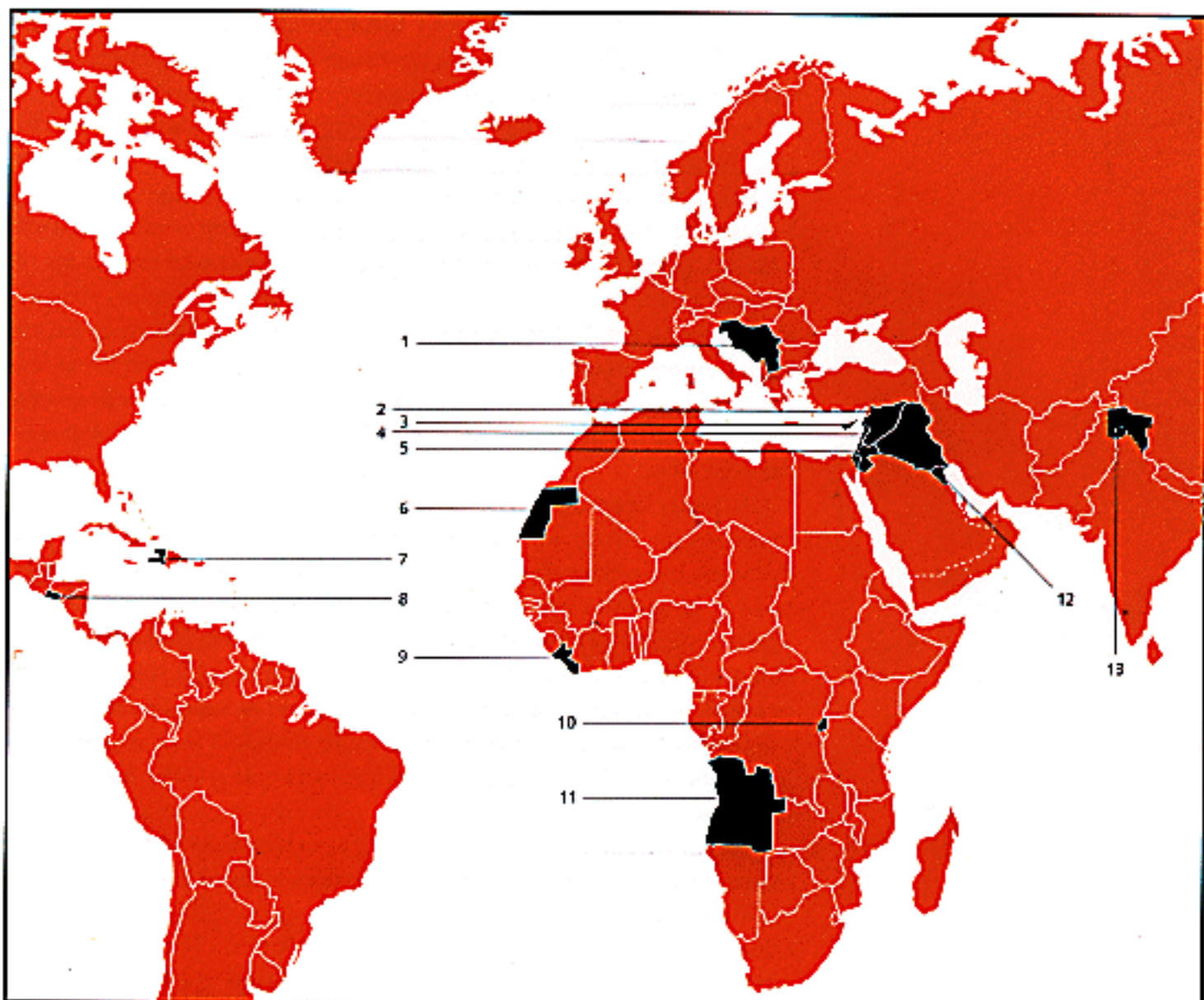
1. Former Yugoslavia, UNPROFOR
    (United Nations Protection Force)

2. Syrian Golan Heights, UNDOF
    (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force)

3. Cyprus, UNFICYP
    (United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus)

4. Southern Lebanon , UNIFIL
    (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon)

5. Jerusalem, UNTSO
    (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization)

6. Western Sahara, MINURSO
    (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara)

7. Haiti, UNMIH (United Nations Mission in Haiti)

8. El Salvador, ONUSAL
    (United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador)

9. Liberia, UNOMIL
    (United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia)

10. Rwanda, UNAMIR,
    (United Nations Mission in Rwanda)

11. Angola, UNAVEM III
    (United Nations Angola Verification Mission)

12. Iraq/Kuwait demilitarized zone, UNIKOM
    (United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission)

13. Kashmir, UNMOGIP
    (United Nations Military Observer Group in
    India and Pakistan)

Situation at May 1995.