

Chapter 45

THE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE SYSTEM AND THE US MILITARY

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INTRODUCTION

The chaos spreading through many countries in the developing world has drawn together an unusual, sometimes incompatible, assortment of organizations to respond to these multiplying crises. Each year from 1978 to 1985 saw an average of five complex humanitarian emergencies, the term used in the disaster discipline for these crises (see Chapter 43, *Complex Emergencies*); by contrast, there were 17 in 1992, 20 in 1993, and 25 in 1997. The increase in these emergencies appears to be one of the few clear patterns in the post-Cold War world.

Virtually the entire international emergency response system is a post-World War II phenomenon; part of it was in its infancy but most of it was not even conceived of at the time of the Marshall Plan. For those who work in the relief discipline, it seems a small miracle that the existing system works as well as it does, given the conflicting mandates of the responding organizations, the enormous complexity of the problems addressed, and the organi-

zational incongruities that have emerged in the years since the United States helped Europe recover from World War II.

This chapter examines the existing humanitarian response system—made up of private voluntary organizations (PVOs), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and United Nations (UN) agencies—through which the international community responds to these emergencies. Understanding the cultures and operational habits of this triad of organizations and the manner in which each interacts with the others is crucial for anyone who tries to work with them but particularly for military personnel. A civilian US government agency, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) in the US Agency for International Development (USAID), coordinates US responses to foreign disasters and so is another major participant in these efforts. Examples of how the US military has fit into this complex system are taken from missions in the 1990s.

PRIVATE VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE US MILITARY

What is known in the United States as a PVO is known in Europe and the rest of the world as a non-governmental organization. A PVO is a private, nonprofit organization that specializes in humanitarian relief and development work in the Third World and, increasingly, in formerly communist countries. American PVOs employ more than 100,000 people in developing countries. In 1996, they received \$4.8 billion in private revenue and \$1.4 billion in public revenue from USAID.¹ They communicate with the public through newsletters and magazines whose aggregate circulation is in the millions.

Most American PVOs, although private by charter, accept grants of federal money from the USAID. For a PVO to remain eligible to receive such grants or food aid, it must by law raise at least 20% of its total income from private sources. While the proportion of a PVO's income from the US government, whether in the form of cash grants or food aid, varies according to its corporate strategy, some PVOs raise so little private funding that they are dangerously close to this 20% limit. A few PVOs accept no USAID money so they can maintain their distance from the government, whose policies they find objectionable.

The PVO suspicion of US government influence extends to the military as well. When President Bush ordered US military forces to Kurdistan in June 1991, several PVOs, particularly European ones, refused to cooperate with them. Kurdistan became a seminal experience for American PVOs as it showed them that they could work together productively with US forces in a humanitarian emergency, something that even organizations not opposed to close association with the military had doubted.

To paraphrase management expert Chester Barnard, the US military and American PVOs are unlike in every important way.² Indeed, it is difficult to imagine two more dissimilar cultures. The military is highly disciplined, hierarchical, politically and culturally conservative, and tough; it has a mission to defeat the enemy. American PVOs are generally independent, resistant to authority, politically and culturally liberal (with the exception of some Christian PVOs), and sensitive and understanding; they have a mission to save lives. Because military missions tend to be explicit and tangible, the military sometimes fails to appreciate all the subtleties of humanitarian mission statements, where objectives can be implicit and intangible.

PROFILE OF THE PRIVATE VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION CULTURE

Goals and Personnel

All PVOs have ideologies and missions based, to some degree, on each organization's private donor base and institutional history. Many are firmly on the ideological left, others are more centrist, still others are on the right. PVO comfort levels in working with the US military decline as one moves from right to left on that spectrum. Nearly all PVOs share a devotion to the concept of sustainable development in any country or region in which they operate. They share an aversion to quick fixes, which they believe military operations tend to emphasize. Their own painful experiences through 4 decades in the field have taught them that real development is a slow, difficult process. One political value all PVOs share is a robust internationalism; there are no isolationists in these organizations.

PVOs tend to recruit former Peace Corps workers, religiously committed activists in the faith-based PVOs, and young people with graduate degrees in development economics and public health. Most get the bulk of their operational training on the job; there are few equivalents to military doctrine or field manuals to describe how a particular program is to be run. Where PVO doctrine does exist, it is developed from generally shared experiences and responses, is seldom written down, and is not always followed uniformly. Field experience in the culture of PVOs is comparable to combat experience in the military: a badge of honor, accorded the highest respect.

Types

PVOs are a diverse group and may be divided into those that attempt to influence public policy and remain focused on advocacy work and those that manage projects in the field and remain focused on operational issues. Most large PVOs do both because they have realized that thoughtless or pernicious behavior (whether government policy, donor attitudes, or developing country demands) can quickly undo generally well-conceived and well-implemented community development work.

Advocacy and operational groups both have their weaknesses. PVOs that only advocate tend to have a limited understanding of field realities in the developing world. They tend to be governed by ideological preconceptions rather than pragmatic appraisals of what works. PVOs that exclusively operate in the field can go only so far in criticizing

public policy before their workers and programs are threatened by government officials intolerant of criticism.

Some PVOs specialize by sector, such as health, education, or economic development. A few do only relief work, others only development. Some do both, particularly the larger PVOs, such as the three largest in the United States: Care, Catholic Relief Services, and World Vision. Since the Ethiopian famine of 1985, a body of scholarship has developed suggesting that well-conceived relief work should be designed with developmental components and that good development work should include disaster prevention and mitigation measures to reduce the need for relief in disaster-prone areas. Agricultural development programs in drought-prone areas, for example, should include drought-resistant crop varieties and water conservation measures.³

Although most PVOs of US origin employ indigenous staff to manage their programs, some remain Western in their leadership, culture, and standards. In most developing countries, there is an array of indigenously organized and managed PVOs that do relief and development work, sometimes forming partnerships with Western PVOs to meet common objectives. While many of these indigenous groups run fine programs, some are suspect in their operational capacity, professionalism, and accountability. Their reputation, good or bad, usually precedes them.

The assumption that Western PVOs can be trusted and Third World PVOs cannot is both unfair and simplistic. Such an assumption, all too easy to make during planning, can endanger a mission if it is used to support operational decisions. In Somalia in the early 1990s, the UN and, before it, the United States gave short shrift to Somali PVOs, with unfortunate consequences. When the battle was joined with General Aideed, Somali PVOs might have rallied support for the international presence in the country. Instead, the UN received little help from the more responsible elements of Somali society that were represented by local PVOs.

Funding Pressures

The fundraising imperative, which provides insight into their sometimes curious behavior, operates to some degree in all PVOs. PVOs must communicate with the American people, either through electronic media or direct mail solicitation, to raise funds. Income increases significantly when paid advertisements are combined with coverage of the PVO's

work on national television and radio news programs. The more dramatic and heart-wrenching the scenes and reports of disaster in the developing world, the more income PVOs can expect from their solicitations. As well, the donors to the PVOs expect to see public recognition of their role in media reports of the success of "their" PVO.

In spite of their nonprofit nature, PVOs need to compete—less so than private businesses, perhaps, but compete they must. The quality of their field programs affects their capacity to win government grants, and their public visibility affects their private contributions. The interest of PVOs in telling their stories to the news media is not so much a case of large ego (though that is sometimes there, too) as it is of survival. US government personnel who take public credit for a response to a complex emergency must understand that PVOs find that annoying; an organization's financial health can be affected by military or other government public affairs announcements. Conversely, a carefully tailored series of such announcements, emphasizing the teamwork involved in success, would go a long way to reassuring many PVOs, their workers, and their donors that young Americans, in and out of uniform, were together helping those in need.

Chain of Command

PVOs have chains of command just as the military does; the chains are not as disciplined or explicit, though, and they inevitably contribute to tensions between the PVO field staff and the central staff at headquarters. Differing policy or operational concepts within the same PVO usually occur because each level in the hierarchy responds to a different agenda and a different set of pressures. Headquarters considers donor concerns, budget limitations, and the worldwide institutional consequences of a given policy. The field staff focus on the human need in a particular village, where they struggle daily to overcome operational difficulties and chaotic work-

ing conditions so they can alleviate suffering and save lives.

Security Issues

PVOs will likely already be anywhere in the world where a humanitarian crisis exists when US or other military forces arrive and will generally be there when military forces depart. (Kurdistan in 1991, which did not have any PVOs, was an exception to this rule.) Military action can create animosity in the indigenous population that will eventually affect the PVOs, who have little or no security and so are very vulnerable when conflict erupts. The PVOs can be perceived at worst as Western or at best as foreigners from the same tribe or clan that produced the troops. The World Vision headquarters in Baidoa, Somalia, was bombed in February 1994 by a Somali militia leader annoyed with UN peacekeepers over an issue unrelated to World Vision policies or operations. And in an example of why PVOs are suspicious of military efforts, when the staff injured in the bombing needed UN peacekeeper help to get to a medical facility, the help was late and hesitant.

PVOs do not rely on guards (whom they seldom employ) or on weapons (which they virtually never carry themselves) for their security. They rely on two aspects of their culture to keep them safe from violence. The first is the importance of the work they do for the community. Even after Somalis as a group had turned violently against the UN presence in Somalia, they continued to request expansion of foreign PVO programs in their country. The second is their perceived nonpartisanship. Many PVOs find it difficult to remain neutral in conflicts that are inherently political (eg, the Cambodian or Rwandan genocides), but it is essential to their security in such conflicts. So when military forces, whether under the flag of the UN or the United States, are perceived to be supporting one side in a conflict, PVOs are at increased risk of violence.⁴

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

The ICRC, founded in 1863, is by far the oldest humanitarian relief organization. It is also the largest such organization, with 6,300 employees worldwide and a budget of \$608 million in 1993.⁵ It specializes in conflicts and it and UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees are the only relief organizations with a mandate under international law, a fact which ICRC's managers, called delegates, frequently cite. Of all humanitarian in-

stitutions, it is the most doctrinally developed. It has an elaborate system of rules for functioning in conflicts, which work well most of the time and which its delegates can recite in their sleep.

While the ICRC is part of the International Red Cross movement, it has a tenuous and sometimes acrimonious relationship with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the "United Nations" of the Red Cross national

offices. The ICRC, the Federation, and the UN agencies described later in this chapter are international organizations; they are not PVOs.

Mission

The ICRC is the most focused international aid organization, using its authority under the Geneva Conventions to gain access to the vulnerable in conflicts where other relief agencies have difficulty. It does no development work—a strength in that its mission is clearly focused and a weakness in that it does not address root causes of an emergency. Its focus is on family reunification, delivery of messages between family members separated by a conflict, protection of civilians and prisoners of war, and humanitarian relief for those most severely affected. It is the most expensive relief organization, given the high cost of living of its largely Swiss staff and the cost of the high standards it sets. It is the only organization primarily funded through annual contributions from donor governments and national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; those funding sources relieve it of the requirement to solicit funds from the public (although it does some modest fundraising among the Swiss public). The US government for many years has been by far its largest donor.

How It Operates

The ICRC's impressive performance in chaotic situations may have less to do with its age, budget, size, and doctrine and more to do with the fact that it is run by the Swiss, whose culture values both discipline and order. An ICRC program is fairly predictable programmatically and in terms of quality wherever it is to be found, a claim that few PVOs or UN agencies can make. Little is left to chance or human discretion in ICRC operations. Conflicts by their nature are chaotic; consequently, any organization that can impose a modest degree of order in a conflict has an immediate operational advantage. The ICRC is the relief organization with the most in common with the military; it is also the one least likely to have much to do with the military. This apparent paradox can be traced to its operating doctrine, which calls for absolute political neutrality in all conflicts. ICRC doctrine places a premium on voluntary adherence to international law by contestants. The very presence of peacemaking forces with an aggressive mandate means ICRC persuasion has been replaced by armed force, even if that

force operates under the UN banner. Only on direct order from ICRC headquarters will delegates even converse with any military force, let alone work with them.

The ICRC will not work in a conflict unless both sides agree in writing to complete transparency in standard operating procedures. This means in practice that all sides of the conflict will get prior notice of each relief flight and each convoy, including travel routes, cargo descriptions, and times of departure and arrival. In Somalia it also meant getting approval from the clan elders for each region in which the ICRC operated. Indeed, until Somalia the ICRC never employed armed guards or drove in convoys protected by military forces. In fact, it was doctrinal heresy for the ICRC to use force to protect its operations and to work closely with the military. The change was caused by the chaos in the countryside rather than a deliberate change in ICRC doctrine.

The Red Cross symbol appears on every vehicle, building, and piece of equipment the ICRC employs, not so much for its public relations value (though it does not hurt), but because in conflicts this symbol has become associated with the neutrality provided for in the Geneva Conventions. The ICRC's desire to protect this symbol led at one point to an extended debate with US representatives over whether the US flag or the Red Cross would appear on US Air Force planes delivering ICRC relief food—donated by the US government and the European Community—to famine-ravaged Somali cities during Operation Restore Hope in 1992 and 1993. The Red Cross won.

Staff

The ICRC was until the early 1990s entirely staffed by Swiss nationals. It has served in some respects as their version of the US Peace Corps, an outlet for the altruistic and adventurous instincts of Swiss youth that is also open to older people. The pathological levels of violence encountered at various times in the post-Cold War world, however, have dramatically increased the fatality rate of ICRC delegates, as well as the psychological problems of staff traumatized by the atrocities they sometimes witness. The Liberian civil war reached such brutal levels in 1992 and 1994 that the ICRC withdrew twice and several delegates required psychiatric hospitalization. These conditions have caused fewer young Swiss to volunteer, and, for the first time in its 150-year history, the ICRC has resorted to hiring non-Swiss staff.

THE UNITED NATIONS

Some in the disaster relief community blame the UN for most failed responses to complex humanitarian emergencies. While some of this blame is properly directed, much is not. The UN has been held accountable for work it was not staffed to do until the mid-1990s. It has also been held responsible for some work it will never be able to perform, given two different realities: its nature as an institution and the fact that the permanent members of the Security Council and many developing countries do not want it to be involved in certain types of interventions.

Organizational Structure

The UN is not one institution, centrally managed, with a hierarchical organizational structure. The UN General Assembly and Security Council together resemble the US Congress, with the Secretary General representing the Speaker of the House more than the President. The Secretary General presides rather than rules.

Four nearly autonomous UN agencies provide most of the operational support and services required to respond to a complex humanitarian relief situation. They also are voluntary agencies; countries are not assessed fees for their operation but instead contribute what they wish. The four agencies are the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which has responsibility for refugees and, in practice, for internally displaced people; the World Food Program (WFP), which provides food for people affected by droughts and civil wars and for UNHCR-mandated refugee camps; the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which specializes in medical, educational, and job training support for women and children; and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which has responsibility for development assistance, usually through country governments. In addition, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), part of the Secretary General's staff, conducts the negotiations needed to bring humanitarian support through conflict lines and provides a modicum of coordination among the four UN agencies, to the extent that any of the four UN agencies wishes to be coordinated. It is one of the great ironies of the UN system that its least important and badly run work is supported by assessment, while its better work is funded voluntarily through these agencies. A half dozen other

UN agencies claim an operational role, but they are more modest players.

The four agencies, resembling feudal barons, only nominally report to the Secretary General. They are in fact quite independent of the Secretary General and of each other, obtaining their resources and political support from donor countries whose representatives sit on their independent governing boards. All assiduously cultivate their bases of political support in their home countries. While the Secretary General has a hand in appointing the leaders of each of these agencies, few have ever been removed by the Secretary, nor does the Secretary control their budgets, staffing, or policy. Until 1994, they did not report to the General Assembly in any managerially significant way, nor did they get policy guidance from it. In Somalia, the field directors of these agencies reported to their headquarters in New York, not to the director of UN humanitarian operations located in Somalia. The UN Security Council in 1994 approved a little-noticed but significant managerial reform of the governance of UN specialized agencies. Under the reforms, the Economic and Social Council of the UN has budget and policy review authority over all specialized agencies, the first time such authority and oversight has been vested in a membership body of the UN.

Humanitarian Relief Operations

These four UN agencies had little operational capacity in the 1980s but instead provided money to the governments of developing countries to do the work through indigenous government ministries. UNHCR's refugee camps in many countries were managed through the ministries of the host government or under grant agreement with PVOs. It is only since the end of the Cold War and the rise of the complex emergency as a painful fact of international life that the agencies have hired staff with operational skills and experience. The quality remains uneven in 1997, the depth limited.

These UN agencies have used four models for coordinating humanitarian relief operations with varying degrees of success. In the first model, the Secretary General assigns leadership in a particular disaster to one of the four agencies. In Bosnia (1992-present) it has been UNHCR, in the southern African drought (1992) it was the World Food Program, and in Sudan (1989-present) and Kurdistan

it has been UNICEF. The second model, successfully employed in Angola (1992-1996), vests leadership in OCHA.

The third model, used in Somalia from 1992 to 1994, had no lead agency. Instead, the UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, created a new, hybrid entity not tied to any of the UN agencies. The UN military, political, and humanitarian section heads reported to the Special Representative of the Secretary General, who reported directly to the Secretary General. The Somalia experience suggests that this last model, however much preferred by the Secretary General, is unmanageable. The Secretary General and his staff were incapable of centrally supporting extended field operations in Somalia. The procurement, personnel, contracting, and budgeting systems of the four UN agencies, however weak, are greatly superior to those of the UN Secretariat in New York.

The fourth model was the norm before 1989. Seldom followed now except in smaller natural disasters, it called for the country director of UNDP to act as the chief UN officer in any country affected by a major disaster. UNDP's lack of experience and interest in complex emergencies has made this traditional model inefficient.

Constraints on Reform

All of the models reflect the vagaries of UN personnel policy, which mixes skilled and dedicated career international bureaucrats with friends of those whose votes in the General Assembly or on governing boards are important to the agency bureaucrats. The size of this latter group is debatable, but it is certainly not representative of the average operational UN staff in the specialized agencies. Within the UN as a whole, though, there is no functional personnel system, there are no career ladders, and promotions based on merit are not the norm. The newer, operationally skilled employees are too often contractors with limited career opportunities. The personnel system still reflects the much less rigorous demands of an earlier era, when the permanent members of the Security Council did not want a robust UN system. It is arguable whether this situation has much changed in the 1990s.

Because of the institutional weaknesses of the position of the Secretary General and the feudal structure of the UN system, humanitarian emergency activities, ranging from routine coordination to development of comprehensive and integrated strategy, are difficult to plan and implement. In late

1990, led by the Nordic bloc nations and supported by the United States, donor countries proposed and the General Assembly approved reforms that created the OCHA, which is managed by one of 17 Under Secretaries General. But the role that OCHA can play in complex emergencies is affected by its limited statutory authority and the byzantine bureaucratic politics of the UN system.

Developing countries were quite unenthusiastic about the reforms that created OCHA and strengthened the UN's operational capacity in complex emergencies: some of their governments were causing the problems that the reforms were meant to address. Third World elites and intellectuals suspected that the OCHA reforms would advance the case for humanitarian interventionism, which some of them perceived to be a form of Western neocolonialism masquerading as altruism. They feared that the changes promised to unleash meddling, do-gooder PVOs and donor aid agencies whose roots are sometimes found in the colonial affairs offices of contributing countries. The protection of national sovereignty in nation-states with weak national identities, some of which govern using police-state tactics, is a central concern in these states' policy formation processes. Indeed, the issue of sovereignty threatens the very foundation of states. Consequently, to secure approval of the OCHA reforms, the reformers diluted the language of the resolution to ensure OCHA had no independent authority to intervene in a nation-state, even if for humanitarian reasons. Given its real mandate, OCHA has done reasonably well, particularly as it has matured organizationally, but its work reflects modest incremental improvements to the old system, not breakthroughs in innovative organization or management.

The UN will always be held hostage to some degree by the governments it serves. In its assessments of impending famines, for example, crop estimates are heavily influenced by local ministries of agriculture, whose estimates are sometimes politicized and frequently suspect. The agricultural production figures used to judge food aid requirements for the southern African drought in 1992 were based on such estimates, most of which turned out to be significantly overstated. The effect of the distortion was a significant overcommitment of food aid in Mozambique. In 1990 the Bashir government in Sudan refused to acknowledge a massive drought during its critical early months. When the government finally did report drought conditions, under intense international pressure, it overestimated food

requirements. When the UN promptly publicized the Sudanese numbers, its credibility suffered.

Even with the UN's institutional weaknesses, however, the international community needs the UN when responding to a humanitarian crisis. No

sovereign state alone has the UN's legal and moral sanction to intervene, its coordinating authority, its peacekeeping troops (however constrained by their home governments), its diplomatic good offices, and its financial and staff resources.

DONOR-GOVERNMENT AID AGENCIES

The final component of this complex system is represented by donor-government aid agencies. In the United States, that function is fulfilled by the OFDA in USAID. OFDA is charged under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 with coordinating all US government assistance in foreign disasters. It operates under a unique and jealously guarded provision of law—the so-called “notwithstanding” provision. This allows OFDA to act quickly in a disaster situation, notwithstanding many of the procedural, administrative, and bureaucratic requirements of the federal government and irrespective of other policy measures restricting US assistance to particular countries (eg, sanctions against military aid, economic support funds, or development assistance). Because it is exempt from prohibitions on US government assistance to certain countries, OFDA can provide life-saving relief assistance to people suffering the effects of natural or man-made disasters anywhere that the State Department has declared a disaster. OFDA, with expenditures of approximately \$190 million a year and a staff of 25 regular and 25 contract employees, has a simple, focused mission: save lives and reduce human suffering through relief and rehabilitation interventions.⁶ It is not authorized to do development or reconstruction work.

OFDA projects itself into disasters either indirectly, through grants to PVOs, the ICRC, or UN agencies, or through direct operational intervention

using its Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DART). These teams have the authority to spend money in the field, and with their satellite telephone capacity, they can order additional staff, equipment, and logistical capacity from the OFDA office in Washington. Their daily situation reports to USAID and State Department leadership can shape US policy. Early in the Kurdish emergency, for example, the only reports that the Secretary of State and the Deputy Secretary of State received on what was actually happening in the field were situation reports from OFDA.

Because of their technical expertise in relief, rapid contracting capacity, and long experience in emergencies and in giving grants to other actors, OFDA officers have influence that, even if unofficial, extends throughout the response system. OFDA is perhaps the only element of the international humanitarian relief system that can call meetings, get quarreling groups to work together, and draft strategic plans that other organizations will take seriously. Frequently when the UN is either not present in the field or its contracting mechanisms are too slow, OFDA will fill the gap and hand operations over to the UN later. In 1993, the European Community created an office modeled after OFDA, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), that attempts to provide them with a similar operational capacity in emergencies.

WORKING TOGETHER

The relief response institutions—the PVOs, ICRC, and UN, in conjunction with OFDA and ECHO—make up the system used by the international community to respond to complex humanitarian emergencies. The challenge in the system is that many of the institutional players do not like or trust one another. The PVOs quarrel quietly among themselves and publicly with the UN. The UN does not often deal with the ICRC, which keeps to itself and protects its prerogatives. Much of this distrust is understandable. It results from the ambiguous or overlapping organizational mandates; the stresses of working in combat where relief workers

are regularly kidnapped, wounded, or killed; the competition for scarce private or donor-government resources; the lack of experience in dealing with each other; and the turf issues over geographic and sectoral (eg, food security, health, sanitation) focus.

Fortunately, coordination and cooperation are improving rather than declining as the humanitarian relief system matures. In spite of its decentralized character, the system does function, though it is more effective when competent and skillful leaders manage the response in the field. Experience in the early 1990s suggests, not surprisingly, that the quality of this leadership can profoundly affect the

competence with which the relief response is managed and whether it ultimately succeeds or fails. As in most organizations, leadership does make a difference.

How well this humanitarian response system works with military forces in peacekeeping operations, whether or not the forces operate under the UN banner, is determined by the quality of military and civilian leadership and the leaders' familiarity with the humanitarian response structure. The only part of the US military force structure prepared by doctrine, training, experience, and personnel recruitment policy to deal with these organizations is the Civil Affairs Branch of the Army. Unfortunately, commanders and military planners often include a civil affairs function in a humanitarian relief operation only as an afterthought, if at all. Both PVO and UN managers have repeatedly commented how well they could work with US forces if they could deal with civil affairs officers instead of combat commanders.

Civil Affairs

The greatest strength of the civil affairs organization is also its greatest weakness, that except for a small, overextended, active duty battalion at Ft. Bragg, NC, all civil affairs assets are in the Army's reserve components. The strength derives from the recruitment of professionals in the civilian world who generally are not found in the active force; these specialists readily understand civilian humanitarian agencies. The weakness lies in their reserve status and in the low opinion that some individuals in the active force have of the reserves. Interservice rivalry in Somalia aggravated the already-present friction between the active and reserve forces and tended to weaken the US relief effort.

The way in which civil affairs units were employed in the Persian Gulf War and in Somalia was counterproductive in the former instance and nearly catastrophic in the latter. In Rwanda, Haiti, and Bosnia, the US humanitarian assistance effort included a robust civil affairs component, which reduced incidents significantly and increased contacts of the military with the civilian population. The requirement for civil affairs units in all humanitarian operations is becoming more apparent, so much so that commanders could be judged negligent if they fail to integrate them into operational plans. In a complex humanitarian emergency, a civil affairs unit is a powerful force multiplier; in a UN peacekeeping operation, a civil affairs company could be worth an infantry battalion.

Who Is in Charge?

Perhaps the most consistently difficult lesson for US military forces to learn is that unlike their role in combat, they are not in charge of managing the response to a complex humanitarian emergency. US forces in Europe, apparently unfamiliar with the disaster relief discipline, attempted to write an operations plan for Kurdistan that was impractical and slowly paced. Once commanders were directed to let field staff from USAID take the lead with the ICRC and PVOs (the UN had not yet arrived), the situation improved.

The unfortunate reality is that usually no one is in charge in a complex humanitarian emergency, a situation which is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. The notion that if any institution is in charge it should be the UN is by no means universally acknowledged among relief responders. It would also be challenged within the UN by agencies that do not want their rivals in the system to be in charge if they can not be. UN performance up to the mid-1990s has not matched its mandate, and, until it does, the UN cannot assume an undisputed leadership position in disaster relief operations. When the military, which is trained to deal with chaos, steps in to fill this vacuum, it can be perceived to be usurping the prerogatives of other agencies. Training and practice in humanitarian operations with PVOs and UN agencies can overcome such misperceptions.

The Military's Capabilities

The two most important capabilities the military brings to any emergency response remain logistics and security; these are areas in which relief organizations can never match the military's expertise but find they increasingly need during complex emergencies. When the military focuses on what it does best, it serves well; when it is required to do nation-building and development, complex disciplines about which it knows relatively little, it can do more harm than good.

The military must learn to live and work with the other humanitarian actors described in this chapter. The US military now finds itself committed to a doctrine of cooperative engagement with humanitarian agencies in which the military contributes three key proficiencies: security; logistics; and limited, temporary assistance in providing food, water, and medicine when humanitarian organizations are unable to cope with a life-threatening

emergency event. The military should not attempt to replace or dominate humanitarian organizations, nor should it be directed to undertake nation-building activities. Projects such as port and road

reconstruction, which the military sometimes undertakes as part of its own transportation requirement, should be of short duration and sustainable without its ongoing attention.

SUMMARY

A reasonable person might conclude that there will be more, rather than fewer, humanitarian relief operations in the years ahead. The planner's paradox is that no single source of support in such operations—the PVOs, ICRC, UN, or national assistance offices—is organized, trained, or equipped to perform all of the functions necessary to relieve human suffering in complex emergencies. With military forces in the asset pool, many more capabilities become available to overcome suffering.

Success in such operations will be determined by the degree to which all of the players can step outside of their individual cultures and value systems, surrender some of their autonomy, and seek the best in those with whom they must solve the problems of a complex humanitarian emergency. Planning, training, exercises, application of operational lessons learned—all these can contribute to improved understanding and eventually improved execution of relief responses when millions of lives may be at risk.

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