

Caring for Carthage: Humanity as a Weapon of War

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“The key lesson I have learned in nearly forty years of humanitarian work ... is that in between theory and practice is a very important field called politics. Like any other field, aid work is intertwined with politics. We must always be conscious of this.”

— Dr. Bernard Kouchner, co-founder,
Médecins Sans Frontiers, March 2, 2004

Introduction

When Scipio Aemilianus sacked Carthage in 146 BC, he destroyed the walls, burned the harbor, razed the city, and placed 50,000 Carthaginians in bondage. Furthermore, according to legend, he even sowed salt in the fields to make them unproductive, rendering Carthage uninhabitable forever. He did not distinguish between combatants and noncombatants, nor did he rush to employ a reconstruction and development plan for the city after its fall. Humanitarian concerns simply did not factor into his martial calculus.

The great Prussian military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz suggests why humanitarian concerns were not taken into account. Commenting generally on the role of humanity in war, he wrote:

Kind-hearted people might of course think there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat an enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war. Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed: war is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst....

To introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war itself would always lead to logical absurdity.¹

I would submit, however, that Clausewitz was wrong, or at the very least, dated, about the role of humanity in war. Governments increasingly have come to see strategic merit in adhering to humanitarian norms in the course of armed conflict. In short, humanity has become a weapon of war, but not without considerable controversy.

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In October 2003, the Feinstein International Famine Center (FIFC) held a workshop for humanitarian organizations to address what many have described as a “crisis of humanitarianism.” The concern stems from the performance of humanitarian missions by US military forces in conflict zones where they were also belligerents, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq. Some civilian aid workers argue that when the military performs such tasks under these circumstances it politicizes the aid effort, undermines the neutrality of independent aid organizations, and threatens the efficacy of humanitarian action. In short, many civilian aid groups “feel that humanitarian action has been politicized to an extent rarely seen and tainted by its association with the Coalition intervention [in Iraq]: it has become a partisan action.”²

The tenor of the analyses of military humanitarian action by scholars and activists is decidedly negative. Such critiques are largely normative and suggest humanitarian action *should* be performed in a certain way and the military *should* have certain roles and not others in the humanitarian enterprise. Though such approaches have merit, there is also substantial room for objective analysis of this phenomenon. Rather than simply asserting that military forces should not use humanitarian assistance as an instrument of influence, scholars must also ask why it is being used or, more specifically, what makes humanitarian assistance useful as an instrument of influence.

The purpose of this paper is to propose an agenda for objective inquiry into military humanitarian assistance as an instrument of national power. I take no position on the legitimacy of such activity but, rather, propose to study it simply as a tool of statecraft. The paper begins with some basic definitions relevant to the discussion. Next, it takes a brief look at international relations theory to determine how it influences the subject. The paper then analyzes recent military humanitarian activity and concludes with a series of hypotheses and questions for future study.

Terms of Reference

For analytical purposes we must distinguish between humanitarian and developmental assistance. Humanitarian assistance is meant to save lives that are at imminent risk as a result of a natural disaster or armed conflict. As such, it has a character of immediacy, whereas developmental assistance is designed to address the structural causes of poverty in society, and thus has a longer time horizon than humanitarian assistance.

Developmental projects usually do not take place in the context of armed conflict. Post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) is a recent addition to the assistance lexicon, though the concept is not. PCR is an amalgam of developmental and humanitarian assistance in so far as it takes place immediately after or during the waning phases of armed conflict. Its focus, however, is on rebuilding the physical infrastructure and governing mechanisms necessary for a society to function, rather than necessarily meeting immediate, life-threatening human needs. When referring to military humanitarian assistance, I mean traditionally defined humanitarian assistance and PCR activities performed by military forces to achieve tactical or strategic benefit.

Most civilian humanitarian aid agencies adhere to four key principles: neutrality, impartiality, humanity, and independence. Neutrality means that aid agencies do not favor any side of the conflict. The organizations remain impartial by serving all people in need of assistance regardless of their partisan affiliation, and they are restricted only by their operational capacity to deliver aid. Humanity implies that aid agencies respond to crises

motivated solely by a desire to alleviate human suffering and not by any other political purpose. Lastly, independence means that aid groups are free to plan and conduct their operations without any direction, reliance on or interference from any other entity, such as a sovereign government or insurgency group.

Of these principles, neutrality and independence are arguably of the utmost operational concern for humanitarian actors. Since virtually all of these groups are unarmed and depend on a certain level of security in order to provide services to at-risk populations, they rely on their ability to convince all belligerents of their neutrality in order to minimize their possibility of becoming a target in military operations. Similarly, the ability of aid organizations to be both financially and logistically independent decreases any necessity to cooperate with military forces in the field; in theory, doing so increases the perception of their neutrality. Aid agencies believe that their neutrality is compromised when aid agencies are perceived to be actively cooperating with and servicing the objectives of one party to the conflict. As the United Nations Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civilian Defense Assets in Complex Emergencies states:

The need for humanitarians to maintain an actual and perceived distance from the military is especially important with regard to belligerent forces or representatives of an occupying power. Any coordination with a party to an armed conflict must proceed with extreme caution, care, and sensitivity, given that the actual or perceived affiliation with a belligerent might lead to the loss of neutrality...of the humanitarian organization, which might in turn affect the security of beneficiaries as well as humanitarian staff, and jeopardize the whole humanitarian operation in a conflict zone. Thus, cooperation...with belligerent forces should in principle not take place, unless in extreme and exceptional circumstances and as a last resort....³

The US military doctrine behind civil-military operations (CMO), however, rests on entirely different premises. As with all other functions they perform, the principal rationale for the conduct of these activities by military forces is to serve national interests. The US Military's Joint Doctrine for Civil Affairs states:

The purpose of CMO is to facilitate military operations, and to consolidate and achieve operational US objectives. CMO are the activities of a commander that establish, maintain, influence, or *exploit* [emphasis added] relations between military forces, governmental and non-governmental civilian organizations and authorities, and the civilian populace in a friendly, neutral, or hostile operational area. CMO may include performance by military forces of activities and functions normally the responsibility of the local, regional, or national government. These activities may occur prior to, during, or subsequent to other military actions.⁴

While called "civil-military operations" as a military term, the use of humanitarian assistance by military forces to achieve operational and strategic ends has been dubbed "instrumentalization" by some international civilian aid officials. Pierre Krahenbuhl, Director of Operations for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), has defined instrumentalization as the "integration by some state actors of humanitarian

action into the range of tools available to them in the conduct of their campaign against terrorist activities.”⁵⁵ The difference in definitions reflects a fundamental disagreement between the military and the civilian aid community about the purpose of humanitarian assistance, the nature of civil-military relationships in areas of armed conflict, and the consequences of military performance and co-option of humanitarian activities.

Thus, military forces in general, and US military forces in particular, are inherently non-neutral when performing humanitarian activities. They do not disburse humanitarian goods and services impartially if doing so would undermine their strategic or operational objectives. Moreover, given that US military doctrine states that the purpose of CMO is to “achieve operational...objectives,”⁵⁶ military forces are not principally motivated to conduct humanitarian operations by a sense of humanity, but rather to support the policies of their government.

New Directions in Humanitarian Assistance

Government agency or military engagement in humanitarian action is not new. What is new, however, is that governments are performing these activities while ensuring that they are publicizing their efforts; serving as combatants in the same theater in which they are providing assistance; supporting their own tactical and strategic objectives; and working in geographic proximity of civilian international aid agencies that are protective of their status as neutral humanitarian actors. Furthermore, the US government is partially reorganizing itself in order to better cope with the successful provision of humanitarian assistance. These are the factors that are the basis for the so-called crisis of humanitarianism.

In part, humanitarian workers argue that the performance by the military of humanitarian activities in war zones where they are also combatants corrupts and endangers the humanitarian enterprise in a number of ways. First and foremost, they argue that the attachment of strategic or tactical military objectives to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, which should be impartial and free of partisan value, necessarily identifies such activity with one party to a conflict. Second, they maintain that the simultaneous provision of humanitarian assistance by civilian aid workers and combatants on a battlefield inevitably distorts the identity of both groups and exposes neutral aid workers to attacks by belligerents who either confuse them for soldiers or presume that their activities are in support of the other side. Finally, they submit that for all of their training and logistical capabilities, professional soldiers are simply not as good at the various aspects of humanitarian assistance as professional aid workers. Hence, by performing aid missions principally to achieve strategic and tactical benefit rather than assuring that at-risk civilians receive the best assistance possible (i.e., from professional aid workers), military forces acting in a humanitarian capacity can decrease the effectiveness of an aid operation and undermine the very *raison d'être* of humanitarian assistance. For all of these reasons, the civilian humanitarian community has taken a very dim view of military humanitarian assistance and argued that, to the extent possible, military forces should perform traditional security and logistical missions in support of humanitarian activities undertaken by neutral civilian aid agencies.

There is an emerging pattern in international affairs, particularly in US foreign policy, of military forces providing humanitarian assistance in conflict zones as a means of achieving tactical and strategic influence with various local and global actors. The emergence of this phenomenon, especially since the beginning of the US-led war in Afghani-

stan in 2001 raises a crucial theoretical question: What has changed in the international environment to make military humanitarian assistance, in perception or in practice, a viable instrument of national power? There are at least three interrelated developments which account for this change. The first is the increased presence of civilians on the battlefield and the resulting harm that warfare causes them. The second is the growth in the potency of international humanitarian norms. The final development is the unique character of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), which requires other means of influencing or defeating potential adversaries beyond the direct application of force.

Modern warfare has been marked by its increasing impact on civilians. While only five percent of combat fatalities during World War II were civilians, it is estimated that over ninety percent of those killed in conflicts around the world during the 1990s were civilians.⁷ In some cases like ethnic cleansing in the Balkans or Rwanda, attacks on civilians have been the object of military operations. In others, from the first Persian Gulf War to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan, civilian deaths have been the regrettable and unintended consequence of combat action. Regardless of the intent of the perpetrators of violence, the fact remains that noncombatants have borne a steadily growing share of the brutality of war over the last century.

In the fifty years since the end of World War II, and especially since the end of the Cold War, the international community has become increasingly concerned about the impact of warfare on civilians. This has been evidenced by the increasing codification of international humanitarian law (IHL), from the drafting of the Geneva Conventions in 1949 to the articulation of individual war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which came into force in 2002. The growth in conventional IHL, as well as the strengthening of its customary norms, has contributed to the intellectual framework used by civil society groups to lobby sovereign governments to abide by the humanitarian norms which they have putatively accepted under international law.

Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink argue that the growth of any international norm occurs in a three-stage process: norm emergence, norm acceptance, and norm internalization.⁸ Integral to the success of the first stage are what Finnemore and Sikkink call “norm entrepreneurs.” Norm entrepreneurs are state or non-state actors who have a vested interest in the development and acceptance of a particular norm in international affairs. Furthermore:

[n]orm entrepreneurs are critical for norm emergence because they call attention to issues or even “create” issues by using language that names, interprets, and dramatizes them. Social movement theorists refer to this reinterpretation or renaming process a “framing.” The construction of cognitive frames is an essential component of norm entrepreneurs’ political strategies, since, when they are successful, the new frames resonate with broader public understandings and are adopted as new ways of thinking about or understanding issues. In constructing their frames, norm entrepreneurs face firmly embedded alternative norms and frames that create alternative perceptions of both appropriateness and interest....In other words, new norms never enter a normative vacuum but instead emerge in a highly contested normative space where they must compete with other norms and perceptions of interest.⁹

Humanitarian and human rights NGOs have been particularly aggressive and effective norm entrepreneurs for civilian protection in warfare since the end of the Cold War. By virtue of their presence on or near the battlefield, organizations like Doctors without Borders and Human Rights Watch have been able to bear witness to the plight of civilians affected by warfare. Aided by the framework of IHL, which helps to delineate the boundaries of war within a common legal paradigm, and by a global news media through which they can transmit their observations and positions, such groups have achieved some success in altering state practice with regard to civilian protections.

Changes in the nature of modern warfare in which the United States is engaged also account for its use of humanitarian assistance as an element of national power. The dominant strategic paradigm of the Cold War was deterrence, which assumed that a rational adversary could be deterred from acts of aggression, and nuclear aggression in particular, by the assurance that its actions would be met with equal or greater force. However, the Bush administration suggested that this theoretical approach is no longer relevant in the GWOT since the adversary is a stateless actor who is prepared to die for his or her cause. Since adversaries cannot be presented with any meaningful consequence that would alter their decision calculus and thus deter their potential aggression, the only practical response is to strike first. From this perspective, deterrence is no longer a viable strategy for the defense of the United States.

The failure of deterrence is not the only reason why another approach to warfare is necessary. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and others have argued, the GWOT is as much a battle of ideas as it is a clash of arms. "Victory" in the GWOT, therefore, is dependent on altering the perception of the United States in the minds of would-be terrorists in order to dissuade them that their hostile intent is justified. If potential adversaries can be convinced that the United States is not their enemy, then, so the theory goes, they will be much less likely to adopt the sort of militant hostility that cannot be deterred. Therefore, while the principal operational challenge of the GWOT is to identify and destroy the terrorists who are determined to do harm to the US and its allies, the greater strategic challenge is to dissuade those people who are "on the fence" from becoming radicalized and, hence, unable to be deterred. As Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the US House of Representatives noted, "The real key [in the Global War on Terror] is not how many enemy (sic) do I kill. The real key is how many allies do I grow."¹⁰ One means of achieving this objective is the demonstration of American beneficence, which is achieved in part through the provision of military humanitarian assistance.

Such an approach is a quintessential example of soft power, which is defined by Joseph Nye, Jr. as:

...the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced....When you can get others to admire your ideals and to want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction.¹¹

As we have seen, the protection of civilians from the ravages of war has become a norm that has been widely accepted by the international community. To the extent that the

United States can demonstrate that it is a champion of this norm, then it will increase its soft power vis-à-vis those who care most about it. This is important on both a tactical level, as it provides aid to local populations to garner assistance in tracking terrorists or insurgents, and on a global strategic level, as it attempts either to dissuade individuals from providing material assistance to terrorist groups or encourage democratic populations to support US foreign policy objectives.

The use of military humanitarian assistance to achieve a tactical or strategic objective can also be seen as an example of what Peter Katzenstein calls a constitutive norm. As opposed to regulative norms, which constrain the behavior of international actors (usually states), constitutive norms create new actors, interests, and categories of action.¹² Whereas the norm entrepreneurs responsible for advancing international humanitarian law after World War II saw civilian protections as a set of regulative norms that constrained what states could do in combat by articulating a set of obligations toward non-combatants, the United States is attempting to turn it into a constitutive norm through which it hopes to exert strategic influence. It is at this theoretical nexus that conflicts over policy arise between the civilian humanitarian community and agents of the US government, particularly the US military. At issue is whether civilian protection should be a means of constraining state action or a method of advancing state interests. One could reasonably question if the motivation for civilian protection matters so long as civilians are protected. Those who fear a crisis of humanitarianism argue that the motivation for providing assistance is of the greatest importance since political motives can taint the entire humanitarian enterprise, undermining the very protections that such actions are meant to provide. Advocates of military humanitarian assistance, however, would say that not only can states do well by doing good, but that it is both reasonable and understandable that states will use every advantage they have to advance their interests, including the provision of military humanitarian assistance.

As I argue below, empirical research can help shed light on this theoretical debate in two principal ways. First, it is debatable whether there is sufficient empirical evidence to prove that the use of military humanitarian assistance politicizes aid, resulting in the compromise of the civilian aid effort. While aid workers have come under increasing attack in Afghanistan and Iraq since the US-led military campaigns in those countries, it is unknown whether the attacks were a direct result of the instrumentalization of aid or whether instrumentalization in other contexts has led to similar results in a statistically significant fashion. Conversely, there is not sufficient empirical evidence to demonstrate either that the use of military humanitarian assistance has the strategic effect for which its purveyors hope or that the way in which such aid is provided yields the maximum strategic benefit. To address both sets of questions requires the exploration of several starting hypotheses.

Analysis of Strategic Humanitarian Assistance

Why is Aid a Tool of Influence? The Triumph of Humanitarian Ideals

One of the developments in international relations since the end of the Cold War is the extent to which humanitarian concerns have gained increasing legitimacy in a number of polities. Human rights and humanitarian activists have encouraged this trend by arguing that relieving human suffering in places from Somalia to Bosnia was not only a normative imperative but also in the strategic interests of developed states.

At least two schools of thought have emerged among academics and government officials regarding the strategic importance of alleviating human suffering in failed or fragile states, especially during and immediately after armed conflict. The first school recognizes that the characteristic instability of such states can be a strategic liability to other countries. Speaking about the implications for US foreign policy, Stuart Eizenstat, et. al., argued in *Foreign Affairs*:

Terrorism, conflict, and regional instability are on the rise throughout the developing world, and the repercussions will not just be felt locally. Weak and failed states and the chaos they nurture will inevitably harm US security and the global economy that provides the basis for American prosperity.¹³

And further:

[Failed and fragile states] are...attractive to illicit transnational organizations specializing in everything from terrorism to narcotics trafficking and other organized crime. These non-state actors take advantage of porous borders and underground economies to establish operational bases from which they secure financing, recruit soldiers, and plan attacks....

In addition, the violence, epidemics, and refugee crises that plague decayed nations often spill into neighboring countries, destabilizing entire regions.¹⁴

The implication of Eizenstat's argument is that addressing the sources of instability in failed and fragile states can ameliorate threats to US interests. Presumably, this logic would apply to the interests of other developed states as well. As such, states can have a strategic interest both in resolving the political causes of such situations and in meeting the basic humanitarian needs of the affected population.

The second school of thought suggests that states can derive strategic benefit by publicly responding to human suffering, particularly in the context of armed conflict and natural disasters. The increasing recognition and legitimization of humanitarian norms both by governments and their populations post-Cold War has facilitated this approach. The emergence of global, real-time media outlets permits states to demonstrate their beneficence to the world by broadcasting the humanitarian activities of their soldiers or officials that are meeting the needs of at-risk civilians. I argue, for example, that it was precisely with this logic in mind that the US Department of Defense released grainy night-vision footage of American aircrews delivering Humanitarian Daily Rations (HDRs) by air to Afghan civilians located in the same geographic area where US pilots were conducting combat operations in the autumn of 2002.

How does it work: The Mechanism of Influence through Aid

States can have a strategic interest both in the inherent alleviation of human suffering and in being seen as the agents relieving the suffering. Yet there is not sufficient empirical data to demonstrate which approach yields greater dividends for foreign policy, and why. There are at least two different explanations for strategic influence through humanitarian aid which lead to very different policy conclusions.

First, one might hypothesize that states benefit most when human suffering is mitigated and complex emergencies are stabilized. Following Eizenstat's model, the threat to national interests comes from the mere existence of destabilizing forces. Hence, the threat is mitigated when those forces are abated.

Alternatively, one might argue that the threat to national interests comes from the *perception* that states are not responding to human suffering and thus do not adhere to humanitarian norms. In the context of the GWOT, which Bush administration officials have argued is as much a war of ideas as it is combat on the battlefield, this approach deserves careful consideration.

Though they are not mutually exclusive, each of these approaches could logically lead to very different policy outcomes. The first suggests that strategic benefits naturally flow from humanitarian assistance properly executed. The second sees humanitarian assistance as a form of public diplomacy. If one accepts the premises of the first approach, then it follows that states have an interest in ensuring that human needs are met for failing states and in complex emergencies, regardless of who actually provides the aid. In this sense, humanitarian aid is only strategic to the extent that it truly is humanitarian. Hence, one possible implication is that the most important thing for states to do is to help neutral civilian humanitarian aid agencies maintain their neutrality and enhance their logistical capability to deliver assistance.

If, however, one sees aid as a type of public diplomacy, then humanitarian assistance is only strategic to the extent that the agents of the state are seen performing humanitarian missions. Therefore, the most important thing for a state is to ensure that the audience that is the target of influence understands that the state is the party responsible for the provision of assistance, even if it may not be the most effective or efficient purveyor of aid in a given circumstance.

As noted earlier, most practitioners in the humanitarian community would reject each of these approaches, arguing that neutrality and impartiality are inherent to the humanitarian enterprise. Considerations of strategic benefit are, at best, inappropriate. Yet even if one accepts the concerns of the humanitarian community as valid, they miss a larger point. As long as states believe that they can derive strategic benefit from adherence to humanitarian norms, they will logically seek to gain influence through the public delivery of humanitarian assistance. This is especially so if other instruments are not well suited to particular circumstances, regardless of the normative considerations of the civilian aid community. If this is the case, then it is imperative that such activity be studied to understand how, if at all, it leads to strategic success. At the moment, there is not sufficient empirical evidence to suggest which of these approaches yields greater strategic advantage and under what circumstances, or if there is some other model that should be considered. Scholars are left to study the issue objectively and understand the dynamics of how this instrument works in practice.

Brave New World? Implications for Aid Workers and Civilians

If the theory presented here by which states can derive strategic success from humanitarian assistance is correct, then it is essential that such assistance preserve its normative character. As Andrew Natsios, former Administrator of the US Agency for International Development, has argued:

Doing good may sometimes bring geostrategic advantage, a concept that may offend the Puritan instinct in [the American] national character because it seems to mix motives so deliberately. In fact, the integration of the humanitarian imperative into US foreign policy strategies will both bring geostrategic advantage and increase the effectiveness and force of those strategies.¹⁵

Given concerns of the civilian humanitarian community that the attempt to balance geo-strategic interests with normative impulses inherently undermines the humanitarian enterprise, one must ask if these divergent views can be accommodated. More specifically, can traditional civilian humanitarian action with its emphasis on neutrality and impartiality coexist with instrumentalized humanitarian assistance, especially when performed by military forces in the context of armed conflict? This is a question of paramount importance to sovereign states who engage in the practice, to civilian aid agencies who may be uncomfortable with it, and to civilians who may depend on it. Yet the issue has not been sufficiently studied to answer definitively.

There is, however, an impetus to consider that these two approaches must coexist. The nature of modern warfare has placed civilians in the middle of the battlefield, thus requiring military forces to respond to their needs in the course of their military operations and forcing civilian aid agencies to operate in close proximity to military forces even as they struggle to remain neutral while performing their life-saving work. In other words, these three groups - soldiers, civilians, and aid workers - are increasingly intermingled in armed conflict, contrary to old paradigms, which generally separated them. Yet if they are to be successful in their respective missions, aid workers and soldiers must find a *modus vivendi* which takes into account the dynamics of modern warfare, the humanitarian impulse of aid workers, and the strategic imperative of soldiers as instruments of national policy.

Conclusion

Much has changed in the practice of war since Scipio sacked Carthage. Weaponry has become infinitely more sophisticated and lethal, and tactics have changed to accommodate new technology. One of the greatest changes, however, is the relative utility of violence in the achievement of strategic objectives through war. No longer is it the case that the more force one applies against an enemy, the more likely one is to fulfill the political purposes of the conflict. Indeed, given the increased importance of humanitarian norms, the exact opposite may now be true. When force extends beyond the boundaries assigned to it and harms noncombatants, there may be serious repercussions that undermine the very reasons for which a state engages in a war. It was for this reason, in part, that the United States did not use nuclear weapons to target likely hiding places of Osama bin Laden in fall 2001. Though such a massive application of force might well have achieved the principal objective of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, namely the death or capture of bin Laden, the catastrophic harm that would surely have been visited upon millions of civilian Muslims would have worked against the broader American aim of averting a global war with Islam as it pursued a fight against Islamic terrorists.

This logic has led states not only to control their applications of force more carefully in accordance with restrictive humanitarian norms but to search for ways to co-opt those norms to support their strategic objectives. The provision of humanitarian assistance has proven to be an attractive option in this regard for several reasons. First, it allows militaries to publicly and tangibly counteract the worst byproducts of its operations, namely the harm caused to noncombatants. As previously noted, it is for precisely this reason that the United States took great pains not simply to provide emergency food rations by air during ENDURING FREEDOM, but also to publicize these efforts to the world. Second, it helps to put a more benign face on the instrument of state violence that, at least in the American case, is more consistent with the military's view of itself. It is presumed that this

has salutary effects for the legitimacy of the application of violence in the eyes of both domestic and international populations. Finally, military humanitarian assistance is an attractive instrument because it plays to one of the core competencies of any successfully military: logistics. Military forces need not transform themselves radically to perform humanitarian missions. Instead, they need only change the beneficiaries of their normal activities of providing food, medical care, and infrastructure support from military personnel to civilians in need.

The humanitarian community's concern about instrumentalization is motivated by the implications of this military activity on their own institutional survival and on the beneficiaries of aid. Their survival is threatened not by the fact that there is another actor performing humanitarian tasks per se but that the strategic provision of humanitarian assistance compromises the entire concept of neutrality. Not only might civilian aid workers be mistaken as military forces who are performing the same tasks, but, more fundamentally, one belligerent might, justifiably, come to see the provision of humanitarian assistance as a strategic goal of the other side and thus regard all humanitarian activity as an understandable, though still illegitimate, object of attack. This would fundamentally endanger the humanitarian enterprise as it has come to be known and thus have profound consequences for at-risk civilian populations.

Despite the *prima facie* merit of both positions, neither should be accepted uncritically. That is, states should not presume that the provision of humanitarian assistance is appropriately suited to be an instrument of statecraft without carefully examining the causal mechanisms by which this could work. Neither should the humanitarian community presume that state-sponsored instrumentalization of humanitarian assistance has such a corrosive effect on neutrality. Rather, it is vital that the strategic role of humanitarian assistance and the crisis of humanitarianism be subjected to empirical scrutiny in order to illuminate this crucial foreign policy debate and facilitate the development of useful policy options for militaries and humanitarian organizations alike.

The increasing recognition of humanitarian norms, especially in armed conflict, presents opportunities and challenges for traditional humanitarian action and instrumentalized humanitarian assistance. One of the most important contributions that international relations scholars can make to this field is to study this development objectively. In so doing, they may help both soldiers and civilians adjust to the new battlefield and this new age of humanitarian action. In the long run, this attention will accrue to the benefit of states, aid agencies, and most importantly, at-risk civilians who are the object of concern for us all.

ENDNOTES

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