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## POLITICAL AND MILITARY (MIS)USE OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND AID: SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR AND THE ONSET OF “THE WAR ON TERROR”

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**ABSTRACT** Since the end of Cold War and especially since the onset of “the War on Terror” under the George W. Bush Administration, the political and militarized character of humanitarian action and aid, which had already long been politicized, has been reinforced. This was observed especially when civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) started to take place in the 1990s. Various actors, including aid recipient governments, local rebel groups, donor governments, and the military—in particular the U.S. Government and military—as well as the so-called Islamic “terrorist” organizations have been (mis)using aid and NGOs. As a result, already weak or non-existent humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence are being lost. Divisions of roles between aid workers and military actors have become blurred as the latter are suspected to have morphed into humanitarian aid workers. While a military is involved in combat and simultaneously conducts humanitarian operations, using a “winning hearts and minds strategy,” this situation puts at risk both the civilians caught in the conflict and civilian aid agencies. This has led to increased mistrust, fear, suspicion, and insecurity among local recipients towards aid agencies and aid itself, which resulted in aid workers losing access to recipients.

**Key Words:** Civil-military cooperation (CIMIC); “The War on Terror”; Humanitarian principles; Winning “hearts and minds.”

### INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, humanitarian assistance in areas affected by conflict<sup>(1)</sup> has drawn attention worldwide due to the end of the Cold War, which resulted in the collapse of some states. The end of the Cold War has allowed humanitarian actors, which include both the United Nations (UN) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), increased access to all sides of many ongoing conflicts and to the rising humanitarian needs related to conflicts in Africa and the Balkans—partially due to the advancement of Information Technology. This contrasts with the Cold War whose *realpolitik* prevented humanitarian organizations from operating in conflict areas, except for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Competing vetoes by major powers on both sides of the East-West division often prevented the UN from dealing with these conflicts.

Over the course of the 1990s, as humanitarian agencies expanded in number, size, and role, one important initiative was taken: civilian organizations, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and NGOs, engaged in cooperation with the military in crisis response, leading to the expression “civil-military cooperation” (CIMIC). This practice was initiated in the aftermath of the

1991 Gulf War, which produced Kurdish refugees. CIMIC's objective was to mutually supplement both organizations' strength, in other words, civil organizations' delicate service to the vulnerable groups and the military's logistics capacity; this cooperation continued in Bosnia, East Timor, Afghanistan, and Haiti. This increasing trend of CIMIC, as described below, has enabled military organizations to "use and co-opt humanitarian assistance as an integral part of warfighting ... essential to the success of the military intervention" (Lischer, 2007: 100).

On the other hand, a number of humanitarian organizations have been concerned that CIMIC could negatively affect, among other things, the humanitarian principles. In addition, the issue of militarization of refugee camps, which are meant to maintain civilian and humanitarian space, became more visible. These difficulties, such as non-respect for and militarization of humanitarian space, led to the UN Security Council (UNSC) opening an unprecedented debate in 1997 on the provision of military protection for humanitarian operations in high-risk areas and protection for humanitarian assistance to refugees (UNSC, 1997). However, these two issues are not entirely new, but have been ongoing during and even before the Cold War. Humanitarian principles have been indeed "patchy, weak or simply non-existent" (Barnett & Weiss, 2011: 12) in the conflict context possibly ever since its proclamation in 1965 by the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Government actors and guerrilla factions, which relied heavily on financing from the superpowers during the Cold War, stopped receiving financial support from them. Thus, the local actors were obliged to seek available resources in the 1990s elsewhere, one of which was humanitarian assistance.

This paper will argue that humanitarian aid, which has long been politicized, has reinforced its political and militarized character since the end of the Cold War and especially since the onset of the War on Terror following the attacks of September 11, 2001. It is not merely the recipient governments and local rebel groups, but also the foreign governments and troops, in particular the U.S., that have been misusing aid. As a result, humanitarian principles are completely being lost, and the humanitarian organizations have been facing more difficulty in accessing aid recipients, including refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and those who are forced to remain due to their inability to move to safe areas. This is because these recipients have become more cautious and fearful of receiving aid from the agencies.

After examining the nature of humanitarian action and aid, this paper will analyze how various actors have undertaken the political and military transformation of humanitarian aid, especially since the 1990s. The concerned parties include both the local and international actors, the latter of which comprise the U.S. Government, as well as the so-called Islamic "terrorist" organizations. The nature of humanitarian action and aid includes its principles, the dividing line between civilians and the military, and the attitude of donor countries and of aid recipients. The examples of Africa's Great Lakes region in the 1990s and of East Africa and the Horn of Africa in the 2000s will be used, whose regions were respectively affected by the post-Cold War context and "the War on Terror."

## THE NATURE OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION/ASSISTANCE

Mary B. Anderson's *Do No Harm: How Aid can Support Peace—or War* (1999) had an enormous impact on policymakers, as if it were the first book questioning whether aid was doing more harm than good. However, Barbara Harrell-Bond's *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (1986) as well as others, had already pointed out similar problems back in the 1980s. The basic elements of these critiques need to be thoroughly reviewed as humanitarian action and assistance, whose objective is to save lives, has been easily misrepresented. The term "humanitarian" is often used in an ambiguous and manipulative way in order to escape critiques and to avoid a certain political inaction by "political" organs such as the UN General Assembly and the UNSC (Chimni, 2000: 244; Warner, 1999). "Humanitarian" often signifies "an abnegation of responsibility by those in power" (Warner, 1999), and terms like "humanitarian crisis" or "complex emergencies," which in fact means political emergencies, have been used to replace phrases like "civil war" (Lischer, 2003: 106).

It is generally said that humanitarian action has become a substitute for Western military and diplomatic intervention into some of the post-Cold War crises (Pomfret, 1997). One of the typical examples is France's intervention in Rwanda during the genocide in 1994; although France presented it as a strictly "humanitarian" action, it apparently intended to facilitate the flight of its ally, the former Rwandan army soldiers to eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and to oppose an Anglophone (Rwandan rebel group) incursion into a francophone country (Prunier, 1999: 281, 284). However, humanitarian action becoming a substitute for Western intervention does not apply only to post-Cold War crises. In 1977, during the riot by anti-President Mobutu dissidents, the same French intervention was justified in the DRC as a "humanitarian" intervention to protect the DRC against the Communist peril, to save European residents, and also to save President Mobutu himself, who was the strong ally of France (McNulty, 1999: 64). It should be noted that this term "humanitarian" probably started to spread during the 19th-century rule of Belgium's King Leopold II in the Congo. During that time, he amassed a personal fortune for his own profit and aggrandizement and "justified his genocidal exploitation ... by advancing civilization as a humanitarian project" (Barnett & Weiss, 2011: 39). At that time, the Great Power scramble for colonies gave birth to the term "humanitarian intervention" that would become familiar a century later (Barnett & Weiss, 2011: 39). Many colonial powers rationalized the use of military force in humanitarian terms, and they often chose areas of immediate strategic and economic interest (Barnett & Weiss, 2011: 39).

In fact, contrary to Pomfret's above-mentioned statement, aid itself must be regarded as "a convenient *form* of political action" (Cutts, 1998: 4). As the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, used to say, "there are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems because the problems were caused by political factors." Indeed, all humanitarian activities in and out of conflict zones are political because it is likely that various actors possess hidden agendas, thus political exploitation of aid is a principal condition of existence. Likewise, Christian NGOs have been used for political and evangelical aims. For

example, the Lutheran World Federation has spread the message of Christ through education, development, and medical aid programmes, often accompanied by religious instruction (Ghandour, 2003). During the 1980s, World Vision distributed numerous bibles to Cambodian refugees in the camps, which were generally Buddhist strongholds. Bible-reading was compulsory in the schools, and the organization staff have even reportedly promised American visas to converts. As a result, about three-quarters of the 500 NGOs operating on the Cambodia/Thailand border have sought converts. In Nigeria, U.S. fundamentalist Protestants have practiced the forced baptism of Muslim children and Christian prayers by Muslim patients at the hospitals (Ghandour, 2003).

### (MIS)USE OF HUMANITARIAN AID BY LOCAL ACTORS

As the international aid organizations' access to recipients increased in the post-Cold War era, the fact that aid has been manipulated by local recipient actors—both the governments and rebel groups—has become more visible and evident. Three main manipulative ways, which are inter-connected, will be illustrated below.

First, material aid and administrative cost of aid organizations, which implies resources, can promote militarization through its diversion, looting, and informal taxing by armed groups. In particular, humanitarian goods—especially food and drugs—are used for their own consumption, for barter or sale, and even for export (Predergast, 1996: 22). The former Rwandan Hutu government officials who sought sanctuary in Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire, taxed the refugees, selling the emergency relief on the black market and using the profits to enrich themselves and purchase arms. According to the U.S. government official, in one camp alone, the former Hutu government was able to earn \$6 million a year from weapons purchases (Pomfret, 1997). This can easily become part of a self-sustaining war economy, supported by northern donors.

The administrative cost of aid organizations comprises office and house rents, salaries of personnel, transport contracts including fuel, storage contracts, import duties, permits, visas, and port or airport charges levied on humanitarian organizations and personnel, which are major sources of foreign currency for war leaders and their financiers. In Somalia, for example, individual armed guards, employed by the relief agencies, benefited enormously and were able to increase the network of contractors and commanders' access to aid work (Predergast, 1996: 26). Aid provided to third-party "security forces," such as the Congolese Special Forces hired by UNHCR to protect the refugee camps in eastern DRC, often went into the pockets of corrupt military officials (Predergast, 1996: 26).

Moreover, as many arms used in some battles are generally flown in on hijacked aid agency planes, former Congolese President Mobutu's army also hijacked UN-chartered planes to transport weapons to fight against the rebels (Pomfret, 1997). These planes, under the gaze of international aid workers, flew into UN-run refugee camps where the arms were distributed to Rwandan Hutu refugees, former soldiers, and militiamen, some of whom were involved in Rwanda's 1994 massacres and had become Mobutu's first line of defense. At the same time, the anti-

Mobutu rebel army, backed by the Rwandan army, also stole aid trucks—which was evident as the rebels did not repaint the logos of aid organizations—and helped improve their transport capacity again under the disguise of international aid organizations. In addition, the rebels flew on stolen aid fuel, which was used to ferry 300 troops and their weaponry (Pomfret, 1997).

Second, in some cases, the provision of material aid symbolizes power. Humanitarian assistance is used to bolster the actors' international recognition and political goals because aid enables the extension of "state power at a local level" (Shearer, 2000: 191). For example, during the civil war, the Angolan government made the local population believe that humanitarian assistance was provided by the government, not by the international aid organizations. This was disadvantageous for the rebel group, as lack of access to aid distribution affected the electoral constituency (IRIN, 2002). Aid can also cause people to move from one place to another (Khan, 1981). In the 1980s, the famine relief to southern Sudanese refugees in neighboring countries helped the Sudanese government to depopulate some areas of the south, especially those with a high concentration of oil (Keen, 1998: 58). Aid and aid agencies have been used as "bait" to lure refugees and other beneficiaries. In Zaire, while the Hutu extremists gathered Rwandan refugees at one camp and controlled the aid distribution in 1994, Rwandan-backed rebels also misused aid agencies to attract refugees from where they had been hiding. The Burundian and Ugandan officials respectively lured the Rwandan refugees under false pretenses with promises of food, then forced them onto trucks to be repatriated to Rwanda.

Third, some guerrilla commanders have grown sophisticated, using the humanitarian agencies and aid for their military strategy, such as creating a forward garrison in order to act as a buffer zone for the principal garrison of the warring commander in southern Sudan (Predergast, 1996: 21). The governments in Sudan and Ethiopia used aid shipments to transport arms to garrisons, which gave incentives to rebels to attack these shipments (Keen, 2008: 125). By inviting aid providers to a particular location, in a "hearts and minds" campaign—to be explained below—local leaders often established themselves as "legitimate" authorities in the eyes of the civilian population. The benefits were so enormous that in some cases, war leaders *intentionally* exacerbated malnutrition to attract more aid (Predergast, 1996: 20). In other cases, joint collaboration with the warring authorities in needs assessments could sometimes facilitate their roles in pressuring humanitarian organizations for increased aid, enabling agencies to inaccurately assess information because of (deliberately) incorrect translations or intimidation (Predergast, 1996: 26). International organizations partnering with "indigenous NGOs," which could act as fronts for military factions, is another method for war leaders to generate resources (Predergast, 1996: 26).

### (MIS)USE OF HUMANITARIAN AID BY INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

Apart from the local actors, international actors also (mis)use aid mostly for political objectives. Donor governments have often deployed humanitarian agen-

cies as shields in conflict areas, so they can claim that they are taking appropriate actions in response to crises (Lischer, 2003: 106). Provision of large-scale humanitarian aid to the Rwandan refugees in Zaire and Tanzania right after the genocide aimed to “disguise the international inaction” in relation to the genocide (Keen, 2008: 118). In 1995–1996, large U.S. Air Force transport planes landed very frequently at the airport in Rwanda, supposedly to carry aid for the genocide victims. It was, nevertheless, suspected that the bulk of the aid could not have been merely for the genocide survivors, “who never reported any particular largesse on the part of the Americans” (Prunier, 2009: 126–127).

Furthermore, with the global developments of the 2000s, such as the military campaigns related to the “war on terror” and the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC), divisions of roles between aid workers and other actors have become blurred as the former are being used to gather intelligence (Ferreiro, 2012). A typical example was observed when Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir in 2009 reacted defiantly to his arrest warrant for war crimes in Darfur by the ICC. He announced the expulsion of 13 international aid organizations, which were believed to have provided information to the ICC. Indeed, some of these NGOs that had monitored the human rights situation of IDPs could have compiled information, used by the ICC. Subsequently, Sudan continued to expel aid workers repeatedly for various reasons, including the fact that UNHCR distributed “rape-detection devices” to several relief groups working in Darfur (BBC, 2010). Indeed, as humanitarian actions correspond with military, judicial, and political forms of interventionism, humanitarian and political-military agendas have also become blurred, which increased violence against aid workers and led to loss of access to beneficiaries (Allié, 2011). It is not only the ICC that may have used Western NGOs for information gathering, but also the U.S. Government that clearly cooperated with American NGOs for intelligence purposes.

### I. (Mis)Use of NGOs and of Aid by the U.S. Government

NGOs and aid have often been used in order for Western countries, especially the U.S., to access some strategic areas. For example, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), founded at the request of Albert Einstein in 1933 in order to assist the Jewish refugees, has been suspected to have been working on behalf of the U.S. Government. In order to overthrow Congolese President Mobutu, the IRC has provided “half-humanitarian, half-military support” in eastern DRC (Prunier, 2009: 127), having installed anti-aircraft artillery in two capital cities in eastern DRC. In addition, the IRC provided food aid, instead of wages, to the civil servants of the rebel administration (Reyntjens, 2009: 68). The IRC was also said to have transported weapons at the onset of the Second Congo War in 1998, while all the UN and international NGO personnel fled eastern DRC.<sup>(2)</sup>

In particular, after September 11, American NGOs are gradually acting on behalf of the U.S. Government. Then-Secretary of State Colin Powell called aid workers “force multipliers” in the war effort. Although this practice is not new for American NGOs, it was the first time a U.S. Secretary of State had made such a public statement. Powell also declared, “[we are] all committed to the same,

singular purpose to help humankind...in need, who is hungry, who is without hope” (Powell, 2001). In other words, he implied that civilian humanitarian aid workers and the military share the same values, so their efforts should be combined in order to mutually reinforce their influence.

In 2010, Richard Holbrooke, the former U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, made it clear that the U.S. Government had relied on NGOs for information gathering (Burns, 2010: 3). In fact, cooperation for information exchange purposes between the CIA and the NGOs has been strengthened in the 1990s, when a major humanitarian crisis took place in Africa’s Great Lakes region (CIA, 2008). Unlike embassy officials, NGOs are deployed throughout the various regions, including remote areas, thus have abundant information on the local situation; this could reinforce policy making by the U.S. Government. In addition, NGOs’ ability to obtain and collect information has improved with the spread of information technology and their growing size and professionalism (CIA, 2008).

At the same time, the U.S.-led coalition force in Afghanistan provided local humanitarian aid in exchange for some important and sensitive information on the whereabouts of Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders (OXFAM, 2011: 19; MSF, 2004b). The U.S.-led coalition force indeed admitted to threatening local residents using humanitarian aid as bait for information, delivering more aid to those who helped with news (Lischer, 2007: 105). In Pakistan, the CIA used a surgeon to obtain bin Laden’s DNA under the guise of conducting an immunization survey (Washington Post, 2014). Following this incident, another UN doctor was shot during the polio immunization campaign, which the Taliban suspected was a cover for espionage.

Similar use of humanitarian and development aid started to be used in the Horn of Africa as part of a post-2003 regional “War on Terror” strategy, which has fallen under the U.S. African Command (AFRICOM) since 2008. As a tool to justify its intervention and for the U.S. presence to be well accepted in the local communities in the Horn of Africa, the U.S. Government and military have used the slogan “win hearts and minds” (Dickinson, 2009; Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010: 4). According to the U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual, “[H]earts’ means persuading people that their best interests are served by [counterinsurgency] success. ‘Minds’ means convincing them that the force can protect them and that resisting is pointless” (Department of the Army Counterinsurgency, 2006: Appendix A, A-26). Nevertheless, as explained below, it became clear that this strategy was not productive.

## II. (Mis)Use of Aid by Islamic “Terrorist Organizations”

Islamic NGOs, which have developed steadily since the early 1980s, may also have been used for terrorism operations. To recall, in the aftermath of the 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the political role of Islamic NGOs has become prominent. Members of Al-Qaeda possessed the ID cards of an NGO. Posing as aid workers, they lived in the NGO’s office in Kenya and planned the bombing (Africa Confidential, 2014: 6). One NGO, which was not



involved with any relief activities, has been used by Al-Qaeda as a cover organization (Africa Confidential, 2014: 6). Five NGOs were investigated by Kenyan police and the FBI, while five other Islamic NGOs were banned (Salih, 2004: 175). This clampdown on Muslim NGOs has led to increasing restrictions on the flow of funds from the Gulf and Middle East states.

Following these U.S. Embassy bombings, the Dadaab refugee camps, situated in north-eastern Kenya, started to be regarded as recruiting and training grounds for “terrorist organizations.” Reportedly, the recruitment was organized by Kenyan government officials and Somali exiles in Kenya (Human Rights Watch, 2009a). Due to Dadaab’s location in the politically and economically marginalized desert area, unemployed youth tend to be easily tempted by Al Shabaab and Al Qaida (Burns, 2010: 11). According to the UN and local government, apart from the fact that small arms traffickers operate (Austin, 2002), Al Shabaab has been mobilizing combatants in these refugee camps, who are tempted with false promises of lavish pay and claims of support from the UN and the U.S. (Human Rights Watch, 2009a). One of the main funding sources of Al Shabab is charity (Masters & Sergie, 2009), and most humanitarian aid to Somalia consists of food aid, which is susceptible to diversion (UNSC, 2010: para. 234). Furthermore, about 15% of the rent is to be paid to Al Shabaab when landlords lease their property to the UN and NGOs (Hansen, 2013: 91, 115). For the resident permit in the Al Shabaab-controlled area, Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) has contributed \$10,000 in tax in the form of *khat* (Hansen, 2013: 91).

In addition, following the September 11 attacks, “terror” networks’ tendency to abuse Islamic NGOs started to emerge as a global issue with suspicions that some terrorist groups might have misused Islamic NGOs as front organizations (Kagwanja & Juma, 2008: 176). It appeared that Somali radical Islamist organizations had been present in the camps, such as al-Ittihad al-Islami, linking with Al Qaeda and Islamists in Taliban Afghanistan (Kagwanja & Juma, 2008: 222). Moreover, al-Haramain Islamic Foundation, the sole Muslim charity agency in Dadaab, manages religious schools and distributes rice, sugar, and other commodities that are not even provided by the World Food Programme (Kagwanja & Juma, 2008: 222). Providing camel and goat meat during Ramadan was indeed the organization’s way to win the “hearts and minds” of many Somali Muslim refugees (Kagwanja & Juma, 2008: 222–223).

## CONSEQUENCES OF HUMANITARIAN AID IN “THE WAR ON TERROR” OPERATION

As a result of the misuse of aid by various actors for political and military objectives, two main consequences have arisen: loss of humanitarian principles and higher risk to local aid recipients.

### I. Contradiction of Humanitarian Principles

As mentioned above, humanitarian principles have long been non-existent, but

“the War on Terror” military initiative and humanitarian principles have now become more contradictory. The main humanitarian principles include neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Neutrality implies that humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature. Impartiality ensures that humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class, or political opinions. Independence means that NGOs themselves make decisions without any influence from governments or other sponsors.

Even though humanitarian action does not aim to support any political or military organization or rebel groups, initiating aid operations in the field necessitates direct negotiation with the *de facto* authorities, who could be the rebel groups identified as “terrorists.” This implies that aid agencies are indirectly cooperating or taking sides with the belligerents who are generating victims, and this action undermines neutrality. In 2010, the U.S. enacted legislation to crack down on “material support” for organizations and individuals the State Department identified as “terrorists” or a “threat to U.S. national security and foreign policy” (Weissmen, 2011). This legislation not only bans assistance to groups themselves, but also the humanitarian aid itself provided to territories under control of these groups, with exemptions for medicine and religious materials (Humanitarian Policy Group, 2011: 4). In this situation, maintaining neutrality is not just difficult but also impossible.

Moreover, the growing tendency for aid to be deployed according to military objectives shows that humanitarian actors, especially those who are directly or indirectly involved in “the War on Terror”, violate conflict neutrality. This is because “the War on Terror” with a clear government agenda is partial, whereas neutrality means theoretically not taking any sides. Assistance thus becomes another weapon in favor of the military, “which can condition, deny or reward relief to those who fall in or out of line with its larger security agenda” (Hofman & Delaunay, 2010). In addition, not favoring one warring faction over another is often impossible as one group could deserve strong condemnation as the clear perpetrators. As Terry states, “refusing to make a judgement about who is right and who is wrong in many ways assumes a legal and moral equality between oppressors and their victims” (Terry, 2002: 22). Indeed, silence in the name of neutrality supports the abuse-of-power relationship between various perpetrators.

Impartiality is also non-existent if, as is often the case, the needs on one side of a group are greater than on the other, in which case aid is provided in an unbalanced manner to the former (Terry, 2002: 22). Thus, depending on how visible and audible the needs are, one party often receives more than the others. This lack of impartiality was obvious in 1999, when the people in Kosovo were provided aid that amounted to \$1.23 per person, whereas the refugees in Africa were given merely 11 cents per person (New York Times, 1999). Western nations naturally supported their neighbors in Europe more than the needy people in Africa. In addition, most humanitarian organizations select their places of activity largely according to the security situation, accessibility to the needy people, and needs of the donors themselves—especially for the information-gathering

objective—and not necessarily according to the needs of the recipients. As a result, aid has become “constraint-based” and “threat-based” rather than “needs-based” (Hofman et al., 2010), although humanitarian aid should not buy information, be kept free of charge, and “be neither obliged by law nor owned as compensation for harm done” (MSF, 2004a).

Following the September 11 attacks, donor countries and international organizations have changed their attitude, causing some NGOs to malfunction. Some donors have become more cautious and conservative when dealing with potential partners on aid funds in order not to be misused by terrorist groups (Howell & Lind, 2009: 145). As a result, some Islamic agencies were obliged to stop their operations due to shortages or lack of funding. The fact that the UN has designated al-Shabaab as a terrorist organization has disabled NGOs operating in areas they control from taking UN funds (Bradbury, 2010: 14).

Finally, independence is another contradictory issue for all humanitarian organizations, which remain primarily Western enterprises accepting financial support from Western/NATO governments (Brassard-Boudreau & Hubert, 2010). That NGOs have long been supported by the superpowers is a well-known fact (Hulme et al., 1997; Terry, 2002: 74–75). Due to this generous support, NGOs can hardly remain independent, and their policies and activities are easily driven by the donor countries. A USAID Administrator even warned that all humanitarian aid groups were being viewed as an “arm of the U.S. government,” and if aid groups did not agree with recognition, he would then look for other partners (InterAction, 2003).

Among all the principles, it is important to question whether neutrality is feasible when civilians are *deliberately* targeted by armed groups during the conflict. Kaldor claimed that the rate of civilian deaths from the conflict dramatically increased since the end of the Cold War, highlighting that this targeting of civilians was one of the characteristics of “the New War” following the end of the Cold War (Kaldor, 2007: 2), which is not entirely true. This practice has been ongoing because it is most likely that data on civilian deaths was systematically *underestimated* before the data improved in the mid-to-late 1980s (Malander et al., 2009: 515). In particular, when major battles do not take place, such as in the case of the eastern DRC (Yonekawa, 2016), forced displacement of civilians cannot be an unintended consequence of war, but rather an objective as well as tactic of the warring parties. Forced displacement by armed groups involves not just the removal of whole groups and individuals from their home areas, but it also serves military, political, and economic functions. These can be classified into five types: first, robbing and looting civilians’ belongings; second, clearing land so that access to mining areas and/or grazing area for cattle can be gained where residents happen to live, allowing them to undertake forced labor (Muggah, 2006: 123); third, incorporating civilian groups into armed groups (Johnson 2003, 155); fourth, punishing anyone who collaborates with the opponents who are considered a “mortal enemy” (Human Rights Watch, 2009b: 54); and fifth, producing victims *intentionally* in order to demonstrate that the battle is ongoing—though there is hardly any fighting—and to attract humanitarian aid. In this situation, how can neutrality be maintained?

## II. Higher Risks to Local Recipients

This leads to the second point. The most problematic interaction between the militaries and the civilian agencies in a conflict context is that when a military is involved in combat and simultaneously conducts humanitarian operations, this situation puts at risk both the civilians caught in the conflict and civilian agencies providing assistance (Das, 2007: 40). What is rarely discussed is that aid organizations that take sides with populations at risk, who are in general considered to be the “mere” victims of conflict, can be perceived to be taking sides in the conflict itself.

There are two reasons. First, apart from the opinion makers, some residents could easily favor one warring faction over others for ethnic, religious, or other reasons. Second, armed groups could be deliberately hidden among the civilian population for the purpose of self-defense, and thus the “civilian group,” which is used as a shield by armed groups, can be considered not to be neutral by any conflict actors. The typical example was when Rwandan Hutu armed extremists were amidst the Hutu refugees in the refugee camps in Congo and Tanzania in 1994–1996, leading the newly established government in Kigali to perceive all refugees as anti-government. At the same time, the aid organizations that were working in the refugee camps were also considered to be anti-Rwandan government, because their aid reinforced the Hutu extremists on the one hand, while, on the other hand, most aid organizations did not work inside Rwanda even after the end of genocide in 1994.

Since the 1990s, when the field of humanitarian aid started to expand, various actors have become more involved in it, including private security firms. The so-called “humanitarian soldiers,” the military actors taking on humanitarian characteristics (Lischer, 2007: 108), are not only the military personnel morphing into aid workers, but also some aid workers who may morph into military-like figures. This can be considered as aid workers’ *collaboration* with “enemies” of aid recipients (Hofman, 2011). The Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan, which consist of both military and civilian components, are typical examples. In order to conduct humanitarian reconstruction projects under a “hearts and minds” strategy, these teams were condemned by humanitarian organizations because “such operations create a security threat for NGO workers who could be mistaken for military personnel” (Lischer, 2007: 104).

After having monitored activities against Al Qaeda and collected intelligence, the local aid recipients in Somalia were well aware of the strategic motives of the U.S. Marines and the use of humanitarian activities, which was merely to cover up their presence (Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010: 57). This was clear in Afghanistan, when U.S. planes dropped cluster bombs on suspected Taliban forces and at the same time dropped food packets for civilians. However, these two payloads were difficult for local residents to distinguish since both of them were packed in the same color (Lischer, 2007: 104).

Another example demonstrates a cover-up; when schools and latrines were renovated by the U.S. marines, a religious leader in north-eastern Kenya said,

Why does the most powerful country in the world come all the way here to repair—not even build—a public latrine? Do they think we are stupid? (OXFAM, 2011: 23–24)

The local residents highly suspect that aid projects such as borehole drilling and provision of veterinary drugs were in reality a cover for harmful activities such as the burying of nuclear waste and killing local people's animals (Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010: 52; Kenya Somali Consortium, 2008). The machines donated by the U.S. military to drill boreholes easily broke down in three months, while the borehole drilled by the Kenyan government lasted for 30 years (Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010: 62). Even the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa has been involved with Quick Impact Projects, such as constructing schools and mobile veterinary clinics. However, there is no clear indication that this "War on Terror" strategy has improved security; on the contrary, the presence of U.S. troops has made local residents feel more insecure than before (Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010: 5).

Local residents are suspicious that the humanitarian aid is a mere means for the U.S. military to surveil the local Muslim residents, whom the U.S. regards as hostile (Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010: 52). The local communities are aware that aid has a risk of being a "weapon" that sacrifices their lives, and thus refuse to accept aid (Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010: 58). This threat-based humanitarian principle and blurring of civil-humanitarian and military purposes has generated fear and caution among the recipients.

These negative attitudes among Islamic authorities and populations towards humanitarian aid have affected its access and its delivery. Some aid agencies, which are simply regarded by some belligerents as extensions of Western governments, have been confronted by Al-Shabaab over their relationship with foreign governments and their potential agendas towards Al-Shabaab (Bradbury, 2010: 9, 12). Although the relationship remains unclear, the immunization survey in Pakistan mentioned above seemed to have an impact on Al-Shabaab banning vaccination campaigns and kicking out humanitarian agencies, because they were "collecting data under the guise of demographic surveys, vaccinations reports, demining surveys, nutrition analyses..., and analyses for dishonest policies and programmes" (Al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, 2011). Two U.S. NGOs were also expelled from Al-Shabaab-controlled areas in 2008 for allegedly spying and gathering intelligence that led to the assassination of an Al-Shabaab leader in a U.S. air strike (Humanitarian Policy Group, 2011: 8). Food aid bearing the logo of the U.S. flag and school textbooks delivered by the U.S. have also been banned (Bradbury, 2010: 9). Indeed, as McNamara (2003) claims, meeting the need of aid agencies for a secure political and military environment for their operations without being regarded as humanitarian cover for strenuously contested political action remains a challenge.

## CONCLUSION

For a lengthy period, humanitarian action and aid has signified power, bait, and resources, often used as a shield not only by the local governments and warring parties but also by foreign governments. Humanitarian aid was also used for a religious purpose, such as Christian NGOs to convert Buddhist refugees and Islamic NGOs to help their people under the “hearts and minds” strategy. However, the use of humanitarian aid or action for military and political strategy started to be reinforced in the post-Cold War era, when both the number of humanitarian actors—from government, NGOs, and even the military—and their access to aid recipients have increased, together with the development of CIMIC. Islamic NGOs were also suspected of being supported and manipulated by terror networks. These militarized and political characteristics of humanitarian aid even strengthened and became more obvious following the “War on Terror” when the U.S. high government officials made such public statements. Western NGOs, and American NGOs in particular, were used for information gathering on the “terrorist” organization or potential crimes against humanity committed by conflict actors.

As a result, the distinction between civilian and military or “terrorist” organizations, and between humanitarian space and the battlefield, has become blurred due to the morphing of both humanitarian actors and the military; beyond that, the difference between aid material and military devices is often unclear. Most importantly, the objective of aid, which is primarily to save lives and to meet the needs of recipients, has gradually become ambiguous and threatening in the eyes of the civilian population. While the “winning hearts and minds” strategy by Islamic NGOs may work for Muslim refugees, the same strategy by the U.S. military simply has generated mistrust and suspicion among the Islamic recipient community. Due to this suspicion about misused aid, donors are becoming hesitant to fund NGOs working in a “terrorist”-designated area, and the local Islamic community has rejected receiving aid, which has become a weapon in favor of the military.

All this implies that humanitarian principles, which have been weak and non-existent since its creation, have been lost. Moreover, humanitarian actors’ access to recipients, which increased in the post-Cold War era, has dramatically decreased following the September 11 attacks. In particular, the Islamic communities, which may be regarded as “enemies” of the U.S. Government and military, can remain more vulnerable without outside assistance. While the aid recipients are the most affected by this “War on Terror”, humanitarian aid workers have also become victims of the conflict between the so-called Islamic “terrorists,” which have used Islamic NGOs as cover organizations, and “the War on Terror” operations of Western governments.

In order not to aggravate the concern that “aid can do more harm than good,” further analysis of the changing nature of humanitarian principles, and of the Western agenda and “terrorist” organizations’ strategy on “the War on Terror” operations is of particular importance.

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## NOTES

- (1) The term *conflict* is used in this paper to signify armed conflict.
- (2) The author learned this while deployed in eastern DRC as a UNHCR staff member.

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