PROVIDING HUMANITARIAN AID

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S EXPERIENCES with conflicts and natural disasters in the 1990s led to big changes in the scope, funding, and profile of humanitarian aid—making it much more controversial. During the decade just over 3 million people lost their lives to these events.[1] Conflicts were far more lethal than natural disasters, killing three times as many people. But natural disasters were far more widespread than conflicts, affecting seven times as many people.[2] In response, official development assistance for humanitarian aid nearly tripled, from just over $2 billion in 1990 to almost $6 billion in 2000. In most of those years the United States provided three to four times more humanitarian aid than any other donor.[3]

HUMANITARIAN AID IN THE 1990S: HIGHER STAKES, HIGHER PROFILE

There is no reason to believe that the disaster pattern of the 1990s was exceptional, with natural disasters being more numerous and affecting more people but conflicts being more deadly. Natural disasters will likely become even more devastating as populations at risk increase. And most of today's conflicts are internal—occurring within states. Both trends guarantee that humanitarian aid will remain enormously important for the international community and for the United States. They also guarantee that the controversies over this aid will continue.

Natural disasters

Famines and other natural disasters continued to take a tremendous toll worldwide. But natural disasters are neither simple nor purely nature-induced. And their devastation in global economic terms and for affected populations far outstrips the damage caused by conflicts.[4]

For the 1990s the number of deaths due to natural disasters is estimated at 665,000.[5] This, despite the benefits of early warning and disaster preparedness measures as well as advances in such basic services as clean water and sanitation.[6]

The number of reported disasters has skyrocketed, with three times as many in the 1990s as in the 1960s.[7] Earthquakes and volcano eruptions have held fairly steady in number, but disasters related to water and weather have increased dramatically

CHAPTER 5

(figure 5.1). During 1991–95 there were three El Niño-Southern Oscillation phenomena, causing devastating droughts in Southern Africa in 1991–92, 1993–94, and 1994–95. In 1997–98 this weather pattern struck again, affecting temperatures and rainfall around the world. South and Central America experienced devastating floods and landslides in some areas, droughts in others.[8] Southeast Asia experienced droughts and fires, while East Africa suffered heavy rains and floods.

In 1998 Hurricane Mitch swept across Central America, killing 10,000 people and setting development in the region back by decades.[9] The 1999 Orissa cyclone in India killed 10,000–40,000 people and devastated the lives of millions.[10] And the 2000 floods in Mozambique were the most devastating to hit the country in 150 years, generating the largest air rescue operation (by nine national air forces) ever mounted in a short period.[11]

While estimates vary widely, a report by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates losses from natural disasters at $400 billion for the 1990s—10 times the amount in the 1960s.[12] The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies puts losses for the decade even higher, at $780 billion.[13]

Hurricane Mitch inspired the creation of an equation with logic that applies to most natural disasters: rapid population growth plus urbanization plus mass poverty plus high inequality plus deforestation plus other environmental degradation plus a lack of land use and building sta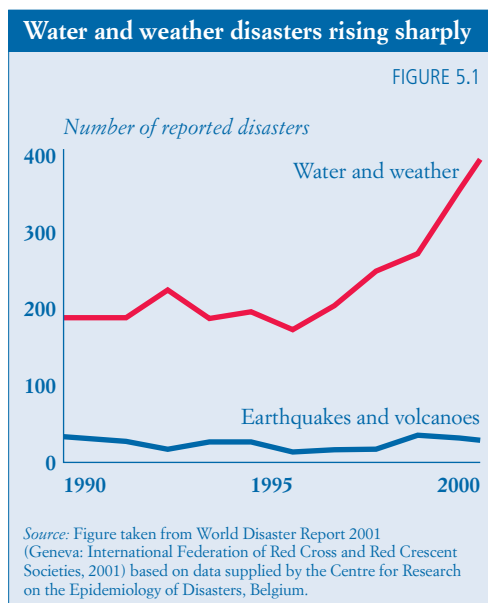ndards plus institutional weaknesses equal increasing vulnerability and eventual catastrophe.[14] This equation emphasizes how decisions (or nondecisions) on development and institutions transform natural hazards into natural disasters.

CONFLICTS

Conflict was the defining disaster type of the 1990s, with the decade-long growth in humanitarian aid driven by the devastation that accompanied the increase in internal (within-state) conflicts. Between 1985 and 1989 an average of five manmade humanitarian emergencies were declared each year. In 1990 there were 20. After peaking at 26 in 1994, new manmade emergencies averaged 22 a year through the late 1990s.[15] Most of these emergencies were directly related to conflict or severe government repression. Countries from every region made the list, including Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Haiti Indonesia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Uganda, and Yugoslavia (Serbia/Montenegro).

By the end of 2000 internal conflict and repression had generated 14.5 million refugees and asylum seekers worldwide—and nearly 25 million people displaced within their own countries (figure 5.2).[16] The number of refugees, just below 10 million in 1984, peaked at 16.3 million in 1993–94, then began to fall.[17] Significant refugee repatriations from peace agreements in Cambodia, Mozambique, Namibia, and Central America contributed to the decline. But continued conflicts in Africa (especially in the Great Lakes region) and elsewhere partly offset these gains. At the end of 2000 the three largest refugee populations—Palestinians (4.0 million), Afghans (3.6 million), and Sudanese (460,000)—made up more than half the total. In addition, 6 of the top 10 refugee-generating countries were in Africa.[18]

The number of internally displaced persons has increased even more dramatically (see figure 5.2). From an estimated 1.2 million in 11 countries in 1982, the number rose to 11–14 million in 20 countries in 1986 and to more than 20 million in 40 countries in 1997.[19] Sudan and Angola have the most internally displaced people, followed by Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.[20] This increase reflects the growing

Water and weather disasters rising sharply

FIGURE 5.1

Number of reported disasters

Water and weather

Earthquakes and volcanoes

Source: Figure taken from World Disaster Report 2001 (Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2001) based on data supplied by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, Belgium.

number of internal conflicts in the 1990s as well as more accurate counts of displaced populations. It also reflects the world community's efforts to limit refugee flows through assistance models that try to keep people within their own countries.[21]

MONEY MATTERS

In 2000 the United States provided $1.6 billion in official humanitarian aid—more than the combined total of 12 other OECD donors.[22] Moreover, in 1998–2000 the United States provided about a third of all official humanitarian aid , up from about a fifth in 1995–97 (figure 5.3). In addition, in 2000 the United States provided more than half of all resources for the relief operations conducted by the World Food Program.[23]

Although official financing for humanitarian aid nearly tripled in the 1990s, this growth did not keep pace with economic growth in OECD countries. In fact, between 1990 and 1998 global donor spending on humanitarian aid dropped from 0.03 percent of these countries' GDP to 0.02 percent—or to 20 cents of each $1,000 in GDP.[24] Looking at UN agency budgets, in 2000 donors provided less than 80 percent of World Food Program requirements for long-term relief and 84 percent of requirements for immediate relief. Resources for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees peaked in 1992 but have since fallen by 60 percent.[25]

Given the differences between the funds required and provided, some triage occurs. Highly visible, geopolitically important crises in places such as the former Yugoslavia are often oversubscribed while "silent" emergencies such as those in Angola, Burundi, and Somalia (in the late 1990s) remain significantly underfunded.[26]

In addition, the dollar amounts of humanitarian aid mask the fact that large portions of donor resources are in kind—primarily food. The failure to provide cash for nonfood needs (such as clean water and sanitation) in emergencies seriously limits the benefits of food in many emergencies. During the 2000–02 drought in the Horn of Africa, seeds, veterinary assistance, health, water, and sanitation programs were more than 70 percent underfunded, impeding recovery.[27]

By the late 1990s donors were funneling at least a quarter of their humanitarian aid through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—and for the United States, estimates are much higher.[28] Donors' decisions to provide funds through NGOs or multilaterally through UN agencies will

IN 2000 THE UNITED STATES PROVIDED $1.6 BILLION IN OFFICIAL HUMANITARIAN AID— MORE THAN THE COMBINED TOTAL OF 12 OTHER OECD DONORS

Estimated number of the world's people in need of emergency humanitarian assistance, 1984–2000

FIGURE 5.2

Million people
■ Total ■ Refugees[a] ■ Internally displaced persons
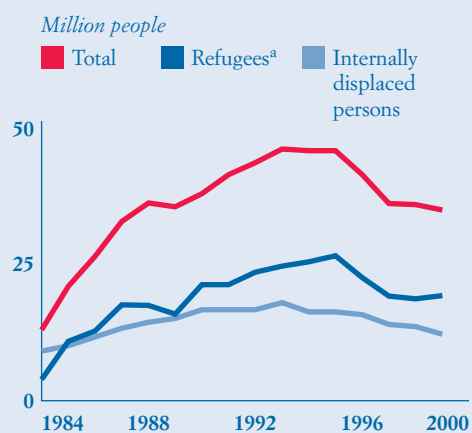
a. People who fear persecution or harm if returned to their home countries but are not recognized by governments as refugees. Some are given temporary refuge or allowed to remain undocumented. Information on these groups is fragmentary, and estimates of their numbers often vary widely.

Source: NIC 2000.

The United States provides the most humanitarian assistance by far

FIGURE 5.3

The major donors of bilateral humanitarian assistance, 2000 US$ million
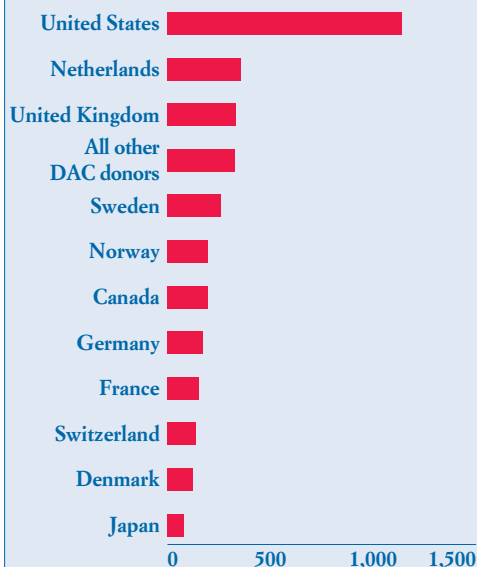
Source: Randel and German 2002.

*BY THE LATE 1990S
DONORS WERE
FUNNELING AT LEAST A
QUARTER OF THEIR
HUMANITARIAN AID
THROUGH
NONGOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATIONS*

continue to be a source of tension in the humanitarian relief community. Some argue that the "bilateralization" of this aid makes NGOs less independent, ties humanitarian goals too closely to donor geopolitics, and reduces resource allocations based on need. Others charge that UN agencies lack the speed, flexibility, and operational skills to get the job done, making NGOs essential to improving operational efficiency and effectiveness in the field.

Finally, it is worth noting that humanitarian aid grew in the 1990s—while overall development assistance fell. Since 1991 official development assistance has dropped 11 percent in real terms.[29]

NEW HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

Lacking support from superpowers, armed groups have turned to exploiting the natural resources around them and stripping civilian assets to finance their operations.

Killing, injuring, and kidnapping aid workers is also part of the "new war" scenario, as are child soldiers and gender-specific atrocities (raping women, executing men). This brutality is facilitated by the greater availability and low cost of a wide variety of weapons.[30]

The 1990s saw not only vast human suffering generated by "new wars" and other global threats, but also a greater interest in addressing them on humanitarian, human rights, and security grounds. Humanitarian actors had new opportunities to intervene—their mission to save lives and reduce human suffering merging with the larger security interests of the international community, at times making them an element of larger political and military strategies.[31]

COMPLEX EMERGENCIES, COMPLEX RESPONSES

Humanitarian relief workers often refer to conflict settings as complex humanitarian emergencies, defined as "internal conflicts with large-scale displacement of people; fragile or failing political, economic and social institutions; random and systematic violence against non-combatants; infrastructure collapse, widespread lawlessness and interrupted food production and trade."[32] This term reflects the human suffering caused by these conflicts—though the emergencies are, at heart, political, with real solutions lying outside the humanitarian realm.[33]

The complexity has as much to do with the nature of responses as with the intricacies of conflicts. Responses in war settings were once the responsibility of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as the custodian of the 1949 Geneva Convention and 1977 Additional Protocols. But today UN agencies, NGOs, and a range of military actors are on the scene. The relationships within and between these entities differ in each case, and coordination among them has become more difficult with the growing number and type of actors.[34]

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was created to address coordination, but for many reasons (including insufficient authority, financial resources, and qualified staff), it has been unable to meet the challenges of complex emergency responses. Without radical restructuring of the humanitarian architecture (say, by creating a central response agency or pooling donor resources into a single response fund in or out of the UN—options unpopular with both donors and UN agencies), prospects are poor for resolving the coordination conundrum in the near term.

INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES

On the civilian side, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been joined by a large contingent of other actors. Three operational UN agencies (autonomous and funded through voluntary contributions and reporting to separate governing boards) take the lead in responding to complex humanitarian emergencies. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is responsible for protecting and assisting refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund focuses on the needs of women and children, and the World Food Program emphasizes food movements and logistics. The United Nations Development Programme's role has been limited by its traditional ties to country governments, but at times it has played an important coordination function at the field level. It is also playing new roles in crisis prevention and recovery. The Food and Agriculture Organization and World Health Organization, though not central players, are also positioning themselves to become more involved in emergency settings.

These agencies have changed over the last decade.

- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is doing more to help people in refugee-like situations. In Bosnia and Herzegovina it mounted a relief operation during a war for the first time in its history, aiding refugees, internally displaced persons, and other war-affected groups. But while its assistance capacity has expanded to address conflict settings, its protection abilities have failed to keep pace. Thus it is working to improve both legal protection for refugees and physical protection for all the populations it serves.
- The World Food Program has evolved from a predominantly development agency to one focused on emergency responses. In 1990 development programs absorbed about 70 percent of the agency's resources—but today, just over 10 percent. New strategic priorities include a strong commitment to ensuring that women play a central role in gaining access to and managing the distribution of food.
- The United Nations Children's Fund has taken steps to mainstream emergency responses throughout its systems.

Almost all organizations have expanded their operational ties to each other and to local and international NGOs, the primary implementing partners for the United Nations. Two other intergovernmental bodies—the International Organization for Migration and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies—are often also important responders and UN partners.

THE RISE OF NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Like UN agencies, in the 1980s bilateral donors such as the U.S. government began to rely increasingly on NGOs to deliver humanitarian aid in conflict settings, primarily because NGOs generally have a grassroots orientation and a flexible, results-oriented approach.[35] NGOs used to work at arm's length from donor governments, but over time the relationship has become more intimate.[36] Interest in increased impact and accountability has led to more intense donor involvement in NGO program designs, while increased funding has made some NGOs donor-dependent. For example, three of the five largest aid programmes in the United States—CARE,

Catholic Relief Services, and Save the Children—receive around half their funding from the U.S. government.[37]

Reflecting this close relationship, the USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance channels 60–70 percent of its funds to NGOs. Other donors also exhibit close relationships with NGOs.[38] Increased bilateral funding has heightened the danger that NGOs will be perceived as agents of Western governments rather than as independent, nongovernmental actors. As one NGO executive has noted, "availing oneself of government resources to the fullest while retaining independence and remaining true to the [humanitarian] ethos can be very difficult."[39]

With donors and UN agencies increasingly dependent on them, NGOs have at times become the heart and soul of relief operations. Working in nearly every crucial intervention area (including food, shelter, water, sanitation, health, agriculture, and microenterprise development), they have provided services in situations where governments and other members of the international community have been unable or unwilling to do so.

With hefty resources available from UN agencies and donor governments, the number of NGOs exploded in the 1980s and 1990s. To illustrate, some 100 NGOs operated in Rwandan refugee camps in eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), 170 in Rwanda, 150 in Mozambique, and 250 in Bosnia-Herzegovina.[40] While these NGOs have addressed critical needs, their proliferation has at times led to duplicated efforts and projects working at cross-purposes, hampering the development of an overall strategic vision in the field.

Complicating matters is the enormous organizational and philosophical diversity in this growing sector. Some NGOS are secular, others are faith-based, and many are increasingly international, with multiple national headquarters for fundraising and advocacy and diverse headquarters-field relationships. Some strictly adhere to humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality. Others openly side with those most severely affected by emergencies.

These diverse groups often compete intensely for financial resources and local staff. NGOs' access to resources makes them powerful local players, and they can undermine the authority of

governments—siphoning off not only legitimate government duties but also staff and resources. In Afghanistan, for example, NGOs are paying skilled workers far more than what the transitional government can afford.

Other recent NGO trends include the growth in (and growing donor preference for) local and national NGOs and the growing number of other NGOs with which humanitarian NGOs increasingly collaborate. These include human rights NGOs, conflict resolution NGOs, and women's groups. In today's "new war" settings, the lines between these various entities are increasingly blurred, with women's groups taking up peace issues, human rights groups concerned about violations of humanitarian law, humanitarian groups concerned about peace and justice issues, and so on.[41]

MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

While logistical military support has been common in natural disasters over the past half-century, the end of the Cold War prompted the military to reconsider its role in nonwar settings (operations other than war).[42] As with agencies that provide humanitarian aid, militaries have been asked to address emerging threats to human security. This trend is reflected in the enormous increase in UN peacekeeping operations. In the early 1990s there were 8 peacekeeping operations involving 10,000 troops—while by 2000 there were 15 operations involving 38,000 troops. (UN peacekeeping operations peaked in 1993, when 78,000 troops were deployed.)[43]

Three types of civilian-military collaboration have occurred in the past decade.[44] In the first, ongoing humanitarian operations, the military deploys assets to help civilian agencies quickly deliver life-saving aid. Support usually comes in the form of logistics, as in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. After failing to stop the genocide, 11 countries provided military resources in response to the initial outflow of refugees and resulting cholera epidemic in eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo).

Civilian-military collaboration also occurs when humanitarian aid is an "add on" to peacekeeping operations. In these cases, as in Cambodia and Mozambique, humanitarian operations are usually part of a comprehensive peace settlement in which political objectives remain foremost. In such operations military involvement is consensual and based on principles of neutrality, impartiality, and nonuse of force. Military-civilian collaboration on humanitarian aid is greatly facilitated when these parameters are established beforehand.

The third type of civilian-military collaboration is forceful humanitarian intervention: when the military is used to protect, through force if necessary, the delivery of humanitarian aid and sometimes the civilians receiving that aid. Until the 1990s this approach was largely theoretical. But no longer. Forceful humanitarian interventions were widespread in the 1990s, the most visible reflection of the weakening of the sovereignty principle and the merging of security and humanitarian concerns. Perhaps the most vivid example was the "humanitarian war" in Kosovo, undertaken by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) without authorization from the United Nations Security Council.

Other examples of forceful humanitarian interventions include Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq (1991), Operation Turquoise in Rwanda (1994), INTERFET in East Timor (1999), and UN-sponsored operations in Somalia (1992), Bosnia (1992–95), and Sierra Leone (2001). As Kaldor notes, "starting with the establishment of a safe haven in northern Iraq in 1991 and culminating in the NATO air strikes in Yugoslavia in 1999, the presumption that there is a right to use armed force in support of humanitarian objectives has become widely accepted."[45]

PRIVATE ACTORS

Private, for-profit entities are becoming more active in disaster responses. Examples include:
- Companies like Microsoft, which help apply advanced technologies in emergency settings.
- Military contractors, which provide operational support to the armed forces.
- Private security firms, which offer their services to aid workers and governments.

The role of multinational corporations in generating conflict—say, by buying diamonds and valuable minerals from belligerents—has led to growing calls for them to be more socially responsible and abide by international humanitarian and human rights laws. Indeed, if calls for increased

corporate responsibility are heeded, these powerful entities could play a much larger role in humanitarian aid.

INNOVATIONS, FAILURES, AND THE CRISIS IN HUMANITARIAN AID

Initiated in 1989, Operation Lifeline Sudan was the first UN access agreement negotiated with both a government and a rebel movement to ensure lifesaving assistance in the midst of a war. Negotiated access agreements have become a basic model for delivering aid in conflict settings, and have been used in countries such as Angola, Ethiopia, and Mozambique. In a variation on the theme, the United Nations has also negotiated "days of tranquility" and "humanitarian cease-fires" to deliver lifesaving aid.

In Bosnia, eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), and northern Iraq logistics operations reached new heights. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees described its humanitarian operations in Bosnia as unprecedented in "scale, scope and complexity."[46] They included the Sarajevo airlift, the longest-running humanitarian airlift ever—surpassing even the 1948–49 airlift in Berlin. Civilian-military collaboration allowed for impressive new logistical feats as well as new security models. The idea of safe havens was born, where protection and assistance are provided within a war-affected country.

Despite (and perhaps partly because of) these innovations, by the mid-1990s humanitarian aid was widely considered to be in a state of conceptual crisis. As political analyst William DeMars has observed, "In the modern history of humanitarian action dating from civilian relief during the Second World War, never before has the legitimacy of the enterprise been so profoundly and publicly challenged, while at the same time never have the services of humanitarian organizations been more in demand."[47] Why?

POSSIBLE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF ASSISTANCE

Part of the answer lies in the unintended negative aspects of relief, so evident during the 1990s and now well documented.[48] Operation Lifeline Sudan is a case in point. This remarkable structure has averted and reduced famine in Sudan for more than a dozen years—but it is also thought to have prolonged the conflict. Warring parties, especially the government, deny access to some locations, and all sides use aid to finance the war. Military forces use days of tranquility and humanitarian ceasefires to regroup for the next round of fighting. In addition, aid supports belligerents who impose "taxes" or steal to obtain relief assets; makes civilians targets for militias that strip them of their assets; empowers belligerents by allowing them to control civilian access to resources; and absolves ruling parties from their welfare responsibilities by meeting local needs. Finally, introducing relief supplies into a resource-scarce environment may dramatically fuel a war economy in which many have a continuing, vested interest.

Development economist Mary Anderson describes two kinds of negative aid impacts: tangible ones related to resource transfers that empower belligerents and reinforce a war economy, and intangible ones that convey unintended messages. Negotiating access, for example, unwittingly elevates the status of armed groups and confers legitimacy on conflict.[49]

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AID AND POLITICS

The conceptual crisis of humanitarian aid also derives from its occasional failure to be complemented by effective political and military strategies. Operation Lifeline Sudan shows how aid can become a substitute for more concerted action to address the causes of humanitarian need. Although at its inception Sudanese relief groups called for Operation Lifeline Sudan to lay the foundation for a broader peace agreement, that did not occur. Much political muscle has been flexed on access for aid—while little progress has been made on peace.

Nowhere was this substitution of aid for aggressive diplomatic action more evident than in Bosnia. The groundbreaking airlift operations there (as well as in Somalia and Sudan) reflected the new heights to which the international community would go to deliver lifesaving aid. But they also showed its inability to prevent the need for such aid in the first place. The Sarajevo airlift became a symbol of the international community's resolve to provide aid but little else in the context of the war.

PRIVATE, FOR-PROFIT ENTITIES ARE BECOMING MORE ACTIVE IN DISASTER RESPONSES

This focus on aid in the absence of concerted action to stop aggression gave rise to the expression, "the well-fed dead." That is, relief efforts kept "vulnerable civilians alive only to have them brutalized by war, human rights violations, and other forms of abuse."[50]

Safe haven failures

The international community's willingness to address the material needs but not the physical safety of civilians in the midst of war has also been grimly evident in strategies for so-called safe havens. The safe haven concept brought with it some of the most profound tragedies of the 1990s, largely because the civilian nature of safe havens was not maintained and because the international community designated "safe" areas that it was unwilling to defend.

Only in northern Iraq was this concept initially well implemented, because Operation Provide Comfort was backed by sufficient force to protect hundreds of thousands of returning refugees. But even there the safe haven concept failed Iraqi Kurds five years later, in 1996, when the United States proved unwilling to thwart the Iraqi army from invading Kurdish areas.[51] While the safe haven created by French troops in Rwanda in 1994 is widely credited with stemming further destabilizing outflows of refugees into neighboring countries and allowing for the delivery of urgently needed relief, it also protected some of the architects of the 1994 genocide. Their presence in the Kibeho camp led to a Rwandan Patriotic Front assault in which several thousand people were killed. (Though not in a declared safe haven, the failure to separate civilian and military groups in camps in eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) led to similar disastrous results.)

The most poignant failure was the Bosnian safe haven of Srebrenica. Lacking military means to stop the advance of Serb troops, UN peacekeepers stood by while Serb troops executed 7,000 men and boys—the largest massacre in Europe since World War II. The Srebrenica debacle raised profound moral questions for many in the international community. The question was inescapable: how can those who claim to protect and help war victims be held accountable when they fail, egregiously, to fulfill their mandate? In a stunning recent development, the government of the Netherlands, including the prime minister and his cabinet, stepped down from office as a result of a damning report on its role in the Srebrenica tragedy.

Military engagement, security, and humanitarian values

The expanded use of military assets in conflict settings has created new dilemmas. For some analysts the use of force is inconsistent with humanitarian values, making the idea of a forceful humanitarian intervention an oxymoron. Still, there is little doubt that a military presence was stunningly effective in northern Iraq and allowed relief to be delivered to large, previously inaccessible parts of Somalia. Military forces also made crucial contributions in eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) in rapidly responding to a cholera outbreak among Rwandan refugees, and they allowed safe passage of relief supplies in parts of Bosnia. But the use of military forces has compelled the relief community to examine the extent to which traditional tenets of humanitarian aid— rooted in principles of impartiality and neutrality—can be maintained. For some these principles are negated by alliances between relief workers and external military forces intervening without the consent of warring parties.

On a more practical level, relief agencies recognize that military escorts raise serious risks for their workers, sometimes drawing fire from belligerents who view military-protected convoys as legitimate targets. In addition, where military officers implement aid activities (as currently in Afghanistan), the concern is that their encroachment on humanitarian space melds political and military objectives with humanitarian ones.

Military protection also means that relief workers can stay in war zones to provide humanitarian assistance, but that as a result they witness atrocities they are powerless to stop. This presents a new moral dilemma for humanitarian agencies: does speaking out about such atrocities further jeopardize war-affected populations through retribution or denied access to relief, or does it help them by raising awareness about their plight? Even more poignantly, does failing to speak out— in an effort to remain neutral and retain access rights—make a relief worker complicit in some way? Faced with such dilemmas, aid agencies have made different choices depending on

realities in the field and their views on the relationship between human rights and humanitarian aid.

In sum, the humanitarian innovations of the past decade brought impressive successes in some cases and deadly consequences in others—and more often than not, a bit of both. These experiences have led to evolving practices that point to future challenges in the field.

Evolving practices and future challenges

In response to the perceived crisis in humanitarian aid, a set of initiatives is redefining the nature of humanitarian responses. Efforts are being made to:
- Improve standards and accountability.
- Improve protection for relief workers seeking to help civilians caught in conflicts.
- Strike a balance among political, military, and humanitarian strategies.
- Address the links between disasters and development efforts.

Improving standards and accountability: professionalizing the industry

For better or worse, humanitarian aid has become big business. Concerns about uneven performance among aid agencies, the potential negative effects of aid, and the blurring of the distinction between humanitarian and military operations has led to efforts to root aid more firmly in international humanitarian law and to set higher standards for performance and accountability.

In 1994 the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief issued a code of conduct for disaster assistance organizations. The code emphasizes the rights of disaster victims to assistance and affirms the independence of humanitarian actors from governments. But it has internal inconsistencies: for example, local societies must be respected, even if their values and practices violate human rights and humanitarian law. And more violated in the breach than the practice, it ignores the existence of predatory political actors in most complex emergencies.

Building on the code, the Sphere Project—established in 1997 by a consortium of aid agencies—

seeks to recommit agencies to principles flowing from international humanitarian, refugee, and human rights law and to set minimum standards in five core sectors: water supply and sanitation, nutrition, food, shelter and site planning, and health care.[52] The resulting framework allows for more formal, consistent evaluations of aid agencies' performance.

The code of conduct and the Sphere Project documents refer clearly to the rights of people affected by conflicts and disasters and reflect a shift in the philosophy of many aid organizations: assistance and protection are now seen as rights due, not privileges granted. From this perspective, countries and the international aid community must be held accountable not just for but actually to crisis-affected populations. Two recent initiatives, the Humanitarian Ombudsmen Project and the Humanitarian Accountability Project, take the rights of aid recipients to new levels. Both seek to create accountability mechanisms that empower humanitarian "claimants" and give them greater say in the aid process.[53]

A recent, deeply disturbing report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Save the Children UK on sexual violence and exploitation of refugee children in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone makes clear the ease with which personnel of powerful relief organizations can prey on the populations they are intended to assist and highlights the importance of making aid agencies more accountable to aid recipients. Aid organizations need to make explicit to their workers how principles must be embraced and translate them into organizational policies, operational guidelines, and rules of behavior. Better assessment and monitoring will necessarily follow. Absent an independent body with the authority to determine compliance with principles or minimum standards and to impose sanctions, new and more rigorous self-policing will be required. Donor agencies that control substantial funding flows have an ethical duty to insist on high standards, whatever the attempts at self-regulatory codes.

Improving protection for civilians caught in conflicts

This new code of conduct is just one component of the international community's search for better protection measures for refugees, internally displaced persons, and other civilians affected by

Humanitarian innovations of the past decade brought impressive successes in some cases and deadly consequences in others—and more often than not, a bit of both

conflicts. The UN Millennium Declaration's pledge to "strengthen the protection of civilians in complex emergencies" is playing out in many ways. Proposals for rapid deployment forces to thwart violence against civilians, peacekeeping operations with more robust civilian protection components, greater use of international, regional, and local police forces, and engagement of private security firms to protect civilians are outgrowths of past protection failures. And the creation of war crimes tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia and the ratification of the Rome Statute for an International Criminal Court reflect determined efforts to punish those who violate internationally recognized standards of protection.

These initiatives bear special relevance for internally displaced persons, who suffered many protection violations over the past decade. Their number has grown exponentially as a result of internal conflicts, and their needs are often more pressing than those of other war-affected groups. They are less likely to have adequate shelter, less likely to be able to earn a livelihood, less accessible to relief workers due to insecurity, more vulnerable to assault, and less likely to carry the documentation needed to receive benefits.[54] Because no single international organization has a mandate to protect and assist them, their needs are usually addressed on an unsystematic basis by various international organizations and NGOs. In addition, no binding legal framework specifically addresses internally displaced persons (unlike for refugees), though the 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are an important step forward.

UN restructuring to create a lead agency to address the needs of internally displaced persons has essentially been dismissed, but efforts are being made to heighten awareness of their problems and to improve coordination among responders. Improving assistance and protection of such populations will be an important test of the humanitarian aid architecture over the next decade. Much will depend on donor's political will to take on the relevant security issues and provide the resources needed to improve both assistance and protection.

IMPROVING SECURITY FOR RELIEF WORKERS

Humanitarian aid workers continue to face grave security threats. Since 1992, 200 UN civilian staff have been killed, most during humanitarian oper-

ations. Similarly, since 1997 the International Committee of the Red Cross has experienced 120–135 security incidents a year.[55] The increase in the number of workers killed reflects the rise in the number of conflict settings and of relief personnel working in these dangerous environments. Less clear is the extent to which relief workers are being targeted for political reasons (as opposed to being victims of crime) and why. The central question is, does perceived neutrality protect relief workers from attack and improve agency access (as is the standard refrain)? Understanding the security threat will better inform debates on neutrality and impartiality in these contexts.

UN agencies and NGOs, with strong donor support, are trying to minimize their vulnerability to security threats while maintaining their presence in insecure areas. Efforts include better security training, regular field reporting on security, coordination structures that serve as a locus for exchanges of security information, more hardware (radios, satellite phones), more security personnel (such as guards), increased insurance premiums, and more secure housing for staff.

Increased protection for aid workers has significantly raised the costs of humanitarian relief. Interestingly, donors are willing to provide the resources to cover these costs, allowing aid workers to take risks that donors are unwilling to take. Many donors cannot even monitor the relief programs they fund (as in Afghanistan). What does it mean when donor governments are willing to train and pay aid organizations to go where their civilian personnel will not? The growing number of deaths in the aid community is another reflection of the substitution of aid in environments that really require more aggressive political—and perhaps military—interventions.

STRIKING A BALANCE AMONG POLITICAL, MILITARY, AND HUMANITARIAN STRATEGIES

Events in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Sudan show what happens when relief is delivered in the absence of effective strategies. These experiences have led to calls for closer links among humanitarian, political, and military strategies, but such integration requires careful consideration. Combining political, military, and humanitarian efforts can subordinate relief goals and politicize them to the point that they are no longer acts of humanity, but instead exclusively political or military tactics.

Donor efforts to selectively provide emergency fuel to Serbia in the winter of 1999–2000[56]—focusing on areas opposed to former President Slobodan Milosevic—and to make food aid to the People's Democratic Republic of Korea conditional on political negotiations are examples of strategies that threaten to equate humanitarian aid less with reducing human suffering and more with achieving governments' political and military objectives. Many aid agencies and aid scholars properly call for political and military solutions to complex emergencies—but then insist on distance, not always practical, between these efforts and their humanitarian aid efforts.

Striking a balance between aid and politics will involve not so much merging the two but rather running them on parallel tracks, "reinforcing but not preempting the other."[57] Some political objectives can be met while achieving humanitarian goals of saving lives and reducing suffering. Relief programs have been used to build confidence in political negotiations, protect democratic and economic reforms in countries experiencing instability, and support implementation of peace accords.[60] But some mixes of politics and aid are better than others. Where political and humanitarian ends do not meet, humanitarian aid agencies must vigorously defend the preeminent humanitarian principle of saving human life and reducing suffering, fiercely resisting incompatible geopolitical agendas.

ADDRESSING THE LINKS BETWEEN DISASTERS AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

In 1983, far ahead of his time, Fred Cuny (later tragically murdered on a humanitarian mission to Chechnya) identified the close connection between disasters and poorly designed development efforts.[59] He argued that the two are interdependent: disasters affect development, and development efforts often provide the preconditions for further disasters. This perspective was not well received at the time because embracing it would have required political and economic elites in disaster-prone countries to fundamentally alter how they planned, guided, and allowed development to occur. That is, they would have had to consider hazard and vulnerability in nearly every development project.

Not much had changed by 1999, when James Lewis offered the metaphor of the "disaster bicycle."[60] One wheel is a cycle of disaster, emer-gency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and preparedness—but circling back to disaster. The other wheel, completely separate, is development. The bicycle metaphor highlights that, institutionally and otherwise, international efforts to address disasters and development are not connected—precluding "the possibility of a necessarily wider view to take account of crucial political, institutional, social, cultural, economic and physical factors that are the root causes of vulnerability to 'natural disasters.'"[61] That separation removes disasters from other fields, particularly development planning, absolving them of their responsibilities to help prevent and respond to disasters.

Those who work on natural, technological, and conflict-related disasters are pushing development experts to recognize that many development projects cause or at least increase countries' vulnerability to disasters. But enormous obstacles—mainly political—remain. In effect an entire paradigm has to be changed, because the fix is not technical. Rather, it is rooted in systemic factors that lie at the heart of development thinking.

In sum, it has been hard to banish the traditional view that conflicts and natural disasters are interruptions in—but separate from—the development process. But a clearer understanding is emerging that development efforts create vulnerabilities that enable conflict to take root and that transform natural and technological hazards into disasters. (See chapter 4 for further discussion of the relationship between conflict and development.) Still, achieving this change in consciousness remains an uphill battle because of the formidable political and economic forces resisting it. But it is a battle that must be waged, because the type, number, and severity of future disasters will partly depend on the outcome of efforts to change the current development mindset.

LOOKING AHEAD

As late as the mid-1980s, only a few—and not at all well-received—pessimists were discussing the potential for religious nationalism, ethnic conflict, and intrastate wars that would soon so profoundly affect the world. Still, we must look ahead as best we can. With that in mind, consider the following:

- In some areas, such as southern Africa, Central Asia, and countries around the Mediterranean

COMBINING POLITICAL, MILITARY, AND HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS CAN SUBORDINATE RELIEF GOALS AND POLITICIZE THEM

Sea, lack of rainfall and higher temperatures are predicted to dramatically increase water stress, with concomitantly lower harvests. By 2010 an additional 50 million people will be at risk of hunger (box 5.1).[62]

- Economic migrants will continue to swell urban ghettos, with many in poor housing lacking water and sanitation. Flood-induced cholera outbreaks in urban slums will become more common, requiring emergency responses.
- Population pressures will force more people to move onto marginal lands where human activity has already caused deforestation, water shortages, and desertification—or into lowland areas more prone to floods or hurricanes.[63]
- Health emergencies are expected to proliferate, further taxing public health systems. Mosquito-transmitted diseases such as malaria and dengue fever are expected to spread well beyond their current geographic limits.[64]
- Infectious diseases such as AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, already health emergencies, are significantly deepening the impacts of conflicts and natural disasters. HIV/AIDS among drought-affected populations, for example, is making many people more susceptible to health problems associated with food shortages (and other infectious diseases). Related illnesses (and death) deeply affect food security and will render many families less able to recover from conflicts and natural disasters.
- Technological accidents and disasters are projected to increase in number and severity because of spreading industrialization, aging plants and technologies, declining resources for safety and monitoring, and increasing vulnerability caused by ill-informed development decisions and nondecisions. The consequences of such accidents will not be border sensitive—entire regions could be affected.[65]
- Domino effects are also possible, where a natural disaster triggers a technological accident in an urban area, creating unforeseen and uncontrolled population movements and generating conditions for conflict.
- Challenges remain in meeting the needs of today's war-affected populations. While

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Box 5.1. Five principles for addressing famine

The U.S. government bases its policies to address famine on five core principles:

A hungry child knows no politics. Food aid will not be used as an instrument of diplomacy in a nutritional emergency.

Target the vulnerable. Immediate responses include food aid to targeted populations. Companion responses are general immunization of children under 5, water and sanitation interventions, equitable market interventions to stabilize skyrocketing prices, and heightened attention to the most vulnerable, such as the landless poor and women-led households. Interventions to support livelihoods and coping systems are also undertaken by targeting families living in poor, vulnerable areas.

Develop local capacity and support livelihoods. U.S. food aid programs develop local capacities in famine prevention, mitigation, and preparedness so that famine-prone countries can withstand episodic shocks without international help. Some immediate actions can be adjusting agriculture and livestock practices (planting alternative famine crops, improved pastoral practices), building food stocks (better post-harvest storage practices, lending programs for purchase of food) and changing food habits (identifying and harvesting wild foods).

Make early warning information available. U.S. policy is to build commitment among senior political leaders in affected countries and to disseminate information to help communities respond to early signs of conflict and famine. This is done by connecting early warning systems to the political system and to decision-makers. Incentives are also provided for affected governments to take more responsibility for reducing vulnerability and the likelihood of future emergencies.

Transparent accountability. Democratic systems of government are the most effective measures to reduce the risk of famine. And as Nobel economics laureate Amartya Sen has noted, no country with a free press has had a famine. One common characteristic of famines is an authoritarian system of government. Famines are not identified with democracies. That is why democratic government, transparency, and accountability are priorities for the U.S. government effort to stop or avert famines.

Source: USAID staff.

expert opinions vary on whether new internal conflicts will emerge, ongoing ones are increasingly intractable and lethal—with growing numbers of civilian casualties and increasingly global consequences.

- Potential chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive disasters loom large in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, with unknown implications for humanitarian aid.

Thus needs for humanitarian assistance show no signs of abating. Moreover, new dimensions of disasters will create new exigencies. These trends indicate an even larger, more complex role for humanitarian aid in the next few decades. The United States—the last remaining superpower with truly global reach—has a crucial role in addressing today's challenges and shaping future trends in disaster assistance.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S UNEVEN RECORD

The United States was at the fore in shaping the "new humanitarianism" of the 1990s. In 1991 its military led the effort to send home Iraqi Kurds trapped in the mountains of northern Iraq, and in 1992 it landed in Somalia to break the famine that killed 500,000 people. But this warm embrace of "assertive multilateralism" by President Bill Clinton's administration was transformed after the 1993 deaths of 18 U.S. soldiers in Somalia. In 1994 Presidential Decision Directive 25 narrowly reinterpreted conditions for U.S. engagement in peace operations abroad.[66]

Yet even more tragic results followed, with the United States failing to aggressively address the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and taking cautious approaches elsewhere in Africa—including Angola, Liberia, and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo).[67] The policy tide turned again later in the decade with NATO's "humanitarian war" in Kosovo, epitomizing the close new relationship between humanitarian, political, and military interests. But this effort raised suspicions that the West favored the needs of Europeans over those of Africans.[68]

So, U.S. responses to conflict-related humanitarian emergencies were disturbingly uneven in the 1990s. At one extreme, humanitarian responses were overridden by political concerns (as with the famine in the People's Democratic Republic of Korea and the genocide in Rwanda), leading the United States to do too little, too late. At the other extreme, the United States engaged in "cure all" humanitarianism,[69] substituting large amounts of aid for robust political action (as in Bosnia prior to the Dayton Accords, Rwanda after the genocide, and Sudan until recently).

DEVELOPING A COHERENT STRATEGY FOR U.S. HUMANITARIAN AID

The sole remaining superpower has a moral obligation to take a stand against human atrocities whenever and wherever they occur. But humanitarian interventions are also in the national interest: failed and failing states are by definition dangerous to the United States and to global security. They have destabilized entire regions and provided recruiting grounds and safe havens for criminals, extremists, and terrorists—a point that takes on new salience in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks.

Forging a coherent strategy for U.S. humanitarian aid calls for efforts on several fronts. The relationship between humanitarian aid and foreign policy objectives needs to be more carefully assessed and, to the extent possible, more mutually reinforcing. This will require elevating and more fully exploring the humanitarian dimensions of political and military strategies.

PROTECTING WAR-AFFECTED POPULATIONS —ESPECIALLY THE INTERNALLY DISPLACED

While the United States has played an important role in improving relief operations over the past decade, it must now place special emphasis on protecting war-affected populations, especially internally displaced persons. The U.S. commitment to better security for relief workers and relief goods is clear. Less clear, or at least less reliable, is its commitment to physical protection of people receiving relief. While discomfort lingers in the humanitarian community over mixing human rights and humanitarian aid programs, and over using military and other security forces to enforce protection, the problem of the "well-fed dead" must be addressed.

Though not the only war-affected population, internally displaced persons have unique assistance and protection needs. Yet even though they

are often among the most vulnerable populations in conflict settings, they have not received the attention from donors that their number and plight demand. But without strong leadership and sufficient resources from the United States, local and international responses to internal displacement will remain inconsistent and inadequate. Today no U.S. financing, government entity, or authoritative policy document is exclusively dedicated to the problem of internal displacement.[70] Addressing the broader issue of protection will require a far more rigorous, systematic approach to internal displacement.

ADDRESSING OTHER EMERGING PRACTICES AND FUTURE TRENDS

The emerging practices and future trends outlined in this chapter point to a number of other clear directions for the United States:

- It should not only support NGO and UN initiatives to improve standards and accountability, it should insist on them (and link financial support to them). This strategy should be mirrored by internal reviews of U.S. accountability measures. At the extreme, the extensive review by the Netherlands of its role in the Srebrenica massacre should be taken to heart.[71]
- On the development side, the U.S. government should review all of its development programs with an eye toward creating a culture of "development for disaster prevention." For too long, development efforts have ignored the fact that they have often increased vulnerability to disaster, either through ignorance or misinformation.
- Reflecting the growing complexity of relief contexts and operations, USAID should expand its staff to include human rights experts, economists, and other social scientists to work alongside technicians on field-based disaster responses and in its headquarters and regional offices.

When should aid be ended? When it has the potential to do harm. But that does not mean doing nothing. As the United States learned in Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Angola, aid agencies have to ensure that food aid is not providing the wherewithal to fund the conflict or sustaining the conflict in other ways. And in the Rwanda genocide, donors supported refugee camps in Tanzania, Uganda, and (then) Zaire—camps that provided a haven for *genocidaires* and became sources of instability for

the fledgling government and the region. Aid clearly has to be conditional of the assurance that such insidious conditions do not exist.

The same is true for U.S. contributions to multilateral efforts. To deliver effective humanitarian aid in situations of chaos requires understanding the great operational constraints and the bureaucratic, security, and political subtleties. Overcoming those constraints and dealing with these subtleties demands leadership of the type the United States is equipped—and prepared—to give.

NOTES

1. IFRC 2001.
2. IFRC 2001.
3. Randel and German 2002. Official development assistance is money given by members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Members include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Commission for the European Union. ODA for humanitarian aid includes (but is not limited to) food aid, and aid to refugees abroad and in the donor countries for their first year of assistance. This latter piece distorts the statistics somewhat since some of the funds counted are spent in donor countries. See ODI report for fuller discussion of what is comprised in the humanitarian assistance statistics. The dollar figures are in 1999 prices and exchange rates.
4. IFRC 2001.
5. IFRC 2001.
6. Abramovitz 2001.
7. OFDA 2000.
8. OFDA 1998.
9. Abramovitz 2001.
10. IFRC 2001.
11. Christie and Hanlon 2001.
12. OFDA 2000.
13. IFRC 2001.
14. Olson 2001, p. 1, 6.
15. NIC 1999. NIC used a combination of USAID and UN data. USAID assistance is triggered by a formal "declaration of disaster" by the U.S. Ambassador or the U.S. Department of State. Thus, the reference to "declared" emergencies.
16. USCR 2001.
17. NIC 1999.
18. USCR 2001.
19. Deng and Cohen 1998.
20. USCR 2001.
21. Deng and Cohen 1998. Consider, for example, Iraq and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the international community created "safe havens" to protect and aid people within their own countries and limit refugee flows.
22. Randel and German 2002.
23. Randel and German 2002.
24. UNHCR 2000.
25. Randel and German 2002.
26. Randel and German 2002.
27. WFP 2002.
28. Randel and German 2002.
29. IFRC 2001.

30. NIC 1999.

31. Macrae and Leader 2001.

32. Kracht 2000.

33. Concurrent natural disasters often exacerbate conflicts, with food insecurity at times so severe that widespread malnutrition and famine result, as in Somalia in 1992 and Sudan in 1998.

34. For a discussion of this issue see Lautze, Jones, and Duffield (1998).

35. Weiss 1999.

36. Duffield 2001.

37. Stoddard 2002.

38. For more information on this trend, see Randel and German 2002.

39. Finucane 1999.

40. UNHCR 2000.

41. Kaldor 2001.

42. Weiss 1999.

43. Kaldor 2001.

44. OECD 1998.

45. Kaldor 2001.

46. UNHCR 2000.

47. DeMars 2000.

48. See for example, Anderson (1999), Prendergast (1996), and Macrae and Zwi (1994).

49. Anderson 1995.

50. Minear 2001, pp. 70–71.

51. Natsios 1997.

52. The Sphere Project 2000.

53. For more information, see the following websites: http://www.oneworld.org/ombudsman and www.hapgeneva.org.

54. Kunder 1999.

55. NIC 2000.

56. Macrae 2002.

57. Minear and Weiss 1995.

58. Natsios 1997.

59. Cuny 1983.

60. Lewis 1999, p. 129.

61. Lewis 1999, p. 130.

62. UN 2001.

63. Kent 1997.

64. Kent 1997.

65. Kent 2001.

66. Minear and Weiss 1995.

67. Borton and Tanner 2001.

68. Borton and Tanner 2001.

69. The phrase "cure all" humanitarianism is drawn from Minear and Weiss (1995).

70. Kunder 1999.

71. Samantha Power, "Bystanders to Murder," *The Washington Post*, 21 April 2002, p. B7.

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