Article

The (de)Militarization of Humanitarian Aid: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract: Humanitarian workers often complain that international aid to victims of armed conflicts is more and more militarized because relief organizations are embedded into peacekeeping operations, used as a "force multiplier", or manipulated as an instrument of diplomacy by proxy. Historically, however, charity has always been a military issue in times of war. We can distinguish four types of militarization of relief organizations in this regard. First is the use of charities to make "war by proxy", as in Afghanistan or Nicaragua in the 1980s. The second pattern is "embedment", like the Red Cross during the two world wars. The third is "self-defense", as with the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem (now Malta) in the 12th Century. The fourth, finally, is the model of "International Brigades" alongside the Spanish Republicans in 1936 or various liberation movements in the 1970s. In comparison, humanitarian aid today appears to be much less militarized. However, this perception also depends on the various definitions of the word "humanitarian".

1. Introduction

Syria, Mali, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo: in war-torn countries, humanitarian workers often complain that international aid is more and more militarized. Relief organizations, they allege, are embedded into peacekeeping operations, used as a "force multiplier", or manipulated as an instrument of diplomacy by proxy. In addition, some armies provide humanitarian assistance and blur the line between civilian and military aid. In Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s, for instance, there were many controversies regarding the role of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams introduced by the United States government and led by military officers to achieve quick development

projects. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the United Nations also tried to use relief NGOs to complement peacekeeping and win the hearts and minds of the population. As for the European Union, the coordinator of its Counter-Terrorism Policy suggested in 2013 to employ young Muslim immigrants in humanitarian projects to avoid them being tempted to fight and join the jihad in Syria [1].

Undoubtedly, the distribution and the targeting of relief are very political in war-torn countries. However, are they really more militarized since the end of the cold war or the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001? A historical perspective shows that the embedment of relief organizations is actually quite old [2]. During World War One, for instance, private humanitarian volunteers of the Red Cross, the YMCA, the Salvation Army and the Quakers were under the authority of the military command and had to wear uniforms. In comparison, the civilian personnel of Doctors without Border (MSF) or Save the Children today appear to be relatively demilitarized, even in Afghanistan and Iraq. By the same token, the alleged militarization of humanitarian organizations is often portrayed as a result of coercion, governmental manipulation, or financial pressure, even if, historically, the use of force was sometimes advocated by relief workers to save lives or to defend themselves.

This article thus shows that humanitarian aid to war victims, as we usually understand it since the foundation of the International Red Cross in 1863, was always intermingled with military issues. The differences observed in the course of time depended on the specificities of the local context before and after the institutionalization of NGOs by the United Nations in 1945. "Militarization" referred to various patterns. A classic one was the "top-down" embedment of relief organizations into armies or armed struggle movements. Some charities also took side and supported one of the belligerents. In another "bottom-up" model, they resorted to force to protect their volunteers, or they advocated a military intervention to save lives. At the end of the cold war, however, their militarization took new forms that were perceived as unique despite historical evidence about such a process on the long run.

Analyzed in the first part of the article, current views on the issue need to be put into perspective. The three following parts identify the main patterns of the militarization of humanitarian aid in History: governmental manipulation, embedment, self-defense, and political commitment. Taking examples of relief organizations that advocate the use of force to save lives or support an armed struggle, I also show that this militarization can be voluntary. I finally argue that there is no universal consensus on a proper definition of the humanitarian sphere to restrict its activities and severe all links with the military domain.

2. Current Views on Militarization

Several factors now frame current narratives on the militarization of humanitarian aid. A first one pertains to the persistence of armed conflicts that do not reflect anymore an ideological opposition between the East and the West. Paradigms changed. Analysts depoliticized armed struggles and insisted on the criminalization of civil wars in the context of failing states. "New wars", as they perceived them, were allegedly more chaotic and defined as "internal armed conflicts primarily waged by non-state actors who subsist on illicit and parasitic economic behavior, use small arms or other low-technology hardware, and largely prey on and victimize civilians" [3]. In the same vein, emergencies suddenly became "protracted" and "complex", meaning they could not be explained properly. As for combatants, they were supposedly motivated by greed only, not by genuine political grievances. They looted aid and paid no more respect to the International Humanitarian Law. According to Kurt Mills, for instance, the

Red Cross principles of humanity, neutrality and non-discrimination were overwhelmed and lost [4]. Attacks against humanitarian workers were on the rise. Relief organizations could not operate like before and had to seek military assistance, pay bodyguards or contract private security firms to protect their staff and their assets [5,6].

The shock of 9/11 also played a role. Conventional wisdom suggests that war on terrorism exacerbated the militarization of humanitarian aid, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq where the fight against poverty was understood as a way to prevent jihad, export Western democratic norms and make the U.S. occupation acceptable [7]. The British in Malaysia, the French in Algeria and the Americans in Vietnam had already attempted to use humanitarian relief to "win the hearts and minds" of the people. However, it is now alleged that since 9/11, the security-development nexus became so systematic that it is no longer comparable to the old counterinsurgency strategies of the cold war. As a result, military interferences rose and both the civil society and humanitarian NGOs were seen with suspicion [8].

Another factor was the multiplication of peacekeeping operations after the end of the cold war. Such interventions were often labeled "humanitarian" [9,10]. Hence they brought back into force the old problem of the relationship between relief organizations and the military [11]. The former complained that their integration into peacekeeping operations could compromise their neutrality, their security, and the access to victims [12,13]. Statistics actually showed that the risk of an attack was higher when humanitarian workers crossed a frontline or attempted to help all sides [14]. Insecurity was not worse when they intervened together with a peacekeeping operation, precisely because the mandate of peacekeepers was often to protect relief organizations [15]. To many relief workers, though, a humanitarian "license to kill" was a moral oxymoron and a source of confusion. Undoubtedly, peacekeepers shared a common objective: to save lives and alleviate the suffering of civilians. Unlike relief organizations that reacted to emergencies, however, peacekeepers tended to work on the long term in order to rebuild failed states and reconstruct war-torn societies [16]. As their mandate got more robust, peacekeeping operations extended their activities in the political sphere: they attempted to export democratic norms and became an instrument of soft power. Sometimes, the humanitarian responsibility to protect was even used to justify toppling a dictatorship, as in Libya in 2011 [17,18].

In this regard, many relief workers complained about a politicization of peacekeeping as well as a militarization of aid. The famous UN resolution on the R2P (Responsibility to Protect), they alleged, was a game of hypocrites. In theory, it relied on the principles of sovereignty and subsidiarity to justify a military intervention of the international community only when a state could not properly handle a crisis. However, in practice, it entailed political reform and a change of regime when a government was not able or not willing to stop massacres on its own territory. In his proposal to standardize "military humanitarian" interventions, Robert Pape even suggested a de facto territorial secession to separate the perpetrator and the victims, whether in Kosovo or Iraq Kurdistan [19]. He indeed claimed that partition was likely to solve conflicts and result in peace and democracy if implemented fully through the creation of separate sovereign states [20]. His refashioned R2P could thus promote struggle for independence, at the risk of fostering ethnic cleansing and segregation.

3. Old Wine, New Bottles

Current controversies on the use of force to save lives are not new, however. Historically, the debate has been going on for centuries. As it involved strangers, it was not simply a matter of self-defense. The issue of killing in the name of humanity opposed jurists regarding the *jus ad bellum* and the *jus in bello*, as well as religious scholars about the "right" to intervene in a "just war" (the good against the powers of evil) and the "duty" to intervene in a "holy war" (during a crusade). In practice, saving the lives of strangers sometimes justified the use of force. In the 19th Century, India and Africa were colonized to combat famine or slavery. The Ottoman Empire was also targeted to prevent massacres of Christians. Yet the "humanitarian" military interventions of superpowers in the Balkans were as much contested as in Libya in 2011. In 1877, for instance, the British press criticized the Russian expedition to assist Christian Bulgarian freedom fighters against their Turkish Muslim oppressors because the fighting killed 80,000 people and caused more victims than the massacres it was supposed to prevent [21].

The end of the 19th Century is quite instructive in this regard. Indeed, humanitarian aid and law first targeted soldiers, not civilians [22]. Dealing with the *jus in bello*, the Geneva Convention of 1864 was signed when several crises blurred the line between relief and military rescue to save lives, a matter that pertained to the *jus ad bellum*. In England, the term "humanitarian intervention" was introduced in 1880 [23]. At that time, some volunteers crossed the Rubicon. During the Balkan Wars of 1875–1878, for instance, a British by the name of James Lewis Farley established a relief fund to help Christians and ended up supplying weapons to Serbian rebels who fought against the Ottoman troops [24]. As for Charles Ryan, an English surgeon who worked for the Red Cross, he chose the other side and joined the Turkish Army at Plevna in 1877 [25]. To them, providing medicine was not enough to save lives: the victims also needed a military rescue, or "*intervention d'humanité*" in French, a prelude to the debate going on about Bosnia in 1995 or Syria since 2011.

At the time, decision makers thought it made sense to mix military assistance and civilian relief. The two went together when international aid was formalized and modernized after the Second World War. In Western Europe, they aimed both to contain the communist threat and rebuild war-torn countries. Grouped in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), the main donors did not distinguish between the two. In developing countries, medical and food aid were also used to win the hearts and minds of the people in asymmetric wars that opposed imperialist powers to liberation movements: the British in Malaysia or the Dutch in Indonesia in 1948–1949, the French in Algeria from 1954 and the Americans in Vietnam from 1964. These psychological tools were integrated in the manuals of guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency [26,27].

In other words, war on terrorism was definitely not the first attempt to use humanitarian aid for strategic purposes. Neither was it the first attempt to control charities, as Jude Howell and Jeremy Lind have claimed [28]. During the cold war, for instance, the British government of Margaret Thatcher threatened to cancel the charitable status and tax exemptions of relief NGOs that supported "terrorist" armed struggle movements against apartheid in Southern Africa. Likewise in Vietnam, the U.S. forbade aid to the Communist North and intimidated American private voluntary organizations that were suspected to assist the Vietcong guerrilla in the South. Instead, they established GONGOs (Governmental Non-Governmental Organizations) to back "freedom fighters" against "communist dictatorships" in Afghanistan or Nicaragua [29]. Under the disguise of relief, the non-military aid of

some American NGOs thus facilitated the work of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) to feed and train "friendly" guerrillas.

During the Reagan Republican administration, especially, these organizations helped the Contras to buy weapons, pay combatants and lobby their case in the U.S. to carry on fighting the socialist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. In a report dated 18th April 1985, the Congress parliamentary group on foreign policy thus investigated twenty-or-so "humanitarian" American NGOs and showed that most of them were involved in some form of military assistance to the Contras. Launched in September 1984 by True Davis, the Nicaraguan Refugee Fund was an offshoot of the Human Development Foundation, an establishment based in Miami and financed by the CIA from Panama. As for the CAUSA (Confederation of Associations for the Unity of the Societies of America), it was set up in 1980 by two former employees of the South Korean Central Intelligence Agency: Kim Sang In, an agent in Mexico, and Colonel Bo Hi Pak, top deputy to the Reverend Sun Myung Moon. Such NGOs were usually the creations of conservative networks both within and outside the American administration. Under the aegis of the USCWF (United States Council for World Freedom) and the WACL (World Anti-Communist League), for example, the IRIS (Institute for Regional and International Studies) was designed in 1984 as a tax-exempted educational establishment to replace the U.S. Police Academy and train the Contras and El-Salvador security forces to intelligence and psychological warfare.

4. Two Regular Patterns of Militarization: War by Proxy and Embedment

Humanitarian aid to victims of armed conflicts has thus always been a military issue, whether during the cold war or the period that followed the first Geneva Convention of 1864. In the 1990s, there was a relative normalization of the involvement of military actors in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, but nothing really new as such. Historically, the differences had more to do with norms and practices indeed. We can distinguish four types of militarization of charities in this regard. First is the "war by proxy", as in Afghanistan or Nicaragua in the 1980s. The second pattern is "embedment", like the Red Cross during the two world wars. The third is "self-defense", as with the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem (now Malta) in the 12th Century. The fourth, finally, is the model of "International Brigades" alongside the Spanish Republicans in 1936 or various liberation movements in the 1970s. From the funder and state perspective, the pattern depends a lot on the direct involvement of the donor country in the hostilities. Whenever it was the case, relief organizations were embedded into the military to rescue their nationals or win the hearts and minds of the people of occupied territories. If not, they were often used to make war by proxy and assist friendly armies or guerrillas. From the perspective of relief organizations, however, it also depends on circumstances. Insecurity sometimes compelled relief workers to resort to force to defend themselves; or political leaning pushed some NGOs to take side in a conflict.

A brief review of these four patterns show how deeply military issues are entrenched into humanitarian aid for war victims. A lot has already been written on the embedment of charities during the two world wars. According to Robert DeChaine, the French doctors of MSF (*Médecins sans frontières*), which was created in 1971, were actually the first non-military medical emergency NGO to assist directly war victims on the battlefront [30]. Before that, the national societies of the Red Cross were fully embedded in the armies of their government, especially during World War One [31]. Other

charities followed the same pattern, as with the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), the Salvation Army, and even pacifist Quakers in the U.S. and the UK. In Russia, for instance, provincial municipalities did set up a general organization of local governments (*zemstvos*) to send medical teams in Manchuria and assist soldiers injured during the fighting against Japan in 1904. This public initiative was placed under the aegis of the Russian Red Cross, a supposedly private charity which tried to compensate with new resources its lack of popularity and its poor performance. Funded by the government, the *zemstvos* then contributed to assist the victims of a famine in 1906–1907. However, their success seemed to challenge the tsarist regime, which did not invite them to deliver aid during another food crisis in 1911–1912.

Just before the First World War in 1914, the general organization of the *zemstvos* was thus split in two separate Unions, one for the cities, the other for the injured and sick soldiers [32,33]. From a military point of view, their task was to evacuate the war-wounded from the battlefield and assist civilians near the frontline. Set up in 1915, the joint organization of these two Unions, Zemgor, was also to supply the Russian Army with tents, clothes and ammunitions manufactured by some 100,000 employees. In the same vein, it had to build roads and trenches, or dismantle factories on the verge of being captured by the German troops. The Russian military command appreciated Zemgor because it was more efficient than civilian authorities. Moreover, the leaders of Zemgor were quite happy with being embedded: they were "part and parcel of the army", as one of them stated proudly in 1916 ([32], p. 684). Actually, they were so close to the military command that the tsarist regime became suspicious. The Unions of the *zemstvos*, in particular, had a reputation for being liberal and reformist. Its social activities helped the monarchy to contain the grievances of internally displaced people. However, its programs were eventually centralized by the government in 1916 and dismantled by the Bolsheviks after the Revolution of 1917.

The embedment of a charity in a governmental army was thus a standard pattern during the two world wars. However, the phenomenon was not limited to regular forces. It also involved insurgent groups. As soon as the 1870s in the Balkans, for instance, various "freedom fighters" did set up their own Red Cross to relay their claim for independence. Since then, many "professionalized" guerrillas established relief departments in developing countries to channel international aid, supply logistics for the armed struggle, mobilize the population through community programs, improve public relations with the media, facilitate communication with western NGOs, and legitimize their rebellion. During the last three decades, this was the case of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) with the TRO (Tamil Rehabilitation Organization), the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army) with the SRRC (Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission), the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) with the ERA (Eritrean Relief Association), the TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front) with the REST (Relief Society of Tigray), *etc*.

All these "charities" usually had offices in neighboring countries or abroad to play a diplomatic role as the informal embassies of underground movements. Differences touched upon their development and their humanitarian performance. The SRRC was known to be just a conduct to divert international aid in Southern Sudan, whereas the ERA had a reputation for doing a good work amongst war-torn communities in the liberated areas of Eritrea. Unlike "offshoots" that were directly created by liberation fronts to relay a political cause, some charities were also set up before the guerrilla movement they were to support, like Ufo with the SNM (Somali National Movement) or the RRWF (Rwandese Refugee Welfare Foundation) with the FPR (*Front patriotique rwandais*) in the 1980s. Some of these NGOs

eventually became official governmental relief departments when the rebels came to power, as in Eritrea in 1991 or Southern Sudan in 2005.

5. Other Patterns of Militarization: Self-Defence and International Brigades

As mentioned earlier, the embedment of a charity in an army or a guerrilla movement has not been the only pattern of militarization of humanitarian aid. Sometimes, insecurity also compelled relief workers to resort to force to defend themselves. Historically, the Order of Malta is a textbook case of such a militarization. Born in 1113 as a catholic charity to provide care for poor and the sick in the Hospital of Jerusalem, it quickly evolved into an order of chivalry and built its own castles in the Holy Land. Actually, it did not resort to force only to protect its charitable activities. Hence its knights fought several wars with crusaders until they were expelled from their last stronghold in Palestine in 1291. Resettled in the island of Rhodes in 1310, they built a powerful naval force and sailed the eastern Mediterranean Sea, winning many famous battles for the sake of Christendom. Defeated by the Turks in 1523, they moved again, this time to the island of Malta. After surrendering their territory to the French revolutionary army in 1798, they settled definitively in Rome, where the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem kept its extraterritorial status but lost its military character and eventually came back to its first mission: charity, instead of security and protection.

Obviously, the story of the Knights of Malta is quite exceptional. It seldom happens that a humanitarian NGO becomes an army in itself! By contrast, however, the political leaning of some relief workers that take side in a conflict is much more frequent [34]. In this case, "humanitarian" organizations follow the model of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War in 1936. They help one side only and mix relief operations with strategic and military support. Here the ambiguity of the meaning of the word "solidarity" comes in full force. From humanitarian aid to political involvement, NPA (Norwegian People's Aid) illustrates this quite well. Based in Oslo and established in 1939 by the Labour movement, *Norsk Folkehjelp* originates from trade unions and a comity created in 1936 to help Spanish Republicans. Today, NPA operates in many countries and openly admits that it doesn't believe in humanitarian neutrality. According to one of its internal document, "it is not possible to be neutral if the organization is to work in areas of conflict. Not taking stand against oppression is also to take sides" [35]. Hence NPA was nicknamed "Norwegian People's Army" for it openly supported the Kurds in Iraq, the Tibetans in China, the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) in the Occupied Territories, the ANC (African National Congress) in South-Africa, the SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organisation) in Namibia, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the SPLA in Sudan and various political movements struggling against conservative dictatorships in South America in the 1970s.

Regarding humanitarian performance, this position has the advantage to facilitate access to guerrilla zones and to empower some communities. "Solidarity, as stated in the principles adopted by NPA's General Assembly in June 2003, is the opposite of charity. Whilst charity implies that the giver has control over the recipient, solidarity means showing respect for the partners' integrity and their right to set their own conditions". However, by so doing, NPA legitimized violence and political forces which were not necessarily representative of the people and could divert humanitarian aid to military ends, as in Sudan or Sri Lanka. In Southern Sudan, for instance, the planes it chartered supplied war material to the

rebels, including landmines, in contradiction with NPA's membership of the Co-ordinating Committee of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines [36].

Interestingly enough, such an ideological position does not always contradict the logics of embedment into the foreign policy of a donor country. Born in 1942, Oxfam (Oxford Famine Committee against Famine), for instance, was developed by Fabians socialists of the British Labour movement. Its political leaning in favor of Marxist liberation movements in Southern Africa, Nicaragua or Vietnam clearly embarrassed conservative governments in power in London, especially Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. However, it was sometimes a diplomatic asset too. In Kampuchea after the fall of Pol Pot in 1979, Oxfam thus played the role of an informal British Embassy in a country whose regime was not recognized by the international community. The first driver of this position, however, was ideological. In this regard, it was quite different from the structural embedment of American NGOS like CARE (Co-operative for American Relief Everywhere), which was set up in 1945 to ship out military surplus at the end of World War Two. CARE was always close to the U.S. government, whether Republican or Democrat. Due to its work in war-torn countries, it was a source of intelligence for diplomats. In Kosovo, for example, it signed an agreement with the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) to supply information about the Serb troops' movements, just before the military intervention of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in 1999.

This quick review of "humanitarian" organizations that take side in a conflict wouldn't be complete, however, if we did not consider religious NGOs that propagate radical ideologies and give funds or carry logistics linked to rebel movements. During the cold war, some Christian charities advocated the theology of liberation and supported insurgent groups in Latin America, Asia and Africa [37]. After 9/11, analysts focused more on "terrorist" Islamic NGOs that took side and tried to proselyte. Founded in Karachi in 1988 and based in Riyadh, the Al-Haramayn Islamic Foundation, for instance, supported Muslim radical groups in Somalia, Kenya, Bosnia and Chechnya. The propagation of Islam (*daawa*) was part and parcel of its mission. Moreover, its trans-national character was quite different from the "branches" of guerrillas, for Al-Haramayn was neither linked to a specific organization nor entrenched in a liberated zone. Accused of funding Al-Qaida, it was eventually dismantled in 2004.

6. Militarization: A Choice or a Constraint?

There are thus a wide variety of "humanitarian" NGOs that take side in an armed conflict: "covers" for dictatorships or terrorist groups; GONGOs that relay foreign policies; "offshoots" of rebel movements, political parties, business groups, trade unions, *etc.* For each case, the issue is to know if militarization is voluntary or not. It is certainly active when militant or dubious charities support a cause, a struggle or an ideology. Sometimes, humanitarian workers are embedded in an army because they freely want to, especially when their country is at war with another. However, the militarization process of relief can also be passive because of the way belligerents perceive and use local as well as foreign charities.

Typically, international aid supplies a war economy at three levels. At a first level, the most visible one, there is direct predation and hijacking by combatants: NGOs' vehicles are stolen, food warehouses looted, medicine stolen, refugee tents sold, humanitarian workers protected for money or abducted and released for a ransom, *etc*. At a second, more subtle, level, one can find the side effects of international

aid. In economies where resources are scarce, NGOs rent houses, employ locals, pay customs duties to authoritarian regimes, "buy" the agreement of warlords with baksheesh, and feed a population wholly engaged in civil wars. At a third level, finally, the injection of humanitarian funds and logistics in a conflict allows local resources to be invested in the fight, leaving to NGOs the provision of basic public services. Money is the nerve of war and the introduction of aid resources in a conflict widens the field of competition and predation. This is the main challenge that humanitarian organizations are confronted with.

Hence a difference must be made between ideological involvement and the impossible political neutrality of a relief NGO in the field. Let us clarify. Ideological neutrality consists in not showing an "a priori" position before intervening in a war-torn country. Once operational in the field, political neutrality consists in not taking position for one side of the conflict. In practice, such an objective often remains wishful thinking since aid infringes the dynamics of war. Used for ethnic cleansing or military victory, hunger can be a weapon. As a result, food aid delivered to one side is seen by the other as taking a position. There are two humanitarian strategies in this regard. The first one aims at supplying "equally" each of the parties of a conflict, even if it implies giving assistance according to the military balance rather than actual needs. The ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) typically advocates this option to have a good national coverage of countries like Sudan or Somalia, where it gained a reputation of impartiality in the 1980s and 1990s, yet had to feed populations that were not always starving. On the contrary, another strategy, less costly for smaller NGOs, consists in trying to satisfy the victims' needs according to available assessments, at the risk of being perceived as politicized by the parties who don't get assistance.

Of course, the military implications of aid in war-torn countries do not mean that all relief organizations freely accept to be militarized. Actually, many volunteers would certainly contest the humanitarian character of NGOs that take side in a conflict and support armed struggle. They would probably claim that the Russian Zemstvo, the Catholic Order of Malta or the Saudi Al-Haramayn Islamic Foundation were so politically engaged that their mandate was out of bounds, contradicting the Red Cross principles of non-discrimination and non-violence. Historically, it also happened that some charities refused to be labeled "humanitarian", whether because it concealed their spirituality, as with the American Quakers, or because they refused to remain neutral and preferred to support the struggles of the poor, as with the French CCFD (*Comité catholique contre la faim et pour le développement*). In any case, the issue highlights the lack of universal understanding of the word "humanitarian".

7. Conclusions: What is Humanitarian?

This article has thus shown that contemporary views on a unique militarization of aid to the victims of armed conflicts are not supported by historical evidence. The use of force to save lives or fight a just war is a very old debate that has shaped the development of the humanitarian industry. It is neither new nor peculiar to the post cold war period. Today, there is still no standard and no consensual certification process of what a "good" relief NGO should be. From voluntary international brigades to profit-making humanitarian mercenaries, there is no international law forbidding the confusion between assistance, human security and the use of force. Even private security firms now have their own relief department. In Iraq, for instance, the famous company of Tim Spicer, AEGIS (formerly Sandline), did set up a foundation to win the hearts and minds of the population and to carry out Civil Affairs Program for the

Gulf Region Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. To ban these activities abroad would be extremely difficult. In the UK, the Foreign Office had to give up the idea because it would have been almost impossible to prove a direct participation to the fighting, let alone logistical support to an "army" and its medical services. Otherwise, the authorities would have to ban the ICRC or MSF since they also take care of combatants, and not only civilians.

As the oldest "modern" humanitarian organization worldwide, the ICRC is a reference in the matter because its mandate covers the promotion of the Geneva Conventions. It was thus used as a standard by the International Court of Justice to rule that the U.S. support to the Contras was not humanitarian. Yet the Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies have a military status since they are the official auxiliaries of their government's army. Moreover, the unintended consequences of international aid in civil war economies are a regular problem that sustained the conflicts in Biafra in the 1960s, Cambodia in the 1970s, Afghanistan in the 1980s, Somalia and Southern Sudan in the 1990s, Iraq in the 2000s, *etc*. In practice, it is very difficult to differentiate between humanitarian assistance and incitement to violence through logistical support or lobbying. To assess the political neutrality or the ideological involvement of an NGO is quite subjective in this regard, depending a lot on various points of view. This leaves us with much room to appraise all the meanings of the word "humanitarian action".

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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