

HUMANITARIAN AID AND INTERVENTION:
THE CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION

The Value of Integration: A U.S. Perspective

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The integration of humanitarian action into intervention operations, and particularly the inclusion of a military component, carries risks—but none so great as to be worth sacrificing integration on the altar of humanitarian purity. As in the case of Iraq in the first, emergency phase of an operation, humanitarian teams working closely with the combat troops can greatly reduce civilian suffering caused by shock, displacement, and lack of access to necessities of daily life. In the transition phase, as the military begins to turn over power to an independent political authority, integration of development teams is likewise important. Integration in the interest of humanity is no vice. Humanitarian exclusivity in the interest of purity is no virtue.

The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the State Department is multilateralist in its approach to humanitarian action—because it works. It works for financial burden sharing because UN consolidated appeals permit the U.S. taxpayer to bear only 25 percent of worldwide refugee program costs—as opposed to 85 to 100 percent were we to act unilaterally. Multilateralism also works better for the victims of complex emergencies. This is possible because serious UN supporters such as our part of the State Department understand how to get effective performance out of all

actors in the multilateral humanitarian system. We do it with discreet diplomacy. We do it with daily intensive engagement and monitoring in Washington and at multilateral headquarters, such as in New York and Geneva, and wherever the United Nations is engaged in the field. We do it with almost weekly phone calls to UN principals. And we work hard to get the best people to fill senior UN posts. By tying in to the tested competencies of the United Nations, the United States can accomplish its humanitarian objectives with smaller government and less spending than were we to go it alone, while having access to more economic resources that help to ensure that our operations have successful outcomes.

These multilateral practices place us in stark contrast with the unilateralism of key European humanitarian actors. The European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), for example, delivers approximately 75 percent of its financial contributions for refugees unilaterally through European NGOs. Only 25 percent of ECHO's refugee funding goes multilaterally through the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the agency mandated internationally with the protection of and assistance to refugees. ECHO, or any other organization trying to do refugee protection and assistance on its own, is in

effect trying to “play” the UN and UNHCR. By disbursing funds unilaterally to organizations that lack a protection mandate (perhaps as a result of the strong lobbying pressure by European NGOs to receive funds directly), ECHO is missing an important concept: the inseparability of assistance and protection. U.S. multilateralism not only ties in to the burden-sharing economies and the operational competencies of the UN system; it also permits the integration and unity of effort possible through the mutual reinforcement and interoperability of UN agencies. It is the effectiveness and self-interest benefits of multilateral action that drive and define the approach I take to integration in humanitarian action.

We approach integration in terms of the various components of the total civil-military effort: political, security, humanitarian, and development—plus human rights as a vital part of the humanitarian component—executed by various players operating under their mandates and according to their competencies. Political players are, of course, state governments, and the security players include the police force and international military force. The humanitarian component is centered on the four operating agencies of the United Nations—UNHCR, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR). This component receives strong support from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and from non-UN organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The development component includes UNDP, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and the World Bank and regional development banks. From my standpoint as a practitioner, I

believe there are five major principles and corresponding mechanisms necessary to achieve effective integration among the players of these four principled components.

COMPREHENSIVE MISSION PLANNING

The military is very good at campaign planning—from the advance stages to the in-progress adjustment. But what military persons are not good at—and nobody is good at—is comprehensive campaign planning. By this I mean the planning and integration of security, emergency response, military-to-civilian transition, development, and reconstruction elements—the elements that span the entire life cycle of a campaign. We call it political-military planning; humanitarians prefer to call it political-military-humanitarian planning. The value of comprehensive planning is that it provides a vehicle to include and orchestrate all of the essential actors, a process that begins with their participation in planning the mission and continues with the development of a range of specified and implied tasks that security forces could be called on to provide in support of civilian emergency response and reconstruction efforts. Comprehensive planning becomes a “software program” of the critical path from the start to the desired end of a complex contingency operation that permits the positioning of each key player at both the point and the time they must appear to achieve an integrated operation.

Such planning is indispensable but seldom used in actual practice. Presidential Determination 56 under President Clinton mandated the creation of a political-military plan for any major complex contingency operation. But we have never man-

aged to produce a political-military plan in time for actual effect on and benefit to operations in the field. The plans that have been written have always been late. Domestically, they have tended to reflect an interagency least common denominator and fall short in terms of clarity and adequate provision for each phase of a complex contingency operation. These are the challenges of effective integration: trying to clear a plan in an interagency process as complex as the one in Washington is a Herculean task; taking into account the interests of the players in the international system and the United Nations makes it nearly impossible to reach agreement on a plan.

It is also necessary that civilian planners and all other key civilian players give military planners their input regarding the expected political, economic, and especially humanitarian impact during the military's mission planning process, which is a component of the comprehensive campaign planning. We also need to look at ways to improve communication with outside players that can provide useful input into planning a U.S. mission: the UN member governments and agencies and the NGOs.

The lack of precedents and guidelines for comprehensive mission planning make it a daunting exercise. Nevertheless, there is potential value even in the process of comprehensive planning: it is needed to extrude civilian planners through the same planning rigor that military persons take for granted and to help avoid some of the major oversights and miscalculations by both civilian and military planners in past contingency operations and interventions. For example, going into Bosnia in 1992 without a comprehensive plan obscured a lack of preparedness to do civil policing and human rights monitoring and to bring minority refugees and internally displaced persons back to

their homes. Similar omissions occurred with respect to Iraq, in which case the assumptions about popular Iraqi support for the campaign and the time it would take to establish effective local public safety elements proved faulty.

With such considerations in mind, I ask our bureau staff to write a comprehensive campaign plan for the major emergencies, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq. Even if it doesn't result in an official doctrine or a common statement of purpose or plan on the part of the U.S. government as a whole, undertaking these exercises is valuable for prioritizing our own resources and exercising a serious strategic role with respect to other colleagues at the State Department, the other institutions of the U.S. government, and the international community. The results of this process for Afghanistan permitted the United States to benefit early on from the role of the United Nations and to transition effectively from military operations to the establishment of a local political authority. The process also pinpointed the difficulties in achieving synergy among public safety structures, the justice system, and mechanisms for monitoring human rights. Being aware of those difficulties allowed us to take measures to overcome them, which laid the foundation for nation building by achieving an exceptionally successful transition between the fundamental stages that ultimately led to local rule.

The fundamental stages of the planning for Afghanistan were building capacity in Afghan ministries in terms of staffing and infrastructure and then assisting the ministries to plan, program, budget for, and administer public services. There has been a lot of superficial and ill-considered criticism of how things have worked out in the case of Afghanistan. In my view, the glass is far more than half full. Nearly three million

Afghans have been able to return from abroad, and about half a million internally displaced persons have gone back to their home areas. The importance of such returns should not be underestimated, as indeed Afghanistan's foreign minister Abdullah noted: "Refugee and IDP returns are not just distractions on the way to reconstruction; refugee returns are reconstruction." The United Nations has played a vital role in the transition from the military operation to continuing the humanitarian and public services work that it had performed for years while the Taliban were in power. While initially it took charge of implementing public service duties through the Program Secretariat Process, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan was able to transfer the governance processes of planning, programming, and eventually budgeting to the Afghan authority relatively quickly.

When I was in Afghanistan in July 2002, I was struck by the potential of this process. Hence, I was convinced that it was imperative to neutralize the opposition to it that came, unfortunately, from some of the senior leaders in the Afghan government. There was also the need to counter a strong anti-humanitarian mentality, as well as an anti-UN mentality, at the top of the Afghan government, in order to derive the maximum benefit for Afghanistan's reconstruction. We undertook forceful private interventions with senior Afghan leaders, who needed to become aware that initially donors had less confidence in Afghan ministries than in UN agencies. Serious Afghan watchers began to see the shift in Kabul from criticizing humanitarian action and complaining about the "high overhead" costs of UN and NGOs' personnel (many of whom enjoyed higher salaries and more comfortable living conditions than Afghan public officials), to critically recognizing and

applauding the vital contribution of humanitarian action and international organizations and NGOs.

This effort, springing from the State Department, paid off. The Afghan transition experience stands as a model for the vital role the United Nations can play in most nation-building situations, acting as an essential "halfway house" in the postconflict phase by simultaneously delivering governmental services and transferring those responsibilities as rapidly as possible to local authorities.

HUMANITARIAN IMPACT STATEMENT

Evaluating the humanitarian impact of actions taken or forgone is vital for effective integration. Five examples of recent policies underline the importance of evaluating humanitarian impact.

First, the failure to assess in the early 1990s the impact of not acting in the Balkans was a factor in the resulting ethnic cleansing. It should have been apparent to everyone that we could not afford a second Holocaust in the twentieth century and that we would need to act quickly to avoid it.

Second, in the summer of 1995, a few humanitarians were warning that the pending invasion by the Croatian army to "ethnically cleanse" the Serb-populated Croatian region of Krajina would result in the displacement of 150,000 people and that the UNHCR must be prepared to deliver relief articles. That impact was never calculated or operationalized in the policy decisions of major donor countries. Rather, the key people in charge—they included both American and German officials—focused on the advantages of using the invasion to readjust the map of Bosnia. The number of displaced civilians actually turned out to be much

greater than humanitarians had predicted—more than 200,000—most of whom still remain displaced.

Third, during the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, we witnessed how the lack of humanitarian assessment and not acting on intelligence leads resulted in massive movements of people. The U.S. officials and those of the other NATO governments committed a major mistake by not coordinating the air campaign plans with the UNHCR. There was a lot of criticism of the UNHCR for having performed in a substandard manner in the Kosovo operation. Undoubtedly, some of this criticism was justified. However, a significant responsibility rests heavily on the shoulders of the NATO governments who did not share the information with the UN agencies capable of acting on it, and those agencies who failed to calculate the inevitable negative humanitarian impact of not being prepared. When the bombing commenced and masses of people started to move, major donor states failed to contribute sufficient funds to the UNHCR, an accountable agency, so that it could respond adequately. When we feel invited to heap most of the blame on the United Nations, it is important to recall that we, the member governments, are the United Nations.

Fourth, the international response to the genocide in Rwanda that commenced on April 6, 1994, amounted to sleepwalking into an apocalypse that any observer could have predicted. There was a horrifying reluctance and state of denial on the part of the most important UN member states, including the United States. Similar failures at UN headquarters have been detailed in the inquiry commissioned by the United Nations.¹ The sequence of inaction, delayed action, and insufficient action resulted in the slaughter of 800,000 people. Official protests that little could have been done in practice or

apologies after the fact do little to wash the hands of those officials from whom much more was expected.

Finally, the crisis in Goma, Zaire, in July 1994 was a disaster whose advent was obvious when the million-person march from southwest Rwanda into eastern Zaire started. The French pulled out of Operation Turquoise, which provided counter-genocide protection for some million Hutus, on July 14, 1994 (ironically, Bastille Day). However unconscionable their pull-out, the French at least put the world on notice that they were going ahead with it. The humanitarian world, especially the UNHCR and the executive director of the World Food Programme, knew it was coming and that it would most likely result in a human catastrophe of biblical proportions. The common excuse for doing nothing was that the crisis was too big to handle. But what these humanitarian leaders neglected to acknowledge was that even biblical disasters could be alleviated by providing essential humanitarian supplies. The four-to-six-week warning period that the UNHCR and the World Food Programme had before this million-person march started offered time to plan for the first priority—water. There was even time to plan for the alleviation of food shortages already ravaging refugee pipelines in Africa to give at least some attention to the impending food needs around Goma. It was left to the Congressional Hunger Center, a nongovernmental organization based in the United States, to get the United States to do its part, and to get the United States to get the United Nations to pick up its responsibilities.

¹ Members of the Independent Inquiry, “Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Actions of the United Nations During the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” S/1999/1257, December 15, 1999; available at www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=S/1999/1257.

These haunting examples—and one could cite several others—suggest that unless government and UN policy-makers recognize the importance of heeding humanitarians’ warnings about impending human disasters through incorporating a humanitarian impact assessment as part of their policy decision procedures, the response to crises will remain inadequate. In turn, this implies that for an effective strategy of coherence in international humanitarian response, policy-makers must work closer with humanitarian bodies.

CIVIL-MILITARY PLANNING FOR SPECIFIED AND IMPLIED TASKS

This principle, although related to comprehensive civil-military mission planning, goes beyond it to the range of specified and implied tasks that military forces could be called upon to perform in support of the humanitarian or nation-building effort. This principle was practiced for the first time in Iraq in 2003. Well before the operation started, civilian planners worked together with military planners to lay out responsibilities for tasks and how to coordinate them.

For the Iraq humanitarian contingencies, this planning was quite thorough and comprehensive. U.S. civilian planners reached out early on to senior UN officials to attempt to reach a common understanding of likely contingencies and how to deal with them. Although these UN planners almost unanimously objected to the idea of any conflict in Iraq, the support that all the agencies’ heads—of the UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, as well as the UN emergency relief coordinator and the head of the task force in the United Nations, Deputy Secretary-General Louise Frechette—provided was magnificent. They did everything they could as

far as preparedness, pre-positioning, staffing, and financial contribution to prepare for, and prevent, a humanitarian crisis. Our bureau and USAID did everything in our delegated powers to make it work.

That kind of planning did, indeed, avert a humanitarian crisis in Iraq. But beyond this coordination at the top of the United Nations, there was a need to get input from individual UN agencies and from the NGOs on individual civilian and humanitarian measures that might require security from the coalition military forces. We received input from NGOs on the range of tasks they envisaged might be needed, and came up with a concrete list of specific tasks. We obtained similar input from UN operational agencies, which we then took to the military planners in Qatar and Kuwait to make them aware of the humanitarian community’s full range of concerns. A key event was missed—the looting of the Baghdad museum—although other agencies in charge of historical preservation foresaw it. The major omission, as we now realize, was the persistence and the intensity of the resistance of the Baathists and the Fedayeen. We foresaw the chaos, the lack of public safety, and the need for robust civilian policing linked to a justice system. We knew that shortfalls in these areas would produce major problems. Nevertheless, the preconflict planning must be credited with avoiding other major problems, most notably a humanitarian crisis that could otherwise have occurred at any stage during the period following major military operations.

PREDEPLOYMENT “HUDDLING”

It is vital to convene a predeployment workshop prior to intervention. The only precedent for this kind of predeployment “huddle” of all the players is the interactive,

participatory workshop that Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Martti Ahtisaari conducted for the UN Transition Assistance Group for Namibia prior to the civil-military deployment to that country in 1989. If Ahtisaari were asked today why this was one of the finest hours of the United Nations, he would answer that it was because we got the whole civil-military team together and discussed where each actor was supposed to be positioned in Namibia, what each actor's job was, who would be reporting to whom, and what mutual needs and expectations there might be. Ahtisaari attended every session during this two-week period, and used them to generate loyalty and esprit in the team and provide the best possible opportunity for the unity of effort. Such team building contributed enormously to the success of that operation. We should have done it for Afghanistan. For Iraq it was done through what the military calls a "rock drill," a huddling of key players, ideally before deployment, to assign roles and missions and identify gaps that could impede or deny success, as well as develop measures that could result in a higher probability of success. But the predeployment "rock drill" was very short. It did, indeed, identify critical gaps that could become significant obstacles but there was insufficient time to address them.

REAL-TIME POSTACTION REVIEW

Finally, there is need for all the key players to conduct individual and joint assessments of the progress of the operation as it unfolds from day to day. Such real-time assessments

permit greater optimization of the integrated approach because they suggest necessary adjustments—both civilian and military—to personnel, priorities, and procedures. The military does this—and, indeed, it did it in Iraq—and it credits much of its success to the rigor of this during-action review. There was no comparable civilian assessment conducted by the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Aid, headed by General Jay Garner (Ret.), or by the Coalition Provisional Authority, headed by Paul Bremer. Although admittedly hard to do, this kind of running assessment needs to go beyond the military to include the other parts of the operation so that adjustments can be made, particularly in the civil affairs, police, justice, human rights, and infrastructure areas.

The United States tries to make the different actors involved in humanitarian action—political, military, and humanitarian—accountable and to give them incentives consistent with the government's priorities and responsibilities to the American people. The United States uses—and urges other states to use—a system of close monitoring, both in headquarters and in the field. Diplomatic tactics usually work to these goals—we lavish public praise for good performance and private admonishment when operational improvements are needed. In one rare case of sustained poor performance (many years ago), we made it known that a UN official had lost the confidence of the United States and he was replaced. But in international diplomacy, we much prefer "face-saving" solutions where possible.