

The International Humanitarian Response System

ANDREW S. NATSIOS

© 1995 Andrew S. Natsios

The chaos spreading through many countries in the developing world has drawn together an unusual, sometimes incompatible, assortment of organizations to respond to these multiplying crises. Each year from 1978 to 1985 saw an average of five complex humanitarian emergencies, the term used in the disaster discipline for these crises; by contrast, there were 17 in 1992 and 20 in 1993.¹ The increase in these emergencies appears to be one of the few clear patterns in the new world order.

Were Harry Truman and George Marshall designing the Marshall Plan today, they would face a complex, sometimes bewildering international structure for implementing their strategy for rebuilding Europe. They might even think twice about whether or not to undertake the effort. Virtually the entire international response system is a post-World War II phenomenon; part of it was in its infancy, but most of it was not even conceived at the time of the Marshall Plan. To those of us who work in the relief discipline it seems a small miracle that the existing system works as well as it does, given the conflicting mandates of the responding organizations, the enormous complexity of the problems they address, and the organizational incongruities that have emerged in the years since the US helped Europe recover from World War II.

This article examines the existing humanitarian response system—made up of private voluntary organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and United Nations agencies—through which the international community responds to these emergencies. The article assesses the cultures and operational habits of this triad of organizations and the manner in which they

interact with each other. It then describes a civilian US government agency, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), in the Agency for International Development, which coordinates US responses to foreign disasters. Throughout, there are examples of how the US military fits into this complex system.

Private Voluntary Organizations

What we in the United States call a private voluntary organization (PVO) is known in Europe and the rest of the world as a non-governmental organization (NGO). As used in this essay, the term PVO describes private, non-profit organizations which specialize in humanitarian relief and development work in the Third World and increasingly in former communist countries. American PVOs employ hundreds of thousands of people in developing countries, have private revenue of \$4 billion and receive \$1.5 billion from USAID, and communicate with the public through newsletters and magazines whose aggregate circulation is in the millions.²

Most PVOs, private by charter, accept grants of federal money from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in order to carry out their work. For a PVO to remain eligible to receive such grants or food aid, it must by law raise at least 20 percent of its total income from private sources. While the proportion of a PVO's income from the US government, whether in the form of cash grants or food aid, varies according to its corporate strategy, some PVOs bump up against this 20 percent limit. A few PVOs accept no USAID money in order to maintain their distance from the US government, whose policies they may find objectionable.

This PVO suspicion of US government influence extends to work with the military. When President Bush ordered the US military to Kurdistan in June 1991, several PVOs, particularly European, refused to work cooperatively with them. Kurdistan became a seminal experience for American PVOs in their relationship with US forces, as it showed them they could work together productively in a humanitarian emergency, something that even organizations not opposed to US government policies or to close association with the US military had doubted.

Andrew S. Natsios (Lieutenant Colonel, USAR Ret.) is Vice President of World Vision U.S. and Executive Director of World Vision Relief and Development, the technical arm of World Vision U.S. From 1991 to 1993 he was Assistant Administrator of the Bureau of Food and Humanitarian Assistance in the US Agency for International Development; in that position he was appointed by President Bush as special coordinator of Somalia relief to manage US government relief efforts in the Somalia famine. In 1989-1991 he served in USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. In his Army Reserve capacity as a civil affairs officer he served during the Gulf War in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait City as executive officer of the Kuwait Task Force which planned for relief and reconstruction requirements post-liberation. In early 1993 he served on the Joint Staff at the Pentagon working on Somalia and Bosnia. He is a graduate of Georgetown University, holds an M.P.A. degree from Harvard, and from 1975 to 1987 was a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

To paraphrase Chester Barnard, the US military and American PVOs are unlike in every important way.³ Indeed, it's difficult to imagine two more dissimilar cultures. The former is highly disciplined, hierarchical, politically and culturally conservative, tough, with a mission to defeat the enemy. By and large, American PVOs are independent, resistant to authority, politically and culturally liberal (with the exception of some Christian PVOs), sensitive and understanding, with a mission to save lives. Because military missions tend to be explicit and tangible, the military sometimes misses the mark on humanitarian mission statements where objectives can be implicit and intangible.

Profile of a Culture

Any PVO reflects certain ideologies and organizational missions, to some degree based on the organization's private donor base and institutional history. Many are firmly on the ideological left; others are more centrist; still others are on the right. PVO comfort levels in dealing with the US military decline as one moves from right to left on that spectrum. PVOs tend to recruit former Peace Corps workers, religiously committed activists in the faith-based PVOs, and young people with graduate degrees in development economics and public health. Most recruits get the bulk of their operational training on the job; there are few equivalents to military doctrine or field manuals to describe how a particular activity or program is to be executed. Where PVO doctrine does exist it comes out of generally shared experiences and responses, is seldom written down, and is not always followed uniformly. Field experience in the culture of PVOs is comparable to combat experience in the military, a badge of honor, accorded the highest respect.

Conversely, nearly all PVOs share a devotion to the concept of sustainable development in any country or region in which they operate. They share an aversion to the quick fixes which they believe military operations tend to emphasize. Their own painful experience through four decades in the field teaches that real development is a slow, difficult process. One political value all PVOs share is a robust internationalism; there are no isolationists among these organizations.

The term private voluntary organization covers an array of organizations which help define PVO culture in all its color and complexity. PVOs may be divided into those which exclusively undertake advocacy work, attempting to influence public policy, and those which are primarily operational, managing projects in the field. Most large PVOs do both because they have realized that thoughtless or pernicious behavior, whether government policy, donor attitudes, or developing country demands, can quickly undo generally well-conceived and implemented community development work.

Advocacy and operational groups both have their weaknesses. PVOs which only advocate tend to have a limited understanding of field realities in the developing world. They tend to be governed by ideological preconcep-

tions rather than pragmatic appraisal of what works. PVOs that only operate in the field can go just so far in criticizing public policy before their workers and programs are threatened by government officials intolerant of those who examine and criticize government policies or behavior.

Some PVOs specialize by sector, such as health, education, or economic development. A few do only relief work, others only development. Some do both, particularly the larger PVOs such as Care, Catholic Relief Services, and World Vision, the three largest in the United States. Over the past decade a body of scholarship has developed which suggests that well-conceived relief work should be designed with developmental components and that good development work should include disaster prevention and mitigation measures to reduce the need for relief in disaster-prone areas. Agricultural development programs in drought-prone areas, for example, should include drought-resistant crop varieties and water conservation measures.⁴

Although most PVOs of US origin employ indigenous staff to manage their programs, some remain Western in their leadership, culture, and standards. In most developing countries there is an array of indigenously organized and managed PVOs which do relief and development work, sometimes forming partnerships with Western PVOs to meet common objectives. While many of these indigenous groups run fine programs, some are suspect in their operational capacity, professionalism, and accountability. Their reputation, good or ill, usually precedes them.

The comfortable assumption that Western PVOs can be trusted and indigenous PVOs cannot is both unfair and simplistic. Such an assumption, all too easy to make during planning, can endanger a mission if it is used to support operational decisions. In Somalia, the United Nations, and before it the United States, gave short shrift to Somali PVOs and leadership, with unfortunate consequences. When the battle was joined with General Aideed, Somali PVOs could have rallied support for the international presence in the country. Instead, the UN received little help from the more responsible elements of Somali society that were represented by local PVOs.

The fundraising imperative, which provides insight into their sometimes curious behavior, operates to some degree in all PVOs. PVOs must communicate with the American people either through electronic media or direct mail solicitation to raise funds. Research has shown that income increases significantly when purchased advertisements are combined with coverage of the PVO's work on national television and radio news programs. The more dramatic and heart-wrenching the scenes and reports of disaster in the developing world, the more income PVOs can expect from their solicitations.

One of the comparative standards against which PVOs are judged by the American news media is their overhead rate compared to the money they actually spend on programs in the field: the former should be as low and the latter as high as practicable. Obviously, their constituents would expect to see

some public recognition of the role they played as donors in media reports of the success of “their” PVO.

In spite of their non-profit nature, PVOs need to compete—perhaps less so than private businesses, but compete they must. The quality of their field programs affects their capacity to gather government grant funding, and their public visibility affects their private contributions.

All this is to say that the interest of PVOs in telling their stories to the news media is not so much a case of large ego (though that is sometimes there too), as it is of survival. When US government personnel take public credit for a response to a complex emergency, they ought to know that PVO teeth are grinding: an organization’s financial health can be affected by military or other government public affairs announcements. Conversely, a carefully tailored series of such announcements, emphasizing the teamwork involved in success, would go a long way to reassuring many PVOs and their members that young Americans, in and out of uniform, were together helping to alleviate suffering.

PVOs have chains of command just as the military does, though not as disciplined or explicit, and these chains of command inevitably contribute to tensions between PVO field staff and central staff in headquarters. When observers find differing policy or operational concepts within the same PVO, it is often because each level in the hierarchy responds to a different agenda and is under a different set of pressures. Headquarters must respond to donor concerns, budget limitations, and the worldwide institutional consequences of a given policy. The field staff focuses on the human need in a particular program in the villages, where they struggle daily to overcome operational difficulties and chaotic working conditions to alleviate suffering or save lives.

PVOs will likely be there on the ground anywhere in the world where a humanitarian crisis exists when US or other military forces arrive and will generally be there when military forces depart. Kurdistan is the only recent exception to this rule. Hence military action can create animosity that will eventually affect the PVOs. The latter, with little or no security in conflicts, can be perceived at worst as Western, at best as foreigners from the same tribe or clan that produced the military. The World Vision headquarters in Baidoa, Somalia, was bombed in February 1994 by a Somali militia leader annoyed with UN peacekeepers over an issue unrelated to World Vision policies or operations. To make matters worse, when the staff injured in the bombing needed UN peacekeeper help to get to a medical facility, it was late and hesitant.

PVOs rely for their security on two aspects of their culture, not on guards, which they seldom employ, or on weapons, which they virtually never carry themselves. One is the importance of the work they do for the community. Even after Somalis as a group had turned violently against the UN presence in Somalia, they continued to request expansion of foreign PVO programs in their country. Second, while many PVOs find it difficult to remain neutral in conflicts which are inherently political—how could anyone remain apolitical in the

Cambodian or Rwandan genocides?—their perceived nonpartisanship is essential to their security in such conflicts. Don't bother us, they say, we don't take sides. So when military forces, whether under the flag of the UN or the US, are perceived to be supporting one side over the other in a conflict, PVOs are at risk.⁵

International Committee of the Red Cross

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), founded in 1863, is by far the oldest humanitarian relief organization. Specializing in conflicts, it is also the largest such organization, with 6300 employees worldwide and a budget of \$608 million in 1993.⁶ It is the only one with a mandate under international law (except perhaps the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees⁷), a fact which its managers, called delegates, frequently cite. Of all humanitarian institutions it is the most doctrinally developed, with an elaborate system of rules for functioning in conflicts, which work well most of the time, and which its delegates can recite in their sleep.

One generally knows what to expect programmatically in an ICRC program wherever it is to be found, a claim that few PVOs or UN agencies can make. It is the most focused, using its authority under the Geneva Convention in conflicts where other relief agencies have difficulty gaining access to the vulnerable. It does no development work, a strength in that its mission is clearly focused, and a weakness in that it does not address root causes of an emergency. Its focus is on family reunification, carrying messages between family members separated by a conflict, protection of prisoners of war and civilians, and providing humanitarian relief for those most severely affected. It is the most expensive, given the high cost of living of its largely Swiss staff and the cost of the high standards it sets. It is the only organization primarily funded through annual contributions from donor governments and national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which relieves it of the requirement to solicit funds from the public (although it does some modest fundraising among the Swiss public). The US government for many years has been far and away its largest donor.

Some would argue that the ICRC's impressive performance in chaos is less a function of its age, budget, size, and doctrine than the fact that it is run by the Swiss, whose culture values highly both discipline and order. Little is left to chance or human discretion in ICRC operations. Conflicts by their nature are the embodiment of chaos; consequently, any organization that can impose a modest degree of order in a conflict has an immediate operational advantage.

The ICRC is the relief organization with the most in common with the military; it is also the one least likely to have much to do with the military. This apparent paradox can be traced to its operating doctrine, which calls for absolute political neutrality in all conflicts. ICRC doctrine places a premium on voluntary adherence to international law by contestants: the very presence of peacemaking forces with an aggressive mandate means the spirit of ICRC persuasion has been replaced by armed force, even if those forces operate under the UN banner. Only

on direct order from ICRC headquarters will delegates even converse with any military force, let alone work with them operationally.

The ICRC will not work in a conflict unless both sides agree in writing to complete transparency in standard operating procedures. This means in practice that all sides to the conflict will get prior notice of each relief flight and each convoy, including travel routes, cargo descriptions, and times of departure and arrival. In Somalia it also meant getting clan elder approval for each region in which the ICRC operated. Indeed, until Somalia the ICRC never employed armed guards or drove in convoys protected by military forces. In fact, it was doctrinal heresy for the ICRC to use force to protect its operations and to work closely with the military in that country. The change was more a function of the chaos in the countryside than deliberate change to ICRC doctrine.

The Red Cross symbol appears on every vehicle, building, and piece of equipment the ICRC employs, not so much for its public relations value (though it does not hurt), but because in conflicts this symbol has become associated with the neutrality provided for in the Geneva Conventions. This characteristic led at one point to an extended debate with US representatives over whether the US flag or the Red Cross would appear on US Air Force planes delivering ICRC relief food—donated by the US government and the European Community—to famine-ravaged Somali cities during Operation Restore Hope.

The ICRC has until the last several years been entirely staffed by Swiss nationals. It has served in some respects as their version of the US Peace Corps, an outlet for the altruistic and adventurous instincts of Swiss youth, but one open to older people as well. However, the pathological levels of violence encountered at various times in the new world order have dramatically increased the fatality rate of ICRC delegates, as well as the psychological problems of staff traumatized by the atrocities they sometimes witness. The Liberian civil war reached such maniacal and psychotic proportions that the ICRC withdrew and several delegates required psychiatric hospitalization. These conditions have caused fewer young Swiss to volunteer, leading the ICRC to recruit some staff from outside Switzerland. It is an indication of the chaos spreading through the world that for the first time in its 150-year history the ICRC has been forced to hire non-Swiss staff.

While the ICRC is part of the International Red Cross movement, it has a tenuous, in the past sometimes acrimonious, relationship with the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the “United Nations” of the Red Cross national offices. The ICRC, the Federation, and the UN agencies described below are international organizations; they are not PVOs.

The United Nations

It has become fashionable recently in the disaster relief community to blame the UN for most failed responses to complex humanitarian emergencies. Some of this blame is properly directed, but much is not. The UN is being

held accountable for work it was not until recently staffed to do. It is also being held responsible for some work it will never be able to perform, given two different realities: the nature of the institution, and the fact that the great powers and more than a few developing countries do not want it to be involved in certain kinds of activities.

The UN is not one institution, centrally managed, in a hierarchical organizational structure. The UN General Assembly and Security Council resemble the US Congress, with the Secretary General representing the Speaker of the House, rather than a chief executive. The Secretary General presides, he does not rule.

Four nearly autonomous UN agencies provide most of the operational support and services required to respond to a complex humanitarian relief requirement. They also are voluntary agencies in that countries are not assessed fees for their operation, but instead contribute what they wish. The four line agencies are: the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Program (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). In addition, the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (UNDHA), part of the Secretary General's staff, conducts the negotiations needed to bring humanitarian support through conflict lines and provides a modicum of coordination, to the extent that any of the four UN agencies wish to be coordinated. It is one of the great ironies of the UN system that its least important and badly run work is supported by assessments, while its better work is funded voluntarily through these agencies.⁸

The four line agencies, resembling feudal baronies, only nominally report to the Secretary General. They are in fact quite independent of the Secretary General and of each other, obtaining their resources and political support from donor countries whose representatives sit on their independent governing boards. They do not report to the General Assembly in any managerially significant way, nor do they get policy guidance from it. In Somalia the field directors of these agencies reported to their headquarters, not to the director of UN humanitarian operations located in Somalia. Three of the four agencies are led by politically well-connected Americans, the fourth by a Japanese. All assiduously cultivate their bases of political support in their home countries. While the Secretary General has a hand in appointing the leaders of each of the Big Four, few have ever been removed by the Secretary. Nor does he control their budgets, staffing, or policy.⁹

These four UN agencies had little operational capacity five years ago, but instead provided money to the governments of developing countries to do their work for them through indigenous government ministries. UNHCR's refugee camps in many countries were managed through the ministries of the host government or under grant agreement with PVOs. It is only with the advent of the new world order, and the rise of the complex emergency as a painful fact of

international life, that they have hired staff with operational skills and experience. Even now the quality is uneven, the depth limited.

These UN agencies have used four models for coordinating humanitarian relief operations, with varying degrees of success. In the first model, the Secretary General assigns leadership in a particular disaster to one of the four line agencies. In Bosnia it has been UNHCR, in the southern African drought it was the WFP, and in Sudan and Kurdistan it has been UNICEF. The second model, successfully employed in Angola, vests leadership with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

The third model, used in Somalia, had no lead agency. Instead, the UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, created a new, hybrid entity, not tied to any of the UN agencies, in which the military, political, and humanitarian section heads reported to a powerful UN czar, the Secretary General's personal representative, who reported directly to the Secretary General. The Somalia experience suggests that this last model, however much preferred by the Secretary General, is unmanageable. Neither the Secretary General nor his staff was capable—temperamentally, intellectually, or organizationally—of centrally supporting extended field operations in Somalia. The procurement, personnel, contracting, and budgeting systems of the line UN agencies, however weak, are greatly superior to those of the Secretariat at UN headquarters in New York.

The fourth model was the norm before the advent of the new world order. Seldom followed now except in smaller natural disasters, it called for the country director of the UN Development Program to act as the chief UN officer in any country affected by a major disaster. UNDP's lack of experience or interest in complex emergencies has made this traditional model unappealing if not dysfunctional.

All of the models reflect the vagaries of UN personnel policy, which mixes skilled and dedicated career international bureaucrats with languid and incompetent relatives of petty dictators whose votes in the General Assembly or on governing boards are important to the agency bureaucrats. The size of this latter group is debatable; my experience is that it is large enough to be a costly and visible nuisance, but certainly not representative of the average operational UN staff in the specialized agencies. There is no functional personnel system; there are no career ladders; and promotions based on merit alone are not the norm. The newer, operationally competent employees are too often contractors with limited career opportunities. The personnel system still reflects the much less rigorous demands of an earlier era, when the great powers did not want a robust UN system. It is arguable whether this situation has much changed since 1989.

Because of the institutional weaknesses of the position of the Secretary General and the feudal structure of the UN system, activities ranging from routine coordination to development of comprehensive and integrated

strategy in humanitarian emergencies are difficult to plan and carry out. In late 1990, led by the Nordic bloc and supported by the United States, donor countries proposed and the General Assembly approved reforms which created the previously mentioned Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), which is managed by one of 17 Under Secretaries General. Expectations of what DHA can do in complex emergencies are thwarted by its limited statutory authority and the Byzantine bureaucratic politics of the UN system.

Developing countries were quite unenthusiastic about the reforms that created DHA and strengthened the UN's operational capacity in complex emergencies: some of their governments were causing the problems that the reforms were meant to address. Third World elites and intellectuals suspected that the DHA reforms would advance the case for humanitarian interventionism, which some of them perceived to be a form of Western neocolonialism in the robes of Mother Teresa. The changes promised to unleash meddling, do-gooder PVOs and donor aid agencies whose roots are sometimes found in the colonial affairs offices of contributing countries. National sovereignty in nation-states with weak national identities, some of which govern using police-state tactics, is a central issue for policy development. Indeed, the issue of sovereignty threatens the very foundations of states. In order to secure approval of the DHA reforms, the reformers diluted the language of the resolution.

Given its real mandate, DHA has done reasonably well, particularly as it has matured organizationally. It has created a centralized system for identifying and evaluating needs and donor appeals for funding; both, however, remain highly inflated and unprioritized. DHA conducted diplomatic negotiations between combatants in conflicts to ensure the protection of relief efforts, managed coordination with PVOs and the big four UN agencies (though all four continue to resist this coordination), and provided start-up funding for fast onset emergencies out of a \$50 million emergency revolving account. The fund is now out of money despite the generous donor funding that created it. The work done by DHA reflects modest incremental improvements to the old system, not breakthroughs in innovative organization or management.

The UN will always be held hostage to some degree by the governments it serves. In its assessments of impending famines, for example, crop estimates are heavily influenced by local ministries of agriculture, which means the estimates are sometimes politicized and frequently suspect. The agricultural production figures used to judge food aid requirements for the southern African drought were based on such estimates, most of which turned out to be significantly overstated. The net effect of the distortion was a significant overcommitment of food aid in Mozambique. In 1990 the Bashir government in Sudan refused to acknowledge a massive drought during its critical early months. When the government finally did report drought conditions, under intense international pressure, it overestimated food requirements, which the UN promptly publicized.

Even with the UN's institutional weaknesses, however, the international community needs the UN when responding to a humanitarian crisis. No sovereign state alone has the UN's legal and moral sanction to intervene, its coordinating authority, its peacekeeping troops (however constrained by their home governments), its diplomatic good offices, and its financial and staff resources.

Donor Government Aid Agencies

The final component of this complex system is represented by donor government aid agencies. In the United States, that function is fulfilled by the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) in the Agency for International Development. OFDA is charged under the Foreign Assistance Act with coordinating all US government assistance in foreign disasters. It operates under a unique but jealously guarded provision of law—the so-called “notwithstanding” provision—which allows it to act quickly in a disaster situation, free of the many procedural, administrative, and bureaucratic requirements of the federal government. Because it is exempt from prohibitions on US government assistance to certain countries, OFDA can provide life-saving relief assistance to people suffering the effects of natural or manmade disasters anywhere that the State Department has declared a disaster. OFDA, with expenditures of \$189 million a year and a modest staff of 25 regular and 25 contract employees, has a simple, focused mission: save lives and reduce human suffering through relief and rehabilitation interventions.¹⁰ It is not authorized to do development or reconstruction work.

OFDA projects itself into disasters either indirectly, through grants to PVOs, the ICRC, or UN agencies, or by direct operational intervention through its Disaster Assistance Response Teams. These teams have the authority to spend money in the field on the spot, and their daily situation reports to USAID and State Department leadership can shape US policy. With their satellite telephone capacity, these teams can order additional staff, equipment, and logistical capacity from the OFDA office in Washington. Early in the Kurdish emergency, for example, the only reports that Secretary of State Jim Baker and Deputy Secretary Lawrence Eagleburger received on what was actually happening in the field were situation reports from the OFDA.

Because of their technical expertise in relief, rapid contracting capacity, and long experience in emergencies and in grants to other actors, OFDA officers have influence which, even if unofficial, extends throughout the response system. It is perhaps the only element of the humanitarian relief system that can call meetings, get quarreling groups to work together, and draft strategic plans that other organizations will take seriously. Frequently when the UN is either not present in the field or its contracting mechanisms are too slow, OFDA will fill in the gaps, handing operations over to the UN later. The European Community two years ago created an office modeled after OFDA, which they

call ECHO, the European Community Humanitarian Office, that attempts to provide them with a similar operational capacity in emergencies.

Implications

The relief response institutions—PVOs, ICRC, and the UN—in conjunction with OFDA and ECHO, make up the system used by the international community to respond to complex humanitarian emergencies. The complicating subtlety in all this is that many of the institutional players really don't like or trust one another. The PVOs quarrel quietly among themselves, publicly with the UN. The UN does not often deal with the ICRC, which keeps to itself and protects its prerogatives. Much of this distrust is understandable—it results from ambiguous or overlapping organizational mandates; the stresses of working in combat where relief workers regularly get killed, wounded, or kidnapped; competition for scarce private or donor government resources; the lack of experience in dealing with each other; and turf issues over geographic and sectoral focus.

The good news is that coordination and cooperation are improving rather than declining as the humanitarian relief system matures. Necessity encourages it and painful experience requires it. In spite of its feudal character, the system does function, though it is better when competent and skillful leaders emerge to manage the response in the field. Experience over the past few years suggests, not surprisingly, that the quality of this leadership can profoundly affect the competence with which the relief response is managed and whether it ultimately succeeds or fails. Jim Grant, director of UNICEF, provided inspired leadership in the early years of Operation Lifeline Sudan, as has Mrs. Ogata, High Commissioner for Refugees in Bosnia. As in most organizations, leadership does make a difference.

How well this humanitarian response system works with military forces in peacekeeping operations, whether or not the forces operate under the UN banner, will be determined by the quality of military and civilian leadership and its familiarity with the humanitarian response structure. The only part of the military force structure prepared by doctrine, training, experience, and personnel recruitment policy to deal with these organizations is the civil affairs branch of the Army. Unfortunately, commanders and military planners often include a civil affairs function in a humanitarian relief operation as an afterthought, if at all. Both PVO and UN managers have repeatedly commented how well they could work with US forces if they could deal with civil affairs officers instead of combat commanders.

The greatest strength of the civil affairs organization is also its greatest weakness: except for a small, overextended, active-duty battalion at Ft. Bragg, all civil affairs assets are in the Army's reserve components. The strength derives from the recruitment of professionals in the civilian world, who generally are not found in the active force; these specialists can relate

readily to civilian humanitarian agencies. The weakness lies in their reserve status and in the low opinion—whether deserved or not—that some individuals in the active force sometimes have of the reserves. Interservice rivalry in Somalia aggravated the friction between the active and reserve forces, which tended to weaken the US relief effort.

The way in which civil affairs units were employed in the Gulf War and Somalia was counterproductive in the former instance and nearly catastrophic in the latter. In Rwanda, the US humanitarian assistance effort included a robust civil affairs component. This element was initially provided by the US Army Peacekeeping Institute but was substantially augmented by active and reserve component civil affairs personnel as the US effort matured. The requirement for civil affairs units in all humanitarian operations is becoming more apparent, so much so that commanders could be judged negligent if they fail to integrate them into their operational plans. In a complex humanitarian emergency a civil affairs unit is a powerful force multiplier; in a Chapter VI or VII peacekeeping operation, a civil affairs company could be worth an infantry battalion.

Perhaps the most consistently difficult lesson for US military forces to learn is that unlike their role in combat, they are not in charge of managing the response to a complex humanitarian emergency. US forces in EUCOM, apparently unfamiliar with the relief discipline, attempted to write an operations plan for Kurdistan that, if followed, might find the Kurds still in camps in the Turkish mountains. Once commanders were directed to let field staff from the US Agency for International Development take the lead with the ICRC and PVOs (the UN had not yet arrived), the situation improved.

The unfortunate reality is that usually no one is in charge in a complex humanitarian emergency, a situation which is unlikely to change at any point in the foreseeable future. The notion that if any institution is in charge it should be the United Nations is by no means universally acknowledged among relief responders. Furthermore, it will be challenged as well by UN agencies that don't want their rivals in the system to be in charge if they can't be. UN performance has not matched its mandate; until it does, the UN cannot assume an undisputed leadership position. In such a vacuum the military, trained to deal with chaos, can be perceived to be usurping the prerogatives of other agencies. Training and practice can overcome such misperceptions.

The two most important capabilities the military brings to any emergency response remain logistics and security: they are tasks that relief organizations can never match but increasingly need in complex emergencies. When the military focuses on what it does best it serves well; when it is required to do nation-building and development, complex disciplines about which it knows relatively little, it can do more harm than good.

The response structure includes the other humanitarian actors described in this article with which the military must learn to live and work. The ambiguous

situation in which the US military now finds itself requires a doctrine of cooperative engagement with humanitarian agencies in which the military contributes three key proficiencies: security, logistics, and limited, temporary assistance when humanitarian organizations are unable to cope with a life-threatening emergency event. The military should not attempt to replace or dominate humanitarian organizations, nor should it be directed to undertake nation-building activities. Projects such as port and road reconstruction, which the military sometimes undertakes as part of its own transportation requirement, should be of short duration and sustainable without its ongoing attention.

A reasonable person might conclude that there will be more, rather than fewer, humanitarian relief operations in the years ahead. The planner's paradox is that no single source of support in such operations—PVOs, Red Cross, UN, or national assistance offices—is organized, trained, or equipped to perform all of the functions inherent in relieving human suffering in those crises. With military forces in the asset pool, many more capabilities become available to overcome suffering.

Success in such operations will be determined by the degree to which all of the players can step outside of their individual cultures and value systems, surrender some of their autonomy, and seek the best, rather than the worst, in those with whom they must solve the problems they will confront in a humanitarian emergency. Planning, training, exercises, application of operational lessons learned—all can contribute to improved understanding and eventually improved execution of relief responses where millions of lives are at risk.

NOTES

1. Study done by Faye Henderson of the LAI/OFDA staff (3 August 1992) for the author, who was then serving as assistant administrator FHA/USAID, Bureau of Food and Humanitarian Assistance.
2. See USAID 1994 annual report entitled "Voluntary Foreign Aid Programs," Bureau for Humanitarian Response, pp. 70-97.
3. Chester Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968).
4. See *Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies in Times of Disasters* (Boulder, Colo., and Paris: Westview and UNESCO Presses, 1989).
5. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has written a set of NGO guidelines for doing disaster relief entitled "Code of Conduct" (1994) which addresses some of these issues.
6. See the ICRC 1993 Annual Report, pp. 273, 277.
7. Under the UN Charter, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees has a legal mandate to provide support and protection to refugees.
8. The UNHCR has responsibility for refugees (and by practice, more recently, for internally displaced people). The World Food Program provides food for people affected by droughts and civil wars and UNHCR-managed refugee camps. UNICEF specializes in medical, educational, and job training support for women and children. And the UN Development Program has responsibility for development assistance, usually through country governments. While a half dozen other UN agencies claim an operational role, they are more modest players.
9. The UN Security Council last year approved a little-noticed but managerially significant reform of the governance of UN specialized agencies. Under the reforms, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN will have budget and policy review authority over all specialized agencies, the first time such authority and oversight has been vested in a membership body of the UN.
10. See OFDA Annual Report for FY 1993, p. 57.