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**valuating the politics of
humanitarian military
interventions in complex
emergencies: reflections
from the case of Somalia**

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Abbreviations

NGO	non-governmental organisation
US	United States
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

This paper seeks to analyse questions regarding the politics of military action, which has sometimes been described as humanitarian in purpose in the period since the cold war. Special attention shall be given to the United States (US) since it is the foremost country in military interventions. The military intervention in Somalia shall be cited as a case example in this study, which may bring insights on why the US committed itself to the Somali crisis in 1992. Using this example, I shall evaluate, in general, the politics of humanitarian military interventions in complex emergencies. Taking the state or the government as the principal stakeholder, I shall focus on some methodological approaches to policy evaluation in order to understand what drives states to military intervention. Then, based on this evaluation, I will conclude on the extent of neutrality and impartiality of human military interventions in complex emergencies.

Key terms

Politics in this paper is defined as the use of instrumentalities, whether covert or overt, to guarantee that certain policies are pursued. Since governments formulate and implement policies, this paper therefore assumes that government decisions are often politically motivated.

In this paper, humanitarian military intervention will refer to the deployment of military forces, which are not limited to ground troops alone. Any participation such military airlifts of aid materials, for example, is covered under deployment, even if the actual distribution of relief is done by NGOs. Military missions may also include providing security for relief distribution or launching other operations, such as peace-keeping. The deployment is politically justified by the sending state and multilaterally sanctioned by allied states and is aimed at protecting the lives and welfare of a deserving target population in a foreign country. Most planned interventions claim universal legitimacy to draw international support.

The concept of complex emergency in this paper shall be borrowed from Apthorpe (1997). It refers to the following

situations in which on top (or bottom) of everything else, vital aspects of society and the economy, the state and the government, are in disorder and at risk. Hundreds or thousands of human lives are being lost. Armed conflict is considerable. Exactly whether in such circumstances the war is civil or territorial, or whether a 'faction' is a civil or a military or a political entity, is not entirely clear. Nor is it always certain when and from where the fire will next come, or for what reasons exactly (Apthorpe 1997:89).

Exploring political motivations

Humanitarian interventions should raise the issue of why states intervene. What are the interests of intervening states? The Americans justified their military actions in the Gulf War by exaggerating the image of Iraq as an aggressor producing weapons of mass destruction. It is difficult, however, to explain why the intervention in the Gulf extended to Kurdish and Shiite protection. The US has allowed the Iraqis to abuse the Kurds for scores of years. Why is it then that the US suddenly began to care about the Kurds immediately after the Gulf War? Does this mean that the norms of intervention have changed? If so, how different are the norms from those of the cold war period? Can a new norm of intervention create a new motivational interest? Do interests generally remain unchanged over time, simply camouflaged by labels which are widely accepted at the time? Is there political agenda hidden in the use of the word 'humanitarian' rather than 'democratisation'? Do intervening states hide behind popularly accepted justifications to pursue their less popular and more self-interested reasons for interventions? These are just a few examples of provocative questions that need to be answered if we are to understand better the politics humanitarian military interventions in complex emergency situations.

The US action in Somalia in 1992 is a puzzling case of military intervention. Somalia seems to be economically insignificant and is clearly not a security threat to the US. Some political observers might have normally interpreted the US's swift intervention in Somalia as a political effort motivated by an interest in promoting democracy in the rebuilding of the torn state. Such an approach was typical during the cold war. However, the US has always categorically emphasised that their intervention in Somalia is of a humanitarian, not democratising, nature. Alternatively, observers have postulated that the US must have been concerned about the geostrategic location of Somalia, being near to the oil fields of the Middle East and to strategic sea lanes. Unexpectedly, however, the US was also swift in getting out of the country, resisting UN pressure to disarm the bandits. These perplexing phenomena provoked me to ask whether American foreign policy and use of military forces have changed in the period after the cold war.

The Bush administration may have first considered intervening in Somalia in 1992 due to growing agitation in the US, especially among black-American leaders. Moreover, the US must have felt still greater pressure when Boutros-Boutros Ghali accused the UN Security Council of racism, contrasting the large amounts of humanitarian spending in European Bosnia with the inactivity over the crisis in Somalia. These criticisms may have caused President Bush to approve the intervention in the hope that, by being responsive to domestic and UN concerns, he could leave the Presidential office with an improved political image. Evidently, the decision for intervention was made a few months before the 1992 US election.

The Bush administration probably took so long to intervene in Somalia, because of the costly nature of the undertaking. With the 1992 election approaching, however, Bush might have intended to use the Somalia crisis to boost his campaign for re-election. If he

should have failed to be re-elected, the effect of government expenditures in Somalia would be shouldered by the Clinton administration. This exploratory thinking indicates that the decision for military intervention could be motivated by political self-interest.

There certainly must be a policy-driven reason for the unexpected withdrawal of US troops from Somalia. The short intervention could have been staged just to deny Ghali's accusations of racism in US policy. The US, however, rapidly capitalised on the death of 21 US marines to withdraw its troops from Somalia. In this way, the US had already demonstrated to the world its humanitarian concern and non-racist policy approach, while, at the same time, saving American lives and enhancing Bush's popularity.

The US withdrawal of economic aid to Somalia and the closure of its embassy there has contributed much to the escalation of the emergency crisis in the country. This loss of American political interest in Somalia may point to a significant change in perceptions resulting from the changing world order and technological advances. This change might have lessened the geostrategic importance of Somalia to the US. Moreover, the death of the 21 US marines fuelled growing criticism of the Bush administration for being overly concerned with foreign policy issues, while lacking concern for domestic policy and the economic recession in America.

Finnemore (1996:158) argued that humanitarian justifications have been used to disguise deeper and more important motives. Although a humanitarian motive may be entirely genuine, it is usually only a portion of a mix of motivations driving states into interventions. States justify their interventions by connecting their actions to the shared values and expectations generally held by state leaders and their publics. Since the generation of leaders and publics changes over time—constantly creating unique situations—internationally held standards may also change. Changes in international behaviour can be led by the UN. Powerful states, however, strongly influence the UN, as was the case when the US, Britain and France sought UN resolutions for the protection of Kurds in Iraq. On the other hand, a superpower state which articulates respect for international law may use its international influence to organise a legitimate multilateral intervention outside the auspices of the UN. Thus, a superpower may, in a way, violate the very international standards of behaviour which it is articulating. This leads us to question the extent of neutrality or non-neutrality of humanitarian interventions.

It might be impossible to be totally impartial in the operation of humanitarian military interventions. Peacekeeping troops can be exposed to attacks while protecting the distribution of relief. In self-defence, deployed troops will normally use force to overcome armed attackers. However, using force to protect the distribution of aid may be perceived as taking sides in the conflict. It may also be interpreted as an act of hostility, especially when the outcome of fights is not obvious. Confusion about humanitarian and combatant roles of deployed ground troops may lead to continuous attacks on them and such a situation could escalate into an unending guerilla war.

In the case of Somalia, the UN Security Council negotiated with the two warring clans in Mogadishu for the deployment of peacekeepers to protect the distribution of aid. There were confirmed reports that Aidid's clan reluctantly agreed to the presence of the UN peacekeepers. As far as I know, however, the opposing clan of Ali Mahdi did not agree. If the Ali Mahdi clan never agreed, then the US airlift of peacekeepers may not be taken as neutral, because it ignored exhaustive negotiations with Ali Mahdi's party.

To complicate the state of emergency, the Bush administration publicly announced prior to the US military airlift of aid that it would take a leading role with other nations and international organisations in the intervention. The announcement sounded as if US leadership of a multilateral approach was to be set in place, with the US airlifts to North Kenya serving as relay points to Somalia. Yet the Kenyan government claimed that the US had not consulted with them concerning the use of Kenyan airspace and airports. Kenya further criticised the US for acting unilaterally without Kenyan approval. The US, committing itself to its previous declaration, tried to show the world its humanitarian attitude toward Somalia. The news, however, did not depict the whole truth of the American political insult towards Kenya. The US quickly denied the Kenyan charges and immediately negotiated to get formal airlift approval!

While a superpower may have the capability of staging a unilateral action, the above case demonstrates the importance of following the internationally established practice among nations. Contemporary interventions can be effectively carried out in a multilateral setting. Interventions must appear legitimate to be politically acceptable in the international community of nations. The normal procedure is to seek a UN resolution or wide international participation before beginning an intervention. In this period of globalisation, nations have become more interdependent. Intervening states should recognise the importance of generating political support both domestically and internationally prior to intervention.

Evaluation

Most evaluations of humanitarian relief activities are focused on the efficiency of delivery and the benefit to the targeted population, which, I suppose, are the major interests of donor organisations. This is a rather economic approach aimed at improving the performance of future humanitarian activities. There are, however, other perspectives for evaluating humanitarian activities, depending on who seems to be the most important stakeholder.

In terms of a state or a government, political interests can always be assumed since a state or government decision is usually, if not always, governed by politics as well as policy, which may have domestic and international impacts and secret objectives. Thus, political evaluations involving sensitive issues may be kept away from public knowledge. This could explain why many evaluations are focused on the ethics and economics of humanitarian interventions, while political issues and concerns are often overlooked or misunderstood.

A good evaluation should be able to serve its purpose after interpreting its set terms of reference. In most cases, evaluations are intended to understand the inputs, outputs or impacts of activities. Hence, evaluation is a learning and correcting function. In evaluating the politics of an intervention, as demonstrated by the Somalia case in this paper, available information is analysed in an effort to understand better the suitability of using humanitarianism as a reason for a military intervention, and the extent of its neutrality.

Bureaucrats who work for security and intelligence services could often carry out a quick, but incomprehensive, evaluation of the politics of state-led humanitarian intervention. Political observers, possibly coming from the academe, could also do a quick evaluation. However, they could sometimes only speculate on political behaviour and impact. Thus, the selection of evaluators is very important after preparing the terms of reference. Martin (1998:8) has pointed out a general guideline that personal qualities and substantive experience are more important factors in the selection of evaluation staff than specific behavioural or methodological knowledge. Therefore, an individual or an evaluation team, if it is to carry out a more comprehensive evaluation, should have a substantive experience with the politics involved in any military action and a familiarity with the political context of humanitarianism.

Evaluating the politics of a humanitarian military intervention is not only ethically significant, but it also helps us to predict the possible future behaviour of intervening states. It will also help political scientists monitor the political agenda of intervening states. Furthermore, potential supporting states would be more aware of the possible impact of participating in a joint humanitarian military activity.

Coles (1993:57) has said that military actions are always linked with politics. Hence, political motivations should be examined whenever humanitarian justifications are used in military interventions. Decisions implementing interventions are policy-driven and policies are politically motivated. To understand military interventions, one has to look at the broader policy, not merely the justifications, because justifications may only be a small portion of wider objectives. Evaluations should therefore investigate potential hidden objectives more thoroughly.

Every project, such as a military intervention, has several clients to satisfy. Who the clients are depends on the project. In the case of the intervention in Somalia, examples of clients are the UN Security Council, the American public, the Somali refugees and the Kenyan government. These clients normally have sub-clients. The needs of each client may be different. Thus the success or failure of a humanitarian military intervention project could depend on the judgements made by clients.

More important, however, is how reports are made. Reports are usually designed to satisfy specific clients. However, a report that focuses on answering the interests of a specific client could be biased against other clients' interests, or, if not, could be at least misleading. Thus reports of success become relative to clients' expectations. When bias

becomes obvious, judgements or reports may not be seen as credible. However, biased perceptions could possibly be toned down or hidden through the use of an acceptable language. As Apthorpe has emphasised, semantics are very powerful tools of negotiation (1997).

Thus, there is a need for a report evaluator to read between the lines and analyse the texts. Similarly, a politician's discourse, such as President Bush's public announcement of American military humanitarian participation in Somalia, could be analysed. Questions could be raised, such as

- What is Bush's real intent?
- Could it be possible that Bush may have intended to mislead the American public deliberately out of political self-interest?
- What outcome or impact is Bush aiming at?

It would be logical to assume that intervening states see a political advantage in humanitarian interventions, as well as possible economic advantages.

Conclusion

Humanitarian project evaluation not only demands knowledge of project evaluation methods, but also of policy analysis. The usual failure of policy analysis, however is to view humanitarian interventions as not at all political, only humanitarian. Evaluators should normally consider that any humanitarian player could be acting for political reasons. All players behave according to their institutional or organisational policies. In fact, in complex emergencies, any humanitarian activity will need a great deal of inter-organisational negotiation and coordination. This participatory approach rules out the total neutrality, impartiality and independence of participating organisations and governments. At some stage, players may have to compromise their principles. Thus, a participant's claim that intervention is purely humanitarian and not political can often be misleading.

To criticise the neutrality and politics of humanitarian intervention, Apthorpe (1997) raised the question, '[w]hy should food aid not go as a matter of course always to both [all] sides in a complex conflict rather than only one?' I could raise another question; why are capable states less enthusiastic to send humanitarian aid to starving North Korea? Furthermore, if humanitarian aid is based on need and raising dignity of life, why is it so focused on food and health?

Indeed, the norms of interventions are very much dependent on the motivational policies of intervening states and the influential initiatives of the powerful groups like the UN and the US. Precisely identifying motivations for interventions would be impossible for this short essay. However, the neutrality of humanitarian interventions is always doubtful, because intervention projects are policy driven, reflecting political interests.

Furthermore, humanitarianism and military forces are motivated by conflicting objectives and modes of operation in complex emergencies. Humanitarianism is usually viewed as a civilian undertaking to be treated separately from military forms of intervention. However, humanitarianism and military interventions interact and are often coordinated. Such links are necessary in providing assistance to victims of complex emergencies. However, regardless of whether humanitarianism is civilian or military, politics in practice often undermines the theory of neutrality and impartiality.

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